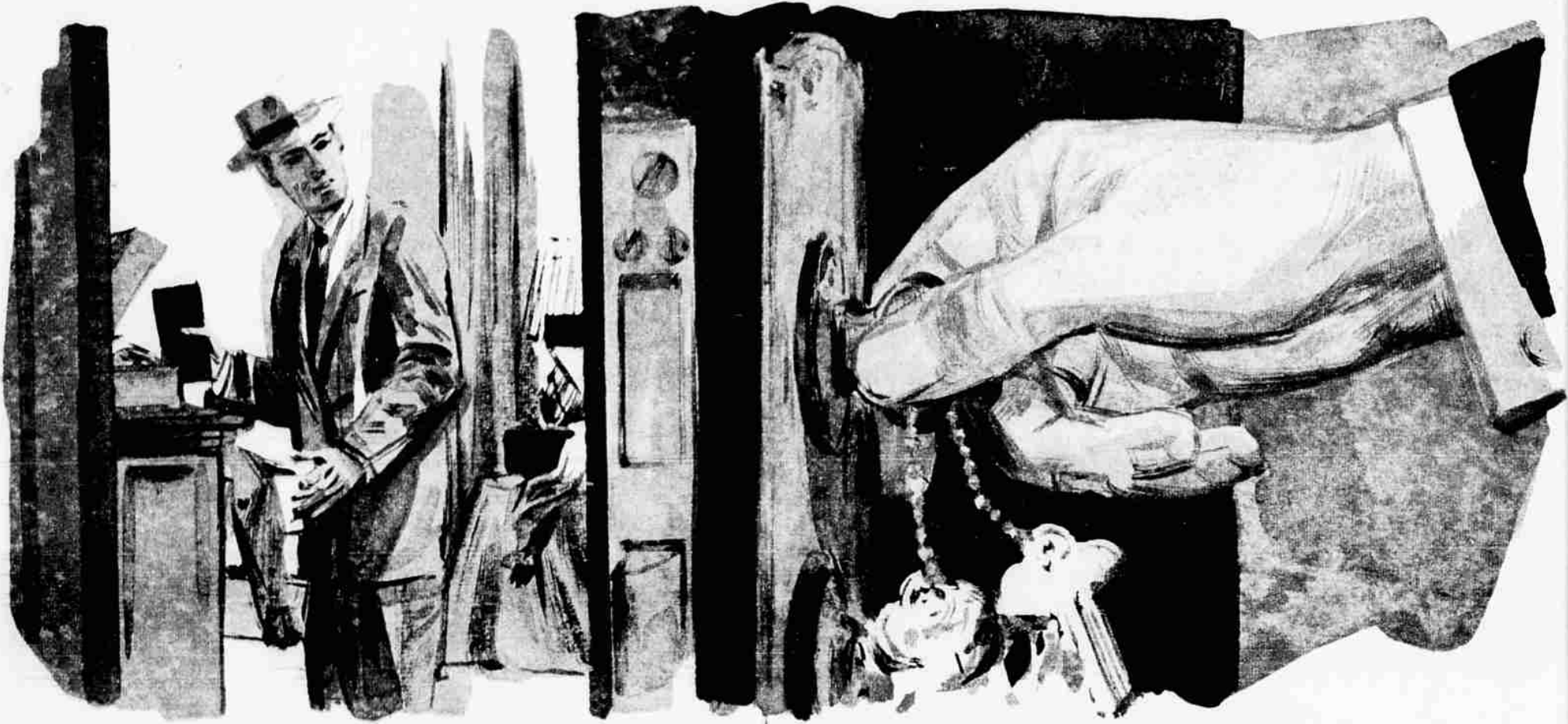


As he walked into the room, he found a neatly dressed young man rifling his dresser.



Case of the Unlucky Number

by William T. Brannon

Art by Bill Neebe

THE CHICAGO hotel clerk glanced up politely as a man approached the desk. "Yes, sir?"

"The key to 1121, please."

"Yes, sir." The clerk turned to the slot assigned to No. 1121 and frowned. "I'm sorry, sir, the key to 1121 is not here. Did you leave it at the desk when you went out?"

"I'm sure I did," the guest replied, but he rummaged in his pockets nevertheless. "No, I don't have it. I know I left it here when I went out."

"Maybe it was put in the wrong slot. I'm very sorry, sir." The clerk rang for a bellboy. "The key to 1121 has been misplaced. Please see that this gentleman gets into his room."

The guest was admitted to 1121 with a master key while the clerk began checking the slots in search of the original key. Before he had completed the task, the guest, now irate, stormed back and demanded that the room clerk call the hotel manager.

During his absence, he told the

manager, his room had been ransacked. Somebody had gone through his luggage; bureau drawers had been upset. Several valuable items were missing. The guest hinted at an inside job, since the door had been locked and there was no sign of forcible entry by the thief.

The manager promised to make good the losses, and the guest, mollified, departed after being given a new key. The desk clerk continued his search, but the missing key wasn't found. The whole thing remained a mystery to the staff.

About a week later, at another Chicago hotel, a dapper, neatly dressed young man with a brisk air stopped at the desk and said:

"The key to 1121, please." The key was handed over.

The young man had hardly disappeared when another man, tall and muscular, approached the desk. "The key to 1121, please."

The clerk looked at him in surprise. "I just gave out that key, sir, to another man! He just went up in the elevator a few seconds ago."

The big man, W. J. Kane of Dayton,

O., a former pro football player with the Green Bay Packers, looked puzzled. But he shrugged and went to the elevator. A maid used her passkey to admit him to Room 1121.

As he walked in, he found the neatly dressed young man rifling his dresser. Kane grabbed the intruder and pushed him into a chair while he phoned for a house detective.

Suddenly, the captive jumped up, threw the chair at Kane, and fled. He was out of sight when two house detectives arrived.

Taking Kane with them, they commandeered an elevator, which started downward, stopping briefly at each floor. At the fourth floor, the thief stepped in; when he recognized the other occupants, it was too late to make an escape.

The prisoner gave his name as Jack Hartford. He said he had run down the stairs, pausing only long enough to drop some keys in a sand bucket on one of the floors. He had almost reached the street when he discovered he still had the key to 1121 and the key he had discarded was to his own room at another hotel. He went back

to retrieve it, found it on the fourth floor, and decided to take the elevator.

In Hartford's room, police detectives found loot from dozens of burglaries, mostly watches and jewelry. In a dresser drawer, they found keys to rooms in 39 large Chicago hotels. Most of them were to Room 1121!

Hartford said his scheme had been simple. He walked up to the desk and looked in the slot for 1121. If the key was there, he asked the clerk for it. Then he would call the room on the house phone to make sure it was unoccupied. If there was no answer, he went to the room, entered with his key, and looted it at his leisure.

Although he had entered some rooms with other numbers, 1121 was his favorite. After his initial success in hotel burglaries, he came to regard 1121 as his lucky number.

As he was taken to the lockup, the detectives paused outside police headquarters on South State Street. "This is going to be your address for a while," the prisoner was told. "But you won't have the key."

Hartford glanced at the number over the door. It was 1121!