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by Stanley R. Matthews**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S PRIZE; OR, THE PLUCK THAT WINS ***



MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 23
JULY 31, 1909.

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR MATT'S OR THE PLUCK
PRIZE THAT WINS

BY THE AUTHOR
OF "MOTOR MATT"

<p style="text-align: center;">MOTOR STORIES THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION</p>
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OR,

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By the author of "MOTOR MATT."

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CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

Matt King, otherwise Motor Matt.

Joe McGlory, a young cowboy who proves himself a lad of worth and character, and whose eccentricities are all on the humorous side. A good chum to tie to—a point Motor Matt is quick to perceive.

Ping Pong, a Chinese boy who insists on working for Motor Matt, and who contrives to make himself valuable, perhaps invaluable.

George Lorry, who, befriended by Motor Matt at a critical time in his career, proves a credit to himself and to his friends.

Mr. Lorry, George's father; a man who knows how to be generous.

Ethel Lorry, George Lorry's sister; an admirer of Motor Matt.

Pickerel Pete, whose elemental mind evolves a grievance against Motor Matt and is further worked upon by an unscrupulous enemy of Lorry and Matt. The result is almost a tragedy.

CHAPTER I.

A CLASH IN BLACK AND YELLOW.

"Woosh!"

"Fo' de lan' sakes!"

Then followed a bump, a clatter of displaced stones, and sounds of a fall. When quiet once more ensued, two surprised youngsters were on hands and knees, peering at each other like a couple of hostile bantams. Between them lay a string of perch, and off to one side a hickory fishpole, and an old tomato can with a choice assortment of angleworms squirming out of it.

One of the lads was a fifteen-year-old Chinese, in fluttering blouse, wide trousers, wooden sandals and straw hat; the other was a diminutive moke, black as the ace of spades, barefooted, and wearing a "hickory" shirt and ragged trousers.

The bank of Fourth Lake, where they had come together so unexpectedly, was an admirable place for such collisions. In this place the bank was some thirty feet high, steep and rocky. A narrow path, thickly bordered with bushes, angled from top to bottom. At the foot of the path was a boathouse.

Now, if a Chinese boy, in a good deal of a hurry, went slipping and sliding downward from the top of the path, it will be readily understood that he could not put on the brakes in time to avoid an obstruction appearing suddenly in front of him as he scrambled around a bushy angle.

And if that obstruction happened to be a diminutive darky, sitting squarely in the path, sunning himself and half asleep, too drowsy to take notice of sounds above and behind him, it will also be understood that a collision was certain.

It happened. The Chinese took a header over the darky, and when each flopped to his hands and knees, they were looking into each other's eyes with growing animosity.

"By golly!" flared the negro, "is dem glass eyes en yo' haid? Ef dey ain't, why doan' yu use dem?"

"Why blackee boy makee sit in China boy's load?" gurgled the other.

"Yo' own dishyer lake?" taunted the little moke; "yo' gotter mo'galidge on dishyer bank? Go on wif yo' highfalutin' talk! Ah'll sot wherebber Ah wants, en ef yo' comes erlong en goes tuh shovin', by golly, yo'll fin' Ah kin do some shovin' mahse'f."

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"My gottee light comee down bank," asserted the Chinese boy, picking himself up. "My makee go allee same boathouse; you makee stay in load, you gettee shove. My plenty same choo-choo tlain, you makee sleep on tlack. Savvy? You makee some mo' shove, my makee some mo' shove, too."

The Chinese boy stood his ground. The black-skinned youngster sat up and pulled his string of fish closer.

"Ah nebber did lak Chinks," he grunted.

"My no likee blackee boy, all same," averred the Celestial.

"Ah reckons Ah kin lick yu' wif one han' tied behin' mah back. Go 'long, yaller trash! Ah's er hurriclone en a cynader, all rolled intuh one, when Ah gits sta'ted. Look out fo' a big blow en a Chink wreck, dat's all."

"Woosh! Blackee boy makee plenty blow. Me allee same cannon. My makee go bang, you makee go top-side. No likee your piecee pidgin."

Then a comical thing happened, and if any third person with a humorous vein in his make-up had been around, the proceeding would have been highly enjoyed.

Both youngsters glared at each other. Each had his fists doubled, and each fiddled back and forth across the steep path. The black boy sniffed contemptuously. The Chinese lad was a good imitator, and he also sniffed—even more contemptuously.

"By golly," fumed the little moke, "Ah dunno whut's er holdin' me back. Ef any one else had done tuh me whut yo' done, Ah'd hab tromped all ober him befo' now. Ah's gwine tuh dat boathouse mah'se'f. Git outen de way an' le'me pass, er Ah'll butt yo' wif mah haid!"

"My makee go to boathouse, too."

A little curiosity suddenly crept into the black boy's hostile brain.

"Whut bizness yo' got at dat boathouse, huh?" he demanded.

"Gottee plenty pidgin. My workee fo' Motol Matt."

"Yo' workin' fo' Motor Matt?" grunted the other. "By golly, he's mah boss."

"Him China boy's boss."

"Naw, he ain't. Yo's talkin' froo yo' hat. Doan' yo' go er prowlin' erroun' dat 'ar boathouse. Ah ain't a-lettin' nobody git dat job away f'om me."

"Motol Matt my boss, allee same," insisted the Chinese boy.

"When you all git hiahed by Motor Matt?" demanded the darky.

"Long time, allee same Flisco."

"Den dat let's yo' out, yaller mug. Motor Matt done hiahed me fo' days ergo, at two dollahs er day. Skun out. Doan' yo' try cuttin' me loose from dat 'ar job."

The darky took a step downward, but the Celestial planted himself firmly and put up his fists. Once more there was a hitch in proceedings, but the affair was growing more ominous.

"Ah shuah hates tuh mangle yo' up," breathed the darky, "but de 'sponsibility fo' what's done gwine tuh happen b'longs on yo' had en not on mine."

The Chinese lifted his yellow hands and crossed two fingers in front of his face, then, in a particularly irritating manner, he snorted at the black boy through his fingers.

That was about as much as flesh and blood could stand. The colored lad was so full of talk that it just gurgled in his throat.

"Dat's de mos' insulatin' thing what ebber happened tuh me!" he finally managed to gasp. "By golly, Ah doan' take dat f'om nobody. Dat snortin' talk Ah won't stan', dat's all."

"Blackee boy makee heap talk," taunted the Chinese; "him 'flaid makee hit with hands."

"'Fraid?" cried the darky. "Say, you, Pickerel Pete ain't afraid ob all de Chinks dat eber walked de erf. Chinks—waugh! Ah eat's 'em."

"Mebby you tly eatee Ping Pong?" invited the Celestial.

Pickerel Pete, watching his antagonist warily, stooped to pick up a small pebble. Very carefully he laid the pebble on his shoulder.

"Knock dat off," he gritted, his hand closing on the string that held the perch. "Yo' all ain't got de nerve. Yo's got gas enough fo' er b'loon dissension, but dat's all dere is to yu. Knock de stone offen mah shoulder! Go on, now, you yaller trash."

Ping leaned over and brushed the pebble away. That settled it. There was no retreat for either of the two after that.

Pete gave a whoop and struck at Ping with the string of perch. The string broke, and Ping got a perch down the loose collar of his kimono, while another slapped him across the eyes. For an instant the air was full of fish, and under cover of the finny cloud the enraged Chinese rushed at his enemy and gave him a push.

Pete sat down with a good deal of force, and, as it happened, he sat down on his fishhook. A fishhook was never known to lie any way but point up and ready for business, so Pete got up about as quick as he sat down. The next moment he rushed at Ping, trailing the line and the fishpole after him.

This time the two boys clinched, and the noise they made as they rolled about among the perch and pummeled each other caused a commotion at the boathouse. Motor Matt and George Lorry rushed out of the building and looked up the path.

"Great spark-plugs!" exclaimed Matt. "There's a fight going on up there, George."

"It looks that way, that's a fact," answered Lorry. "Let's go up and put a stop to it."

Matt was already bounding up the path. Before he had ascended more than fifteen feet he was met by two rolling, plunging, tumbling forms coming down. A tremendous clatter of sliding stones accompanied the descent, and a towed fishpole whacked and slammed in the rear.

Bracing himself, Matt succeeded in laying hold of the two closely grappled forms, and in bringing them to a stop; then, when he recognized who the fighters were, his astonishment held him speechless.

"Pickerel Pete!" exclaimed George Lorry.

"And Ping Pong," added Matt, as soon as he had recovered a little from his amazement. "The sight of Ping pretty near gives me a short circuit."

"My gottee job," whooped the breathless Ping; "Pickelel Pete no gottee!"

"Hit's my job, en Ah ain't er quittin' fo' no yaller feller like you!"

Thwack, thwack!

"Here, now," cried Matt, "this won't do. Stop it, you fellows!"

Pickerel Pete had a firm grip on Ping's pigtail—which is about the worst hold you can get on a Chinaman. Ping had one hand and arm around Pete's black neck, and the other hand was twisted in the fishline.

Every time Pete would pull the queue a sharp wail would go up from Ping, and every time the fishline was jerked Pete would howl and squirm.

"You boys ought to be ashamed of yourselves," said Matt, masking his desire to laugh with all the severity he could muster.

Lorry was leaning against a tree, his head bowed and his whole form in a quiver.

"Leavee go China boy's pigtail!" chirped Ping.

"Stop yo' pullin' on dat 'ar fishline!" howled Pete.

"Let go, both of you!" ordered Matt; then forcibly he pulled the two lads apart. "Here, Lorry," he called, "you hang onto Ping and I'll take care of Pete."

The youngsters were a disordered pair when separated and held at a distance from each other.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Matt.

CHAPTER II.

PICKEREL PETE'S REVENGE.

For several moments neither Pete nor Ping was able to reply to Matt's question. The darky was busy getting the fishhook out of his trousers, and the Chinese was hopping up and down on one foot, shaking the perch out of his flapping garments. Both the fish and the fishhook were extricated at about the same time.

"Say, boss," cried Pete, "yo' all ain't done passed me up fo' dat yaller trash, has yu? Ah's workin' fo' yu yit, ain't Ah? Dat 'ar slant-eye hefun was er sayin' dat he had de job, but Ah 'lows yo' wouldn't go en cut me offen yo' pay-roll fo' de likes ob him."

"My workee fo' Motol Matt," clamored Ping, "altee time. Blackee boy no workee. Me one piecee fine China boy. Lickee blackee boy altee same Sam Hill."

"Yo' nebber!" whooped Pete. "Ah kin git yo' on de mat wif mah eyes shut, en——"

"Stand right where you are, Pete!" cut in Matt sternly. "I'll not have any more rowdying. You and Ping ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"You ketchee boat my sendee by expless, Motol Matt?" inquired Ping.

Matt had "caught" the boat, all right. Ping, without any instructions, had sent the eighteen-foot *Sprite*, with engine installed and various accessories in the lockers, from San Francisco to Madison, Wisconsin, by express, charges collect.

At first the king of the motor boys had been considerably "put out" by this unauthorized move of Ping's, but later he had been glad that the *Sprite* had come into his hands.

"Yes, Ping," said Matt, "I received the boat, and we have now got her in the boathouse down there, making some changes in her to fit her for the motor-boat race next week. Where have you been, Ping?"

"Makee come flom Flisco," answered the Chinese, hunting up his sandals and his hat. "My workee fo' you, so my come findee boss."

"The boat got here quite a while ago. How long have you been in the town?"

"Ketchee town yessulday. Makee ask chop-chop where my findee Motol Matt. Thisee molnin' 'Melican man say, so my come. Blackee boy altee same stone in China boy's load; China boy no see um, takee tumble; blackee boy velly mad, makee fight. Woosh!"

Pete, with snapping eyes, had been standing back listening to this talk. Now he thought it about time that he put in his own oar.

"Ah's brack, boss," said he to Matt, "but Ah ain't yaller. Cho'ly yo' ain't goin' tuh frow me down fo' dat 'ar no-'count hefun, is yo'? Ah's workin' fo' you fo' two dollahs er day. Ain't dat right?"

"Peter," said Matt, "you're not to be depended on. I hired you for two dollars a day to pilot me around the lakes, and I paid you for a day in advance. You went with me through the canal to Fourth Lake, and then up the Catfish to Whisky Creek. I left you to watch the boat, and you deserted, and I haven't seen you since until this minute. Now you bob up, just as though nothing had happened, and want to keep right on working for me. I don't think I need you any longer, Pete. You didn't work for me more than three hours, but you got paid for a full day, so you ought to be satisfied."

Ping puffed himself up delightedly. Pickerel Pete, on the other hand, seemed struck "all of a heap."

"Yo' doan' mean dat, does yo', boss?" he pleaded. "Ah's er good li'l moke, en Ah got testimendations f'om de gobernor ob de State. Yo' ain't gwineter turn down dem testimendations, is yo'?"

"I can't depend on you, Pete," said Matt. "I don't need a boy any more, anyhow; but I'm under obligations to Ping, so I'll have to take him on."

"Den Ah's kicked out?" shouted Pete.

"No, you're not kicked out. I don't need you, that's all."

"We had er contract, en yo's done busted hit!" flared Pete savagely.

Matt could not restrain a laugh at the little darky's rage.

"You got the best of our contract, Pete," said Matt. "You owe me about a dollar and a half, but I'm willing to call it square."

"Ah owes yo' more'n dat," fumed Pete. "Yo's done kicked me out, en Ah ain't er gwine tur fo'git. Hit's dat yaller trash dat's 'sponsible"—he shook his black fist at Ping—"but Ah's gwine tuh play eben wif yo' all fo' whut yo's done. Jess watch mah smoke!"

"You little rascal!" spoke up Lorry; "what do you mean by talking that way? Get out of here!"

"Ah's gotter right tuh stay anywhere Ah please erround dishyer lake," cried Pete. "Yo' kain't drive me off, nuther. Yah! Dat ole boat you's fixin' up fo' de race ain't worf nuffin'. Ollie Merton he's gotter boat dat is er boat, en he's gwinter beat yo' outen yo' boots, dat's whut he is. Ah wouldn't 'sociate wif no sich fellers as you, en Ah wouldn't work fo' Motor Matt ef he paid me a millyun dollahs er day! Jess yo' watch mah smoke—Ah'll git eben, yassuh!"

With that the angry little rascal turned and ran up the path. But he did not run far. As soon as a bend in the crooked course had hidden him from the eyes of Matt and Lorry, he plunged off along the side of the bank, hiding himself in the undergrowth, and working his way slowly down toward the boathouse.

As soon as Pete had vanished, Lorry turned to Matt with a laugh.

"There's another enemy for us to deal with, Matt," said he.

"If he was bigger," returned Matt, "he might prove dangerous; but Pete's too small to count."

"Blackee boy no good," put in the smirking Ping. "My knockee blame head off!"

"Don't be so savage, Ping," said Matt humorously.

"So this is the chap that sent the *Sprite* to Madison by express, eh?" inquired Lorry, grinning as he gave the Celestial an up-and-down look.

"He's the fellow. Why did you drop out so suddenly in San Francisco, Ping?" and Matt turned to the Chinese.

"My waitee fo' you by Tiburon landing, you savvy?" said Ping. "Bumby, my see launly boss come down landing likee house afire. Woosh! No likee launly boss. My say 'goo'-by' and lun away. One, two, tlee day, my makee hunt fo' Motol Matt. Him gone. P'licee man say he gone Ma'son, Wiscon', so my gettee 'Melican man boxee boat, shippee Ma'son. You ketchee awri'. Velly fine. Now my workee fo' you. Hi-lee-lee, hi-lo-lo——"

Ping was happy. He had found Matt, and he was back on the job again. Not only that, but the "blackee boy" was cut out for good.

"Do you remember the three men who made us so much trouble in San Francisco, Ping?" asked Matt.

"Allee same. Red-whiskels 'Melican——"

"That's the fellow who's called Big John."

"Sure; him Big John, awri', and big lascal, too. Woosh! My lecollect Kinky and Loss. All thlee makee Matt heap touble."

"Big John, Kinky, and Ross, those are the men. Have you seen anything of them, Ping, since you left Frisco?"

"No see um, Motol Matt. My punchee head, me see um. Where Joe McGloly, huh? Him big high boy, Joe."

"McGlory's off around Picnic Point on a motor cycle, trying to find out how fast the boat is that the *Sprite* has got to beat. As the *Wyandotte* races through the lake, Joe was to race along the road on the lake shore, just keeping abreast of the boat. Then Joe's speedometer will tell him how fast the boat is going."

"No savvy," murmured Ping, shaking his head.

"Your talk is too deep for him, Matt," laughed Lorry. "Well, let's get back to the boathouse. You were just going to explain the changes you were making in the *Sprite* in order to make her fast enough to beat the *Wyandotte*."

"When Joe gets back," said Matt, "we'll know just how fast the *Wyandotte* can go, and just how fast the *Sprite* will have to travel."

"Merton may try to fool us, Matt. If he knows Joe is timing him, he'll not let the *Wyandotte* put in her best licks."

"I told Joe to be careful and not let any one on the *Wyandotte* see him. We've got to be just as careful. I'd hate to have Merton know what we were doing to the *Sprite*."

"Sure," nodded Lorry, "it won't do to have our hand tipped at this stage of the game."

Matt and Lorry started back toward the boathouse, Ping following them and looking back up the path on the chance of catching sight of Pickerel Pete.

"All the changes I'm making in the *Sprite*," continued Matt, "are drawn on that roll of papers I left on the work-bench. We'll go over those diagrams, one at a time, George, and I think I can make everything clear to you."

"Whatever you say, Matt, goes," returned Lorry. "You've got a head on you for such things. I know a good motor launch when I see it, and I can drive such a boat as well as anybody, but I'm no mechanic. All I want," and Lorry's eyes flashed and his words became sharp, "is to get a boat that will beat Merton's. You know how much that means to me."

"I do," said Matt, "and we're going to make a fast boat out of the *Sprite*. We'll give Ollie Merton a run for that prize, and no two ways about it. When Joe gets back, if he has had any kind of luck, we'll know just what we're up against."

The boathouse was large and roomy, and the doors were open, front and rear. Matt had transformed part of the interior into a workshop, and there was a bench, with a machinist's vise, under an open window at the side of the building. Tools and parts of the boat's machinery were scattered about, apparently in great disorder, but really with a methodical carelessness that left them handily in the spot where they would next be needed.

As the boys entered the boathouse, Matt started directly for the bench to get the roll of drawings. They were not where he had left them, and he turned blankly to Lorry.

"Did you do anything with that bundle of diagrams, George?" he asked.

"Never touched 'em, Matt," replied Lorry, with some excitement, "but I saw where you laid them—and it was right there."

Lorry dropped a hand on the work-bench, close to the open window.

"They've been stolen!" exclaimed Matt aghast. "They were taken while we were up the bank! Who could have done it?"

"Who but Merton and some of those rascally friends of his?" queried Lorry, his eyes flashing.

Matt ran to the other end of the boathouse and stepped out upon the small platform above the water, but, strain his eyes as he would, he could see nothing of any boat on that part of the lake.

CHAPTER III.

A "DARK HORSE."

Ollie Merton was the only son of a millionaire lumberman. The millionaire and his wife were making an extensive tour of Europe, and while they were away the son was in complete charge of the big Madison mansion, with a large fund in the bank subject to his personal check.

Never before had such a chance to "spread himself" come young Merton's way, and he was making the most of it.

The lad was commodore of the Winnequa Yacht Club, which had its headquarters near Winnequa, on Third Lake. Another institution, known as the Yahara Motor Boat Club, had its boathouse on Fourth Lake; and between the Winnequas and the Yaharas there was the most intense rivalry.

Twice, in two years hand running, the Winnequas had contested against the Yaharas for power-boat honors. By winning the first race the Winnequas had secured a trophy known as the "De Lancey Cup," and by winning the second race they still retained possession of the cup. By winning a third time the cup would pass to them in perpetuity. The Yaharas, feeling that their very existence as a club was at stake, were bitterly determined to snatch the prize from their rivals. A vast amount of feeling was wrapped up in the approaching contest.

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George Lorry was vice commodore of the Yahara Club. In a secret session, months before, the Yaharas had commissioned Lorry to carry the honors of the club and secure a boat which would outrun any the Winnequas might put in the field.

Lorry, no less than Merton, was the son of a rich man. Without consulting his father, Lorry ordered a five thousand-dollar hydroplane, and, at the last moment, parental authority stepped in and denied the young man such an extravagance.

George Lorry at this time had rather more pride and conceit than were good for him. His father's action, in the matter of the hydroplane, stung him to the quick. He felt that he had been humiliated, and that his comrades, the Yaharas, were giving him the cold shoulder on account of his failure to "make good" with a winning boat.

George had been wrong in this, but, nevertheless, he resigned from the boat club and went to the other extreme of making a friend and associate of Ollie Merton.

Merton, recognizing in Lorry the only source of danger to the prestige of the Winnequas, had advised George to do certain things with the object of clearing a rival from the field during the forthcoming race.

That Merton had advised unscrupulous acts, and that Lorry had tried to carry them out, matters little. Motor Matt met Lorry at just the right time to keep him from doing something which he would have regretted to the end of his days.

Very recently Lorry had discovered the false friendship of Merton, and, coming to see the folly of what he had done in a misguided moment, had gone back to the Yaharas and requested a renewal of the commission to furnish a boat for the coming race that would regain the De Lancey cup for his club. Lorry had been received by his former comrades with open arms, and they had immediately acceded to his request.

From this it will be understood how great a stake George Lorry had in the third contest with the Winnequas. Apart from the intense club spirit which prompted a winning boat at any cost, there was a personal side to the issue which meant everything to Lorry.

Merton's specious counsel, given for the purpose of getting Lorry out of the race, had almost brought Lorry to ruin. Now, to best Merton in the contest had come to be regarded by Lorry as almost a personal justification.

To Motor Matt young Lorry had turned, and the king of the motor boys had promised a boat that would regain the lost prize for the Yaharas.

Matt felt that the *Sprite*, with certain changes, could beat anything on the lakes. Lorry shared his confidence, and Matt was working night and day to get the swift little eighteen-foot launch in shape for "warming up" on the water before the regatta.

The theft of the drawings was the first backset Matt and Lorry had received. Well aware of Merton's questionable character, it was easy for the lads to believe that he had slipped into the boathouse while they were up the bank and had taken the plans; or he need only have come to the window and reach in in order to help himself to them.

Lorry was terribly cut up.

"Merton has got the better of us," he muttered disconsolately. "He'll know just what we're going to do with the *Sprite* now, and will make changes in the *Wyandotte*, or else arrange for another boat to stack up against us. It's too late for us to order another boat, and we'll have to go on with the *Sprite* and look at Merton's heels over the finish line. Oh, thunder! I wish this Chink and that Pickerel Pete were in the bottom of the lake!"

Noticing the scowl Lorry gave him, Ping slunk away from his vicinity, and came closer to where Matt was walking thoughtfully back and forth across the floor of the boathouse.

"Don't lose your nerve, Lorry," counseled Matt, coming to a halt and leaning against the workbench. "No fellow ever won a fight unless he went into it with confidence."

"It's all well enough to talk of confidence," grumbled Lorry, "but this is enough to undermine all the hopes we ever had."

"Looked at in one way, yes. Those were my working drawings. They contained all the measurements of the *Sprite's* hull, my plans for changing the gasoline tanks from the bow aft where they would not bring the boat down so much by the head, also my arrangement for a new reversing-gear, the dimensions of the motor, and the size and pitch of our new propeller."

Lorry groaned.

"Why, confound it!" he cried, "Merton will be able to figure out just what the *Sprite's* speed should be—and he can plan accordingly for another boat. There's a way of getting those plans away from him, by Jupiter!" He started angrily to his feet.

"How?" asked Matt quietly.

"The police," returned Lorry.

"No, not the police! We don't know that Merton has the plans; it's a pretty safe guess, all right, but we don't absolutely know. When you call in the law to help you, George, you've got to be pretty sure of your ground."

Lorry dropped back in his chair dejectedly, and Matt resumed his thoughtful pace back and forth across the room.

"I've thought for the last two days," Matt went on finally, "that Merton was rather free in showing off the *Wyandotte*. He has her over here in Fourth Lake when she belongs in Third, and he's trying her out on the other side of Picnic Point, almost under our noses. I'm not sure but that Merton wants us to see his boat's performances."

"Then he's not running the *Wyandotte* at her racing speed, Matt," averred Lorry. "He's only pretending to, hoping that we'll watch her work and get fooled."

"He'll not fool us much. The *Wyandotte* is a thirty-seven-footer, five-foot beam, semi-speed model. She has a two-cylinder, twenty-horse, two-cycle engine, five-and-three-quarter-inch bore by five-inch stroke. The propeller has elliptical blades, and is nineteen inches in diameter by twenty-eight-inch pitch—"

Lorry looked up in startled wonder. Motor Matt had reeled off his figures off-hand as readily as though reading them from a written memorandum.

"Where, in the name of glory, did you find out all that?" gasped Lorry.

Matt smiled.

"Why," said he, "I got them in a perfectly legitimate manner from the builder of the boat, who lives in Bay City. The name of the builder was easily learned, and a letter did the rest. The *Wyandotte* can log fourteen or fifteen miles—no trouble to find that out with pencil and paper, since we have all those dimensions. Now, the *Sprite*, as she was, could do her mile in four-twelve—possibly in four—and Merton knows it. Why, then, is he showing off a boat that is not much better than the *Sprite* has been all along? Take it from me, Lorry," and Matt spoke with supreme conviction, "the *Wyandotte* is not the boat the Winnequas will have in the race. *There's another one*, and I've felt morally sure of it all along."

"You're a wonder!" muttered Lorry. "Why, you never told me you'd written to Bay City about the *Wyandotte*."

"I intended to tell you at the proper time."

"Well, if Merton is going to spring a surprise boat on us the day of the race, that makes it so much the worse."

"I have other plans for changing the *Sprite*, but I have been holding them back until I could make sure Merton was holding another speed boat in reserve. Those plans weren't in that roll that was stolen, George; as a matter of fact, they're not down on paper at all. From the drawings and memoranda Merton has secured he can figure the improved *Sprite's* speed at a little less than sixteen miles an hour. Let him figure that way. The other plans I have will enable her to do twenty."

Lorry bounded off his chair.

"Twenty?" he cried. "Matt, you're crazy!"

Before Matt could answer, Joe McGlory staggered into the boathouse, dragging a motor cycle after him. Both he and the wheel were splashed with mud, and bore other evidences of wear and tear, but the cowboy's eyes were bulging with excitement.

"You've been gone two hours longer than I thought you'd be, Joe," said Matt, studying his chum with considerable curiosity. "What's happened?"

"That's it!" exploded McGlory, breathlessly, leaning the motor cycle against the bench. "Speak to me about that! Sufferin' thunderbolts! but I've made a whale of a discovery."

"What is it?" demanded George, wildly impatient.

"Why," cried McGlory, "Merton's got another boat, and she's certainly a blue streak, if I know the brand. The fat's in the fire, pards. If the poor old *Sprite* gets into a race with this new boat of Merton's, she'll be in the 'also ran' column."

Lorry collapsed.

"A dark horse!" exclaimed Matt. "I'd have bet a farm Merton was planning to spring something like that. Buck up, Lorry! Perhaps this isn't so bad, after all. Tell us about it, Joe."

CHAPTER IV.

PLANS.

"When I got over the point, pards," said Joe, dropping into a chair and fanning himself with his hat, "the *Wyandotte* was just comin' down the lake to pull off her usual race with herself. I hauled up in the road, with the bushes between me and the water, ready to jump into the saddle the minute the boat came opposite. I was keeping shady, you can bet your moccasins on that, and it was some sort of a jolt when I saw a galoot perched on a stone. He looked like a hobo, and the way he grinned got on my nerves.

"'I'm funny, all right,' I says to him, 'but where I come from a feller gets shot if he looks that way at some one else.'

"'I ain't laffin' at you,' says the tramp, 'but at the joke them other mugs is playin' on you an' your push.'

"'Where does the joke come in?' I inquires.

"'Why,' he comes back, 'that other club is foolin' you with a boat here on Fourth Lake when the real boat is over on Third. If what I'm a-sayin' is worth a dollar to you, just remember and cough up.'

"Well, say, that hobo wasn't a holy minute grabbin' my attention. I fell off the chug wheel right there and proceeded to palaver. It turned out that Merton's gard'ner was sick for a few days, and that the tramp mowed the lawn and did a few other things around the place. There was an open window, Ollie and some of his pards were on the other side of it, and the noise of the lawnmower didn't prevent the tramp from hearing what was said. You can bet your last dollar it was hot news he got hold of.

"Merton and the Winnequas were plannin' to fool us with the *Wyandotte* on Fourth Lake while they were warming up the real boat on Third. The hobo said I could wait there at the Point till the *Wyandotte* came closer, and that I'd see Merton wasn't aboard; then he allowed that if I'd sizzle over to the gun club on Third Lake I'd see the real prize winner doing stunts that would curl my hair.

"The tramp was off for Waunakee, and had just dropped down on a stone to rest. My coming along was a happenchance, as he hadn't intended to peddle the news he'd got hold of, but he recognized me as being a pard of Motor Matt's, and a dollar looked pretty big to him.

"I waited till the *Wyandotte* was close, and then I saw that Merton wasn't aboard. Would I swallow the hobo's yarn or not? I decided that I would, so I threw him a dollar and burned the air in the direction of the gun club and Third Lake.

"Well, t'other boat was there, sliding around like a streak of greased lightning. Half the time I couldn't see her for the foam she kicked up. I managed to pick up the label on her bow as she was making a turn, and it's the *Dart*. But go—speak to me about that! Say, she gets to a place pretty near before she starts. Merton was aboard, and so was that red-headed pard of his,

Halloran. Halloran was working the machinery. I watched my chance and kept abreast of the *Dart* for a mile. Twenty-one miles is what the speedometer registered, although the count may be shy a little one way or the other. I was too excited to be entirely accurate. Our hands are in the air, pards, and no mistake. The *Sprite*'ll look like a turtle wallowin' along in the wake of a swordfish."

Matt and Lorry had listened to this recital with varying feelings. Matt was deeply interested, but Lorry was visibly cast down.

"How big is the *Dart*, Joe?" inquired Matt.

"Twenty-five or thirty feet, Matt."

"You must be a little wrong in your estimate of the *Dart*'s speed. It doesn't seem possible that she could turn a mile in less than three minutes."

"Well, look!" exclaimed McGlory, catching his first glimpse of Ping. "If there ain't little Washee-washee Slant-eyes I'm a Chink myself. When and how did he flash out in these parts?"

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Matt, by way of relieving the tension aroused by McGlory's exciting news, told of the scuffle in the path leading up the bank, and then allowed the Celestial to finish with an account of the way he had come from Frisco.

"Let's get back to the boats," put in Lorry impatiently, when Ping had got through with his pidgin English. "Hadn't I better withdraw the *Sprite*, Matt, and let some other fellow meet Merton?"

Matt stared.

"I didn't believe you were that sort of a fellow, Lorry," he returned, "and I don't think so yet."

"But if the *Sprite* hasn't any chance——"

"She has a chance, and a good one, after I get her ready. There'll have to be more extensive changes, that's all."

"What other changes are you thinking about?"

"Ping," said Matt, turning to the Chinese, "you go outside the boathouse and see that no one hangs around it while we're talking."

"Can do," chirped Ping, and shuffled out.

Matt pulled up a chair close to Lorry's and motioned for McGlory to join the inner circle. Then Matt explained about the loss of the roll of drawings.

The cowboy was mad clear through in half a second.

"It was Merton, all right," he scowled, "and you can bet a ten-dollar note against a last year's bird's nest on that. By this time he'll know what the improved *Sprite* can do, and he'll also know that the *Dart* can run circles around her. We're Jonahed, for fair."

"No, we're not," said Matt. "As long as I thought we had only the *Wyandotte* to beat, I was only planning to make the *Sprite* fast enough for that purpose. But I can make the *Sprite* the fastest thing on the lakes—it'll take a hustle, though, and I'll have to have a machinist helper."

"I don't care how many men you have to have, Matt, nor how many extra supplies," returned Lorry, beginning to gather a little confidence from the quiet, determined air of the king of the motor boys. "Go ahead, and call on me for what money you need."

"Over at the machine shop, where I've been getting some work done," proceeded Matt, "they have a double-opposed, four-cycle automobile engine, capable of developing from eighteen to twenty horse-power at eighteen hundred revolutions per minute. The cylinders are five by five. That's a pretty stiff engine for the *Sprite*, but the hull could be strengthened, and we could put it in and get about ninety or ninety-five per cent. of the horse-power by gearing down three to one. After the gears wear a little, the percentage of horse-power might drop to eighty. This motor will drive a three-bladed propeller twenty-six inches diameter, thirty-two inches pitch. If the vibration don't shake me out of the boat at eighteen hundred revolutions per minute, the speed we'll get will be astonishing."

"Whoop!" exulted McGlory. "I don't know what it all means, but it listens good. I reckon there's a kick or two in the old *Sprite* yet."

"You can't run a boat engine like you run an automobile motor, Matt," said Lorry.

"Of course not. A steady load and steady plugging in the water is a whole lot different from the give-and-take a motor gets in an auto; but we can keep up the eighteen hundred revolutions for ten minutes, anyhow—and the race only covers five miles. I'm fixing the *Sprite* to win the race, that's all."

"By George!" exclaimed Lorry, "it takes you to make a fellow feel good, Matt! You know what you're doing, every time and all the time. Go ahead with the work, and bank on me to hold you up with both hands."

"Me, too, pard!" added McGlory.

"What we're doing," said Matt, "we want to keep strictly to ourselves. Merton has our drawings, and probably thinks he knows just what we're about. Let him think so. If he springs a 'dark horse' on us, we'll get even by springing one on him."

"But can you get the *Sprite* ready in time?" asked Lorry anxiously.

"Sure I can! I'll have to begin at once, though, and some of us will have to stay in this boathouse night and day to make sure that none of the Winnequas come prowling around. If you'll stay here with McGlory, George, I'll borrow your motor cycle to go over to the machine shop and dicker for that second-hand engine."

"Go on," said Lorry. "While you're there you might get a man to help you."

Matt got up and pulled the motor cycle away from the bench.

"I'll be back in an hour, fellows," said he.

Leaving the boathouse, he dragged the wheel to the top of the steep bank, then, getting into the saddle, he gave the pedals a turn and was off like a shot along the wooded road that led past the insane asylum and by the Waunakee Road and Sherman Avenue into town.

If Motor Matt loved one thing more than another, it was a good, clean fight for supremacy, such as the one that now confronted him and his friends. There was a zest in such a struggle, and the pleasure of winning out against odds, in a good cause, was its own reward.

As he whizzed along the wooded road, mechanically steering the wheel while his mind busied itself with other things, he was confronted suddenly by a rail held breast-high across his course. It was impossible to turn out at that point, and Matt had to shut off the power and jam down hard on the brake.

He caught a glimpse of a silent form at each end of the rail, and then, as he halted, of half a dozen other forms rushing out at him from the bushes on each side of the road.

In another moment he was caught and dragged from the motor cycle.

CHAPTER V.

AN ORDER TO QUIT.

This unexpected attack, coming so suddenly, had taken Matt at a disadvantage. He fought as well as he could, in the circumstances, but there were too many against him.

There were eight of his foes, all told, and Matt was carried into the timber at one side of the road and dropped unceremoniously in a small cleared space. Bounding to his feet, he stood staring about him.

His eight enemies had formed a narrow circle, hemming him in. They were all young fellows, well dressed, and carried themselves with an air of firmness and determination. The face of each was covered with a handkerchief, which left only the eyes visible.

"What are you trying to do?" demanded Matt angrily.

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"Don't lose your temper, Motor Matt," answered one of the eight, in a voice that was plainly disguised. "We're not going to hurt you—now. Do what we want you to and we'll remain good friends. All we've stopped you for is to have a little talk."

"Did you have to head me off with a rail in order to have a little talk?" asked Matt sarcastically.

"We wanted to make sure of you for about five minutes, and this was the only way we could think of. We were going over to your boathouse, but saw you coming down the hill from the point, and thought we'd better lay for you."

"Well," said Matt, "here I am. Hurry up with your talk. I'm in a rush, and don't want to stop here long."

"We want to ask you a question: You're a professional motorist, aren't you?"

"I've driven a racing automobile, if that's what you mean."

"They say you know gasoline motors forward, backward, and sideways."

"I've studied them, and I've worked in a shop where they were made."

"Then I guess we've got you dead to rights. Do you want to make a hundred dollars?"

"That depends on how I'm to make it," answered the king of the motor boys, immediately suspicious.

"You won't have much to do. We'll give you the money now if you promise to leave town to-night, and not come back to this section for a month."

"Oh!" exclaimed Matt, a light suddenly dawning upon him. "You're representative members of the Winnequa Club, I take it, and you want to keep me from running Lorry's boat in that race."

"We don't care how you take it," was the sharp retort. "The question is, will you accept that hundred and get out?"

"Certainly not," said Matt promptly.

There was a silence. One lad was doing all the talking, the others remaining silent and watchful.

"Will you leave for two hundred?" went on the spokesman.

"No," was Matt's indignant response, "nor for two thousand! What do you fellows take me for?"

I'm George Lorry's friend, and I'm going to see him through this racing contest."

"I don't think you will," was the significant answer. "You probably have an idea you will, but you'll change your mind before you're many days older."

"I understand," observed Matt quietly, "that your club is composed of pretty decent fellows. I'm pretty sure the rest of the members don't know what you eight are doing."

"That's nothing to you. You're a professional racer."

"There's nothing in the rules governing the race that bars out a professional driver," said Matt.

"That may be, but it's hardly fair to stack up a professional driver against an amateur."

"Halloran is not an amateur," returned Matt. "He has handled motor boats for two years. I happen to know this. If Halloran is going to drive Merton's boat, I don't think you fellows can complain if I drive Lorry's."

Matt's knowledge regarding Halloran must have staggered the eight masked youths. Silence reigned again for a space, one set of eyes encountering another and the glance traveling around the circle.

The king of the motor boys was studying those around him. One of the eight he believed to be Ollie Merton, although of that he could not be sure. Merton must have made good time from Third Lake, if he had left the *Dart*, crossed the city, and come around Fourth Lake to that point.

"We're not here to discuss Halloran," went on the young fellow who was doing the talking for the rest of his party. "We don't want you backing up young Lorry. There are going to be some bets made on that race, and we want Merton's boat to have a cinch. If what we've heard of you is true, you're deep, and when you go into a thing you go in to win. If you won't take a couple of hundred and leave town, how much will you ask to throw the race?"

Matt stiffened, and his eyes flashed dangerously. Once before, in the course of his career, an insult of that sort had been offered him. That was in Arizona, and a gambler had approached him and offered him money to "throw" a bicycle race on which the gambler and his friends had been doing some heavy betting.

Matt had principles, hard and fast principles which he knew to be right and on which he would not turn his back. He had never seen any good come of betting, and he was against it.

"I guess," said he sharply, "that if you know me better you wouldn't make such a proposition. I'm a friend of Lorry's, and I'm going to stand by him. Not only that, but if you fellows have been foolish enough to bet on Merton's boat, I'll do my best to see that you lose your money. I guess that finishes our talk. Break away and let me go on."

"Don't be in a rush," growled the spokesman. "If you won't take our money and leave town, and if you won't throw the race for a share of the proceeds, then we'll hand you an order which you'll do well to obey. It's an order to quit. Understand? You're an outsider and we don't want you around here."

"So is Halloran an outsider," said Matt caustically. "He comes from Milwaukee."

"We're talking about you, now, and not about Halloran. Lorry has got to stand on his own pins. He's got money enough to see him through this race without any of your help."

"You're a one-sided lot, you fellows," went on Matt. "All you say about Lorry applies equally well to Merton. Why don't Merton 'stand on his own pins,' as you call it? And why do you ask more of Lorry than you do of Merton?"

"That's our business," snapped the other.

Matt laughed.

"The trouble with you fellows," said he, "is that you're scared. You think the *Wyandotte* has got a little more than she can take care of in the *Sprite*. What kind of sportsmen are you, anyhow, when you try to load your dice before you go into this game?"

Matt's mention of the *Wyandotte* was made with the deliberate intention of hoodwinking the eight. By speaking as he did the masked youths would infer that Matt and Lorry knew nothing, as yet, about the *Dart*.

That Matt's remark had gone home was evident from the quick looks that passed around the circle over the tops of the handkerchiefs.

"We've got you down pretty fine, Motor Matt," pursued the spokesman, who could not bring himself to give up the attempt to influence Matt. "If it hadn't been for you, George Lorry would be in San Francisco now. You brought him back here, and you advised him to get back into the Yahara Club and go on with the programme the Yaharas had laid down for him. That was all your doing, and you know it."

"I'm glad to think," said Matt, with spirit, "that I had something to do with that. But you're mistaken if you think I had *everything* to do with it."

"I suppose this McGlory helped a little."

"He did; but the biggest help came from Lorry himself. Lorry has the right kind of stuff in him, and he'll show you, before long, that he's worth a dozen Mertons."

This goaded one of the others into speech—and it was the one whom Matt suspected of being

Ollie Merton.

"Oh, splash! Lorry's a sissy and he always was."

It was Merton's voice, Matt felt sure of that. But the king of the motor boys wanted to make assurance doubly sure.

"Now are you done?" he asked.

"You refuse to meet us half way in an amicable arrangement?"

"Your amicable arrangement," said Matt ironically, "is an insult to a fellow who tries to be square. I'll have nothing to do with it, and that's the last word."

"We're going to have the last word, my gay motorist, and from now on up to the hour of the race you and Lorry are going to have your hands full of trouble. The *Sprite* will never enter the contest, and you'll save yourself something, Motor Matt, if you obey our orders to quit. There ___"

Motor Matt, watching his opportunity, had made a sudden leap forward. It was toward the side of the circle opposite the place where the chap whom he believed to be Merton was standing.

Instantly the eight made a concerted move in that direction, leaving a gap in the cordon behind Matt. Like lightning, the king of the motor boys whirled about and darted through the gap.

As he raced past the fellow he supposed to be Merton he snatched the handkerchief from his face. The evidence, then, was plain enough.

"Merton!" shouted Matt as he bounded toward the road.

An angry yell went up behind him, followed by a crashing among the bushes as the eight began pursuit. But Matt had the lead, and he was fortunate enough to find the motor cycle leaning against the tree near the place where it had been halted.

To mount, start the gasoline, switch on the spark and pedal off took but a few seconds. By the time Merton and his companions reached the road Matt was sliding around a wooded bend like a shot from a gun.

Around the turn Matt was compelled to sheer off to avoid a big touring car which, deserted and at a standstill, filled the road.

He noted, as he passed, that it was the Merton touring car. Matt had seen the car before, and in circumstances almost as dramatic.

CHAPTER VI.

FACING THE MUSIC.

The automobile repair shop which Matt had started for was in Sherman Avenue, not far from the park that skirted the shore of Fourth Lake. He did not make for the shop at once, however, but kept out of sight until Ollie Merton had passed with the big, seven-passenger car loaded to the limit. As soon as the car had vanished Matt went into the shop.

He was not long in transacting his business there. Before beginning he placed the proprietor under seal of secrecy. The second-hand motor was secured at a bargain, Matt paying spot cash for it. The engine was to be loaded aboard a launch and taken across the lake, in the afternoon, to the boathouse by Picnic Point.

With the engine was to come a young machinist, a son of the proprietor of the shop, who was to be well paid for his services, and who promised to use his hands and eyes and not his tongue.

Matt's final request was that the engine, when carried down to the landing and while aboard the launch, should be covered with canvas. This was to prevent curious eyes from securing information which might be carried to some of the Winnequas, and so to Merton.

From the machine shop Matt rushed on into town for the purpose of sending a message. The telegram was to a supply house in Milwaukee and requested immediate shipment of a new propeller. The sudden change in plans for the *Sprite* made quick work necessary.

It was long after noon when Matt got back to the boathouse, where Lorry and McGlory were impatiently awaiting him.

"You were longer than we thought you'd be," remarked Lorry, a look of relief crossing his face as Matt trundled the motor cycle through the open door.

"Did you get what you wanted, pard?" inquired McGlory.

"Yes," laughed Matt, leaning the wheel against the wall, "and a little more than I was expecting. I was stopped by Merton and seven of his friends, just this side of the asylum and—"

"By Merton!" cried Lorry.

"Sufferin' brain-twisters!" exclaimed the cowboy. "How could that be? Why, pard, I left Merton on Third Lake, in the *Dart*."

"Merton must have come ashore, Joe, pretty soon after you left. He picked up seven of his friends

somewhere and started around Fourth Lake to have a talk with me at the boathouse. They saw me coming down the hill from the point, stopped the automobile around a bend, tied handkerchiefs over their faces and stopped me with a fence rail. Before I fairly realized what was going on, the eight of them had me off the wheel and into the timber."

"What an outrage!" growled Lorry. "You're getting more than your share of rough work, Matt, seems to me. What did those fellows want?"

Matt pulled out a lunch box of generous size, opened it on the workbench and invited his two companions to help themselves.

"I went into town to send a telegram for a new propeller," he observed, "but I didn't even take time to stop at a restaurant for a meal."

"No matter what happens," said Lorry admiringly, "you never forget anything. But go on and tell us what Merton and those other chaps stopped you for."

"They were trying to run in a rhinecaboo of some sort. I'll be bound," averred McGlory.

"The plain truth of the matter is, fellows," declared Matt, "Merton and his crowd are scared. They offered me two hundred dollars to leave town at once and never come back."

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"Tell me about that!" chuckled the cowboy. "Scared? You bet they are! Motor Matt has put a crimp in the confidence they had about the outcome of the race."

"And that leads me to believe," went on Matt, "that, in spite of the fact that Merton has that roll of drawings and knows what we were doing to the *Sprite*, he's still afraid of us. The *Dart* can't be such a phenomenally fast boat as you imagined, Joe. If it was, why should Merton fear the *Sprite*? He's judging her, you understand, according to our first plans for changing her. He doesn't know a thing about the automobile engine and the other propeller we're going to install."

"Listen, once," said McGlory; "it's not the plans that's making Merton sidestep, but Motor Matt. He and his bunch will feel a heap easier if they can know the king of the motor boys is cut out of Lorry's herd."

"Another thing," continued Matt. "Merton and his friends are doing some betting on the race."

"I've heard about that," put in Lorry. "Merton is plunging with his father's bankroll, and going the limit. His friends are in the pool with him, and they're offering all sorts of fancy odds."

"If I could rake together a stake," said McGlory, "I'd take a little of that Winnequa money myself."

"No, you wouldn't, Joe," returned Matt. "I'm out with a club for that sort of thing. Good, clean sport is all right, but when you tangle it up with a lot of bookmakers it goes to the dogs."

"Mebby you're right, pard," grinned Joe, "but any kind of a chance, with money in sight, is excitin'."

"Merton and the rest wanted me, if I wouldn't agree to pull out, to throw the race."

"The scoundrels!" cried Lorry.

"They didn't know our pard very well, George," observed the cowboy. "What did they say when you turned 'em down, Matt?"

"Ordered me to quit. Said if I didn't the lot of us, over here, would have to face all kinds of music."

"I always did like music," said the cowboy. "Right this minute I'm feelin' like a brass band and I've got to toot."

McGlory's "toot" was more like a steam calliope than a brass band, and it was so hilarious that Ping, who was still acting as outside guard, pushed his yellow face in at the window over the workbench.

"Who makee low?" he inquired.

"There's no row, you heathen," answered the cowboy, tossing him a sandwich. "There, take that and stop your face. I'm jubilatin', that's all."

Ping disappeared with a grin and the sandwich.

"What are you jubilating about, Joe?" inquired Lorry.

"Don't you savvy, George? Why, Motor Matt's on his mettle! All that talk that Merton and his pards gave him just cinched him up for the 'go' of his life. You'll see things at that race. As for facing the music—there's nothing to it. Why, the *Sprite's* as good as passed the stake boat and over the finish line right now."

There was little doubt but that McGlory's jovial mood and confident forecast of coming events heartened Lorry wonderfully.

Matt went more into the details of his experience with Merton and his friends.

"That's a nice way for the commodore of a rival boat club to act," remarked Lorry sarcastically.

"How did Merton ever get to be commodore?" said McGlory. "That's what sticks in my crop."

"Money," was Lorry's brief but significant response.

"Money cuts a pretty wide swath, and that's a fact. That work of Merton's and his friends, though, was a pretty raw blazer. Wonder what Merton's thinking of himself, now that Matt's found out he

was in the gang?"

"It won't bother him much," said Lorry. "Between you and me and the gatepost, I'll bet Merton has been flying too high. When his father gets back from Europe and finds out what's been going on, there'll be doings. Like enough, Merton is plunging on the boat race in the hope of getting back some of the money he has squandered. That would ease the tension somewhat when he makes an accounting to his father."

"Too bad if he's got himself into money difficulties," observed Matt.

"A little money has made many a good fellow go wrong, Matt," returned Lorry, with a flush.

George was talking from experience, and it was an experience which he would never forget.

"There's nothing to do, I reckon," said McGlory, changing the subject, "but to plug right along and hustle the changes in the *Sprite*."

"That's all, Joe," responded Matt. "We'll have to do some quick work, and do it well. The engine will be delivered this afternoon, and a young fellow is coming along with it to help me. We'll have to do more or less traveling between here and the machine shop, and I suppose it would be well if we had a boat. Going around the lake takes too long."

"I'll get a motor boat for you, Matt," said Lorry. "I'll bring her over before night."

"Bring a supply of gasoline and oil, too, Lorry."

"It will all come with the boat. If you can think of anything else you want, just let me know. Some one ought to stay here all the time, don't you think? The *Sprite* ought to be watched every minute, night and day. It was no empty threat Merton made when he said he'd make us trouble."

"He and his friends," said Matt gravely, "will do what they can to bother us. But I don't think they'll dare go too far. Joe and I and Ping will stay at the boathouse all the time. That will make quite a respectable force. Then, too, the machinist will be with us during the day. Whenever I have to cross the lake to the shop, he and Joe can look after things here."

"I want to do my share, you know," protested Lorry; "I can't let you fellows do it all."

"You'll have plenty to do, George," laughed Matt. "There's a telephone at the asylum, and we can always get word to you if it's necessary. As for——"

Matt was interrupted by a shrill yell. It came from outside the boathouse and had plainly been raised by Ping. On the instant, all three of the boys jumped for the door.

CHAPTER VII.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

Much to the relief of Matt, McGlory and Lorry, the Chinese boy had not encountered intruders. His trouble was of quite another sort.

In order to watch all sides of the boathouse, he had been tramping around three of its walls, from the waterfront on one side to the waterfront on the other. The day was hot and the exertion tiring. Ping, after some reflection, conceived the brilliant idea of climbing to the roof and watching from the ridgepole.

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An elevated position of that kind would enable him to rest and keep eyes on the vicinity in every direction.

Some empty boxes, piled one on the other, lifted him high enough to reach the eaves. Kicking off his sandals, he took the slope of the roof in his stocking feet and was soon by the flagstaff that arose from one end of the peak on the waterside of the building.

A timber, equipped with rope and tackle, projected outward from the peak. For no particular reason, other than to test his agility, Ping lowered himself astride the projecting timber and hitched outward to the end.

Here a sudden gust of wind struck him. Lifting both hands to save his hat, he lost his balance and rolled sidewise off the timber. But he did not fall. His trousers caught in the stout iron hook by which the pulley was suspended; and, when Matt, McGlory and Lorry finally located him, he was sprawling in midair, badly scared, but as yet unhurt.

"Motol Matt," howled the youngster, "savee Ping! No lettee fall! Woosh!"

"Sufferin' heathens!" gasped McGlory. "How in the name of Bob did the Chink ever get in that fix?"

That was no time to guess about the cause. If Ping's clothing was to give way he would suffer a bad fall on the planks of the boathouse pier. Pulling the tackle rope from the cleat to which it was fastened, Matt climbed hand over hand to the projecting timber.

"Catch hold of my shoulders, Ping," he ordered.

Ping's arms went around him in a life-and-death grip. Then, supporting himself with one hand, Matt detached the Chinaman from the hook with the other and both slid to the pier in safety.

"You gave us a scare, Ping," said Matt. "We didn't know but you had found some one sneaking

around the boathouse. How did you get in that fix?"

Ping explained, and the boys had a good laugh. Shortly afterward Lorry dragged his motor cycle to the top of the bank and chugged away home.

It was about two o'clock when Newt Higgins, the young machinist, arrived with the new motor. His father had brought him across. The engine was unloaded by means of the block and tackle and carried inside.

While Higgins was taking the old motor out of the *Sprite*, Matt connected up the new one with gasoline tank and battery and got it to going. It ran perfectly.

From that time on there were several days of feverish activity in the boathouse. The hull of the *Sprite* had to be strengthened. The original motor had been installed on short bearers, which, according to Matt's view, was entirely wrong. The motor bed, he held, must be rigid and the vibration distributed over as great an area as possible.

A heavy bed was put down, and on this two girders were laid, shaped up to take the rake of the motor and tapering off at the ends. These girders extended as far forward and aft as the curve of the hull would allow.

Lining up the shaft was an operation which Matt attended to himself. This job gave some trouble, but was finally finished to his satisfaction.

The new engine was set farther aft than the old one had been. This enabled Matt to bring the gasoline tanks farther aft, as well. The hood had to be made longer, and a stout bulkhead was built between the engine space and the cockpit.

All controls were to be on the bulkhead. The electric outfit was placed close to the motor, where it would be protected from wet and dampness by the hood. In addition to this, the eight cells of the battery were inclosed in a box and filled around with paraffine.

The hull had already been covered with canvas, given two coats of lead and oil and rubbed down. The last thing would be a coat of spar varnish.

Saturday night Matt dismissed the machinist.

"I wish I knew as much about motors as you do," the machinist had said as he pocketed his pay. "You're Class A, Motor Matt, and you've given Lorry a boat that'll win. I'm goin' to see that race. The Yahara boys are on our lake, you know, and this part o' town is with 'em to a man. It's surprisin' how this section of town is set on havin' the Yahara club get back the cup."

"We're going to do our best, Newt," Matt had answered, "and you'll see a pretty race, no matter how it comes out."

"You bet you!" averred Newt. "Good-by and good luck, Matt. I'd be tickled if we could work together all the time."

During the work McGlory had made himself generally useful. He could run the small launch which Lorry had brought to the boathouse for Matt's use, and whenever there were any errands across the lake not requiring Matt's attention at the machine shop McGlory attended to them.

Ping proved to be a good cook, and prepared the meals on a gasoline stove. When he was not busy in the culinary department he was guarding the boathouse against prowlers.

The boathouse was nicely situated for the work Matt and his friends were doing. There were no other boathouses for half a mile or more on either side of it, and the steep banks by which it was surrounded on every side but toward the water gave it an isolation which had commended it to Matt and Lorry.

It had not been used for some time when Lorry had leased it from the owner, but was in a very good state of repair for all that.

It contained a well which opened directly into a protected cove. An incline fitted with rollers made it easy to launch a boat or to haul it out upon the floor. The water door came down to the lake level, and both door and well were wide enough to admit a craft of eight-foot beam.

During all these days of work Ping had not detected a single person skulking around in the boathouse's vicinity. Matt worked until late every night, and there was always some one on guard on the outside from sunset till sunrise. Generally it was McGlory, but occasionally Lorry would come over and insist that the cowboy should sleep while he did the sentry duty.

It was nine o'clock Saturday night when Matt finished with the varnish coat and, dropping his brush, stood back to look at the trim, shadowy lines of the boat.

"She's a beauty, Matt, and no mistake," called some one from the door.

"Hello, George!" answered Matt, turning to place the lamp on the workbench and scrubbing his hands with a bunch of waste. "She'll do, I think. Anyhow, the *Dart* won't run any rings around us."

"You must be about fagged," said Lorry as Matt dropped down on his cot by the wall. "You've worked like a galley slave, and if we win the prize it will be all owing to you."

"I'm tired, and that's a fact," Matt answered, "but I've got some good feelings in me, as my old Dutch pard used to say. If a fellow's mind is easy it doesn't matter so much about his body."

"I came over to see if you'd heard anything from our friends the enemy yet," said Lorry.

"They haven't peeped," Matt laughed. "I guess they've decided to let us alone."

"Don't you think that for a minute," returned Lorry earnestly. "Merton and his pals have been lying low, but the clouds have been gathering. The storm will break before Tuesday, and I'm wondering and worrying as to how it is going to hit us."

"We'll weather it," said Matt lightly, "no matter what shape it takes. It's a cinch that Merton hasn't been able to find out a thing about what we've been doing. That roll of drawings is all he has to base an opinion on, and the *Sprite* is as different from those plans as you can well imagine. We've fooled Merton to the queen's taste."

"And probably he thinks he has fooled us," smiled Lorry.

"Have you been able to discover anything about the *Dart*?"

"Not a thing. The Winnequas are guarding her as though she was a lump of gold. But there are hair-raising tales, all over town, of the tremendous speed a new boat on Third Lake is showing."

"The *Wyandotte* hasn't been kicking up the water around the point for a couple of days now."

"I guess Merton thinks we're so busy here we won't pay any attention to her. Ever since he stopped sending the *Wyandotte* to Fourth Lake he has been speeding the *Dart* in the evening on Third."

"Well, Merton's consistent, anyhow, no matter what else you can say about him."

"I've got orders from dad and sis to take you over to Yankee Hill to spend to-night and Sunday," said Lorry, after a slight pause. "Will you go?"

"Sorry, old chap, but I can't," Matt answered regretfully. "I'm going to be Johnny-on-the-spot right here in this boathouse till the *Sprite* leaves to enter the race. I'm not taking any chances with her."

"But can't McGlory and Ping look after the boat?"

"They can, yes, and there isn't anybody I'd trust quicker than I would McGlory; but, if anything should happen to the *Sprite* between now and Tuesday, I want to be the one who's to blame."

"I guess I know how you stack up," observed Lorry, with a touch of genuine feeling. "You're doing a whole lot for me, Matt, and my folks know it and appreciate it just as much as I do. I hope I can pay you back some time."

"Nonsense, George!" deprecated Matt. "Do you think there isn't any fun in this thing for me? I've enjoyed myself every minute I've been tinkering with the *Sprite*, and the best part of it all will come when I show the *Dart* the way across the finish line next Tuesday."

Half an hour later Lorry got into his hired launch and started for home. All was quiet and peaceable in the boathouse, but, even then, a storm of trouble was preparing to break—a storm that was to try the three friends to the uttermost and to come within a hair's breadth of ruining their prospects in the power-boat contest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLOTTERS.

Merton and his seven companions were a disgruntled lot when they returned to Madison after forcing an interview with Motor Matt, having their propositions rejected and then watching him get away after unmasking the "commodore."

Merton drove the touring car straight for home, turned it over to the gardener—who was also something of a chauffeur—and then ushered his friends into his father's study, in the house.

The butler and the *chef* had been left to look after Merton's comfort. Merton immediately sent the butler to the ice box for several bottles of beer, and the lads proceeded to drown their disgust and disappointment in drink.

The idea that any human emotion can be blotted out with an intoxicating beverage is a fallacy. The mind can be drugged, for a time, but when it regains its normal state all its impressions are revived even more harrowingly than they were before.

As soon as the glasses had been emptied Merton produced several packages of cigarettes, and the air grew thick with the odor of burning "doctored" tobacco.

"What're we going to do with Motor Matt?" demanded Jimmie Hess. "Take it from me, you fellows, something has got to be done with him or the cup goes back to the Yaharas. He's a chap that does things, all right."

"And game as a hornet," struck in Andy Meigs. "Wish we could find out what he's doing to the *Sprite*."

"That's what's worryin' me," said Perry Jenkins. "If he can coax twenty miles an hour out of the *Sprite* he's got the cup nailed down."

"He don't know anything about the *Dart*," spoke up Rush Partington. "As long as he thinks he's only got the *Wyandotte* to beat, I guess we can hold him."

"Hold nothing!" growled Martin Rawlins. "You don't understand how much that chap knows."

Where did he grab all that about Halloran? He gets to the bottom of things, he does, and it's a fool notion to try and pull the wool over his eyes by sending the *Wyandotte* over to Fourth Lake every day. If I——"

"Mr. Ollie," announced the butler, looking in at the door, "there's a little negro boy downstairs and he says he won't leave till he sees you."

"Kick him off the front steps, Peters," scowled Merton.

Peters would probably have carried out his orders had not the little negro quietly followed him up the stairs. As the butler turned away, the darky pushed past him and jumped into the study.

"Pickerel Pete!" went up a chorus of voices.

The colored boy was one of the town "characters," and was known by sight to everybody.

"Come here, you!" cried the exasperated Peters, pushing into the room and reaching for Pete's collar.

"Drag him out," ordered Merton. "I haven't got any time to bother with him."

"You all better bothah wif me," cried Pete, squirming in the butler's grip. "Ah kin tell yo' about dat Motor Matt, en Ah got some papahs dat yo'd lak tuh have——" [Pg 13]

"Come along, now, and stop your howlin'," grunted the butler, making for the door.

A clamor arose from those in the room.

"Wait, Peters!"

"Hear what he's got to say about Motor Matt!"

"Maybe he can give us a pointer that will be useful. Let's talk with him, Ollie."

"Leave him here, Peters," said Merton.

The butler let go his hold on Pickerel Pete and went out of the study, shaking his head in disapproval of Mr. Ollie's orders.

"Now, then, you little rascal," went on Merton sternly, as soon as the door had closed behind the butler, "if you're trying to fool us you'll get a thrashing."

"En ef Ah ain't tryin' tuh fool yu," returned Pete, "is Ah gwine tuh git two dollahs?"

"You say," asked Merton cautiously, "that you've got a roll of papers?"

"Dat's whut Ah has, boss. Ah stole dem f'om de boathouse ovah by the p'int where Motor Matt is workin' on de *Sprite*."

"Why did you steal them?"

"Tuh git even wif Motor Matt, dat's why," snorted Pete, glaring. "He done hiahed me fo' two dollahs er day, en den he turned me down fo' er no-count yaller Chink. When er man gits tuh be 'leben yeahs old, lak me, he ain't goin' tuh stand fo' dat sort o' work, no, suh. Ah jess sneaked up on de boathouse en Ah swiped de papahs."

It was plain to Merton that Pickerel Pete believed he had a grievance against Motor Matt. This might make him valuable.

"Let's see the papers, Pete," said Merton. "If they're worth anything to me I'll pay you for them."

"Dar dey is, boss," and Pete triumphantly drew the roll from the breast of his ragged "hickory" shirt.

Merton grabbed the roll eagerly, slipped off the rubber band and began examining every sheet. While his friends breathlessly watched, Merton jammed the papers into his pocket, sprang to his feet and paced back and forth across the room.

"What is it, Ollie?"

"Found out anything important?"

"Do those papers really belong to Motor Matt?"

"Tell us about it, can't you?"

"Shut up a minute," growled Merton. "I'm framing up a plan."

For a little while longer Merton continued to pace the floor; then, at last, he halted in front of Pete.

"There's five dollars for you, Pete," said Merton, taking a banknote from his pocket and handing it to the boy.

"Oh, by golly!" sputtered the overwhelmed Pete, grabbing at the bill as a drowning man grabs at a straw. "Ah's rich, dat's whut Ah is. Say, boss, is all dis heah money fo' me? Ah ain't got no change."

"It's all yours, Pete," went on Merton; "what's more, if you'll come here and see me Sunday afternoon at four o'clock, I'll give you a chance to earn another five-dollar bill. Will you be here?"

"Will er duck swim, boss?" fluttered Pete, kissing the crumpled banknote and tucking it carefully away in a trousers pocket. "Sunday aftehnoon at fo' er'clock. Ah'll be heah fo' suah, boss."

"Then get out."

Pickerel Pete effaced himself—one hand in his trousers pocket to make sure the banknote was still there, and that he was not dreaming.

"Now, then, Ollie," said Martin Rawlins, "tell us what your game is."

"Yes, confound it," grumbled Meigs. "We're all on tenterhooks."

"These papers, fellows," answered Merton, drawing the crumpled sheets from his pocket, "contain Motor Matt's plans for changing the *Sprite*. Looking over them hastily, I gather the idea that he's making the *Sprite* just fast enough to beat the *Wyandotte*."

A snicker went up from the others.

"We've got him fooled, all right," was the general comment.

"Don't be too sure you've got that Motor Matt fooled," counseled Rawlins. "Maybe he put that roll where the negro could get it, and expected he *would* get it. This king of the motor boys is deep—don't let that get past your guard for a minute. I've put all the money I could rake and scrape into the betting pool, and I don't want to lose it by any snap judgments."

That was the way with the rest of them. They had all clubbed their funds together and the result was a big purse for betting purposes.

"I guess it means as much to the rest of us as it does to you, Martin, to have the *Dart* win," said Merton dryly. "Motor Matt's deep, as you say, but don't make the mistake of crediting him with too much knowledge. He's only human, like the rest of us. From the way matters look now, we've got him and Lorry beaten, hands down. Motor Matt isn't sharp enough to steer those papers into my hands by way of Pete. Now, in all this betting of ours, the money is being placed with the understanding that if there is *no race* we take the cash; in other words, if the Yaharas back down and fail to send a boat to the starting line, we take the money."

"They won't back down," said Jimmie Hess. "Great Scott, Ollie, you don't think for a second that Lorry will back down, do you?"

"He may have to," was Merton's vague reply. "Anyhow, if you fellows make any bets outside of the pool, just make 'em in that way—that the stakes are yours if the Yaharas back down and there's no race."

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"What's back of that, Ollie?" said Perry Jenkins. "You've got something up your sleeve, I know blamed well."

"And it's going to stay up my sleeve, so far as you fellows are concerned," returned Merton. "If I evolve a plan, I don't believe in advertising it. This Motor Matt *may* have steered those papers into our hands, and he *may* be deep enough to make the *Sprite* a better boat than the *Dart* while not knowing anything about the *Dart*, but I don't think so. However, I intend to be on the safe side. It means a whole lot to me to win—personally, and apart from my desire to see the Winnequas keep the De Lancey cup. Just how much it means"—and Merton winced—"you fellows are not going to know, any more than you're going to know what I've got at the back of my head for Sunday night. Put your trust in the commodore—that's all you've got to do. Open up some of that beer, Perry. I'm as dry as gunpowder's great-grandfather."

The glasses were filled again.

"To our success in the race," said Merton, lifting his glass and sweeping his keen eyes over the faces of his friends; "may the *Dart* win, by fair means"—he paused—"or otherwise."

Four or five peered at Merton distrustfully over their glasses; but, in the end, they drank the toast.

The success of the *Dart* meant dollars and cents to them; and money, for those eight plotters, stood for more than club honors and the De Lancey cup.

CHAPTER IX.

FIREBUGS AT WORK.

Sunday was a beautiful and a quiet day at the boathouse by the Point. Mendota, otherwise "Fourth," Lake was never fairer. Across the ripples, glimmering in the sun, the city of Madison lifted itself out of a mass of green foliage like a piece of fairyland.

The lake was alive with motor boats, sailboats and rowboats. Matt and McGlory, sitting in the shade on the little pier in front of their temporary home, idled and dreamed away the afternoon until, about four o'clock, a snappy little launch, equipped with canopy and wicker chairs, untangled itself from the maze of boats out in the lake and pushed toward the cove.

"Visitors!" exclaimed Matt, jumping out of his chair.

"Speak to me about that!" grumbled McGlory. "Now we've got to get into our collars and coats and spruce up. Oh, hang it! I like a boiled shirt about as well as I like the measles."

Mr. Lorry, his daughter, Ethel Lorry, and George were occupying the wicker chairs under the canopy, while Gus, the Lorry chauffeur, was at the bulkhead controls.

George waved his hand. Matt returned the salutation and darted incontinently into the boathouse

to fix himself up. Ethel Lorry was a fine girl and a great admirer of the king of the motor boys, and Matt felt it a duty to look his best.

By the time the boat drew up in front of the boathouse Matt and McGlory, in full regalia, were out to welcome their guests.

Lorry, senior, and his daughter were firm friends of Motor Matt. They realized fully how much the young motorist had done for George.

"A surprise party, Matt!" cried George. "I'll bet you weren't expecting the Lorrays, eh?"

"Always glad to receive callers," smiled Matt, grabbing the rope Gus threw to him and making it fast to a post.

"We've got to see the *Sprite*, Matt," said Ethel. "All our hopes are wrapped up in the *Sprite*, you know."

"And in Motor Matt," chuckled the millionaire, beside her.

A vivid flush suffused Ethel's cheeks, though just why her emotions should express themselves was something of a mystery.

The party debarked and was conducted into the boathouse. Matt opened the doors at the other end of the building and admitted a good light for inspecting the boat.

All three of the boys were intensely proud of the *Sprite*. In her fresh coat of varnish she looked as spick and span as a new dollar.

McGlory was a nephew of Mr. Lorry's, and, while he was explaining things at one end of the boat to "Uncle Dan," Matt was performing the same service for Ethel at the other end of the craft.

When Mr. Lorry and Ethel had expressed their admiration for the *Sprite*, and their confidence in her ability to "lift" the cup, chairs were carried out on the pier. McGlory went across the lake for ice cream, and the party visited gayly until sunset. When the launch departed, George remained behind, having expressed his intention of staying with his friends at the boathouse that night.

Ping was engaged in clearing up the dishes—part of the camp equipment—on which the ice cream had been served, and McGlory was making the doors at the other end of the boathouse secure. Dusk was falling gently, and overhead the stars were beginning to glimmer in a cloudless sky, soft as velvet. It was a time for optimism, and a lulling sense of security had taken possession of all the boys.

"The clouds don't seem to be gathering very much, after all, George," remarked Matt.

"I must have been mistaken about Merton," returned George. "That roll of drawings, I suppose, has convinced him that the changes we were making in the *Sprite* were not of enough account to worry him."

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McGlory came from the boathouse in time to hear the words.

"We've got Merton fooled," he chuckled, dropping down in a chair, "and I ain't sure but that it's the best thing that ever happened to us, the theft of those drawings."

"That's the way it may turn out, Joe," agreed Matt. "Still, even if Merton knew exactly what we had done to the *Sprite* I don't see how he could help matters any. The *Dart*, from what I can hear, is supposed to be by long odds the fastest boat on the lakes. How could he improve on her, even if Merton knew the *Sprite* was a dangerous rival?"

"Merton wouldn't try to improve on the *Dart*," returned Lorry. "What he'd do would be to make an attempt to make the *Sprite* less speedy than she is."

"I'd like to catch him at that!" exclaimed McGlory. "That tinhorn would have to hip lock with me some if he ever tried to tamper with the *Sprite* while Joe McGlory was around."

"He'd make sure there wasn't anybody around, George," said Lorry, "before he tried any of his underhand games. I've been thinking over the loss of those drawings, Matt," he went on, after a pause, "and it strikes me that they weren't stolen by Merton, after all, but by Pickerel Pete."

"What!" cried the cowboy, "that sawed-off moke?"

"I've thought a little on that line myself," observed Matt. "Pete was mad, when he left us up there in the path, and he could have circled around through the bushes and reached the boathouse before we got down to it with Ping."

"That's it!" assented George. "He hadn't any idea what sort of papers were in the roll, but they were handy to him as he looked through the window, and so he gathered them in. Of course, Pete knew that the papers would be valuable to Merton, if to anybody. It's a dead open-and-shut that he carried them at once to the commodore."

"Which may account for the commodore layin' back on his oars and not botherin' us any while we've been jugglin' with the *Sprite*," deduced McGlory. "We're all to the good, pards, and your Uncle Joe is as happy over the outlook as a Piute squaw with a string of glass beads. I'm feelin' like a brass band again, and——"

"Don't toot, Joe, for Heaven's sake," implored George. "You've got about as much music in you as a bluejay."

"Some fellows," returned McGlory gloomily, "don't know music when they hear it. It takes a cultivated ear to appreciate me when I warble."

"I don't know about that," laughed George, "but I do know that it takes some one with a club to stop you after the warbling begins. When are you going to 'warm up' the *Sprite*, Matt?" he asked, turning to the king of the motor boys. "Every ship has got to 'find herself,' you know. We've Kipling's word for that."

"Then," smiled Matt, "the *Sprite* is going to begin finding herself in the gray dawn of to-morrow morning. Glad you made up your mind to stay with us to-night, Lorry. I was going to suggest it, if you hadn't. I want you and Joe to hold a stop-watch on the boat."

"I wish we had one of those patent logs," muttered Lorry. "They go on the bulkhead, and work hydrostatically—no trailing lines behind."

"Too expensive, George," said Matt. "Besides, we didn't have time to bother installing one."

"You're the most economical chap I ever heard of, Matt," said Lorry jestingly, "especially when you're using another fellow's money."

"Sufferin' bankrolls!" mourned McGlory, "I wish some one would be kind enough to ask me to spend his money."

"Dad told me, when we began fixing up the *Sprite*," went on Lorry, "that he wanted me to be sure and let Motor Matt have free play, no matter what it cost. That's the way the governor feels. There has been a big change in him, Matt, and you're the cause of it."

"That's all the more reason, George," answered Matt, "why I should not abuse his confidence."

"I guess dad knows that, and that it has a lot to do with the way you stack up in his estimation. He'd trust you with a million."

"I'm glad he feels that way. There isn't any sign of a storm, Joe," Matt added to the cowboy, "but we must keep up our guard duty just the same."

"Keno! We're not going to let Merton and his outfit catch us napping, if that's their plan. I'll stand guard to-night."

"I'll divide the duty with you, Joe," put in Lorry. "I'll take the first watch, and will call you at midnight."

"That hits me plumb. I can snooze in good shape for half the night. We'll let Matt put in full time—he needs it."

"Matt ought not to do a thing between now and Tuesday but rest," asserted George. "He's got to be fit as a fiddle for that race."

"I'm generally in shape for whatever comes my way," laughed Matt, getting up and yawning. "Right now's when I'm going to turn in, and you can bank on it that I'll sleep like Rip Van Winkle up in the Catskills. You'll see something surprising in the morning, fellows! If the *Sprite*, after she gets warmed up, can't do her mile in better than three minutes, I'm no prophet."

"If she does that," jubilated McGlory, "we're apt to have the *Dart* lashed to the mast."

"Good night," said Matt.

The parting word was returned, and the king of the motor boys followed the wall of the dark boathouse past the well and on by the workbench to his cot. [Pg 16]

Inside of two minutes he had turned in, and inside of three he was in dreamless slumber.

How long Matt slept he did not know, but it must have been well beyond midnight when he was awakened. He was half stifled, and he sat up in his cot struggling for breath.

A yellowish gloom was all around him, and a vague snap and crackle came to his ears.

Suddenly, like a blow in the face, the realization came that the smothering fog was *smoke*, and that the flickering yellow that played through it was *flame*.

"Fire!" he yelled, springing from the cot. "Lorry! McGlory! Where are you?"

Matt's only answer was the whirring rush of the fire and the weird snapping as the flames licked at the wood. For a moment the heat and the smoke almost overcame him, and he reeled backward against the wall.

CHAPTER X.

SAVING THE "SPRITE."

After a moment of inaction, Matt realized something else besides the fact that there was a fire. Ping and either McGlory or Lorry should be in the boathouse with him; also either McGlory or Lorry ought to be on guard outside.

Why had no answer been returned to his startled shout? What had happened to the guard outside, and what had happened to those inside the boathouse?

In that terrifying moment, when so many dangers threatened him and his friends, Motor Matt had no time to think of the *Sprite*. First he must get fresh air, and then he must find out about his friends.

The landward end of the boathouse seemed to be completely wrapped in flames. A breeze had come up during the night, and it was driving the fire onward toward the waterfront of the building.

Drawing upon all his reserve strength, Matt staggered to the window over the workbench. Picking up a wrench, he smashed the glass, and a draft of cool night air rushed in. For a moment he hung over the workbench filling his lungs with the clear air; and then, at the top of his voice, he repeated his call for McGlory and George.

Still there was no response. Bewildered by his failure to hear an answering shout from his friends, and dazed by the suddenness of the catastrophe which threatened the boathouse, Matt whirled away from the window and groped through the blinding smoke toward the other cot.

Some one was lying on the cot, breathing heavily. It was impossible to tell whether it was Lorry or the cowboy, but, whichever it was, the form was unconscious from the effects of the foul air.

Making his way to the door, Matt unfastened it and flung it open. The breeze which swept through the building caused the roar of the fire to increase, giving an added impetus to the flames.

Darting back to the cot, Matt picked up the form and staggered with it out into the night, falling heavily when a few yards from the blazing building.

In the glare that lighted up the vicinity of the boathouse Matt discovered that it was Lorry whom he had carried to safety. Lorry! That meant that it was after midnight, and that McGlory had been outside of the boathouse, on guard.

The fire was not accidental—it could not have been accidental. Firebugs must have been at work. What had become of McGlory that he had not interfered?

It was impossible that the cowboy was in the burning building. Ping, however, should be there. The Chinese usually bunked under the workbench.

Whirling away, Matt started again for the burning building; but, before he reached the door, Ping, coughing and spluttering, his arms filled with clothes, reeled out and fell in a sprawling heap on the ground.

Rushing up to him, and thankful to find that he was safe, Matt grabbed him by the shoulders and drew him farther from the boathouse.

"Where's McGlory?" shouted Matt.

It was necessary for him to talk at the top of his voice in order to make himself heard above the roar of the wind and the flames.

"No savvy," panted Ping, lifting himself to his knees, his terror-stricken face showing weirdly in the glare. "My no makee yell when you makee yell," he added, digging his knuckles into his smarting eyes. "My heap full smoke. My blingee clothes—"

"Never mind the clothes," cut in Matt, wildly alarmed on McGlory's account. "You— Here, stop that, Ping! Where you going?"

The Chinese had abruptly gained his feet and plunged toward the open door. At that moment, the door looked like the opening into a raging furnace.

"My savee *Splite!*" blubbered Ping. "No lettee *Splite* go top-side! Woosh!"

The yellow boy was as fond of the boat as were Matt, McGlory and Lorry. He had watched her rebuilding, in his curious, heathen way, and every step toward completion lifted his pride and admiration higher and higher.

Matt had grabbed Ping and was holding him back. His mind, dealing with McGlory, worked quickly.

The cowboy, he reasoned, had been on guard outside. Those who had fired the boathouse must have had to take care of McGlory before they could carry out their nefarious plans. This being true, it could not be possible that the cowboy was in any danger from the fire. It was the *Sprite*, therefore, that should now claim Matt's attention. McGlory could be looked for afterwards.

"We'll save her together, Ping," cried Matt, "but we can't go into the boathouse that way. We'd be overcome before we got anywhere near the well. We must get into the building by the other end."

The *Sprite* was in imminent danger, there could not be the least doubt about that. After Mr. Lorry and Ethel had left for home, during the afternoon, the boat had been placed upright on the rollers leading to the incline of the well.

This, bringing her nearer the landward end of the boathouse made the boat's danger greater than if she had been left on the skids which had supported her while the work inside her hulk was going on.

Not only that, but, preparatory to the morning's trial, her tanks had been filled with gasoline. If the flames should reach the tanks—

"We'll have to hurry!" yelled Matt.

Picking up a coat from the heap of clothing on the ground, Matt ran to the edge of the lake and plunged the coat into the water; the next moment he had darted back to the open window, hoping to reach in and get an ax or hammer from the workbench for use in battering down the water-door. This door was secured on the inside, and would have to be broken if entrance was effected

from the pier.

Ping, frantically eager to help, but hardly knowing what to do, rushed around after Matt, copying every move he made.

When Matt picked up a coat and submerged it in the lake, Ping followed suit; and when Matt, with the dripping garment in his hand, rushed for the broken window, the Chinese boy was close behind.

As ill-luck would have it, there was nothing in the shape of an ax or hammer lying on the bench within reach of Matt's groping fingers.

The window was perhaps a dozen feet along the wall from the landward end of the building. The fire, apparently, had been started at the extreme end, and, although the flames were driving fiercely through the building, the blaze was not so formidable near the window as it was by the door.

Matt changed his plans about entering the boathouse by the water door. He would make an essay through the window, push the *Sprite* along the rollers and down into the well, unlock the water door from the inside, and then, under her own power, take her out into the cove.

Not a second was to be lost if this plan was to be carried to a successful conclusion. There was danger, plenty of it, in making the attempt to save the *Sprite*.

Blazing timbers were already falling from the roof of the doomed building, and if one of those dropped on the barrel containing the gasoline supply, an explosion would result and the flaming oil would be hurled everywhere.

But the king of the motor boys did not hesitate. Hurriedly throwing the coat over his head and shoulders, he climbed through the window and rolled off the bench to the smoking floor of the boathouse.

To see anything between the confining walls was now impossible. The smoke was thick, and the glare that shot through it rendered it opaque and blinding.

Matt, however, knew every foot of the building's interior as he knew his two hands. Holding the coat closely around his head to protect his face, he hurried through the blistering fog and finally stumbled against the *Sprite*.

Laying hold of the boat, he pushed with all his strength. In spite of his fiercest efforts, she stuck and hung to the rollers. It was not a time to hunt for what was wrong, but to force the *Sprite* into the well at any cost.

While Matt tugged and strained, the end of the building fell outward with a crash, and a flurry of sparks and firebrands leaping skyward. This released a section of the roof, which dropped inward.

One blazing beam landed on Matt's right arm, pinning it against the rubstreak. A sickening pain rushed through his whole body, and when he had hurled the timber away with his left hand, the injured arm dropped numb and helpless at his side.

"Matt! Motol Matt!"

The shrill, frightened cry came from Ping. He had followed through the window and had been feeling his way about the interior of the boathouse. The crash of the wall and the roof had frightened him, and he would have bolted had not the knowledge that Matt was somewhere in that blazing inferno chained him to the place.

"Here, Ping!" cried Matt, hoarsely. "Lay hold of the boat and help me get her into the water. Lively, now—for your life!"

Their united strength, even though Matt had only his left hand, was sufficient. The *Sprite* started slowly over the rollers, reached the head of the incline, and her own impetus carried her downward. Matt and Ping sprang into her blindly as she leaped away.

Across the well ran the *Sprite*, her nose striking the water door and causing her to recoil backward until her stern brushed the incline.

Matt, dizzy and weak, pawed and floundered toward the bulkhead.

Overhead the roof was all in flames. Any moment it might fall bodily, sinking the *Sprite* and those aboard her under the water of the well—holding them like rats in a blazing trap.

Matt's eyes were of no use to him. They were smarting from the smoke and heat. But he did not need his eyes. He knew the place of every lever on the bulkhead.

A pull started the gasoline, another started the oil, and another switched on the spark. A third lever was connected with the starting device. Two pulls at this and the boat took the push of the propeller.

Boom!

The fire had found the gasoline supply, and shafts of lighter fire shot through the yellower blaze of burning wood.

There was no time to unlock the water door. Already the fire-eaten wreck was swaying.

The *Sprite*, urged by the automobile engine, must ram the door and break it down.

Grabbing his companion, Matt dragged him down under the protection of the bulkhead, while the

Sprite flung herself toward the door, toward the cove—and toward safety.

CHAPTER XI.

OUT OF A BLAZING FURNACE.

The cool night air quickly wrought its work, so far as George was concerned. Sitting up on the ground, confused and unable to understand what had happened, he stared at the conflagration at the edge of the cove.

Rubbing his eyes and muttering to himself, he stared again. He remembered calling McGlory, and dropping down into the bunk after McGlory had got out of it. After that he knew nothing until he sat up there on the ground, with the fire dancing in front of his eyes.

The fog was slower getting out of his brain than out of his lungs. Rising to his feet, he started for the path leading up the bank, animated by the hazy idea that he ought to get word to the fire department.

He stumbled over something. Being none too steady, he fell headlong, only to lift himself again as the object over which he had fallen gave vent to a rumbling, inarticulate sound.

"Is that you, Matt?" he asked.

The answer was a desperate gurgle.

By that time Lorry had, in a great measure, recovered the use of his wits. Creeping to the side of the person who was trying so hard to speak, he saw by the glare of the fire that it was McGlory.

"Great Scott!" he murmured, his hands passing over the form. "It's cousin Joe, and he's tied and gagged!"

Lorry was only a moment in freeing the cowboy's jaws of the twisted handkerchief.

"Tell me about this!" fumed McGlory. "I thought I'd never be found. What are you kneeling there for, George, gawping like you were loosed? Get these ropes off me, and see how quick you can do it. Don't you know that Matt's in that boathouse, and that he and Ping are trying to save the *Sprite*? We've got to lend a hand. Sufferin' blockheads, but you're slow! Cut the ropes with a knife if you can't untie 'em."

"I'm in my underclothes," answered George. "I don't know where my knife is."

"I've got a knife in my pocket. Take it out, but hustle, for Heaven's sake, *hustle!*"

George was shaking like a man with a chill. The terrors of the moment were dawning upon his bewildered mind. His hands trembled while groping through McGlory's pockets, and they trembled worse when he opened the knife and tried to use it.

"Who—who set the fire?" he mumbled.

"Do you think I'm a mind reader?" stormed McGlory. "I was to blame, for I was on guard and ought to have seen those negroes before they downed me and trussed me up in this fashion. If anything happens to Matt, I'll be to blame for it, and if the *Sprite* is burned I'll be to blame for that, too. Oh, I've got a lot to think of, I have!"

The cowboy's self-reproach was keen.

"Did some one steal up on you, Joe?" asked Lorry.

"What do you take me for, George? Do you think I laid down and put my hands behind me so the blacks could tie 'em? They got me, right there at the corner of the boathouse, just as I was coming around. A blow dazed me, and before I could let out a yip, they had ropes on my wrists and ankles and that thing between my jaws. I heard Matt calling, and, sufferin' jailbirds! here I lay without bein' able to say a word. Oh, *can't* you cut those ropes? Take a brace—your nerves are in rags."

George managed finally to saw the blade through one coil of the cord that secured McGlory's hands. With a swift tug from the shoulders the cowboy released himself, then caught the knife from his cousin's hand and slashed it through the ropes at his feet.

The next instant he was up and bounding toward the boathouse.

"Where are you going?" shouted George.

McGlory, rendered desperate by the knowledge that Matt was in the boathouse facing death in a fierce effort to save the *Sprite*, was heading straight for the door of the building.

The door was merely a ruffle in a wall of flame. Before McGlory could reach it, the whole end of the boathouse crashed outward.

He sprang backward, just in time to avoid the blazing timbers, and turned to Lorry with a groan.

"We can't help him!" he cried hoarsely. "Motor Matt's done for, the *Sprite's* done for—everybody's done for, George. And it was all on my account."

Here it was that Lorry came to the front with a little common sense.

"You were not to blame, Joe," he asserted. "You were set on by some negroes, and you could no

more help what happened than Matt or I. Pull yourself together and don't be a fool. Motor Matt knows what he's about. If he's in that boathouse he'll get out of it again. Anyhow, we can't help him from this side. We'll go around by the pier and get the launch. If we can get the launch through the water door, maybe we can hitch on to the *Sprite* and tow her out."

This talk had a salutary effect on McGlory.

"The *Sprite* isn't in the water," he answered. "How could we tow her out?"

"Matt will get her in the water," said Lorry confidently. "What do you suppose he's doing in there if he isn't getting the *Sprite* into the well? We left her on rollers at the top of the incline, and Matt could launch her alone without any trouble. Let's get the launch and be ready to help."

The launch referred to by Lorry was the one he had hired and brought across the lake for Matt's use during the work on the *Sprite*. The boat was kept at one end of the pier. While the *Sprite* was on the skids, the other boat was housed in the well at night, but this night she had been left outside so as not to interfere with the launching of the *Sprite* in the early morning.

Hoping against hope that they could yet do something that would help Motor Matt, the two boys ran alongside the boathouse, jumped to the pier and unfastened the painter of the launch. Just as they tumbled into it and McGlory was turning the flywheel, a loud explosion came from inside the boathouse. A cloud of firebrands and sparks geysered up from the roof.

"What was that?" gasped Lorry.

"The gasoline," answered McGlory, dropping down on the thwartships seat in front of the motor. "I don't know what we can do now, George."

"We'll get into the boathouse," flung back Lorry. "If——"

Lorry was interrupted by another crash. Under the startled eyes of the two in the launch, the water door was ripped and splintered, and through the ragged gap as out of a blazing furnace sped the *Sprite*.

For a moment she reeled as though undecided which way to turn; then, suddenly, she shot off into the lake. Neither Lorry nor McGlory could see any one aboard her.

"Where's Matt?" cried the cowboy.

The echoes of his voice were taken up by another crash, and the remaining walls of the boathouse flattened themselves with a great hissing as the burning timbers dropped into the well, and off the pier into the lake.

"If he was in there," added the cowboy huskily, pointing to the wrecked building, "then there's ____"

"He wasn't in there," cut in Lorry. "He couldn't have been. Do you suppose the *Sprite* started herself?"

While speaking, Lorry was "turning over" the engine. The motor took up its cycle, and Lorry steered into the lake after the *Sprite*.

The *Sprite* was darting this way and that at terrific speed, following a course so erratic that it would be easily inferred there was no guiding hand on the steering wheel.

Away the boat would rush, directly into the gloom that hovered over the lake; then, before she could vanish, she would describe a hair-raising turn and jump to starboard or port.

"But where's Matt if he is in the boat?" demanded McGlory.

"On the bottom, perhaps," replied Lorry. "He started her, and that's all he was able to do. We've got to lay the *Sprite* aboard, somehow."

"That's easier said than done," said McGlory. "She's jumping around like a pea on a hot griddle, and is just as likely to slam into us and cut us down as to do anything else. Sufferin' sidewinders, look at that!"

The *Sprite* had made a complete turn and was now headed shoreward and streaking straight towards the boys.

"Here's our chance!" said Lorry. "If the *Sprite* hangs on as she's coming she'll pass close to us. Will you jump aboard her, Joe, or shall I?"

"I'll do it," answered the cowboy. "Can't you turn the launch and follow the *Sprite*, side by side with her? She'll travel faster than we will, but it'll make it easier to jump without going into the lake."

This manœuvre was carried out, and Lorry, who could handle a boat tolerably well for an amateur, brought the launch about and picked up the *Sprite* as she dashed onward.

McGlory cleared a foot of water at a flying leap and dropped into the *Sprite's* cockpit. In a few minutes he had checked the boat's aimless racing and had brought her to a halt.

"Is Matt there?" queried Lorry anxiously, working the launch close to the *Sprite*.

"He's here," answered McGlory, "but he's unconscious. Ping's here, too, and his wits are wool-gathering, same as Matt's. They're both alive, though, and I reckon they'll be all right with a little care."

"Follow me across the lake," said Lorry. "We'll go to the clubhouse. The quicker we can get a doctor, the better."

The first gray of dawn was just glimmering along the eastern edge of the sky as the two boats stood away for Madison.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT ABOUT THE RACE?

Matt opened his eyes in surroundings that were not familiar to him. The room was big and lofty, and the bed he was lying in was a huge affair of brass and had a mosquito canopy. He tried to lift his right arm. The movement was attended with so much pain that he gave it up. He saw that the arm was swathed in bandages.

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A sound of whispering came to him from the bedside. Turning his head on the pillow, he saw two figures that had escaped him up to that moment. One was Lorry and the other was McGlory.

"The doctor says he'll have to stay in bed for a week," Lorry was saying.

"Sufferin' speed boats!" muttered McGlory. "Let's kiss our chances good-by. It's glory enough, anyhow, just to know Matt got clear of the burnin' boathouse with his life."

"Don't be in a rush about bidding good-by to our chances," said Matt.

McGlory jumped around in his chair, and Lorry started up and hurried to the bedside with a glowing face.

"Jupiter, but it's good to hear your voice again, Matt," said Lorry.

"We were expectin' you to wake up any minute, pard," added McGlory. "How're you feeling?"

"A one, except for my arm. What's the matter with it?"

"A sprain and a bad burn," replied Lorry.

"I remember, now," muttered Matt. "A blazing timber fell from the roof and pinned my arm against the gunwale of the *Sprite*. It isn't a fracture?"

"Nary, pard," said McGlory. "You were in a heap of luck to get out of that blaze as well as you did."

"I guess that's right. Where am I?"

"In the Lorry home on Fourth Lake Ridge," smiled George. "We took you across the lake to the Yahara Club, and when I called up dad on the phone, and told him what had happened, he insisted on sending the carriage after you. The doctor was here when we arrived. He has patched you up so you'll be as good as new in a week."

"Is Ping all right?"

McGlory chuckled.

"You can't kill a Chink, pard," he answered. "Ping was unconscious, same as you, when we picked up the *Sprite*, but he drifted back to earth while we were crossing the lake."

"And the *Sprite*—did she suffer any damage?"

"She's blistered here and there, but otherwise she's just as good as she was when you hit her the last tap."

"What about the race?"

A glum expression settled over the faces of George and Joe.

"Well," said George, "this is Monday morning, and the race is to-morrow afternoon. The doctor says you ought to keep quiet for a week. Of course, the race can't be postponed, and if the *Sprite* doesn't come to the line to-morrow, why, the Winnequas keep the cup. Also, Merton and his clique keep the money they wagered. That has been their game all along, and every bet they made was with the understanding that if the Yahara Club failed to furnish a starter in the race the Winnequa fellows were to pull down all the stakes."

A glimmer came into Matt's gray eyes.

"It looks to me," he remarked, "as though Merton and his friends had a feeling all along that something was going to happen to the *Sprite*."

McGlory scowled, and Lorry looked grave.

"Have you heard anything about who started that fire?" went on Matt.

"The latest comes from Merton indirectly," said Lorry. "We hear that he's spreading a report that we were careless with matches, and that we kept our gasoline in the boathouse."

"Sufferin' boomerangs!" snapped McGlory. "I reckon, if we figure it down to a fine point, people will find that Merton was careless in hiring niggers to do his crooked work."

"Negroes?" echoed Matt. "That reminds me, Joe, that I couldn't find you when I woke up and found the boathouse in flames. Where were you?"

"Speak to me about that!" gurgled McGlory. "Why, pard, I was lashed hand and foot and smothered with a gag. I could hear you callin', but it wasn't possible for me to answer you. That

was torture, and don't you forget it. What's more, I could hear you and Ping talking, and by turning my head I could see you getting into the boathouse through the window. It was only when George, half-dazed, stumbled over me, that I was able to let any one know where I was. George got the ropes off me, and I'd have gone into the boathouse after you, only the front of it tumbled and blocked the attempt. Then we went around and got in the launch, thinking we'd get in by the water door and give the *Sprite* a lift into the cove. Before we could do that the buildin' began to cave in, and the gasoline to let go, and then the *Sprite* came smashing through the door and began dancing a hornpipe out in the lake. Lorry and I manœuvred around until we managed to catch her, and then we brought you across to the clubhouse. That's where the *Sprite* is now, and she'll be well taken care of by the Yahara boys."

"But the negroes!" exclaimed Matt. "You haven't told me anything about them."

"Keno!" grinned McGlory. "I told the last end of my yarn. I reckon the first end was left out because it don't reflect any credit on your Uncle Joe. Lorry called me at midnight to go on guard duty. I slid out, and hadn't been watching the boathouse more than three hours when a couple of black villains nailed me as I was going around a corner. I was dazed with an upper-cut, and before I could get into shape to do any fighting, they had me on the mat. Then I had to lay there and listen to 'em setting fire to the boathouse, with you, and Lorry, and Ping inside, never dreaming of what was going on. I reckon I'm a back number, pard. It was my fault."

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"You can't shoulder the responsibility, Joe," answered Matt. "You couldn't help being knocked down, and tied, and gagged."

"Nary, I couldn't," was McGlory's gloomy rejoinder; "but I might have stepped high, wide, and handsome when I went around that corner. If I'd had as much sense as the law allows I'd have seen that black fist before it landed, either ducked or side-stepped, and then let off a yell. All you fellows inside needed was the right sort of a yell. But I didn't give it. When it came to a showdown, pard, I couldn't deliver the goods."

"I still maintain that you have no cause to blame yourself," persisted Matt. "If George or I had been in your place, Joe, the same thing would have happened."

McGlory bent his head reflectively.

"It's mighty good of you, pard, to put it that way," said he finally.

"Would you know those negroes again if you were to see them?" asked Matt.

McGlory shook his head.

"It was plumb dark there in the shadow of the boathouse," he answered. "I could just make out that they were negroes, and that's all. I reckon, though, that Ollie Merton could tell us who those fellows were—if he would."

"I'd be a little careful, Joe," cautioned Matt, "about involving Merton in that fire. If it could be proved against him it would be a mighty serious business—just as serious as for the fellows who set the fire."

"Well, pard, why was Merton and his friends making their bets in that queer way? In case there isn't any race because of the failure of the Yahara Club to produce a starter, the Winnequas take the stakes. That looks as though Merton and his pals knew what was going to happen. If the *Sprite* was burned, there'd be no boat for the Yaharas to produce."

"Joe's right," declared Lorry.

"Well, keep your suspicions to yourselves," said Matt. "In a case of this kind it's positive proof that's needed, not bare suspicion. Wasn't the fire seen from the city? Didn't any one go across the lake to help fight it?"

"We met a couple of boats going over as we were coming across with you and Ping," replied Lorry. "By that time, though, the boathouse was no more than a heap of embers. It went quick after it got started. But what about the race to-morrow? That's the point that's bothering me. I could take the *Sprite* over the course, and so could Joe, at a pinch, but we wouldn't get the speed out of her that you would."

"I'll drive her myself," said Matt.

"Speak to me about that!" gasped McGlory. "Why, pard, you've only got one hand—and that's the left."

"A man who's any good at automobile driving has a pretty good left hand. In an automobile race, Joe, the driver's left hand has to do a big share of the work. The racer steers with the left hand, holding the right hand free for the emergency brake. The left hand has to be trained to take full charge at all corners, and in a thousand and one other places as the need arises. I can do the racing well enough."

"But the doctor says——" began Lorry.

"I know what I can do better than the doctor, George," laughed Matt. "I'll be in that race every minute—watch me."

Both Lorry and McGlory studied Matt's face carefully.

"Pluck, that's what it is," muttered McGlory. "It's the sort of pluck that wins. But I don't know whether the doctor will let you——"

Just at that moment a servant stepped into the room.

"What is it, James?" asked Lorry.

"Mr. Martin Rawlins to see Mr. King," was the answer.

Lorry looked bewildered.

"Mart Rawlins!" he exclaimed. "Why, he's one of the Winnequa fellows, and a crony of Merton's!"

"He's here to pump Matt," growled McGlory, "or else to find out what his chances are for being in that race to-morrow. Sufferin' tin horns, what a nerve!"

"Have him come up, Lorry," said Matt. "It won't do any harm to talk with him. If he's here to pump me, he's welcome to try."

Lorry nodded to the servant, and a few moments later Mart Rawlins entered the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

MART RAWLINS WEAKENS.

"Hello, Lorry!" said Rawlins, hesitating, just over the threshold, as though a little undecided as to how he would be received.

"Hello, Rawlins!" answered Lorry coldly. "You want to see Motor Matt?"

"That's why I came. I hope he isn't hurt very much?"

"There he is," said Lorry, pushing a chair up to the bed; "you can ask him about that for yourself."

McGlory, feeling sure that Merton was guiltily concerned in the fire, was far from amiably disposed toward such a close friend of Merton's as Rawlins. As Rawlins advanced to the bed the cowboy got up, turned his back, and looked out of a window.

"I'm sorry you had such a rough time of it, Motor Matt," said Rawlins, visibly embarrassed.

"I was in luck to get out of the scrape as well as I did," returned Matt. "You're a friend of Merton's?"

"I was. Early this morning we had a quarrel, so we're not quite so friendly. Have you any idea what caused the fire?" [Pg 22]

"Yes," said Matt bluntly; "firebugs."

"You're positive of that?"

"My friend McGlory, there, was watching outside the boathouse. He was set upon by two negroes, knocked down, tied hand and foot, gagged and dragged off where he would not be in the way. Then the two scoundrels set fire to the building while Lorry, the Chinese boy, and I were sound asleep inside."

Something like trepidation crossed Mart Rawlins' face.

"McGlory is sure that the men were negroes who assaulted him?" queried Rawlins in a shaking voice.

"He's positive."

"Then," breathed Rawlins, as though to himself, "there's no doubt about it."

"No doubt about what?" demanded McGlory sharply, whirling away from the window.

"Why," was the answer, "that there was a conspiracy to destroy the boathouse and the *Sprite*, and that Ollie Merton was back of it."

Rawlins had paled, and he was nervous, but he spoke deliberately.

Matt, Lorry, and McGlory were surprised at the trend Rawlins' talk was taking. They were still a little bit suspicious of him, especially McGlory.

"What makes you think that?" asked Matt, eying his caller keenly.

"Did you lose a roll of drawings a few days ago?"

"Yes."

"And did you have a disagreement with the little negro called Pickerel Pete?"

"Yes."

"Well, Pete stole those drawings and took them to Merton. It was just after"—Rawlins flushed—"just after you were stopped in the woods by Merton and the rest of us, and ordered to quit helping Lorry. We had got back to Merton's house, and Pete came there with the roll of papers. Merton bought them from Pete, gave Pete five dollars, and asked him to come to see him Sunday afternoon at four o'clock—yesterday afternoon. Merton said he had a plan he was going to carry out that would make success sure for the Winnequa boat in the race. He wouldn't tell us what the plan was, but when I heard that the boathouse had been burned I went over to Merton's and had a talk with him. It wasn't a pleasant talk, and there was a coldness between Merton and me when I left."

"You think, then," said Matt, "that Merton hired Pete to get those negroes to set fire to the

boathouse?"

"That's the way it looks to me. As a member of the Winnequa club, and a representative member, I won't stand for any such work. It's—it's unsportsman-like, to say the least."

"It's worse than that, Mart," frowned Lorry.

"It was unsportsman-like to stop Matt, drag him off into the woods, and try to bribe him to leave town, or to 'throw' the race, wasn't it?" cried McGlory scornfully.

Rawlins stirred uncomfortably.

"Certainly it was," he admitted.

"And yet you helped Merton in that!"

"Merton fooled me. He said Motor Matt was an unscrupulous adventurer, and a professional motorist, and that the good of the sport made it necessary for us to get him out of that race. He didn't say he was going to bribe him to 'throw' the race. I didn't know that offer was going to be made, and I think there were some others who didn't know it. If we could have hired Motor Matt to leave town, I'd have been willing. I've got up all the money I can spare on the race, and naturally I want our boat to win—but I won't stand for any unfair practices. Nor will the Winnequa Club, as a whole. We're game to let our boat face the start on its own merits. If we can't win by fair means, I want to lose my money."

Rawlins got up.

"That's all I came here for—to find out how you are, Motor Matt, and to let you know how I stand, and how the rest of the club stands. I have come out flat-footed, and for the good of motor boating in this section I hope you will not press this matter to its conclusion. We all know what that conclusion would mean. It would go hard with Merton, and there would be a scandal. In order to avoid the scandal, it may be necessary to spare Merton."

"Sufferin' hoodlums!" cried McGlory. "That's a nice way to tune up. Here's Merton, pulling off a raw deal, and coming within one of killing my two pards, say nothing of the way I was treated, and now you want him spared for the sake of avoiding a scandal!"

A silence followed this outburst.

When Rawlins continued, he turned and addressed himself to Matt.

"I think I know your calibre pretty well, Motor Matt," said he. "The way you turned down that bribe in the woods and declared that you'd stand by Lorry at all costs, showed us all you were the right sort. Of course, I can't presume to influence you; but, if you won't spare Merton on account of the scandal and the good of the sport, or on his own account, then think of his father and mother. They'll get back from abroad to-morrow morning in time for the race. That's all. I'd like to shake hands with you, if you don't mind."

Rawlins stepped closer to the bed.

"You'll have to take my left hand," laughed Matt. "The right's temporarily out of business. You're the clear quill, Rawlins," he added, as they shook hands, "and I'll take no steps against Merton, providing he acts on the square from now on. You can tell your club members that."

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"Thank you. I half expected you'd say that."

"Will Merton be allowed to race the boat in the contest?" inquired Lorry.

"We can't very well avoid it. It's his boat, and it's the only entry on our side. He'll have to race her, with Halloran. The club will make that concession. After that—well, Merton will cease to act as commodore, and will no longer be a member of the club. Good-by, Motor Matt, and may the best boat win, no matter who's at the motor!"

As Rawlins went out, Ethel Lorry and her father stepped into the room. They had heard the loud voices, and inferring that Matt was able to receive company, had come upstairs.

"You'd hardly think there was a sick person up here," said Mr. Lorry, "from the talk that's been going on. How are you, my lad?" and he stepped toward Matt.

"Doing finely," said Matt.

"I'm glad," said Ethel, drawing close to the bed and slipping her arm through her father's.

"He's going to race the *Sprite* to-morrow, Uncle Dan," chirped McGlory.

"No!" exclaimed the astounded Mr. Lorry.

"Fact. You can't down him. He's in that race with only one hand—and the left, at that."

"It will be the death of you!" cried Ethel. "You mustn't think of it."

"You know, my boy," added Mr. Lorry gravely, "it won't do to take chances."

"I know that, sir," returned Matt, "but I'm as well as ever, barring my arm. I can't lie here and let the *Sprite* get beaten for lack of a man at the motor who understands her. I'd be in a bad way, for sure, if I had to do that."

"I think he's a bit flighty," grinned McGlory. "I reckon I can prove that by telling you what just happened."

"What happened?" and Mr. Lorry turned to face McGlory.

The cowboy repeated all that Rawlins had said, winding up with the promise Matt had made to spare Merton.

A soft light crept into Ethel's eyes.

"What else could you expect from Motor Matt?" she asked.

"I shall have to shake hands with you myself, Matt," said Mr. Lorry, taking Matt's left hand and pressing it cordially. "That was fine of you, but, as Ethel says, no more than we ought to expect. I hope you'll be able to drive the *Sprite* to victory, but you'll have to have less talk in the room and more rest if you're going to be able to take your place in the boat to-morrow. Come on, Ethel."

Mr. Lorry and his daughter left the room and Lorry and McGlory resumed their chairs, but gave over their conversation.

An hour later Matt called for something to eat, and a substantial meal was served to him, piping hot.

The doctor came while he was eating.

"Well," laughed the doctor, "I guess you'll do. Don't eat too much, that's all."

"He's got to corral enough ginger to get into that race to-morrow afternoon, doc," sang out the cowboy.

"He don't intend to try that, does he?" asked the doctor aghast.

"I've got to, doctor," said Matt.

"It may be," remarked the doctor, "that action is the sort of tonic you need. But, whatever you do, don't attempt to use that arm. That'll be about all. If you do get into the race, though, be sure and win. You see," he added whimsically, "I live on the Fourth Lake side of the town."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RACE—THE START.

The Winnequa-Yahara race was open to all boats of the respective clubs under forty feet, each boat with a beam one-fifth the water-line length. It was to be a five-mile contest, each end of the course marked by a stake boat anchored at each end of Fourth Lake. The stake boat, with the judges, was to be moored off Maple Bluff. From this boat the racers would start, round the other stake boat, and finish at the starting point.

Furthermore, although the race was open to all members of the two respective clubs with boats under the extreme length, there was a mutual agreement, from the beginning, that one member of each club should be commissioned to provide the boat to be entered in the contest. Inasmuch as a speed boat costs money, it was natural that the sons of rich men should be told off to carry the honors.

Mr. Merton and Mr. Lorry were both millionaires. They were known to be indulgent fathers, and it had not been foreseen that Mr. Lorry would rebel, at first, against George's extravagance.

But George had gone too far. Mr. Lorry, even at that, might have paid for George's \$5,000 hydroplane had he understood that his son was bearing the Yahara honors on his own shoulders and had been lured into extravagance by a misguided notion of his responsibility.

However, this initial misunderstanding, with all its disastrous entanglements, was a thing of the past. Both Mr. Lorry and George had buried it deep, and were meeting each other in a closer relationship than they had ever known before.

The struggle for the De Lancey cup had become, to Madison, what the fight for the America Cup had become to the United States. Only, in the case of the De Lancey cup, the city was divided against itself.

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The entire population had ranged itself on one side or the other.

The gun that started the race was to be fired at 2 o'clock, but early in the forenoon launches began passing through the chain of lakes, and through the canal and locks that led to the scene of the contest.

The distance had already been measured and the stake boats placed. All along the course buoys marked the boundaries. Later there were to be police boats, darting here and there to see that the boundary line was respected and the course kept clear. Through this lane of water, hemmed in by craft of every description, the two boats were to speed to victory or defeat.

Observers, however, did not confine themselves to the boats. The cottages on Maple Bluff, and the surrounding heights, offered splendid vantage ground for sightseers. Early in the forenoon automobiles began moving out toward Maple Bluff, loaded with passengers. And each automobile carried a hamper with lunch for those who traveled with it. Most of the citizens made of the event a picnic affair.

The asylum grounds also held their quota of sightseers with opera glasses or more powerful binoculars; and Governor's Island, and the shore all the way around to Picnic Point.

The day was perfect. Fortunately for the many craft assembled, the wind was light, and what

little there was was not from the west. Fourth Lake was to be as calm as a pond.

Steadily, up to 1 o'clock, the throng of sightseers afloat and ashore was added to.

The sixty-five-foot motor yacht, serving as stake boat at the starting and finishing point, was boarded by Mr. Lorry and Ethel. The judges were from both clubs, and so the boat was given over to the use of a limited number of Winnequas and Yaharas and their partisans.

As Mr. Lorry and Ethel came over the side of the yacht they were greeted by a tall, gray-haired man and a stout, middle-aged lady.

"Why, Merton!" exclaimed Mr. Lorry. "You had to get back in time for the race, eh? Madam," and he doffed his hat to the lady at Merton's side, "I trust I find you well?"

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Lorry," replied Mrs. Merton. "How are you, my dear?" and the lady turned and gave her hand to Ethel.

"There's where they start and finish, Lorry," said Mr. Merton, pointing to the port side of the boat. "Bring up chairs and we'll preëempt our places now."

When the four were all comfortably seated, a certain embarrassment born of the fact that each man was there to watch the performance of his son's boat crept into their talk.

"Will George be in his boat?" inquired Mr. Merton, taking a glance around at the gay bunting with which the assembled craft were dressed.

"No," said Mr. Lorry.

"Ollie will be in *his* launch," and there was ever so small a taunt in the words.

"Ollie's boat is bigger than George's, Merton," answered the other mildly. "George's driver figured that an extra hundred-and-forty pounds had better stay out of the *Sprite*."

"Who drives for George?"

"Motor Matt."

Mr. Merton was startled.

"Why," said he, "I thought he was hurt in that boathouse fire and couldn't be out of bed?"

"He's hurt, and only one-handed, but he's too plucky to stay out of the race."

"Probably," said Mr. Merton coolly, "the pay he receives is quite an item. I understand Motor Matt is poor, and out for all the money he can get."

"You have been wrongly informed, Merton. Not a word as to what he shall receive has passed between George and Motor Matt. The boys are friends."

"I'd be a little careful, if I were you, how I allowed my son to pick up with a needy adventurer."

"Motor Matt is neither needy nor an adventurer," said Mr. Lorry warmly. "I'm proud to have George on intimate terms with him."

"Oh, well," laughed Mr. Merton; "have a cigar."

Ethel was having a conversation along similar lines with Mrs. Merton, and she was as staunchly upholding Motor Matt as was her father. So earnestly did the girl speak that the elder lady drew back and eyed her through a lorgnette.

"Careful, my dear," said she.

Ethel knew what she meant, and flushed with temper. But both Ethel and her father, deep down in their hearts, pitied Mr. and Mrs. Merton. If they had known of the unscrupulous attack their son had caused to be made on Motor Matt, they would perhaps have spoken differently—or not at all.

Fortunately, it may be, for the four comprising the little party, a band on a near-by cruising boat began to play.

Then, a moment later, a din of cheers rolled over the lake.

"There's Ollie!" cried Mrs. Merton, starting up excitedly to flutter her handkerchief.

Yes, the *Dart* was coming down the open lane, having entered the course from the boathouse, where she had been lying ever since early morning. She was a 25-foot boat, with trim racing lines, and she shot through the water in a way that left no doubt of her speed.

"How's that?" cried Mr. Merton, nudging Mr. Lorry with his elbow. "Nearly everybody was expecting the *Wyandotte*, and just look what we're springing on you!" [Pg 25]

"She looks pretty good," acknowledged Mr. Lorry.

"Well, I should say so!"

"But not good enough," went on Mr. Lorry.

"Have you got five thousand that thinks the same way?"

"No, Merton. I quit betting a good many years ago."

The *Dart* raced up and down the course, showing what she could do in short stretches, but not going over the line for a record. Halloran, the red-haired driver of the *Dart*, and Ollie Merton were fine-looking young fellows in their white yachting caps, white flannel shirts, and white duck trousers.

From time to time Mr. Lorry consulted his watch, checking off the quarter hours impatiently and wondering why Motor Matt and the *Sprite* did not put in an appearance. Could it be possible that Matt had not been able to leave the house on Yankee Hill, after all? If he was able to be out, then why didn't he come along and give the *Sprite* a little warming up?

The boat had not had an actual try-out since the changes had been made in her.

Mr. Lorry did not realize that it was too late, then, for a try-out; nor did he know that Matt was saving himself for the contest, and not intending to reach the course much before the time arrived for the starting gun to be fired.

Five minutes before two a little saluting gun barked sharply from the forward deck of the stake boat.

"I guess your boat isn't coming, Lorry," said Mr. Merton. "There's only five minutes left for——"

The words were taken out of his mouth by a roaring cheer from down the line of boats. The cheer was caught up and repeated from boat to boat until the whole surface of the lake seemed to echo back the frantic yells.

Mr. Lorry leaped to his feet and waved his hat, while Ethel sprang up in her chair and excitedly shook her veil.

For the *Sprite* was coming!

Motor Matt, a little pale and carrying his right arm in a sling, came jogging down the wide lane toward the stake boat. There was a resolute light in his keen, gray eyes, and his trained left hand performed its many duties unerringly.

The danger from which Matt had plucked the *Sprite* at the burning boathouse was known far and wide, and it was his gameness in entering the race handicapped as he was that called forth the tremendous ovation.

Dexterously he passed the stake boat and brought the *Sprite* slowly around for the start.

The *Sprite* was charred and blistered, and, as McGlory had humorously put it, the "skin was barked all off her nose," because of her collision with the water door; but there she was, fit and ready for the race of her life.

She did not compare favorably with the handsome *Dart*; but then, beauty is only skin deep. It's what's inside of a boat, as well as of a man, that counts.

Slowly the boats manœuvred, waiting for the gun. The silence was intense, breathless. Then——

Bang!

The little saluting gun puffed out its vapory breath. Matt could be seen leaning against the wheel, holding it firm with his body while his left hand played over the levers.

It was a pretty start. Both the *Sprite* and the *Dart* passed the stake boat neck and neck.

"They're off," muttered Lorry, with a wheeze, drawing a handkerchief over his forehead.

It is nothing to his discredit that his hand shook a little.

"Oh, dad," whispered Ethel, clasping her father's arm, "didn't he look fine and—and determined? I know he'll win, I just *know* it."

"Say, Lorry," asked Mr. Merton, "who's that youngster over there on that launch—the one that's making such a fool of himself."

"That?" asked Mr. Lorry, squinting in the direction indicated. "Oh, that's my nephew, McGlory. But don't blame him for acting the fool—I feel a little inclined that way myself."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FINISH.

The doctor's guess was a good one. The excitement of that race was exactly what Motor Matt needed. It was a tonic, and from the moment he had entered the *Sprite* in the Yahara Club boathouse, he was the Mile-a-Minute Matt of motor cycle and automobile days. His nerves were like steel wires, his brain was steady, and his eye keen and true.

There was a good deal of vibration—much more, in fact, than Matt had really thought there would be. The more power used up in vibration, the less power delivered at the wheel. But what would the vibration have been if he had not exercised so much care in preparing the engine's bed?

Perfectly oblivious of the spectators, and with eyes only for his course, Matt saw nothing and no one apart from the boundary buoys, until he turned the *Sprite* for the start. Then, while waiting for the starting gun, he caught a glimpse of the taunting face of Ollie Merton.

"Fooled you, eh?" called Merton. "You'll do sixteen miles, at your best, and we'll go over twenty."

Motor Matt did not reply. If Merton had only known what was under the hood of the *Sprite*, his gibe would never have been uttered.

As they passed the stake boat side by side, Merton and Halloran began to suspect something. The *Sprite* hung to them too persistently for a sixteen-mile-an-hour boat.

"He's got something in that boat of his," breathed Halloran, "that we don't know anything about."

"Confound him!" snorted Merton, enraged at the very suspicion. "If he fools us with any of his low-down tricks, I'll fix him before he leaves that made-over catamaran of his."

"You'll treat him white, Merton, win or lose," scowled Halloran.

"Then you see to it that you win!" said Merton.

Along the double line of boats rushed the racers. The waves tossed up from the bows rose high, creamed into froth, and the spray drifted and eddied around Matt, Halloran, and Merton. At the edge of the lane, the craft of the sightseers rocked with the heave the flying boats kicked up.

Halfway between the stake boats the *Dart* began to draw ahead. A shout of exultation went up from Merton.

"Good boy, Halloran! In another minute we'll show him our heels."

But what Matt lost on the outward stretch of the course he more than made up at the turn around the stake boat. The shorter length of the *Sprite* enabled her to be brought around with more facility, and she came to on the inner side and was reaching for the home-stretch when the *Dart* got pointed for the straight-away.

The hum of the engine was like a crooning song of victory in Matt's ears. He *knew* he was going to win; he felt it in his bones.

Halloran's juggling with gasoline and spark brought the *Dart* slowly alongside and gave her the lead by half a length.

But still Matt did not waver. He could juggle a little with the make-and-break ignition and the fuel supply himself. His brain was full of calculations. He knew where he was at every minute of the race, and he knew just when to begin making the throbbing motor spin the wheel at its maximum.

The rack of the hull was tremendous. It seemed to grow instead of to lessen.

Would the hull stand the strain with the engine urging the wheel at its best?

It *must* stand the strain! The crisis was at hand and there was nothing else for it.

Hugging the steering wheel with his body, Matt's left hand toyed with switch and lever. The yacht at the finish line was in plain view.

Matt did not see the waving hats or fluttering handkerchiefs, nor did he hear the bedlam of yells that went up on every side. All he saw was the *Dart*, his eye marking the gain of the *Sprite*.

It was already apparent to Ollie Merton and Halloran that the race was lost—*unless something unexpected happened to Motor Matt or the Sprite*.

Halloran was getting the last particle of speed out of the *Dart's* engine, and steadily, relentlessly, the *Sprite* was creeping ahead.

Deep down in Merton's soul a desperate purpose was fighting with his better nature. Suddenly the evil got the upper hand. Merton waited, his sinister face full of relentless determination.

"When the *Sprite* takes the lead," he said to himself, "something is going to happen."

In one minute more Matt forged ahead. The finish line was close now, and Merton was already stung with the bitterness of defeat.

His hand reached inside his sweater. When it was withdrawn, a revolver came with it.

Why Merton had brought that revolver with him, he alone could tell. It may have been for some such purpose as this.

Matt's back was toward Merton, and Matt's eyes were peering steadily ahead.

If that left hand could be touched—just scratched—the king of the motor boys would be powerless to manage the *Sprite*.

Many of the spectators saw the leveling of the weapon. Cries of "Coward!" and "Shame!" and "Stop him!" went up from a hundred throats.

Mr. Merton, watching breathlessly, saw the glimmering revolver, and something very like a sob rushed through his lips as he bowed his head. What those who saw felt for his son, *he* felt for him—and for himself.

Before Merton could press the trigger, Halloran turned partly around.

"You're mad!" shouted Halloran, gripping Merton's wrist with a deft hand and shoving the point of the revolver high in the air.

Unaware of his narrow escape, the king of the motor boys flung the *Sprite* onward to victory.

A good half-length ahead of the *Dart*, Matt and his boat crossed the finish line—regaining the De Lancey cup for the Yahara Club, winning the race for George Lorry and gaining untold honors for himself.

The lake went wild; and the enthusiasm spilled over its edges and ran riot along the shores. Steam launches tooted their sirens, and motor boats emptied their compressed air tanks through

their toy whistles; the band played, but there was so much other noise that it was not heard. The Yaharas and their partisans went wild.

Somewhere in that jumble of humanity was Newt Higgins, adding his joyful clamor to the roar of delight; and somewhere, also, was the doctor, letting off the steam of his pent-up excitement.

But there was one man on the stake boat whose heart was heavy, who had no word for any one but his wife. To her he offered his arm. [Pg 27]

"Come," said he, in a stifled voice, "this is no place for us. Let us go."

Matt, as soon as he had checked the speed of the *Sprite* and pointed her the other way, jogged back along the line of boats and picked Lorry and McGlory off one of the launches.

Lorry was radiant.

"You've done it, old boy!" he cried. "By Jupiter! you've done it. You sit down and take it easy—I'll look after the *Sprite*!"

"Speak to me about this!" whooped McGlory, throwing his arms around Matt in a bear's hug. "Oh, recite this to me, in years to come, and the blood will bound through my veins with all the—er—the— Hang it, pard, you know what I mean! I've gone off the jump entirely. Hooray for Motor Matt!"

As Lorry laid the *Sprite* alongside the stake boat, somebody tossed her a line.

"Come aboard, all of you," called a voice.

It was Spicer, commodore of the Yahara Club.

While Matt, Lorry, and McGlory were going up one side of the yacht, Mr. and Mrs. Merton were descending the other, getting into the boat that was to take them ashore to their waiting automobile.

Mr. Lorry, red as a beet, his collar wilted, his high hat on the back of his head, and his necktie around under his ear, met the victors, giving one hand to Matt and the other to George.

"Jove!" he said huskily, "I've yelled myself hoarse. Oh, but it was fine!"

Ethel threw her arms around Matt's neck and gave him a hearty kiss.

"Nice way to treat a one-armed fellow that can't defend himself," whooped McGlory; "and sick, at that. He ought to be in bed, this minute—the doctor said so!"

"I—I thought it was George," faltered Ethel.

"Oh, bang!" howled McGlory. "It's a wonder you didn't think it was me."

The vice commodore of the Winnequa Club came forward, carrying the silver cup in both hands. He looked sad enough, but he was game.

In a neat little speech, during which he emphasized the sportsman-like conduct which should prevail at all such events as the one that had just passed, he tendered the cup to Lorry. Lorry, blushing with pleasure, in turn tendered it to the commodore of the Yahara Club.

One of the judges, coming forward with an oblong slip of paper in his hands, waved it to command silence. When a measure of quiet prevailed, he eased himself of a few pertinent remarks.

"Gentlemen, there was another supplementary prize offered in this contest. Unlike the De Lancey cup, which may be fought for again next year, this additional prize inheres to the victor for so long as he can keep it by him. It is not for the owner of the boat, but to the gallant youth who presided at the steering wheel and bore the brunt of the battle. Had the *Dart* won, this extra prize would have gone to Halloran, just as surely as it now goes to Motor Matt. It consists of a check for two thousand dollars, place for the name blank, and signed by Mr. Daniel Lorry. There you are, son," and the judge pushed the check into the hand of the astounded Matt.

"Great spark-plugs!" exclaimed Matt. "I—I— Well, I hardly know what to say. I was in the game for the love of it, and—and I was not expecting this!"

"That was dad's idea," said Ethel happily.

"Bully for the governor!" cried George, grabbing his father's hand. "Why, I didn't know anything about this, myself."

"It was a 'dark horse,'" chuckled Mr. Lorry. "Come on, now, and let's go home and get out of this hubbub. Matt, you and McGlory will come with us. We're going to have a spread."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

All that happened, after Matt received that check for \$2,000, was a good deal like a dream to him. He remembered descending into the *Sprite* for a return to the clubhouse, and finding Ping Pong in the boat.

Where Ping Pong had come from no one seemed to know. Not much attention had been paid to

him after Matt boarded the *Sprite* and started for the stake boat. Yet there the little Chinaman was, kneeling at the bulkhead of the boat, fondling the steering wheel, patting the levers, laying his yellow cheek against the gunwale, and all the while crooning a lot of heathen gibberish.

"What's the blooming idiot trying to do?" McGlory shouted.

It seemed impossible for the cowboy to do anything but yell. His exultation suggested noise, and he talked at the top of his lungs.

"Don't you understand, Joe?" said Lorry. "He's trying to thank the *Sprite* for winning the race."

"Sufferin' Hottentots! Why don't he thank the king of the motor boys?"

The next moment Ping was alongside of Matt, sitting in the bottom of the boat and looking up at him with soulful admiration.

"Him allee same my boss," pattered Ping, catching his breath. "He one-piecee scoot."

"Oh, tell me about that!" guffawed McGlory. "One-piecee scoot! Say, Ping's not so far wide of his trail, after all."

The next thing Matt remembered was standing in the clubhouse, in the locker room, receiving the vociferous congratulations of the Yaharas. Before he realized what was going on, he and Lorry had been picked up on the members' shoulders.

"Three times three and a tiger for Motor Matt and Lorry!" went up a shout.

Well, the Yaharas didn't exactly raise the roof, but they came pretty near it. Matt was voted an honorary member of the club on the spot, and given free and perpetual use of all the clubhouse privileges.

"There isn't any one going around handing me ninety-nine-year leases on a bunch of boats and a lot of bathing suits," caroled McGlory. "But then, I don't count. I'm only carrying the banner in this procession. Matt's the big high boy; but he's my pard, don't forget that."

McGlory's wail caused the Yaharas to vote him an honorary membership; and then, in order not to slight anybody, or make a misdeal while felicitations were being handed around, Ping was likewise voted in.

After that there was a ride to Yankee Hill in the Lorry motor car, with Gus at the steering wheel; then a spread, the like of which Motor Matt had never sat down to before. A good deal was eaten, and a great many things were said, but Matt was still in a daze.

Every time he made a move he seemed to feel the vibration of the twenty-horse-power motor sending queer little shivers through his body.

What was the matter with him? he asked himself. Could it be possible that he was going to be on the sick list?

He remembered crawling into the same big brass bed with the mosquito-bar canopy, and then he dropped off into dreamless sleep.

When he came to himself he was pleased to find that his brain was clear, and that he could move around without feeling the vibrations of the motor.

His health was first class, after all, and he never had felt brighter in his life.

While he was dressing, McGlory and Lorry came into the room.

"What you going to do with that check, pard?" asked McGlory.

"I'm going to cash it, divide the money into three piles, give one pile to you, one to Ping, and keep the other for myself," said Matt.

"Don't be foolish, Matt," implored the cowboy. "A third of two thousand is more'n six hundred and fifty dollars. What do you suppose would happen to me if all that wealth was shoved into my face?"

"Give it up," laughed Matt; "but I'm going to find out."

"And Ping! Say, the Chink will be crazy."

"I can't help that, Joe. He's entitled to the money. I wonder if you fellows realize that we've never yet paid Ping for the *Sprite*? Here's where he gets what's coming to him. He's full of grit, that Ping. You ought to have seen how he helped me at the burning boathouse."

"What are you going to do with Ping, Matt?" queried Lorry.

"I haven't given that a thought," said Matt, a little blankly.

"Well," suggested McGlory, "you'd better hurry up and think it over. He's walking around the servants' quarters lording it like a mandarin. He says he's working for Motor Matt, and that you're the High Mucky-muck of everything between Waunakee and the Forbidden City. Better find something for him to do."

"We'll talk that over later," said Matt. "What about Ollie Merton?"

"You can hear all sorts of things, Matt," answered Lorry. "They say he had a violent scene with his father, that he has squandered fifteen thousand dollars while his parents were in Europe, and that he is to be sent to a military school where there are men who will know how to handle him."

There was a silence between the boys for a moment, broken, at last, by Matt.

"That's pretty tough!"

"Tough?" echoed McGlory. "If Merton had what's coming to him he'd be in the reform school. Don't waste any sympathy on him."

"Why," spoke up George, with feeling, "he's just the fellow that needs sympathy. It's too bad he hasn't a Motor Matt to stand by him and help him over the rough places he has made for himself."

George Lorry was speaking from the heart. He knew what he was talking about, for he had "been through the mill" himself.

THE END.

THE NEXT NUMBER (24) WILL CONTAIN

Motor Matt On the Wing;

OR,

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<h3>MOTOR STORIES</h3> <p>THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION</p>

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TRICKED BY TWO.

"This is a public path," said Guy Hereford quietly.

"Ay, but you can't use it," returned the man he faced, with an ugly glint in his eyes.

"All the same, I'm going to," said Guy coolly. "I'll trouble you to move out of my way, Mr. Harvey Blissett."

For a moment the two faced one another on the narrow sandy road between the bare, barbed-wire fences over which hung the fragrantly blooming orange branches. Both were mounted, Hereford on a well-groomed Florida pony, Blissett on a big, rough Montana, an ugly beast with a nose like a camel and a savage eye.

"I'll give you one more chance," growled Blissett. "Turn and make tracks."

"This is my road," said Hereford, as serenely as ever.

"Then 'twill be your road to kingdom come," roared Blissett, and flashed his pistol from his hip pocket.

But Hereford's steady eyes had never wavered. He was no tenderfoot. With the bully's movement he ducked, and at the same moment drove spurs into his pony's flanks.

As Blissett's bullet whistled harmlessly into the opposite trees the chest of Hereford's pony met the shoulder of the Montana with a shock that staggered it, and before Blissett could pull trigger a second time the loaded end of the other's quirt crashed across his head.

Blissett dropped like a shot rabbit. At the same time the Montana gave a vicious squeal, lashed out violently, and bolted.

Hereford was off his pony in a moment, and, with an exclamation of horror ran to Blissett and stooped over him. But a single glance was enough. One of the Montana's heels had caught the unfortunate man exactly on the same spot where Hereford's blow had fallen and crushed his skull like an eggshell.

He was dead as a log.

"This is a rough deal!" said Hereford slowly, as he rose to his feet. "Wonder what I'd better do."

The trouble was that every one for miles round knew the bad blood which existed between the young orange grower and his neighbor.

Blissett was a cattleman who had bitterly resented the fencing of the land which Hereford had bought. He had deliberately cut the wires and let his scrub cattle in among the young trees, doing endless damage. Hereford had retaliated by pounding the whole bunch so that Blissett had to pay heavily to regain them.

Then Blissett had brought a law suit to force Hereford to give a public road through his place. He had won his suit, but done more than he intended, for the authorities extended the road through Blissett's own land and forced him to fence it.

It was on this extension of the road that the tragedy had taken place.

"If I go to the sheriff there's sure to be trouble," said Hereford aloud. "Ten to one they'll bring it in manslaughter."

"Murder, more likely," came a voice from behind, and Hereford, starting round, found himself face to face with his cousin, Oliver Deacon, who, hoe in hand, had just come through the fence from among the orange trees.

"Why murder?" asked Hereford sharply.

The other, a sallow-faced man some years older than Hereford, gave a disagreeable chuckle. "My dear Guy, every one knows the terms you and Blissett were on. There'll be a jury of crackers, all pals of the late unlamented, and they'll be only too glad to have a chance of taking it out of a man they think an aristocrat."

"What's the good of talking rot?" exclaimed Hereford impatiently. "If you were working in the grove I suppose you saw the whole thing?"

"Yes, I saw it," replied Deacon slowly.

"That's all right then. You know he brought it on himself."

There was a very peculiar look in Deacon's close-set eyes as he glanced at his cousin.

"I saw you hit Blissett over the head with the lead end of your quirt," he said in the same measured tones.

"What in thunder do you mean, Oliver? Didn't you see his pony kick him on the head?"

"I'm not so sure about that," was Deacon's reply.

Guy Hereford stared at his cousin in blank amazement.

"Will you kindly tell me what you do mean?" he asked icily.

"Yes, I'll tell you," said Deacon harshly. "Look here, Guy, I'm full up with playing bottle washer, and it seems to me this gives me just the chance I've been looking for. Need I explain?"

"I think you'd better," said Guy Hereford grimly.

"All right. I'll give you straight goods. I want to be paid, and well paid, for my evidence. Here are you with a place of your own and a good allowance from your father, you've a decent house and a first-class pony. And as for me, I haven't a red cent, and am forced to do grove work like an infernal nigger. As I said before, I'm sick of it, and it's going to stop right here."

Hereford looked his cousin up and down. Then he said, "I knew you'd sunk pretty low, Oliver, but I didn't quite realize the depths you've dropped to. Whose fault is it you are hard up? Your own. You had more than I ever had, and chucked it all away. People were decent to you down here until you were caught cheating at poker. And now you want to force me to pay you hush money under threats of false evidence. May I ask how much you consider your evidence worth?"

Guy's tone of icy contempt brought a dull red flush to the other's sallow cheeks. But he answered brazenly, "I'll take a thousand dollars."

Guy laughed.

"I wouldn't give you a thousand cents."

"Then you'll hang," retorted Oliver viciously.

"Well, that won't do you any good."

"Oh, won't it? Plainly, you don't know much about Florida law, my good Guy. I'm your cousin. Don't forget that. And by the law of this State I'm your next heir. See? When you've left this vale of tears I come in for the whole outfit—your grove and everything. Now, perhaps, you'll sing another song."

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Guy's face went white. Not with fear, but anger. And his gray eyes blazed with a sudden fury that made the other step hastily backward.

"You mean, skulking hound!" he cried. "You're worse—a thousand times worse—than that fellow who lies dead there. Get out of my sight before I kill you."

Oliver's eyes had the look of a vicious cur. "All right," he snarled. "You'll change your tune before I'm done with you. If you don't fork up the cash by this time to-morrow I'll go and give the sheriff a full and particular account of how you murdered Harvey Blissett."

"What's de matter, boss. Warn't dat supper cooked to suit you?"

"Supper was first-rate, Rufe. Only I've got no appetite," replied Guy.

"You done seem plumb disgruntled 'bout something ebber since you come in dis evening," said Rufus, Guy's faithful negro retainer.

Guy looked at the man's sympathetic face. He felt a longing to talk over the black business with somebody, and Rufe, he knew, would never repeat a word to any one else.

"Heard about Harvey Blissett?" he asked.

"No, sah. What he been doing?"

"He won't do anything more, Rufe. He's dead."

"You doan' mean tell me dat man dead?"

"It's quite true."

"How dat come about?" inquired Rufus, his eyes fairly goggling with eager interest.

Guy explained how Blissett had come by his end.

"Well, boss, I doan' see nuffin to worry about. 'Twaren't your fault as dat Montanny animile kick him on de head. An' anyways, we's mighty well rid ob him. Dat's my 'pinion."

"But suppose I'm accused of killing him, Rufe?"

"Dere ain't nobody as would believe dat, sah," stoutly declared Rufus.

"But if some one who hated me had seen it and gave evidence against me?"

Rufus started.

"I bet five dollar dat's dat low-down white man, Mistah Deacon!" he exclaimed.

"You're perfectly right, Rufus. That's who it is."

"And he see you, and sw'ar dat it wasn't de hawse, but your quirt done it?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Hab you done told de sheriff, sah?"

"Yes, I did that at once. Rode straight into Pine Lake."

"And what he say?"

"Told me I must come into the inquest the day after to-morrow."

"Den seem to me, sah, you done took de wind out of dat Deacon's sail. He ain't seen de sheriff befoah you."

"That's all right, Rufe, as far as it goes. Trouble is that he'll be in at the inquest to-morrow and he'll swear that it was my quirt did the trick. That is, unless I give him a thousand dollars to keep his mouth shut."

The negro's face changed suddenly from its usual smiling expression. "Den I tell you what, Massa Guy," he exclaimed with sudden ferocity. "You gib me your gun, an' I sw'ar dat man nebber go to dat inquest to-morrow."

Guy knew well that Rufe meant what he said. He was touched. "You're a good chap, Rufe, but I'm afraid your plan is hardly workable. You see you'd be hung, too."

"Not dis nigger! I nebber be found out!" cried Rufe.

"Still we won't try it," said Guy in his quiet way.

Rufe stood silent for some moments. Then he turned to go back to the kitchen.

His silence was ominous.

"Mind, Rufe," said Guy sharply. "No violence. You're not to lay a hand on my cousin."

"All right, sah," said Rufe reluctantly. "I try t'ink ob some odder plan."

The time dragged by slowly. Guy tried to write letters, but found he could not settle to anything. The fact was that he was desperately anxious.

He knew Deacon's callous, revengeful nature, and was perfectly certain that he would carry out his threat if the money to bribe him was not forthcoming. It was all true what his cousin had said. A jury of cattle owners, "crackers," as they are called in Florida, would certainly find him guilty on his cousin's evidence, and even if he escaped hanging his fate would be the awful one of twenty years' penitentiary.

For a moment he weakened and thought of paying the price. But to do so meant selling his place. He could not otherwise raise the money. Sell the place on which he had spent four years of steady, hard work! No, by Jove; anything rather than that. And even if he did so, what guarantee had he that this would be the full extent of his cousin's demands?

Absolutely none. No, he laid himself open to be blackmailed for the rest of his life. He hardened his heart, and resolved that, come what would, he would stick it out and let the beggar do his worst.

Presently he got up and went out of his tiny living room onto the veranda. The house was only a little bit of a two-roomed shack with a penthouse veranda in front. He had built it when he first came, and had been intending for some time past to put up a bigger place. Now that dream was over.

Sick at heart, Guy flung himself into a long cane chair, and presently, worn out by worry, fell asleep.

He was wakened by the pad pad of a trotting horse, and looking up sharply saw in the faint light of a late-risen moon a figure mounted on one horse and leading another passing rapidly along the sandy track outside his boundary fence.

The something familiar about the figure of the man struck him like a blow.

"By thunder, it's Deacon! What mischief is the skunk up to?" he muttered. And on the impulse of the moment he sprang from the veranda, and, slipping round the dark end of the house, made for the stable.

In a minute he had saddle and bridle on Dandy, and, leading the animal out through the bars at the far end of the grove, was riding cautiously on his cousin's track.

At first he made sure Deacon was going to Pine Lake. To his great surprise the man presently turned off the main road and took a cut across a creek ford, and round the end of a long cypress swamp.

"Must be going to Orange Port," he muttered. "There's something very odd about this. And what in thunder is he doing with that second horse?"

They came to a bit of open savanna dotted with great islands of live oak. The moon was higher now, and the grassy plain was bathed in soft, silver light. As Deacon passed out of the deep shadow of the pine forest Guy gave a gasp.

The horse that Deacon was leading was Blissett's Montana pony.

Guy actually chuckled.

"I'll bet a farm he's picked it up and means to sell it in Orange Port," he said to himself. "Well, it mayn't save me, but at any rate I'll be able to make things hot for him."

It was sixteen miles to Orange Port. Deacon, with Guy still at his heels, reached the place about six in the morning, and took the animal straight to a small livery stable, the owner of which was Sebastian Gomez, a mulatto of anything but good repute.

Guy dogged him cautiously, and when he had left the stable and ridden off, went in himself, put Dandy up, and had him fed. [Pg 31]

Then he went to work cautiously, and by dint of a tip to one of the colored men about the place, found that his precious cousin had indeed sold the Montana to the owner of the stable, and had got fifty dollars for the animal.

"Not such a bad night's work," said Guy to himself as, after breakfast and a bath, he rode home again. He reached his place about nine to find Rufus much disturbed at his long absence. Merely telling the negro that he had been away on business, he lay down and had a much-needed sleep.

At four he woke and rode off to Pine Lake. He meant to find a lawyer to whom he could intrust his case on the following day, but to his deep disappointment Vanbuten, a clever young Bostonian and a great pal of his, was away at Ormond for a week's sea bathing. There was nothing for it but to send him an urgent telegram, begging him to return at once, and then ride home through the warm tropic starlight.

"Wonder if I shall ever ride back to the dear little old shop again," thought Guy sadly, as he opened the gate and led his pony in and up the neat path through the palmetto scrub. He loved every inch of his place, as a man can only love a property which by the sweat of his own brow he has carved out of the primeval forest.

Arrived at the house, he stabled Dandy and fed him, a job which he never trusted to any one else, not even the faithful Rufe.

As he entered the house he could hear Rufe busy with pots and pans in the kitchen. "He'll miss me, if no one else does," muttered Guy; and, feeling desperately depressed, he went into his bedroom to change his boots and coat. Hereford, being a Boston-bred man, was one of those who, even when baching it alone in the wilds, still try to keep up something of their old home customs.

He struck a match and lighted the lamp, then, as the glow fell upon his cot, he started back with a cry of horror.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

HOMES ON THE RIO GRANDE.

The Mexican Indian huts in the villages and upon the ranches of the lower Rio Grande border region of Texas have a style of architecture and construction that is distinctly their own. This type of primitive buildings is rapidly passing out of existence. Modern structures are taking their places. At many places on the border families of Mexicans have abandoned their jacals and moved into more pretentious homes.

One thing that recommended the old style of residence to the poorer Mexicans was its cheapness of construction. No money outlay is necessary in erecting the picturesque structures, neither is a knowledge of carpentry needed. A double row of upright poles firmly set or driven into the ground forms the framework for the walls. Between these two rows of poles are placed other poles or sticks of shorter length, forming a thick and compact wall. At each of the four corners of the building posts are set, reaching to a height of about eight feet. Roughly hewn stringers are laid from one post to another and to these stringers are tied the other poles that form the framework of the walls. The strong fibre from the maguey plant or strips of buckskin are used to tie the poles into position. The rafters are tied to the ridgepole and stringers in the same manner. At one end of the building is built the opening through which the smoke of the inside fire may ascend. Stoves are unknown among these Mexicans and the cooking is all done upon the ground.

When the rafters are in position the thatched roof is put on. Palm leaves form the most satisfactory roof, both as to durability and effectiveness in shedding the rain, but owing to the scarcity of this material on the Texas side of the international boundary stream, grasses and the leaves of plants are used for the purpose. The roofing material is tied to the rafters in layers. Some of the Mexican house builders exercise great ingenuity in putting on the thatched roofs.

The only opening in most of these Mexican jacals is the door which extends from the ground to the roof. The floor is the bare earth. The ventilation is obtained through the crude chimney opening. The door itself is seldom closed. The Mexican Indian is usually a man of large family. A one-room house accommodates all. Perhaps several dogs and a pig or two may share the comforts of the room with them on cool or disagreeable nights.

PIGEONS AS PHOTOGRAPHERS.

Many wonderful feats have been credited to the instinct of the homing or carrier pigeon, but "the limit," to quote the phrase of the moment, seems to have been reached by Herr Neubronner, a Kronberg chemist, who has actually trained pigeons to take photographs. For some time Herr Neubronner has been utilizing pigeons, not only for the transmission of messages to doctors in the neighborhood, but also to carry small quantities of medicine. The latter are inclosed in glove fingers slung about the birds' wings. The method has proved entirely successful, experiments showing that the pigeon can carry a properly distributed load of 2-1/2 ounces a distance of 100 miles.

Toward the end of last year one of the birds lost its way and did not arrive at its cote until after the expiration of four weeks. There was, of course, no means of ascertaining where and how the bird had got lost. It then occurred to Herr Neubronner that a pigeon, equipped with a self-acting camera, would bring in a photographic record of its journey. He thereupon constructed a camera, weighing less than 3 ounces, which he fixed to the bird's breast by an elastic strap, leaving the wings completely free. The process of snapshotting is, of course, automatic. At regular intervals the machine operates by a clockwork arrangement, and registers pictures of the various places covered by the bird in its flight.

The German government has taken a keen interest in Herr Neubronner's notion of utilizing pigeons as photographers, and there certainly seem great possibilities in the idea. The carrier-pigeon photographer would prove extremely valuable for obtaining information in times of war of the country, position, and strength of the enemy.

The carrier pigeon flies at a height of between 150 feet and 300 feet, safe from small shot and very difficult to hit with bullets. Pigeons might be released from air ships at any height within the enemy's lines, and they would carry home with them pictures of great value. The carrier pigeon is peculiarly well suited to service of this character, because when set free in a strange place it commences its flight by describing a spiral curve, in the course of which several pictures could be taken from various points of view.

Then, when the pigeon has determined the position of its goal, it flies thither in a straight line at a uniform speed of about 40 miles an hour. As the moment of exposure can be regulated with a fair amount of precision, the object which it is desired to photograph can generally be caught.

In besieged fortresses information concerning the besiegers can be obtained by tumbler pigeons, which, when released at their home, fly in circles for a time and then return to their cotes.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Added table of contents.

Retained some inconsistent hyphenation ("work-bench" vs. "workbench") from the original.

Images may be clicked to view larger versions.

Page 2, changed "inisted" to "insisted" after "Motol Matt my boss, alle same," and "cred" to "cried" after "Here, now."

Page 3, changed "out" to "ought" in "You and Ping ought to be ashamed."

Page 4, changed "instiution" to "institution" ("Another institution, known as...").

Page 9, changed "sprit" to "spirit" ("said Matt, with spirit").

Page 10, corrected "stakeboak" to "stake boat" ("As good as passed the stake boat").

Page 12, changed "wth" to "with" ("forcing an interview with").

Page 19, corrected "Larry" to "Lorry" ("While speaking, Lorry...").

Page 23, added missing close quote after "prove that by telling you what just happened."

Page 27, corrected "red as a beat" to "red as a beet."

Page 28, corrected "Villiany" to "Villainy" in "next number" table of contents.

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