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MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING ADVENTURE	MOTOR FICTION
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MOTOR MATT'S RED FLIER	OR ON THE HIGH GEAR

By *STANLEY R. MATTHEWS.*

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MOTOR STORIES THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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MOTOR MATT'S RED FLIER

OR,

ON THE HIGH GEAR.

By the author of "MOTOR MATT."

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CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

Matt King, concerning whom there has always been a mystery—a lad of splendid athletic abilities, and never-failing nerve, who has won for himself, among the boys of the Western town, the popular name of "Mile-a-minute Matt."

Carl Pretzel, a cheerful and rollicking German lad, who is led by a fortunate accident to hook up with Motor Matt in double harness.

"**Legree**," a member of the stranded "Uncle Tom" Company, about whom something mysterious seems to hover.

"**Little Eva**," who turns out to be other than appearances would seem to indicate.

"**Eliza**,"

"**Uncle Tom**,"

"**Topsy**,"

} other members of the unlucky road combination helped by Motor Matt.

Brisco, } a brace of reckless adventurers with whom Matt and his Dutch pard
Spangler, } have a particularly exciting inning.

O'Grady, an inn-keeper.

Lem Nugent, the owner of the stolen runabout.

CHAPTER I.

STRANDED "UNCLE TOMMERS."

"Help! Some ob yo' folks ahead, dar! Unc' Tawm's in de ruvver! He drapped de box, an' went in afteh hit head first lak er frawg. He's drowndin', he sholey is! By golly! Legree! Eliza! Come back hyeh dis minyit! Unc' Tawm's drowndin'!"

Topsy was making a terrific commotion. While she screeched for help she ran circles on the river-bank, tossing her hands wildly. If she had put some of her aimless energy into helping Uncle Tom, the kinky-headed old negro in the water would have been a whole lot better off. He was floundering and thrashing and making a good deal of noise himself.

"Hit's ovah mah haid!" he spluttered. "Ah's done got de crampus en mah lef' laig an' Ah's monsus bad off! Bl-r-r-r! Dat's twicet Ah's gawn down, en de nex' time Ah's gwine down tuh stay. Doan' put yo'se'f out none—doan' scramble so ha'd yo' lose yo' bref. Hit's only a coon whut's drowndin', so take yo' time gittin' hyeh an'—"

Uncle Tom swallowed a bucket of water, more or less, just then, and his language was submerged.

"Mercy sakes!" cried Eliza breathlessly, hurrying back through the brush, closely tagged by Little Eva and Legree. "Do something, somebody! Oh, I wish we had a rope. Hang onto the box, Uncle Tom," she added encouragingly; "we'll get you out!"

"Oh, biscuits!" scoffed Little Eva. "Stop t'rowin' yerself around like dat an' try ter float. De way yous handles yerself, Uncle Tom, gives me a pain. Can't y' swim?"

Legree was carrying a blacksnake whip.

"Here," he yelled, posting himself on the edge of the bank and reaching out to throw the whip-lash toward the old negro, "grab hold of that and I'll snake you ashore too quick for any use."

Uncle Tom was beyond talking, but he shook the water from his eyes, saw the whip and grabbed it. Thereupon Legree laid back on the handle and pulled. Uncle Tom was brought upright, his feet on the river-bed. The water came just above his knees, and he waded ashore.

"Well, de old geezer!" exploded Little Eva. "Say, give me a pair o' high-heeled shoes an' I'll walk acrost dat roarin' torrent widou' never wettin' me kicks. How much water does it take ter drown yous, Uncle Tom? Oh, sister, what a jolt."

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Little Eva began to laugh.

"Dat's right," gurgled Uncle Tom, splashing around on one foot to get the water out of his ear, "laff, laff an' show yo' ignunce. Dat didun' git away f'um me, nohow," and he threw a small tin box on the ground in front of Legree.

Eliza stooped and picked up the box.

"You take care of that, Eliza," said Legree. "Uncle Tom must have been careless. What were you and Topsy walking along by the river for?" he added, turning to the old negro.

"We reckons we mout hook er fish," explained Topsy, pointing to the ground where a stick with a fish-line attached to its end had been dropped.

"Ah'm gettin' pow'ful hongry," complained Uncle Tom, "en Ah doan' see how we-all's gwine tuh eat if we doan' ketch er fish er kill er possum, er somepin lak dat. Mah goodness, but Ah'm holla cleah down tuh mah shoes. If a piece ob bresh hadun' switched dat box out'n mah han', Ah wouldn't hab got en de ruvver. Anybody dat wants tuh kin tote dat 'ar box. Ah done had enough

ob it."

"Cheer up, Uncle Tom," said Eliza. "When we get to the next town we'll have something to eat."

"Huccome yo' allow dat, Miss 'Liza? Whah we git de money, huh?"

"I've got a ring," answered Eliza, with a little break in her voice, "and I'll pawn it."

"No, you don't, Eliza," said Legree. "I've got a watch, and I'll pawn that."

"Wisht I had somet'in' t' soak," said Little Eva. "Brisco's head wouldn't be a bad t'ing, eh? Say, mebbly I couldn't hand dat mutt a couple o' good ones if he was handy!"

Legree brought his hand around and boxed the boy's ears—for "Little Eva," in this case, was a boy of nine.

"Stow it," growled Legree, who happened to be the boy's father. "You can talk a lot without saying much, kid. Come on, everybody," he added. "The quicker we get to Fairview the quicker we eat. You and Topsy keep in the road, Uncle Tom, and don't lag behind."

"How's Ah gwine tuh git dried off?" fretted Uncle Tom. "De rheumatix is li'ble tuh come pesterin' erroun' if Ah ain't mouty keerful wif mahse'f."

"Walk fast, Uncle Tom," said Legree, starting back toward the road.

"Ah kain't walk fast," said the old man; "hit's all Ah kin do tuh walk at all, kase Ah's mighty nigh tuckered. Dishyer walkin'-match is monsus tough on er ole man, sho' as yo's bawn. Ain't dey no wagons in dis country? Whaffur dey got er road if dey ain't got no wagons? Ah'd give a mulyun dollahs if Ah had it fo' a mu-el en a wagon."

Topsy pushed close to Uncle Tom's side, grabbed his wet sleeve and helped him along. In a few minutes they broke away from the river-bank into the road.

Little Eva didn't seem to mind walking. He pranced along with a pocket full of stones, and every once in a while he stopped to make a throw at a road-runner or a chipmunk.

Trees and brush lined the road on each side, growing so thickly that it was impossible to see very far into the timber. Eliza and Legree, talking over the difficulties in which they found themselves and trying to plan some way for surmounting them, were pretty well in advance, while Uncle Tom and Topsy were pretty well in the rear. Little Eva was dodging around in between, now and then shying at something with a stone.

The strange little party had not proceeded far before the boy heard a noise in the brush. Heedless of what he might find in such a wild country, he jumped into the thicket. And then he jumped out again, yelling like a Comanche.

"Run!" he piped frenziedly, tearing along the road. "Dere's somet'ing chasin' me an' it's as big as a house an' has a mout' like a church door. Sprint! Sprint fer yer lives!"

The other four gave their immediate attention to Little Eva, and then changed it to something that rolled out of the undergrowth directly behind them.

"A bear!" yelled Legree. "Hunt a tree, kid! Everybody climb a tree!"

This is exactly what everybody proceeded to do. Little Eva shinned up a sapling, Legree gave Eliza a boost into a scrub oak, and then started for a neighboring pine himself, and Uncle Tom displayed a tremendous amount of reserve force, considering his age and his recent experience.

"Ah knows dis trip is gwine tuh be de deaf ob me," he fluttered, getting astride a limb and hugging the trunk of the tree with both arms. "Mah goodness!" he chattered, craning his neck to get a good look at the cause of the disturbance. "Go 'way f'um hyeh, you! We-all doan' want no truck wif you."

The bear was a grizzly—not a large grizzly, but plenty large enough. There were lots of bigger bears in that part of Arizona, but this was the biggest one Fate had to run in among those unlucky "Uncle Tommers."

Having gained a position about half-way up and down the line of treed actors, the bear sat down in the road and proceeded to enjoy the situation.

"Are you all right?" sang out Legree from the top of the pine: "is everybody all right?"

"If bein' hung up like dis is wot yous call all right, dad," answered Little Eva, "den it's a lead pipe dat we's all t' de good. But, say, I ain't feelin' real comfortable in me mind."

"Shoo dat animile away, Mistah Legree," begged Topsy. "Hit ain't right tuh make us stay hyeh lak dis when we's all tiah'd out."

"Go right up to de beah, Legree," suggested Uncle Tom, "en tie dat whip erroun' his neck an' strangle de life outen him. Beah meat is mighty nigh as good as possum, an' we kin git fo' er five dollahs fo' de pelt."

"Oh, dear!" murmured Eliza. "I do wish he'd go away. I guess he's thinking more about making a meal off of us than letting us make one from him."

"Dey trabbles in paihs," called Uncle Tom in trembling tones, by way of enlivening the situation. "Hit's lak snakes, en wherebber yo' finds one yo' sholey is gwine tuh fin' anudder."

"Ah hears de odder!" screamed Topsy. "He's champin' down de road lak er singed cat. Heah him! Oh, mah golly! We's all as good as daid—we's all gwine tuh be et up."

Strange noises were coming from along the back track, coming rapidly and growing louder and louder.

"Dat odder one's bigger 'n a efelunt!" palpitated Uncle Tom, climbing a couple of limbs higher. "All Ah hopes is dat he ain't big enough tuh reach up en take me outen de tree. Ah's a gone niggah, Ah feels hit en mah bones."

The bear heard the approaching noise, and it seemed to puzzle him. He sniffed the air, shook his head forebodingly, and then dropped down on all fours and ambled into the brush. [Pg 3]

The next moment, to the astonishment of the four actors, a sparkling red automobile rushed into sight, coming from the direction of Ash Fork and headed toward Fairview.

A youth in leather cap and jacket was in the driver's seat; beside him was a young German in a "loud" suit and a red vest.

"Pretzel!" yelled Little Eva; "I'm a jay if it ain't Pretzel!"

"Saved!" cried Eliza.

The big red touring-car came to a halt in about the same place where the bear had recently held the fort.

The faces of the two boys in the car were pictures of amazement as they stared at the odd assortment of actors hanging in the trees.

"Vell, py shinks," exclaimed the Dutch boy, "dis vas a jeerful pitzness und no mistake. It iss der fairst time I efer knowed it bossiple to pick actor-peoples outd oof der drees. Vat you t'ink oof dot, Motor Matt?"

CHAPTER II.

THE RED FLIER GETS A LOAD.

Motor Matt didn't know what to think. The queerest lot of people he ever saw were dropping out of the trees and hurrying toward the automobile.

First, there was a young woman of seventeen or eighteen, wearing a dust-coat and gauntlets. There was a look of intense relief on her pretty face.

Following her came a tall, slimly built man, whose clothes suggested the ruffian, but whose face was anything but vicious. He carried a blacksnake whip.

A boy trailed after the man. He wasn't a handsome boy, by any means, but his eyes were bright and sharp and he had a clever look.

From the other way along the road came an old darky in tattered, soggy clothes. A young negro girl hurried along beside him.

"Well," breathed Motor Matt, "if this ain't a brain-twister I don't want a cent. Who are they, Carl? One of them seems to know you."

"Sure I knows him," spoke up the boy. "Got wise t' Carl Pretzel in Denver. 'Pretzel an' Pringle, Musical Marvels.' W'ere's Pringle, Dutch?"

"Don't say someding aboutd him," answered Carl. "I haf scratched him off my visiding-list, yah, you bed you. Pringle iss some pad eggs, und ve don'd ged along mit each odder. Matt, dis vas Liddle Efa, who blays mit a Ungle Dom's Capin Gompany. Ven he geds his leedle curly-viggies on, he looks fine—schust like some girls, yes. Who iss der odder peobles, Efa?"

"Dis is me fader, Dutch," answered the boy; "he's de guy wot licks Uncle Tom in de show. De loidy is Eliza, an' say, she's got 'em all skinned w'en it comes t' jumpin' acrost de river on cakes of ice. Dat's Uncle Tom, scramblin' into de auto wit'out waitin' f'r an invite, an' de goil is Topsy."

"Young man," said Legree, stepping forward and addressing Motor Matt, "we're what's left of Brisco's Uncle Tom's Cabin Company. Brisco took all the funds and left us in the lurch at Brockville, the station west of Ash Fork. The constable took our tent, and properties, and even the bloodhounds. We were left with the clothes we stood in, and that's all. Marks, and St. Clair, and the rest, made a raise and rode back to Denver in the train. They didn't have enough to help us out, and so we've started to walk as far as Flagstaff. When we get there, we're going to get up some sort of an entertainment and see if we can't pull down enough hard cash to see us through to Denver. Brisco owes all of us money. Barrin' the kid, here, he beat each one of us out of more'n a hundred dollars. But we're goin' to get him; you see if we don't."

A grim look came to Legree's face.

"Veil," said Carl, "be jeerful und don'd vorry. I haf der same kindt oof pad luck, den I met oop mit Modor Matt und der luck dook a shange. Meppy yours vill dake a shange, too."

"We're going to Albuquerque," spoke up Matt, "and if you don't mind being crowded we can give you a lift as far as Flagstaff."

A long breath of satisfaction broke from Uncle Tom.

"Dat's fine," said he. "Dis niggah am sholy tuckered. Why doan' yo'-all git intuh de wagon? Dat

beah am li'ble tuh come snoopin' an' pesterin' back."

"Pear?" cried Carl. "Vat you say, huh? Iss dere a pear aroundt here?"

"Dat's no dream, Dutch," answered the boy. "Wot did yous t'ink it was chased us up dem trees?"

"Everythin's been goin' wrong with us ever since we hit Brockville," said Legree. "A lot more'll happen, too, but I reckon we're done with the bear. This machine scared the brute away. How'll you have us in the car, Motor Matt?"

"Little Eva, as you call him," said Matt, laughing a little as he looked at the boy, "had better get in front here with Carl. That will leave four of you for the tonneau. It won't be long until we get to Fairview, and we'll stop there for dinner."

"Um-yum," said Topsy; "golly, but dat sounds good! Dinnah! Heah dat, Unc' Tawn?"

Uncle Tom smacked his lips and rolled up the whites of his eyes.

"Doan' say a wo'd, chile," he cautioned. "Dis seems jess lak er dream, dis ride in de debble-wagon, de dinnah, en all. Yo' speak too loud, Ah's fearin' Ah's done gwine tuh woke up."

With his load of stranded actors aboard, all rejoicing in the good luck that had brought Matt and Carl along with the automobile at that particular time, the young motorist cranked up, threw in the clutch and started. Hardly were they under good headway when a sharp cry came from Eliza.

"Stop! The box! I dropped it when I got up into that tree."

Matt stopped the Red Flier.

"Pox?" cried Carl; "vat iss dot?"

"Dat's whut got me into de ruvver," said Uncle Tom. "Ah 'lows dat box is er heap mo' trouble dan hit's worf."

"If we ever get hold of Brisco," returned Legree, "it'll be that box that does it for us. Wait here a minute, Motor Matt, and I'll go back and get it. I think I know right where it is."

Legree got out of the car, went back along the road, and vanished among the bushes.

"Is der money in der pox?" asked Carl.

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"We don't know what's in it," answered Eliza.

"Dot's keveer. How vill dot pox helup you ged holt oof Prisco?"

"Brisco always kept it by him," went on Eliza, "so we know he thinks it's valuable. He told Legree, once, he wouldn't lose the box for ten thousand dollars."

"How did you come to get hold of it?" inquired Matt.

"That's the queer part of it. Brisco left the Brockville hotel during the night——"

"An' I picked it up by de door, next mornin'," chimed in the boy. "Brisco must have dropped it when he made dat getaway. It was blacker dan a stack o' black cats, dat night, an' he wasn't able t' use his lamps."

"When Marks, and Harris, and St. Clair, and the rest of the company left Brockville," continued Eliza, "they told us to keep the box and not give it up until Brisco paid over what he owed. We lost our wages and everything else we had except the clothes on our backs."

"Dot's me," spoke up Carl; "I vas fixed der same vat you are. Den, pympy, Modor Matt come along mit himseluf, shpoke some jeerful vorts mit me, dook me for a bard, und luck made a shange. Meppy dot iss how it vill be mit you."

"Seems lak he was a long time findin' dat dere box," said Uncle Tom. "Ah's honin' fo' dat hotel in Fairview, an' fo' dat dinnah, an' fo' to dry dese clothes. Mistah Legree is a monstus long time, an' no mistake."

"Stay here, all of you," said Matt, getting out of the car. "I'll go back and see if I can help find the box. If it's so important, it won't do to leave it behind."

"I'll go 'long wit' yous," chirped the boy.

Before he could get out of the car, the sharp, incisive note of a revolver echoed from the bushes at the trail-side, close to the place where Legree had vanished into them.

Eliza stifled a scream.

"Mah goodness!" fluttered Topsy. "Somebody's done gone tuh shootin'!"

"It wasn't dad, dat's a cinch!" cried the boy. "He didn't have no gun!"

"Stay there!" called Matt to the boy, as he whirled and hurried on. "Stand ready to crank up the machine, Carl," he added, "in case we have to start in a hurry." Matt had dropped into the troubles of these forlorn "Uncle Tommers" with bewildering suddenness. He hadn't had the remotest notion that there was going to be any violence, or shooting, and the report of the revolver had sent a thrill of alarm through him.

Had Brisco been tracking the unfortunate actors, and had he attempted to make way with the tin box just as Legree was about to secure it?

As Matt drew closer to the thicket, he heard sharp and angry voices. One voice he recognized as belonging to Legree, and the other struck a strangely familiar note in his ear. He had heard that

voice somewhere before—but where?

There were only two voices taking part in the talk, but the man who had intercepted Legree was armed. Matt knew it would stand him in hand to be cautious, so, instead of turning directly from the road into the brush, he darted for the timber some distance beyond the scene of the altercation. Then, making his way back warily, he pushed through the bushes.

He made very little noise—so little that his approach was not heard by either of the two men. Legree, however, was standing in such a position that he could not help seeing Matt. He was facing the other man, and the latter had his back to the young motorist.

There was something familiar about that back, but even yet Matt could not recall who the man was.

The fellow was roughly dressed. In his right hand he was holding a revolver, pointing it squarely at Legree, and in his left hand he was holding a small tin box.

"If ye think ye can fool Hank Brisco," the man with the weapon was saying, "ye're far wide o' yer trail. He's got a ottermobill, now, what kin shoot through the kentry like a cannon-ball, an' I reckon thar'll be some Cain raised on this part o' the range afore many moons. You take my advice an' hike out o' here without tryin' ter make Hank any trouble, er——"

Just at that moment Motor Matt's opportunity came. Flinging himself forward suddenly, he grabbed the revolver out of the ruffian's hand.

"Bully for you, Matt!" cried Legree.

The next instant Legree's blacksnake whip had curled itself about the ruffian's left wrist, girdling the skin like a loop of fire.

The man roared out an oath. The pain must have been intense, for his fingers curled away from the box and he caught his wrist with his other hand.

Matt stared. When the ruffian had turned and rushed into the woods, cursing and vowing vengeance, Matt continued to stare.

"Ever seen that man before, Matt?" asked Legree, surprised at the boy's manner.

"I should say so!" exclaimed Matt. "Let's get back to the car. You've got back the box, but we haven't seen the last of this—not by a long shot."

CHAPTER III.

THE STOLEN RUNABOUT.

Shouts of relief went up from those in the Red Flier at sight of Matt and Legree sprinting down the road, Legree with the box and Matt with the revolver.

"Hoop-a-la!" jubilated Carl; "be jeerful, eferypody. Here dey come alretty, und mit more as dey vent to ged!"

"Fo' de lan' sake!" chattered Topsy; "Ah sholy expected some one had done been kilt."

"Git right in de kyah," urged Uncle Tom, "so we kin git erway f'om dis hyeh place. Beahs, en robbahs, en oddah spontaneous excitements is monstus tryin' to er niggah wif er empty stummick. Ah doan' lak shootin' nohow."

"Was dat some guy t'rowin' a bullet at yous, dad?" inquired Little Eva. "How close did he come t' ringin' de bell?"

"How many were there?" cried Eliza; "are they following us?"

Matt jumped into his seat, and Legree scrambled for the tonneau.

"Take this, Legree," called Matt, and dropped the revolver over the back of the seat.

Carl, who had been posted at the front of the machine, had already "turned over" the engine. As she took the spark Carl crawled to his place beside Matt, and the Red Flier glided away.

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The young motorist was silent for a while, listening as Legree told how he had gone searching for the box and found it in the hands of a scoundrel whom he had never seen before. The Unknown had fired a revolver, but it had been more to intimidate Legree and keep him at a distance, for the bullet had not come anywhere near him. Legree finished with an account of how Matt had come up behind the ruffian and had saved the day.

"Dot's der vay Modor Matt does pitzness," said the admiring Carl. "You bed my life he vas some virlvinds ven he leds himseluf oudt."

"The name of the man who ran off and left your company stranded was Hank Brisco, was it?" asked Matt.

"That was his name, Matt," replied Legree. "But who was that tough-looking citizen that had me cornered, there in the thicket?"

"I'll have to tell you something that happened to Carl and me, a few days ago, in order for you to understand that part of it," answered Matt. "This touring-car belongs to Mr. James Q. Tomlinson,

a wholesale jeweler who lives in Denver. He and his driver, Gregory, have been touring the Southwest in it. A gang of thieves, among whom was a fellow called Hank, and another called Spangler, robbed Mr. Tomlinson on the trail, several miles west of Ash Fork. Carl and I got mixed up in the trouble, and we had some exciting times racing the Red Flier against a high-powered runabout that the thieves stole from a wealthy cattleman named Lem Nugent.

"Mr. Tomlinson recovered his stolen property and went on to Albuquerque with his driver, Gregory, hiring me to take the touring-car from Ash Fork to Albuquerque. That's how we happened to come along in time to help you out, Mr. Legree."

"If this man, Tomlinson, got back his stolen property," asked Legree, "what became of the thieves?"

"Two of them, Hank and Spangler, got away with the cattleman's car. The stolen runabout can go like a blue streak, and is lighter and faster than the Red Flier. Now, the man that tried to get the tin box, back there in the thicket, was none other than Spangler; and the other villain, who was called by the name of 'Hank,' was the fellow who left you in the lurch at Brockville."

"Shiminy grickets, how t'ings vill turn oudt mit demselufs, vonce und again!" clamored Carl. "Domlinson vould like more as he can dell to haf dose fellers ketched, and Nuchent vants pooty pad dot he gedds his car pack some more. He vill gif fife huntert tollars to any vone vat vill findt der car, und he vill gif fife huntert more for Hank, und der same for Spangler." Carl leaned toward Matt with his eyes almost popping from his head. "Bard," he asked, "can ve scoop it in?"

"I'd like to get back that runabout for Mr. Nugent," said Matt, "but I don't know as we ought to take the time to go fooling along on our way to Albuquerque."

"Vell, Misder Domlinson say dot dere vasn't any hurry."

"He also said," continued Matt, "that he wouldn't trust this car with everybody. If we should get to tearing around after Hank and Spangler, and damage the Flier, we would find ourselves in a hole."

"You hadn't better bother trying to take us to Flagstaff, then," put in Legree, "for as long as we've got this tin box Brisco is going to keep on trying to get hold of it. If he chases us with that stolen runabout, which you say is a faster car than the Red Flier, you're goin' to run some risks with this machine."

"If we work it right," said Matt, "I guess we can get you people to Flagstaff without being bothered much by Hank and Spangler. It's queer, though, to have it turn out that those two scoundrels are mixed up in these troubles of yours."

"Ah's done had trouble enough," wailed Uncle Tom, "en Ah doan' know how Ah could stand any mo'. Ah's er pretty ole niggah tuh go traipsin' erroun' afteh robbahs, en drappin' intuh rivvers, an' climbin' trees tuh sabe my hide from beahs. All de same, Ah 'lows some ob dat money fo' ketchin' dat 'ar Brisco would come mouty handy. But Mistah Legree, yo' listen hyeh. If Brisco sets sich er pow'ful store by dat 'ar box, mebbly he'd buy hit offen de lot ob us, payin' us whut he owes jess tuh git holt ob hit. Why not, sah, entah intuh prognostications wif him wif de view ob settlin' ouah compuncions in er pleasin' manner?"

A shadow of a grin wreathed itself around Legree's lips.

"Well, Uncle Tom," he answered, "it's hard to prognosticate with a chap who's so hard to find as Brisco is."

"Vere vas Hank vile Spangler vas looking for der pox, Matt?" asked Carl.

"That's a conundrum, Carl."

"Und vere vas der runabout?"

"Another conundrum."

"Vell, ditn't Spangler ride to der blace vere he come for der din pox in der runabout?"

"I didn't see anything of the machine, but I was afraid it was somewhere around—which is the reason I was in such a hurry to make a fresh start for Fairview."

"Ve don'd vas shased py der runaboutd, anyway, und dot means dot it vasn't some blace around vere Spangler vas."

"Chee!" came from Little Eva, as he pointed ahead. "Dere's de burg wot we're headin' fer. I'm a jay if it don't look almost big enough fer two 'r t'ree people t' live in."

From the rising ground on which the Red Flier and its passengers found themselves, at that moment, Fairview could be fairly viewed. Perhaps there were twenty-five or thirty houses in the place, the main street being bordered by half a dozen stores.

"Doan' yo' go an' tell me dar ain't no hotel," faltered Uncle Tom.

"No matter how small a town is, Uncle Tom," returned Eliza, "travelers can always find a place to stay. Our hardest work will be, I think, to discover some one who will lend money on our jewelry."

"I'll furnish the jewelry, Eliza," said Legree. "This watch of mine is worth enough, I think, to furnish us with food and lodging while Motor Matt gives us a lift to Flagstaff."

"If you're out of cash," spoke up Matt, in his usual generous style, "I'll foot the bills. Some time, when you get on Easy Street, you can pay me back."

Uncle Tom's anxiety over the prospect fell from him like a wet blanket.

"Yo's a gemman, Mistah Motah Matt," he declared, "yo' is what Ah calls a puffick gemman. Ah'm mos'ly independent in dese money mattahs—dis is de fust time since Ah can remembah dat Ah habn't had all ob two dollars in mah clo's—so hit is mouty spognoocious tuh mah pride, sah, to be fo'ced tuh accept a loan. Still, sah, Ah brings mahse'f to hit bekase yo' is so willin' an' so spendacious. In retu'n fo' dat, Mistah Motah Matt, Ah becomes on de spot yo' official mascot. Yassuh. Ah takes yo' luck en mah own han's, an' evah time what yo' do anyt'ing, Ah agrees tuh make yo' a winnah."

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"Much obliged, Uncle Tom," laughed Matt.

"Go on wif yo'!" cried Topsy. "Why didun' yo' mascot dat 'ar company so dat Brisco couldn't do lak what he done? Mascot! Yah, yah, yah!"

"Laff," returned Uncle Tom tartly, "laff an' show yo' ignunce! What yo' unnerstan' about luckosophy an' mascots? Yo' mouty triflin' an' tryin', dat's what yo' is. Wait twell yo' see what Ah does fo' Motah Matt."

During this talk, the Red Flier had glided down a long slope into the little town. It did not take long to traverse the main street, and as they jogged onward all eyes looked carefully for a hotel.

Finally they saw a sign with a picture of something that looked like a four-leaved clover. Under the picture were the printed words, "Shamrock House."

"Dat 'ar fo'-leaved clovah means luck," averred Uncle Tom.

"It's supposed to be a shamrock, Uncle Tom," said Eliza, "and not a clover-leaf."

"Ah knows dat," went on Uncle Tom, "but hit sho' means luck. Ah done got de feelin'."

Motor Matt and Carl Pretzel "got the feeling," too, for around at one side of the hotel they saw another automobile. There was no one around the car. Carl nearly dropped off his seat.

"Vas I plind mit meinseluf," he whispered, "or iss it der real t'ing vat I see? Matt, dere iss der shtolen runaboutd, mit nopody aroundt! Fife huntert tollars saying it righdt oudt loud, 'Come, oh, come, somepody und pick me oop!'"

Matt was astounded; yet there was not the least doubt about the runabout being the same car that had been stolen.

"Is that the automobile Brisco ran away with?" demanded Legree, leaping energetically out of the tonneau. "That's the one!" declared Matt.

"Then come with me, Matt, you and Carl," said Legree, starting for the hotel door. "Keep behind, though. I'm armed, now, and can meet Brisco in his own way if he shows fight."

CHAPTER IV.

THE COAT IN THE RUMBLE.

Matt, while following Legree toward the front of the hotel, was doing some quick thinking to account for this surprising discovery of the runabout.

Very likely Brisco and Spangler were planning to recover the tin box. It must have been these plans that had brought them eastward from the vicinity of Ash Fork.

Spangler had been dropped on the road to intercept the stranded players and get the box, while Brisco had come recklessly into Fairview. Possibly Brisco had been compelled to come into town after gasoline and oil.

"Ah doan' want tuh be erroun' if dar's goin' tuh be any shootin'," palpitated Uncle Tom, rolling out of the tonneau with more haste than grace. "Ah used tuh be a reg'lar fire-eatah, en mah youngah days, but Ah dun kinder got ovah hit. Topsy, yo' an' Miss 'Liza come right along wif me, dis instinct. We'll go off whah dar's er safe place fo' me tuh do mah mascottin' fo' Motah Matt."

Eliza and Topsy hurriedly descended from the car. Little Eva was already on the ground, but instead of going around the hotel with Eliza, Topsy, and Uncle Tom, he strolled over to the runabout. In their excitement, the others did not miss the boy.

There were two windows in the hotel office—one in the front wall, a dozen feet from the door, and one just around the corner in the side wall. The window in the side wall overlooked the runabout.

Matt, doing some quick figuring, jumped at the conclusion that Brisco, taken by surprise by Legree, would make a bolt through one of the windows, both of which were open.

Close to the front window an eave-spout entered a rain-water barrel. Matt did not believe Brisco, if he tried to escape by a window, would come out at the front, but at the side, where he would be nearer the runabout. With this idea in mind, Matt placed Carl behind the water-barrel, while he went around the corner.

Through the window on that side the young motorist stole a cautious look.

Two men were leaning over a counter in the office. One was plainly an Irishman, and the

proprietor of the place, and the other was as plainly Hank Brisco. Matt knew Brisco too well to be mistaken in him. Neither Brisco nor the Irish proprietor had heard the approach of the Red Flier, nor the entrance of Legree into the office.

With a grim smile on his face, and the revolver in his hand, Legree was leaning against the wall, just inside the door, waiting for Brisco to turn around.

"Begorry," the proprietor was saying, "fifty cints a gallon f'r th' gasoline is all I'm afther chargin' yez. Oi know av robbers around here who'd be chargin' yez a dollar a gallon, but that's not the way wid Terence O'Grady. Fifty cints is th' most Oi'll take from yez. Fifteen gallons at fifty cints is sivin-fifty; then wan dollar f'r oil makes eight-fifty. Eight-fifty from tin laves wan an a half, an' there yez are. Will yez shtay f'r dinner? Faith, we've as foine a male t'day as yez iver put tooth in, an' a dollar is all ut will cost yez."

"I reckon I'll stay, O'Grady," replied Brisco, picking his change off the counter and sliding it into his pocket.

Then he turned, and met the leveled weapon of Legree. Brisco's astonishment was ludicrous to behold. And O'Grady was fully as startled.

"Phat th' blazes d'yez mean by thot?" and O'Grady jumped over the counter and stood glaring at Legree.

"I'll explain," said Legree, with a coolness that filled Matt with admiration, "but while I'm talking, O'Grady, don't get between the point of this weapon and that man, there."

"Is ut a hould-up?" demanded O'Grady.

"Not at all. The man behind you knows me, and he knows that he owes me a hundred and twenty dollars."

"I don't know anything of the kind," replied Brisco, every whit as cool as Legree. "You've made a mistake, my man; and, besides, even if I did owe you money, you're trying to collect it in the wrong way."

"Roight yez are!" put in O'Grady. "Shtick thot pisthol in yer pocket an' go off wid yez. This is a dacint, rayspectible hotel, an' guns ain't allowed in th' place at all, at all. Av yez don't hike, begorry, Oi'll call in th' town marshal."

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"Call the marshal," said Legree; "he's the man I'd like to have here. That fellow who just bought gasoline and oil at this place is one of the gang who robbed Tomlinson, the Denver jeweler, over west of Ash Fork, and stole the automobile belonging to Nugent, the cattleman——"

Brisco began to laugh.

"What do you think of that, O'Grady?" he cried. "Why, that car you just helped me fill with gasoline is Tomlinson's car! I'm taking it east for him. Who this man is, or what game he's trying to play, is more than I know."

Brisco was edging around toward the side window.

"Look out, Mr. Legree!" called Matt, through the opening. "He's trying to get where he can drop out here."

Matt's words caused Brisco and O'Grady to swerve their glances in his direction. A glint darted into Brisco's eyes at sight of Matt. Hank Brisco had good reason to remember the young motorist.

"This looks like a put-up job, O'Grady," said Brisco, still keeping the whip-hand of himself.

"Well, begob," cried O'Grady, "no pack av blackguards can come into th' Shamrock Hotel an' shtir up throuble f'r me customers. Clear out av here," he added, brandishing his fists, "or Oi'll be afther gittin' busy wid me hands."

"Is that man the one who helped rob Tomlinson, Matt?" asked Legree, nodding his head toward Brisco.

"He's the one," answered Matt. "I'd know him anywhere. Don't let him——"

Just at that moment, O'Grady, wofully deceived, but thinking he was doing exactly what was right, kicked a chair at Legree.

The chair struck Legree's shins with a force that hurled him back against the wall.

"Now, then," roared O'Grady to Brisco, "make a run av it! Oi'll take care av this boonch av meddlers!"

With that, he hurled himself upon Legree and the two began to struggle, falling over the chair and dropping heavily on the floor.

They were directly across the doorway, and Brisco sprang for the front window and pushed himself through it.

"Shtop a leedle!" whooped Carl, dodging around the rain-water barrel; "you don'd got away so easy as dot, und—— Himmelblitzen!"

Brisco had grabbed the barrel. That happened to be the dry season and the barrel was empty. Giving it a whirl, he threw it against the Dutch boy with a force that took him off his feet.

Thrashing his arms wildly, Carl laid himself down on the rolling barrel and went caroming off toward the road.

Meantime, Matt, seeing that Brisco was making for the window guarded by Carl, had rushed around to the front of the hotel. He reached the scene of the scrimmage just in time to be grabbed by O'Grady.

The racket in the office had brought O'Grady's Chinese cook from the kitchen; and, while the Chinaman continued the tussle with Legree, the proprietor of the hotel had rushed out to see what more he could do for the man who had paid him so well for gasoline and oil.

"Oi've got yez, yez meddlin' omadhoun!" shouted O'Grady. "Oi'll tach yez t' come interferin' wid dacint people!"

With that he flung his arms around Motor Matt and hung to him with all his strength.

"Hang onto him, O'Grady!" cried Brisco, dashing for the runabout.

"Niver yez fret!" panted the Irishman reassuringly; "good-by t' yez. Next toime yez come we'll give yez betther treatment; there won't be so many hoodlums around t'—"

"Let go!" shouted Matt. Then, suddenly freeing his hands, he struck the deluded Irishman a quick blow.

O'Grady's hands relaxed for an instant. That instant gave Motor Matt his opportunity, and he tore himself free.

About the same moment, Legree, hatless, angry, and chagrined, came running out of the office.

"Where's Brisco?" he demanded.

Just then the question was answered by Brisco himself. The runabout, leaping around the corner of the hotel, shot toward the road, a mocking laugh from Brisco trailing out behind.

"Not this time, Legree!" called Brisco, over his shoulder. "Look out for me, from now on—you and Motor Matt!"

The runabout was headed westward. In the rumble behind, lying partly over the rumble-seat, was a dust-coat. It undoubtedly belonged to Brisco, and he must have thrown it aside while attending to the automobile, a few minutes before.

While Motor Matt and Legree stood staring at the receding car, the coat lifted a little and a hand was waved.

"Great Scott!" cried Matt; "it's that boy."

Legree, far from showing any consternation, leaned against the wall of the building and laughed softly.

Matt was amazed.

"What's the matter with you, Legree?" he demanded.

"I'm just enjoying a situation that has a bad outlook for Brisco," was Legree's queer answer.

"It has a bad outlook for the boy, too," said Matt.

"Don't worry about Little Eva. I know him better than you do, and he'll take care of himself."

At this moment the Chinaman came out of the hotel office and handed the revolver to O'Grady.

"Oi've had about all Oi want av this rough-house!" shouted O'Grady, his temper badly warped by the disturbance and the blow Matt had dealt him. "Yez will shtay roight here, bedad, until Oi can have th' Chink go afther th' town marshal. Go fr' Jennings, Ping," he added, flourishing the weapon in the faces of Matt and Legree, "an hustle. We'll make this slab-soided rooster laugh on t'other soide av his face befure we're done wid him."

CHAPTER V.

MATT BEGINS A SEARCH.

Carl, having untangled himself from the barrel, brushed off his clothes and rubbed his sore spots, came bristling up to O'Grady.

"You vas grazy," he cried, "so grazy as I don'd know. Oof you hatn't fooled mit us, t'ings vould haf been tifferent. Ve lose vone t'ousant tollars py vat you do! Yah, so helup me! Pud away der gun und ged reasonaple."

"Huccome dat 'ar resolver change han's lak what Ah see?" inquired Uncle Tom, stepping gingerly around the corner of the hotel. "Didun' Ah do yo no good, mascottin' fo' yo', Motah Matt?"

Eliza and Topsy followed Uncle Tom, peering about them excitedly and evidently expecting to find Brisco a prisoner.

"Something went crossways, Uncle Tom," said Matt. "Brisco got away, and he took the stolen car with him. Mr. O'Grady, here, the proprietor of the hotel, didn't understand the case and helped the wrong side."

By that time O'Grady was himself beginning to think that he had made a mistake. The sight of the big red touring-car, and of the odd assortment of passengers who had arrived in it, afforded him

food for thought. So he was thinking, lowering the revolver meanwhile and grabbing Ping, the Chinaman, by the queue to keep him from going after the marshal.

"Where did th' lot av yez come from?" O'Grady finally inquired.

"Ash Fork," replied Legree.

"Them colored folks come wid yez?"

"Yes."

"Well, mebbi Oi did make a bobble, Oi dunno. Tell me something more about ut."

Briefly as he could, Legree told of the robbery of Mr. Tomlinson and of the stealing of the cattleman's car, then wound up the recital by describing how Brisco had run off and left his theatrical company, and how Motor Matt had picked up those who were tramping along the road and was giving them a lift as far as Flagstaff.

O'Grady seemed to take more stock in Motor Matt than in any of the others. He watched the boy out of the tails of his eyes while listening to Legree.

"Faith," said he, "yez are a har-r-d hitter, me lad. Oi'm feelin' th' rap yez give me this minyit, an' me jaw'll be lame f'r a wake; but sure Oi desarved ut av so be Oi'm raysponsible f'r th' mon gittin' away. A good custhomer he was, an' Oi make ut a rule t' trate good custhomers wid ivery consideration. Oi supplied him wid gasoline out av me private barrel, an' sint th' Chinee f'r oil which Oi let him have at double th' proice Oi paid f'r ut. By th' same token, Oi felt loike tratin' th' mon white, d'yez see? Now, av yez won't say annythin' more about th' fracas, sure Oi won't, an' we'll let bygones be bygones. Was yez all thinkin' av takin' dinner at th' Shamrock?"

"Dat 'ar was de notion we had, boss," spoke up Uncle Tom eagerly.

"Then, begorry, Oi'll make yez a special rate av sivin dollars f'r th' six av yez."

"I'll give you three," said Matt.

"T'ree ut is," was the prompt rejoinder. "Th' ladies can go t' th' parlor, an' th' gintlemen will foind a wash-bench by th' kitchen dure. Hurry up wid th' meal, Ping," the proprietor added to the Chinaman.

O'Grady handed the revolver to Legree, excused himself and went into the hotel.

"It don't take him long to forget the trouble he made us," remarked Legree, with a wink. "He's wise, too, in being willing to overlook the matter if we are."

Motor Matt couldn't understand Legree. He didn't appear to be worried in the least about the boy; on the contrary, he seemed pleased with the situation.

"Where's the kid?" inquired Eliza.

"He went away with Brisco," replied Legree.

Startled exclamations came from Eliza, Uncle Tom, and Topsy.

"Don't fret about him," went on Legree, with a calm confidence that was too deep for Matt, "for he'll come back. I'll have to stay here and wait for him, of course, and if Matt feels as though he has to pull out for Flagstaff before the kid gets here, why, we'll have to come along the best we can."

"The boy's in danger," said Matt, "and I'm not going to leave Fairview until I try to do something for him."

"Don't go to any trouble, Matt," returned Legree, "for I tell you again the kid's able to look out for himself. This work of his may result in the capture of Brisco and the recovery of the stolen car. After we eat, I'm going to find a cot, lie down, and take a snooze. I've got that coming to me, I think, considering what I've been through to-day. Let's hunt up that wash-bench and get ready for dinner."

Matt was in a quandary. He knew, by his own experience, that Brisco was a desperate man, and Legree's firm conviction that the boy would keep out of trouble looked like the craziest kind of misjudgment.

Following the dinner, to which they all did ample justice, Uncle Tom curled up on a door-step in the sun, Legree found a hammock in the shade, and Eliza and Topsy disappeared inside the hotel. Matt led Carl off to the Red Flier.

"It's a queer layout, Carl," said Matt, nodding his head in the direction of the hotel. "Hasn't it struck you that way?"

"Vell," returned Carl, running his fingers reflectively through his mat of tow-colored hair, "I vas making some reflections on der soobjeck. Leedle Efa don't seem to cut mooch ice mit Legree, hey? Or meppy he cut a whole lot dot ve don'd know aboutd."

"You knew the boy in Denver?" went on Matt.

"Yah, aber I forged vat his name vas, or vat he dit. Und I ditn't know vedder he hat a fader."

"Well, I don't think we ought to go on to Flagstaff until we find out something as to what becomes of the boy."

"Me, neider; aber how ve find outd, hey?"

"We'll take the Flier and see if we can't track the runabout."

"Und oof ve come too close py der runaboutt, den vat?"

"We'll take some old bottles along. If the runabout shows up and tries to chase us, we'll make a run of it and smash the bottles in the road behind us."

Carl chuckled. That was an expedient to which Motor Matt had already had recourse—and with brilliant success.

"Pully! I vill go findt der pottles, Matt, vile you ged der macheen retty."

Carl went off toward a junk-pile back of the wood-shed. By the time Matt had made the Red Flier ready, Carl was back with an armful of bottles.

"Ve vas on der high gear dis drip, you bed you," observed Carl, dumping the bottles into the tonneau. "I like dose oxcidements, yah, so. It vas goot for der nerfs und makes a fellow jeerful like nodding."

As they got into the car, ready for the start, Eliza came hurrying out of the hotel. She carried the box in her hand and made straight for the automobile.

"Where are you going, Matt?" she asked breathlessly.

"We're not intending to run off and leave you," Matt laughed. "We want to see if we can't find out something about Little Eva, as you call him. It don't seem right to let the boy be carried off like this and not try to do something to help him."

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"He's a queer kid," said Eliza thoughtfully. "He and Legree were only with the company about two months, and they both had a queer way about them, sometimes. But if Legree isn't worried I don't know why we ought to be."

"I don't know, either," said Matt, "but I am, all the same. Carl and I are going to see if we can't follow the trail of the runabout for a ways. I don't think we'll be gone more than an hour or two."

"May I go along?"

"Why, yes, if you want to; but hadn't you better leave that box here?"

"Legree told me to keep it by me all the time," answered the girl.

"Probably he didn't intend for you to take it out into the hills. Well, never mind. If it's so mighty valuable I guess Legree would be taking care of it himself. Jump in, Eliza."

The girl climbed into the tonneau, and Carl closed the door. Matt started at low speed, getting into the road at the same place where Brisco had driven the runabout. The trail of the broad wheels was well defined in the dust, and led along the course followed by the Red Flier in coming into town.

"Prisco vent oudt like ve come in," said Carl. "I'm vonderin' in my mindt oof he vent pack py Ash Fork?"

"Give it up, Carl," answered Matt. "I don't know where he went. There's a whole lot about this business that's the rankest kind of guesswork."

"Sure! Liddle Efa vas foolish mit himseluf for gedding indo der car; und he vas foolish some more for shtaying der car in ven he mightd chump it off. Aber meppy he hat his reasons, hey?"

"He must have had a reason for doing such a reckless thing, but he don't know Brisco so well as we do."

"He ought to, Matt," spoke up Eliza; "he was with the company for two months."

"At that time," Matt answered, "Brisco had the best part of his character uppermost. Carl and I have seen the worst side of him, and he's the biggest scoundrel out of jail."

"Vorse as dot!" averred Carl.

The tracks of the car led up the slope, out of the valley that contained the town, and on along the Ash Fork road.

Matt held the Flier down to an easy pace. For several miles the little party had a pleasant ride, without any excitement whatever. But there was plenty of excitement in store, and when it arrived it came suddenly.

A turn in the wooded road brought those in the car abruptly into a long, straightaway stretch. The instant they were able to look along the trail beyond the turn, a thrill shot through the nerves of all of them.

Three mounted men were coming toward the car at a tearing clip. Evidently they had heard the pounding of the motor and had put their horses to top speed.

"Prisco!" shouted Carl; "und dere iss Spangler, too. Durn aroundt, Matt! Durn aroundt so kevicke as der nation vill let you! Shiminy grickets, aber dis vas suttent!"

Motor Matt had recognized two of the riders as Brisco and Spangler, even before Carl had given his frightened yell.

Where had Brisco exchanged his seat in the runabout to the saddle of the horse? And why had he changed, and where had he left the car?

All this darted through the young motorist's mind as he halted the Flier, reversed, and began backing to make the turn.

CHAPTER VI.

LOSING THE BOX.

Matt had not dreamed of being pursued by horsemen. The Red Flier would have no difficulty in running away from anything on hoofs, and certainly she could leave these three riders behind providing she could turn and get under headway before being overhauled.

Brisco, Spangler, and the other man were dangerously close before Matt got the Red Flier turned the other way. Just back from the bend there was a grassy hill, along the foot of which the road ran smoothly. It was an excellent place for speed, and Matt jumped from first to second, and from second to third with masterful quickness, considering the fact that he had to be careful about stripping the gear.

As the car leaped away, like a spirited horse under the spur, Brisco was alongside the tonneau. A scream from Eliza called the attention of both boys. Matt, of course, was busy with his driving and could not turn to see what was the matter. Carl, however, got on his knees in his seat, face to the rear. What he saw brought an angry shout from his lips.

Brisco, leaning from his saddle, was reaching over the side of the tonneau. He had caught hold of the tin box, and Eliza, hanging to it with both hands, was struggling to keep him from securing it.

"Leaf dot alone!" yelled Carl, floundering to get to the girl's aid; "dot pelongs to Modor Matt!"

Carl was excited, but it wasn't excitement alone that caused him to say the box belonged to Matt. He knew Brisco was after a box he had once owned himself, and Carl had a hazy idea that if he said the box belonged to Matt it might be left alone.

The gathering speed of the car carried it away from Brisco; and, as Brisco's one hand was stronger than the girl's two, the box remained with him.

Carl got into the tonneau, head over heels and with a crash like the breaking of a dozen windows—for he fell into the heap of useless bottles. When he picked himself up, the three riders, with jeering laughs, had pointed their horses the other way.

"It's gone, Matt!" cried the girl wildly; "the box is gone! Brisco snatched it out of my hands!"

"Vat a luck it iss!" growled Carl, holding one hand to his face, where it had been cut by a piece of glass. "I got pack here so kevick as I couldt, Miss Eliza, aber dot Prisco feller was kevicker as me. Donnervetter! Matt, ve come oudt to look for dot poy und ve lose der pox! Dot vill be some nice t'ings to dell Legree."

"Oh," cried the girl, half-crying; "I shouldn't have come! Even if it was all right for me to come I ought to have left the box at the hotel. Now we'll never be able to get our money from Brisco!"

Matt slowed down the car and took a look rearward. The three men were out of sight beyond the turn. [Pg 10]

"Don't worry about it, Eliza," said Matt. "If any one is to blame, I'm the one. There's something queer about that tin box. If it's so valuable, why didn't Legree take care of it himself? Why did he trust it to you?"

"Before I had it," returned the girl, "Uncle Tom was carrying it. He lost it in the river, and had to jump in after it."

"More carelessness on Legree's part! Uncle Tom, as I figure it, is about the most irresponsible member of your party, and yet Legree allowed him to carry a box which, Brisco had said, was worth ten thousand dollars. It don't look reasonable to me."

"Dot's vat it don'd!" exclaimed Carl. "Aber Prisco vanted dot pox pooty pad to go afder it like vat he dit. Meppy it vas vort' a lod to him, und nodding to Legree and der rest oof der parnshtormers."

"Just because it *was* valuable to Brisco is the very reason I should have been more careful with it," went on the girl. "We might have made him pay us what he owed us, and then we could all have gone back to Denver. Now—now——"

The girl began to cry.

"Say," wheedled Carl, "I vouldn't do dot. You don'd helup nodding novay oof you cry. Don'd fret aboutt der olt pox. Matt und me vill gif you der money to go py Tenver. Jeer oop a liddle."

"Take my word for it, Eliza," said Matt, as the girl lifted her head and got better control of her feelings, "that box isn't worth a whole lot or Legree wouldn't have taken chances with it like he did. I'm sorry Brisco got away with it, of course, and I'm going to hurry back to Fairview and do something I ought to have done before—and that is, find an officer and put him on Brisco's track."

"Dot von't amoundt to nodding, Matt," said Carl, climbing back into the front seat. "Prisco vill ged off der horse und indo der runaboutt und der officer mightt as vell dry to ketch some shtreaks oof greased lighdning."

"It may be, Carl," speculated Matt, "that the runabout has broken down. I don't believe Brisco and Spangler would be able to fix the machine if anything very serious got the matter with it. Perhaps they had to leave the car and take to horses."

"Vat's deir game, anyway? Dot's vat I want to know. Oof deir game vas to ged der pox, den it vas all ofer, und ve don'd haf nodding to do mit Brisco und Spangler some more. Py shinks! Dot knocks us oudt oof a t'ousand tollars, Matt."

"All Legree was keeping the box for," quavered the girl, "was so that Brisco would follow us and try to get it. That would give us a chance to make Brisco pay what he owed us."

"Legree ought to have hung onto the box himself," insisted Matt.

"Prisco iss too schlick for Legree," asserted Carl.

"I wish I understood what Brisco and Legree are up to," muttered Matt. "There's more to this than appears on the surface."

"Yah, I bed you," agreed Carl, wagging his head. "Oof I knew as mooch as I vould like, den I vould tell you all aboutt it, vich I don'd. Den dere iss Efa. His monkey-doodle pitzness makes der t'ing vorse."

A quarter of an hour later the Red Flier drew up in its old berth alongside the hotel. Eliza got out and ran hurriedly to tell Legree what had happened to the tin box.

"I'm sorry for Eliza," said Matt, climbing slowly over the brakes as he got out of the car. "She's a nice girl, and it's too bad she has to feel all cut up over the way the box was taken from her. I've got a notion that Legree is fooling them all—and you and me into the bargain, Carl."

"How you t'ink so, Matt?" asked Carl, opening his eyes wide.

"I don't know how he's doing it, or why he's doing it, but it's just a hunch I've got."

"How long ve going to shtay here?"

"I don't want to pull out until we learn something more about this business. There are parts of it that have a crooked look to me."

At that moment Legree issued from the hotel. He did not act at all excited, although he must certainly have learned from Eliza what had happened.

"Eliza's been telling me what a time you've had," said he. "The principal thing is that Brisco has left the car and got onto a horse. I was surprised to hear that. I can't imagine why a rascal, who's as badly wanted as he is, should leave a swift automobile and take to horseback."

"I should think, Mr. Legree," remarked Matt, "that you would be more interested in the loss of that box than in anything else."

"Not at all. In fact, I haven't thought so much of that box since the lot of us left Ash Fork. It was a good thing to hang onto, but it wasn't so terribly important. I've told Eliza not to feel bad over what happened. I'd feel worse myself if the kid hadn't got away in that runabout, like he did."

All that Legree said merely made the whole situation darker for Matt. And for Carl, too. The Dutch boy stood blinking at Legree, and running his fingers through the tangle of tow he called his hair.

"You were keeping the box in the hope that Brisco would come after it and give you a chance at him, weren't you?" demanded Matt.

"Yes," answered Legree.

"Well, now that Brisco has got the box you can't expect him to come after it."

"Hardly," and Legree gave a short laugh. Noting the perplexity of the two boys, he went on: "You miss one point, Matt, in sizing up this situation. We're not done with Brisco—not by a long chalk. It isn't the box, but what was in it, that Brisco is anxious to get."

"Wasn't there anything in the box?" queried Matt.

"No, and there hasn't been since we left Ash Fork. I opened the box on the q. t. in that town and took out what it contained. That object is in my possession. I intend to stay in this town, Matt, until Brisco is captured. I don't care anything about Spangler; Brisco is the man I want. If you've got time, you can stay and help me; and you can keep all you get for recovering the runabout for yourself."

"What will you get for your work?"

"Why, I'll send Brisco over the road. *The contents of that box will do it!*"

Matt and Carl were dumfounded. The situation was clearing a little, but not much.

CHAPTER VII.

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A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

"Do you know this cattleman in Ash Fork who had the runabout stolen from him?" asked Legree.

"I know him by sight," answered Matt; "I'm not acquainted with him."

"Are you sure that he will pay five hundred dollars for the recovery of his automobile?"

"He said he would, and he's able to do it. And he offers to pay five hundred dollars apiece for the

capture of Brisco and Spangler."

"Then there's a chance for you to make fifteen hundred. I'd advise you to stay here and do it."

Matt leaned against the car and went into a brown study.

Mr. Tomlinson had not required him to get to Albuquerque in a hurry. He could take a reasonable amount of time for the trip. But Mr. Tomlinson *did* expect the car to be brought safely to its destination. Would Matt in any way endanger the car by staying a short time in Fairview? That was the question that bothered him.

"I t'ink, Matt," said Carl, "dot I could use some oof dot fifdeen huntert. Vy nod shtay und dry dem a virl?"

"If I stay, Legree," observed Matt, "I won't be called on to use the Red Flier for chasing Brisco and Spangler, will I? The car doesn't belong to me and I can't take any chances with it."

"You can do as you please about that, Matt. I'm after Brisco. If you get Spangler and the runabout, you'll have to do it in your own way. Spangler and Brisco, though, seem to be working together, just now, so my work ought to help you."

"Why not get an officer here and——"

"Do you want to divide with an officer what the cattleman is willing to pay?"

"You know a lot that you're not telling me, Legree," said Matt quietly.

"Well," grinned Legree, "when it comes to that, I know a lot that I'm not telling anybody—just now. You've heard more from me than any one else—excepting the kid."

"I think I'll lay over here until to-morrow," said Matt.

"Hoop-a-la!" exulted Carl. "Be jeerful, everypody. I t'ink, Matt," he added, "dot I vill infest my haluf oof dot fifdeen huntert tollars in gofermend ponds, und——"

"Don't invest it till you get it, Carl," interposed Matt dryly. "Pull off your coat, now, and we'll wash up the car and fill the tanks."

For two hours the boys were more than busy. While in Motor Matt's hands, the machine was always as carefully groomed as a race-horse. Not only that, but after the day's run he made it a point to go over the machinery with a wrench and pliers, tightening up everything that had worked loose and making sure that every part was in complete working order.

The water-tank was filled. Ten gallons of gasoline were needed for the gasoline reservoir, but before he bought any from O'Grady, Matt tested it carefully with a hydrometer. Finding it nearly the same grade as he had been using, he funneled it into the tank, not only straining it through wire gauze but through thin chamois skin as well. The oil supply was also replenished.

When the boys were through, the Red Flier was as spick and span as when it had come from the shop. Not only that, but it was fit to take the road at a moment's notice and make a record run.

To Matt's regret, there was no place in town where the car could be housed for the night. There were two or three old barns, but they were so foul and unclean that he would not take the machine into them. He preferred to leave it outdoors all night, sleeping in the tonneau and guarding against tampering.

When supper was announced, Carl watched the car while Matt ate; and when Matt had finished, Carl went in for his own meal.

Uncle Tom, feeling much better now that his physical necessities had been relieved, walked out to the car with Matt when he left the dining-room.

There was something on the old negro's mind. He seemed flustered and backward about getting at it. Finally he broached the astonishing proposition, leading up to it by degrees.

"Ah's done let out ob er job by de scan'lous actions ob dat 'ar Brisco, Marse Matt," said he moodily.

"Hard luck, Uncle Tom," answered Matt sympathetically. "Where do you live when you're at home?"

"Ah's one ob dem 'ar rolling stones, en Ah ain't had no home sense Ah was knee-high tuh a possum, no, suh. Fo' de las' few houahs, Marse Matt, Ah's been kind ob cogitatin' en mah haid an' I 'bout come tuh de conclusion dat yo' outlook in life is juberous, yassuh. Yo's a puffick gemman, but yo' take so many chances dat yo' prospecks am sholy juberous."

"How can I help that, Uncle Tom?" asked Matt, enjoying immensely the old darky's vagaries.

"Ah knows how dat kin be fixed, sah," went on Uncle Tom. "What yo' has got tuh hab is a official mascot, sah, tuh be wif yo' all de time an' wuk off de hoodoo. Ah 'lows, sah, dat I could fill dat job. How much yo' willin' tuh pay fo' an official mascot by de monf?"

That was too much for Motor Matt. Laying back in the tonneau he laughed till he shook.

"Doan' laff, Marse Matt," begged the old fraud; "hit's a mouty complexus bizness. Tu'n hit ober in yo' mind, sah, en if yo' t'ink Ah'm wuth mah bo'd an' keep, jess considah Ah'm engaged."

"Why, Uncle Tom," said Matt, "I haven't much more than enough to board and keep myself, so I guess my prospects will have to continue to be 'juberous.'"

"Doan' say dat, sah; t'ink it ober. Ah'll hold mahse'f open fo' de engagemunt."

Uncle Tom stumped back into the house, and Matt kicked off his shoes and snuggled down under a blanket which O'Grady had furnished him.

Half an hour later, Carl came out with a blanket of his own.

"What are you going to do, Carl?" asked Matt, rousing up and peering at his friend through the gloom.

"Dis iss some games vot two can blay ad, my poy," chuckled Carl. "I vill shleep py der machine mit you."

"Go on!" scoffed Matt. "What's the use of denying yourself a good bed when you can just as well have one?"

"Vell, I dredder shtay mit you. Don'd say nodding, because it vasn't any use. My mindt iss made oop, yah, you bed you."

"All right, then," said Matt. "Curl up on the steering-wheel and enjoy yourself."

The front seat, of course, was divided into two sections, so it was impossible for Carl to stretch himself out in it; however, he wrapped his blanket around him and crowded down between the seat and the dash, head and shoulders over the foot-board on one side, and his feet tangled up in the foot-pedals and levers on the other.

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Just as Matt was getting to sleep a wild *honk, honk!* brought him up like a shot out of a gun.

"What's that?" called Matt.

"Dot vas my feets," explained Carl coolly. "I hit dem against dot rupper pag vat makes a noise. Oof der car vas vider, den I vouldn't be too long for der blace vat I am. Meppy I puy somet'ing else don gofermend ponds mit dot money. Meppy, yah—so——" and Carl's words drifted off into a snore.

Matt settled down again, and this time nothing disturbed him.

Carl had some bad dreams that night. He thought his feet were caught in a giant clothes-wringer, and that a locomotive was hitched to his head. Some one would run him through the wringer, flattening him out up to the knees, and then the locomotive would back up and pull him out again. When his dreams had tired him out with that set of incidents, they shut him up in a little tin box, and three men on horseback played football with him; other experiences, too numerous to mention, followed, and at the wind-up Carl thought he dropped several miles through the air and smashed through a skylight. Starting up with a groan, he rubbed his eyes and looked around.

It was morning. Carl was sitting up on the ground, chilled and chattering.

At first he thought that skylight episode was not a dream, and he looked up to see the place he had come through. Instead of seeing anything so unsubstantial, his eyes encountered the face of Legree.

"You sleep like a log, Carl!" exclaimed Legree. "Where's Motor Matt? What's become of the automobile?"

Then, in a flash, Carl's hazy mind connected with the tangible things surrounding him when he went to sleep.

"Vy," he cried, struggling to his feet and staring around, "I vas in der car mit Modor Matt! I vent to shleep in it mit him."

"I know you did; but where are Matt and the car now?"

Carl rubbed his eyes again, and then took a more careful look about him.

He was standing in the very place where the car had stood. But there was no sign of the car! And no sign of Motor Matt!

The blanket Carl had taken into the Red Flier with him was lying crumpled on the ground, a dozen feet away.

"Vell, py shinks!" gasped Carl. "I don'd like dot. I don'd like some shokes vere sooch a monkey-doodle pitzness iss made mit me. Modor Matt nefer made dot shoke."

"There's no joke, Carl," answered Legree; "I wish to gracious it *was* a joke. The Red Flier left here some time during the night. No one heard it. No one knew it was gone until I looked out of the window of my room. You were lying on the ground here, but neither the car nor Matt were in sight. Do you think Matt would pull out and leave you?"

"Leaf me? Matt? Vell, he vas my bard, und how you figure oudt dot he do dot? No, py shinks! Oof he ain'd here he vas dook off, und oof he vas dook off id vas dot Prisco und Spangler vat dit it!"

With that, Carl went over to the well and sat down. He was still confused, but slowly the realization of what had happened was growing upon him. And as the realization grew, his temper mounted with it.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPIRITED AWAY.

Carl was not the only one who had been troubled with dreams that night. Motor Matt floundered through one of the worst nightmares he had ever had. The whole scheme of the thing was rather vague, but mighty depressing. He seemed to be engaged in some tremendous struggle, striking away and countering a thousand or more huge fists that leaped at him out of the gloom. One by one he put the clenched hands out of business, and when he had conquered the last of them he opened his eyes in bewilderment.

The humming of a motor was in his ears. It was the Red Flier's motor, he could tell that instinctively. The stars were overhead, the cool, damp smell of the night was all around, and the glow of the acetylene lamps was glimmering and dancing in advance. The car was moving briskly through the silence.

Matt had a queer, sick feeling at the pit of his stomach. Counting out the time he raced the limited train on his motor-cycle, collided with a freight-wagon and was laid up for a fortnight, he had never been confined to his bed for a week in his life.

He wondered what ailed him, and his mind was sluggish and slow in working out the problem.

He had felt just as he did then once before. That was the time he had been drugged and taken out of Phoenix to keep him from racing with the Prescott champion, O'Day.

Had he been drugged now? If so, why, and by whom?

By degrees the cool air cleared his befogged brain. He went back over the chain of events, picking it up where he had dropped it.

The queer party of stranded actors—the arrival at Fairview—the escape of Brisco from the hotel—the ride into the hills to look for the boy—the pursuit by the horsemen and the loss of the tin box—all these events dragged through Matt's mind. He and Carl had gone to sleep in the automobile. Why was the car moving? Had Carl, giving rein to some wild impulse, cranked up the car and started for a night ride?

Matt stirred. "Carl!" he called, "what are you trying to do?"

Matt became aware, then, that there was some one beside him in the tonneau.

"Carl, hey?" came a jeering voice, as a strong hand reached over and pushed Matt back in the seat. "Ye got another guess comin'. Thar ain't no Dutchman along, this trip."

"Tuned up, has he?" asked a voice from the front seat.

"Yep; he's got back ter airth, Hank."

"Surprised?" The man in front laughed hoarsely as he asked the question.

"Waal, kinder. He thought his Dutch pard was erlong."

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Matt, while this talk was going forward, realized with a shock that the two men in the car were Brisco and Spangler. Brisco was in the driver's seat, and Spangler was in the tonneau.

With a quick gathering of all his strength, Matt flung himself toward the door of the tonneau. His first unreasoning impulse was to get away from his captors. The car must have been going forty miles an hour, and the roadside was lined with sharp stones. If Matt had succeeded in his desperate attempt, he could hardly have escaped without serious injury; but his rash move was nipped in the bud. Spangler, who was in the tonneau for the purpose, grabbed Matt and hurled him back into the seat.

"None o' that!" he growled. "Want ter break yer bloomin' neck? Not as I keer much about yer neck, but Hank an' me hev got diff'rent plans fer ye."

Matt was still dizzy and weak. The nausea at his stomach was leaving him slowly, but it made him feel as limp as a rag and utterly helpless.

"Did you men run away with this car?" he asked.

"Looks that-away, don't it?" returned Spangler.

"Where's Carl?"

"Didn't hev no time ter bother with the Dutchman, so we left him behind."

"Was he hurt?"

"Hurt? Nary, he wasn't hurt. We ain't opinin' ter hurt anybody this trip so long as we hev our way. The Dutchman was snoring like a house afire. All we did was ter lift him out o' the keer an' lay him on the ground. We give him a smell o' somethin' on a han'kercher, jest ter make him snooze a leetle harder, that's all."

"You drugged both of us, then?"

"That was the easiest way ter keep ye from makin' er noise."

"Where are you taking me?"

"Ye'll know afore long."

It was a rugged road they were traveling, and the Red Flier negotiated it with many a juggling bump. Mountainous rocks, half-screened by bushes and trees, glided by, and there were dusky gashes and seams, and now and then a splash of falling water.

Rougher and rougher grew the trail, and the reckless driving of Brisco caused Matt's nerves to thrill with fears for the car.

"You'll rack the car to pieces if you keep driving like that!" Matt called sharply.

"What's it to you?" taunted Brisco.

"It means a whole lot to me. This car belongs to Mr. Tomlinson, and I've promised to take it safely to Albuquerque."

"Be hanged to you and Mr. Tomlinson!" snarled Brisco. "We'll fix this car before we're done with it. If you ever take it to Albuquerque, you'll have to scoop up the pieces and tote 'em there in a lumber-wagon. That's part of what we're going to do to play even with you and him!"

Matt's heart skipped a beat, and a cold chill ran through his body. Could the villains really mean to destroy the Red Flier?

"You'd better think well about what you do," warned Matt. "If you ruin this car, Mr. Tomlinson will never let up on you till he puts you where you belong."

Spangler brought his hand around in a sweeping blow. Matt dodged the hand so that the stroke was only a glancing one.

"Shut up!" he cried savagely. "Ye ain't here ter make any threats, 'r throw any bluffs."

At that moment, Brisco brought the car to a stop, putting on the brakes so suddenly that the wheels locked and slid.

"I reckon this'll be far enough," said Brisco, turning in his seat. "Make him get out, Spang."

"Hear that?" cried Spang. "Open the door and git down."

"What's this for?" returned Matt, making no move to obey.

For answer, Spangler, with an oath, seized him by the collar and jerked him roughly out of the tonneau.

Matt was unable to make any resistance. As he stood in the road, the jagged uplifts by which he was surrounded seemed to swim about him in circles.

Spangler got back in the car, as Matt staggered to a big boulder and leaned against it, and Brisco backed the car around until it was headed along the back course.

"Wait!" cried Matt, as a thought of what all this might mean to him took shape in his brain.

"We're going to wait—and for just about a minute," returned Brisco.

"Are you going to steal that car?" asked Matt, "just as you stole Nugent's?"

"You're too much of a meddler," snapped Brisco. "If you could go along and mind your own business, you'd be a whole lot better off. You had to tangle up with Tomlinson, back there at Ash Fork, and you hadn't any call to butt in. If it hadn't been for you, we'd 'a' won out on that game and been all to the good. I don't reckon we'd have bothered you at all, though, if you'd been content to carry out your orders and push on to Albuquerque. But you couldn't do that; oh, no. You're trying to be first aid to the weak and down-trodden wherever you run into them, so you had to mix up with that bunch of stranded actors.

"When I drove the runabout into Fairview after gasoline and oil, I dropped Spangler off to lay for the tramps and get that tin box. You had to butt in, as per usual. I got away from Fairview by the skin of my teeth, picked up Spang at the place where he was waiting, and we went on to where our other pard had some horses. We side-tracked the runabout there, and slid back toward Fairview, intending to push through the timber—a move we couldn't make in the car. Then"—and here a swirling oath dropped from Brisco's lips—"we dropped into your little trap."

"What trap?" demanded Matt.

"Oh, no, you don't know a thing about that, do you? You weren't moseying out there just to give us a chance to lift that tin box, were you? And you hadn't the least notion it was empty, had you? If you hadn't turned that trick, my bantam, we wouldn't have turned this one. We're going to settle with you, all right. This is a part of the country that isn't traveled once a week, and you're seventy-five miles from Fairview. By the time you get back to town, we'll have got what was in that box, and have smashed the Red Flier into a heap of jack-straws. I know a nice little cliff alongside the road, and when we're through with the car we'll lash the wheel, open her up and let her go over the edge! I reckon that'll cook your goose with Tomlinson. He didn't calculate you were going to use his car transporting a lot of stranded actors, and mixing up in their affairs on the way to Albuquerque."

For a space, Motor Matt's heart stood still.

"You wouldn't dare do that!" he shouted.

"Wouldn't I?" and a reckless, mocking laugh came with the words. "From what you know of me don't you think I would? Hope you'll have a nice, easy walk to Fairview, Motor Matt! There'll be some surprises in store for you when you get there. Good-by!"

Spangler also shouted a jeering farewell.

The car got in motion, the humming slowly decreased, and the glow of the tail light winked suddenly into darkness.

Motor Matt had been abandoned.

But, worse than that, the two scoundrels who had spirited him away from Fairview were bent on the wanton destruction of Mr. Tomlinson's car!

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Motor Matt came nearer being utterly cast down, at that moment, than ever before in his life. Weak and sick as he was, perhaps his discouragement was not to be wondered at. Sinking down at the foot of the boulder against which he had been leaning, he began finding fault with himself.

It was all right to pick up the stranded actors and carry them on to Fairview. That was merely a kindness for which no one could blame him. But to jump into their troubles, at a time when he was engaged in work for Mr. Tomlinson and was not, strictly speaking, his own boss, that gave the affair another look. Now, because of his desire to help Legree, Eliza, and the rest, there he was, hung up in the hills seventy-five miles from Fairview, with the Red Flier in Brisco's hands and pointed for the scrap-heap.

Mr. Tomlinson would be perfectly justified in laying the destruction of the car to Matt's own disregard of orders. And it was Mr. Tomlinson who had selected Matt to take the Red Flier to Albuquerque because he was satisfied the car would receive better care in his hands than in any other!

There was enough in these reflections to make Motor Matt dissatisfied with himself. But he was not, and never had been, a "quitter." And the one cry of his soul had always been for Fate to keep him from joining the ranks of the "quitters."

As a matter of fact, Motor Matt was a self-reliant American boy, and there was never the least danger of his going over to the useless crowd of mistakes and failures. Naturally, he might make a misplay now and then—running behind just enough to keep him "gingered up" for ultimate success in the big things.

While he crouched at the foot of the boulder, the cool air clearing his brain and the sick feeling leaving him, he fell to planning for turning the tables against his enemies.

What was there he could do, afoot and seventy-five miles from town?

At first, the prospect seemed utterly hopeless; but Matt knew that a brave heart and a firm will had time and again snatched victory from seeming defeat.

He would start for Fairview. Possibly, although the road was not much traveled, he might have the good luck to encounter some freighter who would give him a lift.

Without losing a moment longer, he got up and started off in the direction taken by Brisco and Spangler.

He wondered, as he swung along, what Carl would think when he came to himself and found the car missing—and Matt gone with it. And what would Legree think? And Eliza?

But what those in Fairview might think was a minor consideration. The great point was the recovery of the Red Flier before the car's captors could wreck the machine.

Brisco was the only one of the two scoundrels who could run a car, and even Brisco's knowledge was superficial. An hour's instruction, from the driver of Nugent's runabout, was all Brisco had had.

Brisco now had two stolen cars and he could run only one of them—unless, indeed, the third man he had picked up knew something about motors.

Matt, perhaps, had walked a mile through the gloomy hills, when he heard a noise as of some one in the road ahead. He halted, half-fearing that Brisco and Spangler were coming back.

But that could not be, he reasoned. If they had wanted to come back, they would have used the car—and the noise Matt heard was of footsteps.

He listened, straining his ears and eyes. Only one man was coming. He could not see, but hearing alone told him there was but one.

Backing into the deep shadow of a nest of boulders, he continued to wait.

The man, whoever he was, was coming hurriedly. Sometimes he ran, and occasionally he stumbled. As he drew closer, Matt saw that he was a small man, and as he came closer still the figure resolved itself into that of a mere boy.

"Hello!" called Matt, stepping out into the road again.

The figure gave a startled jump.

"Chee!" it cried. "Say, who's dat?"

Matt's pulses quickened, and a glow of hope ran through him.

"Hello, kid!" he shouted. "What're you doing here?"

"I'm a jay if it ain't Motor Matt!" came delightedly from the boy as he dashed forward. "How's dis f'r a come-off? Say, it sure knocks de wind out o' me! Where'd you come from, yerself? Was you on dat automobile wid Brisco an' Spang?"

By then the boy was close enough to grab Matt's hand and give it a shake.

"Yes," answered Matt; "I was on the car with them and they let me out and turned back."

"How'd de mutts come t' git yous on de mat, hey?"

Matt explained how he had been spirited away.

"Well, on de level," breathed the boy, "dat's de rummest move I ever connected wit'. Raw? Oh, sister!"

"Now tell me something about yourself," said Matt. "Why did you get into that car? And where have you been since you left Fairview?"

"Easy, cull! T'ings is bein' pulled off in such a bunch it's hard t' straighten dem out. Le's do de ham-restin' act, right here on dis nice bunch o' rocks, while we chin a little."

They sat down, side by side.

"You must have had some reason, Eva, for hiking out with Brisco like you did, and——"

"Cut out de 'Eva.' Fergit de styge name. I was on'y dat back o' de tin lamps, an' no more of 'em fer mine. Call me Josh. Not dat I'm a joshier, understan', 'cause I ain't. An' here's somet'in' else I'm battin' up t' yous: Dere's a few t'inks rattlin' around in me block dat I can't let yous in on. Not bekase I ain't willin' meself, but bekase it ain't on de program. See?

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"First off, Matt, I crowdied into dat car becase de idee looked good t' me. Dat's all yous is t' know about dat f'r now. I rode t' w'ere Brisco stopped de car an' took on Spang—about de place w'ere dad an' yous had de set-to on account o' dat box.

"Den we moved on ag'in, me still under de coat an' wonderin' how long I could keep shy o' de lamps o' dem two dubs. You can bet yer lid, Matt, I didn't breathe on'y when necessary. I was de sly boy, all right. W'en we pulled up ag'in, we was clost t' t'ree horses, all saddled an' bridled, an' wit' a beer-faced guy on one o' dem.

"De runabout was backed into de brush, an' Brisco an' Spang got onto two o' de horses an' all t'ree o' dat strong-arm bunch pulled deir freight back down de road. It was right den I wished dat I knowed how t' work dem cranks an' t'ings so'st I could make dat car go w'ere I wanted. But I didn't know de tail lamp from de carburetter, so I jess had t' lay low an' wait.

"W'en dem jays got back, dere was yer Uncle John right under de coat, same as usual, an' still holdin' his breat'. If one o' de mugs lifted de coat, I was plannin' to work me pins an' head right into de weeds, like anot'er bear was on me trail.

"But dey didn't look under de coat, none of dem. Dey was too mad. Chee! but dey was r'iled! Blatter, blatter, blatter, dey went, swearin' like a plumber wot's burned hissself wit' his torch. Say, de air was blue an' smelt like de odder place. If dey'd piped me off den, dey'd have took me skelp, all right.

"From de spiel dey was givin' each odder, I hooked onto de infermation dat dey'd got de box an' dat dere wasn't not'in' in it—w'ich I knowed all de time. Dey was crowdin' all deir swear-words onto Motor Matt. Yous had fooled dem, dey said, an' dey was goin' t' saw off even if it took a leg.

"Brisco give de mug on de horse his orders to go t' some place w'ere Brisco an' Spang would go foist an' wait. Wid dat we started up ag'in—me on de job an' still sayin' me prayers back'ards, for'ards, an' sideways. I couldn't see where we went, but we was goin' f'r a hunderd years, seemed like, I was dat worked up t'inkin' I might git nabbed. Den we stopped, backed t'roo some brush, an' stopped ag'in, dat time t' stay.

"I had drawn into me shell, listenin' w'ile Brisco an' Spang was rammin' around de place w'ere we was. After a w'ile, deir bazoos seemed t' move off, an' I stuck out me coco an' piped de layout.

"We was in a well. Anyways dat's how it looked. De well was about fifteen feet acrost, steep rocks all around an' on'y one place w'ere dere was a break. De break was choked up wit' brush, an' I'm wise right off dat we'd backed t'roo it w'en we come into de well.

"I see anot'er nice little clump of brush off t' de right, an' it looked so invitin' dat I slipped out from under de coat an' ducked f'r it.

"I was in dat clump w'en de odder bloke, who dey called Klegg, blowed in t'roo de break wid de hosses; an' I was still dere w'en night come down, an' de t'ree of dem lighted up de runabout an' went away w'id it.

"Couldn't git in de back seat den, kase Klegg was dere, so dey bumped off into de night an' left me in de well wit' de t'ree horses.

"I kinked me thinker all up t'ryin' t' guess whedder I'd better stay right dere or borry one o' dem horses an' ride some place. Well, I didn't ride, not knowin' any good place t' ride to. Couldn't even make a guess which way de town was.

"I went out t'roo de brush an' moseyed around in de dark till *chugetty-chug!* along come dat runabout ag'in an' backed t'roo de brush into de well. But dere was on'y one man in it, an' it was Klegg. W'ere was Brisco an' Spang? Dat was wot fretted me. W'ile I was frettin', along comes dat red tourin'-car. I made out Brisco in front, an' Spang in de rear—an' dere was some odder mug in de rear wot I couldn't get next to. De tourin'-car went on past de well.

"Chee, but I was rattled! Wot was happenin', I says t' meself, an' w'y was it happenin'? De tourin'-car come back ag'in an' in it was Brisco an' Spang, but de odder guy had been left somew'ere. De tourin'-car was backed into de well, w'ere de runabout had gone, an' I started dis way t' see wot I could find. Say, Matt, I was knocked stiff w'en I found yous! Great, ain't it, how luck takes a shoot, once in a w'ile? If dat—— Wot's de matter w'id yous? W'ere yous goin'?"

Matt had jumped up, grabbed Josh by the arm and was pulling him down the road.

"Come on!" said he. "We haven't got any time to lose!"

CHAPTER X.

A DARING PLAN.

"Say," panted Josh, as he and Matt traveled rapidly along the road, "put me wise to dis move, can't yous? Wot's in yer block, Matt?"

"Do you know what Brisco intends to do with the Red Flier?" asked Matt.

"He's layin' in a supply o' benzine-buggies t' start a garage, 'r somet'ing, ain't he?"

"He ran off with that touring-car just to play even with me, Josh. He says I've meddled with his affairs long enough, and that he's going to run the Red Flier over a cliff just to pay me back for using the car to help you people."

"Wouldn't dat frost yous?" muttered Josh.

"And he said I was seventy-five miles from Fairview," went on Matt, "and that by the time I had walked to the town he would have finished his business there."

"Brisco has got anodder guess comin'. He ain't so warm. Dad can show him a t'ing 'r two, an' don't yous fergit dat. Chee! Dat guy's de limit. But wot's yer game, cull?"

"You say that both cars are in that 'well,' as you call it?"

"Dat's w'ere dey was w'en I started for here."

"Well, I'm going to get the Red Flier away from that outfit!"

Matt spoke as confidently as though he had merely remarked that he was going over to the hotel after his dinner. [Pg 16]

"Say, cull," returned the boy, "I like yer nerve, all right, an' I marks yous up f'r de entry, but how yous goin' t' git under de wire? Dere's t'ree o' dem guys, an' dey've got a lot o' artillery. How we goin' t' git away wit' de car if dey don't want us to?"

"I don't know," replied Matt, "but we've got to do it somehow."

"Yous is a reg'lar lollypaloozer, Motor Matt, an' I'd back yous t' win any ole day, but dis looks like too big a load. But yous can count on me. Dad'll tell yous dat I'm big f'r me age an' no mutt in a getaway, so jest set yer pace an' I'll push on de reins."

"How far is it to the place where the automobiles were left?"

"We're close t' dere now. I'm wonderin' w'y Brisco dropped yous widin a short walk o' de hang-out—dat is, if he was fixin' t' stay at de place?"

"I don't know," answered Matt; "but that's what he did and it's enough for me. I've got to recover that car, Josh. If I don't, and if anything happens to it, I'd look nice making my report to Tomlinson, wouldn't I?"

"If yous hadn't picked up dat bunch o' tramps on de road yous wouldn't have got into dis fix."

"I'm not sorry I helped you out, Josh."

"Sure not. Yous ain't dat kind, Motor Matt. All de same, yous would have been peggin' along to'rds Albuquerque, nice as yous please, if it hadn't been for dat crowd o' Uncle Tommers. Dere'll be doin's in Fairview in de mornin', w'en dad finds out yous ain't w'ere yous ought t' be."

"What can your father do?"

"He can do a lot w'en he gits started. Don't yous never t'ink he's a slow one, Matt."

Matt knew that Legree could keep a cool head in a pinch, but, for all that, he didn't see how he could do anything when he didn't have money enough even to pay his board-bill.

"Mr. Tomlinson has a lot of confidence in me," said Matt; "and, if that car is wrecked, I'll have ___"

"Sh-h-h!" whispered Josh, coming to a wary halt and laying a hand on Matt's arm. "Look ahead, dere. See dat black splotch on de side o' de hill by de road?"

"Yes," answered Matt, straining his eyes in the direction indicated.

"Dat's de brush dat hides de openin'. Are we bot' goin' t' blow in dere an' try t' make a run wit' de red car?"

"We can't do the trick in such a hurricane way as that. We've got to lay some other plan. I'll go in and look the ground over, Josh, and maybe I can get hold of an idea."

"I'll try t' git holt o' one, too, w'ile I'm waitin' fer yous. Don't make much noise w'ile yous is in de bushes, Matt, or dem terriers'll pepper yous."

"I'm going to sneak into the place as quietly as I can. I don't think they'll hear me."

Leaving the boy a little way from the dark patch of verdure clinging to the face of the hill, Matt

went on carefully. As he approached closer to the vague blot it gradually took form under his eyes.

The wall of the hill seemed to be cracked through from crest to base and wrenched apart until it formed a narrow opening. Up both sides of the opening grew the bushes, their branches spreading out and forming a thick screen.

On account of the darkness, Matt could not make a very close examination of the queer fissure, but he saw enough to convince him that Nature had contrived a secure retreat for Brisco and Spangler.

The bottom of the opening, Matt judged, was all of ten feet in width. Dropping down on his hands and knees, he began crawling through the middle of the break, parting the bush branches from in front of him as he advanced.

So wary was he that he made very little noise.

He had gone perhaps a dozen feet through the brushy tangle, when a glow of light struck on his eyes. This acted as a sort of beacon, and served to guide him the rest of the way. A dozen feet more brought him to the opposite side of the opening and to the edge of the bushes.

Crouching silently on the ground he proceeded to survey the peculiar niche in front of him.

Josh's description, likening the place to a "well," was quite appropriate. The niche was circular in form and its walls arose steeply to a height of at least fifty feet. In the shadow of the walls the place was very dark, but the glowing lamps of an automobile enabled Matt to see enough to send a chill of disappointment through him.

There was only one automobile in the niche!

And that one was the runabout!

Brisco and Spangler must have emerged and gone off somewhere with the Red Flier.

Had they taken it away to destroy it?

The three horses were not far from the runabout. They were secured to some bushes, and could be heard pawing and stamping.

Matt could also hear something else, and that was the snoring of a man in deep sleep.

After a moment's hesitation he continued to creep onward, redoubling his care and vigilance.

He was upon the man before he was fairly aware of it, one of his groping hands coming in contact with an outstretched foot.

The snoring ceased with an explosive grunt and Matt drew back breathlessly.

The man did not rouse up. Shifting his position slightly he continued to snore.

Making a détour, Matt got around the man—whom he knew was not Brisco or Spangler, and consequently must be Klegg—and reached the runabout.

Pausing there, the young motorist let his mind circle about this new phase of the situation.

If he couldn't get the Red Flier, why not take the runabout? That would afford himself and Josh a quick means for making the return trip to Fairview. Besides, no matter what happened to the Red Flier, there was something to be gained in getting the runabout away from the thieves.

Close to the car was a heap of horse-trappings. Matt felt about among the saddles, bridles and blankets until he had found two coiled riatas.

Could he, by quick work, get one of the ropes around Klegg's hands before he was thoroughly awake and able to struggle? Josh would have been of use in such an attempt, and Matt decided that he could not make it successfully unless he did have the other to help. He would go back after Josh, he decided; but first he would look over the runabout and make sure it was ready for the road.

Laying the ropes in the front of the car, he arose to his feet, softly removed the tail lamp from its bracket, and flashed it into the rumble.

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The coat, used so cleverly by the boy, was still there, crumpled on the floor as though by a man's feet. Passing on to the forward part of the car, the pencil of light jumped from point to point, Matt's eyes following critically.

Everything seemed to be shipshape and in good order.

A small object on one of the front seats caught the youth's attention. It was pushed well back into the angle where the back joined the seat, and Matt picked it up and held it in the glow of light.

It was a small bottle, and the label bore the written word, "Chloroform."

Matt stifled an exclamation. Undoubtedly it had been some of that bottle's contents which had helped Brisco and Spangler get the better of him, in Fairview, and run off with the touring-car.

Then a startling expedient darted through Matt's mind. Turn about was fair play. With the aid of the drug he could clear a passage for the runabout, and without resort to any violence.

Setting the lamp down on the front seat, Matt drew the cork of the bottle, took a handkerchief from his pocket and proceeded to wet it with the chloroform. Then, re-corking the bottle and laying it aside, he went down on his hands and knees and started toward Klegg.

A lightening of the sky over the steep walls that hemmed in the niche told of coming day.

The darkness would be a help to Matt and Josh in getting to the road and away, and if advantage was to be taken of night Matt knew he would have to hurry.

But he was well equipped to carry out his plans now, and lost no time in getting about them.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE ROAD.

Kneeling beside Klegg, Matt leaned over and held the saturated handkerchief close to his face. The fumes were strong, and seemed to strangle him. With a gurgling grunt he shifted his position.

Matt moved the handkerchief and again held it over his face. This time Klegg sputtered a little, but did not change his position. Evidently the narcotic was beginning to have its effect. After a moment, Matt allowed the handkerchief to drop on Klegg's face. He left it there for two or three minutes and then threw it aside. Klegg was breathing heavily and seemed to be completely under the influence of the drug.

Catching hold of the blanket on which the man was lying, Matt began to pull it toward the wall of the niche.

"Chee!" whispered a voice close to Matt's side. "Wot kind of a smell is dat, cull? Wot yous done to Klegg?"

"I thought you were going to wait outside, Josh?" answered Matt.

"Dat's wot I t'ought, but yous was so long in comin' dat I took de notion t' come in an' look yous up. Wot's de play?"

"I found a bottle of chloroform in the runabout, and it must have been out of that same bottle that Brisco took the stuff that put me to sleep. Thought I'd see how it worked on Klegg."

"Yous is a jim dandy, Matt!" laughed Josh delightedly. "But w'ere's Brisco an' Spang?"

"They're not here, and neither is the touring-car."

"Tough luck! Yous figgerin' on makin' a getaway wit' de runabout?"

"Yes. We might use that for a quick run to Fairview and get the sheriff to hunt up Brisco and Spangler. I'll go with the sheriff and use the runabout. It's a faster car than the Flier, and we may be able to catch the two thieves before they wreck Mr. Tomlinson's car."

"Yous has got a head on yous, Matt, an' no mistake," said the boy admiringly. "An' yous pulled all dis off yerself! Well, say, if yous ain't a winner dis heat yous ought t' be. Dat's right—on de level an' no stringin'. Dad would like t' have a guy like yous t' work wit' all de time. An' so would Little Eva, de child wonder. But it's gittin' daylight, Matt, an' if we're goin' t' pull our freight, let's be at it."

It was already light enough so that they could see without the lamps. These were extinguished, and then Matt put the tail lamp back in its place, started the engine and got into the driver's seat.

On the low gear they moved slowly across the bottom of the niche.

Josh was still laughing softly to himself.

"Chee, cull, but I'd like t' be around w'en Brisco an' Spang find dat Klegg feller!" he chuckled. "Dat would be as good as a circus. Dis is almost too good t' be true, ain't it?"

"It will be, Josh," replied Matt, "if I can only get back the Red Flier."

"Dem coves'll be careful o' dat odder machine when dey find dis one has been took away from dem."

"I know that—providing they find out the runabout is gone before they destroy the Flier."

Setting the runabout at the bushes, Matt drove through the undergrowth, Josh keeping the branches out of his face while he attended to the steering.

"On de road ag'in!" jubilated the boy, as they emerged from the mouth of the opening and turned to the left.

"All I wish is," answered Matt, "that I knew we were going right."

"Dere's on'y two ways t' go, cull. One's up to'rds w'ere you was dropped by Brisco an' Spang, an' t'odder's de way we're headin'. It's a cinch we're hittin' it off about proper. W'ere d' youse t'ink dem odder mutts went wid de tourin'-car?"

"I'm afraid they took it off to carry out their threat and make junk of it."

"I hope yous ain't got it right. If dey did dat, it 'u'd put yous in a bad hole. Yous couldn't make Tomlinson take dis car f'r de odder, could yous?"

"Hardly. This car belongs to Nugent, in Ash Fork."

Something was rattling about the car, and it got onto Matt's nerves. Halting for a moment, he

located the difficulty. The screw-cap of the gasoline-tank was loose. Taking a wrench out of the tool-box he tightened the cap, then dropped the wrench in the rumble and returned to his seat.

"Yous don't like t' hear anyt'ing rattle, hey?" queried Josh.

"Makes me nervous," laughed Matt. "Now hold onto your teeth, Josh. I'm going to let her out!"

"De quicker we kin go de better. Let's see how fast de ole gal kin travel."

They whirled around a turn in the narrow valley. The unexpected was lying in wait for them, for they came upon Spangler, on foot and walking toward the niche. [Pg 18]

Josh gave a startled yell. Spangler, dumfounded at sight of the runabout, charging toward him with Motor Matt and the boy in front, stood as though rooted to the ground.

"Down, Josh!" cried Matt, advancing the spark; "get down behind the dashboard!"

As Matt spoke he sounded the horn. Spangler climbed out of the way with more haste than grace, and the runabout dashed past him.

"Yi-yip-ee!" tuned up the boy, waving his hand mockingly. "D'radder do dat dan git run down, hey?"

"Drop!" yelled Matt, and in a tone that made Josh crumple down between the seat and the dash.

Bang!

Matt had expected a bullet, and he was not disappointed. But it went wide.

Bang!

The next one came closer, but still left a safe margin.

There was no more shooting. Wondering at it, Josh rose up and looked backward.

"Now wot d'youse t'ink o' dat!" he cried. "Wot's dat mug doin' dat for?"

"What's he doing?" asked Matt.

"W'y he's hustlin' a big stone into de middle o' de road. See 'im work! Chee! Wot's de meanin' o' dat?"

The car whipped around another turn, wiping Spangler and his strange activities out of sight. Josh dropped down on the seat.

"That's got a bad look," said Matt, coaxing the runabout to a still faster gait. "We've got to get out of this as quick as we can."

"Chee!" cried the boy, holding to the seat with both hands, "we're goin' fast enough. Gid-ap! Wow! wot a spurt! Don't let anyt'ing slip a cog, cull. If de ole benzine-buggy hit a rock an' stopped, I'd go right on f'r a couple o' miles afore I landed. Oh, wot a clip! We've got de Cannonball Limited licked t' a frazzle!"

Then they took another turn, the rear wheels skidding and Matt deftly catching the motor up and sending the car onward. The runabout did not follow the curve of the road, but made an angling turn—a hair-raising stunt copied after Oldfield, the daredevil racer.

Josh gave a yell, and came within a hair of being heaved over Matt and into the road.

Then, with a muttered exclamation, Matt cut off the power, applied the brakes and quickly reversed, backing for the side of the road.

It all happened so quick that it took the boy's breath.

"Wot's dat fer?" he asked.

Matt was whirling the wheel and starting the car on the back track.

"Brisco is heading us off," he answered—"Brisco in the Red Flier!"

Josh turned to stare along the road.

Matt was right.

Brisco, still a long distance off, was whooping it up in their direction.

"Wouldn't dat crimp yous?" gasped the boy, awed at the gathering perils. "Dey've got us f'r fair, Matt! W'y didn't yous keep on an' give Brisco de go-by?"

"There wasn't room enough in the road to pass!" flung back Matt.

"Dat's w'y Spang was rollin' dem stones in de road! He knew dat Brisco was comin', and dat he'd git us between him an' de rock-pile. Chee! We're It, dis time, an' no mistake."

Matt, his face white and set and his gray eyes snapping, was leaning over the steering-wheel, watching every foot of road as they swept over it.

"We've got to pass that rock-pile before it gets too big!" said he through his teeth.

"Den w'ere'll we go?"

"Anywhere, just so we keep away from Brisco. This car is a faster one than the Red Flier. We can show him our heels at any stage of the game."

They fairly flew, and rocks rushed past them as though hurled by some giant hand.

"There'll be some danger when we get to the place where Spangler is waiting, Josh," said Matt.

"I'll slow down and you can get out, if you want to."

"Wot d'youse take me fer?" cried the boy. "I'm wid yous, Matt, win 'r lose. See? Make yer ole play. If Uncle Josh ain't wit' yous at de finish, den call him a quitter an' mark him off'n yer callin'-list."

Hurling onward, and skidding around the turns, Matt kept straining his eyes constantly ahead.

Their source of peril was now wrapped up in Spangler. If his pile of boulders did not block the road completely—if there was a chance for the runabout to get past the stones, or over them, there was still a fighting chance for escape.

Half a minute later, as the car reached out for the place where Spangler had been at work, Matt's heart went down into his boots.

Spangler was nowhere in sight, but he had worked to good purpose.

A few big boulders were cunningly placed so as to make the road impassable. With a despairing cry, Matt brought the runabout to a quick stop.

CHAPTER XII.

A CLOSE CALL.

"Pile out, Josh, and get busy with those rocks!" yelled Matt.

It was a forlorn hope, for the pounding of the Red Flier could be heard around the turn, coming up hand over fist. Long before the way could be cleared, Brisco would be upon them.

And what had become of Spangler. Where had he gone? And *why* had he gone?

That was a conundrum, and Matt had no time to give to conundrums just then.

Josh, eager to do all he could, was tugging and straining at the rocks.

"It won't do, Josh!" shouted Matt. "Run for those boulders at the side of the road and wait for me."

To think quickly in an emergency was Motor Matt's long suit. Many a time his cool head had helped him out of a bad difficulty.

While he was shouting to the boy he was running back to the car. Snatching the wrench from where he had dropped it in the rumble, Matt went to work with lightninglike energy on the cap of the gasoline-reservoir.

In record time he had the cap off. Bending down he scooped up a handful of sand from the road and dumped the most of it into the reservoir, then, as quickly as he had removed the cap, he replaced it, flung the wrench into the car and jumped for the boulders.

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Hardly was he back of the big stones that clustered along that edge of the valley, when the Red Flier shoved her nose through a cloud of dust and came scorching onward.

Brisco must have been astounded to see the runabout, deserted and at a halt in the road. The way, of course, was blocked for him as well as for the runabout, and he halted the Red Flier at a good distance from the other machine, leaped out and came running to the other car.

The stones in the road probably gave him a pretty good idea of what had happened, for he immediately began looking around him as though expecting to see some one—possibly Matt and Josh.

"Spang!" he whooped. "Where are you, Spang?"

"Here!" answered Spangler, appearing suddenly around the bend.

"What you been doing?" demanded Brisco.

"The dickens is ter pay, an' no mistake!" stormed Spang. "That young cub of a Motor Matt found out whar we'd cached the runabout, an' blamed if he didn't go in an' snake it right out from under Klegg's—"

"Thunder!" broke in Brisco. "Don't you reckon I *saw* the whelp? He was bearing down on me like a hurricane, slamming the runabout through for all she was worth."

"He went past here gally-whoopin'," answered Spang, "while I was makin' fer that hole in the hill. Come mighty nigh runnin' me down at that. I got out o' the way, faced around an' sent a couple o' bullets arter him, but the brat's too lucky ter stop any lead—"

"Depends on who throws the lead," snarled Brisco.

"I kin throw it with ary man that walks! But I didn't take time ter throw much. I calculated the runabout would come up ferninst you, Hank, afore it got out o' the valley, an' that King would have ter turn around an' chase back this way. So what does I do but begin pilin' stones whar they'd do the most good. Jest got enough down ter do the biz, an' went ter see what had happened ter Klegg. Great jumpin' sand-hills! What d'ye think that infernal kid done ter him?"

"What?" fumed Brisco.

"Doped him, by thunder! Doped him out er the same bottle we used last night! Klegg's up thar in the notch, dead ter the world!"

"What did you leave the hang-out for?" roared Brisco angrily. "Didn't I tell you, when I left, to stay there with Klegg? If you'd done as I said, this wouldn't have happened."

"I come out ter see if that kid was moseyin' down the valley," was the sullen rejoinder from Spang. "Ye said I was ter watch out an' make sure he didn't blunder outer the notch."

"Well, you made sure, didn't you?" taunted Brisco. "Where'd Legree's kid spring from? How'd he come to be along with King?"

"How'd I know? Think I'm a mind-reader?"

"Deuced funny thing! He was with King, and I'd like to know where he came from, and how he got here. There's a nigger in the fence, I'll bet. Where'd those boys go?"

"I don't know that, nuther."

"Did they pass you and go up the valley?"

"Nary, they didn't!"

"Then they must be hiding around here somewhere! Let's get 'em. If I lay hands on Motor Matt again he won't get off so easy."

There was only one place in that vicinity where any one could hide, and that was among the scattered rocks not far from where the runabout was standing.

Brisco and Spangler, making a hasty survey of the surroundings, at once hit upon the boulders as the place for them to look.

"They're over thar," cried Spangler, "an' I'll bet money on it."

As he spoke, he started at a run for the side of the valley, pulling a revolver as he went.

"Don't do any shooting," called Brisco, starting after Spangler, "just grab 'em and hold 'em."

"We'll tie King in that thar automobile when we run it over the cliff!" yelled Brisco viciously.

"We'll l'arn him ter play his tricks on *us*!"

Matt and Josh had heard all this conversation. They were not standing still, either, but were busily finding some place where they could stow themselves away.

A fight with the two armed men was to be avoided, if possible. Matt knew that he and Josh would stand little chance in such a one-sided combat; and Matt had formed plans which he was eager to be carrying out.

A little way up the steep hillside there was a ledge, with a recess back of it.

Matt's quick eye picked out the spot, and he climbed briskly, hauling Josh along after him. The boulders shielded them from view while they were getting to the ledge, and Matt pushed Josh into the recess, and then rolled into it himself. From this position Matt was able to peer over the ledge and keep track of the movements of Brisco and Spangler.

"Are they comin' dis way, cull?" whispered the boy.

"Yes," answered Matt.

"Got deir guns ready, eh?"

"Of course, Josh. Scoundrels like Brisco and Spangler always draw and shoot if you give 'em half a chance."

"Dey're hot at de two of us, an' dey'll sure lay out ter do us up."

"We'll have to fight, if they force it on us."

"Wot kin we do?"

"There's a stone on the ledge. If they come too close I'll push it down on them."

"Better give dat dere stone a push right off, bekase——"

"Hist!" cautioned Matt.

Silence fell between the boys. Matt drew in his head, fearing he would be seen. He listened intently, however, and could tell by the scrambling feet below just how near Brisco and Spangler were coming. When they came too close, Matt was intending to push the stone down on them.

"Beats the deuce where those whelps went to!" grumbled the voice of Brisco.

"They must be here. Thar wasn't any place else they could go. I wasn't gone from the road more'n five minits, Hank."

"They wouldn't have had time to get past you?"

"Nary, they wouldn't. They're here, I tell ye; they must be."

"The whole side-hill is under our eyes. If you can see the cubs you can do better than I can."

"Seems like there was a shelf up thar a ways. Mebby they're on the shelf?"

"Gammon! That shelf isn't wide enough for a chipmunk to sit on."

"Anyways, I'm goin' up an' take a look."

Matt got ready to push out and roll the stone off the shelf. Before he could do that, however, a shout from Brisco halted him.

"Say, you! There were three horses in the hang-out with Klegg!"

"What o' that?" answered Spangler.

"Why, those boys have gone there and are getting the horses."

"How could they go thar, Hank? They didn't pass me."

"They might have got there when you didn't see them. While we're wasting time here, I'll bet something handsome they're getting out those horses. Come on! Don't lose another second fooling around among those rocks!"

"Waal, I don't reckon——"

"Come on, I say!" roared Brisco.

The two men were heard scrambling down the slope, getting farther and farther away.

Back in the little recess Matt could hear the boy chuckling and talking to himself.

"Come on, Josh!" whispered Matt, starting up. "Be careful, though! This is our day for luck, all right."

"Well, I guess!" answered the boy, rolling over the ledge. "Chee, but dey're a pair o' dough-heads. Good t'ing f'r us, too. What next, Matt?"

"We'll get to the Red Flier, turn it the other way along the trail, and ride back to Fairview."

"Oh, Lucy!" giggled Josh. "Fer a kid dat ain't had not'in' t' eat since yesterday mornin' I'm feelin' some fine! We gits de Red Flier, after all, an' dem guys is beat, hands down."

They were proceeding down the hillside while Josh was talking. When Matt reached the boulders that lined the road, he looked out.

Brisco and Spangler, hurrying as fast as their legs could carry them, were just vanishing around the bend.

"Now for the Red Flier—and Fairview!" said Matt, running out from among the boulders and laying a direct course for the red car.

"Dat's de talk, cull!" laughed Josh, hustling along after Matt.

Certainly it looked as though they were to have everything their own way, for a while at least—but they were not so lucky as they thought.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAR AGAINST CAR.

It may be that Matt and Josh made too much racket getting down the rocks, or that Brisco had a premonition that something was wrong. Be that as it might, however, yet Brisco and Spangler turned back a minute after they had gone charging around the bend.

Motor Matt, at that moment, was bending to the crank of the Red Flier, and it was Josh who excitedly announced the approach of their two enemies.

The boy had done his jubilating too soon, and the sight of Brisco and Spangler filled him with panic.

"Oh, chee!" he fluttered. "Dey're after us, Matt, like a couple o' grizzlies! Wow! Let's duck f'r de rocks agin!"

"Get into the car!" shouted Matt, giving the crank a whirl.

One beauty of the Red Flier was the quickness with which the machine caught up its cycle; and it had been the same with Matt's twin-cylinder motorcycle. Half a turn of the pedal was enough for the little *Comet*, and one pull of the crank did the business for the red car's motor.

While the machine popped its defiance of Brisco and Spangler, Motor Matt ran around and vaulted into his old familiar place. He felt at home—much more so than he had when driving the runabout.

Neither Brisco nor Spangler wasted any time with their revolvers. Both knew that the runabout was a faster machine than the Red Flier, and both felt confident that a quick start after the boys and a few minutes' chase would tell the tale.

Spangler scrambled into the car. Brisco slipped as he rounded the front of the runabout to turn over the engine, fell sprawling and hit his head on the handle of the crank.

He was not very much hurt, apparently, although from his flow of language his temper must have been severely injured. Besides, he had lost ten seconds—no very serious matter, considering the usual speed of the runabout—but Brisco was anxious for a rapid start and a quick finish for the chase.

As he yanked the lever savagely, the popping from up the road sounding like the rapid discharge

of a Gatling gun. Motor Matt had turned the Red Flier with his customary celerity, and was off on the high gear with the muffler cut out.

"By thunder," howled the frantic Spangler, "oncet I ketch that Motor Matt I'll wring his neck fer him!"

"I'll help you," answered Brisco vindictively. There was a patch of skin gone from his forehead and a little dribble of red was flowing down his cheek.

"If they wasn't out o' sight," growled Spangler, "I'd pepper 'em."

"What's the use of peppering them?" scowled Brisco. "We'll climb right over 'em in less'n five minutes."

"Do it!" cried Spangler, as they shot ahead recklessly.

"Do what?" asked Brisco, just missing a boulder by a hair's breadth.

"Why, climb over 'em," snorted Spangler. "Run 'em down an' shove 'em inter the rocks! Let's hev a smash, with that young whelp right in the middle of it. He's made us trouble enough!"

"Don't be a fool, Spang!" returned Brisco. "If we ran into them we might smash the runabout. We've got use for this machine—after we clean up on Legree and this Motor Matt."

"That's so, too," said Spangler. "We may hev use fer it even if ye don't clean up on Legree. With another pair o' shoes an' tubes, an' a place whar we kin keep a supply o' gasoline an' oil, an' them steel bottles o' compressed air, we could circle all around through this here Southwestern kentry, takin' our toll wharever we wanted ter pick it up."

"Sure we could, and we *will*!"

"I'm glad o' one thing," observed Spangler.

"What's that?"

"Why, thar won't be any more glass throwed in the road, same as thar was during t'other chase we had with that Red Flier. King had a lot in the red car, if ye remember, an' I dumped it all out."

"We'll nip 'im this time," said Brisco, through his teeth.

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"We got ter, that's what. If we don't— Tear an' ages, Hank! Be keerful!"

The runabout had been hurled at a curve. There was no lessening of the speed, and the entire machine slid sideways to the edge of the road, banging into the rocks with a force that pitched Spangler against the dashboard. He came within one of going clear over upon the hood.

"Get back in your seat and hang on!" yelled Brisco. "We haven't commenced to run yet."

After that Spangler had no time to talk—he was too busy holding himself in the car.

Meanwhile the Red Flier had been streaking it through the hills, Josh keeping a pair of keen eyes on the back track, and Matt giving his entire attention to the road ahead.

"Chee, wot a bump!" cried Josh.

He had seen the runabout skid across the road, take a welt at the rock wall and then leap onward like a bullet from a gun.

"What's the matter?" shouted Matt.

He had to shout, for the wind of their flight caught the words out of his teeth and flung them, a mere wisp of sound, far to rearward.

"Brisco tried t' knock over a hill wit' his hind wheels," yelled Josh, "an' Spang tried t' turn a handspring over de bonnet. Wow! but dey're goin some, Matt!"

"So are we," screamed Matt, "Fifty-eight miles an hour."

"Ever race dat runabout afore?"

"Yes."

"W'ch winned?"

"The Flier—by a fluke. I scattered glass in the road—the runabout got into it and went lame."

"Got any glass along now?"

"Yes, in the tonneau; but—"

"None dere now, cull."

"Then Brisco must have thrown it out. It'll all right, though. This is going to be our race."

"We'd better keep our lamps skinned fr' Fairview. It's on'y seventy-five miles from w'ere we started, an we're goin' so fast we might run past de place an' never see it."

Josh felt hilarious. His panic was leaving him and his usual nerve was coming back.

"How's the runabout coming?" roared Matt.

"Gainin'!" whooped the boy. "Oh, sister, how she's comin'! Wisht I had some glass."

"She'll never catch us, Josh!"

"How's dat?"

"Because I've fixed her so she won't."

"I hope yous ain't shy in yer calkilations, Matt. Dem blokes'll sure kill us if we drops into deir hands."

"Watch her, Josh! Tell me when her speed slackens, or when anything goes wrong."

"She ain't slackenin' none yet, an' nuttin' ain't gone wrong."

"Well, watch and tell me."

Matt couldn't understand why the runabout wasn't beginning to develop trouble in the vicinity of the needle-valve. But it would come, sooner or later. Some of the sand was bound to get through the supply-pipe in time.

The valley had widened considerably, and now it began to develop dips and rises which afforded Matt opportunity for nursing the motor and preventing overheating. He could cut off the power on the down grades and give the throbbing cylinders a breathing spell.

Brisco had no such fine ability or discrimination. He took everything on the high gear.

"Still gainin'!" announced Josh.

"How far are they behind?"

"A hundred feet. It's a wonder dey don't shake some bullets out o' deir guns dis way. One of 'em's tootin' his bazoo at us."

"What does he say? Can you hear?"

"He says ter stop 'r he'll put a bullet into one o' our tires. Chee! If he does dat——"

Matt snatched one hand from the steering-wheel.

Honk, honk! he answered derisively.

Sping!

The warning report was followed by the whistle of a bullet. It did not come anywhere near the Red Flier, but spatted harmlessly into the valley wall.

Josh laughed wildly and waved his hand. The spirit of the race was surging through his veins and had wiped out all sense of fear.

"Wow!" he shouted. "Yous ought t' seen dat! Spang has been holdin' on t' de seat wit' bot' hands, but he let go wit' one t' fire at us. De runabout jumped sideways an' he lost his pepper-box overboard. Come clost t' goin' hisself! Say, I wisht he had!"

The runabout was devouring the distance in remarkable style. It was now only twenty-five feet behind, and so near that the sand and pebbles kicked up by the flying rear wheels of the red car struck in the faces of Brisco and Spangler.

Spangler lowered his head. Brisco jerked the goggles down over his eyes.

"Stop!" he roared, "or I'll run into you!"

Honk, honk! tooted Matt defiantly.

Brisco swore and gritted his teeth. With his temper at fever heat, what did he care how he injured the runabout just so he evened his score with Motor Matt?

Closer and closer came the runabout. Josh measured the decreasing distance with his eyes.

"Ten feet! Five, Matt, *five!* She's up t' us, now—look out!"

Not knowing what was to happen, Josh curled over the back of the seat and hung on with both hands.

There was a slight jar, followed by a sudden slewing on the part of the runabout, a quick lessening of speed and the whirr of a racing engine.

"Dey're stoppin'!" shouted the boy; "somet'ing has gone wrong wid de odder car!"

"I knew *something* would happen!" shouted Matt, as he slowed his speed a little to give the Red Flier a bit of a rest.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOWN THE MOUNTAIN.

"Dat engine o' deirs went wrong just at de right time t' save our bacon, Matt," said Josh.

Matt tossed a look backward. The runabout was at a stop, and Brisco was on the ground, tinkering frantically.

"If he knows what to do," said Matt, "he'll be able to come on again. But he'll have more trouble; and he'll continue to have trouble until he takes time to overhaul his fuel-tank."

"What did yous do?" asked the boy.

"Mixed a handful of sand with his gasoline."

"W'en?"

"While we were hung up in front of those rocks Spangler had laid for us."

"Didn't dat geezer see yous?"

"I got out of the way before Brisco showed up; and Spangler, at the time, was away looking for the man in the notch."

"Chee, but you're a wonder! Motor Matt heads de percession an' carries de banner! Yous t'ought o' all dat while I was hustlin' t' git behind dem rocks! Did yous t'ink we was goin' t' have a race?"

"I didn't know but we might. Anyhow, I thought it good policy to fix the machine so it wouldn't be reliable. What's the news from the rear, Josh?"

"Brisco is gittin' back in his seat."

"Is he coming on?"

"Dat's wot."

"Fast as ever?"

"I don't see no diff'rence in de runnin'."

"Well, something is sure to go wrong, just as it did before. One grain of sand clogged the needle-valve, Josh, and there's a thousand more grains to come down the supply-pipe. Face around a minute. The road forks here. Which one shall we take? Do you remember coming this way?"

The boy flopped around in his seat. The Red Flier was rushing toward a place where the road forked. Both roads were bordered by rocky walls, and both had the appearance of being equally well traveled—which wasn't saying much for the travel, at that.

"I don't remember nuttin'," answered the boy, "bein' scart stiff all de w'ile I was in de runabout. I'd say go t' de right. Dat's always a good t'ing t' do."

"If we had the least notion which way Fairview lay we could shape our course a little better. But we don't know, so we'll take chances and go to the right."

There was a slowing of speed while Matt made the turn. For a long distance this fork was a straightaway stretch and fairly level. Matt and Josh were congratulating themselves on the fact that they had made a fortunate choice, when suddenly they whirled out on a vista that surprised them.

At the end of the straightaway stretch, a sudden angle brought the side of a steep mountain under the boy's eyes. The road could be seen clinging to the mountain's side, describing horseshoe after horseshoe—edging its way between dizzy chasms and high cliffs.

"Wow!" gasped Josh, and collapsed in his seat. "Right here's w'ere we fall off de eart'."

Matt took another look behind. The runabout, with the stern, relentless face of Brisco over the wheel, was surging toward them.

"Here we go!" called Matt. "Hang on, Josh!"

"I'm glued! Yous can't shake me!"

The boy was game, and Matt flung the Red Flier at the mountainside and down the ribbon of treacherous road.

There were places where a cliff overhung the trail, and the wheels on the left almost scraped the rocks, while those on the right barely tracked on the brink of a gulf.

The boy's face went white, but his eyes glimmered brightly. He looked back from time to time and saw the runabout sliding after them.

A quick fear had rushed to Matt's brain. Oddly enough, it was not a fear for his own safety, for he knew the Red Flier and knew what he could do with it; but the runabout! If that trickle of sand cut off the power and caused the machine to slew ever so slightly, it would go over the chasm's edge and carry Brisco and Spangler with it!

The world would have been better off, perhaps, if such a mishap had come to pass; but Matt did not want it that way. His own instrumentality in the matter would have been too hideously clear.

And yet, if something did not happen to the runabout, the machine might collide with the Red Flier and drive it over the brink.

Matt knew he must keep ahead. Never had he driven more masterfully than then. His nerves were steady, his brain alert, and every inch of that curving, treacherous down grade was covered by his eyes.

It was more like falling down a hill than riding down. The Red Flier quivered like a thing of life, seeming to realize what was expected of it, and responding nobly.

Far off, over the level plain at the mountain's foot, could be seen the little cluster of houses that represented Fairview. It glowed in the morning sun like a toy village on a toy map.

As the road curved, struck a short straightaway, then curved again, the town swept vividly into view and again as quickly vanished.

At the most desperate part of the trail a rock had crumbled from the wall and rolled to the edge of the chasm. There it lay, almost under the nose of the rushing car.

The boy cast a despairing look into Motor Matt's set, determined face. All he saw was a swift gleam of the gray eyes.

Crash!

The car, skilfully guided so that it touched the inward side of the boulder, forced it from the edge and sent it bounding and smashing downward into the gulf.

A sharp breath tore through the boy's lips. Confidence again took possession of him. After that escape, what difficulty could come up that Motor Matt was not able to conquer?

Matt seemed to be made of steel. With one foot on the brake and both hands on the wheel, he kept rigidly to his work.

"How're they making it behind, Josh?" he called.

The boy knelt in his seat and looked back up the steep incline.

Fortune was riding with Brisco that day. But for that he must have been hurled from the trail in a dozen places.

Driving a car was comparatively new work for him, and the chances are that never before had he been on such a dangerous piece of road. Yet he was naturally a man of iron nerve, and would not hold back where Motor Matt led.

Spangler, from his appearance, was as frightened a man as there ever was in Arizona. A gray pallor had spread over his face, and his eyes were fairly popping from his head. Gripping his seat with both hands, he braced himself with his feet against the forward dip of the car.

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"Dey're slidin' after us, cull," reported the boy.

"Gaining?"

"Dat's wot, but not like dey did on de level road."

"The foot of the mountain is just ahead of us. Can we get there before they overtake us?"

"Well, mebby we kin, but I wish de foot o' de mountain was half a mile nearer dan wot it is."

Facing about in his seat, Josh looked at the foot of the mountain for himself.

They were dropping toward it swiftly. There were no more curves—nothing but a straight fall, a shoot between bordering rocks and then a cheerful reach of road over the plain.

"We're in luck t' git out o' dis widout a broken neck," said Josh. "Chee, but dat level place looks good t' me."

"The Flier's a dandy car!" declared Matt.

"She's got a dandy driver, an' dat's no dream. W'ere'd we been widout Motor Matt at de steerin'-wheel? Yous is a four-time winner, an' dere's odders dat'll hear me say it."

"The runabout will be hot after us as soon as we hit the level ground again."

"Dey'll never ketch us, cull. I don't care how hot dey come, wit' yous handlin' de Flier."

With a final spurt the red car rushed through the rocks, and, for the first time since it had taken that up-and-down trail, both ends were on a level.

As they glided out onto the plain, Matt cast a look backward. There was a feeling of relief came over him at sight of the runabout charging through the rocks at the mountain's foot.

But, as he looked, and just as the runabout was on the point of striking level ground, there was a jerk to the left, a crash, and a sudden stop.

Brisco pitched forward over the wheel, shot clear past the hood, and doubled up and rolled along the stony trail.

Spangler went out on the left side, ricocheting into the air and turning a couple of grotesque somersaults. Like Brisco, when he dropped, he lay still.

A sharp breath escaped Matt's lips. Turning the Red Flier, he started back until he had come almost upon the silent form of Brisco; then he brought the Flier to a halt and jumped out.

"Chee, Moses!" muttered Josh, awed by the abrupt termination of the chase. "Do yous t'ink dem guys is killed, Matt?"

"That's what we've got to find out," flung back Matt, hurrying to Brisco and kneeling down beside him.

Human enmity seemed a paltry thing to Matt as his hand went groping over Brisco's breast, feeling for the heart-beats. A thrill of satisfaction shot through him as he found that Brisco was alive.

Hurrying on to Spangler, he was immensely relieved to find that worthy sitting up in the road and drawing a hand over his dazed eyes.

"What—what happened?" faltered Spangler.

"Nothing to what's going to happen now, Spangler," answered Matt, and picked up the second and last revolver which the ruffian had had about him.

"There ought to be some ropes in the runabout, Josh," called Matt. "Go and get them."

CHAPTER XV.

MOTOR MATT'S TEN-STRIKE.

Josh hustled for the runabout. One of the coiled ropes Matt had put in the car was hanging over a lamp, and the other had been thrown into the road. Taking the one off the lamp, the boy hurried back to the place where Matt was training the revolver on Spangler.

"Fine bizness!" laughed Josh. "Wot d'yous want me t' do, Matt? Put a bow-knot on his lunch-hooks?"

"Stand up, Spangler!" ordered Matt.

Spangler got lamely to his feet. He was still confused and bewildered.

"Somethin' hit us," he mumbled. "From the way I was throwed it must hev been a landslide. Whar's Hank? Is he killed?"

"Brisco will get along, I guess," said Matt. "Put your hands behind you, Spangler."

Just then, for the first time, it began to dawn on Spangler that Matt was making a prisoner out of him. The ruffian, although practically uninjured, had been badly shaken up. Nevertheless, he was in condition to resist, and he leaped backward, swearing.

"If ye think ye kin rope, down an' tie me," he cried, "jest bekase that thar machine bucked an' dumped me inter the road, ye got another——"

"Come this way!" cut in Matt.

The words, hard and keen, jumped at Spangler like so many knife-points. Motor Matt meant business, and showed it in every movement.

Spangler stepped forward.

"That's far enough," snapped Matt. "Now put those hands behind you."

With the open end of his own gun staring him in the face, there was nothing for Spangler to do but to obey. His hands went meekly behind him.

"Can you tie a good hard knot, Josh?" asked Matt.

"T'ink I ain't good f'r nuttin'?" protested the boy.

Passing behind Spangler, he used the free end of the rope for a few moments and then stepped back with the rest of the coil in his hands.

"If he gits dem mitts out o' dat he's a good 'un," announced Josh. "W'ere d'yous want him, Matt?"

"In the Red Flier. Step lively, Spangler. We've got to look after Brisco."

"Get ap!" clucked Josh, shaking the rope.

With a black scowl on his face, the baffled Spangler made his way to the touring-car.

"Get in on the back seat," went on Matt.

Spangler obeyed the order.

"Now, Josh," pursued Matt, "cut the rope and tie a piece of it around his feet."

The boy finished the work expeditiously, and when he and Matt drew away from the Red Flier they left Spangler helpless and fuming in the tonneau.

Brisco was still lying where he had fallen, and he was still unconscious. Matt made a more thorough examination of him. His pulse was stronger and, so far as Matt could discover, there were no broken bones.

"Wot keeps 'im in a trance?" asked the boy. "He's stayin' a long time in de Land o' Nod for not havin' nuttin' wrong wit' 'im." [Pg 24]

"Pick up his revolver, Josh," returned Matt briskly, "and then sit down beside him and wait till he gets his wits back. Don't let him get away from you."

"Get away from me? Not on yer life, cull. I'd radder take dis mutt into Fairview dan pull down a t'ousan' in de long green. Dad wants *him*."

Paying no attention to the boy's rather obscure remark, Matt went to the runabout. He was expecting to find the machine badly smashed, and was happily disappointed.

Both front lamps were broken, and the mud-guard over the right wheel forward had been ripped away. The guard had fallen between the wheel and the rock, and undoubtedly had kept the wheel from being dished. The tire was punctured and the jolt had disabled the motor. For all that, however, the machine, with a few temporary repairs, could travel on its own wheels if not under its own power.

Brisco had not yet corralled his wits. Aided by Josh, Matt dragged the man off to one side, where he would be out of the way; then, cutting about six feet of rope from the other riata, he threw it down where Josh could get at it.

"When Brisco wakes up, Josh," said Matt, "just hold him steady till we put that rope on him."

"Wot yous goin' t' do, Matt?" inquired the wondering Josh. "Yous is busier dan a monkey wit' his hand in a coconut."

"We're going to haul the runabout into Fairview," said Matt. "But I've got to patch her up first."

Getting into the Red Flier, Matt backed her as close to the disabled car as he could; then, hitching onto the runabout with the ropes, he pulled it down onto the level plain.

With a jack taken from the touring-car he swung the runabout's wheel off the ground. The mud-guard, having been ripped off, was not in his way. After locating the puncture and marking it with chalk, he unscrewed the wing-nuts, pushed out the security-bolt, and then, with levers, dug out the inner tube.

Perhaps he was an hour getting the hole patched up, tire back in place and reinflated. When he was through, the runabout was ready to be dragged to Fairview.

"How's Brisco?" asked Matt, putting on his leather coat, which he had thrown off while working with the runabout.

"Same as wot he was, cull," replied Josh. "He ain't twitched an eye-winker."

"He may be shamming," said Matt, "in the hope of making a bolt for his liberty. We'll put him in the tonneau. You can ride with him and watch him every minute. I'll take Spangler in front with me."

"We're goin' t' take de hull outfit into Fairview?" grinned Josh.

"That's the idea."

"A whale of an idee it is, too, an' no stringin'. Reg'lar line-up o' crooks an' stolen automobiles, wit' Motor Matt in charge o' de bunch. Wow! It's de biggest come-easy dat I ever mixed up wit'. Mebby dere won't be rejoicin' w'en we goes pokin' into town wit' all dis load. Well, I guess yes."

Between them, Matt and Josh succeeded in carrying Brisco to the touring-car and getting him into the tonneau.

Spangler, having been transferred to one of the front seats, had been chewing the cud of reflection.

"Looky here, Motor Matt," said he, "ye ain't got no call ter kerry me ter Fairview. Think o' Klegg, down an' out an' mebby dyin' back thar in that notch. If anythin' happens ter him ye'll be responsible. Better turn me loose an' let me go back an' take keer o' him."

"Don't do so much worrying over Klegg," answered Matt. "I intend to have him looked after. Just as soon as we get to Fairview I'll have the sheriff, or some other officer, go to the notch and see that Klegg gets all the attention he deserves."

"Waal, even at that, ye ain't got no call ter lug me inter town. I ain't done a thing. Brisco was the feller that had it in fer you. It's him ye want ter git even with, an' not me."

"You didn't have a hand in robbing Mr. Tomlinson, did you?" said Matt sarcastically. "There are a lot of other things you've done, too, and I'm going to turn you over to Lem Nugent, the man who owns the runabout, as soon as we reach Fairview. It won't take long to get Nugent up from Ash Forks."

"Yous is a game loser, I don't t'ink," scoffed the boy. "W'ere's yer nerve, Spangler?"

"Say," said Spangler, giving his attention to Josh, "where did you butt inter this game?"

"I rode out o' Fairview wit' Brisco," grinned Josh. "He give me a ride."

"Give ye a ride?" echoed Spangler.

"Sure, on'y he didn't know it. I was under de coat in de back o' de runabout; an' I was still dere w'en yous mutts went t' dat hole in de wall. 'Course yous didn't see me. Yous was too mad at Motor Matt t' see anyt'ing."

The whole situation rushed over Spangler with demoralizing clearness. He was able to understand how Josh and Matt, by the exercise of pluck and brains, had succeeded in balking the plans of Brisco.

Spangler swore heartily. It seemed to be his only method for easing his feelings.

"The worst move we ever made," he muttered savagely, "was takin' Motor Matt out o' town last night. I didn't want ter do it, but Brisco had made up his mind, an' that settled it. We ain't got no one ter blame but ourselves fer what's happened. Go on. The quicker we git ter Fairview an' hev this thing over with, the better I'll be suited."

Spangler, resigning himself to the situation, sank back in his seat.

Matt went around to the rear of the car to make the ropes attaching it to the runabout more secure. As near as he had been able to discover there was a level road all the way to Fairview. They were coming into the town from the north and east, and not along the Ash Fork road, where there was a hill to be descended in order to reach the valley.

Having reassured himself about the ropes, Matt returned to the side of the Red Flier and mounted the running-board. Looking over the side of the tonneau, he swept his gaze over Brisco's unconscious face.

"I can't understand what keeps him that way, Josh," said Matt.

"Mebby he's badly shook up inside," answered the boy. "Wot he needs is a doctor."

"Well, he'll have one before long. Stay right beside him and watch him every minute. If he's playing possum with us, we want to make sure he don't gain anything by it."

"I'm right on de job," said Josh.

Matt climbed into his seat and started on the low gear. There was a creaking of the ropes as they took the pull, and the runabout started.

Everything worked smoothly, and Matt, with a load worth fifteen hundred dollars, set his face toward Fairview.

CHAPTER XVI.

MORE TROUBLE FOR THE "UNCLE TOMMERS."

The disappearance of Motor Matt and the Red Flier made Carl Pretzel not only bewildered but furiously angry. He was angry at Brisco and bewildered to account for the way he had pulled off his night raid.

"Oof dot feller inchures a hair oof Modor Matt's headt," wheezed Carl, shaking his fist in the air, "I vill camp by his drail, py chimineddy! I vill go on some var-paths! I vill make him be sorry for vat he dit, yah, so helup me!"

Leaving Carl to rant and vow vengeance, Legree rushed over to the railroad-station and sent a message. The message, owing to financial embarrassment on the part of Legree, had to go collect.

"LEM NUGENT, Ash Fork.

"Come at once to Fairview. Important developments regarding your automobile.

MOTOR MATT."

Legree signed the message with Matt's name because he knew the cattleman wouldn't know anything about a man named Legree; and he also felt sure that Motor Matt's name would secure the cattleman's instant attention.

On his way back to the hotel he inquired for the sheriff. Fairview was too small to have a sheriff, but the town had a deputy sheriff. The deputy, however, was just then attending his father's golden-wedding, in Flagstaff, the marshal had gone with him, and the town was without an officer.

As if this was not sufficiently discouraging, when Legree got back to the hotel he found a very disquieting state of affairs.

The Uncle Tommers had been chased out of the hostelry by O'Grady and Ping Pong, his Chinese cook. They were gathered in a forlorn group in front, and Carl Pretzel was with them.

"Mistah O'Grady, sah," Uncle Tom was saying with all the dignity he could work up, "Ah's de official mascot ob Motah Matt. While Ah's been stayin' in yo' 'stablishment, Ah's been mascottin' fo' him. He will come back, yo' ma'k what Ah say. Gib us ouah breakfus en yo' sho gits yo' money!"

"Begorry, yez have got into me f'r all yez are goin' to," yelled the proprietor. "It's a passel av thramps yez are, iv'ry wan av yez! Av th' marshal was in town, Oi'd have yez all in th' cooler. Get out, befure Oi sic th' dog on yez! Scatther!"

"What's the matter here?" demanded Legree, pushing to the front.

"Py chincher," flared Carl, "dot Irish feller t'inks ve vas vorkin' some shkin games on him. He vas grazier as a pedpug, und he von't gif us some preakfast."

"En we's all hongry es sin," piped Uncle Tom plaintively. "Ah been mascottin' fo' Motah Matt twell Ah's dat fagged Ah dunno whut Ah's about, no, sah."

"I tried to get him to take my ring, Legree," put in Eliza, "but he won't. He says we're only a lot of dead beats, and never intend to pay him."

"Ah tole him," spoke up Topsy, "dat Ah'd wuk in his kitchum fo' de price ob a breakfus, an' he wouldn' hab it. Ah's honest, dat's whut Ah is. Ah nebber stole a cent fum anybody en mah life."

"See here, O'Grady," remarked Legree, "Motor Matt has money and he has offered to pay our expenses while we're stopping with you. I'll have money myself in a few days, and then I'll pay you. You're not taking any chances on this crowd."

"Faith, an' yez are right about thot," scowled O'Grady. "Oi'm takin' no more chances wid yez. Motor Matt! Why, he run aff lasht noight! Sure, he did! He shneaked away so he wouldn't have t' pay me f'r yer kape. Oi'm keen enough t' see thot!"

"Py shinks," whooped Carl, dancing around and waving his fists, "don'd you say dod some more. I can lick der feller vat says somet'ings aboutt Modor Matt like dot. Ven he say he pay, he mean vot he say, und he do it, too. Yah, you bed you! Modor Matt vas my bard, und he don'd vas leafing

a bard in der lurch like vat you say."

"Av Motor Matt is yer pard," said O'Grady, "bedad but it's sthrange yez haven't money. Git out, Oi say! Oi'm done wid yez."

"I tell you," went on Legree, "I'll have money myself in a few days."

"Yez can't make me belave any cock-an'-bull shtory like thot. Niver again will Oi take in anny wan widout baggage. Shoo! Clear out befure Oi git violent."

In O'Grady's present temper there was no reasoning with him, so Legree marshaled his comrades and led them off to a neighboring wood-pile, where they all sat down disconsolately.

"Ah's been accustomed tuh bettah treatment," mourned Uncle Tom. "Ah's got de bigges' notion dat evah was tuh put a hoodoo on dat hotel. Ah could do hit, but Ah restrains mahse'f till Ah gits odahs fum Motah Matt."

"Go 'long wif sich talk!" cried Topsy, out of patience. "'Peahs lak yo' done put dat hoodoo on de rest ob us. Nuffin' ain't gone right sence we left dat 'ar Brockville place."

"There'll be some one here from Ash Fork before long, who, maybe, will help us," said Legree. "Just be as patient as you can, friends, and we'll hope for the best."

"All de patience in de worl', Mistah Legree," answered Uncle Tom, "'doan' fill a pusson's stummick. Mah goodness, Ah didun' know Ah was so pesterin' hongry."

"I tell you somet'ing," said Carl, "oof I knowed vich vay Modor Matt vas, I would go und findt him. I vas madt as some vet hens ofer dis pitzness. Here ve vas, hung oop on a vood-pile mit nodding to eat, und not knowing vere Modor Matt vent mit himseluf. Chonny Hartluck iss hanging aroundt mit us."

Leaving his disconsolate friends, Legree went back to the railroad-station. There he waited for four hours for the local train from Ash Fork. He was rewarded, however, by seeing a big man get off the train, stop on the platform, and look around expectantly.

Legree walked up to the arriving passenger.

"Mr. Nugent?" he asked.

"You've hit it," replied the cattleman, staring the stranded actor up and down with an unfavorable eye.

"Ah! Well, sir, my name's Legree. I suppose you're looking for Motor Matt?"

"Another bull's-eye for you. I came here on a telegram from Motor Matt saying that there had been important developments concerning my automobile that was stolen from me near Ash Fork. Where's Motor Matt?"

"He is unavoidably absent just now," answered Legree, "but I am confidently expecting him to appear at any moment. To be frank with you, sir, I sent that telegram and signed Motor Matt's name to it."

The cattleman became indignant.

"You're pretty fresh, seems to me!" said he. "What business had you doing a thing like that?"

"Because I wanted you here. Your car was in town yesterday. One of the thieves brought it in for a supply of gasoline and oil. Motor Matt and I tried to capture the thief, but he got away from us and took the car with him."

"Who are you, if you haven't any objection to answerin' a straight question?" demanded the cattleman.

"Step into the waiting-room with me for a few moments," replied Legree, "and I'll explain."

They went into the waiting-room and were gone possibly five minutes. When they came out on the platform once more, Nugent seemed to have developed a vast amount of confidence in Legree.

"Why didn't you tell Motor Matt what you've told me?" asked the cattleman.

"I wasn't telling anybody that, Mr. Nugent," answered Legree, "and I wouldn't be telling you now if I hadn't wanted to fix things with O'Grady so that I and my friends can continue to remain at his hotel."

"I know O'Grady," said Nugent. "Come along with me and I'll fix things up for you."

They went to the hotel at once. O'Grady, tilted back against the wall in front, was smoking a pipe and keeping a sharp eye on the wood-pile.

Uncle Tom, with a red bandanna over his face, was leaning back against the wood and was apparently asleep. All the rest were hovering listlessly about, waiting patiently for something to happen.

The sight of Lem Nugent, who was known throughout all that part of the country, wrought a great change in O'Grady. The cattleman and the actor were approaching together, and seemed to be on cordial terms.

"O'Grady," said Nugent, after he had exchanged greetings with the proprietor, "this gentleman is a friend of mine, and his friends are my friends, understand? Take them all in and give them the best you've got. And don't bleed me, you shyster. I'll stand the damage, but I won't be robbed."

"Whatever yez say goes wid me, Lem," said O'Grady. "Come on, all av yez," he cried, standing up and motioning toward the wood-pile. "Oi'll have th' Chink put a male on th' table f'r yez to wanst."

Uncle Tom may have been asleep, but he heard those welcome words and was up like a shot.

"Ah was mascottin fo' dat very t'ing," he admitted, as he ran toward the hotel. "Layin' back dar wid mah bandannah ober mah face, Ah was wukin' lak er hiahed man, yassuh. Now, den, yo' Topsy, yo' see what Ah kin do when Ah lays mahse'f out!"

Just as they were starting into the hotel, a shout from Carl brought them all to a halt and an about-face.

"Hoop-a-la!" yelled Carl, dancing around and throwing his cap in the air. "Look vonce ad vat's coming! Vat dit I say? Here vas a drain oof cars, mit Modor Matt pringing dem in. Ach, himmel, I peen so habby as I can't dell! Modor Matt iss coming!"

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Under the startled eyes of those in front of the hotel two cars could be seen coming along the road. The Red Flier, with Matt and three passengers, was in the lead, and towing behind was the runabout.

"My car, by thunder!" shouted Nugent, starting for the road.

"And Spangler is with Motor Matt," cried the amazed Legree, "and Brisco, and the kid! How in blazes do you think that happened?"

A disgusted look crossed Uncle Tom's face.

"How yo' t'ink dat happened!" he muttered sarcastically; "en me a-mascottin' fo' Motah Matt all de time!"

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

Whether O'Grady really thought Motor Matt had taken French leave during the night or not, is a question. Certainly he was as surprised to see Matt traveling into town as were any of the rest of them.

All those around the hotel flocked to the road.

"Hello, Matt!" called Nugent, reaching up his hand. "It looks like you'd been accomplishing something."

Matt's acquaintance with the cattleman had been of exceedingly brief duration, and never before had he been hailed by him in that cordial tone.

"How are you, Mr. Nugent?" he returned, taking the cattleman's hand. "How did you happen to come over this way?"

"Got a telegram from you——"

"From me?" echoed Matt.

"I sent it, Matt," put in Legree, "and signed your name to it. When you disappeared last night I knew something had to be done, and that there ought to be a man with money to do it. So I sent for Nugent."

"It's all right, my boy," said Nugent, "and I'm tickled to death because I came. You're bringing in my car, I see, and the two fellows that took it away from me. Good! If we don't put 'em through for their crooked work, my name ain't Nugent."

"You'll have to send for a doctor for Brisco," said Matt. "He's been unconscious for two hours, and I don't know whether he's badly hurt or not. You see——"

At that moment Brisco proved that he was far from being badly hurt. With a jump he got out of the tonneau and started at a run toward the edge of town. Uncle Tom happened to be in his way, and was knocked heels over head.

"Dere he goes!" yelled Josh excitedly. "Clear out o' de way so I kin git a shot at 'im!"

But Josh was not allowed to carry out his warlike intentions. Legree took after the escaping ruffian, overhauled him before he had gone far, grabbed him by the shoulders, and hurled him to the ground.

O'Grady, rushing to Legree's assistance, lent a willing hand. Brisco had been a good customer of O'Grady's, but the situation had changed somewhat since the Uncle Tommers had been staying at the Shamrock Hotel.

"I reckon, Matt," remarked Lem Nugent dryly, "that the fellow ain't very badly hurt. How did you happen to get hold of the scoundrels?"

"They were chasing us," answered Matt. "We were in the Red Flier and they were in your car. Brisco ran into the rocks, and he and Spangler were thrown out. Neither of them seemed very much hurt, and Josh and I captured Spangler before he had fully got back his wits. Brisco appeared to be all right, but he was unconscious. I had an idea that he might be shamming. Probably he came to himself just as we got here, and thought the best thing for him to do would

be to make a break."

"His break didn't help him any," said Legree, as he and O'Grady came marching back with Brisco between them. "Go up to my room, Josh," Legree went on, "and get those two plates. You'll find 'em under the northeast corner of the carpet. Front room, boy."

"Dat's me," answered Josh, handing Brisco's weapons to his father and bounding away.

"I'm going to tell you people something," proceeded Legree, "that will no doubt surprise you. And I think," he finished grimly, "that Brisco will be as much surprised as anybody."

Josh presently returned with a couple of flat, square packages. Leaving O'Grady to take care of Brisco, Legree took the packages in his hands.

"A crook by the name of Denver Denny, alias James Trymore," went on Legree, "escaped from the authorities at Denver and came to this part of the country. Denver Denny was a clever counterfeiter, and worked in conjunction with Hank Brisco. At least, following the output of the 'queer' as it trailed along in the wake of that Uncle Tom's Cabin Company, I came to that conclusion.

"Denny owned a set of very fine plates for the manufacture of bogus five-dollar silver certificates. When he was captured in Denver those plates were nowhere to be found. I conceived the notion that they might be in Brisco's possession, and in order to make sure, I became letter-perfect in the part of Legree, and Josh here got the part of Little Eva by heart, and we arranged to join Brisco's company of barn-stormers.

"We were with them for some time, watching Brisco all the while. Brisco was not shoving any of the 'queer' while we were with him, and I was inclined to think that I had made a mistake in connecting him with Denny's operations. However, Brisco had a little tin box, of which he was very choice and careful. His solicitude for that box aroused my curiosity. When Brisco pulled out between two days in Denver, and left his company stranded, by some freak of chance he dropped the box. Josh found it. We opened the box in Ash Fork and found these two packages in it." Legree lifted the two flat parcels so all could see. "I knew perfectly well that Brisco would come after his box, so I continued to play the part of a stranded actor, hoping to get my hands on him.

"Fate was kind to us," and here Legree turned and dropped a friendly hand on the young motorist's shoulder, "by bringing Motor Matt along. He came to the front gallantly and helped us. I should have captured Brisco sooner or later, even without his aid, but he has closed the affair in hurricane fashion and saved the government lots of trouble."

Everybody, Uncle Tommers, Matt, Carl, and Brisco and Spangler, were astounded. Nugent was the solitary exception, for Legree had revealed his identity to the cattleman in the railroad-station.

"These are the plates," went on Legree. "Brisco had them in the tin box."

"And you are——" began Matt, staring at Legree.

"A secret service man in the employ of the government."

A cry of fierce anger escaped Brisco. He made a fierce attempt to get at Legree, but O'Grady restrained him.

"Faith," said O'Grady, with cheerful disregard of his past actions, "Oi knowed yez was a bad egg th' minyit Oi set eyes on yez."

"Dis," remarked Uncle Tom, with immense pride, "is de best job ob mascottin' whut Ah's done yit!"

"Better give up, Brisco!" called Spangler from the touring-car. "They've got it on us an' we'll have ter take our medicine."

"Got it on us, yes," stormed Brisco, "but they wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for Motor Matt."

"Not so quick, I'll admit," said Legree amiably, "but I'd have caught you sooner or later, Brisco. In my report I shall have something to say to the head of the department about Motor Matt. I'd like to hear, though, just how he happened to make this haul."

"Josh helped me," said Matt.

"Not enough so yous could notice it," returned Josh promptly; "Motor Matt was de man on de job from start t' finish. Yous take it from Little Eva, an' no stringin'."

The boy turned to Matt with a wide grin.

"Yous is wise t' why I went off wit' Brisco in dat runabout now, ain't yous? I wanted t' find out w'ere he had 'is hang-out so dad could turn a trick fer de gov'ment. But yous cut out dad, Matt."

"Listen, vonce," cried Carl, who had been trying for some time to get in a few words, "Matt's der pest efer. He prings luck venefer he goes mit anypody. Yah, dot's righdt. I know, because he prought luck mit me."

Uncle Tom was disposed to butt in with an objection, but the cattleman had something to say.

"There's fifteen hundred of my money goes to somebody for all this," said he. "Who gets it, Matt?"

"Divide it up between all of us," answered the boy generously. "The Uncle Tommers need it."

A shout of delight went up from the actor contingent.

"You can leave Josh in the division," said Legree, "but cut me out of it. I'm working for Uncle Sam."

Just at that moment the Chinaman stepped to the door and announced dinner.

"We'll talk all this over while we eat," said Nugent. "Come on, everybody."

Motor Matt and Carl, having lost more time in Fairview than they could well afford, started for Albuquerque early in the afternoon.

Eliza, Topsy, and Uncle Tom, now well supplied with money, were to proceed to Denver by train.

The secret service man and Josh were to remain in Fairview for a few days with their prisoners, and then to take them to Denver for trial.

"Matt," said Carl seriously, as the Red Flier leaped onward toward Albuquerque, "I vas a lucky feller to hook oop mit you. Vone oof dose tays, oof you don'd go pack on me, I vill veer tiamonts!"

"I'll never go back on you, Carl," laughed Matt; "but I'm a little 'juberous' about the diamonds."

THE END.

THE NEXT NUMBER (7) WILL CONTAIN

MOTOR MATT'S CLUE;

OR,

THE PHANTOM AUTO.

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A SNOWBALL FIGHT.

By HORATIO ALGER, Jr.

The snow had fallen to the depth of six inches during the night, filling in the yards and covering the door-steps, throughout the town of Conway. Among those who hailed the arrival of the snow

with joy was Frank Taylor, a boy of fourteen, the son of the Widow Taylor, who lived in a miserable little tenement not far from the mill. Why he was glad to see the snow will soon appear.

Early in the morning he shoveled a path to the street, and then putting his shovel over his shoulder, said to his mother:

"I'm going over to Squire Ashmead's to see if he doesn't want me to shovel paths in his yard."

"He's got a boy of his own," said Mrs. Taylor; "perhaps he will do it."

Frank laughed.

"Sam Ashmead is proud and lazy," he said. "You won't catch him shoveling paths. I think I shall get the job. I want to earn something so that you need not sit all day sewing. It is too hard for you."

"I ought to think myself lucky to get employment at all," said the widow.

"I wish I could get steady work somewhere," said Frank; "but I've tried and tried, and it seems impossible."

"Willing hands will not want work long," said his mother.

"I hope not, mother. But I must be going, or somebody will get the start of me."

While Frank is on his way to Squire Ashmead's, a few words of explanation may be given. His mother had been a widow for two years. Her husband had been a man of some education, having at times taught school, but he had never succeeded in laying up any money, and his widow was left almost penniless. Frank, who was a stout boy, and a good boy as well, had earned something by doing odd jobs, but had failed to obtain permanent employment. The burden of their joint support, therefore, was thrown upon his mother, who was very industrious with her needle, but was compelled to labor beyond her strength. All this troubled Frank, who felt that, as a stout, strong boy, he ought to bear at least half the expense.

In due time he reached Squire Ashmead's, and was glad to see that the snow remained undisturbed.

He rang the bell, and asked if he might shovel the paths that were necessary.

Squire Ashmead was absent in New York, to which city he had gone the morning previous on business, but his wife agreed to employ Frank.

He went to work with a will, and soon had a path dug from the front door to the gate. A path was also required from the back door to the stable, which was situated in the rear of the house. This was quite a distance, and as Frank wished to do the work thoroughly, it required considerable time.

He was about half through this portion of his task when a snowball whistled by his ear.

Looking round quickly, he saw Sam Ashmead standing at the corner of the house, engaged in making a fresh snowball.

"Don't fire any more snowballs, Sam Ashmead," said Frank.

"I shall, if I please," said Sam.

"I haven't time to fire back now," said Frank. "Wait till I get through, and we'll have a match if you like."

"But I don't like," said Sam scornfully. "Do you think I would have a match with a beggar like you?"

"I am no beggar, Sam Ashmead," said Frank, "and if I were I don't think I would beg of you."

"Oh, you're mighty proud," sneered Sam, "considering that you live in an old hut not half as good as our stable."

"Yes, I am poor, and I live in a poor house," said Frank calmly, "but that isn't a crime that I know of. Some time I shall live in a better house, I hope."

So saying, he went back to work, and began shoveling the snow vigorously. He did not anticipate any further attack from Sam, but in this he soon found himself mistaken.

In the course of a minute he felt a pretty hard blow in the center of his back, and looking round saw Sam Ashmead laughing insolently.

"How does that feel?" asked Sam.

"That's the second snowball you've fired at me," said Frank quietly, but there was a light in his eyes as he spoke. "I advise you not to fire another if you know what is good for yourself."

"So you threaten me, do you? Suppose I fire again, what's going to happen?" demanded Sam, with an unpleasant sneer.

"I think you will be sorry for it," said Frank.

Sam hesitated a moment, but only a moment. He was a year older than Frank, and larger in size. Certainly he ought to be a match for him. But he did not believe that Frank would have the audacity to touch him, the son of Squire Ashmead, the richest man in the village. He therefore deliberately made another snowball, and firing it, struck Frank in the back of his head.

Frank no sooner felt the blow than he threw down his shovel, and ran toward his assailant.

"Keep off, you beggar!" said Sam.

"It's too late," said Frank. "I warned you not to fire again."

Sam placed himself in an attitude of defense, but found himself seized violently round the middle, and before he fairly knew what was going to happen he was lying in a snow-bank with Frank standing over him.

He struggled to his feet mad with rage, and "pitched into" Frank, as the boys express it, and endeavored to retaliate in kind. But Frank was watchful and wary, and evading the attack, seized him again when his strength was half spent, and Sam found himself once more occupying an involuntary bed in the snow.

A third struggle resulted in the same way. Sam was furious, but he saw that Frank was more than a match for him.

Just then a servant called out from the door:

"Master Sam, your mother says it's time for you to be going to school."

To tell the truth, Sam was rather glad of the summons, as it gave him an excuse for retiring from the contest.

"I'll be even with you yet," he said, shaking his fist at Frank. "I'll let my father know how you insulted me, you young beggar!"

"If anybody has been insulted, I have," said Frank. "You must remember that you began it."

Sam scowled vindictively, and brushing the snow from his coat went into the house. Before Frank finished the path at the back of the house he was gone to school.

Mrs. Ashmead sent out fifty cents to Frank for his morning's work, with which he went home, well satisfied, wishing that he might earn as much every day. He wondered a little whether Sam would tell his father what had occurred between them. He did not speak of it to his mother, for she was nervous, and would be troubled by it, as she received considerable work to do from the Ashmead family which she might fear would be taken away.

On the afternoon of the next day, however, Frank received a note, which proved to come from Squire Ashmead. It ran as follows:

"FRANK TAYLOR: Please call at my office to-morrow morning at ten o'clock.

JAMES ASHMEAD."

This note Frank thought best to show to his mother.

"What does it mean, Frank? Have you any idea?" she asked.

Frank thereupon told her the story of his difficulty with Sam.

"It may be about that," he said.

"Oh, dear," said the widow. "I'm afraid he's very angry. I hope you will apologize, Frank."

"No, mother," said Frank, "I don't see why I should. I only defended myself from a bully. I should be ashamed to do anything else. I didn't hurt him, and didn't intend to, but I wanted to teach him that he couldn't insult me without having to pay for it."

"I am afraid some harm will come of it," said the widow anxiously.

"Don't trouble yourself, mother," said Frank soothingly. "If we do only what's right, God will take care of us."

Still it was with some anxiety that Frank made his way the next morning to the office of Squire Ashmead. This gentleman was the agent of a large manufactory in the town, of which also he was a considerable owner, so that he received an income of over ten thousand dollars a year, which made him the most prominent and influential citizen in the town.

When Frank entered the office, Squire Ashmead was conversing with a stranger on business.

"Sit down," he said, turning to Frank. "I will be at leisure in a moment."

"Well," he said, after the stranger had departed, "Sam tells me you and he have had a little difficulty."

"Yes, sir," said Frank. "I would like to explain how it occurred."

"Very well. Go on."

It will be unnecessary to give the explanation, as it was strictly in accordance with the facts.

"Do you blame me for what I did?" asked Frank, at the end.

"No, I do not," said the squire. "Sam acted like a bully, and was properly punished. Let that pass. Now let me ask you how you and your mother are getting along?"

"Poorly, sir," said Frank. "If I could have steady work, it would be different, but that I cannot get. It troubles me to see my mother work so hard all day. I think it is too much for her."

"How would you like to come into my office?"

Frank's eyes sparkled.

"I should think myself very lucky, sir, to get so good a chance."

"I want some boy whom I can trust, who can grow up to the business, and after a time relieve me of a portion of my cares. I would take Sam, but I am sorry to say, though he is my own son, that he would not answer my purpose. I have heard good accounts of you from your teacher and the people in the village. I will take you at a salary of six dollars a week, to be increased from time to time if you will suit me. Can you come Monday morning?"

"Yes, sir," said Frank, "and I will do my best to give you satisfaction."

"Very well, my lad. Good morning."

Frank left the office, feeling as if his fortune was made. His mother, who was awaiting the result of the interview anxiously at home, was overwhelmed with astonishment at the unexpected good fortune of her son. Sam was disagreeably surprised, and tried to shake his father's resolution, but Squire Ashmead was a sensible man, and not to be moved.

Frank commenced his duties the next Monday. He was so faithful that he was rapidly advanced, and at twenty-one was receiving twelve hundred dollars a year. At twenty-five, on the sudden death of Squire Ashmead, he succeeded to his agency, and now lives with his mother in the mansion at which he once thought himself lucky to be permitted to shovel the paths. As for Sam, he squandered the handsome property received from his father, and died at thirty from the effects of intemperate habits.

SECRETS OF TRICK SHOOTING.

When a champion rifle shot fires blindfolded at a wedding-ring, or a penny held between his wife's thumb and finger, or, seated back to her, shoots, by means of a mirror, at an apple upon her head or on a fork held in her teeth, the danger of using a bullet is obvious. None, of course, is needed; the explosion is enough. The apple is already prepared, having been cut into pieces and stuck together with an adhesive substance, and a thread with a knot at the end, pulled through it from the "wings," so that it flies to bits when the gun is fired, is "how it is done."

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Generally, the more dangerous a feat appears the more carefully is all danger guarded against. In the "William Tell" act the thread is often tied to the assistant's foot. When, again, the ash is shot off a cigar which the assistant is smoking, a piece of wire is pushed by his tongue through a hollowed passage in the cigar—thus thrusting off the ash at the moment of firing.

A favorite but simple trick is the shooting from some distance at an orange held in a lady's hand. Great applause is invariably forthcoming when the bullet drops out on her, cutting open the fruit. It is inserted by hand earlier in the evening.

Another popular trick is that of snuffing out lighted candles. Half a dozen are placed in front of a screen in which as many small holes are bored, one against each candlewick. At the moment of firing, a confederate behind the screen sharply blows out each candle with a pair of bellows. This trick was accidentally exposed one evening by a too zealous assistant. The lady in the gallery pulled the trigger, but the rifle failed to go off; the candle, however, went out just the same.

In most instances, where a ball or other object has to be broken on a living person's head, blank cartridge is used and the effect produced by other means. A special wig, with a spring concealed in it, worked by a wire under the clothes, is generally used, the confederate manipulating the spring simultaneously with the firing of the rifle. As the ball is of extremely thin glass, a mere touch suffices to shatter it.

In these exhibitions some of the rifle "experts" invite gentlemen from the audience to testify that the weapon is indeed loaded. The cartridge shown looks very well, but it is a shell of thin wax blackened to resemble a leaden bullet. It would not hurt a fly.

REELFOOT LAKE.

The physical history of Reelfoot Lake, of night-rider fame, is not without a certain interest of its own. The lake came into existence as the result of a series of earthquakes, which began in December, 1811, and continued until June, 1812.

Some authorities say that the earthquakes merely heaved up a great ridge of land across the path of the Reelfoot River, which runs into the Mississippi, and that this dam caused the water to back up and broaden out and form a lake; but the favorite account in the neighborhood is to the effect that the ground sank, springs were opened up, neighboring creeks diverted from their course, and the overflowing water of the Mississippi rushed in during the flood season of the spring of 1812.

It is said that for an hour and a half the waters of the Mississippi flowed up-hill while filling up the depression caused by the earthquakes. Both accounts likely have this much of truth in them that the entire configuration of the ground was changed by the earthquakes. Big Lake, west of the Mississippi, in Arkansas, is said to have been formed in the same way at the same time.

Reelfoot Lake is sixteen or eighteen miles long, very irregular in shape, and covers from 35,000

to 40,000 acres of land. It varies in width from a mile in some places to four or five miles in others. The northern end is extended by a series of sloughs and bayous into Kentucky.

The most distinctive feature of the lake's appearance, the feature which first impresses and stays longest with the observer's fancy, is a certain grotesque effect, as if a set of crazy men had been operating a pile-driver there for the last century, for the trunks, stumps, and stark branches of dead trees stick out of it everywhere in desolate parody of some such human handiwork; far below the surface the fish dart among the boles and branches where the squirrels frolicked a hundred years ago.

There are beautiful spots here and there, but the effect, as a whole, is not beautiful; at its best, when the mist rises and myriad protruding tree trunks are white and ghostly in the moonlight, it is weird; the general remembrance is of something uncouth. It is a kind of sloven lake that has preferred to sit down with its hair uncombed all day long, but at night it does manage to achieve a touch of wizard dignity.

A FLOATING SLUM.

Stand beside the imperial custom-house at Canton and let the eye range down the river toward Hongkong. As far as the sight can reach lie boats, boats, and again boats. These are no ordinary craft, mere vessels of transport plying hither and thither, but the countless homes of myriad Chinese, in which millions of human beings have been born, have lived, and have died. They are the dwellings of the very poor, who live in them practically free from rent, taxes, and the other burdens of the ordinary citizen.

The Tankia—which means boat-dwellers—as the denizens of these floating houses are called, form a sort of caste apart from the rest of the Cantonese. The shore-dwellers regard them as belonging to a lower social order; and indeed they have many customs, peculiar to themselves, which mark them as a separate community. How the swarming masses of them contrive to support existence is a mystery, but their chief mode of employment is in carrying merchandise and passengers from place to place.

WILD HORSES OF NEVADA.

Horses are cheap in Nevada. On the government ranges, where they are protected by game-laws, droves of wild horses exist which in the aggregate are said to amount to fifteen thousand. Formerly there was a law in Nevada permitting the shooting of these wild horses for their hides, but there were hunters who were not particular, and the ranchers found their domestic horses disappearing if they let them out on the range. So their shooting was prohibited, and since that time the droves have grown to be exceedingly troublesome. They can be domesticated, but they are not needed there, and it costs too much to ship them East. It seems a pity that, while so many sections could use them to advantage, the transportation problem makes it impossible to get them at a price which they are worth.

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Transcriber's Note:

Added table of contents.

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Retained some inconsistent hyphenation (e.g. "motorcycle" vs. "motor-cycle").

Retained some inconsistent spellings in dialect (e.g. "becase" vs. "bekase").

Page 3, added missing comma after "'Vell, py shinks." Added missing apostrophe after "doan" in "Why doan' yo'-all git." Removed unnecessary quote after "Matt stopped the Red Flier."

Page 4, removed unnecessary quote after "Legree was about to secure it?"

Page 5, changed "as she pointed" to "as he pointed."

Page 10, "would came after it" looks like a typo but has been retained in case it is intentional dialect.

Page 14, removed unnecessary quote before "Matt's pulses quickened."

Page 18, added missing period after "Josh turned to stare along the road."

Page 19, changed "Mat" to "Matt" in "Matt was intending to push the stone."

Page 20, the sentence "As he yanked the lever savagely, the popping from up the road sounding like the rapid discharge of a Gatling gun." seems incorrect, but it is reproduced as originally printed.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S RED FLYER; OR, ON THE
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