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Title: Motor Matt's Make Up; or, Playing a New Rôle

Author: Stanley R. Matthews

Release date: August 25, 2016 [EBook #52891]

Language: English

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

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S MAKE UP; OR, PLAYING A NEW RÔLE ***



MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING ADVENTURE	MOTOR FICTION
No. 29 SEPT. 11, 1909.	FIVE CENTS
MOTOR MATT'S MAKE UP	OR PLAYING A NEW RÔLE
	BY THE AUTHOR OF

MOTOR STORIES
THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Copyright, 1909, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89
Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

No. 29.

NEW YORK, September 11,
1909.

Price Five Cents.

MOTOR MATT'S MAKE-UP;

OR,

PLAYING A NEW RÔLE.

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.

Carl Pretzel, an old chum who flags Motor Matt and more trouble than he can manage, at about the same time. In the rôle of detective, he makes many blunders, wise and otherwise, finding success only to wonder how he did it.

Ping, the Chinese boy.

Ben Ali, the Hindoo hypnotist and elephant trainer, who executes a master-stroke in the matter of his niece, Margaret Manners, and finds that a letter in Hindoostanee can sometimes prove a boomerang.

Dhondaram and Aurung Zeeb, two Hindoos who have appeared before as confederates of the crafty Ben Ali, and who now show themselves for the last time in their villainous part, and vanish—one into prison and the other into parts unknown.

Margaret Manners, the niece of the rascally Ben Ali and a ward of the British nation temporarily. In her particular case, justice is slow in righting a grievous wrong—and would have been slower but for Motor Matt and his aëroplane.

Reginald Pierce Twomley, who represents the British ambassador, wears a monocle, and who, in a passage at arms with Dhondaram, proves himself a man in McGlory's eyes and a near-pard.

Boss Burton, manager and proprietor of the "Big Consolidated," who, in his usual manner, forms hasty conclusions, discovers his errors, and shows no sign of repentance.

The Bearded Lady, the Armless Wonder, the Elastic Skin Man, the Zulu chief and the Ossified Man, all freaks in the side-show tent, who appear briefly but brilliantly in the light of a Roman candle.

CHAPTER I.

HIGH JINKS IN THE SIDE SHOW.

"Hello, dere, Viskers!" grinned Carl Pretzel, reaching up to grab the hairy paw of the Zulu chief.

"Howdy, Dutch!" answered the chief, with a nasal twang that suggested New England. "By Jocks, I ain't seen yeou in quite a spell. How's tricks, huh?"

"Dricks iss fine, I bed you. Say, sheef, dis iss mein leedle shink bard, Ping Pong. He iss der pest efer—oxcept me. Shake hants, Ping, mit a Zulu sheef vat vas porn near Pangor, Maine."

"Tickled tew death," said the chief effusively, taking the yellow palm of a small Chinaman who pushed himself closer to the platform.

The scene was the side-show tent of the "Big Consolidated," Boss Burton's "Tented Aggregation of the World's Marvels." The show had raised its "tops" at Reid's Lake, near the city of Grand Rapids. A high wind had prevented Motor Matt from giving his outdoor exhibition of aëroplane flying, and the disappointed crowds were besieging the side show, eager to beguile the time until the doors for the big show were open.

With the exception of Carl and Ping, no outsiders had yet entered the side-show tent. Carl, having once played the banjo for the Zulu chief while he was dancing on broken glass in his bare feet, was a privileged character. He had walked into the tent without so much as a "by your leave," and he had escorted Ping without any adverse comment by the man on the door.

The freaks and wonders of the side show were all on their platforms and ready to be viewed. The Ossified Man had been dusted off for the last time, the Bearded Lady had just arranged her beard most becomingly, the Elastic Skin Man was giving a few warming-up snaps to his rubberoid epidermis, the Educated Pig was being put through a preliminary stunt by the gentlemanly exhibitor, and the Armless Wonder was sticking a copy of the Stars and Stripes in the base of a wooden pyramid—using his toes.

The Armless Wonder occupied the same platform as the Zulu chief. His specialty was to stand on his head on the wooden pyramid, hold a Roman candle with one foot, light it with the other, and shoot vari-colored balls through a hole in the tent roof. In front of the Wonder, neatly piled on the little stage, were half a dozen long paper tubes containing the fire balls.

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"How you was, Dutch?" inquired the Wonder, doubling up in his chair and drawing a bandanna handkerchief over his perspiring face with his foot.

"*Ganz goot*," laughed Carl, carelessly picking up one of the Roman candles. "I vill make you acquainted, oof you blease, mit mein leedle shink bard."

"Shake!" cried the Wonder heartily, offering his right foot. "It does me proud to meet up with a friend of Pretzel's."

"Allee same happy days," remarked Ping, releasing the foot and backing away.

"Yeou tew kids aire chums, huh?" put in the Zulu chief, leaning down to arrange the row of photographs in front of him.

"Surest t'ing vat you know," answered Carl.

"Dutchy boy heap fine," declared Ping. "We both one-piecee pards."

"That's the talk!" exclaimed the Armless Wonder. "Too much weather for the flyin' machine to-day, huh? Motor Matt was afeared to go up, I reckon, Dutch?"

"Afraidt?" protested Carl. "Modor Matt vasn't afraidt oof anyt'ing. He couldn't haf shtaid ofer der show grounds, und dot's der reason he dit'nt go oop. Der vind vould haf plowed him galley-vest, und den some."

"I see. These here aëroplanes are hard things to handle, and——Holy smoke! Drop it! Put it out!"

Carl, as has already been stated, had picked up one of the Roman candles. While talking with the Armless Wonder, he leaned back against a tent pole and clasped his hands—the candle in one of

them—behind him.

Ping had stepped back. The Roman candle, held fuse end outward, looked most inviting. Digging a match out of his kimono, Ping scratched it on the pole and applied the flame unseen to the fuse.

While the Armless Wonder was talking, Carl heard a long-drawn-out hiss, a smell of smoke came to his nostrils, and a Niagara of sparks floated around him. Naturally he was startled, and it flashed over him that something was wrong with the Roman candle. Bringing the candle around in front of him for examination, he had it leveled at the Wonder the very instant the first fire ball was due. The ball was not behind schedule. Rushing from the end of the tube, it caught the Wonder in the breast, and he turned a back somersault off the platform.

Bewildered by the mysterious cause of the situation, Carl swerved the candle in order to get a look through the smoke and sparks at the place where the Wonder had been seated.

A roar came from the Zulu chief. A ball of flaming red had slapped against his shoulder, and he jumped for the next platform on the right. Landing on the edge, his weight overturned the structure. There was a scream from the Bearded Lady and a whoop from the Elastic Skin Man, and the next moment they landed in a tangled heap on top of the Zulu chief.

"Put it out!" the Armless Wonder continued to yell.

"Point it up or down!" bellowed the gentlemanly trainer of the Educated Pig.

"Ged some vater!" howled Carl, running back and forth and waving the candle; "ged a pucket oof vater und I vill drown der t'ing in it!"

The Dutch boy didn't know what to do. If he dropped the candle he might get hit with some of the balls himself, and if he turned it straight upward he might set fire to the top of the tent. While he was running up and down, trying frantically to think of some way out of the trouble, of course the fire stick was continuing to unload.

Whizz—slap!

A wad of yellow fire hit the Pig, which squealed and bolted. The gentlemanly attendant tried to head off the Porcine Marvel, but it ran between his outspread feet and knocked him off the stand. A rain of lettered blocks followed.

The frantic Pig bunted into Ping, tripped him, and hurled him against Carl. Both boys went down, and Carl rolled over and over, discharging red, white, and blue balls as he revolved.

Up to that moment the Ossified Man had escaped. But now his turn had come. He was said to have been turning to stone for thirty years, and was supposed to be so brittle that he had to be handled with extreme care.

The first ball that struck him, however, caused him to jump off his board slab with a yell. From the way he rushed to get out of the tent, it was pretty certain that he was as wiry and pliable as the average.

The Educated Pig, to an accompaniment of yells, howls, and screams, and with the lurid glare of the popping balls lighting the smoky interior of the tent, ran on blindly, overturned the stage set aside for the Zulu chief and the Armless Wonder, showered broken glass over everybody, and then tore through the tent wall and out into the open.

Naturally, this Bedlam, suddenly turned loose in the tent, had excited the wonder and curiosity of the ticket seller, the "barker," and the man at the door.

As the man at the door looked in, the last of the balls struck him below the belt, and he collapsed in the arms of the "barker," who was crowding in behind him.

The last of the balls! That hollow, pasteboard tube seemed to have been a perfect mine of shooting stars. It had disgorged itself of a dozen. Carl had not counted them—he was too busy with other matters—but it seemed to him as though the tube had been fully an hour getting rid of its contents.

A madder assortment of freaks it would have been harder to find than wrangled and protested, there in the side-show tent, while they rubbed their bruises and shook the kinks out of themselves.

"It was one of the Armless Wonder's Roman candles," came in sepulchral tones from the Ossified Man as he climbed back to his slab.

"I'll quit the show, and give two weeks' notice this minute," piped the Bearded Lady as she picked her way through the scattered glass, "if they don't cut out these fireworks. My goodness! You might just as well be killed outright as scart to death. Wha'ju jump onto our stage for?" and she glared at the chief, who was gently massaging his burned spot.

"By Jocks," answered the chief, "I didn't care where I jumped s'long's I got away from the fireworks."

"It was the Dutchman done it," flared the Wonder.

"He's a freak," rumbled the Ossified Man. "Kick him out."

"I don'd peen a freak," said Carl angrily, throwing the burned-out tube at the O. M. "Oof I vas, den here iss vere I should shday."

"Did you set that Roman candle to goin'?" demanded the "barker" fiercely.

"I don'd set him to going, py chimineddy! I hat him in my handt, und he vent off mit himself. Dot's all aboutt it."

"This ain't no place for them kind o' jokes," cried the Elastic Skin Man. "He's played hob with this outfit: Give him a h'ist!"

The ticket seller, the "barker," and the man on the door all three fell upon Carl. Between them they had the Dutch boy turning cartwheels through the entrance.

Ping, the cause of all the trouble, slipped away quietly under the canvas wall—but not until he had picked up something white from the earthen floor of the tent. The object lay close to where Carl had lain, and Ping conceived the idea that it belonged to the Dutch boy and that it was his duty to recover it and return it to the owner.

CHAPTER II.

THE "BARKER" SHOWS HIS TEETH.

When Carl finally rounded up his wits he found himself sitting under the lee of the "animal top," leaning against one of the guy ropes. The wind was blowing half a gale, and the big tents swayed and tugged at their fastenings. There was only one idea just then in the Dutch boy's mind, and that was this:

"How dit dot Roman gandle go off mit itseluf? I remember taking him in my handt und holting him pehindt me, und den—whizz, bang! Ach, how der shparks dit fly! Dere vas forty-lefen palls in der gandle, und I hit a freak mit efery pall. Donnervetter, vat a hot time!"

At this point Ping came rounding the curved canvas wall, head to the wind, blouse and wide trousers flapping, and pulling himself along by means of the guy ropes.

"Hello, Clal!" he called, mooring himself to a tent stake.

"Hello yourself once!" answered Carl, drawing one powder-blackened hand up and down his trousers leg. "How you like der pooty firevorks?"

"By Klismus!" grinned the Chinaman, "him velly fine. Fleaks no likee."

"How dit der gandle go off mit itseluf? Tell me dose."

Ping's grin faded from his yellow face, and he grew solemn and serious.

"No savvy, Clal. Him devil joss stick, awri'. Whoosh!"

A sudden suspicion darted through Carl's brain as he stared at Ping. The Chinese boy was altogether too serious.

"Py shiminy grickets!" whooped Carl, "vas it you dot douched him off ven der gandle vas my pack pehindt und I don'd see? Dit you make all der drouples? Oof I vas sure oof dot, den I would eat you oop like some ham santviches."

Ping gave a yell of protest.

"We allee same fliends, huh?" he demanded. "Why my makee touble fo' fliend?"

"Vell, I don'd know for vy, aber such chokes iss nod vat I like. Oof I findt oudt dot you lit der gandle, den I vill ged efen for dot. You bed my life, I pay efery debt vat I owe."

Ping looked serious. Then, glad that he was able to change the subject, he remarked:

"You losee one piecee papel in tent, Clal?"

"I don't got one piecee paper, shink. How could I lose somet'ing vat I don't got?"

"My findee him same place you makee tumble. Look."

Ping drew the folded sheet from his blouse. Carl stretched out his hand.

"I vill take a look at dot," said he.

When opened flat, the sheet contained writing, but it was not writing that Carl could read.

"Vedder it iss a ledder or nod," mused Carl, "I don'd know. Vat I see on dis paper looks schust like hen dracks. It don'd vas English, und it don'd vas German. Iss it shink wriding, Ping?"

Ping dropped to his knees and examined the sheet of paper upside down and sideways.

"My no savvy," he answered. "Him not China writing. Some fleak lettee dlop—him fleak writing. Him no gottee sense."

Carl wrinkled his brows ominously.

"I tell you somet'ing," said he. "Dere iss more to dis alretty as we know, Ping. I peen a tedectif. Meppy you vill make a tedectif, too. Subbose we findt oudt vat der ledder iss aboutt?"

"Plaps we no makee find out."

"Dot's vere der tedectif part comes in."

"Plaps we no gottee sense enough, Clal."

"*Ach, du lieber!*" grunted Carl. "Ditn't I findt dot Margaret Manners vat vas draveling mit der show? Ditn't I get dot Ben Ali Hindoo feller on der run? Ditn't I vin fife tousant tollars?"

"You no gettee fi' thousan' dol'."

"I vill get dot. It has to come from Inchia, und Inchia iss more as ten tousant miles from vere I am. It takes time to get money from Inchia. I was a shmard feller to do all dot. Meppy I gif you some lessons und you vill be as shmard as vat I am."

"Plaps."

"You vant to choin in mit me, hey?"

"Awri'. No savvy pidgin, Clal. What we do?"

Before Carl could answer, the "barker" for the side show came running around the tent wall. Carl grabbed the letter out of Ping's hand and thrust it into his pocket.

"What yuh got there?" demanded the "barker," coming to a halt and glaring at Carl.

"You don'd got some pitzness to know," was the Dutch boy's calm reply.

The "barker's" name was Bill Wily, but, on account of his shady character, he was generally known as Wily Bill.

"I lost a letter durin' that shake-up in the tent," said Wily Bill, truculently, "an' it looked to me as though that sheet yuh just tucked away in your jeans was the one. Hand it over."

"Don'd get gay mit yourseluf," warned Carl, rising to his feet.

"Where'd yuh git that paper?"

"Dot's for me to know. Oof you get pitzness any blace else, don'd let us keep you a minid. Moof on. I don'd like you none too vell, anyhow."

"You'll give me that paper," declared Wily Bill angrily, "or I'll twist that Dutch neck o' yours."

"Meppy you vill," answered Carl, "aber I don'd tink. Here it iss different as it vas in der show. You don'd got der freaks und der odders to helup."

"I'll find Burton," fumed Wily Bill, "and I'll tell him yuh've stole that there paper off me."

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"Den you vill be telling Purton vat ain'd so."

The "barker" took a step forward.

"Yuh goin' to give me that?" he shouted.

"Say," answered Carl, with a happy thought, "you tell me vat iss in der ledder, den oof it agrees mit vat iss dere you prove he belong mit you, und I gif him oop. Oddervise, nod. Hey?"

"Oh, you fall off the earth!" growled Wily Bill. "I don't have to tell what's in the letter in order to prove it's mine, see? Fork over."

Carl had thought he might get Wily Bill to translate the "hen tracks," but the "barker" either could not or would not.

"You und me don'd agree on dot," said Carl stoutly. "You tell me vat iss in der ledder, oder you don'd get him. Dot's all aboutt it."

"Look here," and Wily Bill made a threatening gesture with his clinched fist, "pass that over or I'll push yer face inter yer back hair. Now, then. Cough up or take the consequences."

"I dradder fightt as eat some meals!" whooped Carl. "Come on vonce, oof dot's der game. Hit me in der eye! Dot geds my madt oop kevicker as anyt'ing, und I fightt pedder der madder vat I ged. Eider eye, it *machts nichts aus*. Blease!"

With a savage exclamation, Wily Bill threw himself forward and lunged with the full force of his right. Carl ducked sideways. The fist missed him, and the impetus of the blow hurled Wily Bill over the guy rope.

Boss Burton, the proprietor of the show, seeing the clash from a distance, was hurrying up to take a part in proceedings. He arrived just in time to collide with the tumbling form of the "barker."

It was with difficulty that Burton retained his footing. The breath was knocked out of him, and as he tottered and gasped he glared at Wily Bill.

"Dere iss Poss Purton," chuckled Carl. "Schust tell him vat you vant und see vat he say."

"What're you roughing things up like this for, Wily?" demanded the showman. "You know very well I don't allow any fighting on the show grounds."

"That Dutchman," answered the "barker," getting his temper a little in hand, "has got a letter belongin' to me. I want it, an' he won't give it up."

"Is that so, Carl?" asked Burton, whirling on the Dutch boy.

"I don'd know vedder or nod it iss so," replied Carl. "I got a ledder, und he say it pelongs by him. Aber he von't say vat iss in der ledder, so how could I know?"

"Isn't the envelope addressed?"

"Dere iss no enfellup."

"Isn't there a name on the letter?"

"Dere iss no name anyvere."

"It's from a pal o' mine, Burton," explained Wily Bill, "and I dropped it out of my kick in the tent. This Dutch lobster and that chink turned on a row in the side show. The Dutchman got one of the Armless Wonder's Roman candles, and while he held it behind him the chink touched a match to it, and we had all kinds of fireworks for a——"

"Donner und blitzen!" yelled Carl, facing Ping and shaking his fist. "Den it *vas* you, hey? I von't be no teductif mit you! You vas no bard to blay sooch a choke! I vill ged efen, yah, so hellup me! Oof you——"

"That will do," cut in Boss Burton sternly. "We'll settle this letter business before we do anything else. Where did you get the thing, Carl?"

"Dot false-alarm chink gif him by me," answered Carl, watching angrily while Ping allowed the wind to waft him out of sight around the side-show tent.

"Where did he get it?"

"He picked him oop from vere I lay on der groundt. Dot's vat he say, aber my confidences in him vas padly shook."

"Give it to me."

There was no dodging such an order from the proprietor of the show, and the folded sheet was handed over.

Burton looked at the letter. While he was doing so, Wily Bill made a desperate grab for it. The showman was too quick for the "barker," and jerked the sheet out of reach.

"That's your game, is it?" growled Burton. "Go back to your job, Wily. Come to me after the show, and we'll talk this over. I don't like the way you're acting in this matter, and if you know when you're well off, you'll put your foot on the soft pedal and keep it there. Not a word! Clear out!"

With a black scowl, and a look at Carl that boded him no good, Wily Bill turned on his heel and made his way back to the side show.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN FROM WASHINGTON.

"Sufferin' hurricanes, what a blow!" remarked Joe McGlory. "What good's a flying machine, pard, when a spell of weather puts it down and out? The *Comet's* a back number in a hatful of wind."

"Hatful!" repeated Motor Matt. "If this breeze isn't doing fifty miles an hour I'm no hand at guessing."

The two motor boys were in their old rendezvous, the calliope tent, sitting on a couple of overturned buckets and listening to the roar and boom of bellying canvas, the flutter and snap of banners, and the whistle of violently disturbed air around the tent poles.

The big card played by Burton was the aëroplane flights, two of which were given every day, before the afternoon and the evening performance—wind and weather permitting. Since the motor boys' engagement with Burton, Matt had not failed to take the aëroplane aloft on an average of more than two days a week. This violent wind made the morning flight at Reid's Lake one of the "off" days. There was a chance, however, that the wind would go down with the sun, and that it would be possible to do a little flying before the evening show.

It was Saturday, and the "Big Consolidated" was to remain at Reid's Lake over Sunday and give two performances Monday. On Monday, therefore, it was quite possible the *Comet* would be able to carry out her part of the circus programme.

"Up in North Dakota," observed Joe McGlory, "where it blows like sin when it *does* blow, you've capered around in the sky in the face of a breeze every bit as strong as this, Matt."

"There it was different," answered the young motorist. "I didn't have to manipulate the machine over the show grounds, and there were not thousands of people directly underneath to suffer if the aëroplane didn't come down in the place from which it started. I don't want any more accidents like the one we had at Jackson."

"Where a snake short-circuited the engine, and you had all kinds of hair-raising experiences," breathed McGlory. "Speak to me about that! By gorry, I wouldn't even look on while you pulled off another such performance, pard, for a million in yellow boys!"

Before the king of the motor boys could make any reply, Landers, the man who had charge of the calliope, showed himself in the tent door. Behind him trailed a smooth-faced man of forty, in a cap and gray tweeds.

"That's Motor Matt," said Landers, pointing to the young motorist. "This gentleman wants a word with you, Matt," he added, "and I volunteered to show him where you could be found."

Landers ducked away again, and the stranger pushed into the tent.

"Fancy!" he exclaimed, staring at Matt, then at McGlory, and then letting his eyes wander around the tent. "So this is Motor Matt. Ah, by Jove!"

McGlory picked up a bucket, emptied the water out of it, and turned it upside down.

"Sit down, pilgrim," said the cowboy, "and make yourself comfortable."

The other pulled up his trousers at the knees and deposited himself carefully on the bucket. He laughed a little, lifted a round piece of glass from his coat and tucked it into his right eye, and then took another look at Matt and McGlory.

"Only fancy!" he murmured.

"If you want to join the show," said McGlory, with a wink at Matt, "you'll have to see Burton."

"Join the show?" returned the other. "Why, I don't want to join the blooming circus. I'm just looking for Motor Matt, don't you know."

"You're not looking for him, neighbor, but at him. It's your move."

"Deuced odd, that. My move. In other words, I'm to tell my business, eh? It's private, very. I want to talk with Motor Matt alone."

McGlory started to get up, but Matt stopped him with a gesture.

"This is my chum, Joe McGlory," said he. "I have no secrets from him. Fire away, sir."

"Aw," drawled the other. "Well, if that's the way of it, then here goes."

Drawing a morocco case from his pocket, the stranger extracted a card and handed it to Matt.

"Reginald Pierce Twomley," ran the legend on the card; then, down in the lower left-hand corner were the words: "Attaché British Embassy, Washington."

Matt passed the card to McGlory.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Twomley," said Matt. "What can we do for you?"

Reginald Pierce Twomley lighted a cigarette. It was a pretty cigarette, with a gilt monogram on one side. He offered the case to the boys, but they respectfully declined.

"Aw, let us approach our business with method," said Mr. Twomley. "I have come from Washington—aw—on very important business. Allow me to prove my right to act as agent for his excellency the Ambassador by recapitulating a few facts with which you must be familiar.

"At one time, my dear sir, there was with this circus a Hindoo mahout who called himself Ben Ali. That was not his real name, but it will serve. With Ben Ali was a young lady who was called Haidee. Ben Ali was a rotter—the worst case of thug that ever came out of the Bombay presidency—and he had a powerful rajah for a brother. Ben Ali took care of the rajah's elephant herd. The rajah's sister married one Lionel Manners. Manners died, his wife perished by the infernal practice of *suttee*—even now secretly practised in spite of the English government—and Ben Ali left India with Manners' only daughter, Margaret. The girl known as Haidee was in reality Margaret Manners. Am I correct?"

Matt nodded.

"Ben Ali was an adept in the hypnotic line," proceeded Twomley, looking thoughtfully into the smoke of his cigarette, "and Miss Manners was in this country and with the show against her will. Her uncle, the rascally Ben Ali, kept her under his evil influence, and was gradually causing her to forget even her own identity. The mahout bore a grudge against his powerful brother, the rajah, and he had stolen the girl in a spirit of revenge. Eventually, he hoped to force the rajah to pay many rupees for Miss Manners before Ben Ali released her. But this is beside the mark. I don't care a hap'orth about that part of it. The point that concerns the British Ambassador, Sir Roger Morse-Edwards, is this:

"You and your friends, Motor Matt, discovered who Haidee really was. You rescued her from the evil spell of the mahout, and she was left in Lafayette, Indiana, in charge of a worthy English lady, pending advices from her uncle, the rajah, in India. We have received advices, not from the rajah, but direct from our foreign office. I was sent forthwith to Lafayette to get Miss Manners, take her to New York, and, with a suitable maid as companion, send her by first steamer to Liverpool, and so to London."

"Good!" exclaimed Matt, with visible satisfaction. "Miss Manners is a very fine girl, and I suppose her future will make up for the many hardships she has undergone while in this country."

"Exactly," answered Twomley, "if we could find her. But we can't. She has disappeared."

"Disappeared?" gasped Matt.

"That is the way of it. I went to this English lady in Lafayette, and she received me with astonishment. Several days before a man, professing to be from the ambassador, had called and taken Miss Manners away. We are done, done as brown as a kipper, and a telegram to Washington brought an answer requesting me to hunt up this show and have a talk with you."

Motor Matt was astounded. And so was McGlory.

"Have you any idea who the man was that called on the English woman in Lafayette and took Miss Manners away?"

"No. The Lafayette police are looking for him."

"Have you any idea that Ben Ali is mixed up in the affair?"

"I have, Motor Matt, and a very clear idea. I was ten years in India, and learned the natives there, and their ways. It was for that, I fancy, that Sir Roger asked me to come for Miss Manners. While I was about taking the train at Lafayette, yesterday, I received another message from the ambassador. That message informed me that a telegram had been received from Ben Ali, informing Sir Roger that he again had the girl in his possession, and that she would be delivered to any agent Sir Roger might send after her on payment of ten thousand pounds."

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"Fifty thousand dollars!" exclaimed Matt. Then he whistled.

"Old Ben Ali is out for the stuff," muttered McGlory grimly.

"He's a crafty beggar!" commented Twomley. "I left all the telegrams with the police, and Sir Roger is taking the whole matter up with the United States state department. The Secret Service of the government will presently be at work on this case, for it is of international importance. Can you give any information, Motor Matt, that will help us find Ben Ali, or Miss Manners?"

Matt shook his head.

"Why doesn't the ambassador agree to send some one to meet Ben Ali? Then the rascal could be caught."

"He's too clever to let himself be caught. He——"

Just here Boss Burton strode into the tent, followed by Carl.

"Shut up about that, Carl," the showman was growling. "You haven't any right to that letter, and I'm going to keep it."

"I'm in der tedectif pitzness," returned Carl, "und I need dot ledder, py shinks, to helup unrafel der case. Modor Matt," and Carl appealed to his pard, "make Purton gif me der ledder."

"What letter?" demanded Matt.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Burton to Carl; "we'll leave the letter with Matt. If Wily can prove it's his, then Matt can turn the thing over to him."

Burton handed a folded sheet to Matt. The latter, entirely in the dark, opened the sheet and laid it on his knee.

"What sort of writing is this?" he asked.

"That's too many for me. It isn't Chinese—Carl said Ping told him that—and it isn't Dutch. Of course, it's not English. And who it belongs to, or where it came from, or what's the good of it, is more than I know. But it appears to have caused a lot of bother."

"It's Hindoostanee," spoke up Twomley, staring at the open sheet. "I can read the language. If you wish, I'll translate it."

Then, for the first time, Burton and Carl turned on the Englishman and took his measure.

CHAPTER IV.

A CLUE IN HINDOOSTANEE.

"Who are you, my friend?" inquired Burton bluntly.

"A friend of Motor Matt," replied Twomley easily. "He'll vouch for me, I fancy."

"Mr. Twomley, attaché of the British Legation at Washington, Burton," said Matt. "Mr. Burton," Matt added to the Englishman, "is the proprietor of the show. The other lad is Carl Pretzel, who is also a chum of mine. We can talk over this matter before them. Carl had everything to do with the finding of Margaret Manners, back there at Lafayette."

"Aw," drawled Twomley, screwing his monocle in his eye, and regarding the Dutch boy, "he's the claimant for that thousand pounds reward, I dare say."

Tremors of excitement ran galloping through Carl.

"Haf you prought der money?" he fluttered. "Vas you looking for me to pay ofer dot rewart?"

"I am sorry to say that I haven't brought the money. That matter is still in abeyance."

"Vat iss dot?" asked the puzzled Carl. "I don'd *verstch* dot vort apeyance."

"He means the matter is still pending, Carl," put in Matt. "In other words, you haven't got the money yet."

"I know dot, aber vill I ged it? Dot's vat gifs me some vorries."

"The rajah's a regular topper," said Twomley. "He'd never miss a thousand pounds, and I fancy he'll do the right thing."

"Mooch opliged," breathed Carl, in deep satisfaction. "It vas a habbiness to know dot I ged him some dime."

"Now, if you wish," went on Twomley, stretching out his hand for the letter.

"Just a moment, Mr. Twomley," said Matt. "We don't know much about this letter, and I'd like to find out where and how Carl got it, and what the dispute is about."

The Dutch boy launched into an explanation, beginning with the Roman candle and ending at the place where Burton refused to turn the letter over to Wily Bill. Carl touched but lightly on the culpability of Ping in the matter of the Roman candle. In this he was wise. Motor Matt's orders were to the effect that there should be no bickering between the Dutch boy and the Chinese lad. They had been at swords' points for a long while and had only recently developed a friendly feeling for each other.

"I always sized up that Wily Bill for a false alarm," remarked McGlory. "Can he read that Hindoostanee lingo? I'll bet my spurs he can't! If that's the case, what's he doing with the letter?"

"He must have wanted it a whole lot," said Matt, "or he wouldn't have made such a fight to get it. Perhaps the letter itself will be a clue. Tell us what's in it, Mr. Twomley," and Matt passed the letter to the Englishman.

The latter studied the sheet with absorbed attention. Finally he sprang up.

"By Jove!" he exploded.

"What's the matter?" inquired Matt.

"This is luck! Just fancy such a clue coming into our hands at this very moment when it is most needed. Aw, it's—aw—incredible."

"You might give us a chance to pass judgment on that, Mr. Twomley," returned Burton. "Maybe it's not so incredible as you seem to think."

"It was written by Ben Ali," said the attaché.

"*That* tinhorn!" exclaimed McGlory. "I thought we'd cut him out of our herd altogether. Beats creation how he keeps bobbing up."

"Who's it for?" spoke up Matt. "Has Bill Wily any right to it?"

"The name of Wily doesn't appear anywhere in the writing," answered Twomley. "In fact, the letter's addressed to a fellow named Dhondaram."

Here was another hot shot. Both McGlory and Matt were brought excitedly to their feet.

"Dhondaram!" growled Burton, with an expressive glance at the king of the motor boys. "I thought we'd heard the last of that villain."

"Who was he?" demanded Twomley.

"A Hindoo——"

"So I gather from the name."

"He blew into the show grounds with a cobra and a home-made flute, when we were at Jackson, and I gave him Ben Ali's place as driver of our man-killin' elephant, Rajah. Oh, he did a lot of things, Dhondaram did. We captured him, but he got loose and dropped off the train between stations."

"Aw, Ben Ali didn't know that," reflected Twomley. "Ben Ali must have thought he was still with the show, and sent this letter to him."

"What does the letter say?" asked Matt, with some impatience.

"It asked Dhondaram to finish his work as soon as possible and to join Ben Ali, with the money, in short order."

A silence followed, and during the silence the motor boys exchanged wondering looks.

"What was Dhondaram's work?" queried Twomley.

"Nothing more or less than putting Pard Matt out of the running," replied McGlory. "Ben Ali's on the warpath against Matt, because of what he did in Lafayette, and Dhondaram tried hard to wipe my pard off the slate."

"Ben Ali speaks of money," went on Twomley. "What does that mean?"

Burton muttered wrathfully.

"I'll bet a thousand," said he, "that refers to the proceeds of the afternoon performance in Jackson, which the ticket man and this Dhondaram tried to get away with. Ben Ali put up the job with Dhondaram, and the ticket man was helping them out."

"Matters must have been lively all around in Jackson," observed Twomley. "Dhondaram didn't get the money?"

"Not so you could notice," answered McGlory. "Pard Matt jumped in and plugged that little game."

"Ben Ali," reasoned the king of the motor boys, "has probably been thinking of recapturing Miss Manners for some time. All he had Dhondaram try to do, in Jackson, was to help on his villainous schemes. But Dhondaram failed. Probably Ben Ali is needing some money pretty badly, about now. What is the date of that letter, Mr. Twomley?"

"There is no date."

"Then there's no telling how long Bill Wily has carried it in his pocket?"

The attaché shook his head.

"He must have got it after we left Jackson, pard," interposed McGlory. "If he had got it before, he'd have passed it on to Dhondaram."

"How he got it at all is a mystery," mused the young motorist. "He has probably seen and talked with Ben Ali."

"Before the show got to Jackson, then," continued the cowboy, who was doing a little sharp thinking. "If he had talked with Ben Ali after the doings in Jackson, he'd have told the old skinner how Dhondaram fell down."

"There's a clue here, but it's not so promising as it might be," came disappointedly from the Englishman.

Matt walked toward the tent door.

"Our best clue," said he decisively, "is Bill Wily. We'd better go to the side show and have a talk with him."

"Bring him here, Matt," suggested Burton. "We can talk with him in this place to better advantage than in the side-show tent. I'll go with you and make sure he comes. The rest of you wait," and the showman started from the calliope tent after Matt.

Inquiry of the man on the door at the side show developed the fact that Bill Wily had started for town. He had been gone about five minutes, Matt and Burton were informed, and had left the show grounds for the street-car track.

"He's making a getaway!" averred Burton.

"That's the way it looks," agreed Matt. "We've got to stop him, if we can."

Without loss of time the king of the motor boys and the showman hustled for the place where the street-car track made a loop, just beyond a big concert garden. They were hoping to catch Wily before he could board a car.

But in this they were disappointed. A car was moving off in the direction of town, and all their frantic yells and gestures were powerless to secure the attention of the conductor.

"It'll be fifteen minutes before there's another car," panted Burton, "and by that time the 'barker' will be—the deuce only knows where. It's a cinch, Matt, that he's scared, and is running away. If there was an automobile handy, we could overhaul the car." Burton looked in every direction. "But, of course," he added, "whenever you want a chug-wagon there's none in sight."

A familiar humming drew Motor Matt's attention. Looking in the direction of the sound, he saw a motor-cycle spinning along the road from the direction of Grand Rapids. A young fellow of nineteen or twenty was in the saddle.

"There's something that will do—if we can borrow it," said Matt, and jumped into the road and waved his hands.

The motorcycle came to a stop.

"Are you flagging me?" asked the driver of the machine.

"Yes," said Matt hurriedly. "I want to overhaul the street car that just left here. There's a man aboard that we've got to catch. Will you let me take your motorcycle?"

"Well, I guess not!" was the reply. "The last time I loaned this machine I was two days getting it back into shape again."

"I'll give you twenty dollars for the use of it, young man," put in Burton eagerly.

"No inducement," was the answer.

"There's hard luck for you, Motor Matt," grunted Burton.

The young fellow had been on the point of starting away, but he suddenly paused and turned to Matt.

"Are you Matt King," he asked, "the fellow they call Motor Matt?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Doing an aéroplane stunt with the show?"

"Yes."

"Well, take the machine. It won't cost you a cent, either. I work in a motor-car factory in the Rapids, and we've heard a good deal about you there. I'm tickled to death to be able to help you out. Bring the machine back here when you're done with it, and you'll find me waiting."

"Such is fame!" laughed Burton.

With a hasty word of thanks, Matt headed the machine the other way and got into the saddle.

One turn of the pedal and the motor took up its cycle. Half a minute later the king of the motor boys was out of sight down the road. [Pg 8]

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING WRONG.

McGlory, Carl, and Twomley waited in the calliope tent until their patience was exhausted.

"Py shiminy," fluttered Carl, "I bed you somet'ing for nodding dot Wily Pill don'd vas by der site show yet."

"I reckon you've dropped a bean on the right number," agreed the cowboy. "What's our next jump, your highness?"

The question was put to the Englishman.

"Aw, I say," said the latter, in remonstrance, "I'm not that, don't you know. I'm not of the peerage. An uncle and three cousins, all distressingly healthy, stand between me and an earldom."

"I want to know!" murmured McGlory, in mock surprise. "Why, I didn't think any one this side a lord could wear one of those little window panes in the right eye."

"You jest," said Twomley, with a faint smile. "Fancy!"

"Well, anyhow, what are we going to do? Sit here and wait, or hit the trail ourselves and find out what's doing?"

"Hit the trail?" echoed Twomley, lifting his brows. "Deuced odd, that. Why should we hit it, and what shall we hit it with?"

"Vat a ignorance!" murmured Carl.

"We'll hit it with our feet, excellency," went on McGlory.

He had a hearty contempt for the monocle, and took it out on the wearer.

"I don't know whether I rise to that," returned Twomley, "but if it means to go forth and look into the cause of our friends' delay in returning with Wily Bill, then, it's ay, ay, with a will."

"Come on, then, and we'll vamose."

McGlory led the way to the side-show tent, and Twomley and Carl followed him closely.

The crowds had long since entered the big tents, and the performance in the "circus top" was in full blast. With the beginning of the "big show" there was no business left for the annex, and the ticket seller was withdrawn under the lee of a canvas wall, hobnobbing with the man on the door. These two informed McGlory, Twomley, and Carl that Wily Bill had left for town on the street car, and that Motor Matt and Burton had started for the car line in the hope of overhauling him. But that had been all of half an hour before.

The three searchers immediately departed for the car-line loop. There they found Burton and a young fellow kicking their heels impatiently and keeping their eyes down the track.

"Where's Matt?" asked McGlory.

"Ask us something easy," replied Burton. "Wily has hiked for town. When we got here the car he was on was too far down the track to stop. This young man"—the showman indicated his companion—"came along on a motor cycle. Matt borrowed the machine with the intention of overtaking the car and bringing Wily back, but neither has shown up yet. Must be something wrong."

"Vell, I bed you!" said Carl anxiously. "On some modor cycles Mile-a-minid Matt always geds vere he iss going pefore he shtarts. Somet'ing has gone crossvays alretty, und dot's no tream."

"I'm doing a century to-day," remarked the motor cycle owner, "and this is cutting into my time."

"Don't fret about your wheel, neighbor," spoke up McGlory. "You'll get it back, all right."

"I'm not fretting. Motor Matt's welcome to a dozen of the gasoline bikes if I had 'em. But I'd like to be moving on."

Burton looked at his watch.

"Matt's been gone thirty-five minutes," he announced.

"If he was running all the time," observed the lad from the motor-car works, "he could be thirty-five miles from here."

"Perhaps," ventured Twomley, "he has mucked the play, somehow."

"Mucked the play!" exclaimed the exasperated McGlory. "That's not his style, your lordship."

"We'll wait twenty-five minutes longer," announced Burton. "If Matt isn't back by then, this young man and I will start along the car track in my runabout and we'll see what we can find."

"Dake me along," clamored Carl. "I vas afraidt somet'ing iss wrong mit Matt."

"If there are any extra passengers in the runabout," said McGlory resolutely, "I'm the one."

"My word!" muttered Twomley. "I hope everything's all serene, I do, indeed. I'm a juggins at waiting when there's so much excitement going on."

"Juggins is good," grunted McGlory. "You can retire somewhere, Mr. Twomley, and hold onto your nerves while the rest of us hunt up the 'barker.' You'll not shine much till we find Wily Bill, anyhow."

"You're an odd stick," answered Twomley, whose good nature was not a thing to be ruffled.

He was sharp enough to see that the cowboy had a pique at him, and he had sufficient good sense to take it calmly.

"Py shinks," said Carl, after ten more weary minutes had passed, "Matt has hat time to do some centuries himseluf, und I can't guess it oudt for vy he don'd get pack. Oof you don'd dake me in der runaboutt, den, so helup me, I vill valk. Anydink is pedder to shtand as uncerdainties."

Carl constantly watched the road that paralleled the car track. And so, for the most part, did the Englishman.

"My word, but it is trying!" murmured Twomley. "If we could only see a bit of dust, then we'd know Motor Matt was coming, and my relief would be profound."

"Dust! *Ach, himmelblitzen!* Vy, Matt vill go so fast on dot machine der dust vill be a mile pehindt und you don'd see dot."

"Here's something," came from McGlory. "Speak to me about it, will you? Where's Ping? Little Slant-eyes is always around when anything is doing, but I haven't seen him since he finished watering the calliope."

Carl knew why Ping wasn't around. Ping was afraid Carl would do something to him to play even for the Roman-candle business. Oh, yes, that was an easy one for Carl to guess. There was secret satisfaction for the Dutch boy in the reflection. And he gloated over it and kept it to himself.

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"Time's up," announced Burton, snapping his watch, "and here's where I go for the runabout. My thoroughbred is hitched to the buggy, so be ready to go with me," he added to the owner of the motor cycle.

"I'm not worrying about the wheel, understand," said the lad, "but about the century I'm to turn. I'm making it right in the teeth of this wind."

Inside of five minutes Burton came with the runabout, his Kentucky thoroughbred stamping off the ground at a record pace.

The runabout seat was narrow, and Burton and the lad from the motor-car factory filled it comfortably. But they took McGlory on their knees and whipped away, leaving Twomley and Carl gazing after them disconsolately.

Hardly were the runabout and its passengers out of sight when a car rounded the loop and deposited its passengers on the platform.

"Led's ged on der car, Misder Dumley," suggested Carl. "Ve vill vatch der road as ve go, und oof ve see somet'ing ve vill trop off. I peen a tedectif feller, und oof dere iss any clues dey von't ged away from me."

"Go you!" answered Twomley heartily.

Any sort of action was a relief for his impatience, and he and Carl scrambled aboard the car.

Meanwhile the pedigreed Kentucky cob was pounding off the distance. In the horse's performance the proud showman lost sight of the main business in hand—temporarily.

"See that knee action!" he exulted. "Did either of you ever see a prettier bit of traveling? We're doing a mile in two-thirty!"

"Bother the horse!" growled McGlory. "Keep your eyes on the road for clues."

"Clues! I'll bet money the 'barker' wouldn't get off the car. How could Matt make him? He couldn't, of course. Nothing short of a cop and a warrant could make Wily Bill leave the car if he was set for reaching Grand Rapids. I might have known that, if I had stopped to think. We'll have to keep right on into town—and, then, like as not, we won't find either Matt or Wily. Now——"

"Whoa!" cried McGlory. "You're shy a few, Burton. Here's where we stop."

"What's up?" returned Burton, reining in his spirited roadster.

"Look there!"

McGlory pointed to the left-hand side of the road. Close to a steep bank, against a clump of bushes, stood the motor cycle.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Burton.

"Great Scott!" cried the owner of the machine.

McGlory tumbled clear of the runabout and started toward the bushes. He had not taken half a dozen steps, however, before he came to a dead stop.

A form fluttered out of the bushes and approached him excitedly.

"Ping!" gasped the cowboy. "Speak to me about this! Where'd you come from, Ping? And where's Pard Matt?"

The Chinese boy's feelings apparently defied expression. He tried to speak, but his lips moved soundlessly. Hopping up and down in his sandals, he waved his arms and pointed—not toward Grand Rapids, but off across a piece of rough woodland.

CHAPTER VI.

A BLUNDER IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

Ping had felt certain that his move in touching off the Roman candle had not been seen. It was a disagreeable surprise to him, therefore, when Bill Wily told Carl just who was responsible for the fireworks.

Ping and Carl were trying hard to be pards. Their hearts were not in the attempt, for deep in the spirit of each one slumbered a latent animosity against the other. But they had to try to fraternize. Motor Matt had issued an edict to the effect that, if they did not become pards, he and McGlory would cut them out of the motor boys' combination.

So the lads did their utmost to appear friendly. They wandered around together, and whenever Matt or McGlory was in sight they locked arms and addressed each other in terms of endearment. When they were away from Matt and McGlory they still kept up the pretense, but in a manner that was more subdued.

Ping could not resist the temptation to touch a match to the Roman candle. He had not expected to cause such a disturbance, and the fact that chaos had reigned in the side show, and that his culpability had become known, filled him with apprehension.

Carl would tell Matt, and Matt would sidetrack his Chinese pard. Ping worried, and had no desire to see Matt, or any one else. The show was to be at Reid's Lake for three days, and there was no Sunday performance. Ping, therefore, could flock by himself until Monday afternoon.

Ping's work consisted of watering the steam calliope, and in helping the aëroplane take its running start for the flights. Owing to the wind, there would be no morning flight, and—very likely, as he argued to himself—no afternoon ascension, either. And Ping knew Motor Matt would not work on Sunday.

Taken all in all, this was a most propitious time for Ping to absent himself from the show grounds. With the idea that he would go into Grand Rapids and hunt up some of his countrymen, he left the grounds and made his way around the concert garden to the car-line loop.

Here his nerve began to fail him, and he allowed two or three cars to come and go without getting aboard. Finally he bolstered up his tottering resolution and climbed into one of the cars.

Looking through the open window, after he had taken his seat, he saw Wily Bill swing up by the hand rails.

Ping was asking himself what this could mean when the car pulled out. A little worried, he knew not for what reason, he got up from his seat and walked to the forward platform, thinking it well to keep out of Bill Wily's sight.

Suddenly he became aware of something. A voice, from far behind, was shouting for the car to stop. The passengers, thrusting their heads from the windows, were looking back, and some of them were talking excitedly.

Ping, hanging out from the lower step, turned his gaze rearward, and what he saw caused his heart to thump wildly against his ribs.

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One of the little two-wheeled devil wagons was rushing along the road that paralleled the track, coming like a limited choo-choo train, and Motor Matt was in the saddle!

Ping had but one thought. The Dutch boy had told Matt about the Roman candle, and Matt was chasing the street car in order to remove his Chinese pard, read the riot act to him, and cast him adrift.

What a turn Ping had! He crouched down on the step, and the clatter of the gong, as the conductor gave the motorman the bell from the rear platform, sent a shiver of dread through his nerves.

Rather than face Matt and be cut out of the motor boys' combination, Ping would have done almost anything. The only thing that suggested itself at that moment was to jump and run. His original intention to lie low until the Roman-candle incident blew over grew stronger in his mind.

The car was beginning to slow down, but it was still proceeding at a lively gait when Ping threw himself straight out from the lower step.

The Chinese boy did not know the proper way to alight from a swiftly moving trolley car, and the result of his leap can be imagined.

The passengers who were looking out from that side of the car had a vision of a small Chinaman in the air, pigtail flying. The next instant the Chinaman touched ground, but found it moving too fast for a secure foothold. Ping bounded into the air again, his slouch hat going in one direction, his sandals in another, and he himself describing what is technically known as a parabola. The Le Bons—the best "kinkers" in the Big Consolidated—could not have twisted themselves into more fantastic shapes than did Ping during that stunt of ground-and-lofty tumbling. He landed on the ground like a frog taking to the water from the top of a toadstool, and he wound up his performance by throwing a number of choice cartwheels and then sitting up in the dust and looking around in considerable mental perturbation.

About the first thing he saw and was able to realize was that another besides himself had made a jump from the car. The other was Wily Bill, and he must have dropped from the rear platform a

little before Ping dropped from the platform forward.

Wily Bill, however, must have known how to jump from a swiftly moving car and yet keep his balance, for he was on his feet and making a dash for a brushy bank at the roadside.

Motor Matt had swerved his motor cycle and was making in the "barker's" direction, calling loudly the while for him to stop.

The light that dawned on Ping, just then, was a good balm for his bruises.

Matt was not chasing him, after all, but had been hot on the trail of Wily Bill!

While Ping sat there in the dust, hat and sandals gone, his clothes torn and awry, and himself more or less disorganized, he saw Wily Bill scramble up the steep bank and vanish among the bushes on the top of it. Possibly thirty seconds later, Matt sprang from the motor cycle, leaped up the ascent like an antelope, and likewise vanished.

"By Klismus!" murmured Ping, rubbing his knees. "Velly funny pidgin! My no savvy. One piecee queer biz, you bettee. Wow! China boy all blokee up! Motol Matt no wanchee pullee pin on China boy. Hoop-a-la!"

Between his physical pain on account of his bruises and his rejoicing over the discovery that Matt had not been following him, Ping failed to observe that the street car had stopped and backed up to the place nearest the spot where he was crooning to himself and rubbing his bruised limbs. It was not until the conductor and the motorman faced him that Ping realized that he was the object of their consideration.

"Didju fall off?" asked the conductor.

"No makee fall," answered Ping, cocking up his almond eyes, "makee jump."

"Blamed wonder yu didn't break yer neck!" growled the motorman. "Chinks don't know nothin' anyhow."

"Hurt?" asked the conductor, animated by a laudable desire to avoid a damage suit in behalf of the company.

"Heap sore," chattered Ping, "no bleakee bone. Hoop-a-la!" he jubilated, a wide grin cutting his yellow face in half. "Woosh!" he added, as the grin faded and a look of pain took its place.

"Well, I'm stumped!" muttered the conductor. "Is he crazy, or what?" he added, looking at the motorman.

"Pass it up," snapped the motorman. "Chinks is only half baked, best you can say for 'em. Let's snake 'im aboard and go on. We've lost enough time."

One got on either side of Ping and lifted him to his feet. They would have dragged him to the car had he not resisted.

"Leavee 'lone!" he shouted, squirming.

"Oh, snakes!" ground out the exasperated motorman. "Ain't you fer the Rapids?"

"No wanchee go Glan' Lapid!" declared Ping. "Why my makee jump my wanchee go Glan' Lapid?"

"That's so," said the conductor. "What did he jump from the car for if he wanted to go on with us? We'll leave him, Jim. I thought, when I saw him hit the ground, we'd have to take him to the hospital, but he seems to be all right."

Jim, with an angry exclamation, let go of Ping and hustled back to his place at the front end of the car. The conductor mounted the rear platform, and the starting bell jingled.

As the passengers looked back, they saw the Chinese boy attempt a war dance in his stocking feet, then suddenly cease and reach down to clasp his right shin.

"He's got out o' some lunatic asylum," thought the conductor. "Well, it's none o' my funeral," he added, and went into the car and began collecting fares.

Ping, when the car was out of sight, limped around collecting his scattered wardrobe. While he was about it, he was wondering, in his feeble way, why Motor Matt was chasing Bill Wily.

Probably, he reasoned, Wily had cut up so rough with Carl that Matt had thought best to pursue the man and call him to account.

Ping was not in very good condition to take part in the chase, but if he could manage it, and proved of some assistance to Motor Matt, such a move would go far toward making his peace with the king of the motor boys.

"My makee tly," groaned Ping, limping to the place where the motor cycle had been left.

With infinite patience he crawled up the steep slope. One of his legs felt as though it didn't belong to him—it seemed more like a cork leg than anything else, and was numb from ankle to thigh. But, somehow, he managed to get up the bank with it. Pausing there, he called aloud for Motor Matt. His voice echoed weirdly in the scant timber of the rocky ground in front of him, and the shout brought no response.

"My findee Motol Matt," declared the Chinese lad to himself, as he limped into the timber. "My ketchee Motol Matt, mebbey ketchee Wily Bill. Woosh! Hoop-a-la!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS.

While making his slow and painful way among the scrub oaks that grew out of the stony earth, Ping was looking in all directions for Matt and Wily. He was listening, too, with all his ears. But he could neither see nor hear anything of the two for whom he was searching.

"My findee!" he said, with dogged determination. "Motol Matt no chasee China boy, him chasee Wily Bill," and again he exulted.

Action was perhaps the best tonic he could have had. As he swung onward, the leg which did not seem to belong to him began to remind him, in no uncertain manner, that it was really his, and that he was responsible for its condition.

A slow pain made itself manifest, running up the member like a streak of lightning and giving Ping a "gone" feeling in the pit of his stomach. But he was "game." Shutting his teeth on more than one groan, he kept resolutely on through the bleak timber, looking and listening.

Finally he came out on a rough crossroad, which he followed. Five minutes of wabbling along this road brought him to the end of it—and across the end squatted a dingy white house with green shutters. The shutters were closed, and the house had the appearance of being deserted.

Here, Ping felt, was the end of his trail. He was on the wrong track, and the question that pressed upon him was what he should do next.

Withdrawing to a clump of bushes, he sat down and gave the matter extended thought.

Who lived in the house? And was there any one at home? If there was any one in the place, would they talk with him and tell him whether they had seen Matt or the side-show man?

Ping, unlike Carl, made no boasts of being a "tedectif." He could blunder around and, maybe, stumble upon something worth while, but it would be purely a hit-and-miss performance.

Yes, he decided, he had better go to the house and see whether there was anybody there.

Barely had he made up his mind when, with amazing suddenness, Bill Wily rushed around the corner of the house, jammed a key into the door, and disappeared.

He did not close the door behind him, being, as it seemed, in too much of a hurry to attend to such trifling matters.

While Ping was still wrenched with this startling exhibition, an even more astounding spectacle was wafted his way.

Motor Matt followed Wily around the house corner, paused an instant in front of the open door, then was swallowed up in the dark interior.

Ping had not called out, for amazement had held him speechless.

The Chinese boy had blundered in leaping from the street car, but, as it had chanced, that had been a blunder in the right direction. All the heathen gods of luck had been ranged on his side, too, when he followed the crossroad and went into communion with himself in the clump of bushes facing the green-shuttered house.

In about two minutes, Ping figured, Matt would have Bill Wily by the heels. So it followed, if Ping was to have any part in the capture, he would have to hurry.

In the excitement of the moment he forgot his bruises, emerged from the undergrowth, and made his way rapidly toward the house.

At the open door he stopped, thrust his head into the hallway, and used his ears.

The silence was intense, and not the faintest sound was to be heard.

There was something weirdly mysterious about this. With Matt and Wily both in the house, and each more or less hostile toward the other, there should have been a good deal of noise.

A qualm raced through Ping's nerves.

There was something ominous about mysteries, and he had made it a rule to fight shy of ominous things. He did not consider them at all good for a Chinaman's health, or his peace of mind.

And a Melican house, too, deserted and with closed shutters, offered dangers not lightly to be reckoned with.

But Ping, as yet, was Motor Matt's pard; and wherever Motor Matt led the way, then Ping would be more of a hired man than a pard if he did not follow. Shutting his teeth hard, and breathing only when necessary, the Chinese boy crossed the threshold of the house with the green shutters.

He was in a narrow hall that extended through the house from front to rear. A stairway led to the second floor, and two doors opened off to left and right.

Throttling his fears, Ping moved toward the door on the right, his sandals scuffling over the uncarpeted floor. There was no furniture in the house, and the floor was bare.

The swish of the sandals sent vague fears cantering through the little Celestial, and he curled up his toes in order to wedge the soles of his footgear closer to the bottoms of his feet.

The room he entered was dark. With a trembling hand he groped in his blouse for matches. Had he lost his matches in taking that header from the street car? His fears in that respect were

short-lived, for he quickly found half a dozen of the small fire-sticks.

Scratching one, he held it up and peered around. The room was empty—bare as a last year's bird's nest. Going back into the hall, he examined a room on the opposite side. That one also was empty, and over all the emptiness arose a musty odor as of a building long untenanted.

Two more rooms remained to be examined on the first floor.

One of these was the kitchen, and a quantity of soot had drifted down and lay in a heap on the floor. Ping kept away from the soot, and was glad afterward that he had done so. Across the hall was the last of the four rooms comprising the lower part of the house—dark, deserted, and musty as were the other three.

Failure to encounter danger of any visible sort had heartened Ping wonderfully.

"My makee go up stlails," he thought. "Mebby my ketchee something top-side."

He moved softly, but the stairs creaked and rasped under his sandals in spite of his wariness.

There were four rooms upstairs, just as there were below, and in none of the dark chambers did he discover any trace of Motor Matt or of Wily Bill.

Ping was "stumped." The longer he thought of the mystery the more terrified he became.

He believed in demons. Ben Ali, he knew, was possessed of them, for he had heard how the Hindoo, with his eyes alone, had put people to sleep and made them do strange things while they dreamed.

Ping, naturally, had no idea that Ben Ali was in any way concerned with Matt's pursuit of Wily Bill, but the Chinaman's mind reverted to Ben Ali, and Aurung Zeeb, and Dhondaram, three Hindoos, all of whom, at various times, had formed a part of the Big Consolidated.

Had he dared, Ping would have shouted Matt's name at the top of his voice. But he was afraid. A dragon, spouting fire from its red mouth, and with a hundred claw-armed feet, might materialize and attack him, did he dare awake the echoes of that sombre house.

Turning swiftly away from the last room, Ping got astride the banisters, slid to the bottom of the stairs, and ducked through the front door.

The bright sunshine was never pleasanter to him than at that moment. He gulped down a few draughts of pure outside air and started off toward the bushes, bent upon a little solitary reflection.

By a sudden thought, he whirled abruptly, softly drew the door shut, turned the key in the lock, and then slipped the key into his pocket.

He had locked the door on the mysteries, and he hoped the fiends of darkness would respect the barrier until he could think of some way to exorcise them.

Once more in his original place among the bushes, Ping watched the house warily and tried to approach the problem in a reasonable way.

But it was not a question of reason. His investigation had developed facts that defied every logical process.

What had become of Motor Matt?

This was the point that disturbed the Chinese boy most. If he could find Motor Matt, he would be content to leave the question of Wily's whereabouts out of the count.

Abruptly Ping had an idea. Perhaps Wily had rushed out of a rear door, and Matt had followed him? During his investigations, Ping had tried no doors or windows.

Getting to his feet, he made a circle around the house. There was one door in the rear, and only one. Cautiously he approached and tried the knob. The door was locked.

As for the windows, every one was tightly closed in with the green shutters.

These discoveries left Ping in a daze. After several minutes of bewilderment, he finally made up his mind to return to the show grounds, find McGlory, and acquaint him with the situation. McGlory would know what to do!

Then, there was the two-wheeled devil wagon Motor Matt had left at the foot of the bank, by the roadside. A hazy idea of riding the machine back to the show grounds passed through the Chinaman's mind.

To regain the road by the street-car track took time, but the distance was covered much more rapidly than Ping had covered it coming the other way.

Strange to relate, the Chinese boy's bruises caused him little concern. All his aches and pains were lost in the details of the inexplicable situation connected with the deserted house.

While he was in the brush, at the foot of the bank, eying the motor cycle a bit dubiously, he heard a patter of hoofs, a grind of wheels, and a sound of voices.

Looking up, he saw Burton's runabout at a stop. Burton was in the buggy, and so was a young fellow Ping had never seen before—and McGlory. The cowboy was just scrambling out of the vehicle and starting in the direction of the motor cycle.

The sight of reinforcements caused all Ping's wonder, and doubt, and apprehension to revive with redoubled force. He attempted to shout, but no words escaped his lips. Rushing forth to meet

McGlory, he waved his arms and pointed in the direction of the house with the green shutters.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PILE OF SOOT.

Ping was not many minutes recovering the use of his tongue. McGlory grabbed him and shook his powers of speech back into their normal condition.

"Where's Motor Matt?" cried McGlory.

"My no savvy!"

"How did you happen to be here?"

"Stleet cal."

"What're you making a run from the show grounds for without saying a word to Matt?"

That was a point which Ping did not care to reveal. He was not above being careless with the truth in a pinch, having been raised that way. But, while he might resort to a little harmless fiction with McGlory, he would have cut his tongue out before he would have fibbed to Motor Matt.

"Makee see Wily Bill ketchee cal," Ping explained; "my ketchee same cal. Follow Wily Bill. Wily Bill jump from cal. My jump, too. Tumble all ovel load. Wily Bill lun fo' top-side bank. Motol Matt chasee. Motol Matt leavee gas hlorsee by bank. My follow, no findee."

Out of this pigeon English McGlory captured a few germs of sense.

"What the nation was he following Wily for?" demanded Burton. "How did he know we wanted Wily?"

Ping was still equal to the emergency.

"Dutchy boy havee low with Wily Bill," he explained.

"That's right," went on Burton; "you *were* around during the row. I'd forgotten that. That may have been enough to put you on Wily's trail, although I can't figure it out exactly. But you followed him, and then you followed Matt when he ran after Wily. They went up the bank and into the woods, you say?"

"Allee same."

"Then where did they go?" demanded McGlory.

"Makee tlacks fo' house with green blinds."

"They made tracks for a house with green blinds? Now we're getting at it. Where's this house?" [Pg 13]

"Othel side woods. My findee, you savvy; makee sit down, do heap big think. Bymby, 'long come Wily Bill, unlock do', go in house. Plenty soon, 'long come Motol Matt, go in house, too." Ping became oppressed with the awe aroused by the event next to be described, and his voice sank into a husky whisper. "My makee tlacks inside, hunt evel place, no can find. House allee same empty. Motol Matt disapeal, vanish, makee go up in smoke. Woosh! My plenty 'flaid."

"What's he givin' us?" snorted Burton. "He's talking through his hat, seems like, to me."

"He's run into something that he can't cumtux," returned McGlory. "It's plain enough, though, that a house with green shutters is at the end of our trail. Ping can take us there, and it will be up to us to do the rest."

"Say, young feller!" cried Burton, standing up in the runabout and addressing the lad from the motor-car works.

The latter was pulling his motor cycle out of the bushes and making ready to forge away on the rest of his "century" run.

"Well?" returned the youth, one leg over the saddle and ready to pedal off.

"Load that machine into the runabout and drive this rig back to the show grounds for me, will you?" requested Burton. "I'm hungry to see this game through, and I can't leave the horse hitched in the road."

"Couldn't get the motor cycle into the buggy," was the answer. "Anyhow, I guess I've helped you about as much as you could reasonably expect."

"There's twenty coming to you," went on Burton. "Take the rig back and I'll make it thirty."

"There's nothing coming to me. I told Motor Matt he could use the machine, and welcome. Now that he's done with it, I'll go on with my run."

The motor began to pop, and presently settled into a steady hum. A minute later the motor cycle and its rider were out of sight.

Just then, when it looked as though Burton was to be permanently retired from the rest of the pursuit, a street car from the lake rattled to a halt, and Carl and Twomley dropped from the steps.

"Here's the Englishman," muttered McGlory, without much enthusiasm.

"And Carl!" added Burton. "He'll take the rig back for me, and the rest of us will start for the house with the green shutters."

"Vat's to pay?" clamored Carl, running toward McGlory and Ping.

Ping's confidence in Carl, like Carl's confidence in Ping, was badly "shook." The Chinese boy backed away.

"Here, Carl," cried Burton. "Jump into the runabout and take it back to the grounds for me. I've got business with McGlory."

"Meppy I don'd got some pitzness mit McGlory, same as you," demurred Carl. "Vere iss Modor Matt?"

"There's no time to palaver, Carl," interposed McGlory. "Take the rig back."

When Matt was away, McGlory was the boss. Carl could not very well disobey such a pointblank order. Much against his will, he climbed into the runabout.

"My word!" cried Twomley. "You seem to have discovered a clue of some sort. Who's the Chinaman?"

"Never mind that, now," returned Barton. "Come with us, Twomley, and we'll tell you as we go along."

"Lead off, Ping," ordered McGlory.

Carl, very much out of temper, shook his fist at Burton, and then at Ping. Following this, he turned the rig the other way and rode moodily back toward the show grounds.

Ping, meanwhile, had climbed the bank, and was leading the party of investigators through the woods in the direction of the crossroad. As they went along, Burton was telling Twomley what Ping had discovered.

The information given by the Chinaman was lacking in many important points, but its very incompleteness added to the tenseness of the situation.

When they came to the end of the crossroad, Ping halted and indicated the house with the green shutters.

"You say," remarked McGlory, giving the house a swift sizing, "that Wily Bill ran into the house?"

"All same," answered Ping.

"And that Pard Matt trailed after him?"

"All same."

"Then you went in, looked around, and couldn't see anything of either of them?"

"My no findee." Ping shivered. "When my makee come out, my lockee do'."

He dug up the key and handed it to McGlory.

"Well," declared McGlory, "if Motor Matt and Wily Bill went in there, and didn't come out again, we'll find them."

"If the Chinaman didn't find them," struck in Twomley, "they must have come out."

"We'll soon know what's what," and the cowboy made his way to the door, thrust the key into the lock, and pushed the door ajar.

The same dark, funereal silence that had greeted Ping stared McGlory, Burton, and Twomley in the face.

"My no findee," chattered Ping, drawing back; "you no findee."

McGlory pressed into the hall.

"I'll take the rooms on the left," said he, "and the rest of you take the ones on the right. Do your bushwhacking, and then, if you don't find anything, meet me at the foot of the stairs for a look overhead."

Nothing was found. The back door was securely bolted on the inside, and all the windows and blinds of the various lower windows firmly fastened.

The situation upstairs was exactly the same. Puzzled and bewildered, the party returned to the lower hall.

"If Ping's giving it to us straight," said McGlory, "neither Matt nor Wily got out of here. They couldn't have gone through the rear door or any of the windows, without leaving them open. And they couldn't have left by the front door because it was locked, and Ping had the key."

"They might have slipped out while Ping was nosing around upstairs," suggested Burton.

"They'd have made some noise," objected the cowboy. "Matt didn't have any call to keep quiet, and Ping would surely have heard him. Let's go back to the rear rooms again."

Burton and Twomley had examined the kitchen. McGlory now looked that room over for himself.

He was no more than two minutes in picking up a clue. The lighted match which he held close to the floor showed footprints outlined in black. He traced them to the pile of soot under the chimney.

Twomley and Burton unfastened the windows and pushed back the blinds on their screeching hinges. The sunlight, drifting into the room, brought out the trail with weird distinctness.

"Maybe the Chinaman blundered into the soot and left the trail," hazarded Burton.

"My no makee tlail," declared Ping. "No touchee soot."

"There's only one of the chink, anyhow, pards," said McGlory, "and at least two pairs of feet walked through that pile of black stuff. One man wore shoes, and the other wore slippers. The slippers left marks a good deal like Ping's sandals, but the marks are too big for Ping. We'll find out a few things now, I reckon."

With eyes bent sharply on the floor, the cowboy crossed the kitchen into the hall, and then moved along the hall to a spot under the stairs.

The stairs were not enclosed, but sprang directly from the hall floor. In the angle formed by the flight and the floor the sooty trail vanished.

"Now what?" queried Burton. "It looks like we were up in the air as much as ever."

Without replying, McGlory drew his knife from his pocket, opened it, and went down on his knees.

CHAPTER IX.

MATT MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Matt's pursuit of the street car reminded him of his old motor-cycle days in Arizona. The familiar hum of the twin cylinders between his knees carried his mind back to his ill-fated gasoline marvel, the *Comet*, in honor of which he had named the aëroplane he was using with the show.

The borrowed motor cycle had all the improvements, and the way it could run warmed the cockles of Matt's heart. In less than a minute after leaving Burton and the machine's owner, the king of the motor boys was shooting along the road like a bullet out of a gun.

He was pursuing an electric car that ran at a high rate of speed, but the motor cycle must have been going five feet to the car's one. Before Matt fairly realized it he was within sight of the car.

When he was close enough to be heard he began to call to the conductor to stop. The passengers heard him, as the row of heads thrust out from each side of the car conclusively proved; and the conductor also heard him, for he appeared on the rear platform.

Matt could see the conductor reaching for the bell rope. At the same time, Wily Bill rushed out on the back platform, took in the situation at a startled glance, and then dropped dexterously from the car at the track side.

Matt was so wrapped up in what Wily Bill was doing that Ping's leap from the front platform escaped him entirely.

Wily Bill scurried for the side of the road, and Matt shut off the power and glided after him.

"Hold up there, Wily!" cried Matt.

The "barker" paid no attention, but plunged up the bank and darted off into the timber.

By that time Motor Matt's blood was up. He knew that a great deal depended on the capture of Wily. If the "barker" could be made to tell when and how he had received that note in Hindoostanee, a clue to the whereabouts of Ben Ali and the missing Margaret Manners would be secured.

Appreciating fully the exigencies of the case, Matt sprang from the wheel and leaped up the bank. From the top of the rise he could see nothing of Wily, but a crashing of the undergrowth told him plainly in which direction the man had gone. He was but an instant in taking after him.

Wily's actions were those of a guilty man; in fact, they inferred a deeper guilt than the mere possession of a note in Hindoostanee would indicate.

This, naturally, made the fellow's capture all the more important.

For a quarter of a mile, Matt judged, Wily led him a chase through the woods. The "barker" had lost a little of his lead, but was keeping up his fierce pace with a good deal of vigor. Then, suddenly, he began to double. Matt would run on, looking and listening, only to find that there was no thrashing brush ahead. When he stopped, the sounds made by the fleeing fugitive had changed their direction, and the young motorist had to whirl and take another course.

For some time this variation of the game of hare and hounds continued, Matt drawing steadily nearer and nearer.

At last Matt caught his first glimpse of Wily, since he had fled over the bank from the street car, at the rear of a house whose windows were closed with green shutters.

Wily stood out against the house wall, his form sharply defined, just as Matt rushed from a fringe of hazels. The "barker" cast a look over his shoulder, gave vent to a panting exclamation, and

darted around the end of the house.

When Matt reached the front of the structure, Wily had vanished. The key to his disappearance was furnished by the wide-swinging front door, key still in the lock. Besides, Wily had not had time to go around the other side of the house, or to get into the woods again, so Matt knew he must have entered the building.

With scarcely a moment's hesitation, the king of the motor boys followed the fugitive.

Coming in out of the bright sunshine, the darkness of the shut-in hall was intense. As Matt ran on past one of the doors leading to a room on the right a sinewy, turbaned form leaped out and a fist shot through the gloom, landing on the back of Matt's head with tremendous force.

Matt staggered, regained his balance, and whirled around. His brain was reeling, but, looking toward the light that entered at the open door, he saw that the man who had struck him was not Wily, as he had imagined, but a Hindoo—none other than his old acquaintance, Dhondaram.

Flinging out his arms, he leaped at the Hindoo. Then it was that Wily completed the work that Dhondaram had begun. Another blow from behind, savagely given with all the "barker's" strength, caused Matt to sink to his knees and then straighten out unconscious on the bare floor.

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"You saw what was goin' on?" asked Wily breathlessly.

"Even so, sahib," answered the other, in a low tone.

"I'm in luck to find you here. Wasn't intendin' to blow in at this place till night—but any port in a storm. Pick him up and let's get away somewhere."

"The kitchen, sahib."

Between them, the unconscious king of the motor boys was lifted and carried into the kitchen.

"Hang it!" growled Wily, floundering through the soot pile; "this won't do. There may be more after me. There's another place, under the stairs. Sharp's the word, now. Carry him there."

Matt was not bereft of his senses for long. There was too much steel and whalebone in his athletic body to keep him steeped in oblivion for any great length of time.

The first thing he saw, when his eyes slowly opened, was a candle planted in the earth.

He was lying, hands and feet bound and a cloth over his mouth, in a sort of pit. Above him were the stringers and boards of a floor.

A few moments passed while he was picking up the thread of events. While he was piecing details together, he heard a light footfall on the floor overhead, advancing and retreating. Later there came the creaking of boards as of some one climbing a flight of stairs.

Wily and Dhondaram, silent and motionless as statues, knelt in the earth, the fluttering gleam of the candle over them, and were listening to the footfalls with bated breath.

From the manner of these two Matt understood forthwith that the person in the upper part of the house must be one whom his captors feared. Had it not been for the cloth that smothered his lips, Matt would have shouted at the top of his voice and so have informed a possible friend where he was.

Inasmuch as he could neither move nor make an audible sound, the prisoner lay quiet.

There was no cellar under this house with the green shutters, only a scooped-out place in the earth where possibly potatoes and other vegetables had been kept.

Presently the footsteps once more descended the stairs and could be heard leaving the house. Wily turned to Dhondaram with a deep breath of relief.

"That was a close call," he muttered. "If we'd been a second later gettin' down here——"

He bit off his words quickly. The door had slammed and the grating of a key could be heard.

"*Maskee!*" rumbled Dhondaram. "The door has been closed and locked, sahib. You left the key in the door."

"I was in too big a hurry to do anythin' else. As it was, Motor Matt came within one of layin' hands on me. See if he's got his wits back."

On hands and knees the Hindoo crept to Matt's side and peered into his face. Matt kept his eyes closed.

"Not yet, sahib," answered Dhondaram. "It is well. He shall not waken in this world. The goddess Kali——"

Dhondaram did not finish the sentence. He had referred to the malign Hindoo deity invoked by thugs, and it may be he thought the talk unsuited to American ears. Lifting himself on his knees, he drew from the breast of his jacket a glittering blade.

The next moment Wily Bill had caught his arm.

"Chuck it!" he growled sternly.

The Hindoo turned his glittering eyes on the "barker."

"Sahib, you do not understand," said he, in a hissing voice.

"I understood you're intendin' to use the knife," answered Wily Bill, "an' I won't have it. What d'you take me for? They don't hang people in this State, but I don't intend to pass the rest o' my

days in the 'pen.' Put that knife back where you took it from."

"It is my duty to do this thing," flared the Hindoo.

"Go on!"

"Ben Ali saved my life in my own country, and I joined the show of Burra Burton because he told me. I tried to remove Motor Matt because he told me. That will pay my debt to Ben Ali. I failed in my work while I was with the show, but now——"

"You're goin' to fail here, too. I've got a tender regard for my liberty, an' that's why I was runnin' away from the show grounds. There was a fracas turned on in the side-show tent, an' I got mixed up in it. Durin' the row I lost a letter that came to me by mail—a letter that contained somethin' for you. Ben Ali, in my letter, said where he wanted to meet you. I don't know what he said in your letter, as that was in Hindoostanee."

Dhondaram's eyes glowed expectantly, and he held out his hand.

"The writing, sahib."

"I haven't got it. Didn't I just tell you it was lost? That's what made me bolt from the grounds. One of Motor Matt's friends got the thing, and when I tried to get it, Burton took possession of it. If that letter's ever translated, I'll bet it contains stuff that would make the show too hot to hold me. I got away while there was time—but there wasn't any too much time, at that. If——"

Dhondaram drew back.

"Motor Matt, sahib," muttered Dhondaram, "he's listening to your talk."

The prisoner had opened his eyes, and the keen glance of the Hindoo had detected it. Both Dhondaram and Wily turned their gaze on Matt.

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 16]

RESCUE!

Motor Matt understood full well the gravity of his situation. Never until that moment had he known the cause of the murderous Dhondaram's hostility to him, but now it appeared that he was merely seeking to cancel a debt which he owed Ben Ali.

Bill Wily's regard for his own welfare was all that stood between Motor Matt and the knife of the misguided Hindoo.

"Give me that knife, Dhondaram," ordered Wily.

"I will keep the knife, sahib," replied the other.

"Keep it, then, and be hanged to you," answered Wily angrily, "but you'll settle with me if you try any knife tricks on the prisoner. I guess you rise to that, all right enough. Take off the gag. I want to talk with Motor Matt."

Dhondaram bent down and removed the cloth.

"I'm a 'barker,'" went on Wily, still addressing the Hindoo and making brief display of a revolver, "but here's somethin' that bites as well as barks. Put away that knife."

Silently the Hindoo returned the knife to his jacket and sank back on his heels.

"What was you chasin' me for, Motor Matt?" asked Wily.

"Why were you running away from me?" Matt countered.

"That's my business. You answer my question. I guess you'd better treat me white, 'cause it's me that keeps the Hindoo from doin' a little knife work on you."

"Burton wanted you to tell him something about that letter," Matt answered, making up his mind that a little of the truth would not be out of place.

"Oh, ho!" muttered Wily. "Does he think I can read Hindoostanee?"

"No. What he wanted to know was where you got the letter. The Hindoos who have been connected with the show haven't turned out very well—they are all fugitives from the law, even Dhondaram."

Not a ripple crossed the placid brown face of the Hindoo; only his glittering eyes revealed the feeling that slumbered in the depths of his soul.

"I guessed there'd be a stir about that letter," went on Wily, "an' that's the reason I made up my mind to pull out. I'd had to explain, an' no matter what I'd said I'd have been fired, anyway. I used to live in Grand Rapids, and the home town was a good place for me to cut loose from the show, see?"

"Why are you treating me like this?" asked Matt quietly.

"Couldn't help it. Them kid pards o' yours was the cause o' the hull bloomin' twist-up!" Wily Bill swore savagely under his breath. "I'd like to take the kinks out o' that Dutchman. He's too much on the buttinsky order. You chased after me, hung on, an' wouldn't let go. What else could I do

but make myself safe?"

"You didn't have to have Dhondaram knock me down."

"It wasn't him did that. He tried, but I had to finish the job. But I was treatin' you well, at that. I could have dropped down back of a clump o' bushes, there in the timber, and picked you off with this." Wily touched his hip pocket. "But I didn't. That ain't my style. I'd rather have you like this an' come to a little agreement with you. As for Dhondaram, I hadn't an idea he was in the house. I'd given him a key, an' I knew he might be here, but I wasn't expectin' him so soon. Mebby it was lucky for me that he was around."

"So that's it, eh?" commented Matt sarcastically. "You've been meeting Dhondaram, and helping him, when you knew he had been a prisoner of Burton's and had escaped from the show train between Jackson and Kalamazoo. If a person helps a fugitive of the law to escape, he is guilty of a crime and can be punished for it."

"There you hit it! But I was ducking out—and you wouldn't let me duck. I'm going to leave, in spite of you and Burton. That's the worst I've done—talkin' with Dhondaram and carryin' Hindoostanee letters. But I'll not be jugged for that, or——"

A hiss of warning came from Dhondaram. At the same moment he leaned down and replaced the cloth over Matt's lips.

Distant voices were heard, then the sound of a key rattling in a lock.

"The fellow that was here before has brought some others," whispered Wily. "Hang the luck! I wish we had got out o' here while we had the chance. Now, then, we're in for it an' no mistake."

"Listen, sahib!" frowned the Hindoo.

The voices that had been heard outside the house were now talking in the hall. It was impossible to distinguish words, but Matt's heart leaped as he recognized McGlory's voice and Burton's.

They were looking for him!

"They cannot find us down here, sahib," murmured the Hindoo, his voice soft and purring as that of a tiger cat. "They will go as the first one went, then we can leave."

This was Wily's hope. Breathlessly he listened to the sounds above. The footsteps and the voices faded away into the upper regions of the building.

"Now," muttered Wily, "we might be able to dodge through the front door. They're all upstairs."

Dhondaram shook his head.

"The door in the floor, sahib, cannot be found," he whispered reassuringly. "The *feringhis* will not discover us. Be patient."

Presently Matt heard his friends returning to the lower floor, heard them enter the kitchen, heard the sound of lifted windows and opening blinds, marked the slow and steady advance from the kitchen into the hall, and along the hall to a point under the stairs.

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By then, even Dhondaram had begun to take alarm.

"They're at the trap!" gasped Wily Bill.

"Is there no way out of this hole, sahib?" demanded Dhondaram through his teeth.

"Only by the way we came in. I lived in this house and I know all about it."

Dhondaram smashed the flat of his hand down over the light of the candle. The Stygian blackness that reigned showed plainly the rim of daylight under the lifting door.

"The revolver!" hissed Dhondaram. "Shoot, sahib!"

"No, I tell you!" answered Wily. "I'll have none o' that, or——"

With a savage snarl, Dhondaram hurled himself on Wily Bill in a furious effort to secure the revolver and fight off the approaching rescuers.

The trapdoor had been thrown entirely back, and daylight was flooding the pit. The sounds of the struggle between the Hindoo and Wily Bill reached the ears of those above.

"Here they are!" cried the voice of McGlory, and instantly he leaped downward.

With a blow of his fist the Hindoo staggered the cowboy, leaped upward, and gained the floor.

"Dhondaram!" yelled Burton, who was just preparing to follow McGlory down under the floor.

The word was hardly out of his lips before the showman was compelled to drop back to avoid a sweeping blow of the knife in the Hindoo's hand.

McGlory was looking for Matt, and paid little attention to the Hindoo. He found his pard with his groping hands, for his eyes were blinded by the sudden change from day to the darkness of the pit.

"Bully for you, pard!" exclaimed McGlory. "Lashed hand and foot, or I'm a Piegan! Speak to me about this, will you? And gagged, too. Sufferin' blazes, but you've had a time! There, how's that?"

The cowboy pulled away the cloth.

"Wily's here," were Matt's first words. "He and the Hindoo had a fight, and——"

"Bother Wily! It's you I'm after," and, with his open knife, McGlory slashed at the cords. "Now we

can look after Wily."

Leaving that part of the work to his chum, Matt leaped upward and climbed over the edge of the floor. Burton was running toward one of the front rooms.

"Where's the Hindoo?" cried Matt.

"The Englishman tagged him in here, after heading him off at the door," panted Burton. "I always knew that thug was a killer, and if I hadn't been quick he'd have knifed me."

A smash of glass came from the front room and two of the blinds were smashed open. The light afforded by this gave Matt and Burton a view of a desperate struggle in which the attaché of the British Legation was proving himself a whole man, in every sense of the word.

Unarmed, and with every disregard for his personal danger, Twomley had set upon the Hindoo. Dhondaram's knife had ripped Twomley's coat and brought a stain of red, but the Englishman had both hands around the Hindoo's throat, and they were flinging here and there around the room.

The smash of glass and the crash of the blinds had been caused by Dhondaram falling heavily against one of the windows. Then suddenly, before either Matt or Burton could go to his aid, Twomley hurled his antagonist from him with terrific force. The Hindoo fell sprawling against the wall, and dropped stunned to the floor. His knife slipped from his hand, and Burton kicked it aside while he and Matt threw themselves upon the supine figure.

"Take his turban," said Matt, "and bind his hands with it."

The turban was merely a long strip of twisted cloth, and there were two or three yards of it—enough for both his wrists and ankles.

Barely was the tying finished when McGlory drove Wily into the room with his own six-shooter.

"Talk about this, friends," laughed McGlory. "Wily Bill fights with the Hindoo, and has the tuck about all taken out of him. I snatch his revolver, and then we come out from under the floor, Wily in the lead and acting real peaceable. You've caught Dhondaram, too. Everything's lovely, eh?"

"All serene," answered the Englishman.

He had removed his coat and was binding his handkerchief about his arm.

"Twomley captured Dhondaram, Joe," said Matt, "and did it alone."

"Getting stabbed for his pains," added Burton.

"A scratch," was Twomley's cool response. "How could you expect me to do a thing like that without getting a nick or two? A pretty show altogether. And it might have been a good deal worse."

CHAPTER XI.

BILL WILY REPENTS.

McGlory motioned Wily to take a seat on the floor, near Dhondaram, and then turned toward Twomley.

"So you put the kibosh on our brown friend all by yourself, did you?" he asked.

"It wasn't much," was the diffident answer. "I know these Hindoos somewhat."

"You're the clear quill," said McGlory, "and I've got a different estimate of you. What do you think?" he added to Burton. "They had my pard down in the spud cellar, covered with ropes and gagged."

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"Nice how-d'ye-do!" growled Burton. "What sort of a way is that to act, Bill Wily?" and he flashed a look of anger and contempt at the "barker."

"I've made a holy show of myself," mumbled Bill Wily. "That comes of gettin' confidential with these here chocolate-colored crooks. They're no good."

"What do you think of yourself, hey?"

"Not much, Burton, an' that's a fact. I'm down and out, and just because I wanted to shake your show an' not have any trouble. What a lot of excitement over nothin' at all!"

"Fancy that!" remarked Twomley, mildly surprised. "I guess the man doesn't know the true state of affairs."

"He'll know everything before we're done with him," snapped Burton.

"You're not goin' to bear down too hard on me, are you, Burton?" pleaded Wily.

"Why shouldn't I?"

"What've I done?"

"I can't tell that till I hear what happened to Motor Matt. If these disgraceful proceedings get out, it will be a black eye for the show."

Boss Burton was a queer fish. He had always a high regard for carrying out every promise he

made in his show "paper," and was also solicitous about the good name of the Big Consolidated; at the same time, he had done a number of things which gave Matt a poor opinion of his character.

Matt, taking advantage of the opening afforded him, told what had happened after he had left Burton on the motor cycle. The rough treatment he had received brought scowls to the faces of McGlory and Burton.

"That Hindoo might have knifed you, and all on account of Wily there!" breathed the showman.

"But he didn't," returned Matt, "and that was on account of Wily, too. Keep that in mind, Burton."

"Your head, pard," said the cowboy solicitously. "You've had a couple of good hard raps, and I'll bet that block of yours feels as big as a barrel."

"I'm like Twomley," smiled Matt, "and couldn't expect to come through such a tussle without a few marks. But it's nothing serious. Another thing, Burton," he added, turning to the showman, "just recollect that, if Wily wanted to, he could have used that thing Joe has in his hand. But he wouldn't, and he fought with Dhondaram rather than let him use it."

"Wily hadn't the nerve," commented Burton. "He's in the parlor class when it comes to strong-arm work. He's more of a shell worker and a confidence man."

"Don't be rough, Burton," begged Wily Bill.

"What've you got to say for yourself?"

"I'm blamed sorry things turned out like they did. That's all."

"Just how sorry are you? Sorry enough to make a clean breast of everything?"

"That depends on what'll happen to me. You let the ticket man off when he and Dhondaram tried to loot the Jackson proceeds. I didn't do half as much as him."

"Tell me what you've done, and then I'll tell you what I'm goin' to do," said Burton.

"I knew Ben Ali pretty well when he was with the show," returned Wily, "but he didn't put it up with *me* to help steal the ticket-wagon money. I'm not makin' such a terrible sight as spieler for that side-show outfit, and when I get a letter in Kalamazoo, inclosin' another in Hindoostanee and askin' me to deliver same, what am I goin' to do? That letter contained a money order for ten dollars."

"And it was from Ben Ali?" asked Motor Matt.

Wily nodded.

"We got into Kalamazoo about three in the morning," proceeded Wily Bill, "and when I dropped off the train, Dhondaram stepped out from between a couple o' box cars——"

"It was the night we left Jackson that we had Dhondaram lashed and lying in the aisle of the sleeper on section two of the show train," interrupted Burton. "He got loose and skipped. I fired a shot at him, but he jumped off the train. How could he have done that and then shown up in Kalamazoo the morning we got there?"

The showman was trying to pick flaws in Wily's narrative, but the "barker" was equal to the emergency.

"For the reason, Burton, that he didn't jump off the train. Dhondaram rode the platform, and now and then he dodged down on the bumpers when the train men came too close. As I say, he met me as I dropped off, and we had a bit of a chin together."

"Why didn't you grab him," demanded Burton, "and turn him over to me?"

"That's where I was lame, I expect, but you forget I was a friend of Ben Ali's, and Dhondaram was also a friend. That made a sort of hitch between us. Then, too, Dhondaram told me he was expecting word from Ben Ali in my care. I hadn't received any word, and I told him so. Dhondaram said that I would get a letter, sooner or later, and that he'd like to meet me somewhere near Grand Rapids. That's when I told him about this house and gave him one of my keys to it."

"What have you got to do with this house?" queried Burton.

"I happen to own it," was the surprising answer. "It ain't worth much, an' it's been condemned by a railroad that intends runnin' a line of rails and ties right over the place where it stands. For that reason it's closed up. I'm to get twelve hundred dollars for the property any day now. Why," and Wily Bill looked around, "when I was a kid I used to live here. When the folks died I rented the house an' took to roamin' around. It was a good place to meet Dhondaram and give him a letter if there was any come from Ben Ali. I wasn't expectin', though, to call here before night. The letter from Ben Ali reached me in Kalamazoo in the afternoon, at a time when Dhondaram must have been travelin' north."

"What did you do with your part of the letter?"

Wily's profession of repentance seemed to be sincere, and Burton and Matt were doing their utmost to find out everything he was able to tell. Dhondaram, sitting on the floor with his back against the wall, glared at Wily fixedly while he talked. The savage menace of the Hindoo's look, however, seemed to make not the slightest impression on the "barker."

"I tore up my part o' the letter, Burton," replied Wily. "Didn't think it best to carry it around. If I'd

torn up Dhondaram's part, too, I guess I'd have been a whole lot better off."

"I guess you would," agreed the showman dryly. "What had Ben Ali to say to you?"

"He told me where he wanted Dhondaram to meet him. You see, Ben Ali's been busy, an' hasn't been payin' much attention to what's been goin' on in the show."

"By Jove," put in Twomley, "I should say he had been busy."

"Ben Ali didn't know Dhondaram had cooked his goose, so far as the show was concerned, in Jackson, the same day he joined on."

"Where did Ben Ali send his letter from?" inquired Matt.

"Lafayette."

"And where does he want to meet Dhondaram?"

"Five miles west of the Rapids, on the wagon road to Elgin. There's an openin' in the woods, somewhere there, and Ben Ali wants Dhondaram to join him at the place to-morrow morning. I don't know what's up, but I guess it's somethin' mighty important for the Hindoos."

"Does Ben Ali know about this house of yours?"

"Not a thing. I never told him. I guess I was foolish to jump off the car and run over here, but the ruction in the side show and the loss o' that Hindoostanee letter sure got me on the run. I thought mebby, if I couldn't dodge Motor Matt in the woods, I could get him somewhere and have a talk with him that would let me out. But things didn't come out as I wanted. I couldn't shake him in the timber, so I rushed for the house. Dhondaram was here, ahead o' schedule, an' he complicated matters a-considerable."

"Do you think," asked Matt, "that we could go to that place on the Elgin road and meet Ben Ali instead of letting Dhondaram do it?"

Twomley started, for he instantly caught Matt's idea. Dhondaram likewise showed much concern, and undoubtedly he surmised what was at the back of the young motorist's head.

"I don't think you could," replied Wily. "Ben Ali ain't nobody's fool, and he'll have the road watched to see that only the right party comes. If the wrong party comes, then Ben Ali, more'n likely, 'll fade out of the oak openin'. You can't get there any way by road without Ben Ali findin' out just who's after him. That's my notion."

"Suppose we should come in on him from both sides at once?" suggested Burton.

"Then he'd slide out between you. Oh, he's a slippery proposition, that boy!"

Twomley nodded affirmatively.

"He speaks the truth," he averred. "A man who can do what Ben Ali has done is a rogue of the first water."

"There's a way to get at him," said Matt confidently. "Here, in a thickly populated country, that scoundrel can't have things his own way."

"He's takin' chances," put in Wily, "but that's his stock in trade—takin' chances an' throwin' in a little hypnotism now an' then. Why he's so particular about meetin' Dhondaram is what gets me."

"He needs money," said Burton sarcastically, "and he has to run a few risks to get it."

"I've got a plan," said Matt, starting toward the door.

"What is it?" asked Burton and McGlory.

Matt turned around in the doorway and cast a suggestive glance at Wily and Dhondaram.

"I'll not go into it now," said he, "but it all depends on the truthfulness of Bill Wily. If Wily has given us a straight story, then the plan will work. If it does, then I shall insist that Wily be allowed to go free, without any punishment for what he has done. If the plan doesn't succeed, and Ben Ali is not out on the Elgin road to-morrow morning, I think Wily can be put through for the work he has done here in this old house."

"I'm willin' to leave it that way," said Wily, "providin' you're careful how you come onto Ben Ali, so as not to scare him away, an' providin' Boss Burton gives me his word to back up Motor Matt's."

"I'm in on the deal," declared Burton.

"Both Wily and Dhondaram will have to be left here under suitable guard until after the plan is executed," continued Matt.

"Count me in as one of the guard," spoke up Twomley, lighting a cigarette, "but send over some food and something to sit on. And," he finished, pointing to the weapon in the cowboy's hand, "Mr. McGlory might lend me that."

"McGlory will stay and help you with your guard duty," said Matt. "I'll have to hurry off now. I suppose Ping and Carl are at the show grounds and are looking after the aëroplane?"

"Ping!" exclaimed McGlory, looking around. "Why, where the nation is he? He was the one who brought us here, and I haven't thought of him until this minute. But Carl's at the grounds, Matt. Anyhow, one of the canvasmen is on duty at the aëroplane's berth."

"Don't fret about the machine," reassured Burton. "I'm going right back to the grounds and I'll

look after it personally."

"Just a minute, gents," called Wily. "How did you fellows know we were under the floor."

"You walked in the soot," laughed Burton derisively. "McGlory can tell you all about that."

Thereupon he and Motor Matt left the room. They passed the trap in the hall floor, and Matt observed that it was flush with the boards and difficult to locate for any one who did not know it was there.

"I guess the trouble I had here, Burton," remarked Matt, as he and the showman passed through the front door, "will turn out to be a pretty good thing, after all."

"Not for Ben Ali," returned Burton, "if he is caught and turned over to Twomley."

"I was thinking of Margaret Manners," said Matt.

CHAPTER XII.

MATT LAYS HIS PLANS.

On the way through the woods and back to the road by the car track, Motor Matt was extremely thoughtful.

By Ben Ali's cleverness in getting some white man to represent the agent of the British ambassador, the Hindoo had succeeded in luring his niece from the home of the English woman in whose care the girl had been left.

Once this was accomplished, it was easy to guess how the artful Hindoo had proceeded. Miss Manners had been a hypnotic subject for so long that it was useless for her to attempt to fight against the black magic of her rascally uncle. He had but to catch her eye and snap his fingers, and the girl would be utterly in his power.

To fight such a man as Ben Ali called for ways and means at once bold and wary. He was not to be easily snared.

"You're as mum as an oyster," grunted Burton, as they neared the road. "I've spoken to you half a dozen times, and you didn't seem to hear me. Come back to earth now, and tell me what's on your mind?"

"I'll tell you later, Burton," laughed Matt. "I've got a hard problem to solve, and I don't want to say anything about it until it's all worked out."

"From what you said at that house with the green shutters, I take it you're not going back to the show with me?"

"No."

"Be back there in time to take the aëroplane aloft at six-thirty? The wind's down, and you can pull off the trick."

"There'll be no aëroplane flight this afternoon, Burton. I have more important matters to attend to."

Burton began to bristle.

"By Jerry," he cried, "what am I giving you your salary for? We've missed one ascension to-day, and the people will be wild if we don't have one this afternoon."

"Then," answered Matt, "tell them that we'll give an aëroplane performance for the whole of Grand Rapids to-morrow. That ought to satisfy them, and I know you'll make a lot of capital out of it."

Burton stopped stock-still and stared.

"You're crazy?" he bluntly inquired. "To-morrow's Sunday, and I've never yet been able to get you to make an ascension on Sunday. Backsliding, eh?"

"For this one time," said Matt. "I'm not doing this for the benefit of your show, Burton, but because, as I size the matter up now, there's nothing else to be done."

"Whew!" whistled the showman, "you're about the biggest conundrum, now and then, that I ever tackled. When'll you get back to the grounds?"

"This evening, some time."

"Hunt for me the minute you get there, and let me know what's up."

They found Ping waiting for them in the road. He was a disconsolate-looking Chinaman, and ran up to Matt the moment he slipped down the steep bank.

"You heap mad with Ping, huh?" the Chinese boy chattered. "You know him makee shoot Loman candle, play plenty hob with side show? Woosh! My velly bad China boy."

Matt laughed. That laugh caused Ping to brighten.

"I'll have to forgive you this once, Ping," said Matt. "A whole lot of good has resulted from that flare-up in the side-show tent. But I don't like practical jokes—you know that. Get on the car and

go back to the grounds with Burton. As for the Roman-candle business, we'll talk about that later."

"You no pullee pin on China boy?" faltered Ping.

"No. You make your peace with Carl, that's all."

"Hoop-a-la!" said Ping, and limped aboard an electric car that Burton had flagged.

Matt caught a car going the other way, and, as soon as he reached Monroe Street, hurried to the nearest automobile garage, bent upon making the most of the daylight that remained.

He hired a car and a driver who knew the city. It was a small roadster, and Matt had the driver take him beyond the city limits and out for five miles on the Elgin road.

They passed through a small oak opening, which looked as though it might be the place where Ben Ali was to meet his crony, Dhondaram. [Pg 21]

"This will be far enough," said Matt. "Now, turn around and take us back to town."

The king of the motor boys gave careful attention to all the landmarks, going both ways. Returning, dusk had begun to fall, and his survey could not be as comprehensive as the one made on the outward trip. However, he was abundantly satisfied with the information he had acquired.

When they reached the garage, Matt bargained with the proprietor for a powerful touring car, with the same driver who had already been with him, to be at the show grounds at Reid's Lake at eight o'clock the following morning.

After that, he dropped in at a restaurant and had a good meal, then boarded a car for the lake, and rode back to the grounds with a crowd of people who were going to the evening performance of the show.

He had a good deal of amusement listening to the disappointed expressions of the people regarding the failure of Burton to have any aeroplane flights. Mixed up in the talk were a number of complimentary references to Motor Matt and his chums. These, so far as they applied to himself, the king of the motor boys tried not to hear. But, nevertheless, they caused a glow of satisfaction to mount to his face. It was certainly pleasant to know how his efforts in the line of duty had struck a popular chord.

That wild half-hour in the air, over Jackson, when Matt found his batteries short-circuited by a coiling cobra, had been exploited through the press. These, while arousing the popular admiration, only made the general disappointment more keen because of the failure of the Saturday flights at Reid's Lake.

When Matt got off the car at the lake, he made his way to the brilliantly lighted show grounds, and repaired immediately to the calliope tent.

Burton was there, smoking a cigar and nervously walking back and forth in front of the canvas-covered calliope.

"The people are pulling me all to pieces, Matt," he cried the moment the king of the motor boys entered the tent. "They're saying we could just as well have had a flight to-night, that I'm not living up to my promises, and all that. By Jerry, it hurts!"

"Let it be announced in the circus tent," said Matt, "that there'll be a flight to-morrow morning at nine o'clock—not for exhibition purposes, as Motor Matt doesn't give a performance on Sunday—and that all who wish to can see it."

"Good!" declared Burton. "I guess that'll catch them. But what are you making the flight for, if not to please the people?"

"For the purpose of backcapping Ben Ali, capturing him, and finding out where he has taken Margaret Manners."

Burton whirled around and gave Matt a steady look.

"What have you got up your sleeve?" he demanded curtly. "Are you going to try that, all alone, in the *Comet*?"

"Not all alone. You, and Twomley, and Joe are going to help. Send Harris and another trusty man over to that house with the green shutters, will you, and have them relieve the Englishman and McGlory. I want them here to talk with them."

Harris was Burton's brother-in-law, and a thoroughly reliable man in every respect.

"I've already sent them supper, a lantern, and a couple of chairs," said Burton, "but it seems to me all foolishness to hold the prisoners in the house. Why not send 'em to jail, where they belong?"

"Because Wily may not belong in jail, and because, if Dhondaram is taken there to-night, Ben Ali might hear of it and not present himself in that oak opening on the Elgin road to-morrow."

"Can't you tell me what you're going to do?"

"Not till Twomley and Joe get here."

With that, Matt dropped down on a cot, at one side of the tent, and tried to get a little rest. He was used to the band, and to the many other sounds that characterized a show just preceding a performance, and these did not bother him; but his head! that had suddenly begun to remind him that it had been badly treated during the afternoon.

CHAPTER XIII.

MOTOR CAR AND AEROPLANE.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when Matt was awakened by the arrival of McGlory and Twomley. Burton, curious and eager, came into the calliope tent with them.

"I'll tell you what my plan is," said Matt, sitting up on the edge of the cot, "and then you can all go to bed and get a good night's rest. Ben Ali is a crafty scoundrel, and it is necessary for us to capture him in order to find out what he has done with Miss Manners."

"That's the point," approved Twomley. "If we can't get hold of Ben Ali, the Secret Service men will have a bally time locating the girl."

"I'm inclined to think that Bill Wily told nothing but the truth," proceeded Matt.

"You never can tell about Wily," struck in Burton. "It's because he's so shifty and unreliable that they call him Wily Bill. I wouldn't bank too much on what he says."

"It's neck or nothing with him," suggested Twomley. "He has everything to lose by not telling the truth, and I believe the fellow appreciates that fact."

"You can gamble a blue stack he does!" declared McGlory. "Did you see the look Dhondaram gave him while he was handing us that long palaver? If the Hindoo ever gets foot-loose, I wouldn't stand in Wily's shoes for a bushel of pesos."

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"To my mind," said Matt, "the fact that Dhondaram was in that house proves the truth of Wily's story. Well, true or false, my whole plan is built up on what the 'barker' told us. We're to assume that Ben Ali will be in that oak opening, five miles from Grand Rapids on the Elgin road."

"Who knows whether there's an opening there or not?" asked Burton.

When the showman once lost confidence in a man, he put no trust in anything the man might do or say.

"The opening is there," said Matt. "I went out in an automobile and saw it for myself."

"Ah! So that's what you passed up the afternoon flight for, eh?"

"Partly," answered Matt. "Now, let us suppose that Ben Ali is in that opening to-morrow, waiting for Dhondaram to arrive with money which Ben Ali thinks he has stolen. Quite likely the Hindoo will have some one with him—perhaps the old ticket man whom you discharged, Burton, and perhaps Aurung Zeeb. This ticket man has played the part of the agent representing the British ambassador in turning that trick in Lafayette—"

"Sufferin' traitors!" chanted McGlory. "I've a hunch, pard, your finger's on the right button."

"So," pursued Matt, "it is fair to assume that Ben Ali has some one to watch the Elgin road in the vicinity of the oak opening. If he is warned that any suspicious persons are approaching, the Hindoo will slide away snakelike and dodge pursuit."

Twomley nodded.

"You're a fair daisy, Motor Matt, in placing the situation squarely in front of us. By Jove, it looks like a hard nut to crack."

"Matt will crack it," averred McGlory. "Listen, now, to how he proposes to do it."

"How are you going about it?" inquired Burton impatiently. "I've had this on my mind ever since you and I left the house with the green shutters, and I can't tell how nervous you make me hanging fire about it. Seems like a mighty simple thing to go out in the woods, meet a fellow where he intends to be, and nab him."

"Not so deuced simple as you suppose, Mr. Burton," returned Twomley, "when you consider the character of the man, and his ability to make passes, look at you, and give you your ticket to the Land of Nod."

"We're going to work out this problem by motor car and aéroplane," said Matt.

"Aéroplane!" exclaimed McGlory. "That means you and me, pard."

"The motor car for you, Joe," smiled Matt. "You and Twomley, and Burton will go along the Elgin road in that."

"What's the good?" demurred Burton. "You all seem to think it a cinch that the car will be seen, and that Ben Ali will get out of the way."

"You'll lag behind, you and your car," continued Matt, "and you'll let me and the aéroplane move ahead. I'll keep over the road as well as I can, and you can see me. When I sight our quarry I'll descend; then you can put on all speed and come up."

"The aéroplane will be a dead give-away!" asserted Burton. "Ben Ali and his outposts will see that as quick, or quicker, than they will the automobile."

"Suppose Ben Ali sees only one man on the machine, and thinks that the man is Dhondaram?" asked Matt. "Would he run, then?"

There was a silence, a startled silence, while the words of the young motorist were being

pondered by his listeners.

"How'll Ben Ali think Dhondaram is running the *Comet*, pard?" queried McGlory.

"Because the man on the aëroplane will not look very much like Motor Matt, and *will* look a little like a Hindoo."

"You're going to make up for the part?"

"It won't be much of a make-up. A white robe over my ordinary clothes will do."

"But your face——"

"In the air and at a distance, my face won't tell against the deception. When the *Comet* has landed in the opening, then it will be Ben Ali and me for it—with an automobile full of reinforcements rushing to the scene."

"It sounds good," said McGlory thoughtfully.

"Here's something," observed Twomley, who had a clear head and a quick brain. "Ben Ali can think for himself. Won't he think it queer that Dhondaram is navigating the flying machine? Dhondaram, I make no doubt, is highly gifted, but will Ben Ali credit him with skill enough to operate the aëroplane?"

"He may not," admitted Matt; "still, if Ben Ali sees the machine, and a man in it who looks like Dhondaram, even if Ben Ali doubts he'll hold his ground in order to make sure. Ben Ali won't run from one man. Besides, he's expecting Dhondaram. That's a weighty point."

"I believe it will work," said Twomley. "At any rate, it will hold Ben Ali in the opening until the automobile has a chance to come close. Then the scoundrel is ours, no matter what he tries to do. By Jove, I like the idea!"

"Another thing," spoke up McGlory. "If Ben Ali smells a rat and tries to make a run, Matt can keep over him and follow him."

"Hardly that, Joe," returned Matt. "The woods are pretty thick along the Elgin road, and you know how big the top of a tree looks when you're gazing down on it. Besides, if there's any wind, the *Comet* is going to be a fair-sized handful to take care of."

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"There you are," said Burton. "How do you know the opening is big enough for you to come down in? It won't do," and something akin to panic took hold of the showman, "to damage the aëroplane."

"Oh, go off somewhere, Burton, and wring out your wet blanket," growled McGlory. "You're tryin' to throw it over everything."

"We've got to get a look at this business from every angle," said Burton doggedly.

"Well, be easy about the oak opening," came from Matt. "It's large enough to alight in and to start from. If there's only a little wind, there'll be no danger."

The Englishman reached over and took Matt's hand.

"Allow me," said he, with a solemn handshake. "Win or lose, my bucko, you have my admiration."

Matt flushed.

"Why," said he, "this is all talk, as yet, Twomley."

"It's the sort of talk, my lad, that precedes notable achievements. Nine-tenths of all the great work that's done owes more to the head than to the hands. What about the automobile?"

"That will be here at eight o'clock in the morning."

"You even thought of that! I suppose I'll have to be catching a car for town."

Twomley got up and flung away the remains of a cigarette.

"You'd better stay here," suggested Matt. "There's an extra cot behind the calliope, and I'm sure Burton will give you your breakfast in the morning."

Twomley cast a glance around him. The odor from the animal tent, of which the calliope house was only a lean-to, was strong and disquieting. A lantern, tied to one of the tent poles, shed a murky light over the litter of buckets and ropes that strewed the tent floor. Matt had made ready for bed by kicking off his shoes and removing his coat and hat. It was all very primitive. In Washington Twomley looked as though he might have been of a fastidious nature. But, whatever he was at Washington, he was "game" at Reid's Lake.

"Go you," said he briefly. "Just where is that cot, my dear sir?"

McGlory dragged it out for him and opened it up.

"I'll pull it away from the wall of the animal top," said the cowboy. "Rajah, the bad elephant, is just on the other side of that piece of canvas, and he has the habit of snooping around in here with his trunk."

"I don't fancy Rajah will bother me," and Twomley shucked out of his low patent leathers.

"I could almost make a pard out of you," remarked McGlory.

"Nice work you've mapped out for Sunday," was Burton's sly fling as he paused at the door on his way out. "Motor Matt, who refused to make flights on Sunday for me for an extra hundred a week, lays out to pull off a go like this! Well, I'm surprised."

"Fate is no respecter of the calendar, Burton," Matt replied, with some show of feeling. "I'll work all day to-morrow if I can accomplish anything for Margaret Manners."

"Shake again," said the attaché.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OAK OPENING.

Reid's Lake was a popular resort, and a large crowd rendezvoused there on Sundays and holidays. The coming of the crowd, however, had shifted to the beginning of the day, so that the start of the aëroplane might be witnessed.

Owing to Burton's enterprise, an "extra" of one of the evening dailies was on the Grand Rapids streets at nine in the evening, announcing, in large type, that Boss Burton, regretting the disappointment caused the Grand Rapids people because of the failure of the aëroplane ascensions on the first day of the show, was glad to announce that the king of the motor boys would take his famous machine aloft on the following morning at nine o'clock.

This was one of the little things Burton could do, on occasion, which jarred on Matt's nerves. He made it appear in the news columns as though Matt was making the ascension because Burton had so willed it, and as though the showman had willed it because of the disappointment which had been caused the Great Rapids people on the first day of the show.

When Matt discovered this, it was too late to remedy it. He had the satisfaction, however, of telling Burton just what he thought.

Extra cars were put on the run between town and the lake to accommodate the crowds. And the people came not only in the street cars, but also in carriages, wagons, and automobiles.

Carl and Ping had slept under the lower wings of the *Comet*, as was their usual custom when the weather was at all propitious, and to the casual observer it would have looked as though the Roman-candle incident had been entirely forgotten.

Matt was early at the machine, looking it over carefully and making sure that everything was in readiness. The *Comet*, he found, had never been in better trim for work than she was that morning.

Then, too, such a day for aëroplane flying could not have been surpassed. There was not enough wind stirring to flutter the banners on the tent tops.

It was necessary for McGlory, Twomley, and Burton to get away somewhat in advance of Matt, and to take up a position beyond the outskirts of the city on the Elgin road. At sharp eight-forty-five the motor car got away.

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McGlory was usually in charge of the start during the aëroplane flights, but now Matt placed Carl in command. The importance of the position filled Carl with glory, and was correspondingly depressing to Ping, who really knew more about the aëroplane than Carl could have learned in a hundred years.

Carl and Ping were assisted by half a dozen stout canvasmen.

Before Matt took his seat, to the wonder of the crowd pressing against the guard ropes, he shook out a white robe and arranged it about him in such a manner as to leave his arms perfectly clear, but covering every part of his clothing.

After that he stepped on the footboard and dropped down in front of the motor.

The canvasmen, divided by Carl into two groups of three each, were placed behind the wings.

"All ready, Carl!" called Matt.

"Retty it iss!" shouted Carl.

The motor started merrily, the bicycle wheels began to turn, and the canvasmen to push.

Slowly the *Comet* gathered headway. Faster and faster it went, leaving the canvasmen behind; then, like a great bird, it soared into the air, followed by wild cheering.

A vagrant puff of wind struck the planes, just over the concert garden, and only quick work on the part of the intrepid young motorist averted a disaster. Gathering headway under the impetus of the thrashing propeller, the aëroplane darted upward into the blue and began reaching out toward the city.

Matt, while manipulating the aëroplane, had little time for sights and scenes below him. He was obliged to keep every faculty riveted on his work. Now and again, however, as he took his bearings and laid his course, he glimpsed the staring people in the roadways and on rooftops. Some of these spectators had opera glasses and binoculars.

Over the flat roofs of the city he whirled, cheered almost continuously.

The motor had never worked better. Everything depended on the motor. If the power had happened to fail, Matt could have glided harmlessly down the airy slope to earth—providing the city afforded him a good clear space in which to alight. A street zigzagged with telegraph, and telephone, and electric light wires was not such a place.

Passing the close-packed buildings of the business section, Matt gained the residence districts, and held on in a straight line for the Elgin road. He watched his landmarks, and, while they looked differently to him from aloft than they did from the ground, he knew he was going right when he saw the waiting automobile.

McGlory was standing up and waving his hat.

Throwing full speed into the propeller, Matt set the automobile a fifty-mile pace. At such a speed only a few minutes were necessary to carry the flying machine close to the oak opening where Ben Ali was to be in waiting for Dhondaram.

Peering forward and downward, Matt guided and manoeuvred the *Comet* by sense of touch alone, watching eagerly the while for the great gap in the woods.

Finally he saw it, and what he glimpsed in the centre of the cleared space—etched into his brain as by the instantaneous operation of a photographic lens—was startling, to say the least.

The irregular circle of the opening was crossed through its centre by the hard, level road. Off to one side of the road were the dying embers of a fire, and near the fire lay a bundle, on which a young woman was sitting, her head bowed dejectedly. A turbaned figure stood at a distance from the girl—the figure covered with a red robe and its brown, staring face uplifted. This was Ben Ali. And the girl—who was she? Was it possible, *could* it be possible, that the girl was Margaret Manners? A wild hope leaped in Motor Matt's breast.

Ben Ali leaned on a club, leaned and watched with never a move toward running away. Probably he was speculating as to whether his confederate, Dhondaram, had learned to operate the air craft.

Matt gave Ben Ali scant time to come to a conclusion. Quick work was now in order, and the *Comet* ducked downward and slid through the air with slowing motor. Guided by a true, steady hand, the wheels brushed the roadway, then began to turn as the weight of the machine rested more heavily upon them. A short run of a dozen feet brought the *Comet* to a stop.

Ben Ali had not stirred from the place where Matt had first seen him standing.

Gathering the white robe about him, Motor Matt stepped hurriedly to the ground and ran toward Ben Ali.

The Hindoo, staring serpent-like, recoiled, his red robe falling away slightly as his hands raised the club.

"Ben Ali," cried the king of the motor boys, "I have caught you at another of your tricks. Did you think I was Dhondaram? Dhondaram is a prisoner, and you will soon join him in jail."

There followed a tense moment, during which Ben Ali's eyes glowed and scintillated with their marvelous powers, and his hands tightened on the bludgeon.

It was not a time to delay matters, and the young motorist made ready for desperate work against the arrival of the automobile.

"*Maskee!*" cried the astounded Hindoo, as Motor Matt leaped at him.

Ben Ali's amazement appeared to hold him paralyzed for the moment. It was not until Matt had caught the club that he aroused himself and began vigorous resistance.

Every instant Matt expected the automobile to come whirling to the spot with his friends.

He had the club, but Ben Ali, with a tigrish spring, seized him about the throat and clung to him like a leech, and all the while Ben Ali's eyes were rolling about in a way that was horrible to behold.

Matt dropped the club to catch at the Hindoo's straining arms. He felt a wave of weakness sweep through him, while the flashing eyes continued to exercise their baneful spell.

Was he being hypnotized in spite of himself? He had read that this was impossible, and that no man could be put in a state of hypnosis against his will. Yet what did that strange weakness mean?

A tremor ran through Matt's body. He tried to call aloud, but his lips framed voiceless words. By degrees he felt himself growing weaker and weaker, yielding more and more to the spell of the baneful orbs that sought his undoing.

Then, when it seemed as though he was about to come entirely under Ben Ali's power, there fell a blow—sudden, quick, and accompanied by a wild, feminine cry.

Ben Ali's tense fingers relaxed their grip, his form slumped forward, and Matt stood staring at the girl.

She was Margaret Manners, there was not the least doubt of that. In order to save him, the girl had seized the bludgeon, had approached her uncle from behind, and struck him down.

The girl's face was wild with grief, but there was a burning resolution in the eyes.

"I had to!" she cried hysterically. "I had to do that in order to save you. It was the spell, the spell of the eyes! He would have made you his victim, Motor Matt, just as certainly as he has worked his will with me! Oh, let us get away from here! Quick!" In a frenzy of fear she cast aside the club and seized his arm with both hands. "There are others—Aurung Zeeb is one. They are armed, and they will soon be here."

Matt dashed a hand across his forehead, as though to free his brain from some frightful dream.

"There are others, you say?" he gasped.

"Yes, yes," she answered distractedly.

"Where?"

"Watching the road! They— Ah, too late, too late!"

Matt whirled and looked across the oak opening. From the side lying nearest the town came a running figure. It was Aurung Zeeb.

Where was the automobile? Matt could not hear it, and there was now no time to wait.

The girl had dropped to her knees and thrown her hands over her face.

"Come!" he called, bending down and catching her by the arm. "We can get away from here. Be brave, and trust to me!"

The girl started up, and he ran with her toward the aëroplane. As they drew near the machine, Matt saw another Hindoo coming into the opening along the other road.

CHAPTER XV.

AEROPLANE WINS!

Matt supposed that the automobile must have broken down somewhere on the road. His friends had not arrived in time to help him, so he was thrown upon his own resources.

While he and Miss Manners were racing toward the aëroplane, Matt was measuring his chances. The appearance of the second Hindoo, on the other side of the opening, complicated the dangers of the situation.

If these Hindoos were armed, as the girl had declared, then the case was indeed desperate. In making its start, however, the *Comet* would be running away from Aurung Zeeb, and straight toward the other Hindoo. This second man would have to leave the road or be run down; and if the start was made quickly enough, the *Comet* could get away from Aurung Zeeb.

"Sit there," cried Matt, lifting the girl to a seat on the lower plane. "Hold on," he added, starting the motor, "and don't move."

The girl's small fingers twined convulsively into the hand-holds. Matt dropped into his own seat and turned the power into the bicycle wheels. Slowly they took the push, the great wings lurching and swaying as the aëroplane moved.

Would it be possible for the machine, unaided by a crew of men behind the wings, to take to the air before the trees on the opposite side of the opening interfered?

This was a momentous, nay, a vital, question, and could only be solved by actual trial.

Out of the tails of his eyes Matt saw Ben Ali rising groggily to his feet. He flung up his arms and shouted.

Crack!

From behind came a bullet, ripping through the canvas of the upper plane, but, fortunately, doing no damage to the machinery. Aurung Zeeb was doing the firing.

And this same Aurung Zeeb had failed Ben Ali once in a dangerous pinch. This had caused a rupture of the friendly relations between the two men, but their differences had evidently been patched up. Now Aurung Zeeb was doing his utmost to help Ben Ali—and, perhaps, to land himself in the same trouble in which Dhondaram had been entrapped.

Another bullet was fired, but Aurung Zeeb must have been shooting as he ran, for his aim was poor.

Faster and faster raced the aëroplane, and Matt kept measuring the distance between the machine and the trees on the farther side of the opening. The Hindoo, in the road ahead, was running out of the aëroplane's path like a frightened hare.

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By then, Ben Ali had joined in the chase, but the speed of the *Comet* was too great for the pursuers.

They were close to the edge of the timber, very close, when Matt felt the wings beginning to lift. A dozen feet farther and they were in the air.

In a flash the power was switched from the wheels to the propeller. The aëroplane dropped a little before it yielded to the thrashing blades of the screw; then it picked up the lost headway and arose.

The upward tilt was frightful, but necessary if a wreck in the treetops was to be avoided.

Never a word had come from Margaret Manners. White as a ghost, she held to her place, swaying her body to preserve a poise against the tilt and pitch of the huge framework.

The wheels brushed against the outer ends of the tree limbs, but the machine continued to glide

into the air, walking upward as though climbing the rounds of a ladder.

If the motor had failed from any cause, there could have been no harmless gliding back to earth. A sheer drop downward would have been the result.

But the motor performed its work, and the trees presently hid the Hindoos and screened the *Comet* from any further attack.

Then, and not till then, did the king of the motor boys draw a full breath.

"Are you holding on, Miss Manners?" asked Matt.

"Yes," was the reply in a stifled voice.

"You're not afraid?"

"No."

"Bravo! We'll soon be back at the show grounds. You have seen the last of Ben Ali."

High above the trees Matt brought the *Comet* to an even keel, then laid out in a straightaway flight toward the lake. This time he did not follow the Elgin road, but struck across country the nearest way home.

That was not the first time Margaret Manners had had a ride in the aëroplane. Some time before, when, under the name of Haidee, she had traveled with the Big Consolidated, she had ridden on a trapeze swung below the machine. It was against Matt's will, and only a trick of Burton's had made it possible for the girl to make the ascension. At the time she was under hypnotic influence, and could not realize what she was doing. So, it followed, this was really the first ride she had ever taken in the aëroplane while mistress of her own faculties and able to understand her situation.

She behaved admirably, and did not even cry out when the wings tilted sideways, or ducked forward with the seeming intention of hurling her and Matt to the earth.

There was no talk between the two. In silence Matt attended to his work, drove the *Comet* at speed over the show grounds, circled, and came down in the roped-off space set apart for the machine.

The crowds were still lingering, waiting for the aëroplane to return. Cheering began as soon as the *Comet* was in sight, and was kept up until she was safely on the ground in the position from which she had originally started.

Carl and Ping were waiting, too, and the eyes of both boys were big with astonishment when they saw and recognized Margaret Manners.

"Vell, py shiminy grickets!" exclaimed Carl.

The girl smiled at him wanly as Matt helped her from her seat.

"You and Ping take care of the machine, Carl," cautioned Matt, as he led Miss Manners to the guard ropes and parted a course for her through the jostling mob.

"Hurrah for Motor Matt!" shouted some one. "He goes out alone and comes back with a passenger!"

A laugh followed the cheer.

"What's the price for a trip on the *Comet*?" called some one else.

"Where does your air-ship line run?"

"Give me a ticket to San Francisco!"

Matt met the joking good-naturedly and piloted Miss Manners to the calliope tent. The girl was tired and worn out.

"You'd better get a little rest, Miss Manners," Matt suggested. "What you have passed through this morning would have shaken nerves much stronger than yours."

"I don't want to rest," she answered; "I want to talk. You have saved me again, Motor Matt, but what is the use of it all if I can't leave this country and go to England, or back to India? Ben Ali will find me again."

"You are through with him," said Matt, "just as I told you. A man has come from the British legation in Washington to get you and send you away by the first boat leaving New York."

"The man who came to Mrs. Chadwick's in Lafayette said the same thing," answered the girl wearily. "It seems as though there is no escaping Ben Ali."

"Has he hypnotized you many times since he took you from Mrs. Chadwick's?" asked Matt anxiously.

"Only once. I gave up hope, and went with him without trying to resist. He said he intended to send me back to India, but not until the rajah had paid him a lot of rupees."

"He treated you well?"

"He always treated me well—in his way—but the horror of going into a trance and saying and doing things I know nothing about is more terrible than ever to me. It was the fear of a trance that made me promise not to make Uncle Ben any trouble."

"Who was the man who impersonated the agent of the British ambassador?"

"I had never seen him before."

"I thought that perhaps he might have been the man who sold tickets in the ticket wagon for Burton—the one who was with the show when you and Ben Ali were traveling with us."

She shook her head.

"I should have known that man if it had been he."

"Where did the man take you?"

"On the train somewhere. I thought we were going to Washington until we got off the train at a little station and met Uncle Ben. It was then he threw me into a trance, and when he awoke me we were at a little house near the place where we went this morning to wait for Dhondaram. Aurung Zeeb was at the house, and so was the other Hindoo—a man I had never seen before. You are sure," the girl asked tremblingly, "that this other agent of the British ambassador is really the person he pretends to be?"

The girl's lack of confidence was pitiable. She had suffered so much that Matt could readily understand her feelings.

"I am positive, Miss Manners," he answered gently. "You must rest now. I will have Mrs. Harris come and stay with you for a while."

The girl did not object, and Matt had soon found Mrs. Harris and sent her to the calliope tent.

Two hours later, while Matt was lounging around the front of the animal tent, a tired party consisting of Burton, Twomley, and McGlory arrived from the direction of the street-car line.

"You Matt!" cried McGlory. "Why didn't you wait and give us a chance?"

"If I'd waited much longer," answered Matt, "there wouldn't have been a chance for anybody. Did you see me coming back from the oak opening?"

"Did we?" echoed Twomley, putting his monocle in his eyes. "By Jove, I should say we did. Fancy! You up aloft, sailing as nice as you please with Miss Manners beside you, and Burton, McGlory, and me tramping along the road."

"What was the matter?" asked Matt.

"Matter?" fumed Burton. "What's the matter when you set out in an automobile and don't arrive where you're going? The motor bucked, three miles out of Grand Rapids, and you sailed right along and never paid any attention to us. McGlory, Twomley, and I started to walk the rest of the distance, when we saw the machine couldn't be fixed up for an hour or so, and before we'd gone a mile you sailed off in the direction of the show grounds—and never looked our way! Oh, blazes! I'm done with automobiles."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Motor Matt's regret was keen over the failure to catch Ben Ali, Aurung Zeeb, and the unknown Hindoo. It was one of those cases, however, where it was best to be satisfied with the work accomplished, and to forget the failure whereby three miscreants escaped the consequence of their evil deeds.

And it was possible that Ben Ali was not long to enjoy his freedom, for Twomley asserted that all the powers of the United States Secret Service would be bent toward accomplishing his ultimate capture.

When it came to dealing legally with Dhondaram, a serious question arose. If the Hindoo was to be punished severely, it would be necessary to take him to Jackson, where the worst of his crimes had been committed. This would require the presence of complaining witnesses, of which Burton was one. For a man traveling from place to place constantly, as was Burton, such a move could not be made without great sacrifices.

It was deemed better, therefore, to have Dhondaram brought to book for the lesser crime committed in the house of the green shutters. "Assault with murderous intent" was the charge, and a light sentence followed.

Bill Wily, agreeably to promises given him, was released. Whether he profited by his experience or not, Motor Matt never afterward discovered. Such a lesson as he had had, however, should have been enough for any man. For a little matter of ten dollars, he had entered blindly into the schemes of Ben Ali—and Ben Ali's schemes left their mark on every person who had anything to do with them.

Twomley was a delighted Englishman, if there ever was one. He had fulfilled the mission with which he had been intrusted by Sir Roger, and he had done so after discovering that his errand to Lafayette, so far as securing Miss Manners was concerned, was useless.

A Roman candle in the side-show tent had lent itself to the perpetration of a practical joke; and out of that joke had come the clue which had made possible the second rescue of Margaret Manners.

Carl was very much pleased to learn that so much good had developed from a row in the freak tent, but whether or not he forgave Ping for setting off the Roman candle is open to question.

Carl had declared that he would "play even" with Ping for the candle episode, and those who knew Carl best believed that he would prove as good as his word.

Monday morning Twomley and Miss Manners took a train for New York, but not until both the attaché and the girl had expressed to Matt and the motor boys their appreciation of all that they had done.

It was somewhat indelicate of Carl, perhaps, to mention the matter of his five thousand dollars before Miss Manners, but he was beginning to worry about the money. As he expressed it, "Der longer vat der time iss, der more vat I don'd seem to ged dot rewart. I peen sefendeen years olt, und meppy I don'd lif more as sixty years from now."

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Twomley assured Carl that he would do whatever he possibly could to hurry the money along. And with this promise Carl had to be satisfied.

With the turning over of Dhondaram to the police, the liberating of Bill Wily, and the departure of Twomley and Miss Manners, a series of thrilling incidents connected with Motor Matt's show career came to a close.

And Motor Matt's show experiences were likewise drawing near an end. Just how close this end was he did not dream that Monday morning when he and McGlory accompanied the attaché and his charge to the train.

When the two boys got back to the show grounds, however, Boss Burton had a telegram for Matt.

Burton was frankly worried about that telegram. Some other showman, he felt sure, was offering Matt a bigger salary for his aëroplane performances.

"Don't you forget for a minute," said Burton, watching keenly as Matt opened the telegram, "that you're hooked up with me on a contract for the season. You can't break that contract, you know."

"There were conditions, Burton," said Matt.

"The only condition I remember was something about the government buying the aëroplane—which is all a dream. The government has bought one of the machines, and that's enough. It takes a Motor Matt to run one of those cranky Traquair air ships. It'll be a long while before Uncle Sam buys another."

Matt read the message through, gave a whoop of delight, and passed the yellow slip on to McGlory.

Then McGlory jubilated.

"What's to pay?" demanded Burton.

"Uncle Sam has done the trick!" crowed the cowboy. "He takes the *Comet* at the same price he paid for the *June Bug*—fifteen thousand spot—machine to be crated and shipped immediately, if not sooner. Whoop-ya! That settles the aëroplane business for King & McGlory. The next game we get into will be something, I reckon, that I can take a hand in, and not leave Pard Matt to do all the work."

Burton's face grew gloomy.

"Let me look at that message," he requested.

Matt handed it to him, and he read it over two or three times, then dropped it savagely, and ground it under his heel.

"You don't *have* to sell," said he angrily. "You can turn that offer down if you want to."

"No, I can't," Matt answered. "The sale was virtually made up in North Dakota weeks ago. Besides, I'm not the only one interested in the deal."

"Who else besides McGlory?"

"Why, Mrs. Traquair, the widow of Harry Traquair, who invented the extension wings and a few other things that have made the aëroplane a success. Half of the fifteen thousand the government pays for the machine goes to Mrs. Traquair."

"Oh, blazes!" growled Burton. "Don't tell the woman anything about it. Send word back to the war department you don't want to sell; then I'll make a new contract with you for a thousand a week. In seven or eight weeks you boys will receive all your share of what the government pays for the *Comet*."

Matt listened to the showman gravely.

"You don't mean what you say, Burton," said he. "If you think for a minute that I'd play crooked with Mrs. Traquair, or with the government, then you've got pretty far off your track. It's in our contract that, if the government wants the machine, the contract terminates. Here's where the motor boys' engagement with the Big Consolidated comes to a close."

"You'll make a couple of flights to-day, won't you?" asked Burton, swallowing his disappointment.

"Yes, I'll do that much for you," Matt answered, "and then, bright and early to-morrow morning, we begin crating the machine for shipment."

"Blamed if I don't sort of hate to see the machine go," murmured McGlory. "Many a hair-raising old trip you've had in the *Comet*, pard, with me below lookin' up at you and almost kicking the

bucket with heart failure! Mainy a thriller the machine has given us, and—well, I reckon it's done some good, too."

"That's the best part of it, Joe," said the king of the motor boys.

THE END.

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NEW YORK, September 11, 1909.

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A BRAVE DEED.

The mining town of Capelton was alive with excitement. A long-looked-for event was about to take place. Mr. Hilton, the owner of the mines and more than half the village, was to give a ball in honor of his son's twenty-first birthday, and also to celebrate the return of his only daughter from the Parisian school to which she had been sent when but ten years old.

Carl Hilton was an only son, and because of his parents' indulgence had become selfish and tyrannical. His father idolized him, and was blind to his faults. He was to become a partner in the mines on attaining his majority. As Mr. Hilton had been out of health for more than a year, Carl had attended to most of the business, and he had so tyrannized over the miners that they one and all hated him; but they loved and respected his father, and for his sake bore in silence the abuse of the son.

To this birthday ball all the miners and their families had been invited, and the rumors of the great beauty of Nina Hilton only added to the excitement and anticipation.

I will not weary the reader by a description of the affair, and no event of interest occurred until supper was announced. It fell to the lot of Fred Chase, one of the foremen in the mines, to escort the beautiful Nina, and so deeply did they become engaged in conversation that it was some minutes before Fred noticed that Carl sat directly opposite, and was watching them closely. With

an effort the young man concealed his annoyance, and continued his attentions to Nina.

"I intend to visit the mines to-morrow," said the girl, in tones loud enough to be heard by her brother. "I want to descend the new shaft."

"I shall be very happy to conduct you through the mines, but you must not descend the new shaft, for it is not safe. I have warned your brother that the roof of the mine is in danger of falling, but he only laughs at me, and I fear some terrible accident will be the result of his neglect."

"You are a fool, Fred Chase! The shaft is safe enough; if you talk like this, the men will all be afraid of it, and refuse to work. I shall take Nina there myself to-morrow," said Carl angrily.

The young man's face flushed, but he controlled himself, and answered coldly:

"I spoke the truth; the shaft is not safe, and unless more timber is put in to support the roof, you will soon have proof that I am right. I only hope that no lives will be lost."

"Pooh! You are a coward. I will show you to-morrow how little faith I put in your words."

The eyes of all present were drawn to the two by Carl's excited tone, and Fred's reply was plainly heard.

"Call me a coward, if you will, but time will prove the truth of my assertion. Neglect for twenty-four hours to order more timber to be placed in the new shaft for the support of its roof, and you alone will be responsible for what follows."

Carl did not answer, but glanced angrily at Fred, who, after a minute's pause, turned to Nina again, and changed the subject of conversation.

The following morning Carl started for the new shaft alone. Nina refused to accompany him, and begged him to delay his visit until the roof was made secure.

"Nonsense, sis! It is safe enough. That fool, Fred Chase, wanted to impress you."

Carl believed what he said. He had not visited the shaft for several weeks, and had not seen the timbers bend beneath the weight of earth above them. He reached the shaft just as half a dozen miners came from it, and in answer to his inquiries, was told that Fred Chase and another man had remained behind to finish filling the last car with ore.

"I am going down," he said, and in a few minutes was lowered to the bottom of the shaft. In the distance he could see the lights of the two miners. He advanced toward them. By the light of his own lantern he saw that some of the beams were bent; all seemed weighted to their utmost capacity, and he could not but own to himself that Fred Chase was right. He involuntarily shuddered as, in passing one large post, a slight crackling sound was heard; but it was not repeated, and he went on, determined to again make light of the matter.

"You see, I am not afraid of your shaft," he said sneeringly, as he reached the spot where the two men were standing with the now loaded car beside them.

"Only cowards need boast of their bravery," said Fred sternly.

"I am going on a short distance to look at the ore; you may wait for me at the foot of the shaft, and we will all be drawn up at once," continued Carl.

He strolled on, while Fred and his companion returned, as directed, to the entrance. They had barely reached it when they heard a loud report behind; a cry of fear mingled with the noise of falling rocks; then all was still.

With pallid faces the men looked at each other, for each knew what had happened. The roof had fallen, and Carl Hilton was either crushed beneath the rocks or imprisoned in the opening beyond.

Only an instant did they stand motionless. Then Fred grasped the rope and gave the signal to be hoisted to the top.

They told their sad story, and a messenger was dispatched to Mr. Hilton's residence. Soon the entrance to the shaft was a scene of wild excitement. The stricken relatives of the buried man had reached the spot as soon as possible. The father offered large rewards to any who would attempt the rescue of his son; but not a man would volunteer.

Mr. Hilton doubled and trebled his reward, but to no avail; to his entreaties were added the frantic pleading of the mother and Nina's distressed sobs.

Fred had stood silent, with his eyes bent on the ground, until the old man, in sheer despair, cried out:

"I will give half of my fortune, and it is a large one, to the men who will help me reach my boy!"

Fred came forward with a look of resolve on his face. "Mr. Hilton, not for your entire fortune would I enter that mine to save your son; but for humanity's sake, I will do my best to rescue him."

A cheer from the miners greeted these brave words. With a wave of his hand, Fred commanded silence, and running his eye over the crowd, said slowly:

"I must have three trusty men to help me. Who will go?"

For an instant no one responded; then Charles Gray, Fred's chosen companion, stepped to his side.

"I will go, Fred," he said quietly.

Two more men quickly followed the example of their brave leader, and, armed with spades, bars, ropes, and a bottle of brandy, they were lowered into the shaft.

Then followed a time of anxious suspense to the waiting crowd, who could only pray for the safety and success of the rescuing party.

The first act of the workers was to place extra beams, a few of which were lowered down the shaft for the purpose, as near as they could to the fallen roof, to help bear any strain that might be resting on those already there. In a few minutes they realized their wisdom, for a cracking sound was heard which caused them to retreat toward the shaft; but it was not repeated, and they returned to their work. At the end of three hours of cautious digging they came to the car which Fred and his companion had stayed behind to fill, and they stopped for a few moments' rest.

"He cannot be far from here, for we had barely reached the shaft when the roof fell. Hark! What was that?"

Fred stopped suddenly to listen.

"It was a groan! He is alive! Let us get to work, for he must be quite near," said Charlie Gray excitedly.

With new zeal they worked on, and in half an hour they had reached an opening caused by two large rocks, which had fallen together in such a manner as to leave a space between them. In that space lay Carl, with one arm doubled under him, and one foot pinioned by a large stone. The poor fellow was terribly bruised and cut, but conscious. Very gently he was lifted by the men and borne to the foot of the shaft. The signal was given, and they were carefully drawn to the top, and when they laid Carl on the ground a shout went up from the miners that echoed loudly over the hills.

"God bless you, Fred, and your brave companions!" said Mr. Hilton huskily, as he grasped the young man by the hand. "From my heart I thank you."

"No thanks are due. I could not bear to see a fellow creature die without trying to save him."

The crowd soon dispersed, and Carl was conveyed to his home. After many weeks of suffering he recovered; but the crushed foot was useless—he was a cripple for life.

As soon as he was able to do so, Carl sent for Fred.

"Forgive me, Fred," he said frankly. "I was wrong not to heed your advice, but my punishment has been great. Forget the past, and allow me to thank you for saving my life."

Fred could not refuse the apology thus offered, and the two became fast friends.

About a year afterward Mr. Hilton bestowed his daughter's hand upon the brave young man who had saved his son's life, and on his wedding day Fred became one of the owners of the mines. He is now a wealthy and prosperous man, and, with his beautiful wife, is almost worshiped by the miners.

A LOCOMOTIVE HERO.

Well, boys, if you wish it, I'll tell you the story. When I was a youth of eighteen, and lived with my parents, I had a boyish ambition to become an engineer, although I had been educated for loftier pursuits.

During my college vacation, I constantly lounged about the station, making friends with the officials, and especially with an engineer named Silas Markley. I became much attached to this man, although he was forty years of age and by no means a sociable fellow.

He was my ideal of a brave, skillful, thoroughbred engineer, and I looked up to him as something of a hero. He was not a married man, but lived alone with his old mother. I was a frequent visitor at their house, and I think they both took quite a fancy to me in their quiet, undemonstrative way.

When this Markley's fireman left him, I induced him to let me take his place during the remainder of my vacation. He hesitated for some time before he consented to humor my boyish whim; but he finally yielded, and I was in great glee.

The fact was that, in my idleness and the overworked state of my brain, I craved for the excitement, and, besides, I had such longing dreams of the fiery ride through the hills, mounted literally on the iron horse. So I became an expert fireman, and liked it exceedingly; for the excitement more than compensated for the rough work I was required to do.

But there came a time when I got my fill of excitement. Mrs. Markley one day formed a plan which seemed to give her a good deal of happiness. It was her son's birthday, and she wanted to go down to Philadelphia in the train without letting him know anything about it, and there purchase a present for him. She took me into her confidence, and asked me to assist her. I arranged the preliminaries, got her into the train without being noticed by Markley, who, of course, was busy with his engine.

The old lady was in high glee over the bit of innocent deception she was practicing on her son. She enjoined me again not to tell Silas, and then I left her and took my place.

It was a midsummer day, and the weather was delightful.

The train was one which stopped at the principal stations on the route. On this occasion, as there were two specials on the line, it was run by telegraph—that is, the engineer has simply to obey the instructions which he receives at each station, so that he is put as a machine in the hands of one controller, who directs all trains from a central point, and thus has the whole line under his eye. If the engineer does not obey to the least tittle his orders, it is destruction to the whole.

Well, we started without mishap, and up to time, and easily reached the first station in the time allotted to us. As we stopped there, a boy ran alongside with the telegram, which he handed to the engineer. The next moment I heard a smothered exclamation from Markley.

"Go back," he said to the boy; "tell Williams to have the message repeated; there's a mistake."

The boy dashed off; in a few minutes he came flying back.

"Had it repeated," he panted. "Williams is storming at you; says there's no mistake, and you'd best get on."

He thrust the second message up as he spoke.

Markley read it, and stood hesitating for half a minute.

There was dismay and utter perplexity in the expression of his face as he looked at the telegram and the long train behind him. His lips moved as if he were calculating chances, and his eyes suddenly quailed as if he saw death at the end of the calculation. I was watching him with considerable curiosity. I ventured to ask him what was the matter, and what he was going to do.

"I'm going to obey," he said curtly.

The engine gave a long shriek of horror that made me start as if it were Markley's own voice. The next instant we slipped out of the station and dashed through low-lying farms at a speed which seemed dangerous to me.

"Put in more coal," said Markley.

I shoveled in more, but took time.

"We are going very fast, Markley."

He did not answer. His eyes were fixed on the steam gauge, his lips close shut.

"More coal," he said.

I threw it in. The fields and houses began to fly past half-seen. We were nearing Dufreme, the next station. Markley's eyes went from the gauge to the face of the timepiece and back. He moved like an automaton. There was little more meaning in his face.

"More!" he said, without turning his eye.

"Markley, do you know you are going at the rate of sixty miles an hour?"

"Coal!"

I was alarmed at the stern, cold rigidity of the man. His pallor was becoming frightful. I threw in the coal. At least we must stop at Dufreme. That was the next halt. The little town was approaching. As the first house came into view the engine sent its shrieks of warning; it grew louder—still louder.

We dashed over the switches, up to the station, where a group of passengers waited, and passed it without the halt of an instant, catching a glimpse of the appalled faces and the waiting crowd. Then we were in the fields again. The speed now became literally breathless, the furnace glared red hot. The heat, the velocity, the terrible nervous strain of the man beside me seemed to weight the air. I found myself drawing long, stertorous breaths, like one drowning.

I heaped in the coal at intervals as he bade me. I did it because I was oppressed by an odd sense of duty which I never had in my ordinary brainwork. Since then I have understood how it is that dull, ignorant men, without a spark of enthusiasm, show such heroism as soldiers, firemen, and captains of wrecked vessels.

It is this overpowering sense of routine duty. It's a finer thing than sheer bravery, in my idea. However, I began to think that Markley was mad—laboring under some frenzy from drink, though I had never seen him touch liquor.

He did not move hand or foot, except in the mechanical control of his engine, his eyes going from the gauge to the timepiece with a steadiness that was more terrible and threatening than any gleam of insanity would have been. Once he glared back at the long train sweeping after the engine with a headlong speed that rocked it from side to side.

One could imagine he saw a hundred men and women in the cars, talking, reading, smoking, unconscious that their lives were all in the hold of one man, whom I now suspected to be mad. I knew by his look that he remembered that their lives were in his hand. He glanced at the clock.

"Twenty miles," he muttered. "Throw on more coal, Jack; the fire is going out."

I did it. Yes, I did it. There was something in the face of that man I could not resist. Then I climbed forward and shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"Markley," I shouted, "you are running this train into the jaws of death!"

"I know it," he replied quietly.

"Your mother is on board."

"Heavens!"

He staggered to his feet. But even then he did not remove his eyes from the gauge.

"Make up the fire," he commanded, and pushed in the throttle valve.

"I will not."

"Make up the fire, Jack," very quietly.

"I will not. You may kill yourself and your mother, but you shall not murder me!"

He looked at me. His kindly gray eyes glared like those of a wild beast, but he controlled himself in a moment.

"I could throw you off this engine, and make short work of you," he said. "But, look here, do you see the station yonder?"

I saw a faint streak in the sky about five miles ahead.

"I was told to reach that station by six o'clock," he continued. "The express train meeting us is due now. I ought to have laid by for it at Defreme. I was told to come on. The track is a single one. Unless I make the siding at the station in three minutes, we shall meet it in yonder hollow."

"Somebody's blunder?" I said.

"Yes, I think so."

I said nothing. I threw on coal. If I had had petroleum, I should have thrown it on; but I never was calmer in my life. When death actually stares a man in the face, it often frightens him into the most perfect composure. Markley pushed the valve still farther. The engine began to give a strange panting sound. Far off to the south I could see the dense black smoke of a train. I looked at Markley inquiringly. He nodded. It was the express. I stooped to the fire.

"No more," he said.

I looked across the clear summer sky at the gray smoke of the peaceful little village, and beyond that at a black line coming closer, closer, across the sky. Then I turned to the watch. In one minute more—well, I confess I sat down and buried my face in my hands. I don't think I tried to pray. I had a confused thought of mangled, dying men and women—mothers and their babies.

There was a terrible shriek from the engine, against which I leaned, another in my face. A hot, hissing tempest swept past me. I looked up. We were on the siding, and the express had gone by. It grazed our end car in passing. In a sort of delirious joy, I sprang up and shouted to Markley. He did not speak. He sat there immovable and cold as a stone. I went to the train and brought his mother to him, and, when he opened his eyes and took the old lady's hand in his, I turned hastily away.

Yes, gentlemen, I have been in many a railway accident, but I have always considered that the closest shave I ever had.

What was the blunder?

I don't know; Markley made light of it ever afterward, and kept it a secret; but no man on the line stood so high in the confidence of the company after that as he. By his coolness and nerve he had saved a hundred lives.

GEESE DROWN A SQUIRREL.

Jack, a big gray squirrel, who, with his mate, Jill, inhabited the island in the duck inclosure in the Bronx Park Zoo, New York City, sacrificed his life to his love of high living. It was this way:

Jack and Jill long ago discovered that by crossing over the ten-foot-wide stream of water which separates the island from the mainland on all sides they could reach a trough filled with corn, which was replenished daily, for the ducks and geese, which rightfully inhabit the pond and island. A wire fence dividing the inclosure used by the mallard ducks from that enjoyed by the Canada geese offered a means of communication between the island and the corn trough, and Jack and Jill long ago became expert in running along the top of this ticklish pathway.

Daily the two squirrels made pilgrimages to the corn trough, eaten to repletion, and then returned to the island. The ducks and the geese always swam close to the fence, flapping their wings and uttering hoarse cries of rage, but were never able to catch the nimble squirrels. Little by little, however, Jack lost his native agility as he partook of more and more of the rich food, and when he started back from a particularly heavy feast he waddled slowly along the top of the fence instead of hopping nimbly along as had been his wont.

One of the mallards saw him and realized that he was too heavy and too well fed to move hurriedly. The duck sounded a cry which brought all of its mates, and they attacked Jack viciously. The squirrel tried to hurry, but at last was pushed off the fence and fell into the pond.

In an instant he was surrounded by big Canada geese. Persons on shore saw him fight desperately for life, but finally he was forced under water. The geese churned the pond into a foam, and when they swam majestically away there was nothing to be seen of Jack.

Jill, who ran back and forth on the shore of the island while Jack was fighting for his life, retired to a tree after the tragedy, and has not been seen since. Keepers think that she will not try to reach the corn trough any more.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Added table of contents.

Images may be clicked to view larger versions.

Retained some inconsistent hyphenation; in many cases, words are hyphenated when used as adjectives but unhyphenated when used as nouns.

Front and rear covers, accent is missing from "Role" in original; retained inconsistency.

Page 1, corrected ? to ! after "Howdy, Dutch!"

Page 3, corrected "shimiiy" to "shiminy" in "Py shiminy crickets!"

Page 4, corrected "Wiley" to "Wily" in "Go back to your job, Wily."

Page 6, removed stray single quote after "going to keep it."

Page 8, added missing quote before "I'm the one."

Page 9, corrected typo "minues" in "Inside of five minutes."

Page 11, removed unnecessary quote before "Yes, he decided." (Adding a quote after "Yes" would also have been an option; however, this series usually does not quote thoughts).

Page 16, changed "doin 'a" to "doin' a."

Page 18, changed "go" to "got" in "What have you got to do with this house?"

Page 19, changed "he" to "the" in "the loss o' that Hindoostanee."

Page 21, changed "foolishnes" to "foolishness."

Page 22, changed "fair to asume" to "fair to assume." Changed "every" to "ever" in "on my mind ever since."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S MAKE UP; OR, PLAYING A
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