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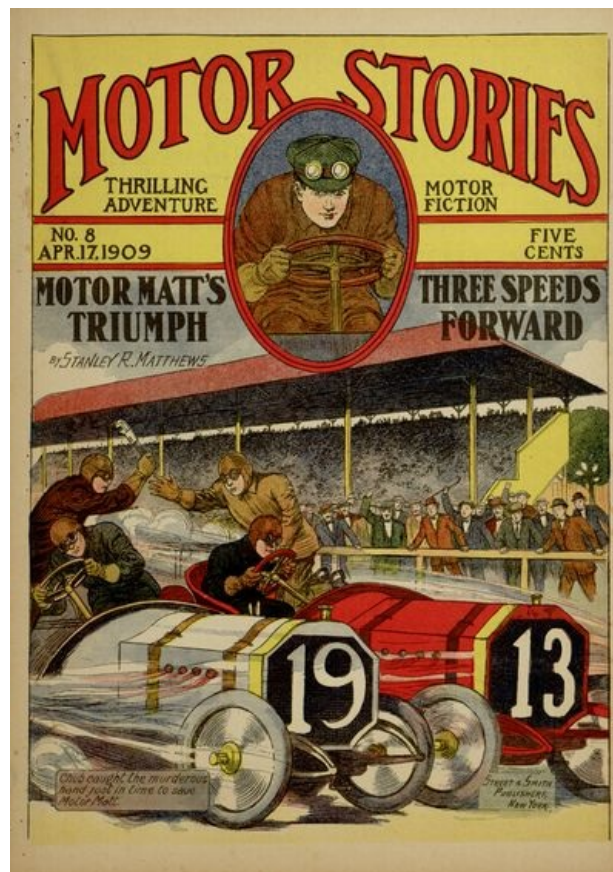
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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S TRIUMPH; OR, THREE SPEEDS FORWARD \*\*\*



## MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING  
ADVENTURE

MOTOR  
FICTION

NO. 8  
APR. 17, 1909.

FIVE  
CENTS

MOTOR MATT'S  
TRIUMPH

THREE SPEEDS  
FORWARD

By *STANLEY R. MATTHEWS.*

STREET & SMITH,  
PUBLISHERS,  
NEW YORK.

# MOTOR STORIES

## THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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## MOTOR MATT'S TRIUMPH; OR, THREE SPEEDS FORWARD.

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."

**Chub McReady**, sometimes called plain "Reddy," for short, on account of his fiery "thatch"—a chum of Matt, with a streak of genius for inventing things that often lands the bold experimenter in trouble.

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

**Colonel Plympton**, secretary of the Stark-Frisbie Motor Company.

**Uncle Tom**, an old darky who was once a member of a traveling dramatic company, but who is now, by self-appointment, Motor Matt's "fishul mascot."

**Mr. Trueman**, of the Jarret Company, who gives Matt car No. 13 in the race.

**Slocum**, an unprincipled schemer, who plays a deep game.

**Sercomb,  
Mings,  
Higgins,  
Grier,  
Finn,**

six members of the Motor Drivers Association, some of whom prove themselves ready to go to any length to keep Motor Matt out of the great race for the Borden Cup.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE WHITE-CAPS.

"Vat's der madder mit you? Ach, du lieber! Vaid a minid! For vy you do dot monkey-doodle pitzness? Hoop-a-la! Oof it vas a fighdt, den ged avay, a gouple oof tozen oof you, und come ad me vone py each. I show you somet'ing, py shings, vat you don'd like und—Wow! Himmelblitzen \_\_\_"

The clamor which suddenly arose in that dark Denver cross-street was as suddenly hushed.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, and two lamps on distant corners shed about as much light as a pair of tallow-dips. Midway between the two street-lamps lay the mouth of a gloomy alley, and here it was that the frantic commotion burst out and died abruptly.

A Dutch boy had been walking along the street, accompanied by a "loudly" dressed youth. At the entrance to the alley the Dutch boy's companion had stopped and given a low whistle. Almost immediately, and before the Teuton fairly realized what was going on, three figures had rushed from the gloom of the alley.

The Dutchman was caught from all sides, and, as he struggled, broke into a wild torrent of words. The torrent was suddenly stemmed by a cloth which was thrown over his head from behind; then, while smothered into silence and held helpless, he was lifted and borne along the alley to a basement door.

One of the four captors descended to the door and knocked three times in a peculiar manner. The door was pulled open, captors and captive vanished swiftly inside, and the door was closed. An inner door now confronted the party, and the same knock was given here as had been given outside.

"Who approaches?" demanded a sepulchral voice.

"Four drivers of racing-cars," answered the spokesman of the party, "bringing the Dutch chum of the fellow who calls himself Motor Matt."

"Give me the countersign."

"Four speeds forward and one reverse."

The countersign was whispered.

"Enter, drivers, and finish your work," went on the sepulchral voice.

Two minutes later the Dutch boy was seated in a chair, released, and the cloth whisked from his head. With a shout of anger he started to his feet.

"Sit down!" commanded a voice sternly.

The captive was blinded by a glare of acetyline lamps, the rays of which crossed the room from all four walls, interlacing and merging in one comprehensive glow. Gradually, as the captive's eyes became accustomed to the light, he made out the mouth of a small cannon thrust into his face. Back of the gun stood a figure cowed in white.

The Dutch boy started back from the leveled weapon and sank into his chair once more; then his wondering eyes swerved about him.

An automobile stood in front of him, backed up against the stone wall of the basement. It was a two-passenger roadster, with acetyline and oil-lamps lighted. In the driver's seat sat another cowed figure. Three chairs on either side of the automobile held more of the white-caps, all rigidly erect and silent.

"Vat a foolish pitzness!" growled the captive. "Oof you hat a ring ve vould haf a circus, und——"

"Silence!" thundered the white-cap with the gun.

He had taken a seat at the captive's side, and leaned from his chair to poke the point of the weapon in the captive's ribs.

Honk, honk!

The man in the car tooted his horn.

"Number Three," said he, "will report."

From one of the chairs on the right a white-cap arose, stepped in front of the car and kowtowed.

"Most Honorable King of Chauffeurs," said he, "I have to report that I met the captive at the

railroad-station. He had claimed a couple of grips and sent them to a hotel by an expressman. I informed him that my name was Higgins, and that I had something of importance to tell him about this fellow who calls himself Motor Matt. He swallowed the bait, hook and all, and I brought him past the mouth of the alley. Aided by Numbers One, Two, and Four, we captured him easily."

Honk, honk!

"Very good, Number Three," said the King of Chauffeurs; "return to your station."

Number Three sat down.

"Py shiminy grickets!" cried the captive, who had been watching and listening with a good deal of amazement, "it looks like I vas Numper Nodding mit a douple cross alongsite!"

"Your name, captive?" demanded the man in the car.

"Carl Pretzel, Most Eggselent King oof der Sore Headts——"

Honk, honk!

"If the prisoner refers again to the head of this exalted society in such insulting terms, Warder, put a hole through him!"

This from the man in the car.

"Even so, your highness!" answered the Warder.

"You are the chum of the Big High Butter-in who calls himself Motor Matt?" proceeded the man in the car.

Carl's temper rushed to the surface.

"Don'd you make some insulding remarks neider!" he scowled. "Modor Matt don'd vas a putter-in! Und I peen his chum, efery tay und all der dime, yah, so helup me."

"Motor Matt came to Denver with Mr. James Q. Tomlinson, in Mr. Tomlinson's touring-car, the Red Flier?" proceeded the man in the car.

"Vat iss it your pitzness?" demanded Carl.

"Motor Matt has come here to enter the racing-field?" continued the other.

"Vell, he iss a pedder triver as anypody, und vy nod?"

"He intends to apply to Colonel Plympton for a place on the Stark-Frisbie staff of racers? He wants to drive a car in the race for the Bordon cup?"

"I don'd say nodding. Vatefer Modor Matt toes, he vill do, und it vill be pedder oof you leaf him alone."

"Carl Pretzel," went on the man in the car sternly, "we have a line on this Motor Matt. He is the original Buttinsky. Wherever he goes he noses around for a place where he can meddle with other people's business. A week ago he was at his old tricks down in New Mexico, and——"

Carl jumped to his feet angrily.

"Sit down!" commanded the fellow at his side, jabbing him with the muzzle of the gun.

"Ven I ged goot und retty," fumed Carl, "I vill sot down, und nod pefore. I know vat I know, und I shpeak it oudt. Make some holes in me oof you vant, aber I don'd t'ink you haf der nerf to make holes in anypody. Modor Matt don'd vas a Puttinsky. Dis iss a free goundry, I bed you, und no fellers in nightd-gowns iss going to make some fault-findings mit my chum, Modor Matt. Vat he do in New Mexico? Vy, he safe his friendt, Tick Verral, from being killed twice. Dot's vat he dit mit his putting-ins. I don'd shday here no more und lis'en to sooch talk vat you make. Vich iss der vay oudt? Oof you don'd led me go, py shinks I make you more drouples as I can dell!"

Carl started toward the door.

Honk, honk!

"Seize him, drivers!" called the man in the car. "Bind him, blindfold him, and place him in the car. Assisted by the Warder, I will carry him off. Remain here, the rest of you, until we return and go into executive session."

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Carl was grabbed by all the white-caps; then, after he had been thrown on the floor, his feet and hands were tied and a cloth was bound over his eyes.

"Pretzel," went on the voice of the man in the car, "we racing-drivers are particular about those who enter our ranks. If Motor Matt attempts to race for the Borden cup, he will never live to face the tape at the start. In your pocket we will place a communication which you will deliver to him. It contains a threat and a warning. Let him ignore that letter at his peril."

"You fellers make me so dired as I don'd know!" stormed Carl, struggling to free himself. "Modor Matt don'd vas a kevitter. Vat you say don'd make no odds aboutt ter tifference. You vill know more vone oof dose tays dan vat you t'ink. Pah! You vas all a back oof gowards, und don'd haf der nerf to show your faces! Ven I dell Modor Matt vat——"

Honk, honk!

"Gag him, drivers, and lay him in the car!"

Something was pushed between Carl's lips and tied there. He still continued to splutter, but the

sounds were muffled and the words indistinct.

He felt himself lifted and crumpled into the front of the roadster.

"Open the doors!" ordered the driver in the car. "Number One, crank-up!"

Carl could hear the doors thrown ajar, and this noise was followed by the popping of the motor as the cylinders took the explosion.

"Remember what I say, drivers," called the leader of the gang, "and wait here for us to return. We have plans to consider."

Then the car moved off on the low gear. Carl felt it turn through the entrance and chuggety-chug up an incline; another turn and they were in the alley, another and they were in the street. After that, for a few minutes, the vehicle flew swiftly. Presently it halted, Carl's ropes were stripped away, and he was thrown out.

Stumbling to his knees, he began frantically jerking off the cloth that covered his eyes, and the gag that interfered with his speech.

The tail-light of the roadster was just vanishing around a corner. Carl shook his fist after the car and got to his feet, saying things to himself.

His novel experience had dazed him. It was all so unreal that it seemed like a dream.

Still muttering to himself, he made his way to the sidewalk, found a policeman, inquired his way to the Clifton House, and set out hurriedly to find Motor Matt, and report.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### MOTOR MATT'S FOES.

Motor Matt was in his room at the Clifton House. Late that afternoon he and Carl had arrived in Denver in the Red Flier, having brought Mr. Tomlinson, the owner of the car, and Gregory, Mr. Tomlinson's driver, from Santa Fé. Matt had been in charge of the touring-car for several weeks, having taken it in hand at Ash Fork, Arizona.<sup>[A]</sup> He and Carl had brought it alone as far as Santa Fé, where they had been joined by Mr. Tomlinson and Gregory.

[A] See MOTOR STORIES No. 5, 6, and 7.

The boys had had numerous adventures on the long trail, and not only they, but the car as well, had been placed in considerable peril. Now, however, the dangers were past, the car—owing to Matt's careful handling—had been placed in the garage in as good condition as when it had come into the young motorist's hands, and everybody was pleased—Mr. Tomlinson exceedingly so.

The extra luggage belonging to the boys had been checked to Denver from Santa Fé, and directly after supper Matt had sent Carl to the railroad station with the checks.

Matt, lounging in his room and waiting for Carl to return, thought his chum was taking a long time to do his errand. The expressman brought the grips, but no Carl came with them.

It was half-past ten before Carl came in. There was a bruise on the side of his face, his clothes were covered with dust and dirt, and he was puffed up like an angry robin.

"Great Scott, Carl!" exclaimed Matt, taking the Dutch boy's sizing with a quick glance; "did you have to have a fight with the baggage-smasher in order to get the grips? You look like you'd had a scrap!"

"Den," growled Carl, "I look like vat it iss." He threw off his coat and cap, pulled down his red vest, and flung himself into a chair. "I haf hat more shcraps as vone, Matt, und dot's all about it. Py shiminy, I peen so madd I don'd can see srtraight," and he went on to rehearse his experiences to the wondering Matt.

"Sounds like a pipe-dream," commented Matt, when his chum had finished. "Instead of being in peaceful, law-abiding Denver, you'd think we had struck a mining-camp. Who was the fellow who met you at the station?"

"He say dot his name vas Higgins, aber I bed you dot don'd vas it, any more as my name vas Dunder. 'You peen Modor Matt's bard,' he say, like dot, making some friendliness mit me, 'und I got somet'ing to tell vat Modor Matt shouldt hear. You walk mit me,' he say, 'und I tell you, und you tell Matt.' Vell, I pelieve vat I hear, und he shteers me py der alley. Ach, it vas some put-oop chobs all der vay t'roo, you bed my life."

"You didn't recognize Higgins as being any one else?"

"I reckognize him as being some plackguards, all righdt!"

"I mean, you'd have known him for Ralph Sercomb, Balt Finn, Joe Mings, or Harry Packard if he had been one of them?"

"Sure; aber he don'd vas dot. He vas some odder fellers."

"All those chaps were mixed up in the trouble we had down near Lamy, in New Mexico, while we were helping Dick Ferral. They're the only Denver motor-racers I know who would have it in for me."<sup>[B]</sup>

"Meppy dose vas der fellers, Matt," said Carl, "aber dey vore vite caps ofer der faces und I don'd vas apke to see oof dey vas."

"Sercomb and his pals were all motorists," mused Matt. "But what good will it do for them to try to keep me out of the Borden cup-race? I've got a chance to make a record by going into that race, and I'm going to get into it, if I can."

"Sure you vas going into der race, bard, und dose sore-headts von't be apke to keep you oudt."

"I'm not going to back-water for them."

"Dot's you," chuckled Carl. "You will be twice as keen to ged in der race now as you vas pefore. Dot's der vay Modor Matt iss pud oop! Py shinks, you vas der pest all-orundt modor feller vat efer habbened——"

"Oh, splash!" laughed Matt. "Use the soft pedal, Carl."

"Py chimineddy, I mean vat I say!" persisted Carl. "You know more aboutt modors in a year as some odder fellers know in a minid, und——"

"I guess that's right."

"Misdor Domlinson say dot you peen a crack racer, und dot you ged oudt oof a car all der speed vat vas in it."

"Well, hang onto your bouquets for a while and let's see that letter the white-caps gave you to deliver to me."

"Vouldn't dot gif you some grimps?" cried Carl, reaching for his coat. "I vas forgeddng all aboutt dot ledder."

He extracted a sealed envelope from his pocket and tossed it to Matt. Matt pulled his chair closer to the light and examined the envelope.

He smiled grimly as he read, "'To Buttinsky, otherwise Matt King, otherwise Motor Matt. Kindness of Wienerwurst.' They're complimentary, that gang. Eh, Carl?"

Carl had been lifted out of his chair.

"Be jeerful, eferypody!" he muttered. "Is dot vat iss saidt on der enfellop, Matt? Iss it me dey mean by dot 'Wienerwurst' pitzness?"

"Of course! Who else?"

"Ach, ven I ged dime you bed you I go looking for dot cellar blace some more, und ven I findt it, I rip dot society oop der pack like some cyclones! 'Wienerwurst!' Pringle call me dot, vonce, und I gif him Hail Golumpy in forty-'lefen keys. Readt der ledder oudt loud, Matt. Oof it say anyt'ing more aboutt 'Wienerwurst,' meppy I go hunt for dot cellar blace do-night!"

"Barking dogs are not always the ones that bite, Carl," returned Matt, opening the envelope and extracting the enclosed sheet. "I haven't a very high opinion of those friends of Sercomb's, and I guess they'll be careful not to do anything very desperate."

"Vell, dey tied Verral in der Ret Flier und shtart him for der cliffs. Dot vas tesperade enough, ain'd it?"

"They did that out in the wilds; but we're in Denver now, and there's a policeman on every block."

Thereupon Motor Matt began to read.

"If Matt King thinks he can come to Denver and butt into the racing game, he's some shy of the situation. The motor-drivers of this town are a little particular who they associate with. Nearly all our members will be represented in the race for the Borden cup, and King is warned to stay out of it. He is also ordered to leave Denver inside of twenty-four hours, and to make no deal with Colonel Plympton, of the Stark-Frisbie Company. *Unless King follows instructions, something will happen to him.* A word to the wise is sufficient."

"Ach, iss dot so!" whooped Carl. "'A vort to der vise,' hey? Say, dot makes me madt as some horneds! I vonder oof dot punch oof plackguards t'ink dey boss der goundry? Donnervetter! I vould like to gif der hull oudfidt a punch in der slads!"

Matt was thoughtful.

"It's Sercomb and his gang all right," he averred finally. "When I saw Sercomb last, he swore he'd be even with me. He sent that letter, not because he doesn't want me in the racing game, but because he knows I won't pay any attention to his orders, and that it will give him an excuse to try some underhand work."

"I vould like to knock dot Sercomb's face into his pack hair," fumed Carl. "He vas a lopsder, a rekular rank-a-tang! Und I bed you dot pefore he iss tone mit us he vill know dot he has peen mixed oop mit a gouple oof life vones. 'Wienerwurst!' He mightd as vell haf called me a sissage. I'll show him I don'd vas anyt'ing like dot. Mings iss as pad as Sercomb, und so iss Packard, aber I ditn't t'ink Finn vouldt shtand for any sooch vork. Dere iss more as Mings, Packard, und Finn mit dem, too."

"Sercomb has told his own story to the rest of the members of that club," said Matt. "He has

rubbed it into my character in pretty strong style, I suppose, and in order to get even with me, and have all the others on his side, he uses the race for the Borden cup as a pretext."

"Vell, be jeerful, Matt. It dakes t'ings like dose to keep a feller chinchered oop."

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"Right you are, Carl," laughed Matt. "I'll get into that race, now, if it takes a leg."

"Sure!" cooed Carl. "You vill be in it mit bot' feets efen oof vone leg iss gone. How iss dot for a choke?"

"It may not be so easy to break into the game, after all."

"Eferyt'ing iss easy for Modor Matt," gloried Carl. "You vill ged indo der game schust like falling off some logs. For vy nod?"

"Well, for one thing, I haven't any racing record behind me."

"Ach, hear dot! Ditn't you beat oudt a Limidet Egspress Drain mit a modorcycle? Und hain't you peen racing pubbles efer since ve left Ash Fork?"

"All that hasn't given me a racing record. When a manufacturer puts a twenty-thousand-dollar racing-car in the field, he wants to be more than sure that his driver has plenty of nerve and skill. About the only way he can be sure of that is by looking back over his record and seeing what he has done."

"Vell, let dem look pack so far as dey blease ofer your recordt. Dey vill findt some surprises, you bed you."

"The race for the Borden cup is only two weeks off, Carl. The Automobile Club decided it was to be run over a Kansas course, and limited to western machines. Why, some of the contestants have already been on the scene of the race for a week!"

"I don'd care for dot," averred Carl stoutly. "You vill make goot schust der same. Mindt vat I say."

Just then there came a rap on the door. Matt answered the summons and found the bell-boy with a card. "Colonel Jasper Plympton," ran the legend on the bit of pasteboard.

Matt caught his breath. Colonel Plympton was coming to see him!

"Ask him to come right up," said Matt, turning away.

"Who it vas?" queried Carl curiously.

"Plympton!" exclaimed Matt exultantly. "He is hunting me instead of letting me go looking for him."

Carl wore a grin you could have tied behind his ears.

"Now vat vouldt dot Sercomb gang say oof dey knowed dot!" he chuckled.

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## CHAPTER III.

### SUSPICIOUS DOINGS.

The Stark-Frisbie Company, like most of the progressive automobile concerns, maintained a staff of racing-drivers. Wherever there was a speed contest, a reliability run or an endurance trial, Stark-Frisbie cars were sure to be entered.

In the early days of the industry, motor-racing was a sport. Now it is rapidly being reduced to a business. "Win at any cost," are the instructions a firm gives its drivers. If a driver makes a mistake he is condemned for all time, and the reputation of his employers suffers in the estimation of the public. For this reason the rule of winning at any cost is carried out strictly.

Colonel Plympton was secretary of the Stark-Frisbie Company, and had entire charge of its racing affairs. Mr. Tomlinson was an intimate friend of the colonel's, and had engaged to secure Matt a position with his firm. Matt, however, had never dreamed that Colonel Plympton would be so eager to secure a new driver that he would call at the hotel.

Presently the colonel entered the room. In appearance he was a good deal of a disappointment to Matt, for he was somewhat slouchy and a little bit shabby. Nevertheless, he had abundant dignity and an air of large importance.

"Mr. King?" queried the colonel, stretching out his hand toward Carl.

"Vell," chuckled Carl, "nood so you can notice it. I peen Modor Matt's pard. Here iss der main vorks," and he waved a hand toward Matt.

"Howdy?" inquired the colonel, shaking Matt's hand. "Tomlinson told me about you not more than an hour ago. If ever the Stark-Frisbie Company needed drivers of nerve and skill, they need them now. The race for the Borden cup is only two weeks away, and we have only two drivers to qualify for it, while in such a contest it is our invariable rule to have at least three entries. One of our best men smashed up his car in the East and has just come out of the hospital. That eliminates *him*. After a close call like that, no driver ever keeps his nerve—he's a dead one so far as racing is concerned."

The colonel had seated himself comfortably and drawn a fat cigar from a vest pocket. He paused

to light it, his eyes glimmering at Matt through the smoke.

"I've never had an accident that made me lose my nerve, Colonel Plympton," said Matt.

"Egad, I guess that's right," chuckled the colonel. "Tomlinson has told me all about you, and I think you'll drop into our racing schedules like a top. Anyhow, we're willing to start you off in the Borden cup race, providing we can make a deal with you. We don't pay our racing drivers any salaries. Whenever there's an important race, we pay the entrance fee, running from five hundred to two thousand dollars, and we furnish the driver with a specially constructed racing-car costing from twenty thousand to fifty thousand dollars. In addition, we pay the driver from two hundred to two thousand dollars for making the race, and if he wins he gets a bonus of from one thousand to eight thousand dollars—depending on the importance of the race to us. In the Borden cup race the entrance fee is five hundred; we pay that, give you five hundred more to make the race, furnish you with a good racing-car, and give you a bonus of two thousand if you win."

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"Hoop-a-la!" exulted Carl. "Dot means Easy Shdreed, mit a pig E. Modor Matt iss a vinner from Vinnerville."

Matt was stunned by his good fortune. The position had come to him even before he had gone to the trouble to apply for it.

"Hiram Borden," went on the colonel affably, "is a fine old sportsman. He's a millionaire several times over and lives in a little town called Ottawa, in the Sunflower state. He has been an enthusiastic patron of automobile racing, and of its development in the West, ever since the sport began. He's too old to race a car himself, but he travels all over this country and Europe, keeping track of the contests. The cup he offered has been fought for for five years. Stark-Frisbie held it three years, hand-running. Our factory is here in Denver, so whoever wanted to take the cup away from us had to come here and race for it. Our principal Western competitors are Bly-Lambert, of Kansas City. During the last Colorado race, Bly-Lambert won the cup. We've tried twice to get it away from them, and as a token of appreciation of Mr. Borden, the third race is to be run on a circuit out of his home town."

"Are there only two competitors, Colonel Plympton?" asked Matt.

"There are a dozen or more competitors in each race, but Stark-Frisbie and Bly-Lambert build the fastest cars, and the issue is almost entirely between them. As soon as you sign on for the race, King, you'll have to start for Kansas and spend the rest of the time becoming familiar with the course. The car I intend to let you have is already at Ottawa. Perhaps you had just as soon sign the paper to-night? In that event you can start for Kansas in the morning."

"Your terms are satisfactory," said Matt, "and I'll sign the agreement at once."

"That's the spirit!" approved the colonel. He drew a paper from his pocket and handed it to Matt. "Just read that over," he added.

The paper was typewritten and set forth the terms already stated by the colonel, *i. e.*, that Matt was to be furnished with a racing-car, have his entrance fee paid, and was to receive \$500 for making the run, and a bonus of \$2,000 if he won. His own expenses, however, were to be borne by himself.

While he was reading, the colonel was unlimbering a fountain-pen.

"Let me take the pen," said Matt, laying the paper on the table.

"You understand that thoroughly, do you?" asked the colonel, getting up and taking the paper from the table.

"It's simple enough, colonel," returned Matt.

"All right, then. Just sling your fist on the bottom line."

The colonel leaned over, laid the paper on the table, and Matt dashed off his signature. The colonel at once picked up the paper, blew on the ink to dry it, folded the document, and placed it in his pocket.

"Call at my office in the morning, King," finished the colonel, picking up his hat, "and I'll give you a letter to our head mechanic. Good night, gentlemen," and the colonel sailed out.

Carl stared at the closed door, and began industriously pinching himself.

"Be jeerful, be jeerful!" he muttered. "Vas I treaming, oder vas I vide avake? Py chimineddy, Matt, how luck climbs ofter itseluf to ged ad you! Oof you don'd preak your neck, you vas on der high roadt to more money as Vanderfeller or Rockypilt efer hat. How easy dot vas! Ach, du lieber! Do I go mit you py Gansas? Shpeak it oudt, kevic!"

Before Matt could "speak it out," however, the door fluttered open and a black face, topped with kinky white hair, was pushed into the room. Matt stared. The eyes of the negro met his and a wide grin parted the black face.

"By golly! Mistah Motah Matt, suh, habn't yo' got nuffin' tuh say tuh yo' 'fishul mascot?"

"Why, Uncle Tom!" cried Matt heartily, making a jump from his chair and grabbing the old negro by the hand. "Come in, old fellow," he added, pulling him into the room. "Where in the world did you drop from?"

"Unkle Dom!" muttered Carl. "Vell, wouldn't dot gif you der chillplains!"



"Yah, yah, yah!" cackled Uncle Tom. "Didun' 'low yo' was gwine tuh see me, huh? Why, chile, Ah done tole yuh when we pa'ted togethah, down dar in Arizony, dat I'd be waitin' fo' yo' when yo' come er prancin' 'long. Ah's yo' 'fishul mascot, Marse Matt, en Ah's been doin' er monsus lot ob mascottin' fo' yo' while Ah's been er waitin'. Notice any luck comin' yo' way, sah? Well, dat was me, jess er rootin', an' er rootin' all de hull blessed time. Seen Mistah Tomlinson dis ebenin', en he say whah yo' was. Ah'd been up heah befo', only Ah was subsequentious to dat odder caller."

Uncle Tom, beaming benevolently, slid into a chair and laid his old slouch hat on his knee.

"How's Eliza, and Topsy, and Legree, and Little Eva?" laughed Matt.

Uncle Tom had belonged to a road company. The company had been stranded, and Matt had helped some of the members to get back to Denver, Uncle Tom being among the number.

"Dunno nuffin' 'bout Legree an' Li'l Eva," answered Uncle Tom, "but Miss Eliza she done gone on tuh Chicawgo whah she done ketched anodder job on de stage. Topsy's waitin' on de table fo' a swell Denvah fambly, en Ah's been promiscussin' erroun' er-waitin' fo' yo' tuh show up. Ah's hia'd out tuh yo', sah, en while dar's lots o' white folks pesterin' me tuh mascot fo' dem, Ah recomembahs Ah's engaged tuh yo'. Yo's er puffick gemman, en ob co'se Ah's hooked up wif yo'. If yo' happens tuh have a lonesome dollah rattlin' erroun' en yo' pocket, Mistah Matt, Uncle Tom allow he could make friends wif it."

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"There you are, Uncle Tom," laughed Matt, flipping a coin toward the old darky.

"When does yo'-all want me tuh trabble wif yo', an' be right on de spot eb'ry minit tuh take care ob yo' luck? Dishyer luck's mighty onnery sometimes, en hit takes er keen eye en er coon dat knows hits ways an' rambiffications tuh keep hit runnin' smooof. While dat 'ar no 'count Ebenezer Slocum was up heah talkin' wif yo', Ah was tu'nin' all dat ober en mah min', yassuh. Yo' see, Marse Matt, dat——"

"Ebenezer Slocum?" interrupted Matt. "Who's he?"

"Dat loafer dat was jess in heah wif yo'."

"Loafer!" exclaimed Matt. "You're 'way off, Uncle Tom. Why, that was Colonel Plympton, Secretary of the Stark-Frisbie Company."

"Dat? Him Kunnel Plympton? Yo's wrong, sah. Ah's mascotted fo' Kunnel Plympton er quatah's wuff evah race dey had run, en Ah knows him lak Ah knows mase'f. Dat fellah dat was jess heah, Ah tells yo' fo' suah, was Ebenezer Slocum, an' he ain't nuffin' mo' dan no 'count white trash, pickin' up er dollah whahevah he can lay his han's on hit. Yassuh. We-all whats hones', en wuks fo' our money, looks down on Slocum, we sho'ly does."

Carl had jumped to his feet and was standing in front of his chair, staring at Motor Matt.

Matt was dumfounded.

Why was Ebenezer Slocum impersonating Colonel Plympton? Slocum's actions were suspicious, to say the least.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A VILLAINOUS PLOT.

"Hab yo'-all been makin' any dealings wif dat 'ar Slocum, Marse Matt?" inquired Uncle Tom. "If he allowed tuh yo' dat he was Kunnel Plympton, den he's done complicated hisse'f all up wif whut dey calls petty la'ceny, en yo' kin sweah out er warrant en put him in de jug."

"I don't believe it's as bad as that, Uncle Tom," said Matt. "I'm pretty busy to-night, and if you can come around and see me some other time we'll have a little talk."

"Sho'ly, Marse Matt," replied Uncle Tom, getting to his feet and bending down to rub one of his legs that didn't seem to be acting just right. "De rheumatix hab been pesterin' me powerful bad evah sence dat 'sperience Ah had down dar in Arizony. Yo' ain't gwine tuh cut me out ob mah job ob 'fishul mascot fo' yo', is yuh? Yo' needs one all de time, sah, en Ah 'lows dar ain't a bettah mascot dan whut Ah is anywhah en de country. Ah mascotted two dollahs' wuff fo' Mistah Tomlinson, en——"

"We'll talk that over next time you come, Uncle Tom," interrupted Matt. "Just now I'm anxious to have a few words with Carl."

"Sho'ly, sho'ly. Well, Marse Matt, Ah wishes yo' good ebenin', an' Mistah Carl good ebenin'. Ah'll root fo' bofe ob yo' when Ah gits back home. Yo'-all kin expec' somethin' tuh happen in de mawnin'."

The genial old fraud let himself out and closed the door carefully behind him.

"Chiminy Grismus!" muttered Carl, as soon as he and Matt were alone. "Vat sort oof a game iss dot Slocum feller drying to blay? Und vy iss he blaying it? Uncle Dom has shtirred oop somet'ing, I bed you."

"It's a conundrum to me, Carl," mused Matt, leaning back in his chair. "That card of his was genuine enough, but, of course, it wouldn't be difficult for a man to get hold of one of Colonel

Plympton's cards. Still, the fellow didn't look as I imagined Colonel Plympton looks."

"Der offers vat he made vas fine und pig," said Carl glumly. "Meppy dot vas pecause he don'd got der righdt to make dem. Aber vy he do dot?"

"Another thing," went on Matt, following his own line of thought, "it wouldn't be likely that Colonel Plympton would come around looking me up. I want the job, and I'm the one to go to him. I ought to have suspected something, just from that."

"Vell, you peen hired, anyway. I vonder how dot Slocum feller vill oxblain vat he dit to der Sdark-Frispie peoples? Meppy dey hired him to come aroundt? Led's be jeerful, anyvays, undil ve know dot Slocum vas blaying some crooked games. He say for you to come aroundt in der morning und he vould gif you a ledder py der masder-meganic vere der race iss to run. In der morning, Matt, you vill findt oudt all aboundt it."

"That's right, Carl," answered Matt, throwing off his worry as well as he could; "in the morning, when I call on Colonel Plympton, I'll find out if anything is wrong, and just what it is. Now let's tumble into bed, pull covers, and try to forget that anything has gone wrong."

The boys had had a hard day, and Carl was snoring almost as soon as his head struck the pillow. Matt, however, lay awake for some time, thinking over all that had happened since he and Carl had reached Denver. They had been in town only a few hours and yet Matt's enemies had lost no time in beginning their treacherous work.

Carl's experience proved that the hostile drivers were organized, and that Sercomb and his friends had prejudiced some of the other chauffeurs against him.

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Ralph Sercomb was unscrupulous. He felt that he had good reason to hate Matt, and to try to play even with him, and he would go to any length in carrying out his despicable schemes.

Motor Matt had for years been eager to make good as a racing-driver. He was at home with a gasoline-motor, and speed, to him, was its highest expression of power. The race for the Borden cup offered him a chance to enter the racing field, and he was not the one to turn back from the goal simply because he was encountering a few difficulties at the start.

"I'll get into that race," he muttered to himself resolutely, "and I'll make good."

And with that resolve and conviction he fell asleep.

Next morning he was up early. Arousing Carl, they both got into their clothes and went down to breakfast.

Colonel Plympton had his office in a building on Sixteenth Street. Following breakfast, Matt started to have his interview with the colonel. Carl was left behind at the hotel.

As Matt turned into the office building, some one brushed past him, through the door. Matt had only a casual glance at the form, but it seemed so familiar that he turned back to look after the man.

To his surprise, he found the fellow turning for a glance at him. It was Ralph Sercomb.

There was a grim, mocking smile on Sercomb's face. He did not stop, but passed hurriedly on and lost himself in the crowd.

Sercomb had just been calling on some one in the building. Could it have been Colonel Plympton?

Matt, somewhat thoughtful because of this unexpected encounter, got into the elevator and rode to the fourth floor. In the ante-room of Colonel Plympton's office he gave his name to a boy, and the latter vanished through a door marked "private." The boy was back in about a minute.

"Colonel Plympton says he can't see you," was the report.

"If he's busy," returned Matt, "I'll wait until he can see me."

"It won't do you no good, see?" said the boy. "He don't *want* to see you. Ain't that plain enough?"

Matt hesitated for a moment. He knew something must have gone wrong or he would not have met with such a reception. Mr. Tomlinson, a good friend of Plympton's and of Matt's, had promised the young motorist that Plympton would give him a hearing.

"Was Ralph Sercomb just here?" asked Matt.

"Sure he was," answered the boy; "he's one of the colonel's men, an' he's here a good deal. Here! Where you goin'?"

Matt had started for the door of the private room. Paying no attention to the boy, he kept right on, opened the door and stepped into the inner office.

A tall man, with gray hair and mustache, was sitting at his desk reading a newspaper. He looked up as Matt entered.

"Well?" he demanded.

"He come right in, Colonel Plympton," called the boy from behind Matt. "I told him what you said."

"Ah!" Plympton laid aside his paper, wheeled the chair about and gave Matt his keen attention. "That was hardly the thing for you to do, King," said he. "When I say a thing I usually mean it."

"I'm sure, sir," returned Matt, "that you wouldn't have refused to see me if you hadn't been misinformed about some things connected with me. I beg your pardon for walking in on you

uninvited, but you can hardly refuse to let me say a few words for myself, Colonel Plympton."

There was something so steady and true in the lad's gray eyes, and something so frank and open about his face, that the colonel nodded toward a chair.

"You might as well sit down, now you're in here," said he, "but I don't think anything you can say will change my opinion of you."

"Did Mr. Tomlinson speak to you about me?" asked Matt, taking the chair.

"He did—and warmly—yesterday afternoon. That made it all the harder for me to believe something that has just come to light."

"Ralph Sercomb was just here?"

"Sercomb is one of our crack drivers, but I wouldn't have believed even him if he hadn't had proof of what he said in black and white."

"Sercomb is not a friend of mine——"

"I have nothing to do with that, King. Every fellow who amounts to anything is bound to make enemies."

"I want to become a racer, Colonel Plympton, and I think, if I had a chance, that I could deliver the goods."

"Why don't you hook up with the Bly-Lambert people?" asked the colonel dryly. "You seem to have established a connection in that quarter."

"I don't understand you," replied Matt.

"Oh, come, come!" exclaimed Plympton impatiently. "Do you mean to sit there and tell me you didn't have a talk with Slocum, last night?"

"Is Slocum connected with the Bly-Lambert people?"

"Well, I should say so! If the Kansas City men want to hire a fellow to throw a race, Slocum is just the one to put the deal through for them."

Matt, who was beginning to see a little light in the queer tangle, laid the card Slocum had sent up, the evening before, on the desk in front of the colonel.

"Is that your card, Colonel Plympton?" he asked.

"Undeniably," was the answer.

"Well, Slocum sent that to me last night, and claimed to be you. I had never seen you, and, consequently, didn't know he was acting a part." [Pg 9]

"Mighty complimentary to me, I must say," muttered the colonel, "to mistake Slocum for myself. Well, go on, King. What happened?"

"Slocum hired me to drive a car in the race for the Borden cup. He offered me five hundred dollars for doing it, and a bonus of two thousand dollars if I won. And he hired me for the Stark-Frisbie Company!"

"Hardly!" returned the colonel. "He had no authority. Stark-Frisbie are not dealing through such rascals as Slocum."

"I signed an agreement to that effect, anyway," went on Matt.

"Did you read that agreement before you signed it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then look at this. Sercomb just brought it in."

The colonel pulled a folded paper out of his desk and handed it to Matt.

The young motorist, taking the paper, opened it and read as follows:

"For the sum of one hundred dollars, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, I agree to enter the Borden cup race with a Stark-Frisbie car, and to do my utmost to throw the race in favor of the Bly-Lambert contestants.

"Signed, MATT KING."

The white rushed into Matt's face. With a gasp he dropped back into his chair, staring with wide eyes at Colonel Plympton.

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## CHAPTER V.

### MATT GOES TROUBLE-HUNTING.

No matter how firmly convinced Colonel Plympton had been regarding Matt's treacherous intentions, the tremendous shock the note gave him was too real to be feigned.

"Isn't that your signature, King?" demanded Plympton.

"Yes, sir, so far as I can see; but certainly I never signed any paper like that. I'm not that sort of a

fellow, Colonel Plympton. Did Ralph Sercomb deliver that paper to you?"

"I don't know why I should make a secret of it. Yes, he did; but it was because he had the interests of the Stark-Frisbie Company at heart."

"You're wrong, sir," said Matt firmly. "This is a cut-and-dried plot, all the way through. Sercomb has got it in for me, and this rascal, Slocum, is helping him spoil my chances with the Stark-Frisbie Company."

The colonel's face hardened.

"Seeing how you took that note, I was ready to believe this the first time you ever laid eyes on it," said he, "but you are spoiling the good impression by blaming Sercomb."

"In a case like this I have to put the blame where it belongs."

A blow in the face could not have dazed Matt more than that note had done. Now, however, his anger and indignation were coming uppermost. In his case, that always meant that his brain was clearing, and every muscle steadying itself to the tensivity of a fore-stay.

"I can't go into your private quarrels, King," said Colonel Plympton, "and even if you are innocent of any dealings with a representative of the Bly-Lambert people, after what has happened I couldn't conscientiously hire you. Besides, you are virtually a stranger; you have never driven in a motor-race—which is vastly different from ordinary driving, and requires experience—and you are rather young to enter the racing field."

"That isn't the point just now, colonel," said Matt. "I am bound to get into that race for the Borden cup, now, in order to show that my intentions are honest—and in order to prove that there is villainous work afoot and that some one is trying to make me the victim of it. I owe this to myself, and I also owe it to Mr. Tomlinson, who recommended me to you. That paper," and he pointed to the document which he had picked up and laid on the colonel's desk, "is not the one I thought I was signing. Slocum juggled it around in the place of the other. I can see that, now that the contemptible plot has come out. Do you know Sercomb's handwriting, colonel?"

"As well as my own."

Matt fished from his pocket the communication which Carl had brought to the hotel.

"Please tell me if that is Sercomb's writing," said he.

"No," answered the colonel decidedly.

"Kindly read the note through, anyway. It will show a reason for this Slocum plot."

Colonel Plympton read the note through carefully, and with a considerable show of surprise.

"Where did you get that?" he asked.

Matt thereupon told how Carl had been waylaid and taken to the meeting room of the Drivers' Club, of what had transpired there, and how Carl had been turned loose in an unknown quarter of the town and sent to the hotel with the letter.

"This is too incredible, King!" exclaimed the colonel. "It's the wildest kind of a yarn. No, I'm not disputing your word at all, but simply suggesting that some of the drivers may be having a little fun at your expense. That the racing men should band together to keep you out of the game is too outrageous for belief."

"I thought myself it was all a bluff until this Slocum business came out," said Matt. He got up. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this, colonel," said he with a glint in his gray eyes, "and I'm going to drive a car in that Kansas race. I should like to race for the Stark-Frisbie Company, but, if that's impossible, I'll go in for whoever will give me a show."

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"I'm afraid it's impossible, King, so far as our people are concerned. I'm glad you came in here and had this talk with me, though, for I think a hundred per cent. better of you than I did before. I was thinking Tomlinson had been deceived in you. I'll not tell him about this signed paper if you don't want me to."

"I want you to, sir," returned Matt earnestly. "I believe Mr. Tomlinson has too much confidence in me to take any stock in that thing."

"You're going to Kansas?"

"Yes, sir."

"On your own hook?"

"It seems that I'm not able to go any other way."

"Egad, I like your spirit, anyhow! When do you start?"

"Just as soon as I transact a little business with Slocum, and a few others who need my attention."

"Well, good luck to you!" The colonel got up and took Matt's hand. "You've got a way of inspiring confidence, and I wish I could do something for you, but I'm afraid it's out of the question. Win that Kansas race, though, and you'll have more offers to drive motor-cars than you can fill."

Matt experienced a sense of great relief as he left Colonel Plympton's office. He felt that he had accomplished not a little in ranging the colonel on his side.

Carl was waiting impatiently for Matt, walking up and down the hotel office and keeping his eyes

constantly on the windows that faced the street.

As Matt, in a quiet corner of the office, told about the treachery of Slocum, Carl's rage was so intense that it would have been ludicrous in any other circumstances.

"Ach, dot sgoundrel! dot fillian!" he wheezed. "Oof I hat him here I would make him t'ink a brick house hat fell on him! Der plackguard! Der tinhorn! Led me go oudt und look for him!"

Carl jumped furiously from his chair, but Matt caught him and pulled him back.

"There's somebody else we're to look for, Carl," said he.

"Who's dot?"

"Sercomb and his scheming friends."

"Yah, you bed you! Ve vill findt dose fellers, und ven ve do findt dem ve vill ged some shtrangleholts on dem und make dem say oudt vere iss Slocum."

"It's not often that I go hunting trouble," said Matt grimly, "but that's what I'm going to do now."

"How ve shtart it oudt, Matt?" queried Carl.

"We'll look for that basement club-room."

"Yah, so, aber how ve findt dot?"

"Can't you take me to the alley where the gang set upon you?"

"Easy! Afder dot, how ve going to findt dot cellar-blace? I had somet'ing ofer my headt ven I vas dook dere, und I don'd see nodding."

"Well, they had an automobile in the cellar. That means that the basement door was wide enough to take the machine in, and that there is an incline for the car to climb and descend. That will give us our clue. I'll warrant that there are not many basement doors of that description opening upon that alley."

"Pully!" murmured Carl, almost overcome with admiration. "Vat a headt it iss! Matt, oof I hat a headt like dot, I wouldt haf Rockybuilt backed off der poard."

"Let's confine our attention to backing Sercomb off the board, and straightening out this tangle." Matt got up. "Come on, Carl."

"Vill dere be anpody in der clup-room now? Meppy dey don'd come togedder undil nighdt, und meppy nod efery nighdt, eider."

"We'll go and try to find the place, anyhow," replied Matt. "If there's no one there we'll go back again to-night."

"Pully!" As they left the hotel and Carl led the way toward the street where he had been captured, the night before, he remarked with a chuckle: "Oof I don'd vas aple to use my eyes lashdt nighdt you bed you I used my ears! I hear how dose raps vas gifen on der toor, und I can gif dem meinseluf schust der same vay."

A ten minutes' walk carried the two boys to the mouth of the alley where Carl had been set upon.

"Dis vas der site oof der shdreet, und dis vas der blace," said he. "Dey must haf dook me oop dere," and he pointed.

The alley was narrow and on both sides was lined with the rear walls of second-rate store-buildings. Every building, so far as Matt could see, had a door.

The narrow passage was paved with brick, and this prevented Matt from seeing the tracks which an automobile might have left on the surface of bare ground.

Slowly the boys walked along the alley, peering at the doors on left and right as they advanced. They were about half-way through the alley when they found what they were seeking, namely, a wide door at the foot of a steep incline. The descent was not more than two feet downward from the surface of the alley, and the wide door was set well back, so that the cut-out place would not interfere with teaming through the passage.

"Py shinks," whispered Carl excitedly, "ve haf foundt der blace!"

"No doubt of it," answered Matt with a grim feeling of satisfaction.

There were no windows in the basement wall of the building, and those in the upper stories were dusty and cobwebbed.

Softly Matt descended to the door at the foot of the incline and motioned for Carl to follow.

The Dutch boy gained his side.

"Now rap," said Matt, "and see how good an imitation you can give of what you heard last night."

Carl drummed the peculiar tattoo. There was no response. After waiting a little he drummed it again, but louder.

This, somewhat unexpectedly, brought an answer.

"Who approaches?" demanded a muffled voice from within.

"Tell him 'Two drivers oof racing-cars,' Matt," whispered Carl. "My voice wouldt gif me away."

"Two drivers of racing-cars," called Matt.

"Give me the countersign."

"Four speeds forward und vone referse," whispered Carl.

Matt repeated the words. Instantly the door was opened and a young man of twenty-two or three stood in front of the boys.

With a bellow of rage Carl jumped forward.

"Higgins! Oof it ain'd! Now vatch, Higgins, vile I show you der peautiful aurora porealis, und der leedle shooding shdars, und der comics. Dis meeding makes me so habby as I can't dell!" [Pg 11]

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## CHAPTER VI.

### HIGGINS TELLS WHAT HE KNOWS.

Higgins seemed to be the only member of the club about the place. The inner doors were open, and the racket which Carl stirred up by his attack did not draw any one through them.

Higgins was very much surprised. Carl's attack was so suddenly made that he was thrown from his feet.

"Vas it you dot wrode dot ledder," fumed Carl, "und saidt in it dot I vas a 'Wienerwurst?' Ach, blitzen, I make you t'ink I peen a volgano mit an erubtion. I bed someding for noddng you don't fool some more Dutchmans!"

Higgins, unable to protect himself from the frantic Dutchman, began begging for mercy.

"That will do, Carl," said Matt. "Leave him alone. We seem to have him all to ourselves and it's a good chance for a little heart-to-heart talk."

Matt sat down on a chair beside the open alley door and Carl appropriated an empty beer keg. It was evident that the members of the Drivers' Club were of a convivial nature. Higgins, nursing the back of his head and a bruise on the side of his face, leaned against the wall and peered sullenly at Matt and furiously at Carl.

"Where's the rest of the gang, Higgins?" asked Matt.

"What's it to you?" flared Higgins.

"That's your mood, is it?" said Matt. "Carl, go and get a policeman. We can put this fellow in jail for what he did last night."

Carl got up and started for the door.

"On der chump!" said he, knowing well enough that Matt was bluffing in the hope of drawing Higgins out and making him more communicative.

"Wait a minute!" called Higgins. "What do you want to mix the police in this thing for? You'll only be making trouble for yourselves, and you can't bother me very much."

"I know what we can do," answered Matt sternly. "Go on, Carl."

"Here, hold up!" begged Higgins, showing signs of alarm. "Can't we straighten this out somehow?"

"We might, Higgins, if you want to talk."

"What is it you want to know?"

"When will the rest of your gang be here?"

"Not before three weeks or a month."

"Where are they?"

"Gone to Kansas to get ready for the race."

"Ach, vat a luck!" groaned Carl.

"When did they leave?" went on Matt.

"Nine o'clock this morning."

"Who went?"

"Patsy Grier, Tobe Martin, Balt Finn, Ralph Sercomb, Harry Packard and Joe Mings."

"They all belong to the club, eh?"

"Yes."

"Who's the club's boss?"

"Grier."

"Are all those you named going to take part in the race for the Borden cup?"

"Yes."

"Do they all drive for Stark-Frisbie?"

"I should say not! Sercomb, Mings, and Packard are the only Stark-Frisbie men."

"Who do the others drive for?"

"Bly-Lambert."

"Where's Slocum?"

"He went with the rest."

"Is he working for Bly-Lambert, too?"

"No, he's working for Slocum."

"Who was it got Slocum to call on me last night?"

"I don't know anything about that," answered Higgins shiftily. "I was the last member to join the Drivers and they don't put me wise to very much that's going on."

"It's plain," said Matt, "that you don't intend to talk. You'd better go on, Carl," he added to his Dutch chum, "and get the officer."

"Wait!" clamored Higgins. "I'll make a clean breast of everything. Sercomb put up the deal with Slocum. I don't know what the deal was, nor how it was worked, but Sercomb was the fellow behind it. I'm new in the club, as I said, and you wouldn't have caught me here this morning if Sercomb hadn't asked me to come and pack up some of his traps to go by express."

"The outfit went to Ottawa, Kansas?" pursued Matt.

"Yes. That's where Borden lives, and——"

"I know about that." Matt got up. "We've found out enough, Carl," said he, "and let's go. As for you and your friends," and here Matt turned sternly on Higgins, "tell them to be a little careful. I know their game, and I'm going to fight it right from the drop of the hat."

With that Matt turned on his heel and left the basement. When he and Carl had reached the street Carl expressed his doubts as to whether Higgins had told the truth.

"I'm pretty sure he gave it to us straight, Carl," answered Matt. "The gang, almost to a man, will drive in that race, and it's high time they were on the ground. Sercomb probably went direct to the railroad station after he left Colonel Plympton's office this morning."

"Vat you going to do, hey?"

"I'm going to Kansas, too."

Carl began to get excited.

"Und me?" he asked; "vere do I come in?"

"You're going along, of course. While I hunt up Mr. Tomlinson and have a talk with him, you go to the hotel, pay our bill and get our grips. Meet me at the station."

"Hoop-a-la!" exulted Carl. "Ve vill carry der var rightd indo dem odder fellers' gamp, I bed you. Dot's der shduff!"

Mr. Tomlinson's wholesale jewelry establishment was on Seventeenth Street. After leaving Carl, Matt made his way directly to the store.

To his intense disappointment he found that Mr. Tomlinson had been called out of town by the sickness of a relative and would probably not be back for two or three days.

Matt had planned on telling Mr. Tomlinson all about what had happened since he and Carl had reached Denver; but that was impossible now, and he would have to let Colonel Plympton do the telling. So far as the result was concerned, Matt was not doing any worrying about the way Mr. Tomlinson would receive the news of Slocum's trickery. What the young motorist had wanted, however, was to point out to Mr. Tomlinson a fact that he had not mentioned to Plympton. This was, that, unless there had been collusion between Slocum and Sercomb, the latter would not have been able to secure the alleged agreement which Matt had signed. If Slocum had been acting in good faith for the Bly-Lambert people, he would have hung onto the agreement; and if he had not been acting in good faith, the whole affair at once resolved itself into a plot of Sercomb's.

Colonel Plympton, Matt had reasoned, was probably keen enough to see that for himself. Just what effect it would have on him Matt could not know, but even a shadow of suspicion, although unwarranted, would be enough to throw a driver out of the Borden cup race.

Matt had made up his mind that he could not race for Stark-Frisbie. If he did, and lost, there might always be a feeling that there had been something in the Slocum business after all, and that he had thrown the race. The chances to drive a car for the Bly-Lambert people, on the other hand, did not seem at all flattering. They had taken three races from the Stark-Frisbie firm, and quite likely the drivers who had been successful in those contests would be the ones to drive in the present race.

Mr. Tomlinson, Matt had been thinking, might know some one connected with the other manufacturers who had entered cars, and could perhaps have given him a letter of introduction that would have been of use. Now Matt found himself thrown upon his own resources, and, strange as it may seem, felt easier in his mind. Being forced to rely wholly upon himself, he marshaled all his grit and determination, and resolved to see the game through for its own sake. There is a pleasure in accomplishing things without the help of a "pull" or a "push," and Matt's blood was already tingling over the prospect of exciting events in Kansas.

At noon he was at the station, and had bought tickets for Carl and himself. Carl was in the waiting-room with the grips.

"Vat dit Misder Domlinson haf to say?" the Dutch boy inquired.

"He's out of town, Carl," answered Matt.

"Tough luck!"

"I don't know about that. There's a pleasure as well as an advantage in going it alone, on your own hook. A fellow can't keep keyed up when he's leaning on somebody else; but when he's depending on himself, he knows he has to be fit and ready for whatever comes his way."

"Meppy dot's righdt. Anyvays, Matt, you vill make goot. I know dot pedder as I know anyt'ing. Dot Sercomb und his crowd vill be surbrised, I bed you, ven dey see us come valking in on dem out in dot Gansas blace. Oof dey make some rough-houses, dey vill findt dot ve're fit und retty for dot, anyvays."

Just at that moment a voice boomed through the waiting-room announcing that the east-bound train was ready.

Matt and Carl, picking up their luggage, started at once for the train-shed.

From the sidewalk Higgins had been watching them through a window. As the two chums left the waiting-room Higgins slid in, his eyes wide with astonishment.

"They're going East," he muttered. "I wonder if they can be on their way to Kansas? What good will it do King to go there, after being turned down by Colonel Plympton?"

This was too hard a nut for Higgins to crack. He tried to find out, at the ticket window, what place Matt and Carl had booked for, but a good many people had bought tickets and the agent had not noticed Matt and Carl particularly.

Baffled in this move, Higgins stepped to a telegraph office and despatched the following message:

"RALPH SERCOMB, on Limited Train No. 10, Dodge City, Kansas: King and his Dutch pal left Denver on east-bound train at noon. Unable to ascertain their destination.

HIGGINS."

"That puts it up to Sercomb," muttered Higgins as he paid for the message and turned away. "I'll bet there'll be warm doings in Kansas before long."

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## CHAPTER VII.

### BRISK WORK AT DODGE CITY.

Matt and Carl had to change cars at a place called La Junta, and there was a tedious wait. In due course, however, they resumed their journey, slept out the night in a sleeping-car and got out at Dodge City for breakfast. The train halted for twenty minutes to give the passengers a chance to eat. This stop was to prove an exciting twenty minutes for Matt and Carl.

Just as they were moving with a crowd of other hungry passengers toward the door of the eating-house a shabby and seedy personage strolled out, chewing a toothpick.

Carl let off a whoop. "Slocum, py shinks!" he called.

Slocum gave a jump and started to run. Matt and Carl at once trailed after him.

The passengers on the station platform got out of the way and stood and gaped at the flight and pursuit. They could not understand what it all meant, of course, and, while it was sufficiently exciting to claim their attention, there was only twenty minutes allowed them for breakfast, and they could not waste much time.

When the shabby man, with the two boys hot after him, had vanished around the corner of the station-building, the passengers began filing into the eating-room.

To say that Matt was startled to catch a glimpse of Slocum would describe his feelings too mildly. If Slocum had taken an early train with the rest of the drivers, what was he doing there in Dodge City? He should have been several hours further along the road.

Matt was not looking for more trickery. The fact that Higgins had watched him and Carl in Denver, and had sent a message to Sercomb, was, of course, unknown to the young motorist. Had that point been brought to Matt's attention he might have suspected something underhand in this strange appearance of Slocum.

Slocum's legs were long and he was making good use of them. After whirling around the corner of the station, he set off across the tracks toward some trees and bushes that lined the edge of the switch-yard.

Matt and Carl were overhauling the rascal steadily, and were not more than a dozen feet behind him when he vanished into the bushes. Matt led Carl by a yard, and when Matt had crashed through the brush and into a little cleared space, Slocum was still out of sight.



Directly in front of Matt was a small tool-house such as a section-gang uses for storing tools and hand-cars. The door of the tool-house was swinging wide, and an open padlock hung in a staple at the edge of the opening.

As Matt stood for a second looking at the tool-house, he fancied he heard a stir inside the small building and a sound of whispering voices.

He felt sure that Slocum had gone into the tool-house, and that there was some one else there. The secrecy with which the quick whispering had been carried on aroused Matt's suspicions.

Had Slocum been informed in some manner that Matt and Carl were on their way East? And had he stopped off the other train to carry out some other treacherous scheme of Sercomb's?

It looked very much to Matt that this was the case, and as though Slocum had secured some one to help him. Slocum had made a bee-line for the tool-house, and it might be that he had had a confederate waiting for him there, and was intending to run the boys into some sort of a trap.

All this flashed through Motor Matt's brain in the space of a breath. By the time Carl came crashing to his side Matt had canvassed his suspicions and laid a counter-plan.

"Vere iss dot feller, Matt?" panted Carl.

"I think he's gone off through the brush," replied Matt.

"Nix, bard; I bed you dot he has gone indo der leedle house."

"We'll look in the brush first," returned Matt, giving Carl a significant glance and pushing him away toward the rear of the tool-shed.

Matt's talk was all for the benefit of those who might be listening. Carl could not understand his chum's tactics, but he understood very well that he had something important at the back of his head.

As Carl moved off around the rear of the tool-house, Matt proceeded quickly and softly toward the front. Close to the open door he paused.

"They'll get away from us, Ralph!" came to him in an excited whisper.

"No, they won't, Joe!" answered an equally guarded voice. "They'll look around toward the rear of the shed and then they'll come in here. Be ready to down 'em the minute they show up in the doorway. We'll fasten 'em in here and they won't be able to get out until night."

"But if we lose that train——" put in another voice, only to be interrupted by Sercomb's.

"Lose nothing, Balt! The train stops twenty minutes, and we'll get back to the station in good time."

"Gad," muttered the voice of Slocum, "Higgins gave us a hot tip. You ought to've seen those chaps when they set eyes on me. That Dutchman would have eaten me up if I'd let him get close enough."

"I knew they'd chase you," went on Sercomb.

"I don't think we're gaining anything, even at that," struck in the voice of Packard. "We jump off the other train and delay ourselves just to set King back a train."

"Trueman, of the Jarrot Automobile Company, has a car in the race and he's not satisfied with his driver. I don't want King to work in there, and I intend to see Trueman and put one of our boys in his car. If we'd stayed on that other train we'd have reached Ottawa in the night. On this train we'll reach our destination in the morning, and I'll have a chance at Trueman before King shows up. If——"

Matt overheard that much, and his astonishment can perhaps be imagined better than described. Sercomb was plotting, as usual, and not only was he in the tool-shed with Slocum, but Joe Mings and Harry Packard and Balt Finn were there as well.

The talk between the drivers came to a sudden close as Carl, impatient to find out what Matt was doing, ran around the other side of the shed.

Matt started to close the door. It was held open by a stone and resisted his efforts. While he was kicking away the stone those inside the shed scented trouble and made a break for the doorway.

"Don't let them get out, Carl!" shouted Matt. "Keep them in. They laid a trap for us, and we'll spring it on them!"

"Hoop-a-la!" cried Carl, striking out with his fists.

If there was one thing Carl Pretzel loved more than another it was a fight; and now there was not only a chance to have a brisk skirmish with the enemy, but also to turn the tables on them. The Dutch boy's heart was in his work, and he planted one effective blow after another, as fast as he could move his arms.

Matt jumped to his aid. Fists shot out of the doorway only to be countered and beaten back. The opening was wide enough for the passage of a hand-car, but not wide enough for all those in the shed to break through side by side.

Slocum, by the shift of circumstances, was juggled to the front of the struggling drivers. Matt grabbed him and hurled him against those behind. Sercomb and Packard tumbled to the floor with Slocum on top. This left Finn and Mings battling fiercely in the entrance.

Matt launched a blow, straight from the shoulder, that drove Mings back against the inner wall;

then, as Carl sparred with Finn, Matt pulled the door toward him.

"Out of the way, Carl!" Matt shouted.

The Dutch boy slipped aside and Matt slammed the door shut in Finn's face. Finn began to push, calling on the rest of his comrades to bear a hand. Carl, while Matt was tinkering with the heavy hasp and padlock, threw his weight against the door on the outside. Another moment and the padlock was snapped into place, leaving those inside practically helpless.

"Cock-a-tootle-too!" crowed Carl. "How you like dot, you fellers? Dot's vonce, by chincher, you got more as you pargained for, hey? Meppy you vill findt oudt, vone oof tose tays, how Modor Matt does t'ings, yah, I bed you!"

"Let us out of here!" bellowed Sercomb, as frantic fists pounded on the door. "We want to go East on that train."

"So do we," answered Matt, "and you'd have kept us from it if you could. Turn about is fair play, Sercomb. I'll reach Ottawa in time to see this man Trueman, whom you were talking about. Much obliged for the tip. You fellows can follow on the train Carl and I would have had to take in case you had been successful and locked us in there."

"Let us out, King," bawled Mings, "or you'll be sorry you didn't! Take that from me!"

"I've taken a whole lot from you fellows already, Mings," answered Matt, "and I'm getting tired of it. If I can ever catch Slocum he'll tell all about that trickery of his in the Clifton Hotel, or he'll wish he had."

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"Dot's righdt!" put in Carl. "You vas a lot oof schmard Alecs, und pooty kevick you vas going to findt oudt dot it don'd pay to act like vot you dit. Dere iss so many oof you dot you von't be lonesome in dere, und ven you come py Oddawa, Modor Matt und I vill meed you mit der pand. Ach, you vas a fine punch oof grafders!"

The door shook and shivered as those inside the shed hurled themselves against it; but it was strongly put together and the baffled drivers could not break it down or force it open.

Carl, shaking with enjoyment, stood off and watched the door bulge outward and rattle back into place.

Presently the attack ceased.

"Look here, King," called the breathless voice of Sercomb, "if you'll let us out of here we'll agree to quit bothering you. Ain't that fair enough?"

"I'm not making any terms with you, Sercomb," replied Matt. "You're too tricky to be trusted."

Just then the engine bell set up its clangor and, from the distance, came the warning "All aboard!" of the conductor.

"Dot means us, Matt!" cried Carl.

Turning away from the shed the boys dashed through the fringe of bushes and off across the tracks. As they bounded to the station platform the last car of the train was flickering past.

Carl gained the steps of the last car at a flying leap, and Matt was close behind him.

The train rolled eastward, and the boys, leaning across the hand-rail and breathing themselves, watched the little patch of brush and timber encircling the tool-shed fade from sight.

"Be jeerful, eferypody!" jubilated Carl. "Ve missed our preakfast, aber it vas vort' der brice. Hey, Matt?"

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### MATT INTERVIEWS TRUEMAN.

Ottawa is as pretty a little town as there is in all Kansas. The streets are wide, and level, and shaded, and through the town runs the historic Marais des Cygnes, the "river of swans"—so named by the ancient French explorers.

At this time the eyes of the Western automobile world were turned upon that part of Kansas, and representatives of more than a dozen alert motor-car manufacturers were located in Ottawa, all busily preparing for the great race.

Long, lean racing-cars darted through the streets, passing back and forth between the town and Forest Park. From in front of the grand stand in the park the race was to start, describe a fifty-two mile circuit out across the prairie country and return to the race track.

The race was to be six times around the circuit, comprising a total distance of three hundred and twelve miles.

Were the Bly-Lambert people to keep the Borden cup, or would Stark-Frisbie take it away from them?

This was the all-important topic, and was under discussion everywhere. None of the other contestants seemed to be considered. Everybody, from past performances on the Western racing field, seemed to think that no one else had a chance.

Matt and Carl reached Ottawa in the early morning. As soon as they had washed the stains of travel from their faces and eaten their breakfast they sallied forth to take in the situation at close quarters.

Each contestant had a garage of his own. In these garages the racing machines were jealously guarded, and about the cars the mechanics were constantly tinkering, making changes here and there as the experience of the drivers continued to suggest.

Only actual trials over the course could show what was needed and what was superfluous, and since the weight of each car must be limited, great care had to be exercised in making changes.

By inquiring of people they met, the boys learned that the Stark-Frisbie people had their garage across the river, in North Ottawa, while the Bly-Lambert folks were as far away in the other part of town as they could get.

The racing talk was in evidence everywhere, the merits and demerits of the various machines giving cause for many warm arguments. There was something about the talk, the sight of the darting cars, and the general air of suppressed excitement that got into the blood. Carl was bubbling over with enthusiasm, and Matt, stirred as he had never been before, was more than ever determined that he would be in the race.

Twenty-one cars had been entered. Among them were several touring cars, their owners being willing to pay the entrance fee just to gratify their sporting instinct—for no touring car could ever win against those high-powered racers, stripped for action and ready to hurl themselves over the course with every ounce of power in their cylinders.

"Py chimineddy!" expanded Carl, "I vish dot I knowed der carburettor from der shpark-plug. Oof I dit, I bed you I vould be in der racings meinseluf."

Matt's particular desire was to locate Trueman, of the Jarrot Automobile Company. He found him at last in a little private garage belonging to one of the wealthy residents of the place. The door of the garage was wide open, and the nose of a red racer could be seen inside. Excited voices could be heard coming from within the garage.

"Confound your superstitions!" cried an angry voice. "If you happen to walk under a ladder on the day of the race, Glick, I suppose you wouldn't drive for me, eh?"

"I'll be careful about doing that when the race is pulled off, Trueman," returned another voice. "Luck plays the biggest kind of a part in a game like this, and I don't intend to hoodoo myself by taking the car out on Friday. We've already been over the course four times, and what's the use of going over it again to-day?"

"Every time the course is gone over it helps you just that much. Taking the race from Stark-Frisbie and Bly-Lambert is no cinch. We have only one car in the race and they have three each. But this red racer of ours can win, providing you learn the course well enough. Will you go out?"

"I'll go out of the garage and back to the hotel," and a slim, lightly built young fellow came through the doorway, paused to light a cigarette, and then moved off toward the main street.

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A stout man of about forty, in automobile cap and coat, stepped to the door and glared after the retreating driver. He was greatly wrought up, and started to say something but bit the words off short. When the driver reached the sidewalk and vanished nonchalantly around a building, the man in the garage door turned his eyes on Matt and Carl.

"Of all the superstitious fools that ever lived," he cried wrathfully, "I think that man Glick takes the bun. He can handle a car better than any man I ever saw, but here he hangs up our day's work simply because this happens to be Friday!"

"Are you Mr. Trueman, of the Jarrot Company?" asked Matt.

"My name, yes, sir," and Trueman gave Matt a more careful sizing.

"Well, I'm a driver. Why not let me take you over the course?"

Trueman shook his head.

"We were going over it for Glick's benefit," said he, "not mine. Who are you, young man, and where do you come from?"

Matt introduced himself, and presented Carl.

"Have you ever driven a racing-car?" asked Trueman, the boy's bearing and talk impressing him more and more.

"No," replied Matt, "but I'm confident I could do it. I've had a lot to do with gasoline-motors, and I've driven a good many cars."

"Come in here and look at this one," said Trueman. "Properly driven, I'll bet money we have a car that can walk away from anything Stark-Frisbie or Bly-Lambert have in the race."

Matt walked into the garage and looked over the red racer. It was a chain-driven, ninety-horse-power machine, and had the savage "get-there" look of a car that, run to the limit, could be made to win.

"Glick knows how I depend on him," remarked Trueman, "so he does about as he pleases. We're giving him a thousand dollars to make the race, and a bonus of two thousand if he wins. If he doesn't spill the salt, or meet a cross-eyed man, or run into a post, he'll stand up under the strain and acquit himself in good shape."

"I don't want to take any man's job away from him, Mr. Trueman," said Matt, "but if anything happens that Glick doesn't make the race, I'd like a chance to show you what I can do."

But still Trueman shook his head.

"You've never been in a race, King," said he, "and while you may know a car from A to Izzard, yet driving fifteen hundred pounds of machinery to win is an altogether different proposition. However, you might take me out in the racer and let me see what you can do. We won't go over the course, but will ride out south of town. Just a half-hour's spin, that's all."

Matt twisted the crank and was pleased with the quickness with which the cylinders caught the explosion. Trueman had already got into the mechanic's seat, and Matt lost no time in climbing in beside him.

"Wait for me here, Carl," said he, as the racer glided out of the garage.

Unless there is a certain sympathy between the driver and the machine he controls, it is impossible to get out of a car all that is in it. In most cases this bond between driver and car has to be acquired by long and patient practise with the same machine; but, in rare instances, a driver, the instant he places himself at the steering wheel, is able to get completely *en rapport* with the complicated engine under his control. Drivers of this sort are born, not made—and Matt King was one of them.

During that half-hour's spin over the flat country south of Ottawa, Motor Matt aroused Trueman's outspoken admiration. There were stretches where Matt drove at the highest rate of speed, where he rounded dangerous corners with the skill of a master-hand, and the clutch went in and gears were changed so swiftly and smoothly that no jarring note broke the steady humming of the cylinders.

"You're a crack-a-jack!" averred Trueman when they were once more headed through town for the garage; "but going out on a little junket like this is vastly different from racing."

"I don't believe I'd get rattled if there were racing-cars all around me," returned Matt with a quiet laugh.

While the car was being put back in the garage Trueman was silent and thoughtful. When the throb of the machinery was finally stilled, and the two got out of the car, Trueman turned to clap Matt on the shoulder.

"I'm going to keep you in reserve," said he. "If Glick kicks over the traces, and throws up his hands, I may fall back on you as a last resort."

"Meanwhile," returned Matt, "I'm going to be on the look-out for a car. I'm going to be in that race, and if I have a chance you can't blame me for taking it."

"Not at all, not at all. I like your driving, though, and if I was sure you wouldn't lose your head with cars all around you and dust so thick you can't see the bonnet, I don't know but I—" He broke off reflectively. "Well," he finished, "we'll see what happens."

Matt and Carl drifted back through the town. Several cars were just coming in from the circuit, their drivers and mechanics begrimed with dust and oil.

"It vas a gredt game, I bed you!" breathed Carl. "I hope dot der suberstitious feller meeds oop mit a plack cat or somet'ing, so dot you ged his chob, Matt."

"I'm going to race for somebody," answered Matt, "even if I have to go over the course in a touring car. I never had the fever like I've got it now."

"Me, neider," grinned Carl. "Led's go pack to der hodel und hunt for some tinner."

That afternoon the two chums passed quietly on the hotel porch, listening to the racing talk that was going on all around them. It was about five o'clock when a boy came hurriedly to the hotel and disappeared inside the office. A few moments later the clerk came out of the office and gave Matt a letter.

"That's for you, Mr. King," said the clerk. "The boy says he's waiting for your answer."

Matt tore open the letter and read as follows:

"KING: Places were drawn for the start this afternoon, and, as luck (or ill-luck) would have it, I got Number Thirteen. That's the number that goes on the car. Glick refuses to race. Can I depend on you, same terms Glick was to receive? Answer yes or no, quick.

"TRUEMAN."

Motor Matt's heart gave a bound, and a thrill ran through his nerves. Turning to the boy who was standing beside his chair, he cried, "Tell Mr. Trueman he can depend on me, and that my answer is yes!"

At just that moment a party with their grips in their hands were ascending the steps to the porch. [Pg 16]

They were Sercomb, and the others, who had been left in the tool-house in Dodge City. Each of them gave Matt and Carl a sour look as he tramped on into the hotel.

## CHAPTER IX.

NO. 13.

Nothing will rack the nerves of a superstitious man like the number "13." Taking a car out on Friday was as nothing compared to driving a car with such a hoodoo number. Glick had balked, but he did not entertain any hard feelings toward Matt for engaging to drive the car in his stead.

When Matt left the hotel next morning and started for the garage to meet Mr. Trueman, Glick met him and walked part of the distance at his side.

"Maybe you'll think I'm a fool," said he, lighting a cigarette, "and I know Trueman does, but I've seen too much of this Number Thirteen business to have anything to do with a car that's marked up for a dozen and one. That car of Trueman's hasn't a ghost of a show to finish the course, say nothing of making a win. It'll go to smash, and if you're in it you'll go to smash, too. Take my advice and keep away from it."

"The number doesn't bother me," laughed Matt, "and I'm only too glad to get the chance to drive in the race."

"Well," sighed Glick, "I'm sorry for you, King. You won't have any hard feelings toward me if the car puts you in the hospital?"

"Well, I should say not!" exclaimed Matt. "I was afraid you might have it in for me for taking the car."

"Not at all," said Glick heartily. "I admire your nerve, but I think your judgment is mighty poor. I wouldn't get into that car in this race for five thousand dollars."

When Glick left Matt the latter hurried on. Trueman was waiting at the garage, and he caught the lad's hand in a cordial grip.

"Glick went back on me sooner than I had expected," said he. "When he quit, yesterday afternoon, he told me that if the drawing hadn't been on Friday I wouldn't have got Number Thirteen. What an idiot! There are twenty-one cars in the race and some one had to have that number. My hopes are all wrapped up in you, King. If you want a start in the racing business, win the cup for the Jarrot folks."

"If the car has the speed, and no accident happens to the motor, we'll win," declared Matt. "I'll watch the other twenty cars and find out just which ones we have to fear. Now we'll go over the course and begin a practical study of it."

"Where's your Dutch friend?" inquired Trueman as they left the garage.

"He's keeping track of some other friends of mine," laughed Matt, "who would like to sidetrack me and put me out of the running."

Then, as they rode through town, across the bridge and to the park, Matt told of his troubles with Sercomb and his friends, and how trickery had prevented him from getting in the race for the Stark-Frisbie people. Matt felt that Trueman should know all about that phase of the matter, and he went into it in detail. To his surprise Trueman reached over and grabbed his hand.

"You're just the fellow to make a showing in this race, King," said he earnestly, "and, speaking from a selfish point of view, I wouldn't have your personal relations any different. Sercomb is the fellow you'll have to beat, for he's Stark-Frisbie's crack man, and Stark-Frisbie have a car in this race that's going to walk away from all three of Bly-Lambert's. The surest way for you to down Sercomb, and give him his due, is by beating him; it's the only way, too, for you to prove to Colonel Plympton that the deal Sercomb says you made with the Bly-Lambert people is all moonshine. Sercomb has run losing races for the last three years, but this year Plympton has given him a car that's the fastest thing on wheels—excepting our own Number Thirteen."

"If it's in this car, Mr. Trueman," answered Matt with a flash of resolution, "I'll be the first man over the tape at the end of the last round."

Reaching the park and the race track, Matt drove the car to the position from which the start was to be made. Halfway around the track they went to a place where a section of the high board fence had been removed. Here the course led out of the park grounds and struck into a level sweep of road that led toward the river. Where the road turned to follow the river bank a sharp curve had to be negotiated. After that, for some four or five miles, the road wound easily through the trees.

"You may have trouble here, King," said Trueman. "When the dust is thick and racing-cars are ahead and behind you, it would be the easiest thing in the world to swerve a shade too far and butt into a tree."

"We'll have to look out for that," replied Matt, his keen eyes watching every part of the way as they went along.

There was another hard turn where the course left the river road, but from that on there were twenty miles of level prairie, with packed earth like asphalt under the wheels. The car reeled off sixty miles an hour on this stretch, and would hardly have overturned a glass of water placed on the flat top of the hood.

The end of the twenty miles brought them to a village called Le Loup. Here the road bent to the north and east and climbed a long low hill, gradually changing its course to the south. Just over

the hill was a collection of shanties near a coal mine, and known locally by the name of Coal Run.

From Coal Run back to the break in the park fence, the course was south and west, splendid going all the way. When the track was reached Matt let the car out on the way to the starting point. At that place the first accident happened, and the left-hand chain flew off, hurtling through the air for fifty feet and landing in the paddock.

Matt brought the car to a halt without accident, found the chain, brought it back and adjusted it with a fresh link.

"We'll have to get on a new set of chains," frowned Trueman. "An accident like that during the race might put us out of it."

"Accidents are always liable to happen," said Matt. "If they come we'll have to make the best of them."

They went over the course a second time, Matt forcing the car and bringing it in in sixty-five minutes from the start.

"You'll do!" declared Trueman. "I feel a whole lot easier with you in the car than I ever felt with Glick. Now let's go back to the garage. We've done enough for one morning." [Pg 17]

"How many men are there at the garage in charge of the car?" asked Matt.

"Two—the best we have in the St. Louis works."

"You can depend on them?"

"Every time and all the time. Why?"

"The car must be watched night and day, Mr. Trueman," said Matt earnestly, "for there's no telling what Sercomb and his gang might try to do."

"They're not afraid of the Jarrot cars, King," returned Trueman. "We haven't cut much of a figure in these Western races so far."

"Well, you're going to cut a big figure in this race, Mr. Trueman, for it's my opinion you have the car to do it."

For a week after that Matt went over the circuit every morning, studying it thoroughly. Having a retentive memory, he came to know every part of it as he knew his two hands. Sometimes Mr. Trueman went with him, and once Carl went along. But one trip was enough for Carl. The way Matt hurled the car through the air gave the Dutch boy an experience that he never forgot. Carl made up his mind that he'd rather hear the racing talk than take part in the race itself.

In one respect, the Number Thirteen bore out its unlucky significance, for Matt did not make a trial ride around the circuit that something did not go wrong, and several times he averted a bad accident only by his quickness and presence of mind.

On one ride the feed-pipe between the gasoline-tank and the carburetor became clogged, and he had to disconnect it and clean it; another time a tire blew up; and again, it was the chain, once more flying off and missing his head by an uncomfortably narrow margin. The car certainly seemed to be working through a very severe case of "hoodoo."

Mr. Trueman was vastly exercised over these mishaps. He was beginning to feel as though there was something radically wrong about the car's construction, and that its chance of running well in the race, say nothing of winning, was decreasing to the vanishing point.

But Matt was not greatly disturbed.

"We're having all our troubles during the trials, Mr. Trueman," he explained, "and when the race comes we'll go over the course the six times without a hitch. Stage people say that when the last dress rehearsal goes badly the first performance is always sure to go smoothly."

Although Trueman admired Matt's spirit, for his own part he still continued dubious.

During Matt's week of hard, gruelling work, fortune was kind to him in one respect, for Sercomb and his friends left him severely alone. For one thing, every driver in the race had his hands full and found no time to give attention to anything else.

Sercomb, Mings, and Packard, driving Stark-Frisbie machines, had a friendly rivalry among themselves. Each wanted to drive his car to victory for the bonus which the victor was to receive, and they were attending strictly to business and learning all the ins and outs of the course. Their dislike of Matt and their desire to get the better of him seemed to be thrust aside by the weightier affairs connected with the race.

Several times, while he was going around the course, Matt either passed or was passed by one or the other of his enemies, but each and all of them ignored him completely.

Matt was well content to let the matter rest in that way.

Nearly every time Sercomb, Mings or Packard passed him, Matt was tinkering with the Jarrot car. The Stark-Frisbie drivers wrapped him in their dust and must have chuckled over the difficulties in which he found himself.

The day of the race was set for Tuesday. Saturday night Matt came in wearily from the garage, washed the grime of dust and oil from his face and hands, talked a few moments with Carl, and went up to bed.

Half an hour later he rang for a pitcher of water. Carl was lounging around the office when the

bellboy carried the pitcher upstairs. Had Carl dreamed what was to happen to Matt because of that innocent little supply of drinking-water, he would have taken the pitcher from the boy and carried it up himself.

Motor Matt's enemies were not ignoring him entirely. They were staying at the same hotel, and, as Carl sized the situation up afterward, they were staying there for the purpose which they finally accomplished. That their evil designs did not keep Matt out of the race was because they overreached themselves by hastening the nefarious plot. Had they waited just a few hours longer, the great race for the Borden cup would have had an altogether different termination.

Nevertheless, the blow, when it fell, came with amazing suddenness; and it seemed so completely successful, and the hand dealing it was so cunningly hidden, that Carl was as deeply bewildered as he was filled with despair.

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## CHAPTER X.

### WHERE IS MOTOR MATT?

Matt and Carl did not occupy the same apartment in the hotel. Their rooms were adjoining, but there was no means of communication between them save by way of the hall.

On the night the mystifying event happened, Carl went up to his room a few minutes after Matt had sent down for the ice water. He tried Matt's door, but it was locked. In answer to his rap Matt called out a cheery good-night, and Carl went on to his own quarters and tumbled into bed.

The ringing of the breakfast bell always got Carl up on the jump. With the morning, he was up with the first beat of the clapper and scrambling into his clothes.

As he passed Matt's room on his way down he tried the door. Usually Matt left the door ajar when he went to breakfast, but this morning it was closed. Carl found it locked. He was about to rap and get his chum up, when he thought how tired he must have been the night before, and turned away.

"Matt has been vorking like a horse," he said to himself, "und he has der righdt to shleep a leedle late on Suntay morning. I von't make some disturpances mit him. Ven he gedts t'roo snoozing he vill come down."

Carl ate his breakfast, missing his chum sadly during the meal. Across from him at the table sat a young fellow who seemed to be a newcomer—at least, Carl had never seen him about the hotel before.

He had a freckled face and red hair, and the clothes he wore were almost painfully new. He ate slowly and seemed to be watching the chair in which Matt usually sat. [Pg 18]

"For vy you look like dot at der blace next py me?" inquired Carl curiously. "You don'd got a mortgage on it, meppy?"

The red-headed boy grinned.

"Mebby not, Tow-head," said he, "but here's a chance for you to put me wise."

"Ret-head yourseluf!" returned Carl. "Vat I pud you vise aboutt?"

"Why, by letting me know whether that chair is the one usually occupied by Matt King, the three-ply wonder of the racing world who is sometimes called Motor Matt?"

Carl braced up in his chair and glowered.

"Vas you making some chokes?" he demanded. "I skelp anypody vat makes some chokes aboutt Modor Matt."

"So will I. Why, Matt used to be my pard."

"Iss dot so?" queried Carl, softening. "Vell, he iss my bard yet. Ah, ha! Vat iss der name vat you go by?"

"Mark McReady, otherwise Reddy McReady, otherwise just plain Chub."

Carl gurgled delightedly, let go his knife and fork and reached over the top of the castor to grab Chub McReady's hand.

"Ach, vat a habbiness!" he beamed. "Matt shpeaks many dimes aboutt you! Yah, py shiminy, he dell me all aboutt vat you dit mit each odder in Arizona. Der lapel vat I tote iss Carl Pretzel. Don'd you know somet'ing aboutt me?"

"Well, Je-ru-sa-lem!" grinned Chub. "Say, I guess I *have* heard about you. The last letter I got from Matt had a long spiel about some work you and he did down near Lamy, New Mexico. Didn't Matt get a letter from me in Denver?"

"Nix, und he don'd got any ledder from dere here, vich vas forwardet. You wride him, hey?"

"Sure, I wrote him. Told him dad was going to Chicago to close a deal for his mine, and that Little Chub was going to trail along, drop off at Ottawa and see the big race. Matt's in it, eh? Had a notion he would be; and I'll bet a button against a last year's bird's nest that he *wins!*"

"I'll bed more as dot!" chuckled Carl, tickled out of his shoes to find some one who liked Matt as

well as he did. "Say," he babbled, "I peen glad as plazes, Chub, dot you habbened aroundt."

"So am I; but where the nation is Matt? I can hardly wait till I grab hold of him and give his fist a shake."

"He was schnoozing mit himseluf," answered Carl. "He has peen vorking like der tickens und I bed you he was dired. Oof you haf got t'roo mit your preakfast, vy nod walk oop to his room mit me? He vill be so habby as I don'd know ven he findts oudt dot you vas here."

"Go you!" and Chub pushed back from the table and got up.

Together the two boys left the dining-room, passed through the office and climbed the stairs. Carl was cackling to himself all the way up the flight, for he knew how surprised Matt would be and how mightily pleased to meet his old friend, Chub.

The door was still closed. Carl listened to see if he could hear Matt moving around.

"Der olt maferick iss shleeping like a house afire dis morning," chuckled Carl. "Now I vake him," and he pounded on the door.

The emphatic summons brought no answer.

"Meppyso I pedder ged a cannon," giggled Carl. "He iss shleeping his olt headt off."

"He never used to pound his ear like that," remarked Chub.

"He nefed got so tired in Arizony like he dit in Gansas," Carl explained, rattling at the door in a way that would have wakened the occupant of every room on that floor.

But still there was no response from Matt. Carl began to get alarmed.

"Maybe he locked the door and went out?" suggested Chub.

"Der fairst blace he vould go vould be to preakfast," returned Carl, "und he don'd vas dere. Der madder is somet'ing to be infestigated. You peen as t'ick t'roo as me, so I don'd guess ve eider oof us couldt ged t'roo der dransom; aber ve can look t'roo, anyvay. I got some feelings dot dere has somet'ing gone crossvays. Vat it iss I don'd know, aber, py shinks, ve find it oudt."

Carl went for a chair that was standing farther along the hall, placed it in front of the door, climbed up and peered through the open transom.

"Donnervetter!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Now vat do you t'ink oof dot!"

"What's to pay?" asked Chub.

"He don'd vas dere."

"Well, that proves what I said a moment ago, that he has gone out."

"Vy, der ped don'd vas shlept in lasdt night! How you aggount for dot?"

"Why, he may not have been here last night, Carl."

"Yah, so! Ditn't I say goot-night mit him ven I vent to ped mineseluf? Yah, so helup me! I vonder vat's oop?"

"We'll probably find him downstairs," said Chub.

"I got some hunches dot dere iss a nigger in der vood-pile," declared Carl, climbing down from the chair, his face full of apprehension. "It don'd vas like Matt to pull oudt like dot. Ve go downshdairs und make some questions aboutt it."

On their way down they met the bellboy coming up.

"Say, vonce!" said Carl, catching the boy's arm, "haf you seen Modor Matt dis morning yet?"

"Naw," answered the youngster; "mebby he hasn't got up."

"He ain'd in der room, und der door iss locked."

"Then he's hiked out some'rs."

"He vonldn't do dot. Vat habbened ven you dook oop der vater lasdt night?"

"What happened? Why, I met that Slocum feller on the way, an' he wanted to know if I was takin' the pitcher to Sercomb's room. We gassed for a minit er two an' he gave me a quarter to go right back down and see if there was any mail for him. He asked me to do it before I gave the pitcher to Motor Matt. There wasn't any mail. When I came back, I picked up the pitcher and went on. Motor Matt took it in—and that's all there was to it."

"Dot looks like a lod oof monkey-doodle pitzness for nodding," muttered Carl. "Vere does der night clerk shleep?"

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"In that room at the end of the hall."

The bellboy went on, and Carl turned and started back up the stairs.

"What are you going to see the night clerk for, Carl?" inquired Chub.

"Vell, Matt ditn't shleep in der ped, und dot means he ditn't shday in der room. I vant to ask der night clerk oof he vent oudt."

The night clerk answered their summons in a sleepy voice and opened the door.

"Dit you see Modor Matt leaf der hodel lasdt night?" asked Carl.



"Yes," was the astonishing reply, "he went out about midnight and took his grip with him. Looked like he was going away."

"For vy shouldt he go away?" gasped Carl. "He vas in der race, und he wouldn't leaf town on a bet, schust now."

"I thought it was mighty funny," said the clerk. "He didn't say a word about paying his bill, or where he was going, or anything else. I called to him and asked if he was going to make a trip somewhere, and he turned around and stared at me. He didn't seem to know what he was doing. He never said a word, but went on out."

"Ach, himmelblitzen!" muttered Carl, rubbing a dazed hand over his eyes. "Wouldn't dot knock you shlap-sitet? Vent away! Modor Matt vent away und nefer say nodding mit me aboutt it! Dere iss something wrong, you ped you!"

"I didn't know whether I ought to tell you or not, Carl," went on the clerk. "These racing folks are coming and going all the time, and, for the most part, they're a queer lot. Motor Matt, somehow, seemed different, but last night I hadn't a notion what was bothering him and I didn't want to pry into his business. Supposed he knew what he was up to. Why don't you go and see Trueman? He may be able to tell you something."

"Who's Trueman?" asked Chub.

"He iss der feller Matt iss triving der car for in der race," replied Carl. "Meppy ve pedder go und shbeak mit him."

The clerk drew back into his room, and Carl and Chub started along the hall toward the stairs. When they were about halfway down the hall a door opened as they were passing it and Slocum showed himself.

There was a guilty look on his face—or so it seemed to Carl—and before he could draw back Carl had leaped at him and grabbed him by the shoulder.

Slocum muttered an oath, and one hand darted toward his hip. When the hand reappeared from under his long coat it held a revolver.

"Oh, that's your game, is it?" cried Chub.

The next moment he had grabbed the hand holding the revolver, and he and Carl, between them, had pushed Slocum back into the room.

With a quick move Chub wrenched the weapon out of Slocum's hand and trained it on him.

"That'll do for you," said he menacingly. "Now sit down and get peaceable. Carl, here, has got somethin' he wants to say."

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## CHAPTER XI.

### RUNNING DOWN A CLUE.

Chub McReady had no very clear idea why Carl was displaying so much hostility toward Slocum. The bell-boy had mentioned Slocum's name in connection with carrying the pitcher of water to Matt's room, and Chub supposed Carl was to do some questioning along that line. The drawing of the revolver not only surprised Chub, but led him to believe that Slocum had a guilty conscience and was ready to go any length in defending himself.

"This is an infernal outrage, by gad!" cried Slocum. "What do you young ruffians mean by setting upon me like that?"

As he spoke he picked up a newspaper and threw it over the table. It was an odd move for a man to make at such a time.

"Vat do you mean py making some moofs mit a gun?" demanded Carl.

"Why, you pie-faced Dutchman, why shouldn't I pull a gun when I'm set upon like that? I was just leaving my room to go down to breakfast when you began to climb all over me. What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"Pie-face!" gasped Carl; "you call me dot! Py chincer, you haf got a face like some hedge fences, und you haf a heart vat iss so plack und dricky as I can't dell. Vat you do ven you meed der poy pringing some vater py Modor Matt's room lasdt nighdt? Tell me dot!"

"Do? I sent him down to see if there was any mail for me. What business is that of yours, anyway? Give me that gun and get out of here, both of you!"

Slocum gave the paper another hitch on the table. Chub was already guessing about the moves he had made with that paper, and what he saw now brought his guessing to the suspecting stage. Stepping to the table, he cast the paper aside. A small bottle, half-full of some drug, lay on the table. Slocum, with a quick sweep of his hand grabbed the bottle away.

"He's got somet'ing he don'd vant us to see!" exclaimed Carl.

"I'm next to that, all right," said Chub. "Put it back on the table, Slocum," he added sharply. "Don't be a mutt. I'm from Arizona, and we don't speak twice when we back up our first talk with a gun."

"This is my property!" faltered Slocum, peering shiftily into Chub's steady eyes.

"You're so blamed careful of it that I'd about made up my mind it belonged to you. Anyhow, drop it on the table. Last call!"

Slocum laid the bottle down.

"By gad," he blustered, "somebody'll pay for this!"

"Look out it ain't you," grinned Chub. "Pick it up, Carl, and we'll take it down to the office, where we can look it over."

"Take that away from here," fumed Slocum, "and I'll——"

As Carl picked up the bottle Slocum made a grab at him.

"Steady!" warned Chub. "Now duck, Carl. We've found out all we can in this place."

With the bottle in his hand Carl walked out of the room. Chub backed out. Taking the key out of the door, he dropped the revolver on the carpet, jumped into the hall, slammed the door and locked it on the outside.

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"That's to give him a chance to get over his mad spell before he tried to shoot," Chub grinned as he rejoined Carl and they took their way down-stairs.

"You don'd know aboutt dot feller und Matt," said Carl, "und I vill dell you. Den you vill know vat I know und ve can guess oudt der resdt togedder."

They went out on the porch and took a couple of chairs; then Carl told how Slocum had called on Matt, in Denver, claimed he was Colonel Plympton and, by trickery, got him to sign a paper that had lost him the opportunity of driving a car for the Stark-Frisbie Company.

Chub scowled.

"I sized him up for bein' pretty low-down," said he, "but I hadn't any notion he'd pull off a trick like that. What did he do it for?"

Carl went on with an account of the doings of Sercomb and his gang. Chub's wrath had been mounting by swift degrees.

"That's a fine lay-out!" he growled savagely. "The gang has done something to Matt, that's a cinch. But what? Matt goes off by himself, bag and baggage, at midnight, looking like he was locoed. Queerest thing I ever heard of!"

Before Carl could make any comment, Mr. Trueman came up the porch steps and started toward him.

"Matt was to meet me at the garage this morning at eight o'clock," said he, "and we were to talk over some important matters. Why didn't he come, Carl?"

"Dot's vat ve don'd know, Misder Drooman," answered Carl gloomily. "Modor Matt don'd been aroundt der hodel since mitnighdt."

Trueman stood as though stunned.

"Matt hasn't been at the hotel since midnight?" he repeated blankly.

"Dot's vat's der madder. Dere has been some keveer pitzness going on in dis blace, you bed my life, und vere Matt iss ve don'd know."

Trueman drew a handkerchief from his pocket and passed it across his face; then he dropped into a chair.

"If anything has happened to King, now," said he, "it will be pretty nearly the last straw. Tell me all about this thing—give me the whole of it, and be as quick as you can."

Between them Carl and Chub contrived to give Trueman a fairly lucid idea of what they had done and what they had discovered.

Trueman, an ominous frown on his face, took the bottle which Carl had brought away from Slocum's room. The label contained but the two words, "*Cannibis indica*."

"It's a drug of some sort," he muttered, holding the bottle up between his eyes and the light and shaking it. "Matt has told me all about Slocum's double dealing, and how the fellow is working with Sercomb and his gang. Do you suppose Slocum merely sent the bellboy down after the mail for a bluff?"

"Bluff!" echoed Chub. "What kind of a bluff?"

"Why, so he'd be alone with the pitcher of water long enough to empty some of the contents of this bottle into it."

Carl and Chub were astounded.

"Dot's vat he dit, und I bed you anyt'ing vat I got!" cried Carl.

"He doped Matt's drinking-water," averred Chub, "and that's the straight of it. I move we go upstairs and lay the tin-horn by the heels. If he's doing that sort of business he ought to be in the calaboose."

"We'll go up and have a talk with him," said Trueman. "Unless he can give a good explanation of what this bottle of stuff is for, we'll walk him over to the jail and land him behind the bars."

A hurried trip was made to the second floor, but Trueman and the boys were too late. Slocum had got someone to open the door for him and he was gone.

"Ach, plazes!" said Carl angrily; "ve ought to haf pud some ropes on him so dot he couldn't ged away. Dot's vere ve vas lame, Chub. Now how ve going to findt oudt vere iss Modor Matt?"

"Slocum, guilty or innocent, wouldn't be able to help us find Matt," spoke up Trueman. "The thing for us to do is to hunt up a doctor and find out just what effect this *cannibis indica* has on a person. It may be that we're on the wrong track entirely."

There was a doctor in the office building next the hotel. His name was Davis. He was an old doctor, but a knowing one.

"*Cannibis indica*," said he, "is a drug that has a very powerful effect upon the brain. It is not dangerous if taken in a small amount. A small dose of it would not induce a state of lethargy, but would be more apt to unhinge a person's mind and cause him to do things of which he would have no remembrance when the effect wore away."

"How long would the effect last?" asked Trueman anxiously.

"That would depend altogether upon the amount that was taken. In this case, two or three days, perhaps."

When Trueman and the boys left the doctor's office the mystery was cleared as to the cause of Matt's sudden departure, but was as deep as ever concerning his present whereabouts.

"For several days," said Trueman, "Matt's enemies have held back. I suppose they planned this thing so as to work it at just the right time to keep Matt out of the race. If he doesn't get back here before long I'll raise Cain with the scoundrels who had a hand in the work. I'm going to see the authorities and have them telegraph and telephone to the surrounding towns. While I'm busy about that, you boys return to the hotel, get a duplicate key of the room, and take the pitcher of water you find there over to Dr. Davis. Ask him to find out if any of the *cannibis indica* was mixed with it. I'm fairly positive as to what his answer will be, but this is a case where we've got to be sure of every step."

By noon the telegraph and telephone had carried their alarm into the neighboring country. The town was being searched, not only for Matt, but also for Slocum. Dr. Davis had declared that the water in the pitcher had contained a strong solution of the drug. Circumstantial evidence connected Slocum with the administering of the drug so that there was not the least shadow of a doubt.

But Slocum could not be located; and neither could Matt. An afternoon of miserable anxiety passed for Carl and Chub, to be followed by a no less miserable and uneventful night.

Monday, the day before the great race, came, bringing crowds of people by every train—but Motor Matt was not among them.

Carl, as Chub expressed it, had "gone off the jump" entirely; and Chub himself was not much better off. [Pg 21]

Trueman, grimly resenting what had happened to his driver, was firmly determined, if Matt did not present himself before the race was started, to arrest every one of the Stark-Frisbie drivers.

If the Jarrot car was to be kept out of the race for lack of a driver, Trueman would see to it that some of the other cars were left in like condition. In levelling their contemptible plot against Motor Matt, the guilty drivers would find that they had launched a boomerang.

This was the condition of affairs up to midnight, Monday night, and the first of the racers was to be started at eight sharp, Tuesday morning.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### FORTY-EIGHT HOURS OF DARKNESS.

Motor Matt had never felt in better spirits, worn and weary though he was, than when he had climbed the stairs to his room that Saturday evening. He had gone over the course three times that day, and the cylinders of the Number Thirteen had pulled nobly. There had been a little tire trouble during the first two rounds, but nothing had gone wrong on the last circuit, and Trueman had held the watch on him. He had done the fifty-two miles in less than an hour.

"You'll improve on that," Trueman had said, "when you've got a man in front of you to overhaul. There'll be twelve ahead of you at the start, and among the twelve will be two of the fast Stark-Frisbie cars and one of the Bly-Lambert machines as pacemakers."

Matt was well pleased with the prospect. Every car entered for the race had passed under his scrutiny, and he felt positive the chance for the Number Thirteen to win was excellent.

Sitting in a comfortable chair in his room, he rang for his ice-water and fell to going over the course of the race in his mind. Every foot of the road was plainly mapped before him.

The water came and he took a long drink. Perhaps the very chill of it served to disguise the slightly astringent taste caused by the drug. At any rate, he did not notice that anything was wrong.

Carl came by, rapped on the door and said good-night. While Matt listened, Carl's feet seemed to go on and on along the hall interminably. It was a queer delusion, and Matt shook back his shoulders and laughed softly.

"I mustn't let this race get on my nerves so much," he said to himself. "Nerves are bad things for a racing-driver. I'm tired out, and I guess I'll turn in."

He started toward the bed, and that was the last thing he remembered for some time.

When he came to himself he saw glittering little lights above him. At first he thought he was dreaming, and sat up, rubbing his eyes.

Even then he thought he was dreaming, his surroundings were so different from what they should have been—from what he had every reason to expect them to be.

The lights far over his head were stars—or seemed to be stars. He was out-doors, and had been lying on a heap of straw at the bottom of a stack. On his right was a large barn, and beyond the barn were the shadowy outlines of a house.

These odd discoveries confused and bewildered Matt. What sort of witchcraft was here? A moment before, as he reckoned the time, he had started for bed in his room at the hotel. Now he woke up in a heap of straw, out of doors and apparently on somebody's farm.

Staggering to his feet, he leaned heavily against the side of the straw-stack and drummed his knuckles against his forehead. A horrible illusion gradually took hold of him. Had he been in an accident with the racing-car? Was he just recovering from the effects of a bad smash?

His brain seemed a bit hazy, but otherwise he appeared to be as well as ever. Stepping away from the stack, with the view of making further investigations, he stumbled over something. Picking up the object, he found it to be his satchel.

This added a further mystery to his situation. He had evidently left the hotel with the intention of going somewhere to stay for a while.

In the dim light his satchel looked frayed and worn, as though it had seen hard usage. His clothes, too, from what he could see of them, offered the same evidence of wear and tear.

"Well, great guns!" he muttered. "I wish somebody would kindly explain how I came to be here! And while the explaining is going on, I wish somebody would let me know whether I am really Matt King or another fellow. This would read like a page out of the 'Thousand and One Nights.' I'll just go up to the house and ask where I am."

The next moment he changed his mind about going to that particular house. A vicious bulldog rushed out at him, and he got over a near-by fence with more haste than grace. Picking up a stone, he drove the dog back, then stepped off toward another house which he could see in the dim distance.

All the while he was moving about, his mind was grappling with the situation—and carrying him nowhere. Had his mind been unbalanced? Had he lost his reason in some strange manner and only just recovered it?

This was a terrible thought, but it was the only explanation that occurred to Matt.

There was no dog at the next house, and he walked up to the front door and rapped loudly. A long time elapsed, and then a window was thrown open in the second story and a head was poked out.

"Who in the name o' goodness is bangin' at my front door at this time o' night?" demanded a fretful voice.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," answered Matt, "but I've lost my way and would like you to tell me how far I am from Ottawa."

"Ottawa?" returned the voice. "Well, you're twenty miles from Ottawa, an' four miles from Lawrence."

"Twenty—miles!" gasped Matt.

"That's it. Lawrence is right ahead over that hill yonder. It's purty dark, but I guess that hill's plain enough. Anythin' else I can tell you? Now I'm up I might as well tell you all you want to know."

"What time is it?" asked Matt in a subdued voice.

"Goin' on four o'clock in the mornin'."

"What morning? Sunday?"

"Say, but you're dumb! Tuesday morning—the day of the race at Ottawa. My boy Joe went down yesterday to see it—all dumb foolishness, too, as I told him. Them automobiles'll go by so tarnation fast he won't be able to see 'em. Jest a-buzzin' like a swarm o' bees, a whiff of gasoline, an' that's all."

Matt was so astounded that he heard little of what the farmer had been saying. He had gone to bed in Ottawa on Saturday night, and here it was four o'clock Tuesday morning and he was four miles from Lawrence. He had been plunged in oblivion for forty-eight hours—but *how*, and *why*?

"Hey, down there!" shouted the farmer. "You gone to sleep?"

"No," called back Matt, recovering himself with a start; "do you want to make ten dollars, friend?"

"How?" asked the man suspiciously.

"By hitching up and driving me to Ottawa."

"Sho! That's a heap o' money to spend for a ride. Why, you can walk to Lawrence and ketch a train. Then t'll only cost you fifty cents to get to Ottawa."

"Can I get a train between now and seven o'clock?"

"I head one whistlin' every mornin' about six-thirty or seven, but whether it's goin' or comin' from Ottawa I don't know. Anyhow, I couldn't leave. My boy's away an' I got to stay home an' do the work."

"All right," said Matt; "much obliged."

"Sure you ain't from the Ossawatomie Insane Asylum? You talk kinder queer, seems like."

"I don't know but I ought to be in Ossawatomie," answered Matt as he started off down the road.

The window closed with a bang.

"Well," murmured Matt, striding along the road toward the hill, "what do you think of that! I've lost two whole days—haven't a notion what I've been doing in all that time. Wonder what's been going on in Ottawa? I was to meet Trueman Sunday morning for a talk. What'll he think? And Carl! Great Scott! I wonder if they'll get the idea I've run away? The race starts at eight o'clock, and I'll have less than four hours to get to Ottawa! What if I can't catch a train?"

The possibility of missing the race bothered him more than the cause of his predicament.

As he strode along the quiet country highway the cool night air beat against his face and freshened his wits. He began wondering if Sercomb and his gang hadn't had something to do with his mysterious departure from Ottawa? That was the only way he could account for what had happened.

A steely resolution arose in his breast. He would get to Ottawa, and he would get there in time to drive the Jarrot car. If Sercomb had plotted against him, then he would beat the scoundrel at his own game.

It was nearly five o'clock when Matt reached the Lawrence railroad station. There was no train to Ottawa, the nightman told him, until half-past nine in the morning—neither passenger nor freight.

Matt was dumfounded.

"I was told that there was a train at six-thirty, or seven," said he.

"Sure," answered the nightman, "but it goes the other way."

"This is tough luck!" exclaimed Matt. "You see," he explained, "I'm to drive a car in that race this morning, and the first car starts off at eight. My car is Number Thirteen. There's a two-minute interval between each car, and that starts me about twenty-four minutes after eight. How far is Ottawa from here?"

"Twenty-four miles."

"Any way I can get there in time for the race?"

"You couldn't get there with a horse an' buggy, that's sure. There's a gasoline speeder in the shed, and the track-inspector sleeps on t'other side the yards in Hooligan's boarding house. You might get the inspector to take you down."

Here was a ray of hope. Matt inquired hastily how to find Hooligan's place, and set out to get the inspector. He was an hour getting the man, and another half-hour getting him to agree to run the speeder to Ottawa. Matt had to promise the inspector twenty-five dollars for making the trip. Another half-hour was lost filling the speeder's tank and getting the machine ready for the road, and the sun was rising before they chugged off along the glimmering rails.

The motor had a chronic habit of misfiring, and there were numberless stops ranging in length from one minute to ten while the machinery was tinkered with.

The entrance to Forest Park was not more than a stone's throw from the railroad track, and as the speeder came close to the town Matt saw the first car leap through the gap in the fence and bear away in the direction of the river road.

It was Number One, a Stark-Frisbie car, with Joe Mings at the steering-wheel!

Matt had twenty minutes, perhaps, left him for getting to the track.

Throwing himself from the speeder at the point nearest the entrance to the park, he flung wildly away through the press of vehicles and pedestrians.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### AT THE LAST MINUTE.

At midnight, Monday night, the police of Ottawa arrested a man who was trying to get out of town on a freight train. The man was Slocum.

Slocum was taken immediately to jail. His nerve had entirely failed him and he was in a pitiable state of collapse. He admitted his guilt in the matter of Motor Matt's disappearance, and offered to make a confession providing no legal steps were taken in his case and he was allowed to go free.

Trueman was sent for; also the district attorney. Both recognized that Slocum was only a tool, and in order to get at those who were more culpable it was agreed to accept his sworn confession and to release him in case it developed that no harm had befallen Motor Matt.

Slocum's confession implicated indirectly every member of the Drivers' Club, but had most to do with Sercomb, Mings, and Packard, and held up Sercomb as the ringleader.

It was Sercomb who had prepared the two typewritten papers—one for Matt to *read* and the other for him to *sign*—which Slocum had juggled with so successfully in the Denver hotel; and it was Sercomb who had paid Slocum's fare and expenses to Kansas in order that, at the right moment, he might administer the *cannibis indica*.

On the basis of this confession, a warrant was issued for Sercomb but was to be held back and not served until just before he was to get away in the race. Also the whole matter dealing with Slocum's arrest and confession was kept a secret so that the arrest and removing from the contest of Stark-Frisbie's crack racer might be successfully accomplished.

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This work of the police filled Trueman with a negative satisfaction. It did not help him out of his own particular difficulty for he was still minus a driver.

Chub who was so worked up over Matt's disappearance and his helplessness in doing anything to find him that he could not keep down his impatience and restlessness, offered to drive the car in Matt's place, or to ride as mechanic with whoever did drive it. Chub had taken lessons from Matt in driving a motor-car, and he had always been wonderfully handy about machinery.

Trueman, however, had made up his mind to drive the car himself, but he was glad to have Chub along to attend to the various duties of *mecanicien*.

While Chub had thus found something to do to take his mind temporarily away from Matt, Carl was in different condition. He moped around the hotel, filled with gloom and discouragement and waiting hopelessly for news.

The town was filled with an enthusiastic mob of people, and the only thing that was talked about, or thought about, was race, race, race! But Carl had lost interest in the race now that it seemed certain Matt was out of it. Chub had all he could do to get Carl to go to the Park when he and Trueman took out the red racer.

"Vat's der use oof going any blace or doing anyt'ing?" said Carl dejectedly. "Matt vas down und oudt mit a dope und life don'd vas vort' der lifing. Vell, meppy I go along mit you, Chub. I got to be somevere."

Although Trueman was a terribly disappointed man, and expected only to finish the course, and had no thought of winning, he made his preparations with as much care as though Matt was to be at the steering-wheel and perhaps drive No. 13 to victory. New tires and new chains were put on, and the hundred and one little things always demanded by a big race were attended to.

The grand stand at the Park was choked with people. Overflowing the seats, the throng packed itself densely along the fences on both sides of the race-track. But the crowds were not confined to the Ottawa end of the course. Over its whole extent from the Park to Le Loup, from Le Loup to Coal Run, and from Coal Run back to the Park again, the circuit was lined with people. They came from the contiguous country in wagons, from various parts of the state in automobiles, and from all over the West by train. The sportsman instinct animated the majority of them, and others had a morbid interest in an affair that might be filled with wreck and tragedy.

Mounted officers patrolled the circuit and kept the crowd back of the danger line.

Each car's weight, with tanks empty, was limited to fifteen hundred pounds. The weighing-in was going forward when Trueman, Chub, and Carl reached the track. The owners of cars that were overweight had to do some more stripping while those that were under the limit found that they could take aboard some necessary appliances of which they were quick to avail themselves.

Mr. Borden, the gray-haired patron of the race, was in evidence here and there about the grounds. It was the first of the races, for which he stood sponsor, ever run in the vicinity of his home town, and he was as pleased as a four-year-old with a tin whistle.

Colonel Plympton was prominently in the public eye, mingling with the Stark-Frisbie drivers and mechanics and giving personal attention to every car. Lambert, of the rival concern, was filling a corresponding position with his own cars and drivers. Many other firms had their representatives on the spot.

The first car to start was a Stark-Frisbie, 70-h.-p., with Joe Mings at the wheel. It got away in a perfect bedlam of cheers.

Two minutes later, car Number Two with Patsy Grier driving for Bly-Lambert, was sent from the tape. It shot away like a streak, and was through the gap in the fence and bound for the river before the wild yelling had died away.

Next came three touring-cars, driven by local celebrities, all out for a good time and caring little about the race.

Then came a No. 6 Bly-Lambert with Balt Finn up, then another touring-car, then a little 40-horse

racer, then a No. 9 Stark-Frisbie, Packard driving.

As Packard got away, a wild-eyed, disheveled youth shot through the crowd lining the track and broke into the banked racers that were waiting for the start.

"Mr. Trueman! Out of there, quick! Give me your racing clothes."

Trueman and Chub, sitting in the No. 13 and gloomily awaiting the word to come forward for the start, nearly jumped from their seats.

"Matt!" gasped Trueman.

His face cleared as if by magic. There was no time for explanations—no time for anything but to attend to the business immediately in hand.

"Hooray!" cried Chub. "How are you, pard?"

Matt stopped and stared as he got into the gear Trueman was throwing at him.

"Chub!" he exclaimed. "Well, this *is* a surprise! I've been having a lot of surprises lately."

"We've found out all about what happened," said Trueman. "Slocum doped you. He tried to get away but was caught and has made a confession. On the basis of that confession a warrant is out for Sercomb, and he will be arrested and taken from his car before he starts."

Matt's eyes drifted through the parked automobiles until they rested on the driver of No. 19. Through his goggles the driver was staring at Matt. It was Sercomb, and Motor Matt's appearance evidently astounded him.

"Don't arrest him, Mr. Trueman, until the race is over," said Matt.

"But—"

"I mean it! Let's make this a clean race and a clean win. It will be better for the Jarrot people, better for me, better for everybody."

"Well, if you insist—"

"I do insist. That's the way I want it."

Matt climbed into the low-hung body of the car and lost himself to the head and shoulders in the driver's seat. The starter was looking toward them and throwing up his hand. Trueman jumped to "turn over" the engine, and Matt made for the starting tape.

In spite of cap and goggles some of those in the grandstand recognized Matt. They were those who had seen him working like a Trojan over the circuit for a week, who had heard about his mysterious disappearance, and who now welcomed his return with hearty cheers.

Matt got away in grand style, whisked around the track and darted through the break in the fence. [Pg 24]

As soon as Sercomb, in the last Stark-Frisbie car, had started, Plympton went over to where Trueman was standing.

"I'm glad King got back," said the colonel. "His disappearance had an ugly look."

"It still has an ugly look, Plympton," returned Trueman.

"Of course! But King's all right. That's the main point."

"It's a good thing for you that he got back," went on Trueman.

"I don't see how you figure that. If what I hear of him is true, he's a star-driver. It isn't a good thing for us to have star-drivers running cars against us."

"But for King, Plympton, one of your crack men would have been out of this race."

"What do you mean, Trueman?" asked the colonel curiously.

"Do you see that sandy-whiskered man over there?" asked Trueman, pointing.

"Yes."

"Well, he's an officer in plain-clothes. In his pocket he has a warrant for Sercomb's arrest. He'd have served the warrant and taken Sercomb out of the race if King hadn't said No."

"A put-up job, eh, to get rid of our best man!" scowled Plympton.

"No put-up job about it," answered Trueman. "Sercomb was responsible for the hoccussing of King."

"Come, come!" growled Plympton angrily. "You've got too much sense, Trueman, to take any stock in such a yarn as that."

"Have I? Well, read this over and then tell me how much stock you take in it."

With that, he handed Slocum's confession to Plympton. The latter read it with consternation in his face.

"It seems incredible!" he muttered, as he passed the paper back. "Whether he wins or loses, this is Sercomb's last race for Stark-Frisbie."

"I thought so!" chuckled Trueman, returning the document to his pocket.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE FIRST HALF OF THE RACE.

Motor Matt had made up his mind, before starting, that he would take the first round steadily and easily. Elimination would be going on steadily, and it was just as well to see what was going to happen before taking the long chances.

The morning was bright and sunny. There was not a cloud in the sky. A gentle breeze fanned the course and dissipated the dust raised by the cars.

And there was plenty of dust! It circled, and eddied, and rolled, outlining the course as far as the eye could see.

At the difficult turn leading into the river road, Matt passed Patsy Grier's overturned car. Grier had failed to negotiate the turn and had gone into the ditch. Grier himself seemed to have escaped without injury, but he was busily bandaging his mechanic's arm.

The river road was an exceedingly difficult part of the circuit. The timber kept the wind from dissipating the dust, and it spread out like a fog. Matt could hear cars ahead and behind, but he could not see them. Intuition, rather than anything else, carried him safely by two of the touring-cars, one of which was suffering from tire-trouble.

Mings, in the Stark-Frisbie, and Balt Finn, in the Bly-Lambert, were both ahead of Matt, and he thought only of getting past them. He was not intending, however, to do much more than hold his own against the better cars during the first round.

The motor was pulling magnificently. Matt, his heart leaping with the joy of the sport, opened the machine out a little more on the fine road from the river to Le Loup.

He passed several more cars, but not Mings', or Finn's. The climb to Coal Run was splendidly made. Between that village and the track he shot past the little "40," smashed into a scrap-heap, and with driver and mechanic standing hopelessly by. Something must have gone wrong with the "40's" steering-gear, for it had left the road and smashed into a big boulder.

All the cars had got well away before Matt came plunging along the track in front of the grand stand. The first round had taken him exactly fifty-eight minutes.

There were only two cars ahead of him—those driven by Mings and Finn.

"Bravo, Matt!" the young motorist heard Trueman shout, high over the ripple of cheering as he dashed past; "only two ahead and you're——"

What the last of it was Matt could not hear. For this second round he was going to cram on all the speed he could. His one idea was to pass Mings and Finn.

The No. 13 was holding up under the strain in fine shape. Nothing had gone wrong with either car or motor.

Chub had strapped himself to his seat. He was busying himself with the lubrication and the fuel supply, keeping tab on everything that was purely mechanical so that Matt would have nothing to do but drive.

Both chums had a deep curiosity to learn what had befallen each other; but that was a time when personal considerations of every nature were of minor importance. Nothing was thought of but the race; every faculty was centered upon the question of speed, and more speed, and then a little more.

The passing of Finn, on the beautiful sweep of road between the river and Le Loup, was an exciting event. In every way possible Finn sought to block the road; yet steadily, persistently, Matt crept alongside the Bly-Lambert car, swung into the lead and hurled through Le Loup.

In the distance, well up the slope toward Coal Run, Matt and Chub could see the moving dust kicked up by Mings' car.

With teeth set and eyes flashing behind his goggles, Matt hurled the No. 13 at the hill. The car jumped up the ascent with incredible speed.

Swiftly, surely, Mings was being overhauled. The spectators in the grand stand had an excellent view of the sharp little scrimmage which put Matt in the lead. The No. 13 appeared to leap alongside the No. 1 car, both drivers turning the very last ounce of power into their cylinders. For the space of a breath it seemed as though the wheels of the two cars would lock. As they rushed around the curve in the track, Matt swung ahead and took the inside course.

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The roar from the crowd was tremendous. But Matt was not thinking of that. He was in the lead, now, and his one idea was to keep it.

Mings had left the starting-tape twenty-four minutes ahead of him, and if Matt had come over the last lap a fraction less than that behind Mings, the race would still have gone to the Jarrot people.

There were still cars on the course, and Matt began meeting and passing those that had left behind him.

"Overhaul Sercomb! Pass Sercomb!"

These were the first words Chub had spoken since the beginning of the race.

It was a startling feat he suggested, that of traveling clear around the circuit and overtaking



Sercomb—an impossible feat, Matt thought, but the impossible is not always a thing to be scoffed at so much as to be striven for.

But troubles were in store for Matt. They began close to Le Loup when Matt found that his governor was not working. Every time he took the clutch out the engine raced, making everything terribly hot, and also making it necessary before changing speed to choke down the motor by the ignition.

A halt was necessary, and Chub let off a groan as Matt slowed down and they got busy repairing the machine. Two cars swept past, while they were tinkering. Both were Stark-Frisbie cars, one, of course, driven by Mings, and the other by Sercomb.

"Instead of our overtaking Sercomb, Chub," said Matt grimly, "it's the other way around. He's overcome the lead we had of him and has passed *us*."

"If the governor works now, pard," replied Chub, leaping into the car, "we'll make up for lost time. Push ahead!"

The governor worked as usual, and Matt began reaching out to regain what he had lost. He flew past Sercomb, and had another struggle with Mings on the track.

Those in the grand stand knew that some accident must have happened, or Matt would never have lost the lead he had gained in the previous round.

Trueman was beginning to feel disheartened. The No. 13 was beginning to "act up," and there was no telling what would happen, or where the disasters would stop.

In Le Loup, Trueman had placed a supply of gasoline. Matt halted to replenish his tank. Sercomb passed, but Mings, for some reason, did not show up.

Shortly after leaving Le Loup the governor went wrong again.

"Don't stop, Matt!" counseled Chub; "we can't waste any more time. I'll switch off at the corners and see if that won't help."

Chub, by switching off at the corners and then switching on again when they got round, enabled Matt to take the turns with the clutch out. For some time they kept up this rough method of driving, and, while engaged in it, they got by Sercomb again.

The Stark-Frisbie machine was at a standstill, and Sercomb and his mechanic were working like beavers.

"Oh, I don't know, pard," laughed Chub. "There's others. I wonder what's become of Mings?"

"Perhaps he's had an accident. We can tell on the next round."

"If we don't have anything worse than what we've got already to buck against, we'll do well enough. I'm satisfied that—"

Just then a very serious accident happened. They were taking the corner that led to the track, clutch out and switch off; the switch went on a fraction of a second too soon, and as the engine, racing tremendously, was dropped into gear on the third speed, there was a loud crash in the gear-box.

"Jumpin' horned-toads!" yelled Chub; "what's was that, Matt?"

"Our third speed's gone," Matt answered. "It's first, second, fourth, second, first from now on."

"That means we're out of it," growled Chub gloomily.

"I don't know about that," answered Matt. "The race seems to be between us, Sercomb, and Mings. We'll hang on and do our best. Maybe Mings is out of it—he's lagging terribly, even if he isn't—and we know Sercomb is having troubles."

As the No. 13 rushed past the grand stand amid the cheers of the people, Trueman could see that something was wrong; but he was feeling more hopeful. Matt was in the lead and if he could keep it and fight down the mishaps that assailed him, there was still a chance that he would hold the lead and win.

As if the troubles Matt had had were not enough, on the road toward the river the motor began to misfire. Having to run on three cylinders instead of four diminished the speed materially, and Chub groaned in his discouragement.

"Don't take it so hard, Chub," said Matt. "Be jeerful, as Carl says. There's Mings' car piled up against a tree."

As they dashed past along the river road they saw the No. 1 smashed badly, and Mings and his mechanic limping around the wreck in extreme dejection.

Miles farther around the circuit they came upon Sercomb. He and his assistant had just finished their repairs and were starting on again.

Matt and Chub had made the complete round of the track and had overhauled Sercomb, but Sercomb was now bidding fair to recover lost ground and take the race from the crippled Jarrot car.

"Did you ever see such measly luck?" growled Chub.

## CHAPTER XV.

### WELL WON, KING!

The narrowing down of the contestants in the race had brought the interest of the onlookers to a focal point. The excitement everywhere was intense.

Carl Pretzel had not seen Motor Matt when he reached the track and took his place in the car, but, from a point in the grand stand he had recognized him when the car leaped away.

For a while the Dutch boy was dazed and dumfounded. Could he believe his eyes? Was that Motor Matt in the car, going over the course with Chub?

For almost an hour Carl kept his post in the grand stand, waiting for No. 13 to come around, so he could give closer attention to the driver and make sure it was Matt.

He made certain; there could be no doubting the evidence of his senses; Motor Matt was really driving the Jarrot car. [Pg 26]

But where had he come from? And what was Sercomb doing in the race? Carl had been told that Sercomb was to be arrested and taken out of the contest, and he was wondering why this had not been done.

In a highly excited condition, Carl left the grand stand and went hunting for Mr. Trueman. He found him in a place reserved for the representatives of firms who had machines in the race.

"Misdre Drooman," demanded Carl, "vat has been going on, hey? I see dot Motor Matt iss in der car. How it come about? Vas I dreaming, oder vas it somepody vat looks like Matt und don'd vas him?"

"It's Motor Matt, all right, Carl," replied Trueman.

"Vere he come from?"

"Give it up. He blew in here just in time to take the car out for the start. He didn't have a chance to explain a thing."

"Ach, I feel so habby as I don'd know! Matt vas pack, some more, und he iss racing like vat he used to. Dere ain'd noddin' wrong mit him."

"He's the best driver in the race, bar none," declared Trueman.

Plympton, who was watching events closely, overheard the remark and turned around.

"I agree with you, Trueman," said he heartily; "Motor Matt's a wonder. And to think, by gad, that this is his first race!"

Probably Colonel Plympton was sorry, then, that he had not secured Motor Matt's services for the Stark-Frisbie people while he had the chance.

"I t'ought dot Sercomb feller vas nod going to be in der race," went on Carl, taking particular pains to let Plympton hear the remark. "He iss a sgoundrel, und noddin' vould haf habbened to Matt oof it hatn't been for him."

"I told Matt I was going to have Sercomb arrested and taken out of the contest, Carl," explained Trueman, "but Matt insisted that he be allowed to stay in the race."

"By gad," said Plympton, turning again, "the boy was right! He wants to beat Sercomb, and he knows it's a whole lot better to give him every advantage. King is a game sportsman, and I take off my hat to him."

"Dot Sercomb feller vat runs der car for you, Gurnel Plympton," said Carl, "iss some pad eggs. Dere don'd vas noddin' fair aboutt him. He has hat it in for Matt for a long dime, und iss der piggest fillian dot efer vas. He vill dry on somet'ing in der race yet, you vatch und see."

"You're mistaken, young man," said Plympton sharply.

"I think you are, too, Carl," spoke up Trueman. "Sercomb, no matter how much he may hate Matt, won't dare do anything crooked."

"Vy nod? Dot feller iss der vorst dot efer vas. Aroundt on der odder site oof der race course he might run indo Matt, oder do somet'ing like dot."

"Beautiful, beautiful," murmured Plympton, watching Matt pass Mings a second time; "I never saw such driving as King is doing."

"He can do anyt'ing!" declared Carl, swelling up. "He iss my bard, und he iss der lucky poy. Oof Sercomb leds him alone, Matt vill vin der race. Aber I don'd t'ink Sercomb vill do dot."

For two hours longer the breathless crowd held to their places. Only Sercomb and Matt were left on the course, all the rest of the machines having given out, or their drivers having given up.

It looked like Matt's race, although it could be seen that his car was bothering him terribly. Chub was as busy as a monkey with its hand in a coconut, switching out and in with one hand, pumping oil with the other, and occasionally giving swift attention to something else. He was fairly plastered with oil and dust.

Matt had passed Sercomb, having gone completely around the circuit and caught up with him. But Sercomb's machine was again working smoothly and was going much faster than the No. 13. He passed Matt. But could he get around the track completely and then cross the finish-line with

a margin to his credit?

If everything held up, it looked as though he would be able to win.

How the crowd in the grand stand watched that gap in the fence, beyond the paddock, for a glimpse of Sercomb rushing over the course to make up his opponent's lead!

Trueman and Plympton were consulting their watches nervously.

"Something's gone wrong with Sercomb," muttered Plympton. "At the rate he was going when he passed here, on the other round, he ought to have been back before this."

"The accidents can't all happen to one car," said Trueman.

"That's so; but Stark-Frisbie usually put out dependable cars. King has been having trouble with your racer almost from the start."

"It's the finish of the race that tells the story," returned Trueman.

"This will be the first race the Jarrot people ever won—providing you win it."

"It's the biggest race, at that. Even if we don't win, it's something to beat the Bly-Lambert people. We've thrown dust in the faces of the cup-holders, anyhow."

Tales of accident on the course had been drifting in, and some of the drivers of the wrecked and disabled cars had got back to the Park.

As by a miracle, no one had been killed, it seemed, or even dangerously hurt.

"Ah!" shouted Colonel Plympton, his eyes on the gap in the fence on the other side of the track, "here comes Sercomb now!"

A flurry of dust was shooting through the break in the fence and turning into the track for the home-stretch. For a space the thick blanket of dust shrouded the car and it was impossible to tell whose car it was.

"Don't be too sure that it's Sercomb," cautioned Trueman excitedly. "I've got money that says it's King."

"Done for a hundred!" returned Plympton promptly. "If it isn't Sercomb, I owe you the money."

Just then the wind whipped aside the dust and a most astonishing sight presented itself.

The dust was raised by both cars, for Matt and Sercomb were rounding the track almost side by side.

Strangely enough, the third cylinder of the No. 13 had stopped its rebellion. Dropping in line with the others, it had taken up its rhythmical action and was doing its full part.

Of course, the race was Matt's. He was the full course, nearly, ahead of Sercomb. Even if the No. 13 stood still, the race would still be Matt's. Why, then, was Sercomb continuing the hopeless fight?

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Around the course came the two cars, Matt keeping the lead by two or three feet. As the two machines, one white and the other red, raced toward the finish-line, the crowd grew nearly frantic.

Rising in their seats the people yelled until they were hoarse; men threw up their hats, and women fluttered their handkerchiefs.

Then suddenly the wild cheering died as if by magic. Sercomb, perhaps carried away by the heat of the contest, had given his steering-wheel into the charge of his mechanic, a red-haired Irishman, and was leaning far over toward the other car.

Sercomb had a wrench in his hand, and his purpose, as could clearly be seen, was to strike Matt with the heavy instrument.

The crowd caught its breath.

"I toldt you, I toldt you!" Carl was muttering to himself as his frenzied eyes watched the grim little affair as it went forward.

Matt, busy with his driving, could not see the danger that threatened him; but not so with the lad at his side. Chub, facing backward in his seat, made a quick move outward and sideways.

The wrench, at that moment, was on the point of falling.

Chub caught the murderous hand just in the nick of time to save Motor Matt.

For a moment Sercomb and Chub struggled as the cars raced. Then the wrench fell, Sercomb slipped back into his seat, and Matt cut off the power and slowed down to a halt.

A great gasp of relief went up from the crowd, followed by a perfect roar of cheers. While Sercomb and his Irish mechanic raced onward, the crowd poured out of the grand stand and over the fences to rush upon the victor and congratulate him.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

"Nobly done, King!" roared Trueman, grabbing Matt out of the car and giving him a rapturous hug. "Oh, it was a grand race, a splendid race, and you have done wonderful things for the Jarrot people! They'll not forget this in a hurry. Make no contract with any one," he whispered, "until you hear from me! I've got to wire St. Louis!"

"Matt!" whooped Carl, pawing through the excited crowd to reach his chum's side. "I knowed dot you would do it, yah, py shinks! Und I knowed dot Sercomb wouldt dry to do you, too. Dot's der vay mit him."

Carl hugged Matt ecstatically, then turned to grab the oil-caked hands of Chub.

"You safed Matt, Chub," said he, "dot's vat you dit. Eferypody saw dot! Eferypody knows, now, schust vat kindt oof a feller dot Sercomb iss. Efen Plympton can'd ged aroundt vat he saw mit his own eyes, nix, py shiminy!"

Off to the left of the grandstand Colonel Plympton was having an interview with Sercomb.

"Why didn't you stop where King halted his car?" he demanded wrathfully.

"I wanted to get away from the crowd," was Sercomb's sullen response.

"Well, I don't blame you for that," said Plympton sarcastically. "The people probably would have done anything but congratulate you. Sercomb, what did you mean by making that attempt on King?"

"I meant to knock him out of the car, if I could!" was the savage response.

"Is that the kind of sportsman you are?" queried Plympton, a gleam rising in his eyes.

He was just beginning to understand what kind of a driver Sercomb was. He was getting an insight into his character which he had never had before. The revelation was disagreeable, to say the least. Plympton himself was a man of high principle, and had no patience with trickery or deceit.

"I've put up with all I'm going to from King," growled Sercomb. "He's dogged me about and is doing everything he can to ruin me."

"I've learned something about that, too," went on Plympton, his voice hard and keen. "Tomlinson told me of that affair down in New Mexico, but I took your side. I couldn't believe it possible that you would act in the way you were said to have done. Now, however, I have had proof that you are a contemptible cur, and that King is a gentleman."

"Oh, yes," sneered Sercomb, "King has a way of making everybody think he's all to the good. I don't wonder that he's pulled the wool over your eyes."

"Look here," went on the colonel impatiently, "if it hadn't been for King, you'd be in jail this minute. An officer was waiting at the track-side to arrest you and take you out of the race. When King got here, he told Trueman to have the officer keep his hands off. That's the kind of work that makes me take stock in a young man. For King's magnanimity in letting you into the race he came near to being seriously wounded, perhaps killed. What do you say to that?"

Sercomb had nothing to say. He heard everything but preserved a sullen silence.

"What's more," pursued the colonel, "I know that you tricked King, through Slocum, into signing a paper he never would have signed if he had known what he was doing; and through that same paper you tricked me."

"You've been listening to King's side of the story," growled Sercomb.

"More than that," went on the colonel relentlessly, "by your vile tactics, again using Slocum as your tool, you drugged King and sent him away——"

"That's false!" stormed Sercomb.

"Don't lie," answered Plympton sternly. "Have strength of character enough to face the music. You've brought this on yourself and you'll have to bear it. Slocum is in jail, and he has made a confession."

Sercomb gasped and his face turned gray.

"Then—then I suppose you're—you're done with me?" he faltered.

"Yes, you've guessed right, Sercomb. Stark-Frisbie are done with you, but the law is not."

As he finished, Plympton stepped back and motioned to a man who was standing near. The latter pushed forward and laid a hand on Sercomb's shoulder.

"You're my prisoner, Sercomb," said he.

At that moment a touring-car came slowly past the place where the little group was standing. The car contained Trueman, Matt, Carl, and Chub, with one of the Jarrot mechanics at the steering-wheel.

They were all smiling and happy, but a puzzled look crossed Matt's face as his gaze rested on the officer and Sercomb.

"Stop a minute!" called Plympton, stepping toward the car. "King," he went on, reaching up to take Matt's hand, "I have done you an injustice, and I ask your pardon. You have acted like a gentleman and a true sportsman and you drove a race that will go down into automobile history as one of the pluckiest ever pulled off. Your car bothered you a good deal, but you hung on and won."

"We won on three speeds," replied Matt. "We had trouble and stripped one of the gears."

"Dree speeds aheadt," bubbled Carl. "Vell, dot vas enough."

"Certainly it has proved so," said the colonel. "The Jarrot people have first claim on your services, King, but if they don't offer you enough, I wish you'd give us a chance."

"Here, here," laughed Trueman. "I don't think the Jarrot people will let you steal from them the driver that won the cup."

"What are you doing with Sercomb, colonel?" queried Matt, still with his eyes on the beaten driver.

"He is under arrest," was the grim reply.

"For what he did last Saturday night?"

"Yes."

"As a favor to me," said Matt earnestly, "I want you to let him go."

"Oh, here," demurred Trueman, "that's carrying the thing too far, King. Don't waste any sentiment on that young scoundrel."

"He deserves all that will come to him," averred Plympton.

"He has been beaten," persisted Matt, "and that is punishment enough. I want him released. Can't you arrange it, colonel?"

"By gad," muttered Plympton, "I can't understand you, King. If that's really what you wish, though, I'll see what can be done."

"This is a day of victory to me," smiled Matt, "and I'd like to celebrate it in that way."

"Your desire does you credit," said the colonel bluffly, "but I think you display poor judgment."

"That's the way with Pard Matt," spoke up Chub. "But I don't think it's such a bad way, either. Anyhow, it don't keep him from making good in whatever he undertakes."

"Sure nod," put in Carl, "aber I don'd like dot. I vouldt radder punch Sercomb's headt as led him go. Dot's me—so savage all der time as some grizzly pears."

"Well, drive on, Patterson," said Trueman impatiently. "Settle the business as Matt wants it, Plympton, if you can."

Patterson drove the car to the hotel, Matt receiving congratulations all the way into town.

He and Chub were both extremely tired, but a bath and fresh clothes made them feel a hundred per cent. better.

While the two boys were looking after their own comfort, mutual explanations were indulged in.

Matt learned how Chub and his father had started for Chicago to make a sale of the mine, how Chub had learned Matt was to take part in the cup race, and had stopped off at Ottawa to be with his chum in his hour of victory—or defeat.

Matt then explained how he had come to himself, early Tuesday morning, camping down on a straw pile four miles from Lawrence.

"It's a queer thing," said he, "coming to your senses and finding yourself somewhere and never knowing the least thing about how you got there!"

"Well, I should smile!" grinned Chub. "You don't know a whole lot about it yet, do you? We haven't had much time for talk since you got back."

"I know I was drugged in some way," returned Matt, "and that I had just time to get from Lawrence to Ottawa in a gasoline speeder so as to enter the race. If Trueman had drawn first place, I guess I'd have been on the bleachers instead of in the car."

Chub told about the miserable hours he and Carl had passed while waiting for Matt to be found, or else to find himself.

"That Dutchman," said Chub, "was as near daffy as a fellow can be and yet have a few lucid intervals. He wanted to fight. He didn't seem at all particular who he licked, but he wanted to be using his fists."

"The little runt!" laughed Matt. "He's a fine fellow, that Carl. His head-work isn't very brilliant, at times, but he's true blue; and when it comes to fist-work, I don't know where you can find his equal for one of his size."

"I've cottoned to him in great shape. How much do you pull down for the winning, Matt?"

"Three thousand."

"That's making money hand over fist!" exclaimed Chub, "and there'll be more coming. A crack driver like you can command his own price."

"You're in for something, too, you know. I never could have won if you hadn't helped me like you did."

"Splash! What's that bell I hear?"

"Supper!"

"Let's run. I'll bet I can eat twice as much as Carl, to-night."

"You'll have to be going some, if you do."

"Well," laughed Chub, "we've been going some for five hours, steady, so we've got our hand in. Three speeds forward, old chap, and hit 'er up!"

THE END.

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NEW YORK, April 17, 1909.

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**TAKING A BIG 'GATOR.**

Arnold Chesney came galloping with his neck for sale up to the shanty among the orange trees, and flung himself off his steaming pony.

"Terry," he roared, "the cold signal's flying. Heavy frost prophesied for to-night. Get out and build the fires."

A good-looking young Irishman in flannel shirt and blue jeans came running out of the rough log building that served both as dwelling place and as office at their orange grove in Florida.

"Faith, I thought as much, Arnold. The wind's going nor'west. There'll be the divvle's own frost by morning," he declared.

The two youngsters toiled like Trojans while the sun sank behind the pine forest and the temperature dropped minute by minute. Great piles of fat pine wood were stacked every few rows among the trees, covered with wet grass, and then as the thermometer in the tube sank close to thirty-two degrees the fires were lighted, and greasy, black smoke poured up in clouds.

But as the cold increased so did the wind, and the smoke, instead of lying in a protecting fog over the trees, streamed away to leeward.

By two in the morning it was blowing a full gale, and the cold was crusting the water buckets in the veranda.

"'Tis no good, Arnold," gasped poor Terry. "Feel this!" He handed him an orange.

It was hard as a baseball, frozen to the very core.

Arnold groaned. "You're right, Terry. We're done."

They were. When morning dawned crisp and clear, and the red sun rose in a cloudless sky, every orange in South Florida was a lump of ice. The green leaves, so stiff and firm overnight, hung limp and blackened. Not only was the crop gone, but the trees themselves were terribly injured.

Arnold and Terence surveyed the scene of ruin in despair.

"Our first decent crop!" growled Chesney. "We'll have to start all over again."

"'Tis not that I'm thinking of," said Terence Burke. "'Tis Cassidy."

"The brute! I'd forgotten him!" exclaimed Arnold in dismay.

"Small chance he's give ye of forgetting him. More be token, here comes the spalpeen."

A short, square man with a flat face, a turn-up nose, and eyes like a pig's, came through the slip bars by the road. In an ill moment the two youngsters had given this Irish-American a mortgage on their grove, a step they had never ceased regretting.

"Good-mornin' to ye, byes. Th' quarther's interest is due. Have ye it for me?"

"There it is. Look at it!" said Chesney, pointing to the ruined trees.

"Ah, don't be pokin' your fun at me. 'Tis cash I want, not froze-up oranges."

Terence turned on the man. "Ye know full well, Cassidy, 'twas the crop we were going to pay ye out of. The crop's gone, and ye'll not be brute enough to want us to pay ye on the nail."

Cassidy's ugly little eyes narrowed. "I can't help the frost," he said. "I'm a business man, and I'm wanting my money."

"Then you'll have to wait for it," said Arnold Chesney bluntly. "We haven't got it, so we can't pay. Is that clear?"

"Clear as soup, begob. An' as ye can't pay, thin I'll take th' grove. An' that's clear, too."

"Not so fast," retorted Chesney. "The law gives us a clear twenty-eight days. If we pay the interest within that time we're safe."

Cassidy scowled. He had not credited the boy with so much knowledge.

"'Twill take more than twinty-eight days to grow a new crop," he sneered. "I'll give ye what grace the law allows, an' not another hour. Ye'd best write north for th' money. Ye'll never make it in th' time. That I know."

"What do you bet?" cried Arnold sharply. "What do you bet we don't make a hundred dollars in the next four weeks?"

"I'll bet ye the hundred, an' small chance I'll have o' being paid."

"Thanks for your kind opinion, but we'll have it in black and white if you don't mind, Mr. Cassidy." And Arnold quietly led the way to the house.

"You're crazy, Arnold. What took ye to make a bet like that? A dollar a day's all either of us can earn. An' even if we get work, that's only forty-eight dollars between us."

Arnold looked mysterious. "Have you forgotten our friend, Enos B. Hinks?" he asked.

"The chap that owns the Palmetto Beach House?"

"That's the man. When I was down there last year, he told me I could have a job any time as guide. Taking his Northern tourists out to kill quail and snipe. Bet he'll take us both on, and it's two and a half a day and grub."

"Faith, I'm thinking 'twill pay better than growing frozen oranges," replied Terence dryly. "I'm your man, Arnold, dear."

"Good. Now to pack and scrape up our fares. We've no time to lose."

Palmetto Beach was eighty miles south, on the Gulf Coast. The tickets were nine dollars, which Arnold raised by selling his watch to a friendly tourist at the station.

When the two arrived at the door of the great building with its Moorish minarets and roofs of gleaming tin, they had exactly sixty cents between them.

"Hinks?" echoed the smart clerk in the office. "Mean Enos B. Hinks as used to own this hotel?"

"Used to own it!"

"Yes. You're strangers, I reckon. Enos B. sold out last summer. Hiram J. Crundall's now the proprietor of the Palmetto Beach."

The two boys stared with blank faces. Terry was the first to recover himself. "D'ye think Mr. Crundall would see us?" he asked sweetly.

Terry's soft Irish voice was irresistible. "I wouldn't wonder, gentlemen. I'll ask him. Step inside the office."

A great, burly man with scrubby black hair and a long, black cigar between his hard lips came into the office. [Pg 30]

"Want rooms, gents?" he asked abruptly.

"Not rooms—work," replied Arnold.

The big man looked them over.

"I haven't any jobs, for you. I've got a yellow chap, Pete Lippitts, who takes the guests out shooting. You'll have to try farther."

"I'm much obliged to you," said Arnold very quietly. He took up his hat, and somehow he and Terry found themselves outside.

A merry party were playing tennis. Smartly dressed people lounged on the shady veranda. The sun shone brightly, and the two poor lads, with hearts heavy as lead, made their way through the beautiful gardens to the outer gate.

"How are we going to get back?" asked Terry. "Sixty cents won't take us far."

"Walk, I reckon," said Arnold grimly.

"Hi, mister. Say, come back. The boss wants you."

Both the youngsters wheeled round. A big mulatto was running after them.

"Look here," said Crundall. "Peter tells me the big 'gator I've got in the pond has bust the netting and crawled out and gone. If you chaps are game to catch him or another, I'll make it worth your while."

Arnold and Terry exchanged glances. "What's it worth?" demanded Arnold.

"Fifty dollars," said Crundall. "That is for one not less'n six foot long. I don't want any toys."

"And if he's bigger than six foot?"

"Don't you fret. You won't get one bigger."

"We might," said Arnold dryly.

Crundall actually smiled. "I like your sand," he said. "Tell you what. I'll make it ten dollars a foot extra for anything above six foot. Is that a go?"

"Agreed!"

"Mind you, he's got to be whole and sound. No shark hooks in him, nor bullet holes," warned Crundall.

"Right," said Arnold. "We'll start in the morning."

Crundall nodded. He was a rough chap, but the straight talk of the young fellow appealed to him. He turned to Pete. "Pete, see these fellers have a bed to-night and grub. So long. The dollars will be ready when you come back with the 'gator."

"A sweet fix you've got us in, Arnold, me boy," was Terry's first remark when, after an excellent supper, the two reached their room.

"What's the matter, Terry?"

"Begorra, what isn't? How are ye going to catch an alligator without hooks?"

"Don't you worry. I'll think it out."

"Faith, 'twill take a divvle of a lot of thinking."

"I'm going to sleep on it first," said Arnold quietly. "We've got to be up at an unholy hour to-morrow. I mean to give Crundall a run for his money. He's worth cultivating—that man."

Terry gave a sigh of resignation, and began pulling off his clothes.

When he awoke next morning Arnold was standing over him ready dressed.

"Have you thought of a plan?" was Terry's first question.

"Bet your life," grinned the other. "Hurry up. Breakfast's ready."

An hour later, guns on shoulder, food for two days, and a coil of stout rope in a game bag, the two were tramping across the wire grass through the dewy pine woods, with the rising sun striking long shafts of light through the red stems.

"Bitter Bayou's the place for my money," said Arnold. "There's stacks of 'em there. But keep an eye peeled for a deer or a pig. I'm not particular."

"Bait, is it?" asked Terry eagerly.

"Just so."

"But that ould Crundall said he wouldn't have a hooked 'gator at any price," replied Terry, puzzled. "An' sure we couldn't hook one anyhow widout a hook."

"True, Terence," laughed Arnold. "Sh—quietly!" As he spoke he dropped flat behind a log. As Terry did the same, there was a crisp rustling in a patch of saw palmetto about fifty yards away, and an old razorback sow, with six piglings behind her, came slowly out into the open.

"Take the first little 'un," muttered Arnold. "Keep your second barrel for the old beggar if she charges. Now!"

Two reports crashed out. Over rolled two of the small pigs. The old sow threw up her sharp head, then with a squeal of alarm bolted with the survivors of her family.



"Good business!" cried Arnold, jumping up and running forward. "Raw pork for Mr. 'Gator, and roast for ourselves. Eh, Terry?"

"Faith, 'tis a funny thing to catch a ten-foot alligator wid!" remarked Terry, ruefully surveying the plump little porker.

"Quite enough," replied Arnold with a grin, as he shouldered the other pig.

The ground began to slope away, pine gave place to live oaks, and live oaks to cabbage palms and cypress. The soil was black and oozy beneath their feet, and at last they found themselves on the edge of a deep river, whose brown stream wound sluggishly beneath the gloomy branches of giant cypress trees.

"Here's the bayou. Now for the 'gator," exclaimed Arnold as he flung down his pig and his gun.

"Faith, you're as pleased with yourself as if ye'd got the scaly beggar in your pocket this minute," complained the Irishman.

Arnold grinned. "How long a one do we want, Terry. Fifty dollars for six foot, and ten for each foot beyond. Fifty and five tens. Eleven foot's our minimum."

"Sure, there's one with a bit to spare," said Terence sharply, pointing.

Out of the dull waters something was heaving itself slowly up. Something long and rugged, like a rough barked, water-sodden log. So slowly did it rise that the oily water did not show a single ripple.

"Phew!" muttered Arnold. "That chap takes the cake! Never saw such a brute in my born days; thirteen foot if he's an inch. Terry, if we can collar him our fortune's made."

"More likely th' baste'll swallow us," retorted Terence.

"Not he. He's going to have something else to swallow. Keep an eye on the old scalawag, Terry, while I fix up a dose for him." And Arnold, plumping down on his knees, whipped out his knife and began operations. He slit open the pig, and then from the game bag pulled out a good-sized tin. In this were two packages, each carefully wrapped in oiled paper and sealed.

Arnold spread paper on the ground, and, turning out half the contents of each packet into two small white heaps, began to mix them together.

"Is it crazy ye are, Arnold?" demanded his Irish chum.

"No; why?"

"'Tis a live alligator Crundall asked for, not a poisoned one."

"I'm not going to poison him; you wait a jiffy!" And Arnold chuckled again, but gently, for fear of scaring the alligator.

The latter, however, was still taking life easy, basking in a patch of sunlight which leaked between the trees.

Carefully mixing his two powders, Arnold made them into one package, which he rolled up in several thicknesses of paper, and tied securely. He then dexterously inserted this package inside the carcass of the diminutive pigling, and sewed it into place.

"Next thing is to present the bait nicely and quietly to our fat friend there," remarked Arnold as he completed operations.

Terry shrugged his shoulders. For once his quick Irish wits were quite at fault.

[Pg 31]

Carrying the pig, Arnold crept cautiously out on a fallen log which extended over the water, and dropped his burden cautiously into the sluggish stream. It floated slowly down toward the spot where the great scaly brute lay basking.

"Only hope another chap don't get it first," muttered Arnold. "It's the big fellow we want."

Alligators have a quick sense of smell. All of a sudden two more scaly heads rose above the surface, and another couple of huge brutes appeared out of the thick saw grass on the opposite bank.

But number one had no idea of being balked of his prey. The oily water began to swirl in front of his great blunt head. He came plowing upstream like a torpedo boat, and almost instantly the huge jaws opened like a barn door, and the tasty morsel disappeared between two rows of gigantic yellow fangs. Then with amazing suddenness the monster vanished.

"Got him!" hissed Arnold in tense excitement.

"Is it a slaping powder ye've given him?" asked Terry eagerly.

"Sleeping powder! You'll soon see." Arnold shook with laughter.

Minutes passed. Nothing happened. Arnold began to look uneasy.

"Your medicine ain't acting, Arnold my bhoy," grinned Terry.

"It's bound to before long," replied Arnold, creeping out to the very end of the log and peering down into the brown bayou.

Suddenly the water boiled violently, and out of the unseen depths the big alligator came flying as if he had been shot from a gun.

"Look out!" yelled Terry.

Too late. The monstrous tail smote the log with a force that sent Arnold flying up into the air. And Terry, wildly grabbing for his gun, saw with horror that his friend had dropped slap on top of the writhing, struggling monster.

For an instant both disappeared. Then up they came again, and Terry could hardly believe his eyes when he saw Arnold seated astride on the huge scaly neck, while the alligator, thrashing the water with its tail, swam round and round in wide circles.

Terry, finger on trigger, dashed out on the log. He was certain the brute would dive and take Arnold with him, and yet he dared not shoot for fear of hitting his friend.

"Don't shoot!" roared Arnold, catching sight of Terry out of the tail of his eye. "Hold on. I'll have him."

The alligator seemed unable to sink. Yet it was evidently trying to. Finding this impossible, it swung its great head round, snapping at Arnold with a sound like the clashing of a shunting train.

But Arnold had his knife out, and every time the brute came round at him drove the point deep into the soft flesh at the joint of the neck.

"The rope!" shouted Arnold.

Terry bounded ashore, and next moment was back with the rope coiled and a slipknot at the end of it.

Round and round went the alligator, churning the water to foam, and sending small waves slapping under the hollow banks. It was fast exhausting its mighty strength.

"Now!" yelled Arnold, as the beast came sailing straight under the log.

Quick as light Terry swung the noose into position. It passed neatly over the great, rugged head, and as it tightened Terry took a half hitch round the log, and the brute was brought up all standing with a jerk that made the tough rope sing and sent Arnold flying overboard.

Terry had him out in a moment, and the two rushed the end of the rope ashore, and, getting round a tree, began playing the alligator as a fisherman plays a salmon.

It was a good five minutes before the giant brute gave out and, more than half throttled, was lugged ashore.

Luckily for the boys, the bank was practically level with the water, or they never could have got the huge weight ashore. Even when he was on land they had a terrible job to noose the great, thrashing tail that was leveling the bushes like a giant scythe.

At last he was safe, tied head and tail to two trees, and the boys, gasping, mopped the perspiration from their dripping faces.

"'Twas mighty funny medicine ye gave him, Arnold," said Terry, as he surveyed their captive with huge satisfaction.

"Can't you guess what it was?"

Terry shook his head.

"Tartaric acid and carbonate of soda, my boy. Turned him into a balloon. He couldn't sink for the life of him."

"Tartaric acid!" gasped Terry; "carbonate of soda! Sure no wonder the poor brute was onaisy!" Then the comic side of it struck him, and he burst into shrieks of mirth. Arnold joined, and the two laughed till they rolled helpless in the long grass beside their ugly captive.

"Geewhillikens!" exclaimed Crundall as he surveyed the monster which four oxen were tugging in a cart through the hotel grounds. "I'll need a new pond for that le-vi-athan!"

"Give us the job to dig it?" put in Arnold quickly.

For the first time since they had met him Hiram Crundall actually laughed.

"I reckon I've got a better job for you two fellers than digging sand. Say, how'd you like to come into my office and learn this hotel business. Don't mind telling you there's a pot of money in it."

"We accept, sir!" cried Arnold briskly. "Whatever it is, it's better than growing frozen oranges."

"I've made half a million at it in ten years, so I ought to know," replied Crundall dryly.

Here Terry put in a word. "I say, Arnold, how about Cassidy?"

"Cassidy—who's he?" asked Crundall.

Terence told the story of the bet.

Crundall slapped his great knee. He pulled out a huge pocketbook, counted out bills for two hundred dollars, and handed them to Arnold. "You git right along," he said, "and collect. And if Cassidy don't pay on demand wire me. I'll come an' make him."

But Cassidy did pay, and then the boys let him foreclose on the ruined grove. They had better fish to fry.

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Some missing punctuation has been inserted without comment in cases where spacing of the type indicates that a position was left for the marks but they did not make it to the printed page in the source copy. Many question marks appear to be missing from Carl's dialogue.

Retained some inconsistent hyphenation (e.g. bellboy vs. bell-boy).

Retained some questionable spellings in dialect.

Page 1, changed "abrutly" to "abruptly" ("died abruptly").

Page 2, changed "blindfolded" to "blindfold" in "blindfold him, and place him."

Page 3, changed ? to ! after "had a scrap!"

Page 4, changed "hs" to "his" in "envelope from his pocket."

Page 8, added missing "a" to "name to a boy."

Page 10, removed extra "i" from "findt" in "ven ve do findt dem."

Page 11, added missing period after "if you want to talk."

Page 12, changed "the" to "they" in "they could not waste much time."

Page 15, changed . to ? after "was to receive?"

Page 16, removed extra space before period in "they left the garage."

Page 17, changed "then" to "than" in "than take part." Removed space before period in "attention to anything else."

Page 20, changed "carred" to "carried" in "carried their alarm." Removed duplicate "of" from "things of which."

Page 21, changed double quotes to single quotes around "Thousand and One Nights."

Page 22, changed "immeditaely" to "immediately" in "immediately to jail."

Page 24, changed "hopelssly" to "hopelessly" in "standing hopelessly by."

Page 25, changed "tremedously" to "tremendously" in "racing tremendously."

Page 28, changed "You" to "Your" in "Your desire does you credit."

Page 29, changed "rung" to "hung" in "hung limp and blackened."

"LATEST ISSUES" ad, changed "detetective" to "detective."

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S TRIUMPH; OR, THREE SPEEDS FORWARD \*\*\*

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