The Perfect Victim

"You're just another crook, Mr. Pitt!"

By

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Paul C. Pitt, Modern Robin Hood and Inventor of Smart Methods, Comes to Grips with an Unscrupulous Banker—and Faces the Toughest Problem of His Mad, Perambulating Career

THERE was a smile on the handsome face of Paul C. Pitt as he spoke to the huge chauffeur behind the wheel; he knew that he was inviting an argument.

"Stop here, Dan," he said.

Dan brought the limousine to a stop against the curb of Buling's main street, which was less than two blocks long. There was both worry and bewilderment on Dan's bullock-like face. He had never become accustomed to Pitt's tendency to stop on their travels in the small cities along the highway, and this town of Buling was scarcely more than a village. The odor of horse-corrals was noticeable in the late afternoon air. The houses were built like old-style farm houses. The stores along the main street looked like shacks. Even the one bank, in front of which they were parked, had the appearance of a barn given a plate-glass front.

"Gee, boss," pleaded Dan, "of all the—"

Pitt held up a graceful hand. "I know what you're going to say, Dan. You're going to tell me that the representatives of the law in these small

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places are inquisitive, and that we, being strangers, will be conspicuous. You're going to tell me that everybody in town will notice us—"

"They sure will, boss. Why, the hicks are staring outa the store windows right now. They'll be getting on their phones and passing the word along. Even the farmers out in the country will know about us."

Pitt went on serenely, as if he hadn't been interrupted: "You're also going to tell me that there's no activity worth looking for in a place like this—that there's no excitement, and no money—"

"Well, ain't it the truth? If you didn't pass out the dough like you do, maybe we could afford to forget it. But—"

"There's a bank here," Pitt pointed out, with a smile.

Dan squirmed uneasily. "Sure. But that ain't your racket."

"True. But there's drama here, Dan—drama under the most placid surfaces. Drama — and misplaced wealth! Besides, it's a beautiful spot. We're in a sort of mountain valley. The products of nature are no doubt abundant. And those bare-looking mountain sides in the distance indicate mineral wealth. Yes, it's a beautiful spot."

"Okay," muttered Dan. "You win. Looks like there's one crumby hotel down the street there—"

"For a few moments," Pitt said contentedly, "we'll just sit here."

Dan's frown was puzzled, but he said nothing. Pitt leaned back against the rich cushions and watched, without apparent purpose, people coming out of the drug store, which adjoined the bank. There were women and boys and old men. But Pitt's keen gray eyes remained somnolent until a man of perhaps fifty, poorly dressed, but tall and straight and with something of half-beaten pride in his bearing, emerged and walked away.

Pitt's gaze followed him for a little while. "Interesting case," he murmured.

Dan looked startled. "Why, that guy looks like he ain't got a dime in the world!"

"He probably hasn't, Dan," conceded Pitt. "But that is beside the point. In a case like this, there is little that is tangible to judge from; one must use the seventh sense of discernment." He stirred. "I'll be back shortly."

HE pushed open the door and stepped to the rough sidewalk. The few natives of Buling who were on the street had been staring at the limousine, whose stately splendor was made more vivid by the drabness of the town. Now they gazed at Pitt, whose long legs were taking him at an easy stride into the drug store—staring at him as if no such human had ever crossed their vision before.

Pitt swiftly approached the clerk, an old man in shirtsleeves.

"A few cigars, please," said Pitt.

Apparently speechless, the clerk pulled open the case. Pitt took a handful of cigars and dropped a twenty-dollar bill on the glass top. The clerk fumbled for change.

"By the way," said Pitt, "I used to know a man who lives here. His name escapes me, but he was tall and had sandy hair. There was a scar down the left side of his neck—"

"You mean Tom Lake," blurted the clerk.

"Lake—that's it!" agreed Pitt. "A fine fellow!"

"One of the best," agreed the clerk.

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"Why, Tom just left here, not three minutes ago. That scar—he got it a long time ago, pulling his partner out of a shaft they had sunk back in them hills. Dang near killed him, too—"

"That's right," Pitt said softly. "And is Tom still—prospecting?"

The clerk shook his head. "I dunno. He was until about a couple of weeks ago, but—well, things has changed since then."

Pitt was fingering his change carelessly. "Then, I take it, things are not going so well with him now?"

"No, not now," said the clerk. He seemed disinclined to go into further detail.

"I'd like to see him," Pitt reflected.

The clerk jabbed an explanatory finger. "Lives around the corner. First turn to the left, then the third house on the right."

Pitt thanked him with grave courtesy and returned to the limousine. He told Dan to take the first turn to the left and stop at the third house on the right.

"I don't get it, boss," Dan grumbled. "The grapevine is already busy—"

Pitt chuckled. "The free movement of information," he remarked, "is one of the charms of a place like this. Everybody knows about everybody else. And there's no greater storehouse of information than the drug store." His eyes strayed back to the store. "However, when people like my friend inside stop talking, there's usually a reason — something they're afraid of—"

"Who could they be afraid of in a—"

"Usually," said Pitt, "it's the banker."

Dan started the car. In a few moments they were parked in front of a very old, low-built house with ivy covering the sides, and well-kept garden beds in front.

"You'd better come with me, Dan," said Pitt.

Mumbling, Dan accompanied him. Pitt wielded the old-fashioned knocker. The door opened presently and Pitt was looking down into the kindly face of a middle-aged woman. She seemed a little abashed as she saw Pitt.

"Mrs. Lake?" queried Pitt, in his softly-resonant tones.

"Yes, sir."

Pitt's gaze wandered for a moment to the room beyond. Standing in the room was the tall man he had seen coming out of the drug store.

"Mrs. Lake," Pitt said gently, "you can do my man and me a great favor."

"I—I'm afraid I don't understand," faltered Mrs. Lake.

"We're traveling through the country," Pitt explained. "And we'd like to stop here overnight. I am tired—and my man is hungry."

Mrs. Lake's eyes traveled to Dan's hulking form just behind Pitt.

"You were recommended, Mrs. Lake," Pitt went on, "as the best cook in Buling."

Mrs. Lake smiled again. "Well, but I don't—"

"My man here," Pitt continued, "has much trouble with his stomach. I'm sure he couldn't stand the cooking at the hotel."

Dan looked embarrassed, but he grinned.

"I'm sorry," said Mrs. Lake, "but we have very little in the house, I'm afraid. I'm not prepared to—"

"Naturally," cut in Pitt. "My idea was that you would kindly permit me to buy the food, so that you could cook it. It would be worth at least twenty dollars to me."

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Mrs. Lake's lips seemed to tremble a little at the mention of the money. She was, apparently, on the point of yielding. But the man standing in the room came forward, put his hand on his wife's shoulder.

"My dear," he said, "you work too hard as it is—"

"I appreciate your point of view, Mr. Lake," put in Pitt quickly. "But I beg you to remember that Dan and I are strangers."

TOM LAKE'S eyes were on him steadily. There was much pride in the carriage of his rugged-shaped head. But Pitt had touched him at a spot more vital than his pride. He smiled, then.

"Well, I was never in the habit of turning away strangers. So, if Mary wants to do it—"

"Of course I do," smiled Mrs. Lake. "Bring your things in. We'll do our best to make you comfortable."

"You make us very happy," murmured Pitt. "And I—"

He stopped abruptly. A young woman was coming up the walk. She was small and trim, and cleanly pretty, with clear blue eyes and a sensitive mouth.

"My daughter, Anna," said Mrs. Lake. "This is Mr. Pitt, Anna. He and—and the other gentleman, are staying with us tonight."

The girl's smile was a little puzzled, but friendly.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Pitt. "Perhaps Anna will show me where to buy the food!"

"Of course she will!" said Mrs. Lake. She explained to Anna, then turned to Pitt again. "We buy most of our stuff from neighbor people. They raise—"

"We'll start right now!" said Pitt.

And for half an hour Pitt and the girl drove about the town, buying here and there, so that when they returned the limousine was well loaded. An undercurrent of seriousness which Pitt had first noticed in Anna was, by this time, coated with a sudden gayety, and by the time dinner was ready they had become good friends.

Just before dinner, Dan met Pitt on the back porch. "Say, what the hell's the idea, boss?" he queried anxiously. "There ain't a chance in the world of making any dough—"

"But they're real people, Dan."

"Sure. Best in the world, boss. Kinda home folks, huh? But that don't help—"

"And they're in trouble, Dan. That much is certain. The old folks are too proud to discuss it, but perhaps we can induce the young lady to talk presently.

Dan grinned. "She's a nifty, all right," he approved. Then he frowned. "But don't get mixed up—"

Mrs. Lake appeared, smiling, announced dinner. After dinner, Anna helped her mother with the dishes, while Pitt engaged Tom Lake in conversation.

But, as he had anticipated, Lake would talk about anything except his own affairs. Presently the ladies joined them.

"By the way, Mrs. Lake," Pitt hazarded, "my man and I may be back in Buling soon. I hope you'll put us up again."

A quick glance passed between Tom Lake and his wife. Anna's lips twitched as if she were fighting back a desire to weep.

Then Mrs. Lake spoke: "Thank you, Mr. Pitt. But we—well, we'll do the best we can when the time comes."

"I'm sure you will," said Pitt. He glanced out of the window. Darkness

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now covered the town. "I'd like to take a stroll. But of course I don't know my way about. Would you mind guiding me, Anna?"

The girl glanced at her mother. "I—I'd be glad," she said.

Presently they walked out, started down the road. "I'm afraid there isn't much to see," said Anna. "It's a very small place—"

Pitt interrupted swiftly. "I'd like to explore," he said, "our own difficulties."

She caught her breath. "I—I don't understand—"

"You and your good people," Pitt said, "are in trouble. Perhaps I can help you. But I can do nothing unless you talk."

She walked along by his side for some time without a word. He took her arm and held it gently. Finally she spoke.

"I'm afraid there's no hope," she whispered.

"You have too much courage to give up," he challenged her. "Think of your mother and father—"

"I'll tell you!" cried the girl. "There's nothing to lose by that. Perhaps you can at least suggest something."

They had come to a large tree stump. She sat on it.

"Start at the beginning," suggested Pitt.

"It may sound silly to you," Anna said. "A young man wanted me to marry him. His name is Clarence Kupp, and his father is the banker here. But I don't even like him. I turned him down. His father blamed my father, so ever since he's hated dad.

"Well, dad is a fine prospector—everybody around here knows that. And for years he's been turning up claims that yielded enough to get by on. But he's been looking, all this time, for some big body of ore, back in the hills. Some time ago he borrowed a thousand dollars on the house so that he could go on with it."

"He found this rich claim finally?"

"Not long ago. Of course, no claim is sure until it's been worked, but others have enough confidence in dad to advance him money on a claim that he believes in."

"Then its value is based largely on confidence in your father's judgment rather than any certain knowledge?"

"That's right. Well, this was a desolate spot, was back in the hills. He staked it out, set up his monument, walked back to where he had left his old car. But someone had done something to the car; it wouldn't run. He had to walk all the way back here. It took him nearly two days. And when he got back—"

She choked on a sob.

Pitt helped her: "Someone had already filed on the claim?"

"Yes!"

"Was it Clarence Kupp, the banker's son?"

"Yes. And, of course, Clarence has since assigned the claim to his father."

PITT ruminated. "Of course, I can see that Clarence could have worked it easily. He could get back to town in his own car, record the claim, then return and replace your father's monument with his own. But did anyone else know where your father was prospecting?"

"A worthless fellow by the name of Eggas," said the girl. "Dad had to have a little help in getting out there once, and foolishly he used Eggas. Of course, Eggas told the Kupps."

"Eggas," repeated Pitt. "We'll remember the name. He was silent a

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little while. "The mortgage on the house is due soon?"

"In a week," Anna said bitterly. "The house that dad and mother have lived in since they were married!"

"So he loses both the house and the claim!" murmured Pitt. "And both to the banker!"

Anna was weeping silently. "Oh, I've told dad I'd marry Clarence, if it would do any good. But he won't hear of it. He—he'd be very angry if he knew that I'd talked to you."

"But I won't tell him," smiled Pitt. "You must trust me, Anna."

"I—I'm afraid I've told you too much," said Anna.

"I'm a stranger," Pitt pointed out. "And you should be good to strangers."

"But not trust them too much," Anna attempted to smile.

Pitt was standing very close to her. "It's a beautiful evening," he said in a low voice.

She got up hurriedly. "Too beautiful," she said: "We'd better go home."

They strolled silently back to the house. Tom Lake was sitting on the front porch. Anna entered the house. Pitt sat down with Lake.

"Mr. Lake," he said, "I'm afraid I haven't been quite honest with you."

Tom Lake looked at him. "Somehow," he said, "I'd trust you anywhere, Mr. Pitt, although I know you're a much smarter man than I am. In fact, I think you're the smartest man I ever met."

"Thank you," Pitt said gravely. "It may have occurred to you that I know something about mining, and that perhaps I'm interested in mining claims in this section."

"I didn't know," admitted Lake.

"Well, that's the truth," said Pitt. "Now, I want to acquire a claim that has been worked and abandoned. Can you help me?"

Tom Lake thought a moment. "I'm not sure," he said, "that I know what you mean."

"I merely want to buy a worked-out claim," said Pitt. "Do you happen to have any?"

"Several," said Tom Lake. "The last one I had was close to the one that Kupp stole—that is, I mean, sir, it's quite a ways back in the hills."

"Would you take five hundred dollars for a sixty per cent interest in it?" Pitt inquired quickly.

Lake stared at him steadily. "The whole thing isn't worth a penny, let alone five hundred dollars," he said.

Pitt chuckled. "It's worth it to me," he said. "Indeed, Mr. Lake, I'd be deeply disappointed if you refused to sell."

TOM LAKE turned his head. From where he sat he could look into the little living room, where his wife and daughter were sitting. He seemed to be looking at them, and thinking very hard. He turned to Pitt again, and his voice was husky.

"I accept your offer. But only with the understanding that my opinion is that the claim is worthless."

Pitt shook hands with him. "That's splendid. "But," he added, "I'll want you to do something for me, Mr. Lake. And I'll want you to do it without question, exactly as I tell you."

Lake looked at him without speaking. "When is the next train to Galesburg?" Pitt asked.

"Galesburg? A few minutes after midnight."

"How long does it take to get there?"

"About six hours."

Pitt was staring at the stars. "And

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when does the train leave Galesburg on the return trip?"

"At noon," said Lake.

The prospector was answering mechanically.

"Good," said Pitt. "Now, this is what I want you to do. You'll take the train at midnight tonight and go to Galesburg. At nine o'clock tomorrow morning you'll go to an address which I will give you—an outfitting concern—and tell them that I sent you. They'll know what to do. At ten o'clock you'll call your home here on the long distance phone and report."

Tom Lake was looking in the window again. "I'll do it," he said in a low voice.

"By the way," Pitt went on, "can I send a telegram from here?"

"Yes," said Lake. "The station agent sends and receives telegrams." He hesitated, looked at Pitt again. "But I should warn you, sir, that if you send a telegram, or get one, that has anything to do with—well, with mining hereabouts, the station agent maybe won't treat it confidential."

Pitt smiled. "Is there someone in particular who might be informed?"

"Yes," said Lake, shortly.

"Thank you. But I'll use a code. And now, Mr. Lake, we can go inside, and I'll pay you the cash right now in exchange for a document transferring to me a sixty per cent interest in that claim."

"You might just as well," Tom Lake said gloomily, "take the whole thing."

"I couldn't use," said Pitt, "more than sixty per cent."

INSIDE, the transaction was completed. Dan came in as Pitt was passing over five hundred dollars in currency, mumbled incoherently, tramped out again. Mrs. Lake and the girl watched silently, uncomprehending.

Tom Lake spoke to his wife: "Mary, I'm making a trip tonight for Mr. Pitt. I leave on the midnight train, but I'll be back by evening tomorrow."

Unquestioning, Mrs. Lake got up and went to pack his bag.

Pitt spoke to Anna: "I have to send a telegram. Will you come with me to the depot?"

She smiled. "Of course. It's only two minutes' walk."

They strolled, wordless, to the almost-deserted railroad depot. A slim man, whose soggy cigar clung to his chin, slouched out of a chair.

"Larkin," said Anna, "this gentleman wants to send a message."

Pitt was already printing words on a blank. Presently he handed it to the station master, whose bulging eyes blinked in bewilderment as he read:

WILLIAM RAVVELOCK,
WASHINGTON, D. C.
TULIPS MACARONI BRIGHTEYES
KNOCK KNEES FASHION PLATE
ON THE LAKE.

PAUL C. PITT.

"That's a funny one," squeaked the station master. "I couldn't make head nor tails of that—"

"I'm sorry," smiled Pitt. "But the man who gets it may be able to read it." He threw a bill on the ledge. "Please send it at once."

He took Anna's arm. They walked out. For a little while they were silent. Before they reached home, however, Pitt spoke again.

"This chap Eggas," he said, "who told Clarence Kupp about your father's prospecting. Is he around town?"

"He's pretty sure," said Anna, "to be at the pool hall."

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"I'd like to talk to him," said Pitt. "I'd much rather be walking with you, but just now business must come first. You just go on home. I'll be there soon."

She smiled up at him. "I'm still trusting you."

Pitt walked down the main street. Across the street was the dusty, unkempt pool hall. A boy was playing at the curb. Pitt motioned to the boy, showed a dollar bill.

"You know a young man named Eggas?" he asked.

"Why, sure, mister. He's right over in—"

Pitt handed him the dollar. "Go tell him I want to see him. Tell him I've got money for him."

Presently Eggas, furtive, dirty, dull-eyed, came out. Pitt walked around the back streets with him for fifteen minutes, talking smoothly. Presently they were back near the pool hall, but still out of reach of the one street light.

"You understand?" Pitt said. "You just tell your little story, as I've suggested. Don't answer any questions."

He handed the youth a twenty-dollar bill. Eggas took it avidly, his grin stupid. "Sure," he said. "I can do it easy."

"There will be two more of those for you tomorrow," Pitt went on, "on condition that I find you've done it right."

"Sure," said Eggas.

Pitt merely nodded, turned away. When he reached the house, Tom Lake was getting ready to leave for the train.

IN the morning, the breakfast which Mrs. Lake prepared seemed to agree hugely with Dan's sensitive stomach. Pitt, as usual, ate sparingly, and apparently unaware of Anna's eyes upon him.

They were just finishing breakfast when a boy brought in a telegram. Pitt handed him a bill, ripped open the telegram, read it:

PAUL C. PITT, BULING.
SORRY YOU COULDN'T MAKE A BETTER DEAL BUT WE WILL GO THROUGH WITH IT STOP UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES WILL HAVE TO CUT YOUR COMMISSION IN HALF. RAVVELOCK.

Pitt, his face unrevealing, merely stuffed the yellow paper into his pocket and sipped his coffee.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Pitt met Dan on the back porch, just beyond the kitchen. Dan seemed worried.

"The old lady," mumbled Dan, "sure is a swell cook. But, geez, boss, I don't see how you're gonna make out. You give away most of your dough. You oughter take care of yourself, huh?"

Pitt was silent a moment. Then he nodded.

"You're right, Dan. I've got to take care of myself. But you can depend upon me this time."

Dan looked skeptical. "You—you mean—"

"I mean I'm not letting sympathy run away with me, Dan. I plan to make this set-up pay *me!*"

"Gee, that's swell! And all the time I thought you was falling hard for the little dame—"

"Don't worry, Dan," Pitt chuckled. "We'll be ready to leave in an hour or two. Have the baggage all packed."

He swung about and strode into the kitchen. He did not look around as he went through to the living room, so he did not see Anna standing behind the kitchen door, her lips trembling, a hurt look in her eyes. But in a few minutes he returned.

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"Oh, here you are!" he said to her. "Would you do me a favor?"

"It's just possible," she said, in a very small voice.

He seemed not to notice the change in her. "Fine! I'm going around to the bank to see Mr. Kupp. But your father will phone from Galesburg. I won't be here. Will you bring me the message?"

She nodded slowly. He swung about, walked out. In a minute or two he was entering the Bank of Buling. There were two employes in the bank, a young man and a young woman. Sitting at a desk, partially concealed by a partition, was a short, broad man whose thin lips were twisted in a never-wearying smile, but whose eyes were fixed and cold with the chill cunning of an ancient fox.

Pitt shoved a fifty-dollar bill at the young man in the cage. "Will you break this for me?"

His voice was disinterested, a little bored. And there was something in his attitude that suggested dissatisfaction, as if he were disgruntled about something.

The man at the desk looked up, squinted around the partition. Pitt didn't appear to notice him. The young man was carefully counting out change.

Pitt thanked him, started to walk out. The man at the desk got up hurriedly, spoke in a wheedling voice: "Good morning, sir. Are you—er—properly served?"

Pitt turned, looked down at Mr. Kupp, president of the Bank of Buling, very casually. "Yes," he said. "Yes, thank you."

He started out. Kupp spoke again: "By the way, Mr. Pitt—"

One of Pitt's eyebrows was raised in surprise.

Kupp's laugh was a little nervous. "You see how it is in a place like this, Mr. Pitt. You're a rather distinguished stranger, and everyone notices you—talks about you." He hesitated, laughed again. "Why, it has even come to me that you are buying mining property in this section!"

Pitt smiled a little. "Only as an agent, sir, acting for others."

"But I—I was given to understand you were buying in your own name—that what you buy is your property."

"A method of convenience, sir," explained Pitt. "Just a temorary measure. The money is put up by others—always. All I get, sir, is a commission. Just a commission, sir. Well, thank you again—"

"Would you kindly step in, Mr. Pitt," urged Kupp. "After all, I'd like to make you feel at home in Buling. And perhaps—who knows?—we might do some business."

Pitt wondered a moment. "Very well," he said.

In a moment he was seated behind the partition with Mr. Kupp. For twenty minutes they talked in low tones, by which time they seemed to be getting along very well. Even Pitt looked happier.

Then the front door of the bank opened. Anna came in.

Her face was pale, her eyes strangely tense. Pitt saw her from behind the partition, arose, beckoned to her. She pushed open the little swinging door and entered.

"Anna," said Pitt, "I'm sure you know Mr. Kupp. He and I—"

"I don't need any introduction," snapped Anna.

Pitt looked at her queerly. "All right, but—"

"I'm just delivering a message, Mr. Pitt," she said in a strained voice.

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"You sent my father to Galesburg. You gave him an address there that doesn't exist! There's no such place!" She ignored Pitt's look of surprise, rushed on: "You're just another crook, Mr. Pitt! You and this contemptible man, Kupp, are both crooks!" Her voice was breaking. "It's hateful! You sent my father to Galesburg just to get him out of the way! You wanted a free hand to carry out your own dirty scheme. You're a liar and a cheat! You—you—"

Her voice failed her. Suddenly, she swung quickly about and ran out of the bank.

Pitt looked at Kupp, and Kupp looked at Pitt. Then Pitt smiled faintly, shrugged one shoulder. Kupp was smiling his everlasting frozen smile.

"Mr. Kupp," said Pitt, "let us be seated."

IT was an hour before Pitt got back to the house. Dan had the baggage packed in the limousine. He was at the wheel.

"Say, boss," he said, uneasily, "what the hell's up? The women is kinda upset. I was trying to be sociable, but—"

"All my fault, Dan," Pitt said. "But I'll be back out in a few minutes."

He went in. Mrs. Lake was busy in the kitchen. Anna was absorbed at a sewing machine in the living room. She did not look up.

"Anna," said Pitt, "I'll be leaving soon."

"You never should have stayed," Anna said in a hard little voice. "But no doubt you made a very good deal for yourself."

"Excellent," said Pitt. "With your help. But I owe two twenty-dollar bills to young Eggas. I won't be seeing him." Pitt put the money down beside her. "Will you please give these to him for me?"

"I'd rather not touch them," said Anna.

"Eggas was a help, too," Pitt went on placidly. "You see, I found Mr. Kupp to be what I expected—foxy, greedy, and vengeful. That made things easier."

"Easier?"

"Of course. There's no one easier to out-fox than the human fox. There's no one easier to hoodwink than the legitimate crook. There's no one easier to take things away from than the man who wants everything for himself. And the desire for revenge, dear Anna, endows such a man with all the attributes of a perfect victim!"

"I'm glad you found it so easy," Anna said tartly.

Pitt continued blandly: "First, Mr. Kupp had to be impregnated with the notion that the claim his son stole from your father was probably worthless—that the really good claim was the one I had acquired an interest in. Eggas' help was invaluable in that respect. It was he who had told the Kupps about your father's work on the new claim. So I got him to pass the word on, last night, that he had been *told* to do that, thereby creating the impression that your father had deliberately misled the Kupps until such time as he had made arrangements for the old claim."

Anna's voice was sarcastic: "You are really quite clever!"

PITT ignored the thrust. "Last night I wired to a friend of mine. The wire was in code, so of course the stationmaster didn't know what it meant. But the answering wire was in plain English — and contained just

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what I wanted Mr. Kupp to think about me. He would believe, no doubt, that while I was in a position to negotiate the holdings I had acquired, I would have nothing to lose by making a new deal, since I was not the party putting up the money. Then, he would believe that I would be dissatisfied because of having my commission cut—"

"I've heard enough!" Anna sprang to her feet, faced him coldly. "To think that I could ever have trusted you!"

"You shouldn't trust strangers," Pitt retorted gently. "But, even if you hadn't trusted me, you helped me very much!"

"I—I helped—"

"Certainly. Everything depended upon Mr. Kupp believing that I was prepared to double-cross your father. You proved that for him—left him no room for doubt. There was no mistaking your sincerity. I had just got through telling him that I sent your father to Galesburg to get him out of the way." He smiled down at her a little sadly. "You were splendid. Thank you."

"So you—you cheated my father so that you could cheat Kupp!"

Pitt didn't seem to hear her. "Think of the opportunity for revenge I gave him!

He was quite willing to give me the good new claim in exchange for my sixty per cent interest in the old one. Why? Well, in addition to the financial consideration, by holding the sixty per cent interest he could play with your father! It didn't take him long to see that!"

Anna choked. "I wouldn't know who to hate worse—you or Kupp—"

"I'll have to be going," Pitt cut in briskly. "By the way, I've written some information for your father." He put an envelope on the table. "Please see that he gets it on his return."

Anna's eyes flashed fire. Pitt merely waved a hand, turned and strolled out of the front door.

In a moment he was sitting in the limousine. Dan waited for him to give the word.

"We oughter make one of the big burgs," Dan suggested hopefully, "by night. Gee, I sure would like—" He stopped abruptly, gaped. "Say, boss, tell me, where did all the dough come from?"

Pitt was stuffing a sheaf of bills in a handbag. "My friend Kupp," he said very quietly. "You wouldn't know about it, Dan. But, you see, he was under the impression that I was going to get a commission on a deal from a man named Ravvelock. Of course, in making another deal with Kupp, it was necessary that he make up the commission I was losing. Kind of him, eh?" Pitt sighed a little. "Well, let's be going—"

A frantic voice at the door of the house halted him. Anna was running down the walk. She stopped, breathless, at the car. In her hand was an envelope.

"You opened it!" Pitt accused her.

"Yes." Her voice was low and uncertain. "It—it—oh, you're giving the claim back to dad!" She started to cry a little. "I—I'm so sorry for what I said," she whispered.

"Perhaps you were right," Pitt said gently. "Well, good-by, and—"

"But I don't want you to go," cried Anna.

"I must," said Pitt.

"Then I'll go with you. I—I—"

"You," said Pitt, firmly, "will wait right here until a better man than I comes along and claims you."

He nodded to Dan. The chauffeur

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started the limousine. As they swung the corner into the highway, Pitt glanced back. Anna was standing in the road, forlornly, gazing at the vanishing car.

"Dan," said Pitt, regretfully, "this going away is—well, rather painful."

"Yeah," said Dan, stepping the speed up to seventy. "The old lady sure was a hell of a swell cook."

The Thief of Teheran

AMONG the other treasures owned by the Shah of Persia was the most valuable armchair in the world. It was constructed of precious metals inlaid with priceless stones. Naturally, such a costly prize tempted many thieves, but the Shah had it so well protected that little opportunity was offered for its theft. Anyone seen carrying such a heavy and bulky article out of the palace would instantly be regarded with suspicion. It would have been very difficult to have broken it up into smaller pieces on account of its sturdy construction and the limited amount of time available for such an operation.

According to the judgment of the thief, the only practical plan was to gouge some of the jewels out and make away with them. Even the reward for that haul would be sufficient for the thief to live in comfort, if not luxury, for years to come.

To effect that end, the thief made overtures to the Keeper of the Palace. He did not say in his application that he desired to steal some jewels; he stated that he wished a job in the Palace of the Shah. So carefully did he word his application and so earnest did he appear that he was forthwith hired.

He gradually became regarded as a fixture about the Palace and no suspicion was aroused by his coming and going. He worked himself up to such a position that he had access to the world's most valuable chair. Then one night when no one was about, he succeeded in getting a handful of stones from it and could hardly wait to trade them for cash.

The theft was discovered at once and a great hue and cry went up to find the guilty person. The Shah ordered the Keeper of the Palace locked up, along with the servants, and promised that the Keeper's head would be chopped off if the thief was not produced in short order. The servants looked forward to a similar fate should they fail to become astute detectives on the spot.

The thief was caught in this dragnet of the Shah and the jewels were recovered. He did not live to enjoy any of the rewards of his thievery, for his head was cut off and paraded through the streets of Teheran on a pole by the Shah's Bodyguard as an advertisement of the assertion that crime does not pay—when the crime has to do with the Shah.

—*John Berry.*

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Death Rides *the* Deep

"This has gone far enough—" he began

By

Fred MacIsaac

Ralph Stephenson Corners the Desperate Criminals Who Bootleg and Hijack Gold — and on the Dark Foredeck of the Giant Liner, Five Inches of Cold Steel Plunge into His Body

What has happened—

CAREY CONNORS hired Goat Garson to stab Bertram Butterfield, a millionaire from Montana, in order to recover some notes which were the rich man's security in a mysterious deal they had undertaken. Because his girl-friend, Dora Dorchester, learned of the murder, Connors strangled her and sent her body in a trunk aboard the great new British superliner *King George,* on which he was sailing for England. The trunk was lost—and the body of Dora was found on the bed in the cabin of a drunkard, Harlow.

Mr. Snark, the purser, kept the murder

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