Paul C. Pitt Invests His Entire Capital in a Scheme That Pays Mr. Skutter 100 Per Cent in Grief

Mr. Skutter was caught off guard

SPECIAL SHORT

D F W

Mr. Dillping *to* Mr. Skutter

By J. Lane Linklater

STANDING at a respectable distance, a number of the idle people of the little town of Nelhi were staring at the limousine at the curb, awed into silence by its suggestion of splendor. Its handsome, Roman-featured owner, Paul C. Pitt, was in the modest café a few steps away, consuming a peaceful lunch with his huge, meaty-faced chauffeur.

The one waitress, obviously a local girl, was standing near the kitchen door, her eyes fixed in wonder on Pitt, whose tall and gracious splendor had obviously entranced her.

Pitt seemed serenely happy. "Dan," he said to the chauffeur, "what a delightful quiet place!"

But Dan was far from happy. "Maybe, boss. But it's a swell place

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for the law to catch up with us. You get every body squinting at you in a burg like this. Now, in a big burg—"

"You're just a little nervous, Dan," Pitt twitted him, "about the pictures on the post office wall. But don't worry—you never did take a very good picture."

"Okay," mumbled Dan. "But that ain't all. It's another courthouse town. That means a sheriff. And I'm damn glad we ain't gonna stop here. As soon as we're through eating—"

"But I'm not so sure of that," Pitt retorted lightly.

Dan stared. "What do you mean by that? There ain't nothing doing here—"

"I'm not so sure of that, either," chuckled Pitt.

Dan was morosely silent. He had learned to respect Pitt's powers of observation—his ability to sense the threat of conflict under life's most placid surfaces. Paul C. Pitt modestly ascribed that ability to what he called the seventh sense of discernment. Whatever it was, Dan was aware that they certainly needed it, since, except for the imposing limousine, it was Pitt's only stock in trade.

"This is an unusually small town, Dan," Pitt went on conversationally, "for a county seat. An old place, I should judge. However, business may pick up here in a few months. Someone left a copy of the local paper here on the table, and I see there's talk of the government's establishing an experimental work camp in the vincinity. Incidentally, I saw the sheriff—"

"What?" exploded Dan.

Pitt smiled. "The sheriff, Dan. You'll remember that we sat in the car outside there for a few minutes before coming in here. Evidently you weren't watching very closely. I saw two men in a doorway not far away. One of them brushed his coat aside and disclosed a badge. They seemed to be keeping out of sight."

Pitt seemed very calm, indeed cheerful. But Dan had lost his appetite. "Why not blow outer this town right now, boss?" he pleaded. "We can make the next big town—"

"Furthermore," Pitt went on placidly, "it appears to me that the sheriff and his companion were interested in this lunch room! And that is why I suggested that we have lunch here!"

Dan gazed anxiously at the door. "But why wouldn't the sheriff come in, if he was interested—"

"Probably," said Pitt, "because he was waiting for someone else to come in first. It doesn't take much intelligence to reason that he was after someone, and that the someone he was after is someone who is sure to come in here to see someone else—perhaps the nice little girl who waited on us."

Dan shifted his gaze furtively to the waitress. "Hell," he muttered, "she don't look worried none. She's just looking at *you*."

"Probably," Pitt pointed out, "she doesn't know yet that there's anything to worry about. That sheriff, by the way, interested me. He's not a very pleasant person, Dan. He's short and stocky and he chews tobacco. He has a bony face and his eyes are mean and hard. He—"

The front door was flung open suddenly. A young man of perhaps twenty-two was hurrying in. His manner and movement were impetuously boyish, and there was a mischievous twinkle in his clear blue eyes. He barely glanced at Pitt and Dan, moved swiftly back toward the kitchen. In a moment he was holding the girl's hands.

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Pitt went on eating, thoughtfully. The girl and the young man were talking in low tones, happily, tenderly, after the fashion of sweethearts.

Dan spoke to Pitt in a hoarse whisper: "Here's one time you're wrong, boss. "*They* ain't in any trouble. But *we* might be if we don't get the hell away—"

AGAIN the door was thrust open. Two men plodded in, one ahead of the other. The man in the lead was short and stocky, and his bony face was set unpleasantly, although his eyes were bright as if he were about to find pleasure in doing something that would have been painful to a normal person.

The two men trudged straight through to the kitchen door. The tender whispering had abruptly stopped.

The sheriff made no attempt to keep his voice low: "Okay, Bob Gaime," he barked. "You can come along with us!"

The girl gave a little gasp.

"Go with you!" the boy said stoutly. "But I haven't done anything. What—"

The sheriff laughed harshly. "The evidence," he said, "says you have. You know about the school house robbery. Well, we got the dope on you. So come along!"

The girl's voice was raised in protest. "It isn't true! Bob is not a thief! You can't—"

"You shut up, Jean!" threatened the sheriff. "And if he don't come peaceable, he'll come with a busted head."

"And who's going to bust it?" stormed the boy. "I don't know anything about the robbery. And I won't—"

"Please, Bob," cut in the girl. "I—I don't want you hurt. You better go with the sheriff. We'll get you out somehow."

There was silence for a moment. "All right," the boy said then. "But I know this is a frame-up. You—"

"Come on," snapped the sheriff.

In a moment or two the two men walked out, the young man between them. There was silence in the lunch room. Dan peered at Pitt, who seemed intent on his lunch. Presently came the sound of gentle sobbing from the girl.

"We better get outer here," Dan urged in an undertone.

Pitt didn't seem to hear. In a little while he looked around, caught the girl's eye, motioned to her. She was dabbing at her eyes as she approached.

"W-what is it, sir?" she stammered.

Pitt looked at her gravely, noted the simple sincerity of her moist brown eyes. He arose, towering over her. He gave the impression, as always, of a travelling conqueror—but a very gracious one. He reached out a hand, took a chair from an adjoining table, and drew it close.

"Sit down, Jean," he said quietly.

"But I—I don't understand—"

"I want you to sit down, Jean, and tell me what's happened. You see, I may be able to help Bob," said Pitt.

He waited for her as she sat down, then resumed his own seat.

"I really don't know, sir," Jean said in a bewildered tone, "just why the sheriff took Bob—"

"You know about the robbery the sheriff mentioned?"

"Oh, yes. Everybody in town knows about that. It happened the night before last. There was a big carnival at the school house to raise money for the poor children of the county. They took in over a hundred

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dollars. The school principal, Mr. Skutter, put the money in the school safe, but when he got to the school the next morning the money was gone."

"A hunderd bucks!" Dan muttered disgustedly. "That ain't enough to do no one any good. What's the use fooling—"

"Quiet, Dan," cut in Pitt. He turned to the girl again. "Bob was at the carnival?"

"Yes, of course. Everybody was there. But Bob left before it was over. I remember he said good-by to me just outside the school house. He was going on a hunting trip, back into the hills. He got back just now."

"Ah!" murmured Pitt. "He went alone?"

"Yes. He always—"

"That, of course, makes it difficult. He probably won't have any alibi. And doubtless the sheriff has evidence."

"I don't care what evidence he has," cried the girl. "It just isn't true. The sheriff always had it in for Bob."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. I guess it was because Bob was always up to mischief, so now he gets the blame for everything that happens. He—he was always getting into trouble. Nothing serious, just pranks. But he's kept out of trouble since he got out of school. He's been working on his mother's farm since then. He—he's good, Bob is."

The girl started to cry a little. Pitt spoke gently to her: "What sort of a man is the school principal?"

"Well, I don't like him," said the girl frankly. "He's kind of mean. I don't like him any better than I like Mr. Dillping."

Pitt raised an eyebrow. "And who is Mr. Dillping?"

"He's the chairman of the school board. He's got a lot of money, Mr. Dillping has—more than anyone in town. He has a general store, and the picture show, and a share in the bank, and—"

"Are Mr. Skutter and Mr. Dillping good friends?" inquired Pitt.

"Well, they used to be. But lately they hate each other—don't even speak. Everybody in town knows that."

"That," said Pitt, slowly, "may mean something. We must remember about Mr. Dillping." He got up. Dan, too, arose. "Don't worry too much, my dear," Pitt told Jean. "I'll see what I can do."

"Are you going to see Bob?"

"I'm going to see," said Pitt, "the sheriff."

II

DAN groaned audibly. He followed Pitt outside. Pitt spoke to Dan in a low voice. "I've got to see the sheriff. But he may not want to talk to me—without some kind of a build-up."

"A build-up?" Dan was puzzled.

"Yes. We must make the sheriff believe that I'm a great philanthropist—if you know what that means, Dan." He thought a moment. "*You* can do that, Dan."

"Me!" croaked Dan.

"That's right. You get in the limousine and drive over to the courthouse. You can see the building from here. I'll walk over there slowly. When you get there, you rush into the sheriff's office, as if very much upset. You tell him that you've lost me, and ask him if he's seen me. Then—"

"*Me* rush into the sheriff's office!" Dan said feebly.

"Of course. You rush in and, in your excitement, you let it slip about me being a very wealthy man from

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New York who is always giving away money. You use your own inimitable terminology, Dan, and I'm sure you'll be convincing. When the sheriff tells you that he hasn't seen me, you can look very unhappy and return to the limousine. About that time I'll arrive."

"But why fool with it at all?" argued Dan. "It don't amount to nothing—just a small-town job. And you might get spotted—"

"It may *look* small, Dan," Pitt reproved him, "but, to me, it would seem that young Bob Gaime is being framed. The job for which he is being framed is small, but the reason for his being framed is much larger."

"Okay. But how about dough? There's nothing for you in it."

"Money!" Pitt chided him. "Why talk about money? Bob's life might be ruined by this episode. Then there's the girl—a very worthy young lady, Dan. And I've no doubt that Bob's mother will be broken-hearted. Forget the money, Dan."

"Okay, okay," Dan said reluctantly.

He started the limousine, leaving Pitt on the sidewalk. Pitt watched the car sweep away. When it had rounded a corner, and was out of sight, Pitt started walking slowly. When he reached the corner nearest the courthouse, Dan was just emerging hurriedly from a door at the side. He saw Dan get in behind the wheel, then strode forward.

"All right, Dan?"

"Yeah," mumbled Dan. "I don't like the looks of that sheriff, so I didn't give him no chance to ask questions—"

"Quite right, Dan," approved Pitt. "I'll be out again soon."

Pitt vanished through the side door of the courthouse. He reappeared in about twenty minutes, rejoined Dan. He sat in the tonneau, silently meditative for a little while.

"They've got something of a case against Bob," he said presently. "And they're determined to build it up."

"Yeah?" growled Dan. "What's the dope?"

"Well, of course, to begin with, Bob has no alibi. Then, the safe was opened by someone who knew the combination. Bob knew it, because during his last year at school he acted as the principal's secretary—"

"Maybe he wasn't the only one," suggested Dan.

"According to the sheriff, he was the only one who knew it, who could possibly have done the job. The robbery was committed in the early hours of the morning by someone who knew the building well."

"How about the dough that was glommed?"

PITT'S eyes brightened. "A pertinent question, Dan. The stolen money has not yet been found. Naturally, finding the money under certain circumstances would cinch the case against Bob. And I'm greatly disposed to believe that that is the scheme."

"Well," Dan said gloomily, "I don't like the way that sheriff looked at me. Let's get outer this burg. Anyhow, there ain't no dough in sight, and you ain't got much left."

"A little over five hundred dollars."

"That's nothing," contended Dan. "You can give five hundred bucks away in five minutes."

"Giving, Dan, is our only excuse for living. Now, I wish you'd drive around to the other side of the courthouse."

Dan stared at him. "You—you ain't gonna go in there again?

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"A different department, Dan." Pitt smiled. "Courthouse records are quite fascinating. They reflect many a human tragedy. They picture many a—"

Dan started the limousine abruptly, drove around the building.

Pitt was inside the building for almost an hour. "The inside of a courthouse is interesting, Dan," he reported cheerfully. "Now, I found a record of two mortgages."

"Mortgages!" Dan muttered disgustedly.

"Yes, two of them. One of them was on a house here in town. It was for two thousand dollars, and is held by the bank. Also, it comes due in three days."

"Maybe the house belongs to this fellow that got pinched—"

"Not that one, Dan. But there *is* a mortgage on Bob's mother's farm. And that mortgage, Dan, is held by our good friend, Mr. Dillping, president of the school board, who is also the local political king."

"So what?" growled Dan.

"So now," announced Pitt, "we shall call upon Mr. Dillping. We will probably find him at his store, which is just a block or so down the street."

Glumly, Dan drove the limousine down the street, stopped in front of the general store.

Cases of goods were piled high in front of the windows.

"Dan," Pitt said thoughtfully, "do you think you could drive along the sidewalk in such a way as to wreck those cases without doing much damage to the limousine?"

"Why, I—I guess so, boss," said Dan, startled. "But what the—"

"Then wait exactly ten minutes, Dan, and do that. And when Mr. Dillping appears, keep him occupied in an argument for at least five minutes more."

DAN watched uneasily as Pitt's long legs took him across the sidewalk into the store. In a far corner, Pitt found a dingy office. In the office a man was sitting at a littered desk; a scrawny man with a cadaverous face and thin brownish hair that looked dusty.

Very courteously, Pitt introduced himself. "A small matter, this local robbery, Mr. Dillping," Pitt said smoothly. "Yet quite interesting. And the prompt apprehension of the culprit by your sheriff is very commendable." Pitt paused to touch a light to a cigarette. "However, it must be rather hard on the lad's mother."

Mr. Dillping wagged his head sorrowfully. "Very sad, sir. I'm deeply touched."

"No doubt," Pitt said softly. "Of course you know Bob's mother quite well?"

"Very well indeed," admitted Mr. Dillping. "She's a fine woman, Mr. Pitt. A brave little—"

"And this trouble of Bob's will cost money," Pitt mused. "It'll take money for a lawyer. Then, of course, Bob won't be able to work on the farm. By the way, do you happen to know if there's a mortgage on it, Mr. Dillping?"

"On the farm?" Mr. Dillping's voice squeaked a little. "Well, yes. I—well, unfortunately, I hold the mortgage myself." He shook his head again, very sadly. "You see, Bob and his mother needed money to carry them over to crop time. They might have got it at the bank, but, being very fond of them both, I offered to lend them the money personally—at a lower rate of interest."

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"Very kind of you," murmured Pitt. "Will they be able to raise any more money to take care of this new trouble?"

"I'm afraid not. This is a very poor community, Mr. Pitt. I'd be glad to do it myself, sir, if I only could." He sighed profoundly. "If I only could! But I'm a little short of cash now."

"And a shortage of cash," Pitt said sympathetically, "is very distressing—"

He was interrupted by a terrific crash that echoed through the store. Several woman customers screamed. A couple of clerks were running. Even Mr. Dillping looked startled. He got up quickly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Pitt," he said nervously. "I'll be back in a moment."

He hurried out through the store. But he was not back in a moment. And when, five minutes later, Pitt himself appeared outside, Mr. Dillping was on the sidewalk, arguing indignantly with Dan.

"Dan!" Pitt exclaimed in shocked tones. "How did you come to wreck Mr. Dillping's goods?"

Dan glared. "Why, I—well, it was like this, boss. I—"

"Never mind," cut in Pitt. He turned to Mr. Dillping. "This happens to be my car, Mr. Dillping, and my chauffeur. I'm terribly sorry about all this. Of course, I shall pay you for the damage. How much do you think it amounts to?"

"Well, I—it—I think it must be at least fifty dollars," Mr. Dillping said hopefully. "Maybe even seventy-five. I—"

"We'll make it an even hundred!" Pitt said graciously.

He took a roll of bills from his pocket. Dan groaned as he watched the money being transferred. Mr. Dillping was trying hard to smile as he took the money.

Pitt was never more agreeable. "With my apologies, good day to you, sir."

Mr. Dillping was murmuring a good-by as Dan and Pitt drove away.

"You'd better find a garage," Pitt told Dan. "The car acquired a few scratches and a dent or two. There's probably only one garage in town."

Dan headed the limousine down the street. "I don't like that Dillping guy," he grumbled.

"Neither do I," agreed Pitt. "He's a very sly old rascal."

"I don't see what the idea of busting around like that was, anyway," Dan went on. "Cost a hundred bucks, and you ain't got—"

"It was worth it, Dan. You see, it gave me a few minutes alone in Mr. Dillping's office, and I'm rather good at a quick search."

"Yeah?" Dan squinted at him suspiciously. "You find out something about his private doings?"

"NOT exactly. But perhaps there was something in his correspondence about his confidential activities in public affairs. And I also noticed an order on Mr. Dillping's desk."

"An order?"

"An order for merchandise, Dan, to be delivered to a certain place at a certain time, and held for a certain party."

"The interesting thing about this order, Dan, was that the merchandise was to be taken to Mr. Dillping's office for inspection before delivery. Now, that—by the way, Dan, there's the place where we had lunch. Let's stop here."

Dan stopped the limousine against the curb.

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Pitt spoke briskly. "We have a spare tire on the back of the car. Please take it off, Dan."

Dan looked groggy. "What the hell! We need that—"

"Let's not waste time, Dan."

Dan got out and sweated over the spare tire. When it was free, Pitt stood it on the sidewalk and looked at it. Then, without a word, he rolled it into the lunch room.

The waitress was still there, and the one customer in the place was just going out. The girl stared at Pitt, puzzled.

Pitt smiled at her. "We're doing what we can for Bob, my dear," he said. "And now I want you to do me a favor."

"I—I'll be glad to."

"Thank you. Here's a brand new tire. Within the next hour I want you to call the garage and offer to sell the tire to the proprietor."

Her eyes widened. "But I don't understand."

"It's very simple. You just tell him that you have a new 19 x 5 Bessing tire and that you'll sell it to him for five dollars. You won't need to tell him where you got it."

"Is—is it that kind of a tire?"

Pitt chuckled. "That isn't important. It's worth a lot more than five dollars. Here's five dollars for your trouble, and you can keep what the garage man gives you for the tire."

"Are you sure he will take it?"

"Perhaps not at first," said Pitt. "But give him time."

The girl suddenly smiled. "I'll do it," she said, "for you."

Pitt patted her lightly on the shoulder and returned to the limousine. In a few moments, Dan was driving into a ramshackle old garage building a block down the street. A man tinkering with an old car blinked up at them stupidly.

"Pitt stepped out of the limousine. "My man," he said to the garage man, "will tell you what he wants done while I use your telephone."

"Sure," grinned the man. "Phone's over there in the corner."

PITT found a small directory hanging to the instrument. He consulted it, then noted on a piece of paper the number of the garage and also the number of the Nelhi Public School. Presently he called the school, asked for Mr. Skutter, the principal. A high thin voice responded.

"Mr. Skutter," said Pitt, in his rich, imposing baritone, "this is Mr. Pitt—Mr. Paul C. Pitt, of New York."

Mr. Skutter seemed properly impressed. "Yes, sir."

"Since arriving here," Pitt went on sonorously, "I've been made acquainted with the deplorable incident of the night before last. It grieves me to learn that the poor children of the county have been deprived of the benevolence intended for them."

"Yes, sir," agreed Mr. Skutter. "It's pretty bad, sir. That rascally scamp who stole the money—"

"Exactly, Mr. Skutter," said Pitt. "Now, I am singularly fortunate in being able, at times, to help the unfortunate, and it occurred to me that I could do something in this case. When could I see you, Mr. Skutter? How about some time this evening?"

Mr. Skutter was silent a moment. "Well," he said slowly, "I'll be busy this evening—got to take a little drive. Probably leave the house by seven o'clock. I live right across the street from the school house, Mr. Pitt, and if you could call in between four and six—"

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"Thank you, Mr. Skutter," Pitt said warmly. "You may expect me—sometime."

He hung up, slipped the telephone notations into his pocket, returned to the limousine.

"This guy says it'll take quite awhile to fix the wagon in good shape," said Dan.

"Of course," said Pitt, agreeably. "And I'm delighted. Now we can spend a few hours simply resting and enjoying the simple beauties of this pleasant little town. Let's go for a stroll, Dan."

Dan shuddered. "But my feet get sore, boss. You know my feet get—"

"All right, Dan. You can wait here."

And for hours Paul C. Pitt strolled about in the shaded back streets of Nelhi.

He rejoined Dan for an early dinner. It was six-thirty when he leaned back with a sigh of content.

Dan looked at him anxiously. "What now, boss?"

"You go around to the garage and wait for me," said Pitt. "I have to call on Mr. Skutter."

"Well, anyhow," Dan said in a grateful tone, "you still got four hundred bucks left. It ain't much, but I was afraid maybe you would give it away."

"That," said Pitt, blandly, "is just what I intend to do."

Dan's face fell. "You—you're gonna—"

"It's for the poor children of Nelhi, Dan. And I certainly intend to see that they get it—before I leave town."

"But what the hell for?" gasped Dan. "What do *you* get out of it?"

"Not a thing, Dan. It's just an unencumbered impulse of mine." he got up. "But I have to make a phone call before I go to see Mr. Skutter."

"Who to?" said Dan.

"The sheriff," said Pitt.

III

IT was a little before seven, and dusk had settled, as Pitt approached a house across the street from the school house. The house was set back from the street, and there was a large tree close to the walk leading to the front door.

Pitt leaned comfortably against the tree and waited.

A light glimmered in a front room. Presently the light went out. The front door opened. A short, plump pompous little man stepped out and started down the walk. He had almost reached the tree when Pitt moved out in his path.

The man stopped with startled abruptness.

"I'm Paul C. Pitt," said Pitt, very politely. "I'm a little late, Mr. Skutter. I hope you didn't mind."

"Yes—ah—Mr. Pitt. I'm afraid I can't see you now. I recall distinctly telling you—"

"To call earlier? Yes," conceded Pitt. "But I won't take much of your time."

Mr. Skutter started forward again. "I'll see you tomorrow," he promised. "But tonight—"

"Just a very few minutes—now," urged Pitt. He grasped Mr. Skutter by the arm, swung him about, moved him back toward the door relentlessly, walking close to him. "A *very* few minutes."

Mr. Skutter was gasping, but seemed helpless. With his free hand, Pitt opened the door, ushered Mr. Skutter into his own house, swung to the left into a living room, reached up and switched on a light.

Mr. Skutter's fat face had paled. "This calls for an explanation, sir."

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"Of course. And you'll get it—quickly. Really," Pitt added pleasantly, "I should wring your neck!"

Mr. Skutter's second chin quivered. "W-what for?"

"For your part in the conspiracy against young Bob Gaime. I'll tell you at once what I know. You and Mr. Dillping are supposed to be enemies. I happen to know, sir, that that is just a pretense for the purpose of avoiding suspicion. You've been working together."

"But I—"

"*I'll* tell the story," Pitt went on rapidly. "Bob's mother has a farm, and it's a good one. Dillping, through his political connections, saw an excellent chance to make some big money by selling that farm to the government for the project it plans to start here—*if* he had the farm. So what did he do? Why, he first very kindly lent Bob's mother money—and took a mortgage on the farm.

"And Bob is a good worker, and there was a good chance that he would make enough out of his crops to pay off the mortgage when due. Dillping then conceived the idea that a sure way to make that impossible was to get Bob thrown into jail. So, with your help, he framed this school house job."

Mr. Skutter was quaking from head to foot. Pitt lit a cigarette.

Pitt looked up suddenly. "You've got that stolen money, Skutter!"

Mr. Skutter wobbled, and sat down quickly. "I—er—you—are you accusing me, sir, of—"

"You took it out of the safe yourself—if you ever put it in there. Bob was arrested. The one thing short of a good case against him was the absence of the money. You, Skutter, were just on the way out to plant the money. The sheriff, who is not on the inside with you and Dillping, would be tipped off. The money would be found where it would most incriminate Bob, probably on his farm." Pitt paused. "You, Skutter, have that money on you right now!"

"You're insane—"

"When I walked into the house with you, I felt quite a bulge against your side, inside your coat. Bring it out, Skutter!"

Mr. Skutter's face puffed out like a hot biscuit. "I—this is absurd, sir!"

Pitt smiled. "You refuse?"

"Certainly."

"Then," said Pitt amiably, "we'll wait."

"What?"

"Just wait," said Pitt.

HE sat down, too, just opposite Skutter. The school principal didn't seem to know what to make of it. He squirmed in his chair. Pitt drew casually on his cigarette. They sat quite silent for three or four minutes.

Then the telephone rang.

"Answer it," said Pitt.

Skutter hesitated, tottered to his feet, clutched the instrument. "Hello," he said weakly.

He listened intently. His eyes bulged. He turned his head to Pitt. "It's for you," he muttered, and put the telephone down.

Pitt nodded. "Did you recognize the voice?"

"The—the sheriff!"

"To be sure," said Pitt. He picked up the telephone. "Hello, sheriff," he said cordially. He listened. "Very good, sheriff," he said then. "In fifteen minutes. However, I think Mr. Skutter has something to say to you."

He put a hand over the mouthpiece.

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"What — what should I say?" whined Skutter.

"I think," said Pitt, "that you'll put yourself in the clear if you'll just tell the sheriff that you've found the school money—that it wasn't stolen at all, but just mislaid."

Skutter wagged his head miserably. "All right."

He took the telephone from Pitt, repeated the message to the sheriff, then hung up.

"Oh, just one thing more," said Pitt. He found a piece of paper in his pocket. "Call this number and tell the man you won't be around until tomorrow."

Skutter had gone into a partial collapse. "All right," he wheezed. "All right." He took the instrument again in his shaking fingers, carried out his instructions, and sank, moaning, into a chair.

Pitt carefully adjusted his hat. "Well, that will take care of Bob. His mother will be able to get a good price for that farm, too. And—with no thanks to you, Mr. Skutter—good-night!"

Without another look at the school principal, he turned and strolled from the house.

IN a few minutes he was at the garage. Dan was already in the limousine, grimly clutching the wheel.

"Geez, boss," said Dan. "I'm glad you come quick. That there sheriff showed up a minute ago. He's around here—"

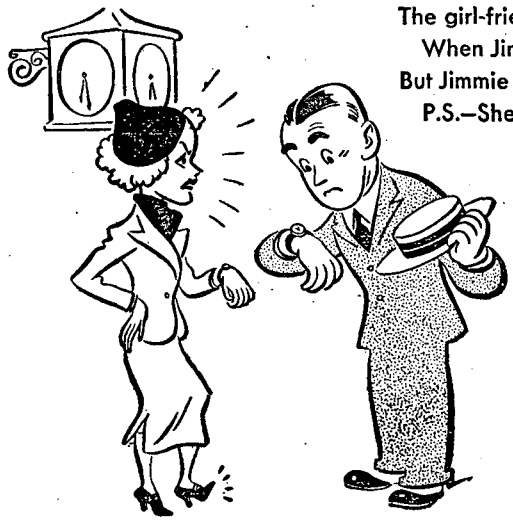
Footsteps plunked across the garage from a door at the back. The sheriff was trudging heavily toward the limousine. The garage man, sitting on a box, watched him as if fascinated. The sheriff's hard-bitten face seemed impassive as the dim light flickered on it.

"Ah, sheriff!" exclaimed Pitt, delightedly. "I see you got here!"

"Sure," said the sheriff. "I said I would, didn't I?"

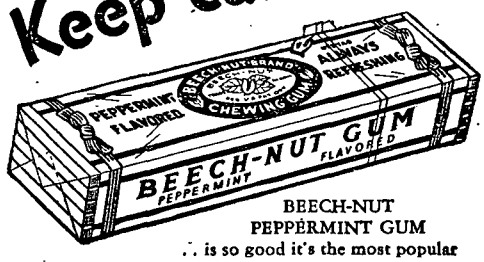
"Of course, you did." Pitt was fumbling in his pocket. "As I told you, sheriff, I was greatly concerned about the poor children of Nelhi, and I thought you would be the proper party to deal with."

The sheriff, perhaps with visions of



The girl-friend made an awful fuss
When Jimmie turned up late,
But Jimmie brought her Beech-Nut Gum . . .
P.S.—She kept the date!

Keep calm with



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

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having his picture in the local paper, actually grinned.

"Here it is," said Pitt. "Four hundred dollars for the children's fund!"

Dan was too stricken to even groan.

"Okay," said the sheriff. "I'll take care of it. That's all you want with me, Mr. Pitt?"

Calmly, the sheriff wheeled about and stomped out of the garage. For a moment there was dead silence.

"All the dough gone!" moaned Dan. "Five hundred bucks!"

The garage man had arisen and was touching Pitt's sleeve. "You owe me," he said, "seven dollars for the work—"

"Of course," said Pitt, and paid him.

"Five hundred bucks—*and* a spare tire!" muttered Dan.

"The spare tire!" repeated Pitt. "That's right." He glanced about the garage. There was a very small supply of tires hanging on the walls. Pitt went over to them, examined the tags, spoke to the garage man: "I'll buy this one!"

"That?" said the garage man. "Why, I—I can't sell you that one. It—"

"I'll give you twenty dollars for it!"

The garage man hesitated. Obviously, the temptation was too much. He took the tire down.

"Throw it into the tonneau," Pitt instructed. "We haven't time to fasten it on the back."

He counted the money in his hand—just thirteen dollars.

"Dan," said Pitt, "have you got seven dollars?"

Dan fished in his pockets, brought out the contents. "I got," he said painfully, "seven bucks and thirty cents."

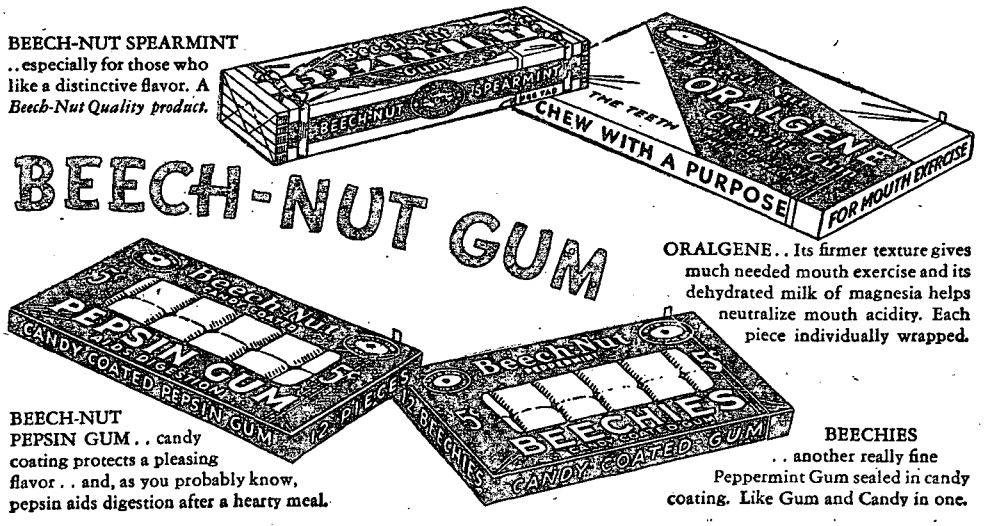
"You seem worried, Dan," said Pitt.

He reached over and took it, handed it with his own money to the garage man. Then he stepped into the tonneau.

"I guess that's all, Dan."

The limousine pushed out of the garage, swung down toward the highway. Dan's shoulders were hunched dejectedly.

"You seem worried, Dan," Pitt said presently.



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"Five hundred bucks!" croaked Dan. "And that spare tire—why, it ain't even the one you left with the little dame. It ain't worth—"

"Of course not," admitted Pitt. "This one is the one that Mr. Dillping sold to Mr. Skutter."

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

"But it's so simple, Dan. Mr. Dillping and Mr. Skutter were putting on a little act of not having anything to do with each other. So, when Mr. Dillping sold the tire out of his store to Mr. Skutter, he sent it around to the garage for Mr. Skutter to pick up."

"Yeah, but it's still a cheap tire," snapped Dan.

"The garage man was holding this tire for Mr. Skutter to pick up this evening. To make sure that he would sell it to *me*, I first had the girl let the garage man know that she had a tire of this kind which she would sell him. And later I had Mr. Skutter phone him that he wouldn't be in for the tire until tomorrow. So the garage man knew that he could get the tire from the girl to replace this one. Of course, the tire the girl has is really different, but anyhow he can get his money—"

"But why all this stuff about a spare tire?"

Pitt chuckled indulgently. "Merely a desire to save Mr. Skutter from corruption, Dan. You see, his house is mortgaged for two thousand dollars. Of course Mr. Dillping knew that. And Mr. Skutter's part in the scheme was making it possible for Mr. Dillping to make several thousand dollars. Naturally, Mr. Dillping would be rewarding Mr. Skutter, but he needed a way of getting the money to him without actual contact." Pitt sighed a little. "Sorry to disappoint you, Dan. But I've just been exploring the inside of this tire. I should say that its actual value is about two thousand dollars!"

Cipher Solvers' Club for July

(*Continued from Page 61*)

Ten—Cub, Chicago, Ill.; Electron II, Paterson, N. J.; Jaleco, Los Angeles, Calif.; Amnyi Machen, Indianapolis, Ind.; Jerry Phelan, Bronx, N. Y.; *Ike N. Wynne, Great Falls, Mont.

Nine—Mrs. Bertram Craven, Rensselaer, N. Y.; Mrs. Patricia Hall, Lagrange, Tex.; E. Sthar Odilnu, Atchison, Kans.; Carl H. W. Oestreich, Grants Pass, Oreg.; Loula Williams, Stockton, Calif.

Seven—Chi Valor, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Six—Akaby, Detroit, Mich.; Flim Bates, Canton, Ohio; Edna D. Brooks, Attleboro, Mass.; Mrs. George E. Curtis, Gulfport, Miss.; J. B. Emerick, Fort Monroe, Va.; Esperanto, Washington, D. C.; Iflac, San Francisco, Calif.; *Kriptobens, Hope, N. Mex.; Mahdi, Merrillan, Wis.; Mossback, Randle, Wash.; Neon, Rochester, N. Y.; Harold W. Pickard, San Diego, Calif.; Sachem, Washington, D. C.; Mrs. Alvin Schisler, Croton-on-Hudson, N. Y.; Joseph M. Schneider, New York, N. Y.; Logan Simard, Pasadena, Calif.; Superior, Superior, Wis.; F. W. Thomas, High Springs, Fla.; A. Traveller, Washington, D. C.; Waltraw, Detroit, Mich.

Five—Duke d'Ekud, Bronx, N. Y.; G. Hirano, Las Animas, Colo.; Sherlock Holmes II, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Donald Houghtalin, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Al. Liston, Newark, N. J.; Segro, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Grace C. Shaw, Milwaukee, Wis.; Mrs. B. C. Squires, Thomaston, Conn.; J. Toscano, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Four—Alice E. Bareerbo, Chicago, Ill.; Bernard G. Bernaski, Hartford, Conn.; Philip Chiesa, Union City, N. J.; Epehaw, Long Island City, N. Y.; William E. Gilbert, Alexandria, Va.; William Nelson, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Three—Stephen Barabas, New York, N. Y.; Hannah Epstein, Brooklyn, N. Y.; David Martin Lieberman, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Two—A. E. Balinsky, Baltimore, Md.; Goldie Elliott, Guthrie, Okla.; Sydney Grablowski, Newark, N. J.; Richard Hendrickson, Bronx, N. Y.; Irving Wooley, New York, N. Y.

One—David Mueller, Cape Girardeau, Mo.; Robert L. Pease, Toledo, Ohio.

Unsigned—Five answers, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Corrections—A. Onyx Starkes, St. Louis, Mo., 24 answers for June instead of 18; Elvin Crane Paynter, Ocean City, N. J., 17 answers for June not previously credited; Kappa Kappa, Seattle, Wash., 10 answers for June instead of 5; Nedyah, New York, N. Y., 30 answers for May instead of 23; Bernice Wallas, Chicago, Ill., 3 answers for May not previously credited.

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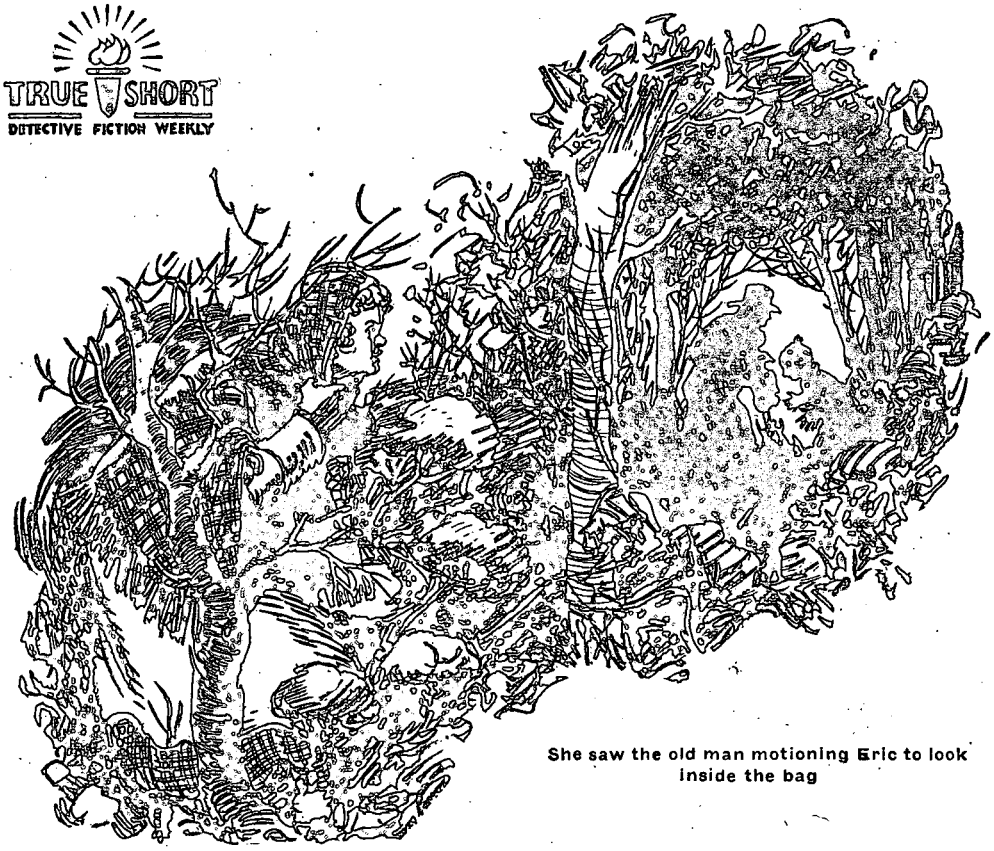
TRUE SHORT
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



She saw the old man motioning Eric to look inside the bag

The Ogre of Mecklenburg

By Dugal O'Liam

MECKLENBURG is a peaceful, agrarian state in Germany where, save for the city of Berlin itself, violence seldom enters the daily scheme of life and neighbors trust neighbors and no man has anything to fear from his fellow men.

Like Bavaria, it is a state of friendliness and good will where the husbandman drinks his beer and plays his skeet and pinochle and the housewife bakes her sweet bread and pumpernickel and cooks her saurbraten and raises her children and dwells in peace with those about.

Perfect Murder! — So Craftily Perfect That the Police of the Entire German Nation Suspected Nothing — Until It Was Almost Too Late

Murderers are few and far between in Mecklenburg because justice is swift, or is supposed to be swift, and there are few hours when either jealousy, or greed or

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