"No! No! Don't come, Tom!"

A Hundred a Minute

By J. Lane Linklater

THE beautifully appointed limousine swept along the highway with noiseless speed. A few miles ahead were the outskirts of a town. Neither Paul C. Pitt, who was the handsome gentleman in the tonneau, nor Dan, who was Pitt's huge bullock-headed chauffeur, knew the name of the town, nor anything about it. The entrance into a strange place, however, was almost a daily experience with them, since their incessant traveling was rarely hampered by any set purpose.

Paul C. Pitt Had a Balloon to Burst — and a Murder to Solve — So He Taught the Local Cops the Rudiments of the Art of Catching a Killer

In a little while, at the entrance of the town, they were passing under a portal which proclaimed its name: Slocan.

Pitt leaned forward. "I think we'll stop here, Dan."

Dan was not so much surprised as worried. "Gee, boss," he argued, "it ain't noon yet. We got lots of time to go on—"

"But it's a delightful little city,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dan," Pitt insisted pleasantly. "Gardens around the houses and trees along the streets."

"And no dough in sight," remarked Dan cynically. "Anyhow, these small towns are dynamite, boss. Everybody looks at you. And these village cops pass the word along from one place to another. Now, maybe that sheriff guy we ditched a couple a days ago has—"

"Stop right here, Dan," said Pitt serenely.

They were now on the main business street of Slocan. Dan slid the limousine against the curb.

"I don't get it, boss," Dan grumbled. "There ain't a thing doing here. This burg is asleep."

"Slumber," Pitt remarked, "is a mask for nightmares."

"Yeah?" said Dan bewildered. "That don't make sense to me. Anyhow, if you find a nightmare, there'll be some cops in it. And it's kinda reckless—"

"Reckless?" repeated Pitt. "No, Dan. Not reckless. Daring, perhaps, but not reckless. There's a big difference. The reckless person bids goodby to reason and acts on blind impulse. The daring person sets his mind on the achievement of some worthwhile aim, keeps his wits about him, takes the risk boldly but with a steady hand and a clear head."

"You're getting way outer my pasture," Dan mumbled unhappily. "Anyhow, we're here now, and how you gonna find out what's going on, if anything?"

Pitt smiled.

"There's a pool hall down the street," he said. "Pool halls are the sounding-boards of gossip. I'll mingle a bit, Dan."

He stepped out, strode casually away. Dan, crouched behind the wheel, noted with concern that, as usual, Pitt's tall graceful form was like a magnet, attracting the gaze of everyone within sight; both men and women, but especially women.

PITT vanished through a doorway. Dan's giant form sank down, as if he would conceal himself behind the wheel. He was fearful of small cities, where Pitt and he were so conspicuous, although Pitt invariably preferred them.

And, in his heart, Dan did not doubt that Pitt would be able to lift some obscure plank that concealed a skeleton of human drama. The few who knew Pitt well ascribed to him an amazing ability to sense troubled turbulence beyond the blank walls of serenity.

Pitt was back in twenty minutes. He was smiling. "I've found something interesting, Dan. *Very* interesting."

Dan groaned. "Okay. So we're stuck here in this—"

"For a little while, yes. Two days ago a man was killed. He was a stranger in town, had been here only a few hours. Registered at the hotel as Bill Stark. Walked out south of town and stood on the edge of a bluff. A local chap came along and threw him over the bluff. Anyhow, that's the story."

"Murder, huh?" Dan said huskily. "That means plenty trouble—a good set-up to keep out of, boss."

"But there's the human interest angle, Dan," contended Pitt. "You see, the local lad admits he was there, but denies touching the stranger. However, another man—one of Slocan's most substantial citizens—says he saw it done very clearly. So the local boy was being taken to the county seat, thirty miles away, under arrest."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So," suggested Dan sarcastically, "maybe we go to the county seat now and see this—"

"By no means, Dan. The boy, whose name was Tom Snow, escaped on the way, and hasn't been seen since."

"So maybe we go look for him, huh?"

Pitt smiled again. "We can at least see two people. One of them is this Mr. August Wiffing, the man who says he saw the whole thing."

"Yeah? How about the other guy?"

"The other guy," Pitt chided him, "is not a guy. It's a young lady named Bess Tolly. She was Tom's sweetheart, and she is very badly upset; so much so, in fact, that she absolutely refuses to see anyone!" Pitt's gaze was almost ecstatic. "Beautiful case, isn't it?"

"Beautiful, hell!" muttered Dan. "It's full of trouble, boss. And where's the dough in it? A few days ago you put the bite on a guy for twenty-seven hundred bucks, but you've given away a grand here and five hundred there and—"

"To very deserving people, Dan." He thought a moment. "Perhaps we'd better see Bess Tolly first."

"If she'll let you," Dan said dubiously.

"True," agreed Pitt. "Bess is originally from way out in Denver, and has only one relative here. She lives in a small white house on the edge of town. It's at the end of Poplar Street, the second street east from here."

Dan started the limousine. In a few minutes they were parked in front of the small white house.

Pitt sat and looked at the house pensively. "Neat little place isn't it, Dan? Bess lives here alone. She teaches school, but yesterday she refused to attend—refused to leave the house."

"Nuts about the kid that was pinched, huh?" said Dan.

"Very much in love with him, Dan. Some women are like that. Well, I'll see what I can do," he chuckled. "I'm inclined to think there'll be action very quickly."

He strolled up the garden walk to the low front porch, snapped the old-fashioned knocker briskly, and waited. There was no response. He knocked again, and presently a third time.

A SCRAPING sound to his left drew his attention. Just above the porch was a window. Someone was pulling down the upper section. The face of a girl appeared. It was a pretty face, sensitive, thoughtful. The rather large brown eyes were at once troubled and wary, and they were gazing at the handsome gentlman on the porch in amazement.

The girl's voice, a little shaky, came over the top of the window: "What do you want, sir?"

"My name is Pitt," said Pitt, very graciously. "Paul C. Pitt. I'm an attorney—from Denver," he added, although he could just as easily been a diamond magnate from Africa. "I'm calling to see you, Miss Tolly, on a matter of business."

The girl hesitated. "What business?"

"The disposition of the estate of a distant relative of yours. You were remembered in the will." He shrugged slightly. "It isn't much, a mere five hundred dollars—but I have the money with me."

The girl seemed undecided. "Just a minute, please," she said presently.

She vanished. Pitt waited. It was at least three minutes before he could

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hear a bolt being drawn, and the rasping of a key inside. The door opened.

"Please come in," the girl said timidly.

Pitt stepped in. The girl quickly snapped the door shut, locked it.

"What is it?" she asked. "I didn't expect a legacy."

Pitt reflected a moment. "My dear girl," he said then, "will you please look out of the window—at my car?"

Bess Tolly gazed at him wonderingly, then turned her head toward the window. Pitt drew an automatic from his pocket, and when the girl turned to look at him again, it was directed straight at her.

Involuntarily, she shrank back, screamed: "Oh! Tom! Tom!"

Pitt remained motionless.

Then the girl cried, frantically: "No! No! Don't—don't come, Tom!"

But from elsewhere in the house came footsteps, rushing, pounding. A door was flung open. A young man hurtled into the room, his eyes wild, his face pale, his towseled hair in disorder. His fists were clenched, although his build was frail, and his good-looking face was naturally mild.

For a moment he stopped, as if preparing to pounce on Pitt.

But suddenly Pitt laughed softly, flipped up the gun, demonstrated its empty chambers. "Nothing to worry about, my boy. I can assure you that I mean no harm."

The girl and the young man stared at each other.

"I—I'm sorry, Tom," cried the girl. "Now I've done it!"

Tom put his arm about her. "Don't worry—"

"Good advice," Pitt said kindly. "You see, I had a feeling that there was some special reason why Miss Tolly refused to go on with her work at school." Pitt studied the young man. "I'm a little surprised, however, that the police haven't searched this house for you."

"Why, I—well, they didn't have any idea I'd come here," he stammered. "They thought I'd get as far away from Slocan as possible."

"And anyhow," the girl put in, "my uncle is the police chief, and he wouldn't suspect *me*. But what do you want?"

PITT chuckled. "I had to get in here to talk to you. And I was sure that, with circumstances as they are, you would feel the need of money quite badly and would not turn down an opportunity to obtain five hundred dollars so quickly. And I regret that it was necessary to frighten the young lady in order to bring you out of hiding, Tom!"

Tom Snow spoke with an effort: "Who are you?"

"I," said Pitt, "am *not* an attorney. I'm a balloon-buster."

"A—a what?"

"There are men in this world," explained Pitt, "who are human balloons. They are swollen up with their own importance, but there's not much inside. And, even as a small boy, I loved to stick pins in balloons and watch them explode."

"But I don't understand what that has to do with us," protested Tom Snow.

"From what I've heard," said Pitt, "I'm inclined to think that Mr. Wiffing, the eye-witness of the murder of which you're accused, is a human balloon—and I'd like to stick a pin in him."

The girl spoke in a strained voice: "You must be joking, sir. And we can't appreciate jokes just now. Be-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sides, Mr. Wiffing is a really important man. I don't like him, but he's a big man here in Slocan."

Pitt became grave. "I can quite understand that. But. Mr. Wiffing is the key to your trouble. Suppose Tom here is recaptured, as he is sure to be, and Mr. Wiffing insists that he saw Tom throw Bill Stark over the cliff?"

"I know," muttered Tom. "That's why I took a chance and ran away. But then I got to thinking that I was leaving Bess all alone, and sneaked back. I've been wanting to give myself up again, and fight it out, but Bess won't let me."

"What chance would Tom have," the girl said bitterly, "against Mr. Wiffing?"

"Precisely," said Pitt. "And of course, you're practical enough to realize that you must work with me, now that I know Tom's here."

The two looked at each other, obviously uncertain.

"But what," queried Tim, "do you want—"

"Tell me what happened," Pitt said.

"There's not much to tell," Tom said hopelessly. "The other evening I had been visiting a farmer friend of mine, and walked back by way of Craven's Bluff, about a mile south of town. A man was standing by the edge of the bluff, a stranger. He was looking the other way. I said 'Good evening' to him. He turned around quickly, slipped and fell over the bluff.

"I stared over the bluff. A moment later I heard someone call. It was Mr. Wiffing. He was running from the road, which was about fifty yards from the bluff. He came up to me and asked what the matter was. It seems he had just come up the road in his car. Well, I told him about the man falling over the bluff. He told me to run for a doctor. I got back with the doctor in about twenty minutes. We found that Mr. Wiffing had climbed down the bluff to where the man was lying. The man had broken his neck and was dead."

"Interesting," murmured Pitt. "The dead man was taken back to town, of course."

"Yes. And then I got the surprise of my life, When we got back to town, Mr. Wiffing, without warning, accused me of throwing the man over the bluff! He said he had been driving along the road slowly, heard my voice, stopped, noticed that I was having an argument with the man. He said he was just about to get out of his car and help me when he saw me deliberately hurl the man over!"

"That's the full story?"

"THAT'S all of it, except that the dead man was from Detroit, and it happens I made a trip to Detroit not long ago." The boy's voice broke. "People here don't like Mr. Wiffing, but nobody can believe he would accuse me unjustly and without reason."

"All human balloons," said Pitt, "are cowards. And all cowards are liars. And they lie for a reason, although sometimes the reason isn't a very good one. You didn't know this stranger?"

"Never saw him in my life."

"Did anyone else in town know him?"

"Not so far as is known."

"Is there anything at all known about him?"

"Almost nothing. He was registered at the hotel as Bill Stark. He had a handbag, but there was nothing in it except some clothes. There were no papers on his person. The suit he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was wearing was made in Detroit. That's all."

"Did he say anything to anyone about his purpose here in Slocan?" he asked.

"He asked the hotel clerk where Craven's Bluff was, and said he was to meet someone there."

Pitt smiled at the two benignly. "This thing gets more interesting as we go along. Has anyone claimed the body?"

"No one."

"And the falling over the cliff was an obvious accident?"

"Absolutely."

"No chance that Mr. Wiffing had anything to do with it?"

"None at all."

Pitt touched a match to a cigarette. "This Mr. Wiffing," he prompted, "is quite wealthy?"

"Lousy with money," exploded Tom. "It's really his wife's money, but he handles it."

"Ah!" said Pitt. "And what kind of a lady is Mrs. Wiffing?"

"Why, she's a regular wildcat—he's scared to death of her."

Pitt seemed very thoughtful. In a moment he brought out a sheaf of currency, thumbed through it. There were six hundred and thirty dollars. He flipped off five hundred, put it on the table.

"What—what's that for?" gasped the girl.

"Tomorrow morning," said Pitt, "you'll probably go through five very unhappy minutes. I'm paying for them now—at the rate of a hundred a minute."

"But that's crazy!" objected Tom. "You don't owe—"

"It's pleasant," observed Pitt, "to be crazy. Anyhow, I told Bess I had five hundred for her. Meanwhile, keep yourselves well concealed until you see me again."

He was moving toward the door. The two watched him in gaping silence as he went out. He rejoined Dan in the limousine.

"Find out anything, boss?" enquired Dan uneasily.

"Plenty," said Pitt, and related what had happened.

"Geez, boss," pleaded Dan, "there was no sense in giving them that dough. That leaves you only—"

"They're poor, and need it, Dan."

"Yeah. But *we* sure need plenty. We might get in a bad jam any time, especially with you fooling around a murder set-up like this. What's the answer, anyway?"

"The key to the situation, Dan, is that Mr. Wiffing is a human balloon."

"I don't get you," grumbled Dan.

"Well, I won't bother you with the complete process of reasoning. The point is that human balloons do queer things when they get badly scared. In this case, we have Mr. Wiffing deliberately accusing Tom of killing a man, for no apparent reason. Yet there is a reason, and I think it is fairly obvious."

"Yeah? But I don't see—"

"This stranger, Bill Stark, tells the clerk that he is to meet someone out on Craven's Bluff. The stranger goes out there. He dies by accident. There are only two present—Tom, and Mr. Wiffing.

"Very well. Later, in town, the hotel clerk tells of the stranger's engagement with someone on the bluff. Obviously, it was with either Tom or Mr. Wiffing. My theory is that Bill Stark was there to meet Mr. Wiffing. And Mr. Wiffing tried to cover up the fact that he knew Stark by accusing Tom. It is just the sort of hysterical thing a human balloon would do."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So what" growled Dan.

"So," said Pitt, serenely, "we shall now attend to Mr. Wiffing."

"I don't see what good that will do—"

"The case against Tom," Pitt pointed out, "has one weak spot. I shall help Mr. Wiffing to strengthen it."

Dan gazed at him, bewildered. "But I thought you was gonna help the young punk, not the Wiffing guy. And anyhow you can't make nothing out of it. You ain't got much more than a hundred bucks left—"

"We'll go to the hotel now, Dan," Pitt cut in briskly." "There's only one good one, according to what I heard in the pool room."

II

DAN started the car toward the business section, but his worry semed to increase.

"What do we want," he complained, "with a hotel? We ain't gonna stay—"

"We'll register," Pitt went on, "as coming from Detroit. It's unlikely that they get visitors from Detroit in this section, so we'll get plenty of attention, since Bill Stark came from there."

Dan looked startled. "Attention! But, cripes, boss, we don't want no attention. And maybe the cops will get interested."

"Quite possible," agreed Pitt. "But the more attention we get, the easeir it will be to convince Mr. Wiffing that I knew Bill Stark. News travels fast in these places."

In a few minutes they had taken a two-room suite at the hotel.

"Pleasant view from here," observed Pitt, gazing out of the window. "I can see the city hall from here—and that includes the police station."

Dan moaned. "I don't wanna see it. I don't wanna go anywhere near it. I—"

"But it's part of the plan," Pitt said, smiling.

"What—"

"In a little while," Pitt explained, "we're going out. And while I'm busy elsewhere, you're going to sit in the car just outside the police station—merely for effect, Dan. But first I must write an anoymous letter to Mr. Wiffing."

Shrugging hopelessly, Dan played a losing game of solitaire. Pitt busied himself at the writing table. In about an hour, Pitt was ready. They left the hotel, drove around to the police station, parked in front.

"Just sit there," Pitt jibed Dan affably, "as if you liked police stations."

Dan muttered a curse, but sat up straight. Pitt strolled away down the street. At the next corner he slipped an envelope, marked SPECIAL DELIVERY, into a mail box, and proceeded. Soon he stopped in front of a building on the main business street, turned into the entrance.

On the second floor he found a door with the simple inscription: AUGUST T. WIFFING.

Pitt opened the door and walked in. A girl at a desk looked up at him. Pitt smiled at her.

"Will you please tell Mr. Wiffing that Mr. Pitt wishes to see him—Mr. Pitt, of Detroit."

The girl murmured politely and went to the door of the adjoining room. Presently she came back, held the door open. Pitt walked past her.

A LARGE man was sitting behind an immense desk. He had a broad heavy face, with faintly cruel lines about his mouth, and large blue eyes which stared.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sit down, sir," he said in a flat, hard voice.

Pitt sat down. "Thank you," he said. "I'll come to the point at once, Mr. Wiffing. I was interested in your local murder case—the murder of Bill Stark."

Mr. Wiffing's heavy eyelids slid up a little. "Really? But I know so little about it—"

"Of course," Pitt conceded pleasantly. "By the way, Mr. Wiffing, were you ever in Detroit?"

"Never, sir," Mr. Wiffing said emphatically.

"But surely you take business trips—"

"Only to Chicago, sir. Only to Chicago."

"And when did you make the last trip to Chicago?"

"Several weeks ago. But—"

"You were gone about a month?" Pitt prompted.

"Not at all. Not over two weeks," asserted Mr. Wiffing. "But you haven't come to the point, sir. What is the purpose of all this?"

Pitt smiled a little sadly. "As a relative of the late Bill Stark—"

"A relative!" exclaimed Mr. Wiffing.

"Only a cousin," Pitt told him. "But when I heard of Bill's death, I thought it only proper to come here to investigate." Pitt gazed placidly at Mr. Wiffing. "I'm told you saw him killed."

"That is correct, sir," Mr. Wiffing said stiffly.

"Well, that clinches the case against Tom Snow—almost."

"Almost?" queried Mr. Wiffing.

Pitt sighed lightly. "There's one weak point, Mr. Wiffing, the matter of motive."

"Motive?"

"True. You see, it is difficult to see *why* Tom Snow should have thrown Bill over the bluff."

Mr. Wiffing stared at him silently for some time. "I know nothing of that," he stated. "But I understand that Tom Snow was in Detroit not long ago. He may have met—"

"Possibly. But there's nothing to show that there was any connection between the two. Now, I'm in the mood to continue the investigation with a view to establishing the truth. And Tom Snow's escape complicates matters." Pitt got up and strolled to the window. "Of course, if Tom Snow were apprehended, and if he were also shown to have had a motive for the murder, that would settle it—I'd have no further interest in the matter."

"I can understand that," Mr. Wiffing said abruptly. "But I—well, I fail to see where I fit in."

Pitt walked back to the desk, smiled down at him blandly. "I'm sorry. I though you might he able to suggest something. Well, I'll return to the police station—"

"You're working with the police?" said Mr. Wiffing.

"After a fashion," Pitt evaded. "Thank you, sir. And—good day to you."

PITT strode out, Mr. Wiffing watching him curiously, walked quickly to the police station. "Well?" Dan said anxiously.

"Mr. Wiffing," Pitt said, "is what I thought—a human balloon. That will help, if anything does. Have you ever noticed how a toy balloon behaves—flitting this way and that according to how the wind is blowing? Well, that is exactly what Mr. Wiffing is doing now. So we must supply the right breezes. He—"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You're way ahead of me," complained Dan. "Where does this Wiffing guy fit in, anyway?"

"Surely," said Pitt, "that was obvious from the beginning. Bill Stark came here to see someone. He was killed. No one claimed the body. That means that not only was he a crook, but also that he was here on crooked business."

"What business?"

"What could it be but blackmail?" countered Pitt.

"Blackmail?"

"It has all the earmarks, Dan. Now, take Mr. Wiffing—a man of wealth whose wealth comes through his wife. And a wife who is known to be a wildcat. Exposure, of course, would be ruinous to anyone in Mr. Wiffing's circumstances. True, he claims he was never in Detroit—but he goes to Chicago on a trip that lasts two weeks. And he could easily commute between Chicago and Detroit unknown to anyone here. Doubtless there was a woman in Detroit—"

"But can you prove that?"

"No time for that, Dan. And we don't care about it. Our business concerns young Tom Snow.

"Tom's a nice chap, and Bess is a fine person."

Dan shook his head. "I don't see what you can do for the young punk—"

"We might," said Pitt, "be compelled to turn him over to the police!"

"A swell way to help him?" said Dan sarcastically.

"Meanwhile," said Pitt, "we'll return to the hotel."

But Pitt did not stay in his room. He was gone about an hour.

"Dan," he said, "I've just had a very interesting interview—with a minister."

"A—a parson!" gurgled Dan. "But what the—"

"The Reverend Oscar Duffle," Pitt went on. "An excellent gentleman. I had the pleasure of handing him a hundred dollars for his church charities."

Dan's eyes popped. "A hundred bucks! But, geez, boss, by the time you pay the hotel we'll be busted—"

"Of course," Pitt said, "The Reverend Duffle has agreed to perform a slight, yet unusual service, for me. I chose him because his word will never be doubted. I have another appointment with him at midnight."

III

IN the morning, arising late, Pitt ordered breakfast sent up to their rooms, with a copy of the morning paper. Pitt seemed to enjoy the paper even more than his coffee.

"I see," he observed, "that our balloon is susceptible to breezes. Well, we'll be leaving within an hour."

"Swell!" said Dan.

"That is," added Pitt, "if it's all right with the police chief."

Dan stared at him. "What the hell has the copper got to do with it?"

"We're calling on him right away," Pitt said. "It's nearly eleven o'clock, and the bank has been open since ten. Load the baggage into the limousine, Dan."

In a few minutes they had checked out and were sitting in the limousine.

"To the police station, Dan," Pitt said. "I think we'll be just in time."

Silently, Dan drove to the police station. Pitt stepped out, walked directly into the neat brick building.

A sign in the hall pointed the way to the office of the police chief on the second floor. Pitt made his way up the stairs. At the top of the stairs a large

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

form loomed impressively in front of him.

Mr. Wiffing, apparently, had just come from the office of the police chief. He stopped abruptly as he saw Pitt.

"Ah! Good morning, Mr. Wiffing," Pitt said affably.

Mr. Wiffing muttered a good morning and started past.

"By the way, Mr. Wiffing," Pitt went on, "I'm just going to see the chief. I think you'll be interested. Won't you join me?"

Mr. Wiffing hesitated. "All right, all right," he snapped.

Together they turned into a doorway. The police chief, a bluff hearty man, a little dull of eye, looked up at them.

Pitt introduced himself quickly. "I'm here in the same connection," he explained, "as Mr. Wiffing—the Stark case."

The chief cleared his throat. "Okay. But what—"

"I," said Pitt, promptly, "know the whereabouts of Tom Snow!"

There was a queer silence for a little while. Mr. Wiffing stared at Pitt as if he wanted to say something yet didn't quite dare.

The chief got to his feet. "Well!" he boomed. "That'll clean things up nicely. Only this morning, acting on a tip, we searched Tom's rooms again and found some papers belonging to the murdered man. No question now that Tom and the dead man was mixed up together some way! So you know—"

"I do," said Pitt. His face was set in unusual gravity. "And I'll take you there now." He paused a moment. "I suggest, sir, that you take with you whatever Mr. Wiffing brought here."

The chief reached into a desk, found a large envelope, inserted it into his pocket. In a few moments they emerged from the building. Pitt got in the limousine beside Dan. Mr. Wiffing went with the chief, in the chief's car.

"To the young lady's house, Dan," instructed Pitt.

Dan's face was a study. But he started the car. The chief's car chugged along behind them.

"Geez," muttered Dan, "I don't get it. You—you're turning the young guy in, huh?"

"There's no other way, Dan."

Dan glanced furtively into the mirror, watched the car behind. "I hate like hell to have a copper's car tail me. He—"

"There's the house, Dan," Pitt cut in.

DAN stopped against the curb. The chief clattered to a stop behind him. When Pitt stepped out of the limousine, the chief joined him hurriedly, followed by Mr. Wiffing. The chief gazed blankly at the little white house.

"Well, I'll be danged!" breathed the chief. He turned to Pitt. "You mean Tom's been hiding out here in Bess's house?"

Pitt nodded briefly. He led the way up the walk to the door. The chief knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again. There was still no response. Then he yelled: "Hi, Bess!"

A face appeared at the side window. The girl looked bewildered, worried, hurt. She shook her head, as if she wanted them to go away.

But suddenly the door bolt was being drawn. The door opened. Young Tom Snow himself stood there. The girl appeared, rushed toward Tom, clung to his arm.

"Come in, gentlemen," Tom said

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

calmly. "No use my trying to dodge you any longer." He was looking queerly at Pitt.

They entered the house. The girl's face was buried against Tom's chest. Abruptly, she turned and looked at Pitt. "So you betrayed us!" she said with quiet bitterness.

Pitt's face was expressionless.

"Sorry, Bess," the chief said firmly. "Tom will have to come along."

"I'm ready," said Tom.

Pitt stepped forward. "I'll appreciate," he said smoothly, "a private word with Mr. Wiffing."

"Why, sure," said the chief. "Sure."

Mr. Wiffing stood swaying a little, as if he were not sure what it was all about. But he followed Pitt into the adjoining room.

Pitt faced him, spoke to him softly: "Sit down."

Mr. Wiffing sat at a table. Pitt sat opposite him. Pitt was smiling blandly now.

"Mr. Wiffing," said Pitt, "I merely want you to write a statement, and sign it."

"A statement?" queried Mr. Wiffing.

"Yes. A statement setting forth that you did not see Tom Snow throw Bill Stark over the bluff—that it was really an accident!"

MR. Wiffing started to get up, then sat down again, as if his legs couldn't quite sustain him. "But this—this is absurd! I—"

"Of course," Pitt cut in genially, "I don't want the statement for nothing. In fact, I'll give you another statement in exchange."

"But I—I don't want any—"

"If you don't want it, I'll just give it to the chief," Pitt announced. "Here is the statement."

He unfolded a paper and read aloud: "This is to certify that I saw Mr. August Wiffing enter the house of Tom Snow by a back window at eleven ten this evening and emerge in the same fashion a few minutes later. I might add that Mr. Wiffing appeared anxious to escape observation.

(signed) Rev. Oscar Duffle."

"You see," Pitt continued, "I an-

BEECH-NUT PEPPERMINT GUM . . . is so good it's the most popular flavor of any gum sold in the United States.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ticipated that you might try to plant something in Tom's house—that being the only place you could plant anything—to conect Tom with Bill Stark, since I was sure that you didn't want me to carry the investigation further. It was fairly obvious that when you climbed down the bluff to Bill Stark's body, having sent Tom for help, you removed all papers from his person. And it was quite likely that you still had some of them. The Reverend Duffle, of course, was watching Tom's house last night."

Mr. Wiffing's large blue eyes had gone a little wild. He was making little gasping sounds. "All right," he mumbled.

He scrawled with nervous rapidity on the back of an envelope. Pitt picked it up, read it, nodded approvingly, put the statement in a plain envelope and sealed it.

Mr. Wiffing got up unsteadily, reached for the paper in Pitt's hand.

"But one thing more," said Pitt. "Just write me an authorization for the chief with respect to the item in this morning's paper—the reward, you know."

Mr. Wiffing found another slip of paper, scrawled on it, handed it to Pitt.

"There's a side door here," Pitt pointed out. "You don't want to see the chief just now. I'll just tell him you hurried home—to your wife."

Mr. Wiffing, apparently, was obeying suggestions without resistance.

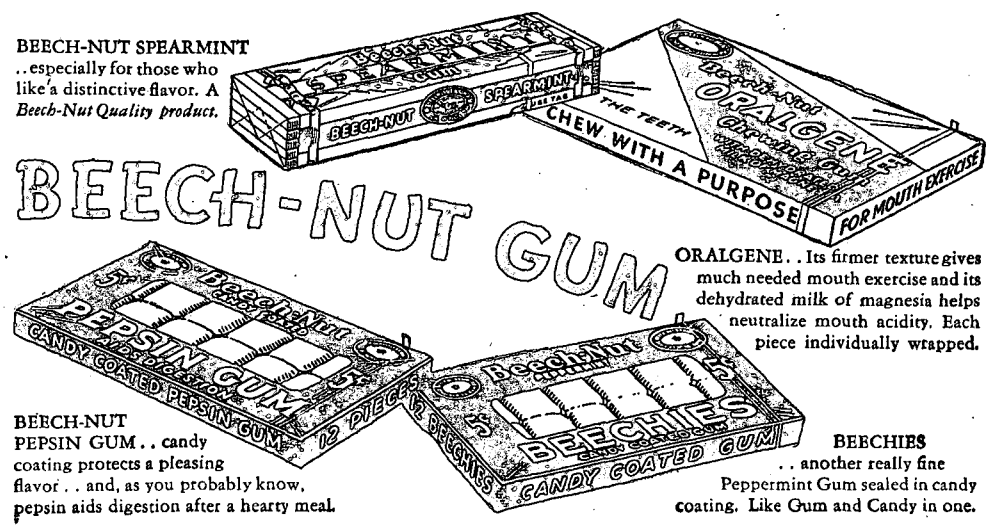
In a moment he was moving uncertainly through the door and along a side walk.

Pitt returned to the room where the others were waiting.

He handed the sealed envelope to the chief. "Mr. Wiffing had to go home to his wife. But he requested you to open this and read it—in five minutes!"

The chief looked a little dazed. But Mr. Wiffing's word was law so far as he was concerned. "Why, sure," he said. "Okay. Anything Mr. Wiffing says—"

"THERE was an item in this morning's paper," Pitt proceeded quickly, "to the effect that Mr. Wiffing was offering two thousand dollars reward to anyone revealing the whereabouts of Tom Snow.



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is his written order to turn the money over to me!"

The chief read it. "Well, I guess that's right." He brought the large envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Pitt. "Guess you're entitled—"

"To be sure," said Pitt. He looked intently at Tom Snow and Bess Tolly. "I wish you two much happiness."

Tom merely stared at him grimly.

Bess snapped out, "Best wishes from a traitor!"

Pitt bowed, hurried out to the limousine, got in with Dan.

"Hurry, Dan," he said.

Dan needed no urging. In a moment they were headed for the highway.

Dan looked at him. "Geez, boss, you don't look so good. "What's worrying you—"

"Five minutes," said Pitt. "Five minutes."

"Yeah. But what—"

"I had to get away with the reward, Dan, before the chief knew that his prisoner isn't really a prisoner. There might have been some question about its payment. So I gave myself five minutes' start."

"What reward you talking about?" said Dan.

"I wrote an anonymous letter to Mr. Wiffing, offering to turn in Tom Snow if he, Mr. Wiffing, published an offer of a reward in the morning paper. I knew he would fall for it, and told him just how to handle it."

They were out on the highway making speed.

Pitt looked at his watch, smiled suddenly. "The five minutes are up!"

Dan looked amazed. "Sure, but why feel so good about it?"

"For five minutes," Pitt said, "those two young people have thought of me as the lowest form of human. There is only one thing more unpleasant than to have some one think of you in that way—and that is to have to think that way about others. I paid them a hundred a minute for it—but it wasn't enough."

THE COUNTERFEIT BILL SWITCH

STOREKEEPERS are usually the victims of this switch. A customer comes in, makes a few purchases and tenders a ten-dollar bill. Soon after he has left a man who could easily be taken for a detective enters.

"Have you changed a ten-dollar bill for a short man, with a black mustache, wearing rimless glasses?"

"Why, yes. He just left here not five minutes ago," replies the storekeeper.

The man who looks like a detective says that he is from police headquarters. The police have been looking for Mr. Savolli who is a notorious counterfeiter. He would very much like to see the ten-dollar bill.

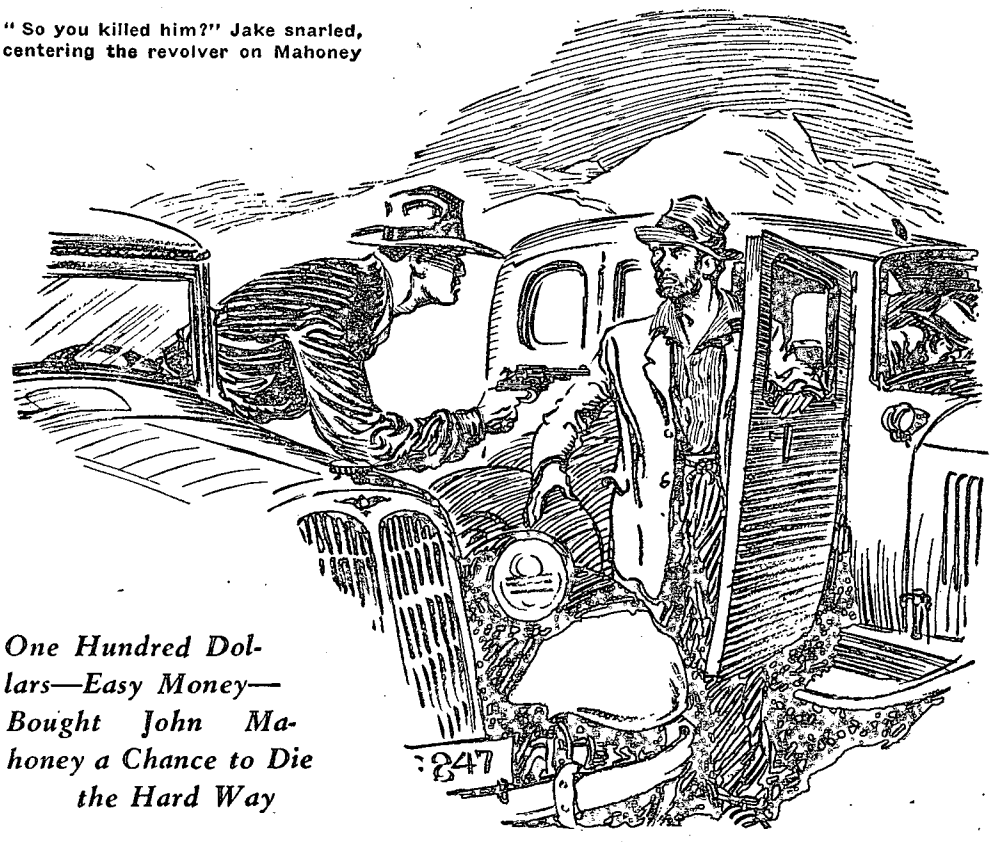
The storekeeper shows the bogus detective the bill. He examines it very carefully, turning his back while he does so. During this interval he has switched the ten-dollar bill which is not counterfeit at all to a counterfeit which he carries with him.

"Just as I thought. It is a counterfeit. Put it aside. I shall be back."

Of course, he never comes back. Fifteen minutes later he is pulling the same stunt a few blocks down the street. The man who enters the store just ahead of him is an accomplice. —*Edward Podolsky.*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So you killed him?" Jake snarled, centering the revolver on Mahoney



One Hundred Dollars—Easy Money—Bought John Mahoney a Chance to Die the Hard Way

Killer's Brand

By Wyatt Blassingame

JOHN MAHONEY'S blue eyes pulled into a worried squint. "There's something wrong about that fellow," he thought, watching the man wander off toward the west end of the freight yards. He was dressed like a hobo all right, but he didn't look like one. There was a dark, criminal twist to his mouth and his eyes were like those of a snake. And no man on the bum should be able to lose a hundred dollars in a crap game and not seem worried about it. John Mahoney, starting with two dollars and nineteen cents, had just won the hundred bucks.

D F W ACTION SHORT

"Hell, I don't have to worry about how he got it," Mahoney thought, pushing big, freckled hands through his red hair. He jumped down from the box car and went slowly toward the weather-beaten switch-house

The crap game had taken place at a freight junction, and though Mahoney knew there was a small town about fif-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED