

# OUT OF MY PAST

Hollywood's  
mysterious tough guy  
reveals that he was  
once the gun-toting consort  
of underworld big shots.  
Here, finally,  
Raft tells the truth  
about his career  
as a young gangster.

By GEORGE RAFT  
as told to Dean Jennings

It doesn't always take the impact of a bullet to convince a man that he has messed up his life. Sometimes one word is enough.

I was driving home from Santa Anita one afternoon in the spring of 1955. The Freeway was full of cars and my wallet was full of nothing after a bad day at the track. I've had a thousand bad afternoons like that. Maybe more. I guess I've dropped a million dollars on the horses, and I kept right on telling myself I'd get even. I was driving alone that day, and I flipped on the radio just to hear some voices. I heard a news broadcaster saying:

"George Raft, the movie star who made his reputation playing gangster roles, had his past catch up with him today. The Nevada State Tax Commission denied Raft a gambling-casino stockholder's permit because he was friendly with such underworld figures as Owney 'The Killer' Madden, Joe Adonis, Lucky Luciano and Bugsy Siegel."

The wheel jumped out of my hand and I missed going off the road by inches. Horns were scolding behind me, and one man passed me shaking his fist and yelling, "Hey, big shot, why don'tcha crawl back in your hole?" There was a time—before I learned to control my explosive temper—when I would have chased a guy like that and knocked his teeth out. But I guess I had it coming.



The Saturday  
Evening  
**POST**

FOUNDED IN 1728 BY

*Benjamin Franklin*

"I'm the loneliest man in Hollywood." Teetotaler George Raft pours a drink for a rare visitor in his Beverly Hills bachelor apartment. Born in Hell's Kitchen, he earned \$10,000,000 as a dead-pan movie villain.





An alert photographer caught this real-life brawl between Raft and his costar, Edward G. Robinson, on the set of *Manpower* (1941). The two tough guys didn't make up for years.



A more amicable costar in *Manpower* was Marlene Dietrich, shown here with Raft today. Georgie's romances were often violent—one jealous female tried to kill him by stabbing him repeatedly with a hatpin.

In *Bolero*, a nongangster picture which he made in 1933 with the late Carole Lombard, Raft revealed his remarkable resemblance to Rudolph Valentino. He and Valentino once worked together as ballroom gigolos.



It was the first time in my life I had ever let go the wheel, and if Big Frenchie DeMange of the old Madden mob had been along he would have said sarcastically, "Georgie, you get careless like that in the old days and some guy comes alongside and puts a slug in you." For a moment I saw myself as I was thirty years before. Young, ambitious and tough, driving Owney Madden's big bullet-proof sedan or delivering a load of bootleg booze to Dutch Schultz. I had a gun in my pocket and I was cocky because I was working for the gang boss of New York. I was as good as any driver in the mob, and I could have steered Owney's car on the subway tracks without getting a scratch on the enameled armor plate.

But this was another day. Or was it?

I was in a black mood as I drove into Beverly Hills to have dinner at the home of my closest friend, producer Jack Dietz. I felt like a man standing naked in Grand Central Station, with no place to hide. I said as much to Dietz when I reached his home, and he said, "Forget it. Your lawyer can handle that Nevada deal. Meanwhile sit down and watch TV. You might see one of your old pictures and that ought to give you a laugh."



"I knew them. They were all friends of mine . . ."



Al Capone, the vicious, undisputed underworld ruler of the 1920's, smiled on his way to prison in 1932.



Dutch Schultz, prohibition-era mobster, lies dying after he was gunned in a Newark, N.J., bar in 1935.



"Bugsy" Siegel, West Coast racketeer, had asked Raft to visit him the night he was murdered in 1947.



Willie Moretti, loose-talking henchman of gambling racketeers, was slain in broad daylight in 1951 by four killers. Like many of Raft's associates, he died violently at the hands of onetime friends.



Joe Adonis, deported gambler, dubbed "one of the 'big six' in American crime."



Frank Costello, underworld king of 1957.

I sprawled in a chair in front of the set, and little Jackie Dietz, my friend's ten-year-old son, was on my lap. I had known and loved this lad since he was a baby, and he always called me pal. We listened to the baseball scores on one station, and then I switched to another channel to hear George Putnam, the TV newsman. That was a mistake, because now it came again. Putnam had that grim look judges get when they're passing out the death sentence, and I felt that he was looking right at me. He told how I had applied for a permit to buy \$65,000 worth of stock in the Flamingo Hotel at Las Vegas, and how the tax commission had turned me down. He mentioned my association with Luciano, Siegel, Madden and even Mickey Cohen, and said the commission evidently concluded I was a gangster off-screen too.

I angrily turned off the set and started to say something to Jackie. The boy was staring at me with obvious disgust, and he said, "You're nothing but a gangster, and I'm not your pal any more." He ran out of the room crying, and I knew this was

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"Am I a gangster? I look like one . . ."

Raft became a star after his performance as "Al Capone's" bodyguard in *Scarface*. Paul Muni (striped suit) played the "Capone" role. Capone himself told Raft he liked the movie, and lent him a bodyguard in Chicago.





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## Out of My Past (Continued from Page 25)

trouble no lawyer could fix. I had no appetite for dinner, and I grabbed my hat and went home.

I hadn't had this trapped, guilty feeling for years. What did this boy know about George Raft? What did anyone know? Even my own mother, who loved me long after I rejected her and ran away from home, had only vague suspicions about the kind of life I led before I got into the movies.

I recall going to see her one night during the prohibition period—she always had my favorite cocoa and homemade coffee cake waiting—and I was wearing one of those tight-fitting, velvet-collar overcoats which were popular then in the underworld. I had a .38 police special in a sling under my arm, and it must have bulged out like a camel's hump.

"Georgie," she said softly, with her eyes brimming, "I thought you were dancing in a night club."

"I am," I said.

"I didn't know dancers carried those things," she said.

I couldn't say to her: *Ma, how do you think I'm living so well these days?* Nor could I bluff her about the gun. She didn't actually see it, but she knew it was there. I looked at her helplessly and she said, "Georgie, as long as you're doing that kind of dancing, I don't think you'd better come here any more." I slunk out like a whipped dog, and it was years before I saw her again. Now it was little Jackie Dietz showing me the door, and I was blue about it.

Late that night, unable to sleep, I walked into the bathroom for a sedative. I looked in the mirror and asked myself the question: *Am I a gangster?* The mirror seemed to reply: *Well, you look like one. Perhaps I do.*

I was gazing at the so-called "menace" you first saw in *Scarface*, and in more than a hundred movie thrillers thereafter: Swarthy skin, drum-tight; high cheekbones and heavy lids over narrow, slanting eyes. One ear still showing the healed slash of a knife fight long years ago, and on the throat a tiny scar where a girl once tried to kill me with a hatpin. Lips clamped into a hard, thin line because movie directors told me over and over, "You don't look tough when you smile." This was the face so thoroughly identified with murder and gunfights that some

people still back away when they see me on the street.

I had worn this deadpan look for so many years that it had become a movie-industry trade-mark and was often the subject for a gag. While filming *Mr. Casanova*, for instance, Bob Hope was overdoing things in one scene and the director finally interfered. "Let's do it without animation," he said. "Give me a George Raft mood."

I don't mind jokes like that, and there have been many. I'm sure I laughed louder than anyone else when the Friars Club recently gave me a testimonial dinner, and comedian George Burns said in his speech, "Raft once played a scene in front of a cigar store, and it looked like the wooden Indian was overacting." I never claimed to be much of an actor, and my gangster face is the only one I have.

But as I looked into my mirror that night, my sense of humor must have been missing. I began to have doubts about the man called George Raft. If a ten-year-old boy had been disillusioned by one word on a television broadcast, what were others thinking?

Was this why the fan letters came no more and the phone stopped ringing? Was this the reason many producers couldn't find "the right script" for me? Was this the reason young hoodlums had mysteriously showed up at my home and offered to work for me? "What kind of work?" I asked one of them. "Anything you say, Georgie," the leader replied. "You want somebody knocked off, we knock 'im off." Even Rocky Graziano got into it. Writing about his violent youth and his sidewalk gang of thieves and thugs, Rocky said I was his boyhood hero. "We thought we looked tough," he said. "We must have been some sight, all rigged up like a bunch of miniature George Rafts, the day they told us that Dillinger got shot in Chicago, and I and the whole mob sat down on the curb and cried."

I should have told Rocky about the time in 1937 when I was handed a script of a big-budget picture. I was cast as an especially vicious gangster, and in one sequence I was to round up a group of juvenile Capones and train them how to be killers and thieves. I told the studio I wouldn't do that scene. I wanted to tell the kids how

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GEORGE KESNER

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

"They seem to be making a go of it."



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(Continued from Page 92) not to be gangsters. I turned down that assignment and they thought I was crazy. Perhaps I was. The picture was *Dead End*, and it firmly established Humphrey Bogart as a star.

No one ever accused Bogart of being a thug in private life, but I know what people have been saying about me. I've heard the whispers and rumors for years: *Raft was a killer and the cops ran him out of New York. . . . Sure, he was good in all those gangster pictures. He was just playing himself. . . . Raft isn't his real name. He just made it up when he got out of prison. . . . You wanna fix something with the West Coast mob, then you gotta see Raft.* And so on.

What is the definition of a gangster? At one of the Kefauver crime hearings a few years ago one witness said, "A gangster is an individual who, by means of force and duress, goes out and obtains money. Gangsterism is very definitely a form of violence."

Am I such a gangster? It's a fair question, and I can answer it only by telling the whole story. The good and the bad, the joys and the heartaches. All the things I've had locked up in my mind for more than thirty years. The things I was ashamed of and the things I never tried to explain. If you are squeamish about the realities of life, this is the place to turn off. For much of my life was violent, far more violent than any melodrama in my movie scripts. But I have found a peace of sorts.

My friend, Tommy Guinan—his sister was the late and beloved Texas Guinan, of Broadway—insists that I would have taken my own life long ago if it were not for television. "Georgie sits there until two in the morning," Tommy says, "and he forgets his troubles. If he didn't have that set, he couldn't go on living."

Well, Tommy, it isn't that tough. Not yet.

In fact, if there is to be a killing of any kind, I'll give Tommy odds that the gun will be used on me by some trigger-happy young hood who thinks I've broken the underworld code by talking too much. I've had a couple of threatening phone calls already, and these gentlemen, who sound like characters in a George Raft movie, have said some very unpleasant things. Don't they know I'm not afraid any more? I lived through the gang wars of the '20's and the '30's when life was cheap, and the cops didn't care who plugged who as long as the victims weren't honest or important citizens.

I would have said right here that gang killings are corny or old-fashioned these days, and that the present generation of movie-goers would probably snicker all the way through one of those bloody thrillers I made in the early '30's. But as I write this, my friend, Frank Costello, the so-called king of the underworld, is trying to find the man who creased his skull with a bullet in May of this year. And only a few blocks away, Sherman Billingsley, of the famed Stork Club, recently told the New York police he carries a gun because he fears an attack from labor racketeers. So things have not changed very much. During the '20's when I was working in night clubs for Owney Madden, he got me out of bed one afternoon, and said, "One of our pals in the night-club business is jumpy and he needs a bodyguard tonight. You're it."

I checked the gun in my pocket and said, "O.K. What's his name?"

"Sherman Billingsley," he said.

You may have decided by this time that I have already answered the question I asked my mirror. If you suspect that I know a great deal about gangsters and their world, you are right. If you think I made mistakes in my foolish youth, you are also right. But you are wrong

if you believe that I have ever deliberately hurt anyone. If I were to be called before a grand jury today—and this is one experience I've never had—the examination might go like this:

Q.: Your real name is George Raft?

A.: No. My name was Ranft—my father was German—but I dropped the "n" because Raft was easier to pronounce. My father never forgave me for that.

Q.: Have you ever been arrested or tried or convicted for a crime?

A.: Never. But perhaps I should have been. When I used to visit Owney Madden in Sing Sing he was always ribbing me. "When they bring you in here someday," he would say, "I'll get you a low number."

Q.: Did you ever pick pockets or roll a drunk?

A.: Yes, I'm sorry to say. During prohibition we thought all the customers in the speakeasies were fair game. You may remember that Texas Guinan greeted them all with: "Hello, sucker."

Q.: Have you ever killed a man?

A.: No. I came close several times, and I thank God for staying my hand. When I was a kid in the Hell's Kitchen district you had to fight for your life every day. I had a terrible temper in earlier years, and it seems as though I was mad at the whole world.

Q.: Isn't it true that the underworld got you into the movies?

A.: Not exactly. The underworld put up money so I could try my luck in Hollywood. I flopped the first time and they gave me enough so I could make a second trip West.

Q.: Has the underworld financed any other big names in show business?

A.: Well—I can think of a dozen off-hand. But that's their story, not mine.

Q.: Were you ever investigated by the Kefauver Crime Committee?

A.: No. As a matter of fact, I knew what Kefauver was planning months before it was announced, and so did the underworld. I was lucky not to be subpoenaed.

Q.: Isn't it a fact, Mr. Raft, that you were an intimate friend of Al Capone, Bugsy Siegel—

A.: Excuse me. It's Benny Siegel. He hated to be called Bugsy, and nobody in the mob dared use that word.

Q.: To go on—Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik, "Machine Gun" Jack McGurn, Larry Fay, Big Frenchie DeMange, Dutch Schultz and Willie Moretti, all of whom are no longer with us, as well as some others who are still living, such as Owney "The Killer" Madden, Joe Adonis, Lucky Luciano, Mickey Cohen and Frank Costello?

A.: Yes, I knew them. They were all friends of mine.

Q.: And what did you get out of all this, Mr. Raft?

A.: Gentlemen, I am the loneliest man in Hollywood.

That's not the whole answer, of course.

I might have mentioned, among other things, that my close friend and roommate, Leo Durocher, was ordered to dump me "for the good of the game," or get out of baseball himself. He dumped me. I remember the embarrassing time the French police searched my luggage in Paris, thinking I had been so ungrateful as to steal \$785,000 worth of jewels from my friend, the late Aga Khan. I cringe when I think of a prominent Los Angeles sportsman who asked me to "arrange" the murder of a business rival because he thought killing for pay was one of my sidelines.

I could have said that among other rewards there were at least four attempts on my life, and that I have some scars I would rather forget. My right ear was almost severed in one knife fight, and I was thirty-eight years old before a Hollywood plastic surgeon fixed it up. I have been stabbed in the stomach three times, and my jaw was broken once by an opponent who used a roll of nickels in his fist because it wasn't smart to get caught with brass knuckles.

I've been shot at by a state trooper, and once I was knocked out, kidnapped and put aboard a Florida-bound train because a mob leader couldn't persuade me to go peaceably. I've been sued a dozen times, and I've been involved in more than a hundred fights and brawls. Twice I played clay pigeon for men in the New York mob, and it was only pure luck that kept my name off the police blotters.

There was the night, for instance, when I sat in a crummy speakeasy at Third Avenue and 168th Street in the Bronx, having dinner with a hothead whose name was Arthur Flegenheimer, but who was better known as Dutch Schultz.

## On the Other Hand

By Hal Chadwick

The kind of hand I like to see

Is big and broad and hard,  
A badge of masculinity

That's callused, rough and scarred,

A hand with skin that's deeply tanned.

And yet I'll have to say

I also like that flabby hand

That passes out my pay.

Dutch had three of his gunmen with him, and we were just starting to eat when a buzzer sounded near the door. "Raid!" Dutch yelled. He and his goons pulled out their pistols, jammed them into my coat pockets and ran to another table.

I knew I was a dead duck, and I could see myself standing before the judge pleading guilty to four counts of a gun-law rap. I was unarmed myself that night, but Dutch knew I worked for his friend Madden and wouldn't fink, and the cops would have had me on their file for the rest of my life. So I just sat there, loaded down with their rods, until the barman began to breathe again and said it was a false alarm. Dutch retrieved the guns and stalked out into the night, and I never let myself get caught alone with him again.

I got even in my own way, though, years later. I created an extra character in one of my gangster films, a dumb slob of a guy, and had him bumped off in the last reel because he was too slow on the draw. I guess Dutch never went to the movies, and perhaps my insult was wasted. All I know is, they finally got him in a real shooting match in a Newark bar. It seems the Dutchman was still fumbling with his gun when the fatal slug hit.

You may wonder why, after years of stubborn silence, I am now being so frank about the smudged pages of my life.

There was a time in my Hollywood career when I was almost unreasonably sensitive about my lack of education, and I stiffened up at every trifling remark that sounded like a dirty crack. In my in-



security and embarrassment I hit many a man merely because he would say, "H'm, you don't look so tough off the screen." I threw punches at my fellow actors—including Edward G. Robinson, the late Wallace Beery and Peter Lorre—because I thought they were needling me about my background. I had such a bad reputation that more than one director backed out of a picture when my name showed up at the head of the cast, saying, "Raft's a knuckle-duster and I'm not going to have him work me over."

Even my friends were often puzzled and hurt by things I said in haste, but some of them understood. I was on location one time, after World War II making *A Dangerous Profession* with Pat O'Brien and Ella Raines. During a lull, Pat and Ella began a little good-natured boasting about their children, some of whom had won honors at school and were celebrating a birthday that same day.

The conversation suddenly stung me—probably because I had no family of my own—and I snapped, "Oh, yeah, I'm celebrating too! My kid gets out of San Quentin today!"

Pat knew what was eating me, and he cooled me off by quipping, "Great, George! Now he can enroll at Joliet without any entrance exams."

There comes a time in every man's life when his account is overdrawn and he has to balance the books. So this is for Jackie Dietz, who said I was a gangster. And for John Doe and Jane Roe and any others who have George Raft on their ledger as a no-good so-and-so who earned \$10,000,000 as a movie villain—not because he was a great actor, but only because he was doing what comes naturally.

It is also for my mother, who thought it was quite wonderful that her first-born son, Georgie, the only one of her six children who lived, remained a movie star and miraculously stayed out of jail at the same time.

I am sure she was never quite convinced I had any virtues, but toward the end of her life she came over to my side, right or wrong. Shortly before her death in 1937 I took her to a premiere in New York, and the studio, as usual, provided me with a police escort. As we entered the lobby, trailed by four husky, uniformed patrolmen, she suddenly became aware of them with one panicky backward look. "Run, Georgie, run!" she screamed, giving me a push. "Don't let the cops get you!"

So I say again that this is for my sweet mother—wherever she may be—and to assure her that the cops didn't get me, but that my conscience did. A man can't run forever.

I am telling this story to Dean Jennings in my bachelor apartment on Charleville Boulevard in Beverly Hills, just a block from busy Wilshire Boulevard.

My landlady is a beautiful actress named Joan Crawford, and I am always hoping she will collect the rent in person, but, of course, she never does. Indeed, few people come here nowadays, or so it seems during all these endless, solitary evenings. There was a time when the phone rang like a firehouse bell all day, and the postman frequently complained about his load of fan mail for me. If times have changed—and they most certainly have—I can say without bitterness that the world is on your team only as long as you stay on top.

You see, I am not so tough, after all. I am like millions of other men. I always wanted to come home at night—and you can call this sloppy sentiment if you like—and hear someone saying, "Hello, darling," and saying it with her heart. That someone might have been any one of many beautiful and glamorous women

who gave me so much happiness and asked so little. I lost them as I lost everything else—and no one can be blamed except George Raft. I used to think love and friendship were like merchandise. The underworld taught me that you could buy almost anything—cops, lawyers, judges, politicians—if you paid enough. I earned millions as an actor, and I spent it buying happiness on the installment plan and thinking I owned it. I never really had it. The world was lending it to me, and it could be repossessed like anything else.

So here I am, wondering what to say and how to say it. I never saved press clippings, which certainly proves I'm no actor, nor did I keep scrapbooks, letters, programs or other mementos. One of the few souvenirs left is a huge photograph of a dark, sultry young man with sleek black hair, and most people say, "Why, that's Rudolph Valentino. Did you know him?" Yes, I knew him intimately. We were ballroom gigolos together. But the man in the photo is not Valentino. It's George Raft, made up and photographed to look like Valentino.

When Rudy died so tragically, the promoters were knocking on my door an hour after the funeral, saying, "Here's your chance, Georgie. You're a dead ringer for Rudy and you can step right into his shoes." They dressed me in a Gaucho costume and they took pictures. One enterprising theater man offered me \$1500 a week if I'd work up an act with Jean Acker, Valentino's first wife. I said the hell with it. But I keep the photograph on my bedroom wall just to remind me that no man can step into another's shoes on resemblance alone.



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I have a pleasant little apartment here, but there aren't many keepsakes to show that I starred in 110 pictures and appeared in night clubs and theaters all over the world. There are no gold Oscars or Emmys. There isn't even a Mickey, though I saw enough of them poured in the old days. I have some attractive little knickknacks around the place, including a gold lighter given to me by the Duke of Windsor for teaching him to do the Charleston when he was Prince of Wales. Some of the other things you might see don't really belong to me. I stole them.

In a dusty box in the basement, for example, there's a handful of cheap table silver.

I was coming West one night on the 20th Century Limited, and I went into the dining car with Dan Topping, co-owner of the New York Yankees, and his then wife, Arline Judge. I stared at the gleaming silver tableware, and I couldn't resist it. I stuffed the whole set into my pocket.

In my drawing room the following morning—after my usual breakfast of orange juice, toast and coffee—the

dining-car waiter handed me a bill for forty dollars. "Forty dollars!" I snapped. "What was in the coffee—gold dust?" The waiter smiled and gave me an apologetic shrug. "The breakfast cost a dollar and a half, Mr. Raft," he said. "The rest is for the silver you took last night." They had me, and I paid. It was the first and only time in my life I was ever caught. I've been stealing little things since I was eight years old, and still do. I don't understand this compulsion. Perhaps I never shall. I have walked into clothing stores and spent \$1000 cash for suits or coats,

and I have to resist the urge to steal a five-dollar necktie when the clerks aren't looking.

There is some irony in the fact, as visitors discover, that I try to avoid being victimized by these little larcenies in my own home. All my pens, book matches and other things that might tempt people are marked: "Stolen From George Raft."

Some of my friends have suggested, in view of the things I am confessing, that I ought to keep a gun handy or get a bodyguard. I never had a bodyguard, gossips to the contrary, and it's been many years since I practiced by shooting at tin cans. I concluded long ago that a man with a gun is a hazard to himself and others, even if he is a law-abiding citizen who argues that he needs it to protect his home.

Once when I was living in the penthouse atop the fashionable El Royale Apartments in Hollywood—this was about 1934—I had a little tiff with my companion, Mack Gray. I grabbed my gun, aimed it at his feet, as some of my gangster friends used to do when they were in a playful mood, and said, "Now dance!" Like many another idiot who flirts with death, I knew the gun wasn't loaded. But Mack was hopping around anyway. I pulled the trigger and—Bang! The bullet plowed through the floor and thudded into the wall of a bedroom in the apartment below. Thank God the bedroom wasn't occupied, but perhaps that incident explains why I had so much trouble at Warner Brothers studio later on. The lady whose boudoir I had drilled was Mrs. Jack Warner.

I don't carry a gun today, of course. If there is a man who thinks he has to take care of George Raft, let him come. My name is on the hall door and my big black car—almost anyone in the neighborhood can spot it—is often parked right there at the curb. He couldn't possibly make a mistake. It may even be an added inducement to say that, like most men who've moved around in the underworld, I rarely pay anything by check, and consequently I carry a roll of cash. There was a time when I always had \$20,000 or \$30,000 in my pocket, and for emergencies I once had as much as \$800,000 cash in a bank safe-deposit box where I could get it in a hurry.

There isn't much else of value around the house except my matched set of cuff links, tie pin and ring—each of which has the initials GR in diamonds. I bought those for myself one year—when no one remembered my birthday—and they're insured with the same company that carries a \$250,000 policy on my life. The unpleasant truth is, I am worth more dead than alive. When I wander alone from room to room late at night, I imagine I can see newspaper headlines which read: GEORGE RAFT DIES, and I hear voices saying: "Yeah? Who cares?"

One more thing before we go on. If my story disturbs you, and you feel an angry impulse to write a letter saying what you think of George Raft, send it to the editors. Don't send it to me, because you won't get an answer. You see, I had only one year of school, and so I never learned to write very well.

My lawyer, Neil McCarthy, offers the comforting thought that at least I'll never have some pretty lass confront me with a ribboned package of my handwritten love letters and sue me for breach of promise. He may be right about that, but there are countless days when I wish it were not so. I would be far happier if I could write to anyone, anywhere, and just sign it: "With all my love —"

Editors' Note—This is the first of five articles by Mr. Raft and Mr. Jennings. The second will appear next week.



## how to buy for the NEXT GENERATION

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