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At this writing, I am in Vista, California, a small town in northern San Diego County. Not *small* like Mertzon, but small for a community 30 miles from the Pacific Ocean between such populous giants as San Diego and Las Angeles. The motel management agreed to allow me inside the office to write as long as the door stayed locked by a deadbolt and I agreed to keep out of the way of the office work.

The word processor appears to be a standard unit, however, the desk is behind thick protective glass. The reception area is so cramped, a gangster and his moll would have to squeeze in a mighty small space to rob the place. The sonar system on the door bongs an extra loud alert upon opening. The owner and the clerk scowl through the heavy glass, demanding not only a credit card be passed through a slot under the glass, but also that photographic evidence of the card and the holder match to approve credit.

The desk chair demands a stiff-back military posture. However, no support is needed to keep me upright, as I sense that close to the cash drawer is a loaded German Luger pistol, or a double-barreled sawed off shotgun. I can tell by the intimidating way the management treats the public that robbing this joint is going to involve more than a misdemeanor hearing in Justice Court – more like the crossfire in the opening volleys at O.K. Corral.

I committed a serious breach of the State of California's landlord's code this morning by asking to

change the 20-watt energy saving florescent bulb in the bedside lamp up to, say, a glaring 60 watter, so I'd able to read the headlines of the *Los Angeles Times* in bed. I further explained that I have to be able to see to tie my shoes in the morning. The front desk denied the request on the grounds that non-smoking rooms require less light than smoking rooms, because of the absence of pollution.

One sidelight apart from the meal: on the top of the menu, bold letters proclaimed: "English Speaking Staff." Upon ordering, the young oriental waitress motioned to the manager, her mother, to come. She bowed and said, "*Buenas noches, señor. Quieres uno traigo o una cervezav?*" Distracted by the long list of choices, I failed to notice she was speaking Spanish, until I overheard the old boy in the next booth say, "Damn, Chinese sure sounds a lot like Spanish." And she did sound Spanish-speaking, calling crepes *tortillas*, and rice *arrot*.

Before the first draft ended, the room clerk told several seedy looking hombres the motel had no weekly rates. At each bong of the door, I crouched behind the monitor screen. It would have been a waste of breath to ask if the thick glass was bulletproof, or how long the gangs were going to stay settled down. One thing for sure, I wasn't going to drag out my stay to find the answers.