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Title: Motor Matt's Hard Luck; or, The Balloon-House Plot

Author: Stanley R. Matthews

Release date: January 15, 2015 [EBook #47975]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by David Edwards, Demian Katz and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net> (Images courtesy of the Digital Library@Villanova University (<http://digital.library.villanova.edu/>))

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S HARD LUCK; OR, THE BALLOON-HOUSE PLOT ***



MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 10

FIVE

MAY 1, 1909.

CENTS

MOTOR MATT'S OR THE BALLOON
HARD LUCK HOUSE PLOT

*Street & Smith
Publishers
New York*

MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1909, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

No. 10.

NEW YORK, May 1, 1909.

Price Five Cents.

Motor Matt's Hard Luck

OR,

THE BALLOON-HOUSE PLOT.

By the author of "MOTOR MATT."

CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I. AN OLD FRIEND.](#)
[CHAPTER II. A TRAP.](#)
[CHAPTER III. OVERBOARD.](#)
[CHAPTER IV. RESCUED.](#)
[CHAPTER V. BUYING THE "HAWK."](#)
[CHAPTER VI. MATT SCORES AGAINST JAMESON.](#)
[CHAPTER VII. AT THE BALLOON HOUSE.](#)
[CHAPTER VIII. THE PLOT OF THE BRADY GANG.](#)
[CHAPTER IX. CARL IS SURPRISED.](#)
[CHAPTER X. HELEN BRADY'S CLUE.](#)
[CHAPTER XI. JERROLD GIVES HIS AID.](#)
[CHAPTER XII. GRAND HAVEN.](#)
[CHAPTER XIII. THE LINE ON BRADY.](#)
[CHAPTER XIV. THE WOODS BY THE RIVER.](#)
[CHAPTER XV. BRADY A PRISONER.](#)
[CHAPTER XVI. BACK IN SOUTH CHICAGO.](#)
[THE RED SPIDER.](#)
[PIGEON-WHISTLE CONCERTS.](#)

CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

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

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

Dick Ferral, a Canadian boy and a favorite of Uncle Jack; has served his time in the King's navy, and bobs up in New Mexico where he falls into plots and counter-plots, and comes near losing his life.

Helen Brady, Hector Brady's daughter, who helps Motor Matt.

Hector Brady, a rival inventor who has stolen his ideas from Hamilton Jerrold. His air ship is called the Hawk and is used for criminal purposes. Brady's attempt to secure Motor Matt's services as driver of the Hawk brings about the undoing of the criminal gang.

Hamilton Jerrold, an honest inventor who has devoted his life to aëronautics, and who has built a successful air ship called the Eagle.

Jameson, a rich member of the Aëro Club, who thinks of buying the Hawk.

Whipple, Pete, Grove, Harper, members of Brady's gang who carried out the "balloon-house plot," which nearly resulted in a tragedy, and finally proved the complete undoing of Hector Brady.

Ochiltree, an ex-convict whose past record nearly got him into trouble.

Harris, a policeman of South Chicago who aids Motor Matt in his work against the Bradys.

Dennison and Twitchell, police officers of Grand Haven, Michigan, who take a part in the final capture of Brady.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD FRIEND.

"Py chimineddy!" muttered Carl Pretzel to himself, starting up on the couch, where he had been snatching forty winks by way of passing the time. "Vat's dot? Der voice has some familiar sounds mit me. Lisden vonce."

A loud, jovial voice floated in through the open window, a voice with a swing to it that set Carl's nerves in a flutter.

"In Cawsand bay lying,
And a Blue Peter flying,
All hands were turned up the anchor to weigh,
There came a young lady,
As fair as a May-day,
And modestly hailing, the damsel did say:

"I've got a young man there,
D'ye hear? Bear a hand there
To hoist me aboard or to bring him to me:
Which his name's Henry Grady,
And I am a lady,
Just come down to purwent his a-going to sea."

The roaring song had come closer and closer. By then it was almost under the open window. Jumping from the couch, Carl ran across the room and looked out.

A youth of seventeen or eighteen, wearing a sailor rig and with his hat cocked over one eye, was lurching along with both hands in his pockets. Behind him trailed four or five hoodlums, bunched close together and talking among themselves.

"Here's where I quit you, you lubbers," said the young sailor, halting at the steps leading up to the boarding-house door, and turning to the hoodlums. "A messmate of mine berths here, and I'm going to drop in on him and have a bit of a chat over old times. 'Bout ship, the lot of you, and make a good offing. I don't like the cut of your jibs any too well, anyhow. Slant away, slant away."

The sailor backed up against a post at the bottom of the steps.

"Say, yous ole webfoot," said one of the hoodlums, "loosen up, can't yous, an' fork over the price o' a drink, all around?" [Pg 2]

The fellow shambled closer to the sailor and held out one hand with an expectant grin.

"Not a bob will I give you for a tot of drink," answered the sailor, "for I'll be keelhauled if you don't look as though you'd already been topping the boom too much for your own good, but I'll loosen up, as you call it, for a good meal all around."

His hand went into the pocket of his trousers and he drew out a big roll of bills. A greedy gleam darted into the hoodlum's eyes as he glimpsed the bundle of money, and those at his back pushed closer together, nudging each other in the ribs and pointing while the sailor's head was bent.

Suddenly the rascal who had acted as spokesman for the rest made a leap and a grab.

"Avast there, you loafing longshore scuttler!" yelled the young tar. "What sort of a beachcomber's trick do you call that?"

The hoodlum had whirled, the roll in his hands, and was making off as fast as his legs could carry him. The sailor sprang after him, but the rest of the thieving pack jumped in his way and began using their fists, hoping to give their pal the necessary time to get clear with the money.

Carl Pretzel, with an angry shout, withdrew from the open window, dashed from the room, down the stairs and out at the front door. Without paying any attention to the sailor and those with whom he was tussling, the Dutch boy rushed past the struggling group and made a bee line after the thief.

Carl was too fat for a swift sprinter, but the thieving hoodlum was handicapped by a game leg, and Carl was able to overhaul him slowly.

Looking over his shoulder in order to take in the situation behind, the thief saw the Dutch boy, and redoubled his efforts to get away. An alley lay just ahead, and the thief turned into it. Carl plunged after him, but when he got into the alley, the fellow with the money had mysteriously vanished.

"Dot's a funny t'ing!" panted Carl, coming to a halt and peering around. "Vere dit he go mit

himseluf?"

Garbage barrels and boxes lined the alley on both sides. Carl started onward again, peering sharply behind each garbage receptacle as he advanced. Suddenly he discovered the man he was looking for, crouching behind a big box.

Carl was a little way beyond the box before he caught sight of the thief.

"Dere you vas!" he yelled, as he faced about. "Now I ged you, und I dake away vat you got—yah, so helup me!"

He rushed at the thief, and the latter got up, squirmed around the end of the box, and leaped for the side of a shed whose wall stood flush with the alley.

The shed had a square opening, about four feet from the ground, for convenience in unloading wood. The thief had his eye on the opening. If he could get into the shed, he probably reasoned, he could run through into the back yard of the house, gain the street in front, and so, undoubtedly, evade his fat pursuer.

But he didn't make it. By the time he was half through the opening, Carl was close enough to grab his thrashing feet, and he hung onto them like grim death.

"How you like dot, hey?" jubilated the Dutch boy. "You findt oudt, py shimmy, dot it don'd vas so easy to ged away mit money dot don'd pelong mit you. Oof you shkin oudt, you leaf your feet pehind, und oof you don't come pack into der alley, den I pull you in two. How vas dot for some fixes?"

"Wot's de matter wit' yous?" came the angry, muffled voice from inside the shed. "Le'go 'r I'll kick a hole in your face!"

"You vill I don'd t'ink," puffed Carl, still hanging to the feet. "Gif oop der money, you dinhorn, oder I turn you ofer py der bolice und you go to der lockoop."

The hoodlum made no move to return the money, but continued to struggle wildly. With a firm hold on each ankle, Carl laid back and pulled for all he was worth; but the thief had caught hold of something inside and all Carl's pulling didn't get him an inch toward the alley.

While the whole matter was at a deadlock, the thief half in half out of the shed, and Carl tugging fruitlessly, the young sailor appeared at the end of the alley. Taking quick note of the situation at the shed, he gave a yell and bore down in that direction.

"Well, strike me lucky, old ship," cried the young tar, "this is my busy day and no mistake. Is that the duffing son of a flounder that got away with my wad?"

"He iss der feller, Verral," panted Carl. "He don'd vant to come out oof der vood shet."

"Hang onto his pins, matey," was the answer, "and I'll fix him."

The sailor pushed his hands through the hole, grabbed the hoodlum by the throat, and exerted a steady pressure.

This manœuvre was successful. Half strangled, the thief's clutching fingers relaxed their hold, and the sailor and Carl, between them, managed to drag him back into the alley.

"Now, you pirate," cried the sailor, dropping down on the captive, "where's that money? That was a raw play you made and you might have pulled it off if it hadn't been for my mate, here. D'you want to go below, in irons? Where's the roll?"

"Look in his bocket vonce," suggested Carl.

"I'll kill you fer dis!" fumed the hoodlum.

"Stow that!" growled the sailor. "I've a knife at the end of my lanyard, but there's nothing about this that calls for cold steel. Drop down on his feet, Carl, and that will hold him steady while I go through his clothes."

While the Dutch boy sat on the hoodlum's feet, the sailor was able to push his hands into the thief's pockets. The roll was found and appropriated, and both boys leaped up.

The hoodlum floundered erect.

"I'll git even fer dis!" he scowled. "Yous can't run in dat kind of a play on Nifty Perkins an' make it stick."

"Bear away!" cried the sailor angrily. "Maybe that'll help you," and he gave the villainous scoundrel a kick that sent him two yards on his way toward the street.

The hoodlum turned to shake his fist, and mutter a threat, then started off at a run. When he reached the street, the rest of his pals joined him. For a time they hung about the alley entrance, apparently trying to make up their minds whether it would be wise to attack the sailor and Carl in force.

"Donnervetter!" cried Carl. "Dot looks like a shance for some scrappings. I don'd vas looking for drouple, aber you bed somet'ing for nodding dot I don'd dodge any. Come along mit yourseluf, Verral! Led's gif dem fellers Hail Golumby."

"Cut away!" shouted the young sailor. "The swabs that ran foul of me bolted as soon as you crossed that other chap's hawse. I'd like to square my score with them."

But the hoodlums did not wait. Carl and the sailor looked altogether too war-like. By the time the two boys reached the end of the alley, the street rowdies had taken to their heels.

"A jolly fine lot they are!" cried the sailor contemptuously. "You saved my roll for me, Carl. Haven't had time to shake your hand before, but I can do it now to the king's taste. Your flipper, mate!"

Carl gripped the sailor's hand.

"Vat a surprise it iss!" he exclaimed. "I don'd haf time to say mooch aboutt dot, eider, aber ven I heardt you singing mit yourself, und looked oudt oof der vinder und saw dot you vas Tick Verral, I ketched my breat' a gouple oof times. Vere you come from, Tick?"

"From Denver, messmate," answered Dick Ferral. "My uncle supplies me with plenty of money, but just the same I'd hate to lose that roll. He made me a present of it when I started for Quebec. But where's my old raggie, Motor Matt? I stopped off here in Chicago just to see him. Got his address from the Lestrangle automobile people, and I'm fair hungry to grip his fin, once more. I'll never forget what Matt King did for me—and my uncle won't, either."

"He don'd vas in Chicago schust now, Tick," said Carl. "He vill be pack in two or dree tays, meppy. Anyhow, oof he don'd come pack py do-morrow, meppy ve go oudt vere he iss, und see him? Vat you t'ink oof dot?"

Dick Ferral's disappointment was keen, and he showed it plainly.

"How far is he from here, Carl?" he asked.

"Only a leedle vays. It iss in a blace vat dey call Sout' Chicago."

"What's Matt doing out there?"

"Vell, ve hat some ructions oudt dere—a mighdy high olt time, you bed you. Look at here vonce. Ven you read somet'ing, den you vill know more."

Carl pulled a newspaper out of his pocket and held it under Ferral's eyes, indicating a certain paragraph with his finger.

What Ferral read was this:

"For Sale—The practicable air ship, Hawk, fully equipped with gasoline motor, rudders, propellers, and almost new gas bag. Apply to Chief of Police, South Chicago, Illinois."

CHAPTER II.

A TRAP.

"Well, sink me!" muttered Dick Ferral, staring at the newspaper paragraph. "Have they really got so they can navigate the air like they do the water? I've heard of such things, but I didn't know they'd made a success of them."

Carl threw back his shoulders and puffed out his chest.

"Vell, Modor Matt und me ve haf sailed der sky mit der air ship," said he. "Matt sailed in der Hawk, und I sailed in der Eagle. Ditn't you hear about dot? Vy, it vas in der bapers."

"I haven't looked at a paper for a week," returned Ferral curiously. "How did you and Matt happen to go up in an air ship?"

"It vas like dis, Tick. Matt und me vas oudt peyond Sout' Chicago taking some spins in a pubble, ven along comes a runaway air ship, und——"

"A runaway air ship?" interrupted Ferral incredulously. "Tell that to the marines, Carl!"

"Dot's rightt," insisted Carl. "Der air ship vas running away mit two fellers vat don'd know how to use him, see? Matt und me shtopped it mit a rope vat vas traggung on der groundt, und der rope proke away und der air ship vent on, aber vone oof der fellers in der car tropped somet'ing oudt oof his bocket, vich Matt und I picked oop. Vell, dot roll oof bapers pelonged mit anoder feller vat hat hat dem shtolen, und ve hat a mighdy oxciding time gedding dem pack. Matt vas carried off in der air ship to a svamp in Intiana, und I followed him dere in der Eagle, und Matt turned der tables on der fellers vat run away mit him, und come pack mit two oof der roppers."^[A]

[A] See No. 9 of the MOTOR STORIES, entitled, "Motor Matt's Air-Ship; or, The Rival Inventors."

"Well, keelhaul me!" exclaimed Ferral. "I'd give my eyeteeth to be able to take a sail in an air ship. How much do they want for this one?"

His hand wandered to his pocket, where he had replaced the roll of money.

"Dey vant so mooch as dey can ged," said Carl.

"Why is the Chief of Police of South Chicago selling it?"

"Prady, der feller vat owned it, vas a t'ief. Some oof vat he shtole vas prought pack by Matt, und der air ship iss going to be soldt to pay a leedle to some oof der odders vat don'd ged der goots pack."

"What's Matt doing?"

"He shows der air ship off to fellers vat come to see how it vorks. He is helupung der bolice, und dey gif him den tollars a day for flying aroundt mit it."

"Strike me lucky!" exclaimed the impulsive Ferral, slapping Carl on the shoulder, "do you think two thousand plunks would buy the craft, Carl?"

"Nix, Verrai, I don't. Oof two t'ousandt vouldt puy her, den Matt vould haf owned her pefore now. He vants der Hawk vorse as anypody you efer see."

"Couldn't we rake up enough between us to buy her?" cried Ferral. "If Matt knows about her, and if she'll sail successfully, I wouldn't like anything better than to go from Chicago to Quebec by the air-ship route. What a high old jinks that would be!"

"Pully!" exclaimed Carl, as highly elated over the prospect as was Ferral. "King und Verral, oof der Air-ship Limidet Line! Ach, vat a habbiness oof it couldt come oudt like dot."

"King, Ferral & Pretzel," said Ferral. "You'll be in on the deal, Carl."

"Fife tollars' vort," returned Carl. "Dot's all der money vat I got."

"We'll let you in on the deal just to have you along. Matt will be captain, I'll be mate, and you'll be the crew."

"Py shinks," chuckled Carl, "I vould make a fine crew."

"Does the Hawk handle easily?"

"So easy as I can't dell! You pull a t'ing und she goes oop, den you pull anoder t'ing und she comes down, und you viggie her aroundt mit some more t'ing—I don't know vat. Aber Matt can vork her so shlick as nodding. Say, Verral, Matt can make dot air ship turn some handt-shprings in der cloudts, und——"

[Pg 4]

"Avast there, Carl! I'll bet Matt can handle the craft, all right, even if he can't make her do any hand-springs. Do you suppose she'll be sold before we get out to South Chicago?"

"Vell, I hope nod. Meppy ve go righdt avay, hey?"

"Sure! The quicker we go, the more chance we will have to get the Hawk. If we——" The boys had been walking slowly back to the boarding house, and Ferral suddenly broke off his words and came to a halt. "Oh, hang it," he went on, "I'm due for a sail on the lake at one o'clock. Merrick, a nice chap I met on the train coming from Denver, invited me to go with him, and I said I'd meet him across the Lake Street viaduct right after dinner. I hate to cut away from Merrick like that."

"Vy nod ged him to sail us as near Sout' Chicago as he can go?" suggested Carl. "Den meppy ve ged off der poat und dake der shdreed car?"

"Right-o!" cried Ferral. "That's what we'll do. How long before you can be ready, Carl?"

"Schust so kevick as I can go up py my room und ged dot fife tollars oudt oof der pureau trawer."

"That's the ticket! But you don't need any money, old ship, while you're with me. I've got plenty for the two of us."

"Anyvay, Tick, I got to vash oop a leedle, und prush my clothes——"

"So've I. Those swabs handled me a bit rough, although they didn't leave many marks on me."

Ferral was completely carried away with the idea of buying the air ship, and he could talk of nothing else while he and Carl were smoothing the kinks out of their personal appearance, and riding downtown on the car.

It was nearly one o'clock and they did not have any time to stop at a restaurant for dinner. But neither of the lads thought of anything to eat—and that was what Carl had a habit of thinking of at the right time, and between times, so it will be understood how the prospect of securing the air ship dazzled him.

A little sailing craft was bumping against the wharf at the lake end of the viaduct. Although a small boat, yet she had a cuddy forward, a cockpit aft, and was as spick and span as snow-white canvas, clean decks, and polished brasswork could make her.

A young fellow, rather loudly dressed, was leaning against one of the posts to which the sailboat was moored. He was smoking a cigarette, and, at sight of Ferral, ran up to him with outstretched hand.

"Ahoy, my gay sailorman!" he cried. "I had a kind of hunch that you'd go back on me, and wouldn't show up."

"Whenever I say I'll do a thing," replied Ferral, catching the other's hand heartily, "I lay my course in that direction. But I'm in a rush to get to South Chicago. Do you suppose you can take us somewhere near there?"

"Take you anywhere, old chap," returned the other.

Ferral presented Carl. The Dutch lad was not very much taken with Ferral's friend. There was something about him that rubbed Carl's fur the wrong way. However, Carl did not pay much attention to this vague distrust. He was thinking of the Hawk, and hoping that he and Ferral would reach South Chicago in time to buy the air ship before she was sold to anybody else.

Carl, more than anyone else, knew how Motor Matt was longing to own the Hawk, and how badly disappointed he was to think he had not the money to buy her. Dick Ferral had dropped into the affair at just the right time.

The name of the sailboat was the *Christina*, and her skipper was a heavy-jawed Norwegian by the name of Erickson. There was something about Captain Erickson that Carl did not like, and the

Swede who helped the skipper sail the *Christina* did not appear to any better advantage. Yet the idea of buying the air ship had put Carl's nerves in a twitter, and he gave little heed to his vague suspicions.

Merrick, Ferral and Carl got aboard the *Christina*, the Swede cast off the bow moorings, the skipper hauled up the mainsail and jib, and then the Swede threw on the stern rope and jumped aboard. There was a fine breeze, and the little boat tripped out through the harbor in the direction of the government pier.

Ferral and Carl went forward and seated themselves on the top of the cabin. Merrick lingered in the cockpit to talk with Erickson, who had the wheel. The Swede was farther forward, setting another of the jibs.

"How long you knowed dot Merrick feller, Tick?" queried Carl.

"About a day and a half. Why?"

"His looks don'd make some hits mit me; und I don'd like der Norvegian or der Svede, neider."

Ferral laughed.

"Why, Carl," said he, "you can't smoke a fellow's roll on such a short acquaintance."

"I ged some hunches ven I see vat I don'd like, und I got all kindts oof hunches, rightd now, dot somet'ing is crooked. Meppy dot Merrick feller shmokes your roll—der vone vat you got in your bocket."

"Belay, Carl! You'll like Merrick after you know him a little better. I'll admit he's not exactly my style, but he's no beachcomber. If anything happened, why, there's two of us to three of them, and we could put up a pretty stiff set-to. But South Chicago and the Hawk loom pretty large in my glass, just now, and I haven't got time to think of much of anything else."

Just at that moment a doubled-up form pushed out of the cuddy into the cockpit. As the form straightened, and turned around so as to face forward, Carl went off the cabin at a jump and gave a yell.

"Prady!" he gasped; "Prady, or I vas a geezer!"

CHAPTER III.

OVERBOARD.

Carl's yell drew the attention of all those on the boat. Brady leaned over the top of the cabin and laughed huskily. Merrick dropped his mask and joined triumphantly in Brady's laugh. The Norwegian and the Swede stared blankly for a minute, and then went stolidly on about their work.

"Brady!" muttered Ferral, squaring around on the cabin so as to get a good look at the man in the cockpit. "Is he the swab that carried Matt off in the air ship, Carl?"

"Sure he iss der feller!" averred Carl. "I vould know him any blace. Ach, himmelblitzen, I toldt you I hat some hunches, Verral!"

"I've made a monkey's fist out of this," growled Ferral, "and I'm a Fiji if I can understand the thing yet. The way this Brady falls afoul of us don't look like a happenchance, and yet I can't make anything else out of it. Ahoy, there, Merrick! Stow that grinning and give me the lay of this business."

[Pg 5]

"Merrick's real name is Brady," explained the outlaw in the cockpit—and outlaw he was, having been a fugitive from justice ever since Matt had navigated the Hawk away from the swamp and into South Chicago. "He's my son, Hector, Jr., and I'm proud of the way he worked this deal," Brady continued, still laughing as though the affair was a huge joke.

Ferral was bewildered.

"You're a thief, are you," said he, struggling to get the matter clear in his head, "and the fellow who met me on the train, and said his name was Merrick, is your son?"

"That's the how of it," returned Brady.

"Then I'm free to say," cried Ferral, "that I don't like the how of it. 'Bout ship and takes us back to the wharf. I'm a bit particular about the company I keep."

"Well, you've got a picture of us letting you go after we've been to all the trouble to get you here. We'll put you ashore somewhere to the north, my bantam, but before we do that we'll frisk you for that bundle of long green you've got in your pocket. The Hawk's for sale, and I'm counting on buying her."

The more Carl heard and saw, the more puzzled he became. It didn't seem like an accident the way Ferral had met Brady, Jr., on the train, and yet the two Bradys must have taken a long look ahead in order to bring about the situation in which Ferral and Carl now found themselves. Their plots, however, had centred about Ferral, and Carl had merely blundered into them.

"I'll hear from you, Merrick," said Ferral sharply. "What have you got to say about this?"

The *Christina* had passed through the break in the government pier and was breasting the heavier waves in the open lake. The pier behind was rapidly receding. There were a score of fishermen on the piles, but they had become mere dots, almost out of sight and entirely out of hearing.

Carl looked around for a glimpse of some other boat. There was a smudge of smoke from a steamer, off on the watery horizon to eastward, and well to the south could be seen the upper sails of a schooner, but these were the only craft in sight, and they were too far away for any practical benefit.

"There's nothing much to say," answered Hector, Jr., as calmly as though he had been talking about the weather. "I was running a hand book on the Denver races, but got a wire from dad that he was in trouble. You happened to be on the same train that brought me to Chicago, and when you flashed that roll on me, and I remembered that I was nearly strapped and that dad needed money, I figured on how I could annex such a nice fat wad of the long green. You wouldn't play cards, you wouldn't drink, and there wasn't anything else I could do but make this sort of a play. I put dad next as soon as I could get to him. He didn't think you'd show up to take the sail, but I told him that you had said you would, and that I believed you were the sort of a fool who always did what you said. I reckon I was right, eh, dad?" and Hector, Jr., came forward and leaned over the top of the cabin beside his worthy father.

"Bright boy, son," said the elder scoundrel approvingly. "We've got you, younker," went on Brady, Sr., again facing Ferral. "We're too far from land for you to swim ashore, and I'm giving you credit for too much sense to try a trick like that. It was a bit of a surprise to me to see that Dutchman trailing along after you, but"—and here a black scowl crept over the man's face—"I've got a bone to pick with him and that meddling whelp, Motor Matt. The Dutchman won't get away from us so easily as you will, Ferral, I can promise you that. And before Motor Matt is many days older, I'll show him what it means to cross Brady's path."

Hector Brady, like his son, was a fair-spoken villain, but none the less dangerous for all that. As he ceased talking, he started to step from the cockpit to the aisle of deck between the cabin top and the sailboat's side.

"Vast, there!" roared Ferral, twitching at the lanyard about his neck and bringing out a sheath knife. "Keep your offing, both you sharks, or you'll find a knife between your ribs. You've got us out in the lake, but you haven't my money yet, and you're not going to cut up rough with my raggie here. I got him into this mess, and I'm going to see him out of it."

A boat hook, dropped by the skipper when he was pushing the nose of the boat away from the pier, lay on the deck close to Carl's feet. He bent down and picked it up.

"Oof he makes some foolishness mit me," averred Carl, "you bed my life I vill haf somet'ing to say aboutd dot meinseluf. I had some hunches all der time," he harped ruefully.

Brady, Sr., did not come out of the cockpit just then. "There are four of us against you," said he sternly, "and if you've got as much sense as I give you credit for, you'll not resist. All I want of you, Ferral, is your money. If what you told my son is true, your uncle is a rich man. He'll give you another roll for the asking and never miss it. Are you a pard of King's?"

"I'm all that," declared Ferral. "I owe Motor Matt a debt I can never repay."

"And I owe him one I'm going to repay," said Brady, with a black look. "He stole my air ship from me, and I've got to buy it back. It's no more than justice that I take part of the money from you—if you're such a good pal of King's. I didn't think, any more than Hector, that the thing was going to fall out like this, but my luck must be taking a turn for the better."

"Skipper," shouted Ferral, looking at the Norwegian over the heads of the two Bradys, "put about and take us ashore! These scoundrels are trying to rob me."

The skipper, however, only returned a stolid look.

"You'll be hauled over the coals for this!" threatened Ferral.

Carl had been on the point of saying something, but off toward the west and south, over the stern of the sailboat, he beheld an object that amazed him and aroused a faint hope.

The object seemed to hang in the sky like a black cylinder. It was the Hawk, there could be no possible doubt about that, but was the Hawk sailing out over the lake or merely traveling over the City of Chicago? So far away was it that Carl could not tell whether it was coming or going. Could it be possible that Motor Matt was bringing the air ship in the direction of the *Christina*? It seemed too much of a coincidence to be true, and yet it was hardly stranger than the circumstances which had enveloped Ferral in the net spread by the two Bradys.

Carl, although the discovery of the air ship stretched his nerves to tightest tension and filled him with fluttering hope, kept the news of his discovery to himself. If the Hawk was really heading lakeward, Brady, if he knew it, might realize the possibilities of escape which it would afford the two boys and take measures to keep the *Christina* away from the air ship.

"No one is going to be hauled over the coals, Ferral," said Brady. "When we put you ashore, it will be in a place from which it will take you a good long while to get back to Chicago. Before you get back, I'll have a man buy the Hawk, and I and my friends will make a quick getaway to parts unknown. The Hawk means liberty for me, for I can't dodge around on the ground and keep clear of the police much longer. Are you going to hand that money over, or have we got to take it away from you?"

Shifting his sheath knife to his left hand, Ferral drew the roll of bills from his pocket and stowed it snugly in the breast of his blue shirt.

"If you get this money you'll have to take it," said he defiantly, "and if that two-faced sea cook you say is your son comes too close to me, I'll get him on the point of this dirk."

Covertly, Carl was watching the round swaying speck in the heavens. That it was round, proved that he was looking toward the end of the gas bag, which, seen lengthwise, would have been of cigar-shaped proportions; and the fact that the object was growing larger by swift degrees, proved that it was coming closer to the sailboat.

"Enough of this foolishness," scowled Brady, drawing a revolver and leveling it at Ferral over the end of the cabin. "Take that money out of your shirt and throw it this way. If you make a miss throw and land it in the lake, I'll plug you for that just as quick as I would for not throwing it at all. It's up to you," he added warningly, "and I'm not going to wait all day."

Carl, in the moment of silence that intervened, suddenly hurled the boat hook with all his strength. The move was entirely unexpected on Brady's part, and he was caught unawares. The handle of the hook struck his arm a violent blow, knocking the weapon out of his fingers and dropping it overboard.

A yell of rage went up from Brady.

"Kick off your shoes, Tick," whispered Carl excitedly. "Ven I gif der vort, chump indo der lake. I know vat I know, und I dell you it vas all righdt. Do schust vat I say, aber don'd say somet'ing."

The presence of the air ship was unknown to everyone on the sailboat except Carl. To Ferral it looked like suicide to jump into the lake, with no other boat anywhere in sight.

"I'll kill you for that!" bawled Brady to Carl.

The Dutch boy paid no attention. He had already kicked off his shoes and pulled off his coat. Holding his coat in his hand, he leaped to the top of the cabin and began waving it frantically.

The Bradys, the Norwegian and the Swede swept the surface of the lake with their eyes. Even then their glances fell too low to give them a glimpse of the Hawk.

Ferral had got rid of his shoes, although he was still reluctant about taking to the water. Carl did not give him much time to consider the matter, but grabbed him by the arm and, when the little craft heeled to a strong gust of wind, pulled him overboard.

CHAPTER IV.

RESCUED.

All those on the *Christina* were astounded at the move made by the two boys.

"Leave 'em in the water for a while!" shouted Brady, Sr. "I guess that'll take the ginger out of 'em. Don't be in any hurry, captain, about turning around."

The captain could not have turned very quickly, even if he had wanted to. With all sail set, the *Christina* was driving through the water at race-horse speed. It would take time, and she would inevitably have to get a long way from the boys before she could be put about.

Both Carl and Ferral were good swimmers and had little difficulty in keeping themselves afloat, hampered though they were with their wet clothing.

"We're in for it now, Carl!" gurgled Ferral. "That sailboat will put about and we'll be hauled aboard—then that swab of a Brady will have us just where he wants us." Ferral rose in the water, shook his head to clear his eyes, and peered after the *Christina*. "They're coming around now," he added.

"Led dem come aroundt all vat dey please," sputtered Carl; "Matt vill pull us oudt oof der vet pefore dey ged here."

"Matt?" echoed Ferral.

"Look oferheadt vonce, Tick."

Ferral took a look upward. Rushing toward that part of the lake and swooping downward like a huge bird was an air ship. The strange craft was almost upon him and Carl. Two men were leaning over the guard rail of the car on each side; both held coiled ropes in their hands, and one of them was shouting instructions to Matt, who was in charge of the motor.

The *Christina* was forging along on the back track, the Bradys well forward and clinging to ropes while they watched the manœuvres of the Hawk. It must have been apparent to them that the Hawk would pick up the boys before the *Christina* could come anywhere near them.

Splash! splash!

Two ropes dropped in the water just as the Hawk, with a graceful, gliding motion, came to an even keel some fifteen or twenty feet above the surface of the lake. The whirling propeller lessened its speed and the air ship hovered over the water.

"Grab the ropes!" shouted a voice from the Hawk's car.

It was a useless suggestion, for the ropes had already been caught.

"Can you climb up?" called one of the men. "It isn't safe to bring the air ship any closer to the water."

Climbing the rope was easy for Ferral. Hand over hand he lifted himself upward, was caught by the man and pulled over the rail and into the car. But Carl was no sailor, and every time he tried to climb the rope he slid back into the water again.

"Hang hard," shouted the man in the car, "and we'll pull you up."

The *Christina*, by then, was quite close. Carl had hardly been lifted clear of the water before the crack of a revolver rang out.

Brady, Jr., had passed his own revolver to his father, and the latter was pecking away at Carl as he gyrated under the car of the air ship.

"Keep a firm hold on that rope!" cried the man in the car. "We've got to ascend and get away from that sailboat." [Pg 7]

The nose of the Hawk tilted sharply upward, the propeller whirred at steadily increasing speed, and the air ship bore swiftly away with the dripping form of the Dutch boy swinging underneath.

Crack! crack! came the reports from Brady's revolver.

Carl, however, was not a good target, and, besides, Brady had to fire from the pitching deck of the *Christina*. All the bullets flew wide, and before Brady could fire more than three shots the air ship was out of range.

The Dutch boy's position was in no wise comfortable for his nerves. The Hawk was steadily mounting toward the clouds, and Carl was swaying underneath like a pendulum. As soon as the air ship was out of pistol range of the *Christina*, however, hands were again laid on the rope and Carl was jerked up to the car and pulled to safety.

"Well, great spark plugs!" cried the voice of Motor Matt. "Of all the brain twisters I ever ran up against, this takes the banner! Where did you come from, Dick? And how does it happen Carl is with you?"

Matt was in a chair at one end of the open space in the middle of the car, his hands on the levers that worked the mechanism and controlled the motor.

Ferral, wet as a drowned rat, was sitting up on the floor of the car, his back against the rail. Across from him was Carl. In the other end of the car were the other two passengers. One of these wore the uniform of a policeman.

Ferral's novel situation filled him with wonder. His eyes were darting all around him, above at the swelling gas bag, around him at the machinery, the propeller, the rudder and space, and below him at the heaving expanse of water.

"Well, strike me lucky," he breathed, "but all this seems like a dream. Am I doing a caulk, and imagining I'm wide awake? If I am, pinch me, somebody."

"You're not asleep, old chap," laughed Matt, "if that's what you mean by 'doing a caulk.' Where did you come from?"

"Denver. I'm on my way to Quebec. Heard you were anchored in Chicago and stopped off there to see you. Couldn't find you at home, but I did find Carl."

"How in the world did you and Carl happen to be on that sailboat?" went on Matt. "And why did you jump overboard?"

"Carl pulled me overboard," replied Ferral.

"It vas healthier for us in der vater dan it vas on der poat," put in Carl, slapping at his wet clothes. "Aber I wouldn't haf pulled Verral oferboardt oof I hatn't seen der Hawk skyhootin' along toward us. Ach, dot vas pully! How you habben to be vere you vas schust ven ve needet you, bard?"

"Mr. Jameson"—and Matt nodded toward the passenger forward with the officer—"is thinking of buying the Hawk, but he wanted to try her out with a good long flight and to see if she would be perfectly safe over water. So we sailed over Chicago and headed into the lake. We saw that sailboat, but didn't pay much attention to her until Harris saw some one waving something on her deck. Then, thinking we were being hailed, we laid a course for her. As we came closer, we saw two persons jump into the water. That was our cue to get closer to the lake and pick you up. But what was the matter on that boat? You haven't told me yet."

Ferral ran one hand into the front of his shirt and fished out his water-soaked roll of greenbacks.

"That's what caused the trouble," said he. "Brady wanted the money."

"Brady?" Motor Matt looked questioningly at Carl.

"Yah, so," spoke up Carl. "It iss der same Prady vat you hat sooch a time mit, ofer py Villoughpy's svamp."

"What do you think of that, Harris?" cried Matt, looking at the officer.

"If Brady is on that boat," returned Harris, showing a good deal of excitement, "we ought to tip somebody off and have him captured."

"We'll turn back toward Chicago," said Matt. "Meantime, Carl, you and Dick tell us all about how

you got into that fix. Hurry up with the yarn. If we're to do anything toward capturing Brady, we haven't much time to lose."

Carl and Ferral went over their recent experiences. Matt's wonder grew as he listened. It was strange the way events had fallen out and brought the three chums together just in time to avert a robbery—perhaps a tragedy.

"It's main queer, mate, don't you think?" queried Ferral, when the details had all been given.

"Queerest thing I ever heard of!" avowed Harris. "I knew Brady had a son, but I hadn't a notion where he was, or what he was doing. Looks as though young Brady was a chip off the old block."

"It's a lesson for me," remarked Ferral ruefully, "never to pick up a fellow on his own showing. The queerest part of the whole business was my meeting young Brady on the train, walking right into the trap he had set for me and his father was going to help him spring, and towing Carl along."

"We're coming close to the shore, King," called Jameson.

Matt stole a look over the side.

"Take out your notebook and pencil, Harris," said he, drawing back, "and write a note. Address the memorandum to the police department and say that Hector Brady and his son are off the government pier in a sailboat called the *Christina*, and that if the scoundrels are captured, a tug better put off at once."

Harris scribbled the note. When it was finished, Matt had him tie the small sheet of paper around a bolt taken from the tool box.

"We'll fly low over the park near the Art building," said Matt, "and you yell to the first policeman you see, Harris, and drop the note."

There was no need of yelling to attract anybody's attention in the park, for every person was looking upward at the air ship.

Harris was not long in sighting an officer, and his own uniform demanded the officer's respectful attention.

The note was dropped, and those in the air ship could see the policeman pick it up, untie the sheet of paper and read the communication.

Before the Hawk got out of sight of the park, Matt and the rest had the satisfaction of seeing the policeman wave his hand to signify that he understood, and then hurry off toward the lake.

"I guess that will cook Brady's goose for him," muttered Harris complacently.

"Are you satisfied with the Hawk, Mr. Jameson?" inquired Matt.

"I never imagined that an air ship had been invented which could be manœuvred as you have manœuvred this one," said Jameson. "I'm so well satisfied with the Hawk that I will give three thousand for her." [Pg 8]

Carl gave a gasp and stared at Ferral, only to find that Ferral was already looking at him.

Were Matt and Ferral to lose the air ship, after all?

CHAPTER V.

BUYING THE "HAWK."

"An air ship's a hard thing to sell," observed Harris; "about as hard, I should say, as a white elephant. Your offer, Jameson, is the best one we've had, so far, and I shouldn't wonder if you'd get the Hawk. What are you going to use her for?"

"For a pleasure craft," was the answer. "I'm a member of the Aëro Club and I'm tired of just plain ballooning. I want to climb around through the air wherever I take a notion, and not wherever the winds choose to carry me."

"You won't make any mistake buying the Hawk at three thousand," said Matt, a disappointed look on his face. "If I had that much to spare, Mr. Jameson, you'd never get her."

"Vell, Matt," spoke up Carl, "oof you vant somepody to helup you oudt mit more money, vy—"

Just then Carl caught an expressive look shot at him by Dick. The sailor shook his head. Carl couldn't understand why he was saying more than he ought to, but bit off his words.

Dick felt sure that if Jameson knew there was some one else to bid over him, he would increase his bid, and run it up until it would be impossible for Matt and Dick to consider the purchase.

Jameson was undoubtedly a man of wealth, and able to go any length in gratifying his hobby for air ships. Matt, of course, did not know what Ferral and Carl had at the back of their heads, for no mention had yet been made of Ferral's desire to joint Matt in the purchase of the air ship.

The return to South Chicago was quickly made, the wind being behind the Hawk and helping her onward. The aeronauts descended at Brady's old balloon house, in a swamp field in the outskirts of South Chicago. Two police officers were constantly on guard at the balloon house to keep

anyone from tampering with the air ship.

After the craft had been safely stowed in its quarters, Matt, Carl, Ferral, Harris, and Jameson set off toward town.

Carl and Ferral were in a sorry plight and in urgent need of dry clothes and hats and shoes, but they were not thinking of their own comfort. The danger of losing the air ship was causing them a vast amount of worry.

"I'll take you fellows to a clothing store," said Matt, as they came into the town, "and fix you out so you'll look respectable. Everybody is looking at you as though you were a couple of freaks."

"Belay that—for awhile," returned Ferral. "Take us to a hotel, or anywhere else where we can have a talk."

"You can talk better if you're in dry clothes," said Matt.

"Don'd you t'ink dot for a minid," palpitated Carl, with an apprehensive look at Jameson.

The signs were plain enough to Matt that Ferral and Carl had something they wanted to tell him. At the place where they left Harris to pursue his way to police headquarters, Jameson likewise broke away.

"You'll hear from me sometime this afternoon, Harris," said Jameson, "and when I come around I'll bring a certified check for three thousand with me."

"You'll have to deal with the chief," answered Harris, "and he's acting under instructions from the court. I suppose your offer will take the Hawk, but I can't make any promises."

"People are not falling over themselves to buy the air ship," laughed Jameson, "and I guess my offer is the best one you'll ever get. See you later."

Matt took his chums to the hotel at which he had been stopping while in South Chicago. As soon as Carl and Ferral got inside the hotel office, they grabbed hold of Matt and hustled him toward some chairs in a corner of the room where they could have a private talk.

"You fellows have got something on your minds," laughed Matt. "I've seen that for quite a while. What is it?"

"How'd you like to own the Hawk yourself, mate?" asked Ferral.

"I'd like it fine," answered Matt, his gray eyes brightening. "If I had more money than I knew what to do with, I'd buy the Hawk just to play with it."

"Jameson offers three thousand," went on Ferral. "If you and I offered thirty-five hundred, and hustled the deal right through before Jameson had a chance to overbid us, we'd get the old flugee, eh?"

"Sure!" said Matt. "But where's the thirty-five hundred to come from?"

"Well, I've got two thousand damp dollars in this roll. If you can scrape up the other fifteen hundred, pard, we'll go halvers on the buy and own the Hawk together."

Matt started forward in his chair. No one knew how Motor Matt longed to own that air ship. Carl thought he knew, but he didn't. It was a passion with Matt, almost a mania, but he had held it under control by his iron will.

Matt had his way to make in the world, and what little money he had in the bank had come by hard knocks. Would it be wise to put it into such a thing as an air ship?

"You've got a wealthy uncle, Dick," said the young motorist, "and I don't suppose he cares a picayune what you do with your money. But it's different with me. I've got to invest what little capital I have where it will bring returns."

"It vill pring redurns oof you pud der money in der air ship, Matt," fluttered Carl. "You can make ascensions at shtate fairs, und a lod oof t'ings like dot."

"And maybe we can sell the Hawk, when we are through with her," put in Ferral, "to the United States government for a whole lot more than we paid for her."

"Und oof der gofermendt don'd vant der Hawk," said Carl, "den meppy you can sell her py some feller like Chameson for more as you pay."

"Keelhaul me!" exclaimed Ferral, struck by a sudden thought. "They're offering all kinds of prizes now for air-ship flights. We can get into some of them, mate, and make more money than we ever dreamed of! Come, old ship! Don't look as though you'd lost half a sovereign and found a sixpence. Say the word and we'll go navigating the sky for all there is in it. It's a first-chop game, you take it from me."

"I thought you were going to Quebec?" queried Matt, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"That's where I was bound for, but it makes no odds how long it takes me to get to the place. Besides, when I'm ready to pull out for the River St. Lawrence and the gulf, why can't I sail there in the Hawk?"

Matt was thoughtful. It was not his habit to jump into any new undertaking blindly, and there was something mighty alluring about this air-ship proposition.

"I'll have to give up my job with the Lestrangle people," said he, "and there's a future to that."

"Future?" repeated Ferral. "Aye, mate, there's a prospect that you'll go into a smash, one of these

days, and break your neck. Racing an automobile is risky business."

"Maybe it's not so dangerous as running an air ship, at that," laughed the young motorist.

"Vell, anyhow," said Carl, "you don't make some collisions in a air ship except mit der clouds. Air ships ain't so blendy like pubbles."

"I'll go you, Dick!" cried Matt suddenly, reaching out his hand to grab Ferral's. "But," he added, "it will have to be an even thing. You put in seventeen hundred and fifty and I'll put in the same amount. That will make each of us a half owner."

"Three times three and a tiger!" exulted Ferral, pulling the roll of bills out of his pocket and counting off the water-soaked notes. "There's your seventeen hundred and fifty, matey," and he thrust the money into his chum's hand; "now, slant away for the place where you pay it over, and be sure you get ahead of Jameson."

"There's plenty of time for that," answered Matt, smiling at Ferral's impatience. "Jameson said he would happen in on the chief sometime during the afternoon. Why, it wasn't more than a half hour ago that we left him."

"A whole lod oof t'ings can habben in haluf oof an hour," said Carl. "Go on, bard, und finish oop der teal. I von't be easy in my mindt ondil I know dot you und Ferral own der Hawk. Himmelblitzen, vat a habbiness dot vill be. Captain Matt, oof you please, oof der air ship Hawk, sailing from eferyvere und going der same blace. Hoop-a-la! I vas so gay mit meinseluf as I don'd know. Be jeerful, be jeerful!"

With that, Carl jumped up and began a war dance around the office. He looked like a crazy man, shoeless and hatless, and with his tow hair standing out all over his head like an albino's.

Ferral was every whit as delighted over the prospect as was Carl. He had to do a little jubilating himself, so he got up and began a hornpipe.

"I'll get out of here," laughed Matt, starting for the door, "before you fellows are pinched for escaped lunatics. If I was around, the officers might nab me, too. Get some decent clothes while I'm away."

With that, he started for the office of the chief of police. On his way to headquarters, he passed a bank. Just before he reached the bank, he saw Jameson come hastily out the front door and hurry to a cab that was waiting beside the walk.

"Police headquarters," Matt heard Jameson call to the driver of the cab.

A suspicion darted through Matt's brain. Jameson, having secured his certified check, was losing little time putting through his deal for the Hawk. Had his remark about dropping in on the chief sometime during afternoon been merely a "bluff"?

There was no other cab in sight, and several long blocks lay between Matt and the chief's office. Jameson was bound to reach police headquarters before Matt could possibly arrive there.

For a minute, Matt stood in front of the bank, racking his brains; then, as a swift counterstroke came to him, he darted across the street to a corner drug store.

CHAPTER VI.

MATT SCORES AGAINST JAMESON.

What Matt had in mind when he raced across the street was the telephone booth in the drug store. He would call up the chief on the telephone.

The chief was a good friend of Matt's. In fact, Motor Matt, because of the plucky and successful work he had done, stood pretty high with the South Chicago police department.

After a hurried examination of the telephone directory, the young motorist called up the chief's office.

"Hello!" said he. "Is Chief Raymond there?"

"Yes," some one answered at the other end of the wire. "Want to talk with him personally?"

"Got to, and right away."

"He's busy just now. Leave your message and I'll see that he gets it."

"Can't. This is important and I'm in the biggest kind of a hurry. Tell the chief Matt King—Motor Matt—wants a word with him."

"Oh! Is that you, Matt? Why didn't you say so at the start off? This is Harris. Couldn't you recognize my voice?"

"Is Mr. Jameson there, Harris?"

"He's just gettin' out of a cab, in front—I can see him through the window."

"Well, please call the chief; I want to talk to him before Jameson gets a chance."

A low whistle floated along the wire.

"All right," answered Harris.

It seemed to Matt as though he waited in that hot telephone box for an hour, although it could not have been more than a minute or two. He was now as eager to get ahead of Jameson in the deal for the Hawk as were Ferral and Carl.

Finally the chief's voice came over the phone.

"Howdy, Matt. What can I do for you?"

"I want to buy that air ship, chief," answered Matt.

"Great Scott, boy! You haven't any money to throw away, have you?"

"I should say not, but——"

"Well, forget it. You'd have about as much use for that flying machine as a pig for two tails. Just wait a second—here's Jameson, the fellow you had out in the Hawk, waiting to talk with me. I'll call you up in a few——"

"No, wait a minute," cried Matt. "Jameson's got three thousand he's going to pay for the Hawk. I'll give thirty-five hundred, and put half the amount in your hands inside of fifteen minutes. The rest will be here as soon as I can get it from Chicago."

"I'm not going to let you squander your money in any such fool way," was the chief's astonishing response. "I've got your best interests too much at heart, my lad." [Pg 10]

"Look here," and Matt's voice took on a steely note, "I'm not so young, chief, that I don't know what I'm doing. I can see a good many chances to make money with the Hawk, and if you keep me from getting the air ship you'll be cutting a big hole in my prospects. Besides, you've got to sell to the highest bidder, and I'm giving you five hundred more than Jameson offers. Not only that, but only part of the purchase money is mine. I've got a partner in the deal, and——"

From a click and a sudden silence on the wire, Matt knew that "central" had cut him off. Throwing the receiver onto the hooks, he rang the bell frantically. After two or three minutes, "central" answered him, begged his pardon for cutting him off, and once more gave him the chief's office.

Harris answered the phone again.

"Where's the chief, Harris?" asked Matt.

"In his private room, Matt, talking with Jameson," came the officer's reply.

"Well, I'm coming right over there," said Matt. "Please find out if the chief will see me when I arrive. You can tell me when I reach headquarters."

"I guess he'll see you, all right."

Matt entered the big stone building in less than ten minutes.

Harris met him with a wide and wondering grin.

"You've bought something, Matt," said he.

"How do you know?" queried Matt.

"Jameson just left, and he was considerably worked up. He said he hadn't any idea that you were bidding over him, and that he had stood ready to offer five thousand for the Hawk before letting the machine get away from him."

"What did the chief say?"

"Why, that if you didn't show up inside of fifteen minutes, with half the purchase money, Jameson could have the air ship."

The young motorist drew a long breath of relief.

"Well," said he, "right here is where I deliver the goods."

He walked into the chief's office, and found that official smoking a cigar.

"Here's the money, chief," said Matt, laying the bills down on the table. "I can give you a check for the balance, or I'll go to Chicago and get the cash."

"I suppose you know what you're doing, Matt," returned the chief, "but I'll be hanged if I do. First off, you'll have to have a place to keep the Hawk, and you know Brady sold that old balloon house before he skipped out, and the place is to be pulled down in a few days."

"I've figured out how I can have a light canvas shelter made and carry it along in the car," said Matt.

"But what are you going to do with the machine?" went on the chief curiously.

"Give exhibitions at state and county fairs, compete for aeronautical prizes, perhaps, and after I and my partner have had all the fun we want to with the Hawk, we'll sell it to the government."

"You're buying a pig in a poke, Matt, but that's your lookout. The Hawk is yours, and I guess I know you well enough to take your check. When do you want possession?"

"This afternoon or to-morrow morning."

"Better make it to-morrow morning. It will take this afternoon to get the necessary papers from the court."

"All right, then. Will you let your officers guard the Hawk until to-morrow morning?"

"I'll keep two men at the balloon house until you show up there to claim your property."

"Thank you, chief. Just give me a receipt for that cash and the check saying the money is in payment for the air ship Hawk and that I'm to have the necessary papers completing the transfer as soon as you can get them."

This business formality was quickly carried out, and when Matt left the chief's office, his Chicago bank account looked as though it had been sandbagged. But Matt had the chief's agreement in his pocket, and his heart was light and his hopes buoyant.

Carl and Ferral were waiting for him in the hotel office.

"The Hawk belongs to us, Dick," announced Matt, and both Carl and Ferral began to rejoice. "We've got to take possession to-morrow——"

"The quicker the better!" cried Ferral.

"What are we going to do with the machine?"

"Do?" gasped Ferral blankly. "Why, fly in it, of course! Navigate the skies."

"We can't be in the skies all the time. We'll have to come down once in awhile, for gasoline, if for nothing else, and for gas. Where are we going to keep the Hawk while she's on the ground?"

"Hitch her to a tree," suggested Ferral. "It's easy enough to find moorings for such a craft."

"But, if there's a storm, the Hawk will have to be protected."

"Py shinks," muttered Carl, "dere iss more to der pitzness as vat I t'ought."

Ferral had bought a new outfit of shoes, hats, and clothes for himself and Carl. Ferral's sailor rig was being dried and pressed, and he had managed to pick up a sailorman's hat, in lieu of the one he had lost on the *Christina*.

Matt's logical remarks impressed Ferral quite as much as Carl.

"Well," said he, with a grim laugh, "owning an air ship ain't all beer and skittles. The best thing for us to do is to keep traveling with it. At night, we'll berth the thing in some farmer's barn, and we'll spend the day fanning along through the air."

"There are plenty of barns big enough to house the Hawk," returned Matt, "but I don't know where you'll find a barn, in the whole country, with a big enough door to take it in. And when you talk about traveling, Dick, where'll we go?"

"Oh, anywhere, mate, it's all one to me until I'm ready for Quebec."

"It costs money to travel by air ship. We've got to buy oil and gasoline, and gas, too, now and then. Wherever we travel, we've got to have the idea of profit in mind. How about going to New York and hiring the air ship to some one out on Coney Island?"

"Fine-o!" applauded Ferral. "You're overhauling the right idea, at last, messmate. I knew we could trust you to do that."

"Pully!" cried Carl. "Ve vill show off der machine at Goney Islandt, und make so mooch money ve von't know vat to do mit it. Hoop-a-la!"

Just then a bell boy came hurriedly up to Matt.

"You're wanted on the phone," said he. "Police headquarters is callin' fer you."

[Pg 11]

Matt and his chums had a distressful feeling that something had gone wrong with the air-ship deal, and that the chief was calling up to tell Matt to come back and get his money. All three of them hurried to the telephone booth.

While Matt was talking, Carl and Ferral hung about the door of the booth, wrestling morbidly with their doubts and fears.

"The air ship is still ours," laughed Matt, as he came out of the booth, "but Grove, one of the gang that worked with Brady, and who was captured and in jail here awaiting trial, has escaped. What's more, the Chicago police haven't been able to find that sailboat and catch the Bradys. The chief here thinks Grove has gone to join Hector Brady, and that——"

Matt paused.

"Go on, mate," urged Ferral.

"And that Carl and I had better look out," finished Matt, "or Brady and his gang will put us out of the way."

"Dey vill haf more as dey can do keeping oudt oof der vay oof der bolice deirselufs," said Carl, "to bodder mit us, Matt."

"That's the way I size it up, Carl," returned Matt. "Besides, if Brady and his gang want to find us, after to-morrow morning, they'll have to get hold of another air ship."

But, even then, the cunning Brady was engineering a plot which was to strike Matt and his chums like a bolt from the blue.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE BALLOON HOUSE.

Late that afternoon Matt and Carl went into Chicago on the train. The young motorist had to sever his connection with the Lestrangle people, who were the eastern representatives of the Jarrot Automobile Company, for whom Matt had won the Borden cup during the recent Kansas race.

While Matt was at the office of the Lestrangle Company, Carl was to go to the boarding house, settle their bill, and get their baggage.

Meanwhile, Dick Ferral went to the balloon house to keep watch over the Hawk with the two officers on guard there.

The Lestrangle people were more than sorry to lose Matt's services. There was no driver who could get more speed out of a racing car than Motor Matt, and it was largely his driving that had won the five-day race at the Coliseum for the Jarrot car. Matt agreed, before he left the Lestrangle offices, that if ever he drove in another race, he would give the Lestrangle and Jarrot people first chance to secure his services. Then, with his back pay in his pocket, he made his way to the Twelfth Street Station, met Carl with the luggage, and they returned to South Chicago.

Matt and Carl went to the hotel to stay all night, and the two officers who had been on duty at the balloon house, having been relieved by a fresh detail, came in about nine in the evening and informed Matt that Ferral was going to stay at the balloon house until morning.

"Verral is afraidt der machine vill fly away mit itseluf," chuckled Carl.

"It's all right to be on the safe side," said Matt. "I guess that there won't be anything happen to the Hawk, with two policemen and Dick to look after her."

"Sure nod," agreed Carl. "Vere vill Ferral shleep?"

"There's a small sleeping room in the back of the big shed. Brady used to spend his nights there when he had the air ship under the roof. There's a fixture in the room for supplying the Hawk with illuminating gas. Brady used to manufacture hydrogen, but since the police department has had charge of the air ship, the supply of gas has come from the city gas works. Oh, Dick will be comfortable enough, out there, and when we join him in the morning we'll take his breakfast along."

It was the intention of the three chums to start on their long journey to New York the following morning. Matt had bought a compass and a number of maps covering the country they would cross. For a long time he sat up, studying the maps and figuring on the towns at which they would stop during their flight. It was nearly midnight when he went to bed, and Carl had been snoring for several hours.

Both boys were up bright and early. They ate a hearty breakfast, and Matt had a meal packed away in a box for Dick. It was about half-past six when they were ready to start for the balloon house, and Matt suddenly remembered that the papers completing the transfer of the air ship had not come from the chief.

"I'll go on out to the balloon house with my satchel and the box of grub for Dick," said Matt, "and you go to police headquarters, Carl, and ask the chief for the papers he was to get for me. If the chief isn't there yet, see Harris. It may be you'll have to go to the chief's house."

"All rightd," answered Carl, "schust so you don'd fly away und leaf me."

"You can bet we won't do that, Carl. We'll wait until you get there before we start."

The two chums separated in front of the hotel, Carl walking rapidly toward police headquarters, and Matt turning toward the outskirts of the town and striding away in the direction of the black smoke from the rolling mills.

Ferral, once more in his sailor rig, was out in front of the balloon house, and gave a yell when he saw Matt coming down the road.

Matt dropped the satchel and lunch box over the fence at the roadside, jumped after them, and then started across the swampy stretch of ground.

"Ahoy, old raggie!" whooped Ferral, whose enthusiasm seemed to have grown during the night. "Our ship's pulling at her cables, just as though she's as anxious to get away as we are. Where's Carl?"

"I sent him to the police department after those papers the chief was to get for us," replied Matt. "Here's some breakfast for you, Dick. Better get on the outside of it as soon as you can. By the way, haven't you some luggage in Chicago you'll want to get?"

"I sent all my luggage through to Quebec. When I travel, Matt, I always travel light. Mighty nice of you to remember my 'scran,'" Ferral added, as he took the box Matt handed him.

While he was eating, the two officers came around the end of the building.

"Our orders was to pull out as soon as you got here, King," said one of them. "You're goin' to leave purty soon, anyhow, ain't you?"

"Just as soon as we can get the Hawk out of the shed. Our Dutch pard will be here by that time."

"I'd like to stay and see you off, but the old woman'll have my breakfast ready, an' there's always

a row if I don't get there while it's hot. Good-by, an' good luck to you."

"The same to you, officer."

The policeman started off toward the road, and Matt went around to the front of the balloon house to open the doors. The doors comprised almost the whole end of the building, and when they were open, the interior of the shed was well lighted by the sun.

The Hawk seemed fit and ready for any work she might be called upon to do. As Matt looked at the great swaying bag, the light car and its trim machinery, he experienced a pride in the air ship he had never before known. This was because the Hawk belonged partly to him, now.

While in the balloon house, the air ship was not moored with ropes, but was weighted down with sand bags hung to the under side of the car. A pull of a lever would release all the sand bags.

There was a supply of gasoline in the shed, and also a small amount of oil. Matt filled the gasoline tank and the oil tank, saw that all ropes belonging to the car were safely stowed, and that propeller and steering rudder were working properly.

By the time he had finished his survey, Ferral had got through with his breakfast and had joined him.

"See anything of Carl, Dick?" asked Matt.

"He wasn't in sight when I came in," replied Ferral.

"Probably the chief wasn't at his office and Carl had to go to his house. He'll be along pretty soon, though. It's a fine morning for the start. Hardly a breath of air stirring."

Matt stowed his maps and compass in a little locker close to the driver's chair.

"We've got to have a compass, eh?" grinned Ferral.

"It's just as well to have one," said Matt.

"And charts! Keelhaul me, mate, but this is just like putting to sea in a ship."

"It's about the same thing."

"Only when we make landfall we drop to it. But what's the good of the charts? We'll be off soundings all the time, and no danger of bouncing up on a reef."

"It's a good thing to keep track of the towns we pass. If we need gas, we want to be able to figure on reaching a town big enough to supply it."

"Right-o, mate. I'll lay a month's pay your head's level on the whole business, and that you've figured out everything connected with the cruise. Are we going to follow the railroad?"

"Not much, Dick! We're going to strike a bee line for where we want to go. That's the beauty of traveling in an air ship. You don't have to go around a mountain, or hunt for a place to cross a stream."

"Strike me lucky, mate," jubilated Ferral, rubbing his hands, "I'm mighty glad I stopped over in Chicago to see you, and that we were able to get our hooks on this air ship. The way the thing fell out, it seems like that was how it was meant to be. Everything that's happened has steered us both for the Hawk. If I hadn't dropped into that trap Brady, Jr., laid for me, I wouldn't have been out in the lake; and if you hadn't come along in the Hawk, just when you did, I couldn't have saved my money; and if you hadn't picked me up, money and all, that other lubber would have got ahead of us and grabbed the air ship. Oh, we've been main lucky, all around."

"What will your uncle say," quizzed Matt, "when you write him you have bought an interest in an air ship?"

"Bless the old chap! Why, matey, anything I do is all right for Uncle Jack. If I'd bought a menagerie, or a steam calliope, the old boy would have clapped me on the shoulder and said I'd done well."

"Well," laughed Matt, "that's mighty nice—for you. Suppose we get the Hawk out of the shed? By the time we do that, Carl ought to be here."

"Aye, aye, my hearty! How do you go to work to warp the craft out of her berth? You'll have to tell me what to do, until I can learn the ropes."

"All we've got to do," said Matt, "is just to take hold of the car and pull the air ship through the door. These sand bags hold her steady. Be careful, though, that the gas bag don't strike the side of the door. It would cost us a lot of money, and delay us for a week or two, if we were unlucky enough to rip the fabric."

By working carefully, the boys got the front part of the Hawk through the end of the shed and into the open air. Matt was at the front of the car, and Ferral was at the rear. While the young motorist bent to his work, he heard a noise as of running feet.

Straightening himself quickly, he whirled around. Four roughly dressed men were rushing at him from the corner of the shed. The rascals were plainly hostile, as their clinched fists and their scowling faces proved. One of the scoundrels, who was within arm's length of Matt, halted and aimed a blow at him. Matt deftly evaded the blow. By then the others were near enough to take part in the set-to.

"This way, Dick!" yelled Motor Matt, as he struck down one of the ruffians.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLOT OF THE BRADY GANG.

The attack of the four men had been engineered with a suddenness that took Matt's breath. The men were not common hoodlums, although they looked the part, but all four of them were men whom Matt recognized.

They were all members of the Brady gang. One was Grove, who had escaped from the South Chicago authorities on the preceding afternoon; another was Harper, who used to drive the Hawk for Brady when the air ship was in his possession; another man was Pete, and the fourth was Whipple.

Matt had seen a picture of Harper in the "rogues' gallery" in the chief's office, and he had had no difficulty in recognizing the rascal at a glance. Harper had been with Grove at the time some blue prints were stolen from Hamilton Jerrold, another inventor of air ships, living in South Chicago. But Harper had been hurt in Jerrold's house and had not got away in the air ship, which the thieves had used to help them commit their robbery.

Pete and Whipple had been with Brady in a rendezvous in Willoughby's swamp, near Lake Station, Indiana. Matt had had some exciting dealings with Grove, Pete, and Whipple, and knew them fairly well.

Ferral, hearing Matt's cry and the rush of feet, had run out of the shed and around the front of the car. As quickly as he could, he leaped to Matt's assistance. [Pg 13]

But what could the two boys accomplish against four husky men, all desperately determined to carry out the plot they had formed? Officers of the law were hunting for all of them, and if they did not succeed in their nefarious work, it would not be many hours before they saw the inside of a prison cell.

Matt King never fought better than he did then. He had struck down Whipple, and had thrown himself at Pete.

About the same time, Ferral engaged Grove. Grove had science as well as strength, and was keeping Ferral pretty well occupied.

Whipple, wild with fury, staggered to his feet. He was behind Matt, and Ferral, out of the corner of his eye, saw him preparing to strike.

"Look out, mate!" warned Ferral. "There's a big swab behind you!"

But the warning came too late. Whipple's ham-like fist reached Matt's head, and the young motorist staggered and flung up his arms. Again the enraged Whipple aimed a blow, but Matt dropped to one side, and the fist only grazed his shoulder. Pete, however, had been watching his chance. Throwing himself forward, he dealt a fierce blow with his fist that toppled Matt to the ground.

Harper, meantime, had come up behind Ferral and successfully carried out the same manoeuvre that had been made use of by Whipple. Both boys were brutally knocked off their feet. The moment they were down, Harper fell on Ferral and Pete dropped on Matt, when Whipple turned on Grove.

"Go ter the side o' the shed, Grove," said he, "an' keep yer eyes skinned along the road. If ye see anyone comin', jest let out a yell."

"What's the use of fooling around here any longer?" demanded Grove. "We've got the car, and all we have to do now is to get into her and let the police look up at us."

"Do as I tell ye!" bawled Whipple. "Our work ain't done yet. The ole man told us what ter do with King, an' we're goin' ter do it. He's played hob with Brady's plans, an' the ole man is crazy ter git even. T'other chap, bein' with King, 'll have ter stand fer the same dose."

Grove, muttering to himself, moved off toward the corner of the balloon house. Whipple, hurrying to the car, took out a coil of rope. It was not heavy rope, but fine and pliable.

Cutting off four pieces of the rope, Whipple went to Matt. The young motorist was still dazed from the blows he had received, and it was not difficult for Pete to hold him while Whipple tied his wrists at his back and his feet at the ankles.

Thereupon Whipple passed to Dick and secured him in the same way.

"Anyone in sight yet, Grove?" Whipple asked as he straightened up.

"No," replied Grove.

"Well, keep yer eyes peeled. We're a good ways from bein' through." He turned to Harper and Pete. "Lay holt o' the car, you two," he ordered, "an' pull the Hawk clear o' the shed. Mind ye don't let the gas bag tech the sides o' the door."

"This ain't the first time I've helped with the Hawk," said Harper. "I reckon I know how ter handle her as well as anyone."

Harper and Pete managed to get the air ship out of the shed without injury. This left the opening into the shed clear.

"You two," Whipple went on to Pete and Harper, "pick up that other feller an' kerry him in. I can handle King, all right."

The way Whipple handled Matt was to grab him by the collar and drag him through the door and the length of the shed. At the end of the big room he opened a door and pulled Matt into a small chamber not more than ten feet square by as many high—hardly more than a big box. There was a window in one wall, and two cots at each side.

Halting in front of one of the cots, Whipple picked Matt up in his arms and dumped him upon the narrow bed.

"Put your kid on the other cot," ordered Whipple to Harper and Pete.

Ferral was lifted and placed as the leader of the gang had directed.

Matt had been conscious of every move that was made, although his mind had not been at all clear. By the time he had been placed on the cot, however, his faculties were as keen as ever, in spite of the pain he suffered on account of his rough treatment.

"What are you trying to do, Whipple?" he demanded, turning his head so he could look directly into the face of the leader of the gang.

"What we're tryin' ter do we've as good as done," was the fierce answer. "We're undoin' the thing you done a week er more ago. The perlice are after us, on account o' you, an' we're goin' ter make a getaway in the Hawk."

"The Hawk belongs to me and my friend, on the other cot."

"How d'ye figger that out? I reckoned the Hawk belonged ter Brady."

"Brady is a thief. He stole a lot of stuff, and the Hawk was sold to help pay back the losses of some of the people who were robbed."

"Oh, ho!" laughed Whipple, huskily, "that's the way of it, eh? An' you an' yer chum bought the Hawk?"

"Yes. If you steal her you'll get into trouble—a lot more trouble than you're in already. I guess you've got more now than you can take care of."

"An' it was you as made the trouble fer us!" cried Whipple, with a black scowl, stepping closer to Matt and shaking a fist in his face. "But you're right at the end o' your rope, my buck. Brady never fergits a feller who crosses his plans like you done. Arter we leave here it won't be you that makes the trouble fer us."

"Is Brady in this?" queried Matt, seeking information.

"He's on deck, you bet, an' we're goin' ter pick him up close ter Willoughby's swamp; then we're goin' ter cross the lake an' come down in a place where we'll be safe fer a spell. While we got the Hawk we're safe from the perlice, all right, but we got our operations ter attend to."

"More robbery, I suppose."

"Suppose what ye blam' please, ye'll never be able ter tell anyone what ye're hearin' from me now. What we're goin' ter do to you an' yer chum'll teach others ter let Hector Brady an' his gang alone. If I——"

Just then a shrill whistle came to the ears of those in the little room.

"Listen to that!" exclaimed Pete, in consternation.

"Somebody's comin'!" gasped Harper. "If we don't make a run out of this we'll be nabbed."

Whipple jumped to a gas bracket against one of the rough board walls. It was not an ordinary bracket, but had a wide mouth to which a piece of hose could be attached. This had been used by the police officials to replenish the gas in the silk envelope of the Hawk.

With one jerk of his hand Whipple turned the gas full on.

"Get out!" he called to the two with him.

Pete and Harper tumbled through the door into the shed. Whipple hurried after them but paused a moment on the threshold to give a wild, taunting laugh.

"That's what Brady told us ter do," said he, savagely, "an' we've done it. Git clear o' this, if ye can!"

With that, Whipple slammed the door.

The fate to which the murderous scoundrel had consigned the two boys was a fearful one. Even as the door closed, Matt could smell the odor of gas pouring into the small room and poisoning the air.

"Dick!" he called. "Can you hear me? Do you know what has been going on?"

"Aye, aye, old ship," came from Ferral. "We're bound for Jones', as straight as we can go. We've lost the Hawk, and probably we've lost our lives. Hard luck!"

"Hard luck!" exclaimed Matt. "Why, Dick, it's the hardest luck I ever had come my way. But there's a chance."

"What sort of a chance, mate? I can't see any."

"Grove, one of the gang, was left outside to watch. He was to whistle if anyone came along the

road. Didn't you hear him give the warning? If anyone is coming, we can bring them here. Use your lungs, pard! Yell for all you're worth! Our lives may depend on it!"

Fighting frenziedly to free themselves of the ropes about their hands, the boys shouted at the top of their voices for help. They could feel the vitiated air of the room bringing their breath short and hard, and they knew that their voices were getting feebler by degrees. Desperately they continued to call, hoping against hope that they would be heard, and that some one would come to their aid before it was too late.

CHAPTER IX.

CARL IS SURPRISED.

Carl, when he left the hotel to call on the chief in accordance with Motor Matt's instructions, left his satchel in care of the clerk. In going to the balloon house, after he had transacted his business at police headquarters, he would have to return past the hotel, and by leaving the satchel he would not have to bother with it during his call on the chief.

It was very early, too early for the chief to be in his office. Nor was Harris at headquarters. No one there knew of any papers that had been left for Matt.

Carl was disappointed, for he was in a hurry to rejoin his friends at the balloon house. Nevertheless, Matt had told him to be sure and see the chief, and so Carl inquired his way to that official's house.

When he arrived at the house, Carl found that the chief had left and gone to headquarters; so the disgusted German turned around and made his way back to the chief's office. The head of the department had not yet arrived there, having been delayed somewhere on the road.

Carl had to wait half an hour. When the chief finally came, Carl got to him at once and asked about the papers. "They're here, all right," smiled the official. "I would have sent them to Matt last night, only I was so busy trying to find that escaped prisoner, Grove, that the matter slipped my mind. You lads are going to start off in the air ship, are you?"

"Sure," answered the impatient Carl, "oof I efer ged dose bapers and meet Matt like vat he saidt. I don'd vant dem fellers to go off mitoudt me."

"Oh, I guess they won't do that! Where are you going?"

"Py New York. Anyhow, dot vas our bresent indentions."

"New York? Great Scott! Do you think that——"

"I vas in a pig hurry, chief," interrupted Carl, wildly. "You see, I haf peen more as an hour looking for you, und I vas vay late meeding Matt und Tick. Oof you vill blease handt ofer dose bapers, I vill shlide oudt so kevick as bossiple."

The chief pulled a sealed envelope from a pigeonhole in his desk and handed it to Carl.

"There you are," said he. "If Matt hears anything about Brady, or the rest of his gang, tell him to be sure and let me know."

"He vill do dot, you bed you. He iss as anxious to haf Brady captured as anypody."

"He ought to be. Brady will do everything he can to get even with Matt for the havoc Matt has played with the gang. And that's what leads me to believe Matt may see something of him. Tell your friend that——"

But Carl waited for no more. He had already lost more time than he could well afford.

Bolting out of the chief's office, he made a rush for the hotel. There he secured his satchel and started along the road toward the rolling mills.

The drops rolled off Carl's face as he hurried. As soon as he struck the beginning of the road that ran past the swampy meadow, he kept his eyes in the direction of the balloon house. It was several minutes before he sighted the big building, and then it was far off and could be seen only indistinctly.

Swiftly he drew nearer and nearer. As the building came more prominently into view, he was able to make out the air ship, swaying in front.

"Dey haf got der Hawk oudt oof der house!" he muttered. "Dey're alretty to go, und dey vas only vaiting for me."

Even as Carl was congratulating himself on the fact that he was not going to be left behind, he was astounded to see the Hawk move upward and away from the balloon house. He was still so far away that he could not see those in the car, and a terrific fear shivered along his nerves.

"Himmelblitzen!" he groaned, "I wouldn't haf t'ought it bossiple! Dey vas leafing me in der lurch. Modor Matt, der pest friendt vat I efer hat, iss skyhooting away mitoudt his Dutch bard! Vat iss der meaning oof dot?"

For a few moments Carl stood rooted to the ground. Then he had an idea.

"Meppy Matt und Tick vas coming pack towards town to pick me oop!" he murmured, and

continued to stand still and watch.

But the Hawk did not turn around and come in Carl's direction. On the contrary, it kept moving off toward the south and west.

"Ach, vat a pad pitzness!" groaned Carl. "Matt!" he yelled, as loud as he could, starting to run along the road and waving his satchel as he went, "vy don'd you vait for your Dutch pard, Matt? Haf you gone back on me?"

If Carl's voice had been strong enough to reach a mile, his yelling might have ascended to the ears of those in the car. As it was, however, Carl might as well have shouted into the empty air. But he was excited, and hardly knew what he was about.

When he came opposite the balloon house he hardly gave it a look; and he was making so much noise himself that he was unable to hear the calls coming from the small addition in the rear of the big shed.

On and on along the road went Carl, keeping up his frenzied pace. He got beyond the big mills, and then, after he had got past the smoke from their huge chimneys, he saw that the air ship had disappeared. Utterly dejected, and tired out with his hard run, he sat down on a rock near the roadside.

"I nefer vouldt haf t'ought dot oof Modor Matt," he wheezed mournfully. "All along I haf hat some hunches dot I vouldn't ged away in dot air ship py New York. Vell, vell! Der pest friendt vat I efer hat has vent pack on me, und I vas a shdray Dutchman mit fife tollars in my bocket und no blace to go."

While Carl mused in this lugubrious strain, a girl came toward him along the road. Her clothes were dusty, and her face was haggard. She was pretty, in spite of her weariness and her coarse clothes, and there was a dauntless gleam in her dark eyes. When she came close to Carl she paused.

Carl pulled off his hat.

"Vas you in some drouples, too, miss?" he asked. "Oof you vas, den ve ought to be some pooty goot gompany. Misery lofes gompany, dey say, und I vas so full oof misery as I can't dell."

The girl stared at him wonderingly for a moment.

"Are you acquainted with the country around here?" she asked. "I ought to know it, but I never came into South Chicago before by this road."

"Vell, I know somet'ing aboutt it," replied Carl. "For vy do you make dose inkviries?"

"I'm looking for the balloon house where they keep the air ship called the Hawk," was the astounding reply.

Carl leaped off the stone as though he had been touched by a live wire.

"Sure I know dot!" he cried. "Vat for do you vant to know?"

"I must hurry and get there," answered the girl. "I've walked a long ways, and I'm pretty tired, but I've got to reach the balloon house."

"Der Hawk don'd vas dere any more," said Carl.

The girl clasped her hands.

"You mean to say that the Hawk has been taken away so soon?"

"Vell, she don'd vas oxactly daken. You see, der bard vat I hat has gone pack on me und he skyhooted off mit der Hawk, leafing me behindt."

"When was this?" asked the girl, excitedly.

"Schust a leedle vile ago. Ter Hawk only schust got oudt oof sight. Couldn't you see it? Oof you hat looked oop you vould sure haf seen der air ship."

"Oh," cried the girl, tearfully, "then I'm too late! And I tried so hard to get here. I hadn't any money, you see, and I had to walk."

"How far haf you valked?"

"All the way from Lake Station."

"Ach, chimineddy! Dot vas too pad, I bed you. Who you vas? I haf fife tollars, und you can haf dot."

Carl pulled the crumpled bill out of his pocket and tried to push it into the girl's hand. But she would not take it.

"No, no," said she. "My name is Helen Brady, and I——"

Carl grew rigid. His amazement was growing.

"Vy," he cried, "den you vas Prady's daughter, eh? Der vone vat heluped Modor Matt ged away from Villoughy's svamp mit der Hawk dot time he prought two oof der gang indo Sout' Chicago?"

"Yes, yes," returned the girl. "I am the same Helen Brady who helped Motor Matt. If the air ship is gone from the balloon house, then it wasn't Matt who sailed away with her, but four of my father's men."

Carl was electrified.

"Ach, I ditn't t'ink my olt bard, Modor Matt, could dreat me in sooch a vay as dot!" he exclaimed. "Vat has pecome oof Matt und Verral?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered the girl. "I'm afraid that some awful trouble has come to them. We must hurry to the balloon house and see."

"Yah, you bed you!" cried Carl. "Meppy I can gif you some helup on der vay? You vas more tired as me—and you valked from Lake Station! Himmelblitzen! vat you t'ink oof dot! A leedle girl like you valk all der vay from Lake Station! Come, und ve vill got togedder py der palloon house."

Carrying his satchel in his left hand, with his right Carl grasped the girl's arm and helped her along the road. They did not proceed at a very rapid pace, but they walked much faster than the girl could have done had she been compelled to go on alone.

"Vat iss der drouple, anyway?" asked Carl. "Vy you vas valking to der palloon house?"

"There is a plot," answered the girl, "a plot to steal the air ship and to do some harm to Motor Matt. Matt helped me, that time he took the air ship away from the swamp, and I want to help him. But I'm afraid I'm too late, too late."

The girl's voice and manner all convinced Carl that there was something very serious the matter. The theft of the air ship would have been bad enough, in itself, but there was a chance that harm had befallen Matt.

Excited and anxious, Carl toiled on along the road, helping the girl and keeping his eyes on the balloon house, just as he had done when he had approached it from the direction of town—only he was even more wildly anxious now than he was then.

CHAPTER X.

HELEN BRADY'S CLUE.

Matt remembered the awful moment when he felt his senses leaving him, when the interior of the bare little room swam on his sight and was blotted out in a black mist. After that he could remember nothing until he opened his eyes in the bright sunlight, and saw the strangely familiar face of a girl bending over him.

[Pg 16]

For a brief space his clearing senses grappled with the situation helplessly; then, as the clear outer air drove from his lungs the poison he had been breathing, his faculties regained their normal condition.

"Helen Brady!" he mumbled, sitting up.

"Yah, you bed you!" whooped Carl, from a little distance away. "Dot vas Helen Prady, Matt, und oof it hatn't peen for her, you und Tick vould haf peen goners. Helen Prady is a pooty fine girl, you bed you. I dake off my hat to her any tay as you can findt in der veek. Miss Prady," and Carl directed his admiring gaze at the girl, "allow me to make some remarks dot you vas a brick—and not a goldt brick, neider. She valked all der vay from Lake Station, Matt, to safe you und Tick!"

Carl was near Ferral, who was likewise sitting up in front of the balloon house, only a little way off.

"Sink me, mate," cried Ferral, "but we had a close call of it. We shook hands with Davy Jones—just about—and then Miss Brady and Carl pulled us away from him."

"I'm all twisted up about this," said Matt, rubbing a hand across his eyes in a dazed way.

"I'm all ahoo over it myself," put in Ferral. "I'm glad I'm alive, but I can't understand how Miss Brady got here and helped us out of that scrape."

"Tell dem aboutt it, Miss Prady," urged Carl. "You haf tone a mighty fine t'ing, und Matt und Tick ought to know all aboutt it."

"Ever since you got away from Willoughby's swamp with the Hawk, Matt," said Helen, "I have been staying in Lake Station. My father, and Pete, and Whipple got out of the swamp by a secret way they knew about, very soon after you left. Dad gave me some money and told me to find a place to stay in Lake Station. He was terribly ugly to me, and I was glad that I was going to be free from him for a while. There was a woman in the village who had some furnished rooms to rent, and I rented them and stayed there. I didn't see anything of dad until last night. I was in the other part of the house, visiting the woman who owned it, and when I went back to my rooms I saw a light shining through a window between the edge of the curtain and the sill. I listened and heard voices—then I knew that dad had found the place where I was staying, and had come there.

"There was a way to get into the cellar, and I got into it and crept up a stairway without being heard. By sitting at the top of the stairs I could listen and hear all that was said.

"Whipple was in the room with dad, and they were talking over a scheme for getting hold of the Hawk. Officers of the law were hunting them, and, if they did not have the air ship, they felt that they would not be able to avoid arrest for very long.

"Whipple told dad how Grove had managed to escape from the South Chicago police, and dad told Whipple how he had been out in a sailboat with my brother, and how they had tried to get

some money from a young fellow my brother had met on the train, and how Motor Matt, with the Hawk, had come along just in time to prevent the robbery. After that, my father said he and my brother had the sailboat set them ashore. My father had come to Lake Station, and had sent my brother to tell Whipple to come to the same place. And that was how the two happened to meet in my rooms.

"Whipple, Pete, and Harper had been in hiding in Willoughby's swamp, and that was the place to which Grove came when he made his escape.

"My father knew that the Hawk was being kept by the police in the old balloon house, and that two officers were constantly on guard to see that no harm came to the machine. It was also known that Motor Matt was spending a good deal of time at the balloon house and running the air ship for the officers.

"Dad's plot centred about the balloon house. It was a risky plot, but dad told Whipple they would all have to take desperate chances if they hoped to succeed in stealing the Hawk and getting away in her. Whipple agreed with dad, and they arranged between them that Whipple, Grove, Harper, and Pete were to get close to the balloon house in the early morning, steal the Hawk, and sail away. If they were successful, they were to stop at the marsh for dad; and if they captured Motor Matt, Whipple was to put him, securely bound, in the back room, behind the shed, and turn on the gas there."

The girl shivered, and an expression of horror crossed her face.

"I can't begin to tell you," she half sobbed, "how terribly I felt. Motor Matt had helped me, and I could not bear to think that my own father was—was——"

Helen paused, and it was a moment before she could recover herself and go on.

"At first," she continued, "I thought of running into the room where dad was and begging him not to let Whipple harm Motor Matt. But a little thought showed me that such a course would be foolish. Not only would dad not listen to me, but he would probably make me a prisoner, so as to keep me from interfering with his plot. I had no money left, and the only thing I could do was to walk to South Chicago, and try to get there before the plot was carried out. I got my hat—it was in a bedroom easily reached from the cellarway—and I started.

"I walked miles and miles through the darkness, and at last I was so tired I had to sit down and rest. Then I got up and started on again. Every little while I would sit down for a few minutes. But I did not dare to stop very long, for fear I would not get to South Chicago in time.

"Morning came, and I guided myself by the smoke from the rolling mills. Just as I was about to give out entirely, I met Carl."

The girl turned her eyes toward the Dutch boy.

"Und it vas a pooty goot t'ing dot Miss Prady met me schust ven she dit. I vas feeling pooty plue mit meinseluf, you bed you. You see, Matt, it vas like dis: Afder fooling aroundt und losing more dime as I wanted to, I got dose bapers from der chief. Den I come pack py der hodel, get my sadchel, und hurry kevick along der roadt to der palloon house. Ven I see der blace, oop goes der Hawk in der air, und I t'ink, py shiminy, dot Matt hat got tired oof vaiting und hat gone off py New York mitoudt his Dutch bard. Vell, meppy it vas some foolishness, aber I shaced afder dot air ship so fast as I couldt. Sure I couldn't ketch der Hawk, aber I vas oft my headt und ditn't shdop to t'ink. I schust run, und yelled, und got vay past der palloon house ven I med Miss Prady. As soon as she say a few t'ings, den I know dot it vasn't Matt vat vent away mit der Hawk, but dot Prady gang; und as soon as she say a few t'ings more, den I ged some vorries aboutt Matt und Tick. Ve come pack py der palloon house togedder, Miss Prady und me, und ve go to dot leedle room pehindt der blace, und, whoosh! sooch a odor vat shtruck us in der faces ven ve obened der door.

[Pg 17]

"Vell, dere vas my bard, Modor Matt, lying shdill on der cot on vone site, und my odder bard, Tick Verral, lying shdill on der cot on der odder site. Ve hat some vildness mit us ven ve t'ink you vas gone oop der shpout, aber ve turned off der gas, got you oudt oof der room und indo der glear air, und pooty kevick, pumpy, you refided. Ach, it vas some habbiness for bot' oof us ven ve see dot!"

Matt and Dick had listened to all this with deep interest. What most impressed them was the courage and determination shown by Helen Brady. Matt reached out and clasped her hand.

"You saved my life and Dick's," said he, with feeling, "and that is something we'll never forget."

"Not if we live to be a thousand years old!" declared Ferral. "You're a brave lass, Miss Brady, and I've an uncle who won't forget what you've done, either."

"I only did what I thought I ought to do," said Helen. "It was merely undoing a wrong of my father's, and it was no more than right that I should do what I could."

"Ach, Matt," piped up Carl, "aber you vas blaying in some hardt luck! Und shdill, mit all dot, vasn't it pooty fine dot you got oudt oof dot tight blace mit your life, you und Tick?"

"Right-o, matey!" agreed Ferral heartily. "Matt and I, between us, have lost the Hawk, which means thirty-five hundred, in cold cash, but, all the same, we ought to shake hands over it and call ourselves well off."

Matt grabbed Dick's hand.

"Shake!" said he. "A fellow never has such a run of hard luck but he can think a little and see

where it might have been a whole lot worse."

A puzzled look had come into Helen's face.

"How was it, Matt," she queried, "that you and your friend lost so much money?"

Matt explained about the purchase of the air ship. As Helen listened, her look of wonder changed to one of distress.

"I am sorry!" she said, with a pang of deepest regret. "I know where dad and the rest have gone, though, and if you wanted to follow them, you might be able to get the air ship back."

The information startled all three of the boys.

"You know that?" cried Matt, his face brightening.

"Yes. They are going to cross the lake to Grand Haven. There's a man in Grand Haven that dad knows. His name is Ochiltree, Dave Ochiltree. Dad is going to see him. I don't know where the rest will be with the Hawk, but no doubt you could find out from Ochiltree."

"It's a clue, and a good one!" said Matt. "We will follow it, Helen."

"Aye, that we will!" exclaimed Ferral.

"You bed you!" averred Carl. "Sooch a goot luck as dot iss vat ve vas looking for. Meppy ve follow der clue und get der air ship pack, den make anoder shtart for New York, hey?"

An idea came suddenly to Matt. Leaping to Carl, he grabbed him by the arm.

"The Eagle," said he, speaking rapidly, "has chased the Hawk before. Why not call on Hamilton Jerrold?"

Carl gave an exultant yell and tossed his cap.

"Dot's der fery t'ing, Matt!" he declared. "Oof dere iss enyvone in der whole vorltdt as vouldt like to do Modor Matt a goot durn, it iss dot feller Jerrold! Led us go to him rightd away, ad vonce, mitoudt losing some more dime!"

CHAPTER XI.

JERROLD GIVES HIS AID.

"You've got me in a monkey's fist again," spoke up Ferral. "What's all this about the Eagle and Hamilton Jerrold?"

"Don'd you rememper, Tick," said Carl, "I toldt you aboutd dot odder feller in Sout' Chicago vat hat inventioned an air ship? His ship iss der Eagle, und——"

"Aye, aye, mate, now I rise to you," interrupted Ferral. "Fine idea, that of chasing one air craft with another. The only point is, will this man Jerrold let Matt take his air ship?"

"Dot feller vouldt do anyt'ing for Matt," averred Carl. "Matt got pack der plue brints for him, und he t'inks der King oof der Modor Poys iss der greadest feller vat efer habbened."

"The quicker we can see Jerrold," suggested Matt, "the sooner we shall know whether or not he can help us. Not only that, but I've got to report the theft of the air ship to the police."

"Who loses der air ship?" queried Carl. "Der bolice, oder Matt und Tick?"

"Matt and Dick," answered Ferral. "We had bought the machine, and if it had been stolen no more than a minute after the money had been turned over, we would still have been the ones to lose it. I don't know what sort of case you're in, Matt, but I've got a head that feels as big as a barrel. If I could soak it awhile in cold water I think it would do it good."

"My head was pretty near knocked off my shoulders," answered Matt, "and then to inhale all that gas on top of the pounding, gave us a whole lot to stand. Work is what we need, Dick. If we can get busy we'll forget our troubles."

The doors of the empty balloon house were closed, Matt and Carl gathered up their satchels, and they started back toward South Chicago, Ferral helping Helen Brady over the road.

"Some beople vill be surbrised ad seeing us come in valking mit ourselufs," observed Carl, "ven ve vas going to rite der odder vay in der Hawk. Ve nefer know vone minid vat iss going to happen der next."

This remark of Carl's was generally agreed to.

"What are you going to do now, Helen?" asked Matt, dropping alongside the girl and Ferral. "Your father has gone away and left you, and you will have to do something for yourself."

"I know it," answered the girl.

"What has become of your brother?"

"I don't know where he has gone. He may go across the lake with dad, or he may stay in Chicago. When dad talked with Whipple, I didn't hear him say what Hector was to do."

"It's a good thing your father has left you, Helen," said Matt, "and if all I hear about your brother is true, I hope he won't come around to bother you."

A sad look crossed the girl's face. With her father and her brother both criminals, her position was forlorn, indeed.

"I have friends in Chicago," said she, "and I could go and stay with them for a time."

"That's the thing to do," approved Matt. Taking two ten-dollar bills from his pocket, he forced them into the girl's hand. "You've got to take the money," said he. "Sometime, if you feel as though you ought to, you can pay me back, but don't let the debt bother you."

"Here," called Ferral, diving into his own pocket and bringing up some money, "I'm in on this."

"Und me, too," said Carl. "I vill dake five tollars' vort'."

Helen thanked all the boys, with tears in her eyes, but Matt's was the only money she would take.

"This will be enough for my immediate needs," said she, "and while I am staying in Chicago, I can arrange to get something to do."

By that time the little party was well into South Chicago. The satchels were returned to the hotel, and Carl was left with Helen, to take her to a restaurant where she could get something to eat, and then to put her aboard a train for Chicago. After that, Carl was to make his way to Jerrold's house.

Matt and Dick, when they left their Dutch chum and the girl, hurried to police headquarters.

When the chief saw Matt, he threw up his hands.

"Did your air ship give out on you?" he asked. "I thought you were well on your way to New York by this time."

What Matt had to say about the air ship nearly took the chief's breath. Then, when he realized all that recent events meant, his temper got the better of him.

"I've got a fine force of roundsmen and detectives," said he sarcastically, "when a pack of scoundrels we're looking for can pull off a trick like that right in the outskirts of town!"

Matt eased the chief's anger somewhat by telling him of the clue they had received as to Brady's whereabouts, and he explained how he and his friends were going to get Jerrold's air ship and follow the clue across the lake.

"Now that sounds mighty good," said the chief, a flicker of hope crossing his face, "and of course the South Chicago police department ought to be represented in the expedition. Suppose I send Harris, in plain clothes, along with you? He knows St. Jo, Benton Harbor, Grand Haven, and all those places across the lake like a native. He'll be a help. Unless I'm mightily mistaken, this man Ochiltree is an old-time crook, and has served a term or two in the 'pen.' Anyhow, his name is familiar to me. But you boys are in a hurry and I won't detain you. Go on to Jerrold's. I'll have Harris get into civilian's clothes and join you there."

Fifteen minutes later, Matt and Dick were at the inventor's rambling old house. Hamilton Jerrold himself answered Matt's ring, caught him by the hand with the utmost cordiality, and ushered him and Ferral into the sitting room.

"It does my eyes good to see you again, Matt," beamed Jerrold. "You've been making some fine flights with the Hawk for the police department. Jupiter, but you're a wonder when it comes to handling anything that's driven with an explosive engine."

Matt flushed and made a deprecatory gesture.

"It seems, Mr. Jerrold," said he, "that I never call on you except when I'm in trouble."

The inventor took fresh interest.

"You're in trouble now?" he asked, showing a good deal of concern.

"I'm in the hardest kind of luck," went on Matt, and he proceeded to explain how he and Ferral had bought the Hawk, and how Brady had executed his balloon-house plot, stolen the machine, and almost caused a tragedy.

Hamilton Jerrold had been himself entangled with Brady and knew just what kind of a scoundrel he was. His experience with Brady had left much bitterness in its wake, and Jerrold was eager to do whatever he could to bring the leader of the Brady gang to justice. Apart from his own feelings in the matter, Jerrold felt that Motor Matt had a claim on him.

"The Hawk," said Jerrold, "is a good machine, but the Eagle is a better one. We can cross the lake in the Eagle and land wherever you want to, and it is needless for me to say, my boy, that both the air ship and myself are at your service."

"Thank you, Mr. Jerrold," returned Matt gratefully. "Is the Eagle ready for use?"

"During the last week Payne and I have been improving her, and we did the very last tap on the car yesterday. All we have to do is to fill the tanks and put a little more gas in the bag—inside of an hour we can start."

The boys accompanied Jerrold into the back yard, where he had the air ship under a canvas shelter. Payne, Jerrold's assistant, was working around the car. As soon as Jerrold had told Payne what was wanted, the latter began making the Eagle ready.

"This is a great town for flying machines," remarked Ferral, as he watched the operation of getting the craft ready for a voyage.

"Jerrold has done a whole lot toward solving the problem of aërial navigation," said Matt. "It was

his work that made the Hawk as good as it is. You see, Brady used to work for Jerrold, and he stole most of his ideas for the Hawk from the Eagle."

"A regular skull-and-cross-bones pirate, that Brady," muttered Ferral. "I hope we can lay him by the heels and cut short his lawless career."

While the Eagle was being made ready, Harris and Carl arrived together on the scene of operations. Harris wore civilian clothes and looked like anything but a police officer.

"Well," said he, rubbing his hands, "this reminds me of that other time, Matt, when Carl and Jerrold and I went chasing the Hawk in order to get hold of you. I hope we'll have better success this trip than we had before."

"Ve vill," declared Carl. "Matt iss mit us, now, und dot means dot ve vill haf more luck. He iss der lucky poy, all der dime."

"I don't know about that, Carl," laughed Matt a little grimly, "my luck seems to have taken a turn."

"Did you look after Miss Brady, Carl?" queried Ferral.

"Vell, I bed you. She hat a good meal, und den I pud her apoardt a drain for der city. She wanted me to say to you dot she vas mooch opliged."

"We're under more obligations to her than she is to us," went on Ferral. "Kind of strange, it strikes me, that she should be willing to give us a tip about her father."

"You wouldn't think it strange, Dick," said Matt warmly, "if you knew the girl better. She knows that her father, if he is not captured, will go on and on in crime until he does something that will earn him more than a mere prison sentence. She wants him captured, and the Hawk taken away from him. That was her plan when Brady captured me and held me a prisoner in Willoughby's swamp. But she wouldn't leave her father when I came away. She considered it her duty to stay with him up to the very last moment. It's a good thing for her that her father went away like he did. Now Helen can look out for herself, and do it with a clear conscience."

"All ready, friends," called Jerrold. "Step into the car and we'll start for Michigan."

Payne was not to go with the searching party. Jerrold, Matt, Carl, Harris, and Ferral were to be the passengers.

All climbed aboard and took the places to which Jerrold assigned them. Jerrold himself was to run the motor, but he had Matt near by to "spell" him now and then. Carl and Ferral were to act as lookouts, and were placed as far forward as the car would allow them to go.

Ferral's position was almost opposite Matt's. The stability of the air ship depended a good deal on its "trim," and the positions taken by the passengers at the start were to be kept throughout the trip.

Weighted bags at each end of the cigar-shaped envelope were used for giving the required angle for rising or falling. The pull of a lever drew in the bag at the forward point, and the Eagle inclined upward. Payne had already pulled aside the top of the canvas protection.

"All ready," said he.

The motor was started, and presently the power was switched into the propeller. The air ship took the push and arose slowly and easily into the air.

"Ve're off!" shouted Carl. "I hope, py shinks, noddig goes wrong und ve come down in der lake. Verral und I haf been in der lake vonce, und it don'd vas any fun, I tell you dot."

CHAPTER XII.

GRAND HAVEN.

Jerrold soon demonstrated the fact that the Eagle was a much faster craft than the Hawk. As already stated, there was scarcely any wind, so the Eagle had practically no adverse air current to contend against. Pointing the air ship east by south, Jerrold tuned up the engine, and the speed they made was marvelous. They could form a tolerable idea of the swiftness of their flight by watching the surface of the earth, some five hundred feet below them.

"She's certainly a swifter craft than the Hawk," remarked Ferral.

"I will improve the Hawk for you," said Jerrold, "so she will be just as swift as the Eagle."

"Oof ve efer ged der Hawk pack, vich ve don'd know," struck in Carl.

"We *must* get her back," averred Matt.

"The biggest trouble with air ships equipped with gasoline," continued Jerrold, "is the fact that the slightest change in the temperature affects the buoyancy. Even a cloud over the sun will cause the gas to contract, and the difference in heat thrown off by the sun at morning and noon will expand the gas and also disturb the equilibrium. Now I have an improvement that remedies that. It consists of a smaller bag inside the gas bag, filled with a vapor of my own invention. When the buoyancy of the outer bag decreases, that of the inner bag increases, and *vice versa*. That gives us a unit of buoyancy which is always the same, and leaves the propeller free to carry us in

any direction."

"Greadt!" cried Carl. "I don'd ondershtand vat you vas gedding ad, aber I bed it vas somet'ing fine. Ach!" and he looked downward, "here ve go ofer der lake. I hope dere iss some ships all along der vay, so dot oof anyt'ing habbens ve can trop down ondo vone oof dem."

[Pg 20]

"Don't worry about our dropping into the water, Carl," smiled Jerrold, "for there is absolutely no danger of that."

In an hour the Eagle was out of sight of land. The sails of one or two schooners could be seen far away on the horizon, but they were too far off to be considered "company."

As the Eagle plowed on and on through the sunny air, with never a hitch or a sign of anything going wrong, Carl's fears slowly subsided and he took delight in this novel experience of crossing a large body of water.

For a time, Matt relieved Jerrold at the motor. So far as the young motorist could see, the Eagle handled as easily as the Hawk; besides that, there were points of superiority about her, in addition to speed, as compared with the Brady air ship.

For three hours the Eagle was over the lake, and then Ferral, with a shout, announced:

"Land ho, messmates, right under our fore foot!"

Harris examined the shore line, critically. A little later, when they were nearer, he turned to Jerrold.

"We're a bit south of Grand Haven," said he, "about two miles, I should judge. I can see the cottages on the trolley line that follows the lake shore."

Jerrold was about to shift the steering rudder so as to point the Eagle directly for the town, when Matt interposed.

"It strikes me," said Matt, "that it would be better for us to land outside the town and go in on the trolley. If we took the Eagle over the place, the whole town would be out to see us. That would make it impossible for us to take this Ochiltree by surprise, and might give Brady and his gang a chance to clear out."

"That's a level-headed suggestion," declared Harris. "An air ship arouses everybody's curiosity, and if Brady and his gang saw us, or heard about us, they'd know at once that we were on their track with the Eagle. Make a landing on the lake shore, Jerrold. That ought to be easy, as the beach is clear of obstructions and covered with good white sand."

"It's never hard for me to make a landing with the Eagle," said Jerrold. "I can come down anywhere, and ascend from anywhere."

He took a look over the side.

"Right ahead looks like an excellent place," he went on, as he drew back. "The trees run right down to the beach, and there are no houses near. That means that our descent will be screened, and that we'll not arouse so much curiosity as we would if we alighted in a more populous place."

Instructed by Carl, Ferral, and Harris, Jerrold brought the air ship to rest on the beach without the slightest difficulty.

"Now to call on this fellow Ochiltree," said Harris briskly, as he stepped out of the car. "We can't all go, and I'd suggest that Carl stay here with Jerrold and watch the car while Matt, Ferral, and I call on the police department here and see if we can find out where Ochiltree lives."

Carl's face fell. If there was going to be any trouble, he had hoped that he would have as big a part in it as any of the rest of them.

Ferral, noting Carl's long face, clapped him on the back.

"Don't go into the doldrums, my hearty," cried Ferral. "If Brady and his gang should find out that the Eagle is here, you and Jerrold may have more trouble on your hands than the rest of us."

Carl brightened visibly.

"Py shinks," said he, "I hatn't t'ought oof dot. Aber you bed you can drust us to dake care oof der Eagle."

Without waiting longer, Harris led Matt and Ferral through the timber and to the tracks of the trolley line. They had not long to wait before a car came along, headed toward Grand Haven. Apparently, neither the conductor nor the motorman had seen the descent of the Eagle, for they had nothing to say about the air ship.

"We're playing in great luck, right at the start-off," said Harris, in a low tone. "In how many places in this country, do you think, could an air ship come down without having a curious crowd around it inside of five minutes? Not many, I'll bet; and yet, here we make a landing in the midst of a summer resort and not so much as a dog comes out to bark at us."

"A good thing for us, too," returned Ferral. "If there's anything to be accomplished in Grand Haven, we can do it, for all the odds are in our favor."

"Exactly," said Harris. "That's the point I was trying to make."

In ten minutes they reached Grand Haven, and in fifteen minutes they were at police headquarters, and Harris was having an interview with the head of the department. Harris was not long with that official, and when he came out he took a chair between Matt and Ferral.

"Prospects are bright," said he. "The chief here knows all about Ochiltree, and says he's a shady character and has a record. We've got to wait for a few minutes for a plain-clothes man who is going with us to call on the party."

"Did the chief say anything about another air ship?" asked Matt.

"I was coming to that," went on Harris. "Yes, another air ship was seen crossing over the town about two hours ago. Everybody was out to look at it, and the chief says there were four or five men in the car."

"That would be Whipple, Pete, Harper, and Brady," put in Matt.

[Pg 21]

"That's the way I had figured it out. Young Brady wasn't picked up by the other four that got the Hawk away from you at the balloon house. It would be a great piece of work if we could capture the whole gang."

Just then a small man, with a restless black eye and a beak-like face, pushed up to where Harris and the boys were talking.

"My name's Dennison," said he. "The chief has told me what you wanted, and I'm to take you to Ochiltree's place."

Harris gave Dennison his name and introduced Matt and Ferral.

"We hadn't better lose much time," suggested Dennison. "The fellow we're looking for is usually at home this time of the day."

"The quicker we can wind this up, the better," said Harris. "Lead the way, Dennison, and we'll be right behind you."

The course they followed took them across the river and then along the opposite bank in the direction of the life-saving station. There, in a patch of scrub, they came upon a small, shanty-like house.

As a precautionary move, Dennison went around to the back door, and left Harris and the boys to present themselves at the front.

It was well this precaution was taken. Although Harris rapped and pounded, no one answered his summons for several minutes. When a voice was finally heard from within the house, it was Dennison's.

"Come in, Harris," he called. "If the front door's locked, come around to the back of the house."

The front door, however, was not locked. Harris and the boys opened it and walked in. They found Dennison, revolver in hand, standing in front of a sulky, black-whiskered man, who was sitting in a chair.

"He didn't like your looks," explained Dennison, "and so he wouldn't open the door. On the contrary, he tried to get away by the rear of the house, and so ran into me. All that looks suspicious, on the face of it."

"I'm tryin' ter do an honest turn," growled Ochiltree, "an' you cops keep naggin' me. It's a wonder I don't go wrong, when ye're all expectin' me to."

"What did you try to duck by the back way for?" demanded Dennison.

"I ain't anxious fer callers," was the sullen response.

"Has Brady been here to see you?"

"Brady?" queried Ochiltree. "Who's Brady?"

"Come, Ochiltree, that won't go down. You haven't forgotten your old friend Brady, have you?"

"Never heard o' such a feller. If he's——"

Matt, who had been looking curiously around the room, glimpsed some one through the front window, stealthily approaching the house.

"Hist!" the young motorist whispered, turning to Harris. "Here comes Harper, now."

Ochiltree began to squirm uneasily in his chair.

"Luck again!" muttered Harris exultantly. "Keep Ochiltree covered, Dennison, and be sure he doesn't open his mouth to call a warning. I'll take care of Harper. He's one of the gang and can give us a line on Brady."

Harris stole noiselessly to the door. Matt likewise crowded up close to it on the other side.

The instant Harper rapped, Harris flung the door open, and he and Matt grabbed the astounded caller and dragged him into the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LINE ON BRADY.

Harper's astonishment was so profound as to be ludicrous. Naturally he could not recognize Harris, even as being a policeman, but he could hardly fail to be astounded at seeing Matt and

Ferral.

With a revolver in his hand, Harris drove Harper into a chair beside Ochiltree.

"What—what's the meanin' o' this?" asked Harper, in faltering tones, his bewildered eyes roaming from Matt to Ferral, and then to Ochiltree.

"You'll find out the meaning of it before you're many minutes older," answered Harris, with a snap of the jaw. "Why, you murderous hound," he went on, "how can you look at King, there, and at his friend, Ferral, and find the nerve to put such a question? I suppose you've forgotten how you tied these two lads, put them in the little room back of the balloon house, and then turned on the gas?"

"It wasn't me done that," protested Harper.

"It was you, just as much as it was Whipple or Pete. The law won't make any fine distinctions, I can tell you, when it comes to playing even for that bit of dastardly work. You're in a hard row of stumps, Harper. I don't know as anything can be done to help you, either, but if you show a disposition to help us, it won't hurt you any."

"Nothin' happened to them two kids," growled Harper, recovering a little of his courage, "an' I knew all the time they'd get clear."

"Use the soft pedal!" warned Harris. "You didn't have any such notion. Anyhow, the law will handle you almost as it would if both boys had been smothered to death. It wasn't anything to your credit that they got out of that room alive. But you're not the main object of our expedition. Where's Brady?"

"Who told you where we was?" asked Harper, ignoring the question.

"Some one gave us the tip, and that's enough for you to know. Where's Brady?"

"I don't know where he——"

"Yes, you do!"

The muzzle of Harris' revolver was pushed closer to Harper's face. He cringed away from it with a frightened look in his eyes.

"Don't get careless with that," he whined. "I'm not goin' to run away."

"You're right you're not. It wouldn't do you any good if you did try. Where's Brady? I'm not going to ask you many times."

"Who're you?" demanded Harper. "What right you got to ask me things like that?"

"I'm an officer from South Chicago," and Harris pulled back his coat and showed the badge pinned to his vest.

"And I," spoke up Dennison, going through the same movements, "am a Grand Haven officer. You're nigg'd good and plenty, my man. If you know when you're well off, you'll help rather than hinder this game we're playing."

Harper cast an appealing look at Ochiltree. The latter met the look savagely.

"What ye lookin' at me fer?" he snapped. "I don't know you—never seen ye before in my life. Ye can see what trouble ye've got me in by comin' here. Take him away an' jug him," Ochiltree added, turning to Harris. "He's nothin' ter me, an' I'd like ter have ye git him out o' this house as soon as ye kin."

"We'll jug the two of you, Ochiltree," answered Dennison grimly, "until we find out just where you stand in this business."

Ochiltree relapsed into his chair with a black scowl. This byplay between Ochiltree and the officer did not serve to make Harper any more easy in his mind.

"Are you going to tell us anything about Brady?" demanded Harris. "I'm waiting."

"What's it goin' to mean to me?" asked Harper, wishing to drive some sort of a bargain on his own account.

"It may help you, but I'm making no promises."

Harper bowed his head and, for a moment, thought the matter over. Evidently he made up his mind that he was cornered, and that it would be well for him to take a chance at doing something for himself.

"What do you want to know?" he queried.

"Where is Brady?" repeated Harris.

"He's out on the trolley line that leads toward Grand Rapids."

"Is the Hawk there?"

"Yes. Something went wrong with the Hawk's motor, and Brady sent me after Ochiltree while he was tinkering with the machinery."

"Sent you after Ochiltree, did he?" echoed Harris. "Why was that?"

"Give it up. I guess Brady was plannin' to have Ochiltree help him to steer clear of the law."

"Consarn you!" flared Ochiltree, glaring at Harper. "What ye tryin' ter git me inter this thing fer?"

I'll admit I useter know Brady," he went on, turning to Dennison and Harris, "but I ain't had a thing ter do with him fer years. Why he comes to me now, like this, is more'n I know."

"It looks bad for you, Ochiltree," commented Dennison.

"I know that," scowled Ochiltree, "an' all because o' this mutt. He's doin' his best ter ring me in on the deal, but I'll swear I ain't got a thing ter do with it."

"We'll find that out for ourselves."

"How far is the Hawk from town?" queried Harris, again taking up his line of questioning with Harper.

"About two miles," was the prisoner's answer.

"How'll we know the place when we get to it?"

"There's a broken oak close to a platform where the cars stop to take on an' let off passengers. Ye can't miss the place. Get off at the platform and walk to the right, straight into the timber."

"Was Brady to wait there until you and Ochiltree joined him?"

"Yes."

"How long will it take Brady to repair the Hawk?"

"He figured on a couple of hours."

"Who's with him?"

"Pete and Whipple."

"No one else?"

"No."

"What's become of Hector, Jr.?"

"He's gone East. Brady thought Hector, Jr., had better cut out of Chicago after what happened on the lake."

"I see." Harris turned to Dennison. "We've got a good line on Brady," he continued. "We'll take Harper and Ochiltree to the lockup, and then we'll pick up another officer and go to the platform by the blasted oak, and——"

"I know the place," broke in Dennison. "I've passed it a dozen times on the way to Grand Rapids. The quicker we pull off the rest of this the better."

"My notion to a t, y, ty."

Harris snapped a pair of iron bracelets about Harper's wrists, while Dennison gave the same delicate attention to Ochiltree.

"I'm blamed if I can understand why ye're treatin' me in this way," growled Ochiltree.

"Your actions are suspicious," replied the Grand Haven officer.

"I can't keep crooks from callin' on me," protested Ochiltree.

"Well, you'd better," was the significant response. "Come along, Ochiltree, and come peaceably."

Ferral walked on one side of Ochiltree, and Matt walked on one side of Harper.

With this escort, the two prisoners were removed from the house, taken across the river and conducted to police headquarters. [Pg 23]

If success was to attend the rest of the officers' movements, there was no time to be lost. The two prisoners had been paraded through the town, and there was the possibility that the news of their arrest might reach Brady and his men in advance of the arrival of Harris and Dennison.

Another officer was secured. While the three plain-clothes men were waiting for the car, Harris endeavored to persuade Matt and Ferral to go back to the Eagle and leave the rest of the work to him, and Dennison, and the other officer.

"Keelhaul me if I cut adrift at this stage of the game," answered Ferral. "Why, it's just beginning to get exciting."

"I feel the same way, Harris," spoke up Matt.

"If Brady does any shooting, Matt," answered Harris, "you can gamble that it will be in your direction. The scoundrel has got it in for you, and he'll take any chance to play even, no matter what it costs him."

"I'll look out for myself," said Matt confidently. "Besides, Harris, you're overlooking one important point."

"What's that?"

"Suppose Brady hasn't got the Hawk in shape. It would be necessary for some one that understands a gasoline motor to lay hold and finish the job. Who could do that, if I wasn't along?"

There was a brief silence, broken at last by Dennison.

"The youngster is right," said he. "Perhaps he'll be needed."

"What's more," averred Ferral, "Matt and I own the Hawk, and it's right and proper that we

should be there to look after it. If there's any shooting, you fellows see that the air ship isn't hurt."

"We'll do our best to look after the Hawk," answered Harris, "but we can't forget that the capture of Brady and his men is our principal business."

"Here comes the car," announced Dennison. "Tumble aboard and we'll start off on the last lap of the chase."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WOODS BY THE RIVER.

There was a wait on a siding, a little way out of town, for another car from Grand Rapids to pass on the single track of the trolley system. Five minutes were lost, and Ferral fretted and fumed.

"Take it easy, son," said Harris soothingly. "We're on the way, you know, and a little wait like this isn't going to make much of a difference."

"It might, matey," answered Ferral. "A whole lot can happen in five minutes."

At last the car got under headway again and rushed over the remaining distance.

"I'd better get off alone," suggested Dennison, just as the car began slowing up for the platform. "If Brady has anyone watching the platform, the fellow won't know but that I'm Ochiltree, or some one sent by Ochiltree and Harper. The rest of you go on a little way, get off, and double back. Show your badge to the conductor, Harris, and he'll let you off anywhere."

This was a good idea, and Dennison deserved credit for thinking of it at the last moment. The success of the whole plan might depend upon the ruse.

Dennison debarked on the platform, and, when the car pulled out, those still aboard saw him stepping off the planks and pushing into the timber that grew close up to the stopping place.

Matt and Ferral, as the car went on, saw the broken oak at the end of the platform. It was a plain enough landmark and not easily to be passed or mistaken.

"Harper is playing square with us, matey," remarked Ferral, pointing to the tree.

"It looks that way, Dick," agreed Matt.

"Here's where we get back our air ship," jubilated Ferral. "Sink me, though, but the loss of that flugee gave me a scare."

"We haven't got it back yet, old chap."

"I know that, but I feel in my bones that we're going to. I——"

Just then the car began to slow down. Harris had got out of his seat, with the other officer, and had gone back to the conductor. Evidently the badges worn by the two men had caused him to slow down the express car for a halt in defiance of rules.

The boys, heeding a call from Harris, got up and ran back along the aisle. They jumped off, after the two officers, and the car resumed its course to Grand Rapids. But there was a mighty curious conductor on the rear platform. As long as the car remained in sight of the four who had debarked, he looked back and wondered what was up.

"We'll go back quietly," said Harris. "The river is just over there, and the woods lie between it and the trolley line. We'll get to the river bank and follow it back. That ought to bring us out close to the place where the Hawk landed. Follow me, Twitchell," he added to the other officer, "and you boys," he finished, "come along behind Twitchell. Quiet's the word."

Harris darted into the timber, which bordered the track closely. The underbrush had evidently been cleaned out, so that the timber had the appearance of a grove. On one of the trees, near the track, Matt saw a big white sign bearing the words, "Lots for Sale."

The river, as it proved, was hardly more than a stone's throw from the trolley track. Turning along its bank, Harris led the way back toward the vicinity of the broken oak and the platform.

[Pg 24]

They all knew they had not far to go, but they were startled at the suddenness with which Harris turned on them before they had followed the river bank for more than two or three minutes.

"I can see the Hawk," whispered Harris. "She's just ahead. And Brady is there—and Dennison, too. They're talking. I can't see Pete or Whipple, and those rascals may be laying low to carry out some black plan of Brady's—but we'll see about that. Come along, and keep behind the trees as much as you can."

As Harris turned about, he drew his revolver. Twitchell likewise got out a weapon. Then the party separated, and each advanced from tree to tree.

It was not long before Matt and Ferral, who were advancing near each other, were able to get a good look at their air ship.

The Hawk had descended in a cleared space hard by the river, and seemed to be in good condition. She was moored to the ground with two ropes at the front and rear of the car, the ropes being tied to trees.

Coming a little closer, the boys were able to see Brady and Dennison.

Brady had his coat off and his shirt sleeves rolled up. He was holding a heavy wrench in his hand and had evidently been working with the motor when Dennison presented himself. The two men were talking, and Matt and Ferral were able to hear what passed between them.

"What did you say your name was?" inquired Brady, evidently distrustful.

"Gammon," answered Dennison. "I'm a pal o' Ochiltree's."

"Where's Harper?"

"He stayed behind at Ochiltree's house."

"Why was that? I told Harper to come and to bring Ochiltree with him."

"I'll tell ye the why of it, Brady. Ye see, the perlice are watchin' Ochiltree good and hard, an' if he was seen comin' here with Harper, the two of 'em might be follered. Ochiltree got word ter me ter come an' put the situation up to you, an' to tell ye that he an' Harper 'u'd be along when it got dark, as it wasn't safe ter come in broad day."

"I see," muttered Brady, studying Dennison with his gimlet eyes.

"Harper said ye had two more men with ye," went on Dennison, playing his game easily and evidently edging closer for a chance to lay hold of Brady and make him a prisoner. "Where are they?"

"They're off watching the platform. I reckon they'll be along in a minute. Prob'ly they followed you, and——"

At that precise moment, Pete and Whipple broke out of the timber. They came up directly behind Dennison and laid hands on him before he could make a move to defend himself.

"What you doing?" yelled Brady, leaping forward.

"Grabbing an officer," said Whipple, with an oath. "His name's Gammon, all right, an' the talk he was givin' ye, Brady, was pure gammon, an' nothin' else."

"How's that?"

Brady's voice, as he put the question, was hard and metallic, and he measured Dennison with glistening eyes.

"Why," explained Whipple, "when he got off'n the keer we seen some 'un else through a winder. I'm a sinner if it wasn't Matt King. Now, whatever was King doin' on that keer? By rights, he ort ter hev got shuffled out o' the game, across the lake in that balloon house. But he didn't, an' here he is, travelin' on the same keer with a feller as says his name is Gammon, an' that he comes from Ochiltree."

Dennison, as he was held helpless in the hands of Pete and Whipple, was studying the timber covertly, but none the less anxiously.

"What have you got to say for yourself?" cried Brady, advancing threateningly upon Dennison.

Matt and Ferral had been wondering why Harris and Twitchell had not shown themselves. Unable to hold back any longer, the boys dashed forward.

The noise they made drew the instant attention of Brady, Whipple and Pete.

"There's King now!" yelled Pete.

In a twinkling, Brady dropped the wrench and drew a revolver.

A sharp, incisive note echoed through the woods and across the river. Matt felt the wind of the bullet as it passed his face.

"Look out, matey!" bellowed Ferral. "Duck for a tree! You're not armed, and can't take any chances. He's going to shoot again."

But it was not necessary for Matt to get behind a tree. Before Brady could fire another shot in his direction, Harris and Twitchell rushed upon the scene.

"Drop your guns!" cried Harris sternly. "Stand right where you are! You're our prisoners!"

Brady, however, was made of sterner stuff. A prison cell was yawning to receive him, and he knew it.

Whipple and Pete, astounded by this sudden demonstration, paused undecided. Their fingers relaxed, and Dennison leaped away from them.

"Treachery!" roared Brady; "Harper has sold us out! Fight for it, boys!"

Dennison, being nearer Brady than any of the rest, jumped for him. He tried to draw his revolver, but it stuck in his pocket. Brady had leveled his weapon at point-blank range, and only Motor Matt's quickness, at that moment, saved the officer's life.

Matt, watching the fight breathlessly, had instinctively picked up a stone. Now, seeing Dennison's danger, he hurled the stone at Brady with all his strength.

The missile sped true, struck Brady's arm with terrific force and caused the revolver to drop. With wild yells, Harris and Twitchell rushed forward to capture Brady and his two men.

But Pete and Whipple, not knowing the extent of the forces against them, thought best to trust

their liberty to their heels. Whirling around, they darted into the timber, leaping from tree to tree as they ran in order to screen themselves from any bullets that might be sent after them.

The bullets came fast and thick, but evidently without doing any damage, for Whipple and Pete did not slacken pace.

Brady, swearing like a pirate, turned on Dennison like a madman, grabbed him about the waist and, with a tremendous display of strength, held the officer in front of him. Still swearing, he began backing into the timber, with the intention of making his escape as Pete and Whipple had done.

Seeing that he would be likely to effect his purpose, Matt and Ferral doubled around behind him and suddenly hurled themselves upon him from the rear.

Brady fought like a tiger. Matt could not have believed that one man possessed so much strength. Dennison, whose temper was fiercely aroused by the turn events had taken, jerked loose from Brady and turned to help the boys.

Harris and Twitchell, seeing that Brady was as good as captured, took after Pete and Whipple.

CHAPTER XV.

BRADY A PRISONER.

Matt, Ferral and Dennison were not long in getting the whip hand of Hector Brady. As Matt and the officer held him down, Dennison called to Ferral to get a rope.

Ferral got a rope from the car and the desperate thief was finally secured, wrist and ankle. Even then he continued to struggle and roar his defiance of his captors.

"You might as well calm down," cried Dennison, picking up the revolver which Matt's missile had knocked from Brady's hand. "Your goose is cooked, Brady, and there's no use tiring yourself out."

After a few moments Brady seemed to realize this.

"You've got me, but you won't keep me," he snarled.

"If you can get away from us," replied the officer, "you're welcome to your liberty. But you won't get away. I had too close a call at your hands to let you do that."

"Who in the fiend's name are you?"

"A plain-clothes man from the Grand Haven police headquarters."

"Did you get this tip from Harper?"

"Harper couldn't help himself. He and Ochiltree are in the lockup."

Dennison turned to Matt and grabbed his hand.

"If it hadn't been for you, King," said he, "I'd have been laid out. You were quick as a cat and as certain as fate. I never met your kind before, and it does me good to shake hands with you. I'm mighty glad," he added, with a grin, "that we couldn't persuade you to stay behind, in Grand Haven."

"That's the way this raggie of mine does things, Dennison," remarked Ferral, looking at Matt admiringly. "He's chain lightning when he turns himself loose."

"The best part of it all is," observed Matt, anxious to change the subject, "no harm has happened to the air ship."

Throwing off his coat and cap, Matt lost not a moment in diving into the machinery. He could see nothing wrong, and he "turned over" the engine and set it to going. It worked perfectly.

"If you're looking for trouble," growled Brady, turning his head to follow Matt's movements, "you won't find any. I've fixed the motor—just got through with it when this cop in plain clothes showed up. If I'd known who he was—" and Brady finished with a diabolical light in his eyes that told plainly what he would have done.

"Pass it up," said Dennison curtly; "you came within an ace of getting me, as it was."

"King balked me again, just as he has been doing right along," went on Brady fiercely. "I'd willingly have gone to Joliet for life if I could have nicked him. He's the cause of all my troubles."

"Bully for King!" applauded Dennison. "The more I hear of him the higher he stacks up with me."

"Who put you next to where I was going, King?" demanded Brady.

"Never mind about that," replied Matt, getting into his coat and cap again. "We've captured you, Brady, and that's enough for you to know."

"Captured, but not sent up," qualified Brady. "Nor I won't be sent up. I'll live and have my liberty until I can settle accounts with Motor Matt and some more of you fellows."

"Let him rave," laughed Dennison. "That's the only thing he can do, and it won't hurt anybody."

"If it was that girl of mine that tipped me off to you and Harris," went on Brady, "she's one of those who'll come in for a fair share of the trouble I'm going to turn loose. Nice kind of a

daughter she is! It's been the grief of my life that she never was more like Hector, Jr."

Matt listened to this in amazement, and his heart sickened as he turned away.

At that moment, Harris and Twitchell came hurrying back.

"Where are the other two?" cried Dennison.

"I'd give a bunch of pay if I knew," answered Harris, very much put out. "We couldn't locate them, and the thing for us to do, Dennison, is to get back to headquarters and use the telegraph and the telephone."

He hurried forward to Brady's side.

"You're in Michigan," said he, "and you're wanted in Illinois. Will you waive requisition?"

"Waive nothing!" shouted Brady. "All you get out of me you'll fight for."

"Personally," said Harris contemptuously, "I don't care a toss-up. We've got you, Brady, and we've got you right. By staying in Michigan until requisition papers are put through you're only delaying a game that can have only one termination."

"Well," was the scowling response, "we'll wait for the termination. Maybe somebody will get fooled before we're at the end of this."

Harris turned away to Matt and Ferral.

"Twitchell, Dennison and I," said he, "will take Brady to Grand Haven and put him in the lockup with Harper. They'll both stand out for requisition, and they'll have to be left on this side of the lake until our governor can get the case before the Michigan executive. Have you looked over the Hawk, Matt?"

"Yes."

"Much tinkering to be done on her?"

"Brady had already fixed the motor so that it works as well as ever."

"Then you and Ferral had better get aboard and make a getaway to the place where Jerrold and Carl have the other air ship. As soon as I finish my work in Grand Haven, I'll join you and we'll all go back to South Chicago together. Your hard luck has certainly taken a turn for the better, Matt, and we want to make sure that you don't have any more backsets. Whipple and Pete are loose in the timber, and I'll bet they'd give their eyeteeth to be able to capture the Hawk. We want to keep them from doing that, or from trying it. We'll take Brady back on the trolley, but before we start I want to see you well away in the Hawk."

"It won't take us more than a couple of minutes to get under way," returned Matt. "All aboard, pard," he added to Ferral. "Get into our air ship, old chap, and we'll go on a still hunt for Carl and Jerrold and the Eagle."

"Aye, aye, Captain Matt," laughed Ferral, getting into the car.

Matt followed him aboard and settled himself in the driver's seat.

"Cast off the ropes, Harris, you and Dennison," called Matt.

Harris was familiar with that part of the work, and he and Dennison soon had the air ship unmoored and the cables in the car. The river offered a clear stretch for rising, and Matt turned the Hawk in that direction.

The motor began to pop and then to settle down to a steady hum. Matt manipulated the steering rudder, switched the power into the propeller, and the Hawk arose gracefully accompanied by the cheers of the officers.

But no cheers came from Brady. With baleful eyes he watched the Hawk's departure.

"That's the second time you've taken my air ship away from me, King," he roared. "The next time ___"

"There'll never be a next time," cried Harris. "You're down and out, Brady, and you'd better begin to realize it."

Up and up mounted the Hawk, the river lying below her like a silver ribbon, entangled among the greenery of the trees. Off to the west sparkled the waters of the lake, and in between the Hawk and the shore lay Grand Haven, cottages and farms, all spread out like a map.

"Getting a bird's-eye view of a scene is a heap finer than looking at it from the ground," observed Ferral, leaning over the Hawk's rail and feasting his eyes on the panorama below.

"We're in good trim to enjoy looking down at the landscape from the Hawk," laughed Matt.

"Right-o, matey," answered the young sailor. "I'd about given up ever taking another ride in the Hawk. We're thirty-five hundred to the good by this afternoon's work."

"That's the least of what we have accomplished," said Matt. "The capture of Brady is a bigger thing than the recovery of the air ship."

"I guess that's right," said Ferral, "but I'm sorry those other two beachcombers got away. They'll be making trouble for some one later."

"Harris will get quick action over the telegraph and telephone," said Matt, "and the chances are good for the overhauling of Pete and Whipple."

"I hope so, and that's a fact. Say, I'll bet Carl and Jerrold will be surprised when they see the Hawk coming for their part of the beach."

"Keep a good lookout, Dick, and let me know when you sight the Eagle. This is unfamiliar territory to me, and your eyes will have to guide us."

"As I get the bearings," said Ferral, leaning over the rail and peering ahead, "we ought to be about east by north of where we want to land. When we took the trolley we went east."

"That's right," returned Matt. "Keep your gaze south and west, and you ought to be able to pick up the Eagle."

A few moments later Ferral sighted the swaying bulk of the other air ship.

"Bear to the left a little, Matt," said he, "and we'll come down right where we want to go. I can see Jerrold and Carl standing on the beach and looking up at us. I'll bet they're wondering whether we're in the car, or whether Brady and his gang are the passengers." [Pg 27]

"Wave something at them," suggested Matt. "We don't want to scare them."

Ferral waved his handkerchief. This calmed the fears of Carl and Jerrold, if they had had any, and Ferral reported that they were waving their hats.

A few moments later Matt engineered an easy landing, and the Hawk was moored within a dozen yards of the Eagle.

CHAPTER XVI.

BACK IN SOUTH CHICAGO.

There was some great rejoicing on Carl's part when he learned what had happened in Grand Haven and out along the trolley line to Grand Rapids.

"Ach, aber dot all sounds too goot to be droo!" exulted the Dutch boy. "I vish I hat peen dere during der fragas. Ferral vas fooling mit me ven he saidt dot Jerrold und I mightd haf more drouples as der resdt oof you. Dere don'd vas any tanger oof dot at any stage oof der game. Prady gaptured! Hoop-a-la! Aber der pest oof all iss dot der Hawk is pack vere she pelongs, und dot pooty soon, pumpy, Modor Matt, Tick Ferral und Carl Pretzel vill sail away mit demselufs py Noo York. Der palloon-house plot ditn't vork oudt like Prady t'ought."

"It would have worked out just as he planned," said Matt, "if it hadn't been for Helen Brady."

"Yah, so! Miss Prady safed der tay for all oof us. Ven ve shdart for Noo York now, Matt? Oof ve vaid too long, den meppy dose odder two fellers, Vipple und Pete, vill hatch some more plots. I don'd like dot. Der kevicker vat ve get away, der pedder all aroundt."

"Carl's got the marlinspike by the right end, old ship," said Ferral to Matt.

"That may be," answered Matt, "but I think we ought to find out something more about what Helen Brady intends doing before we leave Chicago."

"Right-o!" agreed Ferral. "I was forgetting about that. She's mighty independent, though, and I doubt whether she'll let us do much to help her."

"That's one of the things I like about Helen Brady."

Matt went over the Hawk and found that she would need more gasoline before the trip back across the lake was attempted.

Jerrold was also wanting a supply, and he and Matt, leaving Carl and Ferral in charge of both air ships, started for the nearest house to find out where they could get the fuel of which they stood in need.

They found that gasoline was used for cooking, and for manufacturing gas for lighting, in the house where they inquired. The man who owned the place kindly offered to let the air ship owners have all they needed.

In less than an hour Matt and Jerrold were back and filling their gasoline tanks.

A little later Harris reached the scene. The sun was down and darkness was coming on.

"I couldn't get away any quicker," explained Harris. "I am leaving everything in good shape here, though. Harper is willing to go back to South Chicago without any requisition papers, but I thought it best to let him stay and take him across the lake at the same time we took Brady."

"I should think that would be better," agreed Matt.

"Harper is ready to turn states' evidence against the gang in the hope of getting a light sentence," went on Harris. "He claims to know where some more stolen property has been secreted, so I suppose there will be a few happy people in South Chicago if he proves that he knows what he's talking about."

"The law will deal lightly with Harper, I suppose," put in Jerrold, "if he does all that."

"I guess so, but the law will not let him off scot free. Harper will go to the 'pen,' but he won't get anywhere near the sentence that Brady will."

"How long will Brady go up for?"

"That's hard to say, but it will be long enough to keep him out of mischief for twenty or thirty years."

"What is going to be done with Ochiltree?" asked Matt.

"Nothing. Ochiltree will be kept in the lockup until the officers in this part of Michigan have had a chance to capture Whipple and Pete. After that, Ochiltree will be turned loose."

"What are the chances for capturing Whipple and Pete?"

"Good. We have used the wires in every direction, and also coupled a description of Grove with the descriptions of the other two."

"Why, shiver me," cried Ferral, "I hadn't thought about Grove! What became of him, Harris?"

"Harper says that Grove was put down on the lake shore, just before Brady and the rest started across. I don't know how true that is, and I'm just telling you what Harper told me. But Harper's information has panned out straight goods, so far. He says that Grove showed signs of weakening, and that Brady, in a temper, cut loose from him. It may be that Grove will join Whipple and Pete, somehow, and I thought it well to telephone and telegraph his description along with the others. But what are we going to do, Jerrold? Wait here until morning?"

"I don't think we'd better," said Jerrold. "The night bids fair to be as calm as the day has been, and we can cross the lake easily enough by moonlight. If we wait until to-morrow we may have a high wind, and perhaps a storm. Air ships, and flying machines of every sort, ought to be under cover in a time like that. We'd better make the most of the good weather. Don't you think so, Matt?"

[Pg 28]

"You know more about air ships than I do, Mr. Jerrold," answered Matt, "but, from my brief experience with the Hawk, I think a storm would be bad business for an air ship. I've weathered out storms in balloons, but it's possible, with just a plain gas bag, to get above the clouds and the tempest. You can't safely do that with machines like ours."

"Well," said Harris, "if we're going to South Chicago to-night, the quicker we start the quicker we'll get there. I'll confess I'm not in love with the idea of hanging out on this beach all night with these two air ships. We can't tell what might happen, with Grove, and Pete, and Whipple at large."

"Then," said Jerrold, "we'll pull out at once. You start first, Matt, and we'll follow."

"I'll ride mit my bards," said Carl, "und Harris can come mit you, Misder Jerrold."

The ropes were cast off and Matt manoeuvred the Hawk upward and out above the lake. When they had got a good "offing," as Ferral described it, those in the car could look back and see the dark, weird shape of the Eagle flinging itself upward against the lighter background of sky.

What little wind there had been, during the day, had gone down with the sun, and perfect silence, save for the lapping of the waves, reigned on every hand.

The Eagle soon overhauled the Hawk, and side by side the two air ships made toward the Illinois shore.

Could anyone in a boat have seen the air ships, the sight presented would have been strangely exciting. The spectacle would have been prophetic, too, of man's coming command of an element heretofore out of his reach.

As time passed, the moon arose as if out of the water, and a scene of weird beauty unrolled to those aboard the Hawk and the Eagle.

"I would radder be a sailor oof der air dan oof der sea," remarked Carl, breaking a silence during which all hands had been enjoying their novel surroundings.

"Why so, Carl?" came across from the Eagle, in the voice of Harris.

"Pecause," said Carl, "you got four vays to go insteadt oof two. In a sea ship, you don't vas able to go oop und town."

"Once in awhile, matey," laughed Ferral, "a sea ship goes down."

"Yah," averred Carl, "und she shdays town. Go on mit dot song vat you vas singing mit yourseluf, Tick, der dime vat you vas coming py der poarding house to see Matt. It vas a pooty fine song, I tell you dot."

Ferral had a fine voice, and he at once broke into "In Cawsand Bay Lying," and followed it through from start to finish.

Harris thereupon tuned up, and when he got through Carl piped out in German. This singing was kept up, off and on, during the entire trip across the lake.

It was decided, just as the air ships were hovering over South Chicago, that Matt and his chums should take the Hawk to the balloon house and stow her away there. Harris would go on to Jerrold's place in the Eagle, and then send a couple of policemen from headquarters to watch the Hawk until the boys were ready to leave.

This programme was carried out without a break. It was about three o'clock in the morning when the boys got their sand bags in place along the bottom rail of the car and towed the Hawk into her old berth.

Half an hour after that a detail of two officers arrived and went on guard. Matt, Ferral and Carl went into the small room at the back of the balloon house, and two of them took possession of the cots and the third had a bed made for him on the floor. It was Carl who stretched out between the two cots, and it was he who remarked, just before he dozed off to sleep:

"You fellers came pooty near daking a long shleep here, hey?"

"Stow it, matey!" cried Ferral. "I'll be dreaming about that now."

"Ach, donnervetter!" returned Carl, "dere iss pedder t'ings as dot to tream aboutt, Ferral. For insdunce, tream oof der vay Matt shtruck some shtreaks oof hardt luck, und den turned der hardt luck to goot atvantage py gedding Prady gaptured."

"And recovering the Hawk," added Matt. "There's a silver lining to every cloud, Dick."

"There's never a flat foot nor a shellback but will tell you same thing, messmate," agreed Ferral heartily. "Good night, or good morning, whichever you want. I'm ready to take my stretch off the land, and here goes."

Two minutes later the fateful old balloon house was steeped in silence.

THE END.

THE NEXT NUMBER (11) WILL CONTAIN

Motor Matt's Daring Rescue

OR,

The Strange Case of Helen Brady.

The Disappearance of Helen Brady—The Important Letter—By the Old Quarry—A Queer Situation—Pete and Whipple Make a Capture—Brady's Proposition—A Surprise at Hooligan's—Back to the Canal—Brady Returns With Hot News—The Mansion On the River—The Fight—Daring Work—Helen's Ordeal—The Capture of Pete and Whipple.

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[Pg 29]

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THE RED SPIDER.

"This," said Phil Clode, setting down his bag, "is the limit!"

Having given vent to which expressive remark, he laughed to himself and gazed round upon the most desolate scene that it had ever been his fortune to behold. Behind him stood a small, wooden erection, not unlike an enlarged run, which was, however, dignified by the name of station. For the rest, a clove-brown plain stretched away to infinity, marred only by the shining ribbons of the railway track and an occasional clump of cactus or greasewood.

"The limit," the boy repeated solemnly. "Hullo! there's a man, or something very like one. I will get a line on to his vicinity, and try to extract a little useful information."

Picking up his grip, he hustled over to where a specimen of the cowboy genus had lounged from behind the station, leading a broncho that looked rather the worse for wear. Phil, as he approached, saw that a bag branded with the sign "U. S. Mail" was slung over the beast's saddle, and his eyes brightened. He knew that even in that deserted region of Colorado any servant of Uncle Sam's could be trusted.

"Say," he sang out. "Can you give me any notion where I am, mister? I was told to get off at Silver Bridge, and here I am right enough, but I can't see much sign of the town."

"You on foot?" the other returned with undisguised astonishment. "You must be stark——"

"Broncho waiting for me at Silver Bridge," Phil interrupted shortly. He had urgent reasons for not wishing to talk about his private affairs.

"So?" the man muttered with a sidelong glance. He had a pleasant face, rough but good humored, and the lad took to him instinctively. "You're an Easterner, ain't yeh?"

"Yes, and proud of it."

"That's all right. I'm from the East, too, only I've been here so long that yeh wouldn't think it. I guess yeh'd better hop up behind me, pardner. Betsy's a game chicken—she's carried three before now."

"You going to Silver Bridge, then?" Phil queried as the cowboy stroked the unprepossessing broncho fondly.

"I should smile. I'm cattle tender to the ore-crushing plant there."

Phil received this information with a start, but made no remark. In silence he mounted behind the man, who gave his name as Idaho Bart, and felt with some surprise the plain bumping rapidly away beneath them, as the broncho, becoming a bunch of throbbing muscles, pounded eastward with the regularity of tirelessness of a steam engine.

The mail rider did not seem disposed to let the silence continue. Out West curiosity about another man's affairs is usually the signal for gun play, but Idaho Bart proceeded to break the rule by a series of interrogations of the most pointed and particular description.

Phil Clode, however, was old for his years, and he met him at every point, giving a false name, and a reason for his arrival at Silver Bridge that was so obviously wide of the truth that the mail carrier, having turned in the saddle to fix him with a twinkling eye, emitted a short laugh, and relapsed into taciturnity.

This muteness remained undisturbed until they were in sight of Silver Bridge, the big ore-crushing town, the shares of which, back in Wall Street, were at a premium. It appeared suddenly as they topped a swelling hill that surrounded two sides of the city like a wall, and Phil surveyed it with the curiosity of first acquaintance. It reminded him of a battle ship out of action—of something Titanic which is wrapped in incongruous slumber. Though only midday, not a sound rose from the vast collection of shacks and wooden buildings. The mighty ore crushers and distributors were idle, the men lounged listlessly round the two hotels, and the river swirled past unstained by the red of washed metal.

The river? In those two words lay the tragedy—the reason of the inaction that spelled ruin to thousands, including the canvas-coated men who diced and gambled and swore in the saloons. For the river was now a mere meandering stream, and the power that worked the mills was gone, leaving the great plant worse than useless, for it would cost more than it was worth to entrain it to any place where there would be the likelihood of a buyer.

"Looks pleasant, I don't think," Idaho Bart said bitterly as he watched Phil's keen, dark eyes glancing over the drowsy, deserted streets, splashed golden by the afternoon sun. "Two weeks ago yeh would have opined that yeh were back in New York. Busy? I guess we had got the Fountain of Youth faded to a Harlem ash can, when it came to hustling."

"And now the river's gone," the boy rejoined quietly. His remarks were all couched to extract information without giving any in return.

"Say, that's a right hook on the jaw of truth! It's a lead-pipe cinch that this is about the most mysterious thing that ever gave a whole layout brain storm. The river stopped in the night, and we woke up to find this here dribble. The men are going to pike out, if there don't come a change 'fore Saturday."

Phil muttered something to himself.

"Why don't you find out what has dammed the source of the river?" he asked a moment later.

"Say, yeh are a young green-growing thing, all ready canned and labeled!" Bart sniggered. "Do you know that the source of Silver River is up in Black Cañon?"

"What of that?" queried Phil ingenuously.

"Oh, come off! This ain't the season for spring chickens, I reckon. I only know of three men what have been into Black Cañon, and come out alive. Two o' them were engineers belonging to the United States Reclamation Service, and they had the time of their lives. The other was a Indian, and went in to escape the posse that was trailing him for hoss stealing. He said afterwards that he wished he'd stopped and been lynched."

Phil made no reply to these revelations, for they were now in the main thoroughfare of Silver Bridge, and the ore-stained men were lounging up with a tumultuous outcry for the mail. They also bestowed upon the boy the benefit of their rather doubtful wit, but, finding that they got rather better than they sent, soon betook themselves back to the enticements of the saloons, leaving Idaho Bart to take the few official letters up to the office.

"Say, kid, where are yeh going?" he drawled as he strode away with the loping movement peculiar to the riders of the plains.

"To Mr. Allsoner," Phil returned carelessly, keeping pace with him.

He made a clucking sound in his cheek.

"If yeh are after a job, yeh'd better carry your store clothes away along the shining homeward track right now," he said poetically. "Old Allsoner's hoppin' mad, and he'll have yer scalp before yeh could say Teddy."

"I don't want a job," was the irritating reply, and Phil grinned as he noted the other's mystification.

The office of Mr. Allsoner, general manager of Clode's Silver Bridge Reducing Company, Limited, was not an imposing structure. In fact, it might well have been taken for a stack of damaged firewood by the uninitiated, but Phil Clode did not make this mistake. Suddenly shouldering his way ahead of Idaho Bart, he entered the office at a run, and disappeared into the manager's private office—the most sacred spot in the whole townstead—with a coolness that left the two clerks in the outer department absolutely petrified.

Mr. Allsoner, however, was far from being petrified, and he had already used more adjectives than could be found in any dictionary before he looked up, started as though he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, and ejaculated:

"Phil Clode!"

"Yes, it's me," was the ungrammatical rejoinder. "Father's got to keep his eye on the market, or we'd go up in a balloon before an hour was through, and there was nobody else to come. Mr. Allsoner, there's treachery afloat."

The keen-eyed business man uttered an exclamation of wonderment, and then, rising, locked the door.

"Spit it out," he said tersely.

"You know our river is stopped."

"I do."

"It's been dammed purposely."

The manager had just seated himself, but he leaped up again at these quietly spoken words.

"Nonsense! The source is in Black Cañon."

He made his rejoinder with an air of finality, as though there was no room left for argument.

"Nevertheless, father overheard a conversation between two Wall Street brokers that convinced him that they have paid some bad man to dam the river for a time. It's a certainty, not guesswork."

Mr. Allsoner stared at him in bewilderment.

"I may be dense, Phil, but I fail to see what good damming our river would do to anybody."

"You are dense," smiled the boy. "Don't you see? Silver Bridge river runs dry. Panic in Wall Street, and two-hundred-dollar shares sold in bucketfuls, and bought by the men who have had the river dammed. Then, after, say, a month, when they've got control of every share in the market, down comes the river again, up go the shares to top notch, and they've netted a cool million."

Silence reigned for a minute, while the manager reviewed this startling idea. Then he murmured "Jove!" in the tone of one seeing visions.

"You couldn't tell me who's working the rig, could you?" he asked facetiously. The realization that the stoppage was only temporary acted like a tonic. "The boys would give him a lively time, if they got their fingers in his wool. It would be a case of the nearest telegraph pole."

"The man mentioned," Phil answered in a cautious whisper, "was nicknamed Red Spider."

"What! By heavens, you are right! Red Spider is an outlaw half-breed, horse stealer, cattle runner, murderer, and everything else abominable. He is known to have a cache up in the hills, too."

"Then catch Red Spider before eleven o'clock to-morrow. At that hour there is a meeting, and the state of affairs here will become public property. The river must be running before then."

"There isn't a man here that will go into the Black Cañon, and I don't blame them," the manager declared hopelessly. "It's certain death."

"What Red Spider can do we must do."

"He's discovered some secret way. Besides, a cross between an Omaha Indian and a Mexican produces something tougher than a white man."

"I start at midnight," said Phil Clode, strolling toward the door.

It was a few minutes after midnight when Phil Clode rode out of the town.

He was alone. As one man the ore workers had jeered at the idea of attempting to penetrate into the famous Black Cañon. They had already been as far as possible, and found the river unstopped. It had failed at its source, they argued. Such things had been heard of before. Mr. Allsoner did not agree with this latter conclusion, but he was entirely convinced that any attempt to enter the cañon would be futile, and he did not scruple to tell Phil so.

The boy, however, although he pretended to accept the manager's decision as final, secretly determined to make an attempt at solving the mystery single-handed. He knew that the failure to resume operations on the morrow would mean ruin to his father, and with the impetuosity of youth he stigmatized the ore workers as a pack of "superstitious grandmothers."

Once out of sight of the camp, he urged his game little steed to a gallop, and set off to where the mountains rose stark and flat against the mauve-colored rim of the horizon, keeping his course by the dried river bed that led the way into the very heart of Black Cañon.

After about an hour's hard riding the track grew even too steep for the broncho, and Phil, tethering the animal to a rock, made his way forward on foot. Gradually the walls of rock rose up and encompassed him, leaving only a strip of sky faintly seen above his head, and the stillness became so unearthly that he paused occasionally to cast a stone down a chasm for the mere pleasure of hearing it rattle.

Arrived at the entrance of the cañon, he halted and surveyed the way for a few minutes. As Allsoner had told him, the river—now a morass of horrible mud—entirely filled the gulch from side to side, rendering progress without a boat an impossibility. The dam controlling the flow, however, was built half a mile farther up, and this was reached by a species of aerial railway, built on the plan of the old overhead switchbacks, with a car slung to a double rope, worked by block and pulley on the return journey.

It was certainly not an inviting mode of progression, but Phil did not falter. Setting his teeth, he grasped the iron ladder that led up to the summit of the first trestle, and mounted steadily. By the time that he reached the top the wind was shrieking in his ears with demoniac fury, and the trestle seemed to sway bodily before the furious gusts, although only a mild and gentle breeze could be felt in the cañon below.

Buttoning his fluttering jacket tightly around him, he stepped nervously on to the flat, swaying car, and fumbled with the two hooks that held it in place, being secured to a couple of iron rings in the top corners.

With a sudden swoop the frail craft left its moorings, and Phil found himself spinning at a dizzy speed through space. Presently the slope became less steep, and as his conveyance slackened speed he was able to look about him.

Not that there was much to be seen, even though the moon rendered it nearly as light as day. Before him the ropes ran on in an everlasting stream, and on each side nothing was visible but the walls of rock, smoothed in places by human handiwork to allow of the passage of the traveling cradle. Occasionally the car would almost stop as it passed with a shock over the platform of one of the trestles, and Phil found that, by clutching the railings at the proper moment, he could arrest it without feeling any particular strain.

[Pg 31]

He had closed his eyes, and was almost enjoying the rush through the scented night air, when he felt a sudden shudder run through the car, as if it had struck against something. Opening his eyes hastily, he peered round, and then a terrified cry rose to his lips.

The swaying cradle had a new passenger, in the shape of a picturesquely garbed Mexican, who glared upon the boy with fierce wolfish orbs, fiery and bloodshot, as he flourished a long-barreled revolver in his face.

Phil did not need to inquire who the stranger was.

He guessed, and rightly, that it was Red Spider, the outlaw of the plains, who stood before him.

"Carajo!" the man hissed gutturally, thrusting the firearm forward until it snicked the boy's nose. "Whose baby are you? Why are you here? Answer, or over the side you go!"

Leaning forward, he seized Phil's wrist in a vise-like grip, and forced him slowly toward the edge of the car.

"Come to that, who are you?" the boy retorted pluckily. "You've got less right than I have to be here, I guess."

The half-breed's teeth grated with fury at this impertinence.

"I am left here to guard the trestle railway," he yelled, with a curse. "And my duty is to shoot brats who have no business here!"

He pushed the revolver into Phil's face, gradually forcing him nearer and nearer to the edge of the vibrating car.

"You find so many boys trying to steal rides on the trolleys, don't you?" that worthy choked, keeping his wits by a mighty effort of will. He could see that they were rushing rapidly toward the last platform, and, if he managed to cling on till then, he might manage to escape, hopeless as it seemed.

Reaching out as the Red Spider made a vicious lunge, he caught hold of one of the iron crossbars that secured the car to the rope, and held on like grim death. The outlaw, with a shriek of fury, lifted his revolver, and his finger was pressing upon the trigger when the last platform stopped their progress with appalling abruptness. Phil, clinging desperately as he was, narrowly escaped being flung off, and the Mexican, unprepared for the impact, literally hurtled through the air. Over the boy's head he flew, spread-eagled and screaming, and went down—down—down, with the swiftness of a shot bird, and disappeared into the purple mists that veiled the bottom of the cañon from sight. A crash, a single soul-appalling scream, and Red Spider had vanished forever from the sight of men.

Sick at heart, Phil Clode lay for a few minutes without tempting to move. Then he rose cautiously, and, keeping his eyes averted from the dreadful cañon, commenced the descent. Before he had reached the bottom all his natural courage had returned, and he pressed on with renewed energy, inspired by the idea that the outlaw might have left some trail which would lead to his hiding place.

It was black as within a tomb now, for the rocky walls towered up and up higher than the eye could reach.

The track was no more than a smear along the face of the cliff, and Phil began to realize the difficulties that he was to encounter as he proceeded inch by inch, clinging on with teeth and hands, with a thousand-foot drop waiting below. The path, too, grew narrower, and he was just about to relinquish his herculean task in despair when he saw a gleam of light—lantern light—searing the eternal glooms like a streak of fire, and not twenty yards ahead of him as he rounded a sharp bend.

In another minute Red Spider's secret lay revealed.

A square of rock, fitted with powerful hinges, had been opened inward, and the lantern set in the entrance as a guiding light when the outlaw returned. Beyond, the path grew so narrow that it was a human impossibility to scale it; below, until the mysterious catastrophe of its cessation, lay the river, sliding and thundering in cascades and waterfalls, and usually fifty feet or more deep. Phil realized that the passage of Black Cañon was a thing to be dreamed of, and not attempted.

Taking up the lantern, he set off at a brisk pace up the sandy tunnel at the entrance of which it was placed, keeping his eyes open for pitfalls and fissures. The passage led to the right, and perceptibly upward, and ere long he found himself walking parallel with what had once been the river.

After an hour's hard walking he came suddenly into a spacious cave, and found himself gazing once more at the oozing river bed, and at—Red Spider's dam!

Yes, there it was, a great mass of blocks of stone, walling the cañon from side to side, and cunningly diverting the foaming water into a subterranean stream that had been uncovered and channeled for the purpose. Picks and ropes, and blocks of stone, were strewn around in every direction, and just over the mouth of the underground river hung a platform of planking supported by countless ropes, and loaded with a ton or more of cut rock.

Phil was not long in doubt as to its use.

With a little bubbling cry of joy he produced his clasp knife, and went to work busily to hack the ropes in twain.

A score of them were severed, when an ear-splitting crack made him start hastily back. Next instant the whole load of rock fell with a mighty crash, completely blocking the entrance to the subterranean stream that had been draining the life from the river.

Something had to give way, and Red Spider's cunningly constructed dam was directly in the path of the river as it swelled, and rose, and bellied upward. Then, with a roar louder than any thunder, it broke the barrier away, and hurled itself into Black Cañon with irresistible fury, to race and tumble down to where the Silver Bridge Reducing Company's plant was waiting to sully its foaming waters with the red stain of the ore.

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Added table of contents.

Page 1, changed "who" to "whose" ("whose past record") and changed "Motor Mart" to "Motor Matt" ("who aids Motor Matt").

Page 4, added missing italics to "helped the skipper sail the *Christina*."

Page 8, changed "gratfying" to "gratifying."

Page 15, changed "dutsy" to "dusty" ("clothes were dusty").

Page 17, changed "intrrupted" to "interrupted" after "now I rise to you."

Page 29, changed "wtih" to "with" ("with the regularity of tirelessness").

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S HARD LUCK; OR, THE
BALLOON-HOUSE PLOT ***

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