

MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
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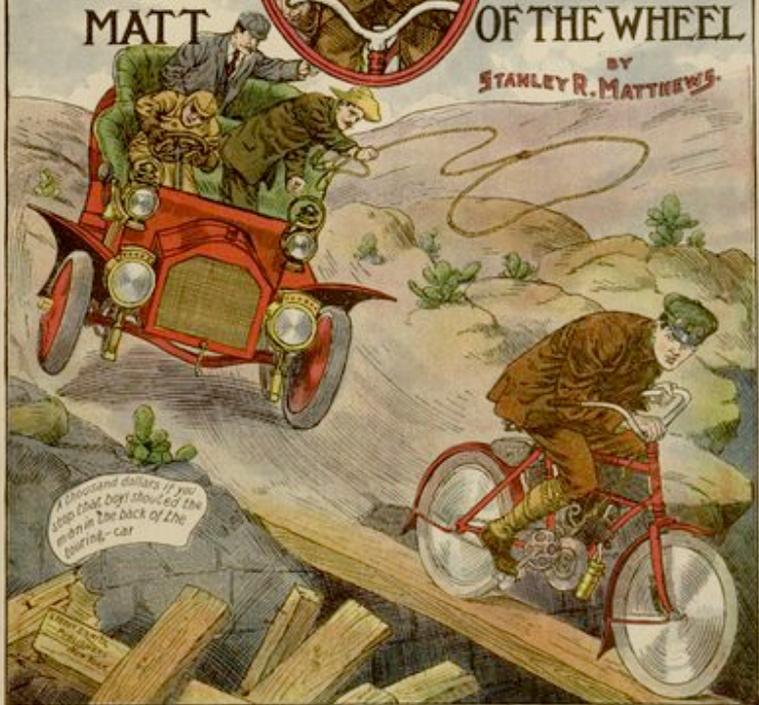
NO. 1
FEB. 27, 1909.

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR
MATT

THE KING
OF THE WHEEL

BY
STANLEY R. MATTHEWS



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MOTOR MATT

or

The King Of The Wheel

By Stanley R Matthews

Street & Smith
Publishers — New York

“Stanley R. Matthews” was the pen name of author William Wallace Cook (1867-1933). These *Motor Matt* stories were collected in sets of three, the main character’s name changed to Bob Steele, and reprinted word-for-word with only that name change. 33 of these weekly stories were written with the final one never officially published, and only the first 30 turned into *Bob Steele* editions.

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THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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Motor Matt

OR,

THE KING OF THE WHEEL.

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CHAPTER I.

BAD BLOOD.

"Hello, peaches!"

The girl in the calico dress turned quickly. There was a startled look in her brown eyes, and she drew back a little from the gate.

The laughing words had been flung at her breathlessly by a boy who was trotting along the road—a boy in running-togs with "P. H. S." in red letters across the breast of his white shirt. He came from the north, and the girl had been leaning upon the gate and looking south, across the bridge that spanned the canal and led into the town of Phoenix.

"I—I don't think I know you," murmured the girl, a look of repugnance crossing her brown, pretty face.

"Yes, you do," panted the boy, swinging in toward the gate and coming to a halt. "Sure you know me." Catching hold of the gate-palings he steadied himself and grinned in a manner which he must have thought engaging. "Why, you've seen me a dozen times, anyhow. Take another look."

After stealing a furtive glance at him the girl took a step backward.

"I've seen you, yes," she said quietly, "but I don't know you—and I don't think I care to know you."

"Don't jump at conclusions like that," the boy went on with a cool laugh. "You're old McReady's girl, Susie, and I'm—well, right here's where I introduce myself. I'm Dace Perry, captain of the High School cross-country team. Had the boys out for a practise run this

morning, and as I'm 'way in the lead of all of them except Clipperton, I reckon I'll linger in this fair spot until they come up. Don't be so bashful, Susie; I won't bite, honest."

"I'm not afraid of your biting, Dace Perry," answered Susie with a flirt of the head. "If all I've heard of you is true, you're more given to barking than anything else."

Temper flashed an instant in the boy's sloe-black eyes, giving an ugly hint of the darker side of his character. When the anger faded an unpleasant crafty look was left on his face.

"You can't believe all you hear, and not more than half you see," he remarked. "Where's Nutmegs? I know him."

"There's no such person as 'Nutmegs,'" answered the girl tartly. "If you mean my brother, Mark, he's in his laboratory down by the canal."

Perry stared a moment, then gave vent to an amused whistle.

"Laboratory, eh? Well, that's a good one, Susie. Where's the reformed road-agent? Is he in the laboratory joint, too?"

"No, Welcome has gone into town, but I can call Mark if you—"

"No, don't call him, Susie," interrupted Perry. "I've got something to tell you about Matt King. Say, I thought that would make you open your eyes. I reckon you don't think much of Matt King, eh?"

Vivid color mantled the girl's cheeks.

"Matt is a chum of Mark's, and a good friend of mine," she answered, "and everybody says he's the best all-around athlete in the high school. Major Woolford has picked him to represent the athletic club in the

bicycle races with Prescott and—"

"King has got to make good at the try-out first," scowled Perry.

"He'll do that, all right," averred Susie. "I guess there's no doubt about his being able to beat *you*."

"If what I've heard about him is true," continued Perry, "I reckon he won't have anything to do with the try-out, or with the race, either."

Sudden interest flashed in Susie's face. "What have you heard?" she demanded curiously.

So deeply concerned was she in this information about Matt King which Perry professed to have acquired, that she stepped eagerly to the gate.

This was what Perry had been waiting for. Susie McReady had jarred his vanity and his temper several times during their brief interview, and it was his nature to try to "play even." His idea of squaring accounts with the girl was directly in line with his low ideals and his insolent nature.

Leaning forward quickly Perry flung one arm about the girl's neck.

"I reckon you'll know me after this," cried Perry, and attempted to give the struggling girl a kiss.

Unseen by either of the two at the gate, a boy had glided noiselessly toward them on a wheel. He came from the direction of town and, as he crossed the bridge and saw Susie and Dace Perry, an inkling of the situation at the gate darted through his mind, and caused him to put more power into the pedals.

Suddenly the captain of the cross-country team was caught from behind and hurled backward with such force that he measured his length on the ground.

"Oh, Matt, Matt!" exclaimed Susie.

"What's the matter with you?" snarled Perry, quickly regaining his feet. His face was black with rage and he stepped toward Matt with doubled fists.

"I guess there's nothing much the matter with me," answered Matt coolly, "but you're a good deal of a cur, Dace Perry."

"What do you mean by butting in here like that?" fumed Perry, anything but logical now that anger had got the whip-hand of him.

"That's the way I was raised," answered Matt.

"I reckon the way you was raised gave somebody a lot of trouble," sneered Perry.

"Well, you can bet I'm going to give somebody a lot of trouble if Susie is bothered any more."

"You're swaggering around with a chip on your shoulder all the time, ain't you?"

"Not so you can notice it," laughed Matt, "but you'll always find a chip on my shoulder when a fellow acts like you were doing just now."

"Oh, punk!" Dace Perry changed his mind about wanting to fight and backed off down the road. "This isn't the end of our little ruction, Matt King. I'll give you the double-cross yet, see if I don't!"

"So-long!" answered Matt.

Perry shook his fist, looked northward along the road in the evident hope of locating some of his team, then turned disappointedly and sprinted for the bridge.

"I was never so glad of anything in my life, Matt," breathed Susie, "as to have you get here just when you did."

"I'm a little bit tickled myself, Susie," laughed Matt,

picking up his wheel and standing it alongside the fence, "but I guess Perry won't trouble you any more."

"I hate him!" cried Susie, stamping her foot. "He's never been a friend of Mark's, nor of yours, either, Matt."

"I guess Mark won't lose any sleep over that, and I know I won't."

"All the same, Matt, you'd better look out for him. A coward who fights you behind your back is more to be feared than a braver enemy who faces you in the open."

"That's a cinch. But let's forget Dace Perry for a while and think of something more pleasant. Where's Chub, Susie?"

Before the girl could answer, a husky voice was wafted toward the two from along the road.

"Oh, a bold, bad man was this desperado,

An' he blowed inter town like an ole tornado—

Ta-rooral—ooral—ay!"

Susie and Matt looked in the direction from which this burst of melody—if such it could be called—proceeded. An old man with a wooden leg was approaching, keeping the tempo of his song with jabs of the pin that took the place of his right foot.

"Here's Welcome Perkins," said Matt, with a broad smile, leaning back against the gate-post and fixing his eyes on the old man.

"He's been to town after something for Mark," returned Susie.

Welcome Perkins, otherwise Peg-leg Perkins, otherwise the "reformed road-agent," always reminded Matt of a picture out of a comic supplement. He was

little, and wizened, and old—just how old no one knew, but it was popularly supposed that he was somewhere around seventy. He had a pair of the mildest washed-out blue eyes ever set in a man's head, notwithstanding the fact that he was constantly asserting that he had passed his early life as a "pirate of the plains"; and displayed with pride an old, played-out six-shooter whose hand-grip was covered with notches—notches that made Welcome sigh and grow pensive every time he looked at them. Welcome averred that he was trying to live down his lawless past, but that his roaring, rampant, untamed disposition made the effort a struggle and a burden.

The old man wore a long and particularly vicious-looking mustache, which he was constantly training upward at the ends in order to make it even more desperate in appearance. His scanty gray locks were allowed to grow long, and they were surmounted with an old sombrero, always carefully whacked into the regulation Denver "poke." His ragged blue shirt was drawn in at the waist with a U. S. Army belt, from which depended a holster containing the notched and useless weapon already mentioned. *Chaparreros*, or "chaps," which, like their owner, had seen better days—or worse and more lawless ones if Welcome's word was to be taken—covered his left lower extremity and all that was left of his right. The right leg of the chaps was cut away at the knee in order to give freer play to the wooden pin.

Silas McReady, the father and sole remaining parent of Susie and Mark, was a prospector, and constantly in the hills. Welcome was an old-time friend of Silas, and for years had been fastened upon the McReady household like a barnacle.

"Howdy, pard!" roared Welcome as he drew near the gate and reached out his hand. "It's plumb good for a

ole outlaw like me to grip a honest pa'm. It helps to make me fergit what I was and to brace up an' be what I ort. I'm a horrible example o' what happens to a man when he cuts loose in his youth an' bloom an' terrorizes all outdoors—but I can't begin to tell ye how pacifyin' to my reckless natur' is the grip of a honest hand."

"Then give it a good grip, Welcome," grinned Matt. "I'd hate to have you get turbulent and go on the war-path. If a man of your age—"

Welcome, still holding Matt's hand, allowed his eyes to wander along the road to the northwest. Suddenly the weather-beaten, leathery face grew stern and the faded eyes snapped.

"Scud for the house, you two!" yelled Welcome; "scud! Trouble's a-tearin' down on us out o' the hills, an' here's whar Eagle-eye Perkins, Pirate o' the Plains, gets busy!"

The old man threw himself on Matt and pushed him through the gate. In his excitement, the strap that secured the wooden pin to Welcome's stump of a leg, broken and mended times out of mind, gave way and dropped Welcome into the yard behind Matt and Susie.

The eagle-eyed defender paid no attention to his fall, but as the gate swung shut drew himself up against the palings and jerked his obsolete weapon clear of the holster.

"Put your trust in Eagle-eye Perkins," he called valiantly to Matt and Susie; "if them red demons get at ye they walks over me to do it!"

CHAPTER II.

THE UNEXPECTED.

Welcome Perkins was as full of vagaries as a moving-picture show is full of trouble. Although he proudly referred to himself as "Eagle-eye," yet his sight was none too good, even when he had on his spectacles.

Matt and Susie, standing in the background, laughed as half a dozen puffing boys in sleeveless white shirts, running-pants and spiked shoes came abreast of the gate and straggled on toward the bridge. When the last one had flickered out of sight, Welcome muttered under his breath, sat upon the ground and began tinkering with the broken strap of his wooden leg.

"All-fired queer," said he, "how my mind's allers a-huntin' trouble that-away. 'Course if I'd a-had them spectacles on my nose I might have seen that them was runners from the high school, but I only ketched the flash o' them red letters on their white shirts, an' I jest up an' thinks o' Injuns right off. It's the ole sperrit b'ilin' around inside me, I reckon, an' I'm afeared it'll make me do somethin' yet that I'll be sorry for. I used to be a powerful man in a tussle."

Welcome pulled at the mended strap and got the wooden leg back in place; then he picked up the old weapon and Matt helped him to his feet.

"It must be awful," said Matt, with a sly look at Susie, "to have the disposition of a Royal Bengal tiger and forced to keep a muzzle on it all the time."

"Tur'ble," answered the old man with a gruesome shake of the head; "I can't begin to tell ye how tur'ble onhandy I find it oncet in a while," and with that he started off toward the back yard.

"Welcome is as jolly as a show," laughed Matt. "It's a mighty good thing that old pop-gun of his is harmless. If it wasn't for that he might make a mistake some time that would be anything but pleasant. It's a cinch he's an old false-alarm, but there's always a possibility that he'll explode by accident and do damage. Where did you say my pal Chub was?"

"In his laboratory," said Susie. "He sent Welcome to town after something, and I guess the old humbug has gone to the laboratory with it."

"What's Chub trying to invent now?" queried Matt, as he and Susie started around the house on the trail of Perkins.

"I think it's smokeless powder," replied Susie.

"Great hanky-pank!" gasped Matt. "Why, that's already been invented. Besides, Susie, Chub hadn't ought to be fooling around with stuff like that."

The back yard of the McReady home stretched down to the cottonwoods that fringed the bank of the canal. Here, in an old poultry-house, Mark, otherwise "Chub" McReady, did most of his experimenting.

A dozen feet from the "laboratory" was a tall pole rising some forty feet from the ground and overtopping the trees. At its lofty extremity was an arm with the tip of a lightning-rod swinging downward from its outer end.

"How's the wireless working, Susie?" asked Matt as they moved toward the canal.

"Mark got a spark from the Bluebell Mine last night," said Susie; "just one flash, that's all. After that something seemed to go wrong. That's generally the way with Mark's inventions, Matt. I wish he'd stop fooling away his time; but, even if his time isn't valuable, there's always the expense. Welcome

encourages him, though, and furnishes most of the money. I wonder where Welcome gets it?"

"Welcome's a sly old possum in spite of his foolishness, and it's my opinion he's got a stake settled away somewhere. This wireless-telegraph experimenting is harmless enough, but I'm Dutch if I think it's the right thing for Chub to tamper with this smokeless-powder idea. Something might happen, and —"

Just then something *did* happen, something that was clearly not down on the program. There was a muffled roar from the laboratory, followed by a burst of smoke from the door and the open window. With a wild yell, Welcome Perkins rolled through the window, heels—or heel—over head. He was on fire in several places.

A chunky, red-haired boy came through the door as though he had been shot out of a cannon. This was Chub, and he was badly singed.

"Whoo!" yelled Chub, coming to a dazed halt and rubbing one hand across his eyes. "That was a corker, though. I guess something went crossways. Say, Perk! Hold up there, Perk!"

Welcome Perkins had scrambled erect and was stumping along for the canal like a human meteor. He was carrying his hat and seemed to think his life depended on getting where he was going in the shortest possible time.

Without waiting to explain matters to Matt and Susie, Chub darted after Welcome.

"Goodness' sakes," screamed Susie, "the laboratory is burning up!"

"Small loss if it does burn up," answered Matt, "but we'd better do what we can to put out the fire and keep sparks away from the house."

Matt ran swiftly into the kitchen of the adobe house, picked up a bucket of water and darted back toward the laboratory. There was a good deal of smoke, but not very much fire, and the single pail of water was enough to quench the flames. But the interior of the laboratory was completely wrecked.

"There'll be no conflagration, Susie," announced Matt, coming out of the place and joining the girl near the door. "Chub was a lucky boy to get out of that mess as well as he did. Let's hike for the canal and see what he and Welcome are doing."

"Mark might have killed himself," said Susie, half sobbing with the strain her nerves had undergone, "and he might have killed Welcome, too. He's got to stop this foolish experimenting. You tell him, Matt, won't you?"

"You can bet I'll do what I can, Susie," answered Matt; "I don't want Chub to blow himself up. If Welcome furnishes the money, though, I don't just see how we're going to keep Chub from furnishing the time for all this fool investigating. The thing to do is to find where Welcome keeps his grub-stake and take it away from him."

When Susie and Matt reached the canal there was a spirited dispute going on between Chub and Welcome. The latter, from his appearance, must have jumped into the canal and extinguished the flames that had fastened upon his clothes, for he was as wet as a drowned rat.

"Perk," Chub was shouting, "I told you to get alcohol, *alcohol!* What was it you brought back?"

"No sich of a thing!" whooped Welcome, jumping up and down in his excitement and raining water over everybody. "Sulfuric acid, that there's what ye said—an' that there's what I got."

"And there was me," snorted Chub, "trying to mix sulfuric acid with gunpowder. Say, Perk!"

"Wow! Talk to yerself, talk to anybody else, but don't ye talk to me. I've had plenty, I have. Look! Everythin' I got's sp'iled."

"Perk," counseled Chub, "you jump into the canal again and stay there."

"Jump in yerself—yah! I'm goin' out inter the hills an' hold up stages an' things jest like I useter do—an' it's you what's driv' me to it. Thar's somethin' for ye to think of when ever'body's huntin' me an' thar's a price on my head an' I ain't got no place to go. When that thar time comes, Chub McReady, jest remember it was you driv ole Welcome Perkins to his everlastin' doom!"

Then, with his head high in the air, the ex-pirate of the plains stumped off through the cottonwoods, jabbing wrathfully with his wooden pin at every step. Chub watched him a moment, then leaned against a tree and looked sheepishly at Susie and Matt.

"I guess I was too hard on Perk," remarked Chub, a slow grin working its way over his freckled face, "for I was as much to blame as he was. By rights, we both ought to jump in the canal and stay there. How's the fire?"

"Matt put it out, Chub," said Susie. "I'm going to tell dad about this when he gets back. You've got to stop this nonsense before you kill yourself or somebody else."

"All right, sis," answered Chub humbly, "I'll stop. If I could only get that wireless-telegraph line to workin' between here and the Bluebell I'd have somethin' to keep me busy. Say, Matt, if you've got time I'd like to have you tell me what's the matter with that wireless apparatus. Got a spark from the Bluebell last night, but

that's all it amounted to. You're no inventor, but you're always pretty handy in telling me where I make a miscue in my machines. Go up to the house, sis," Chub added to Susie, "and keep that old fire-eater from going out into the hills and slaughtering somebody. I don't think he'd slip out at all, and I know he wouldn't massacre a horned toad, but he likes us to believe he's just naturally a bad man trying to reform, and it's just as well to keep an eye on him."

Before Susie left she cast a significant look at Matt.

"Let's go up the canal a ways, Chub," said Matt, when he and his chum were alone, "where we can make ourselves comfortable and have a little quiet confab."

"You've got more'n your hat on your mind, Matt," returned Chub, "I can tell that by the look of you; but if it's this business of mine that's put you in a funk—"

"It's not that altogether, Chub," interrupted Matt. "You see, I've got to leave Phoenix, and I want to talk with you about it."

Chub was astounded, and stood staring at Matt with jaws agape. His hair and eyebrows were singed, there was a black smudge on his face, and his clothes were more or less demoralized. In his bewilderment he made a picture that brought a hearty laugh to Matt's lips.

"Come on, Chub, what's struck you in a heap?" said Matt, catching his arm and pulling him off along the canal-bank. "You act as though I'd handed you a jolt below the belt."

"That's just the size of it, Matt," returned Chub. "Say, if you leave Phoenix you've got to take Reddy McReady along with you—or you don't go. That's flat. Are you listening to my spiel, pal?"

CHAPTER III.

DACE SHOWS HIS HAND.

"First off, Bricktop," said Matt, after he had taken a comfortable seat on a boulder, "you've got to stop messing around with high explosives. Smokeless powder has been on the market for some time, and you're wasting your energies."

"Shucks!" grinned Chub, "sis has been talkin' to you. That's what I told her we were after, but that was only part of it. Perk gave me the idea. If we could take a grain of powder and make it drive a bullet a mile, or ten grains and make it drive a bullet ten miles, we'd have the biggest thing that ever happened. Three men with gatling guns could kill off an army before it got in sight. It's a whale of a notion!"

"You bet it's a whale," agreed Matt. "You'd have so much power back of that bullet, Chub, it would blow the thing that fired it into smithereens—and I reckon the three men who were laying for the enemy would go along with the scraps, all right."

"You're a jim-dandy, Matt. Say, I didn't think of that," gasped Chub.

"Well, old chum, sit up and take notice of these things, and you'll save yourself a lot of trouble. I've been thinking over that wireless proposition of yours, and I've got a hunch that your ground-wire isn't anchored right. There's an old wire meat-broiler out back of your wood-shed—I saw it there the other day when you were poking around looking for scrap-iron. Hitch your ground-wire to the handle and bury the broiler about six feet down; then, if everything is in shape at the Bluebell, I'll bet something handsome you

get all kinds of sparks."

Chub stared at his chum in open-mouthed admiration.

"You're the wise boy!" he chirped; "if I had your head along with my knack of corralling stuff and getting it together I'd have Edison, Marconi and all that bunch lashed to the mast. King & McReady, Inventions to Order and While You Wait. Oh, gee!"

Carried away by his fancies, Chub lay back on the ground and stared upward into the cottonwood branches above him, dreaming things Munchausen would never have dared to mention.

"Come back," said Matt dryly, "come back to earth, Chub. This is a practical old world, and I'm right up against it. That's why I'm thinking of Denver."

Chub sat up in a hurry at that. "Now what are you trying to string me about Denver for?" he demanded. "What's the matter with Phoenix as a place to stay? It ain't so wild and woolly as a whole lot of other places in the West and Southwest; but since you arrived here you've been mighty spry about catching on."

"Phoenix is all right," said Matt. "Wherever I hang up my hat"—and just a shade of wistfulness drifted into his voice as he said it—"is home for me; but the fact of the matter is, Chub, I've got to knock off schooling and get to work—and I've got to do it *now*."

"You're crazy!" gasped Chub. "Why, you'll graduate in June, and you can't think of leaving school before that."

"I've got to," returned Matt firmly. "I've been rubbing the lamp too long for my own good."

"What do you mean by 'rubbing the lamp'?"

"I've got to bat that up to you, Chub, and when I'm

done you'll be the first person I ever told about it. In the first place, I'm a stray—what they call a 'maverick' out here on the cattle-ranges. Everybody calls me King, and I came by the name fairly enough, but for all I know Brown, Jones or Robinson would hit me just as close."

"You're King, all right," declared Chub, with a touch of admiration and feeling, "king of the diamond, the gridiron, the cinder path, the wheel and"—Chub paused "the king of good fellows, with more friends in a minute than I've got in a year."

"And more enemies," added Matt, gripping hard the eager hand Chub reached out to him.

"A chap that don't make enemies is a dub," said Chub. "We've got to be hated a little by somebody in order to keep us gingered up. But go on, Matt. I'll turn down the lights and pull out the tremolo-stop while you tell me the history of your past life."

"I'm going to cut it mighty short, Chub," returned Matt, "and just give you enough of it so you'll understand how I'm fixed. As long as I can remember, and up to a year ago, I was living with a good old man named Jonas King, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. I called him Uncle Jonas, although he told me he wasn't a relative of mine in any way; that so far as he knew I didn't have any relatives, and that he'd given me his name of King as the shortest cut out of a big difficulty. He sent me to school—to a technical school part of the time—but never breathed a word as to who I was or where I had come from. When he died"—Matt paused and looked toward the canal for a moment—"when he died he went suddenly, leaving me by will a fortune of a hundred thousand dollars—"

"Bully for Uncle Jonas!" ejaculated Chub joyously.

"Not so fast, Chub," went on Matt. "A brother of

Jonas King's stepped in and broke the will, and I was kicked out without a cent in my pockets. I got a job in a motor factory in Albany, but I hadn't held it down more than a month before I received a letter enclosing a draft for three hundred dollars. The letter told me to come to Phoenix, Arizona, go to school, and wait for further word from the writer, which I should receive inside of six months."

Chub's eyes were wide with interest and curiosity.

"That sounds like you'd copped it out of the Arabian Nights, Matt," said he. "Who sent you that letter? Some uncle in India?"

"It wasn't signed, and the letter was postmarked in San Francisco. The six months went by and I never heard anything more; and now it's nearly a year since I reached Phoenix and I'm"—Matt laughed—"well, I'm about dead broke, and I've got to get to work."

"Three hundred dollars can't last a fellow forever," commented Chub sagely. "I always knew there was a mystery about you, but I didn't think it was anything like that. You don't have to knock off your schooling now, though. Just come out to our joint and stay with us. It's worth the price just to trail around with Perk. What do you say?"

Chub was enthusiastic. His eyes glowed as he hung breathlessly upon Matt's answer.

"You know I couldn't do that," said Matt. "I've rubbed the lamp for the last time, and what I get from now on I'm going to *earn*." He leaned over and laid a hand on his chum's arm. "It isn't that I don't appreciate your offer, Chub, but a principle is mixed up in this thing and I can't afford to turn my back on it."

Chub was silent for a space. When Matt King used

that tone of voice he knew there was no arguing with him.

"You can't break away from Phoenix right away, anyhow," said Chub gloomily. "There's the Phoenix-Prescott athletic meet, and Major Woolford wants you to champion his club in the bike-race. You'll not turn that down. Why, it means as much as two hundred and fifty dollars if you win the race—and the try-out's this afternoon."

"I'll not ride in the try-out," answered Matt, "because I can't afford to hang on here until the meet. I've sold my wheel, and riding out here to see you is the last time I'll use it. With the money I get for that, and a little I have in my clothes, I can reach Denver and find something to do among the motors. I'll be at the try-out this afternoon, but I'm going there to tell the major he'll have to count me out."

Chub picked up a pebble and flipped it disconsolately into the canal. "Oh, gee!" he muttered, "this is too blamed bad! Ain't there any way you can get around it, Matt, without tramping rough-shod on that principle of yours?"

Before Matt could answer a muffled sound caused him and Chub to look up. Both were startled and jumped to their feet. Dace Perry and his cross-country squad were in front of them. There were seven in the lot, and they carried a hostile air that threw Matt and Chub at once on their guard.

Matt was quick to comprehend the situation. Perry, full of wrath because of the rough treatment young King had given him, had waited beyond the bridge for his runners to come up; then, after giving the lads his side of the story, Perry had led them quietly back across the bridge and along the canal to the place where Matt and Chub were having their confidential

talk.

There were only one or two boys in the squad who were not completely dominated by Perry. One of these was Ambrose Tuohy, a lengthy youth, who rejoiced in the nickname of "Splinters," and Tom Clipperton, a quarter-blood Indian, and the best long-distance runner in the school. Clipperton was shunned by most of the students on account of his blood—a proceeding he felt keenly, and which made him moody and reserved, although sometimes stirring him into violent fits of temper. Clipperton had never given Matt a chance either to like or dislike him. With his black eyes narrowed threateningly, Clipperton stood beside Dace Perry as the seven boys faced Matt and Chub.

Chub had not heard about the affair that had taken place at the gate, and naturally could not understand the hostility evinced by Perry and his squad; but the evidences of enmity was too plain to be mistaken, and when Chub got up he had a stone hidden in his fist.

"Surprised, eh?" sneered Perry, advancing a step toward Matt. "I never forget my debts, King, and right here and now is where I settle the score I owe you. I tipped off my hand at the gate, and here's where I'm going to show it."

CHAPTER IV.

WELCOME SHOWS HIS HAND— WITH SOMETHING IN IT.

"Why didn't you bring the whole gang, Perry?" inquired Chub, with one of his most tantalizing grins. "Billy Dill seems to be missing."

Clipperton, easily swayed by any one who took the right course, hated subterfuge, and was peculiarly outspoken.

"Dill sprained his ankle," said he, in his usual short, jerky sentences. "That's why he's not here. He wanted to come, but couldn't. I reckon there are enough of us, anyway."

"I reckon there are," remarked Chub, his grin broadening dangerously. "All you fellows need is a few feathers to be a whole tribe."

A sharp breath rushed through Clipperton's lips, his muscles tightened, his fists clenched, and the war-look of his savage ancestors swept across his face. Chub's fling had caught him in the old wound.

"Cut it out, Chub," muttered Matt; "Clip's not responsible for this."

Perry also said something in a low tone to Clipperton. The latter's face was still black and relentless, but he held himself in check. Matt advanced a little toward Perry and turned slightly so as to face the boys with him.

"If it's a fight you fellows want," said he, "I guess you'll find the latch-string out. I want to give you the other side of this, though, before you proceed to mix

things."

"That's right," snapped Perry, "crawfish! It's about what I'd expect of you."

There was a glint in Matt's eyes as he whirled on Perry.

"You can butt in later," said he, "and I'll come more than half-way to give you all the chance you want. Just now I'm going to have my say, Dace Perry, and I don't think"—Matt's voice was like velvet, but it cut like steel—"I *don't think* you're going to interfere."

"We've got Perry's side of it," said "Ratty" Spangler, a youth well nicknamed, "and that's enough for *us*. Eh, boys?"

The chorus of affirmatives was short one voice—that of Splinters.

"If I'm in on this," spoke up Splinters, "we play the game right or we don't play it at all." He fronted Matt. "Perry says, King," he went on, "that you've had a grouch against him for a long while, and that you tried to work it off by taking him from behind and slamming him into the road."

"I did have a grouch and I did slam him into the road," said Matt. "If Chub had been around I'd have left it to him—but Chub wasn't handy."

Then, briefly, Matt told of the affair at the gate. Chub growled angrily and sprang forward, only to be caught by his chum and pushed back.

"Wait!" cautioned Matt. "I guess you'll get all the rough-house you want, Chub, before we're done."

A chorus of jeers came from Perry's followers—Splinters excepted.

"That'll do me," said Splinters, turning on his heel

and starting off.

"Where you going, Tuohy?" shouted Perry.

"Home," was the curt response.

"You're taking this tenderfoot's word against mine?"

"I'm sorry—"

"Come back here, then!"

"Sorry King didn't do more than slam you into the road. Oh, you're the limit."

"Either you come back here or you quit the team," yelled Perry, his voice quivering with rage.

"Much obliged," flung back Splinters, keeping on into the timber; "it's a pleasure to quit."

The rest hooted at him as he vanished. This defection from the ranks brought the tension of the whole affair to the snapping-point. What happened immediately after the departure of Splinters came decisively, and with a rush.

Spangler and Perry, hoping to catch Matt at a disadvantage, hurled themselves at him. An instinct of fair play held Clipperton back. He turned for an instant to see what the other three members of the squad were going to do, and in that instant another momentous thing happened.

Chub, hovering in the background, saw Spangler and Perry dashing toward Matt. Brass knuckle-dusters glimmered on the fingers of Perry's right fist. Chub caught the flash of the knuckle-dusters and, being too far away to place himself shoulder to shoulder with Matt, he let fly with the stone he had been holding in his hand.

In his excitement Chub did not throw accurately. The stone missed Perry by a foot and struck Clipperton

a grazing blow on the side of the head. Clipperton staggered back, a trickle of blood rilling over his cheek, and whirled with a fierce cry.

Matt, notwithstanding the fact that Perry and Spangler claimed most of his attention, had witnessed Chub's disastrous work with the missile. Just as Clipperton whirled, Matt leaped backward and threw up his hand. This move, coming at that precious instant, gave Clipperton the impression that it was Matt who had hurled the stone.

In everything that Clipperton did he was lightning-quick. The blow had aroused all the passion that lay at the depths of his nature. With the face of a demon, and with a swiftness that was wonderful, he launched himself forward as though hurled by a catapult. The impact of his body knocked Perry out of his way, and in a twinkling he and Matt were engaged, hammer and tongs.

On occasion Matt could be every whit as sudden in his movements as was Clipperton. Just now his quarrel was not with Clipperton, and he hated the twist fate had given the course of events. Nevertheless Clipperton, his half-tamed nature fully aroused, demanded rough handling if Matt was to save himself.

Perry, perhaps not averse to having the fight taken off his hands, ordered his team-mates to keep back. In a group the five runners watched the progress of the battle. It was the first time any of them had ever seen Clipperton cast aside all restraint and display such murderous energy.

The quarter-blood was about Matt's own age, and his perfectly molded body and limbs were endued with tremendous power. But he had more power than prowess, and his fiery energy lacked the cool-headed calculation which alone could make it effective.

On the other hand, Matt King had science as well as strength, and energy as well as self-possession. No matter what the pinch he was in, he could think calmly, and with a swiftness and precision which alone would have won many a battle.

Chub knew that Matt had no love for a brawl; but Chub also knew that Matt tried always to play square with himself, and that if brawls came there was no dodging or side-stepping, but straight business right from the word "go." There was straight business now, and in many points it was brilliant.

Again and again Clipperton, his eyes like coals, his straight black hair tumbled over his forehead, and his face smeared with the red from his wound, hurled himself at Matt only to be beaten back. The one feature of the set-to that stood out beyond all others was this, that Matt was merely on the defensive. The fury of his opponent offered opening after opening of which Matt could have taken advantage; yet, strangely enough to Perry and his followers, Matt held his hand. Watching Clipperton constantly with keen, unwavering eyes, he countered every blow and beat off every attack.

Baffled at every point, Clipperton at last grew desperate. Rushing in he tried to "clinch," and Matt, while seeming to meet him on this ground, suddenly caught him about the middle and flung him over the steep bank into the canal.

A moment of silence followed the loud splash Clipperton made in the water, a silence broken by a shout from Perry.

"Let's throw the tenderfoot after Clip, fellows! Into the canal with him!"

After the object-lesson which Matt had given the runners in the manly art, no one of them was eager to try conclusions alone with the "tenderfoot," but by

going after him in a crowd there was little risk and an almost certain prospect of success.

Chub ran to his chum's side. Just as Perry, Spangler and the others started forward to carry out Perry's suggestion, another actor appeared on the scene, heralding his arrival with a whoop that went thundering among the cottonwoods.

"Scatter, ye onnery rapsclions! Here's me, Eagle-eye Perkins, the retired Pirate o' the Plains, drorin' a bead on every last one o' ye with ole Lucretia Borgia. Scatter, I tell ye, an' don't force me to revive the gory times that was, when I wants to be peaceful an' civilized."

Perry and his friends stayed their advance abruptly and all eyes turned on Welcome Perkins. The reformed road-agent had never looked more desperate than he did then. He was wet, and singed, and his clothes were burned in places, but the ends of his mustache stuck truculently upward, his wooden pin was planted firmly in the moist earth, and his antiquated six-shooter was swaying back and forth in the most approved border hold-up style.

In Phoenix Welcome was generally believed to be a boaster, with a past as harmless as that of a divinity student, and his loudly voiced regret for old deeds of lawlessness was supposed to result from a desire to be "in the lime-light" and to play to the galleries; but "Lucretia Borgia" looked big and dangerous, and there was no telling how far the erratic old humbug might go with the weapon.

In the canal Clipperton was already swimming to the opposite bank, apparently but little the worse for his fight and his ducking. It was clear that he was going to climb out and run for town.

"Come on, boys!" called Perry sullenly, facing about

and starting along the bank at a slow trot.

The rest fell in behind him and trailed out of sight among the trees. Chub began to laugh.

"Why, you old practical joke!" he gasped, "that gun's about as dangerous as a piece of bologna sausage."

A twinkle stole into Welcome's faded eyes. "Don't ye know, son," said he, "it ain't the dangerousness of a thing that counts so much as the popperler impression about its *bein'* dangerous? Lucretia Borgia ain't spoke a word fer ten year, an' she's all choked up with rust now, an' couldn't talk if she wanted to. But the sight o' her's enough—oh, yes, it's a-plenty.

"I seen the hull o' this fracas, an' the ole sperrit that I'm tryin' to fight down an' conker stirred around inside o' me to that extent that I jest had to take holt or bust my b'iler. I heerd that young whipper-snapper say he'd tipped his hand to Matt at the gate an' had come here to show it. Waal, bumby I reckoned that I'd show *my* hand—an' with somethin' in it. It's jest a bit of a sample o' what I useter be in the ferocious ole times. But come on; let's fergit about fights an' fightin', which is plumb unworthy of civilized folks, an' go up to the house."

CHAPTER V.

DACE PERRY'S CRAFTINESS.

The captain of the cross-country team was a shining example of what wrong bringing-up can do for some boys. His doting mother had spoiled him, and his father, a wealthy Denver mining-man, had for years been too busy accumulating money to pay any attention to him. When his wife died, the elder Perry suddenly realized that he had an unmanageable son on his hands.

While his mother lived, Perry had gone the pace. He was only sixteen when she died, but for more than a year he had been traveling in fast company, drinking and gambling, and doing his best to make, what he was pleased to call, a "thoroughbred" out of himself. His doting mother had been lenient and easily deceived. She had stood between Perry and his father, and when the latter occasionally refused to supply the boy with money she would give it to him out of her own allowance.

With the passing of Mrs. Perry all this was changed. Mr. Perry, in order to get Dace away from dissipated Denver companions, shipped him off to Phoenix and left him there in charge of a friend who happened to be the principal of the Phoenix High School. This was a change for the better in some ways. Dace had naturally a splendid physique, and he had an overweening pride in becoming first in high-school athletics, no matter how he might stand in his studies. He cut out the "budge," as he would have called liquor, because it interfered with his physical development; also he cut out smoking for the same reason. But he continued to gamble, and the poor old professor was as easily

hoodwinked as Mrs. Perry had been.

Perry, Sr., kept his son rigidly to a small allowance. As a result Dace was always head over heels in debt, for, although an inveterate gambler, he was not much more than an amateur at the game, though learning the tricks of the trade fast enough.

When Matt came to the school he aroused Perry's instant and unreasoning dislike. From the best athlete among the seniors Perry was relegated to the position of second best; and this, for one of his spoiled disposition and arrogant ways, constituted an offense not to be forgiven. Now, for the first time, the strained relations existing between Matt and Perry had come to an open break.

Baffled in his plot to give Matt a thrashing, Perry trotted sullenly and silently back toward the bridge across the canal. Before the bridge was reached his spirits had brightened a little, for his crafty mind had found something in the present situation that pleased him.

"See here, fellows," said Perry abruptly, coming to a halt and gathering his followers around him, "you all saw Matt King throw that stone at Clip, didn't you?"

"It wasn't him," piped Tubbits Drake; "it was Nutmegs, although it looked mighty like King did it."

"I say it was King," scowled Perry.

"Oh, well," grumbled Tubbits, "if you say it was King, all right."

Tubbits was an impecunious brother. He was always trying to borrow two-bits—in other words, a quarter—from his large and select list of acquaintances, and the habit had resulted in the nickname of "Two-bits," later shortened to "Tubbits."

"I say it," went on Perry, "and you've all got to swear to it. Savvy? If any one says anything different, I'll punch his head. Chums are like those French guys in the 'Three Musketeers'—one for all, and all for one. What one chum does, the other has to stand for. King and Nutmegs are chums, see? So, even if King didn't really throw that rock, he'll have to take the consequences on Chub's account. Clip *thinks* King did it, and there's been trouble. Just let Clip keep on thinking the way he does."

"Sure," said Ratty Spangler. "If anybody wants to know about who shied the rock, we'll all say it was the tenderfoot."

"That's all," responded Perry curtly, and trotted on to the bridge.

Just as Perry had imagined would be the case when he brought about this peculiar understanding concerning the one who threw the stone, Tom Clipperton was on the other side of the canal, waiting for his team-mates to come up with him. Clipperton's scanty running-garb was wet through, but that was a mere trifle and didn't bother him. He had bound a handkerchief about his injured forehead, and was thinking moodily of the easy way in which he had been handled by Matt. Perry went up to him and dropped a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"How're you coming, Clip?" he asked.

Clipperton grunted petulantly, shook off the hand and started along the road. Perry, used to his moods, fell in at his side and caught step with him.

"It was a low-down trick, Clip," said Perry, with feigned sympathy, "but just about what any one could expect from a fellow like King."

"He threw the rock," snarled Clipperton, hate

throbbing in his voice. "I didn't see the rock in his hand. When it hit me his hand was in the air. Did any of the rest of you see him?"

"We all saw him make that pass at you!" averred Ratty Spangler. "Didn't we, fellers?"

"We did!" all the rest answered as one.

The breath came sharp through Clipperton's lips. "He'll pay for it," he hissed. "You watch my smoke and see."

"That's the talk!" encouraged Perry craftily. "That tenderfoot ought to be kicked out of the school—he ain't fit for decent fellows to associate with. If that old one-legged freak hadn't pulled a gun on us, Clip, we'd have settled with King for what he did to you right there. How are you going to get even with him?"

"I know how," growled Clipperton. "I'll meet him again. I'll meet him as many times as I have to until I do him up."

"You're too headstrong, Clip," returned Perry, "if you don't mind my saying so. That's no way to make a saw-off with Matt King. Be sly. Go after him in a way he don't expect. That's your cue if you want to get *him*—just take it from me."

Clipperton turned a half-distrustful look on Perry.

"I'm no coward," he muttered. "Man to man. That's the way to settle everything."

"Sure, when you're dealing with a fellow of the right sort. But what's Matt King? Why, Clip, he was afraid of you from the start, and that's the reason he tried to get in his work at long range with the stone."

"D'you think that?" demanded Clipperton huskily.

"No think about it; it's a lead-pipe cinch. When you

balance accounts with a fellow like that go after him in his own way."

"What would you do?"

"You're a crack shot, Clip," observed Perry. "I know that because I saw you making bull's-eyes in the shooting-gallery the other day."

Clipperton looked startled.

"What's my shooting got to do with it?"

"Well," went on Perry, "have you got a gun, or can you get one?"

Tubbits and Ratty Spangler grew morbidly apprehensive.

"Looky here, Dace," demurred Tubbits, "don't let Clip go and do anything rash."

"Don't be a fool," snapped Perry. "I reckon I've got some sense left. Old Peg-leg drew a cannon on us, but I'm too well up in law to advise Clip to pull a gun on anybody—even Matt King." His voice grew friendly and confidential as he went on talking with Clipperton. "Can you get a pistol and stuff it in your pocket when you come to the try-out this afternoon, Clip?"

"Yes," was the reply. "What do you want me to do with it?"

Perry turned to the boys behind.

"Jog along, you fellows," said he; "Clip and I have got business to talk over. And mind," he added, as Tubbits, Spangler and the rest moved off ahead, "keep mum about what you've already heard."

"Mum it is," said the cross-country squad obediently, and drew away from the plotters.

"Matt King had better take to the cliffs and the

cactus," remarked Ratty Spangler, with a chuckle. "Ginger, there's going to be doings at the try-out this afternoon. What do you s'pose they want with a gun, Tubbits?"

The uncertainty was just desperate enough to fill Ratty with delightful anticipations. He hoped in his little soul that Perry and Clip wouldn't go far enough to involve the rest of the cross-country team, but he wanted them to be sure and go as far as they could.

"Blamed if I know," answered Tubbits. "I'm shyder of guns than I am of rattlesnakes. When that old skeezicks of a Perkins shook that piece of hardware at us a while ago, I thought I'd throw a fit. Why, the mouth of it looked as big as the Hoosac Tunnel to me. No, thankee, no guns in mine."

"We could jerk him up for that," asserted Ratty. "Say, if we'd have him arrested—"

"Arrest nothin'!" snorted Tubbits. "We'd look pretty small hauling old Perkins up before a judge and then telling why we'd gone back along the canal with Perry. Some things are well enough to leave alone—and that's one of them."

The boys were well into town by then, and the party separated, each going his different way and wondering what was to happen during the afternoon.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRY-OUT.

"There he is, Jack!" exclaimed Major Woolford, leaning across the railing of the judges' stand and pointing; "that's the youngster I was telling you about. By gad, he's the speediest thing that ever happened when it comes to a bike. Give him a sizing, Jack, and then take off your hat to Young America at its best. You see, I know what he can do, and I'm the one who told Carter to bring him to the track for a try-out. Walks like he was on springs and handles himself without a particle of lost motion—every move decisive and straight to the mark. Oh, I don't know! As long as the Old Star-Spangled-Long-May-it-Wave can give us lads like that I reckon the country's safe."

The major slipped his stop-watch into one pocket of his vest and pulled a cigar-case out of another. As he passed the case to his friend, Governor Gaynor, he noticed an amused smile on the governor's face. The major was president, and the governor an honorary member, of the Phoenix Athletic Club.

"Protégé of yours, major?" inquired the governor, striking a match.

"Not much, Jack," answered the major. "I don't believe in protégés, favorites, or any other brand of humbug that leads to the door marked 'pull.' Give me a young fellow that stands on his own feet—the kind that does his own climbing, Jack, without wasting valuable time looking around for some one to give him a boost. That's the sort of a chap Matt King is. Just keep your eye on him."

Below the judges' stand, in front of which ran the

tape, a crowd of forty or fifty persons had assembled. Fully half the crowd was made up of members of the club, young, middle-aged, and a few with gray in their hair—all devotees of clean, wholesome American sport. The other half of the crowd consisted mostly of high-school boys who were furnishing the majority of candidates for the try-out.

Matt, to whom the major had called the governor's attention, had leaped lightly over the fence that guarded the farther side of the track. Lined up just back of the fence were Susie McReady, Chub and Welcome Perkins. They had come to see the try-out, hoping against hope that something would happen to make Matt change his mind and become a candidate in the bike event. Leaning against the top rail of the fence, Matt stood watching the busy officers of the club and listening to the incessant clamor of the high-school boys.

"Rah! 'rah! 'rah! Do or die!

Phoenix! Phoenix! Phoenix High!"

The athletic clubs of both Phoenix and Prescott were for the encouragement of amateurs. Professionals were barred. The clubs could pick up material for their rival contests wherever they chose so long as they did not enlist any one who had ever competed for a money prize.

There was an odd expression on Matt King's open, handsome face as he looked and listened—a touch of wistfulness, it might be, softening the almost steelly resolution of his gray eyes.

"What do you know about him, major?" asked the governor, staring across the track through the cigar-smoke and feeling an instinctive admiration for the trim, boyish figure in cap, sweater and knickerbockers.

"Our acquaintance lasted less than an hour, and was mighty informal," chuckled the major. "I was returning from the Indian School in my motor-car, about a week ago, when along comes that boy on his wheel. He tried to go by, and—well, when I'm out for a spin in that six-thousand-dollar car I'm not letting anything on hoofs or wheels throw sand in my face. I tells the driver to speed her up, and by and by we have the boy's legs working like piston-rods. He was still abreast of us when some confounded thing or other slips a cog under the bonnet; then we begin to sputter and buckjump, and finally stop dead. The boy gives us the laugh and goes on.

"Mike, my driver, gets out to locate the injury. But it's too many for Mike. He was just telling me he'd have to go to the nearest farmhouse and telephone the garage, when the boy on the wheel comes trundling back.

He asks me as nice as you please if there's anything the matter, and if he can't help us out. I was just about to tell him that he had another guess coming if he thought he could make good where Mike had fallen down, when he slips out of his saddle, makes a couple of passes at the machinery, closes the bonnet and begins to crank up. Mike got back in his seat and laughed like he thought it was a good joke; then he pretty near threw a fit when the machine jogged off as well as ever. The boy gave us the laugh again, this time from the rear. And that's how he happened to make a hit with me. I've heard that he knows more about motors than—"

"All ready, boys!" came the voice of the starter.

Dace Perry and two other boys had their wheels at the tape, but Matt King continued to lean against the fence and made no move to come forward.

"Hurry up, King!" shouted the starter. "What's the matter with you?"

"I haven't a wheel any more, Mr. Carter," answered Matt, "and I'm not a candidate. That's what I came out here to tell you."

"Not a candidate?" boomed the major, from up in the stand. "Don't you know the prize that goes to the winner in this event when we meet Prescott is as good as two hundred and fifty dollars? It's not a money prize, for we don't intend to make professionals out of you boys, but—"

"He's lost his nerve, that's what's the matter with him."

The words were so uncalled for, and the taunt in the voice so vicious, that every eye turned at once on the speaker. The captain of the cross-country team, arms folded and hostile gaze leveled at Matt, stood leaning against his machine.

"Quitter!" scoffed a voice in the crowd.

"Dry up, Perry!" called the starter. "You too, Spangler. Neither of you has any call to butt in."

Matt left the fence and advanced slowly across the track toward Perry.

"I've lost my nerve, have I, Dace Perry?" Matt inquired, with a half-laugh.

"What else do you call it?" demanded Perry, keeping his black eyes warily on the other's face.

As Matt stood staring at Perry his expression changed to one of the utmost good humor. Finally, with a broad smile, he turned to the starter.

"It looks as though Perry was going to be lonesome, Mr. Carter," said he, "if I don't ride with him. Can you

dig up a wheel for me?"

Half a dozen in the high-school crowd set up a yell. "Take mine, Matt; take mine!"

"I know something about yours, Splinters," went on Matt, facing one of the lads, "and if you'll oblige me I'll spin it around the track."

"You bet!" chirruped Splinters, bounding away.

"I didn't come here for a try-out, Mr. Carter," said Matt, "but I don't want Perry or any one else to think that I'm a quitter or that my nerve is giving out. Can I ride in this race even if I shouldn't be able to meet the fellow from Prescott when the big event is pulled off?"

"What's the use of jockeying around like that?" grumbled Dace Perry. "What's the use of a try-out if the fellow that makes good don't hold down his end at the big meet?"

Carter was in a quandary, and cast an upward look toward Major Woolford.

"What do you say to that, major?" he asked.

"If we select you to represent the Phoenix Athletic Club in the bicycle-race, Matt," inquired the major, "why can't we count on you to be on hand and see the thing through?"

A touch of red ran into Matt's face.

"I may not be in Phoenix when the Prescott fellows come down, major," he replied.

"I'll take chances on that," growled the major. "Try him out, Carter."

Splinters, at that moment, came up with his machine. "I was going into this myself, Matt," said he, with a significant look at Perry, "but changed my mind. My racing-clothes are over in the dressing-room. They

wouldn't be overly wide for you, but they'd be plenty long."

"Much obliged, Splinters," returned Matt, rolling the bicycle to the tape, "but I'll race as I stand."

A moment more and the four boys were shoved away at the crack of the starter's pistol. The major, watch in hand, followed the flight around the track with eager eyes.

"See him go, Jack!" he cried. "Why, that boy is off like a scared coyote making for home and mother. Dace Perry hasn't a ghost of a show."

The track measured a mile, and was a perfect oval. There were no trees to intercept the vision, and every part of the course could be seen by the major and the governor.

At the quarter Matt was the length of his wheel ahead of Perry, and Perry was the same distance ahead of the foremost racer behind him. At the half the distance, so far as Matt and Perry were concerned, remained the same, but the other two racers were hopelessly in the rear.

"Look at Perry work!" rumbled the major. "He's got his back up like a Kilkenny cat on the fence, and I can almost hear him puff clear over here. But that King boy has him beaten to a frazzle. Look at the *form* of him, will you? Great! Man alive, it's just simply *superb!*"

"There doesn't seem to be any love lost between King and Perry," observed the governor, following the major as he pushed excitedly around the stand in order to keep the racers at all times under his eyes.

"The trouble with Perry," said the major, "is that he's got the disposition of an Apache Indian. He wants to be the whole thing in the high school, and Matt King, during the short time he's been in town, has been

boxing the compass all around him. Just look at the difference between the two, Jack. They're at the three-quarters post and are still the same distance apart. King intends to beat Perry, but he's considerate enough to hang back and win out by no more than a nose. If positions were changed so that Perry was in the lead instead of King, I'll bet good money that—"

Just at that moment, when the two leading racers were making their final spurt along the home-stretch, and when every nerve was as tense as a back-stay and every spectator had dropped into silence preparatory to hailing the victor with all his lung power, a spiteful *crack* cut the air from some point below the grand stand.

Simultaneously with the incisive note, Matt's bicycle was seen to swerve suddenly across Perry's path. Perry's wheel rushed into Matt's with a rattling crash and both riders were flung to the ground with terrific force.

"Great guns!" gasped the major, aghast. "I wonder if they're killed?"

"We'd better go and find out," returned the governor grimly.

Hurrying down the stairs, the major and the governor joined the excited crowd that was flocking toward the scene of the mishap.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAJOR'S SURPRISE.

Well in the lead of those who were hurrying to the scene of the disaster was Chub McReady, his feelings about evenly divided between fear for Matt and anger because of the foul play that had caused the accident. A little way behind Chub, in a rushing crowd of excited high-school boys, came Welcome Perkins, his wooden peg traveling over the ground as it had never done before. Susie was flying along not far from Welcome, a look of wild alarm in her face. The major and the governor were pretty well in the rear.

Matt had picked himself out of the wreck, before any of the crowd reached the scene, and, with the assistance of the two other racers, was lifting Dace Perry and carrying him to the grassy paddock beside the track. Matt's clothes were torn, and there was a rent in his right sleeve through which flowed a trickle of blood.

"Is he killed? How badly is he hurt? What caused the smash?"

These and a dozen other questions were flung at Matt by the breathless crowd as Perry was laid down. Matt's face was white, but he did not seem to be very seriously injured. Kneeling beside Perry he laid a hand on his breast.

"He's all right, I guess," said he, looking up as the major elbowed his way to Perry's side. "He's stunned, major," he added; "I don't think it's any worse than that."

"Is there a doctor here?" called the major; "telephone for a doctor, somebody! See if he has any broken

bones, Carter. Egad, Matt, you two fellows came together like a couple of railroad-trains. It's a wonder you weren't both killed. What was that I heard just before your bicycle ducked across in front of Perry's?"

"The tire blew up," answered Matt coolly.

"Something funny about that," put in Splinters, who was close to the major. "Both tires are new. You didn't run over anything, did you, Matt?"

"Some one fired a pistol," cried Chub; "nobody ever heard a tire pop like that! It came from beyond the lower end of the grand stand. Somebody put a bullet through that tire!"

"Nonsense!" scoffed the major. "What are you talking about, McReady? Who'd do a dastardly thing like that? Besides, it would take a mighty good marksman to put a bullet into a tire moving as fast as that one was."

"Look a-here," fumed Welcome Perkins, "I don't reckon there's a man in the hull Territory that's heard as much shootin' as what I have. I'm tellin' ye a gun was fired, an' by the shade o' Gallopin' Dick, it was fired at Matt there!"

"Clear out!" growled the major, "you're locoed. Who'd want to take a shot at Matt King? What do *you* think about it, my lad?" and the major turned to Matt.

Matt had dropped down and Susie was pushing back his torn sleeve.

"The tire went up, major," said Matt quietly; "that's all I know about it."

"See here," cried Susie, holding Matt's bare forearm for the major to see, "Matt's hurt worse than Dace Perry."

"You're wrong, Susie," returned Matt hastily, "it's

only a cut, and not much of a cut at that. Please tie my handkerchief around it, will you?"

Matt jerked a handkerchief out of his pocket with his left hand and Susie began tying it over the wound. While Perry was being pulled and prodded in a search for broken bones, he suddenly opened his eyes and sat up. There was a dazed look in his face, but he seemed to be all right.

"How d'ye feel, Dace?" inquired Tubbits Drake anxiously, bending down over Perry.

"I'm all right," replied Perry; "a little bit dizzy, that's all. King fouled me! Did you see him as we started down the stretch?"

"Listen to that!" snorted Chub fiercely. "Some of your gang played a low-down trick on Matt, Dace Perry, or he wouldn't have got in your way."

"Tut, tut!" growled the major; "that's enough of that sort of talk. It was an accident, and nothing more. King would have been an easy winner, and there wasn't any cause for him to foul Perry. You boys are lucky to get out of the scrape as well as you did. How are the wheels?"

"Perry's is pretty badly smashed," reported some one who had taken a little time to look at the two bicycles, "but Tuohy's will be all right with a little tinkering. There's a hole in the rear tire, and the track is perfectly clean where the bicycles came together."

The significance of these words was not lost upon the crowd. Major Woolford turned to Horton and Coggsell, two members of the club who were making the race with Matt and Perry.

"You fellows were coming toward the lower end of the grand stand when the accident happened," said he; "did you see any one there?"

"We were 'tending to our knitting strictly," answered Coggsell, "and had no time to look at the grand stand. But we both thought we heard the report of a revolver."

"You didn't, though," declared the major. "That report was the tire when it let go. You'd better try another brand of tires, Tuohy."

As neither of the lads had been seriously injured it became necessary that another trial be made in order to determine who was the better man; and this time Matt started with grim determination in his eye, never once being headed, so that he wheeled across the line ten yards ahead of Dace.

This time there was no suspicious bursting of a tire, and at the conclusion the major spoke up:

"King's our man for the fight with Prescott; and if anything happens that he doesn't show up, we'll use Perry. That will be all for to-day. Will you ride home with me, Jack?"

The major was trying bluffly to appear at his ease, but it was quite clear that his mind was far from serene.

"My man is here with the horse and buggy, major," replied the governor, "and I've got some important business awaiting me at the office. I think you've picked a winner for the race with Prescott," and he gave the major a significant look as he turned away.

Mike was coming up with the major's motor-car, and the proprietor reached out and took Matt by the arm.

"I want you to ride back with me, King," said he, and in another minute Matt was in the tonneau with the major beside him.

"Get the wheel fixed up, Splinters," called Matt; "I'll

stand the damage."

"No, you won't, old chap," answered Splinters. "You've stood enough damage as it is."

"Home, Mike," said the major, and the car moved off across the track and toward the wagon-road.

Matt waved his hand to Chub, Susie and Perkins; and members of the club and some of the high-school boys stopped their heated discussion of the cause of the accident long enough to give a rousing cheer.

"What's your candid opinion, King?" asked the major when the car had left the park and was spinning along the highroad. "You're talking to a friend, understand, and I want to get to the bottom of this."

"I haven't any opinion, major," said Matt. "You know as much as I do."

"But did you hear the report of a revolver?"

"I thought I did."

The major muttered savagely. "Have you any enemy lawless enough to take that way of doing you up?"

"I don't think I have. We'd better let the thing stand just as it is, I guess. There was no great harm done, if you count out the damage to the wheels."

"By gad, I like your spirit! The thing has an ugly look, but for the good of the club the less said about it the better. Sure your arm's all right?"

"It will be as good as ever in a few days."

They met a doctor who had been telephoned for and was hurrying to the park. The major turned him back with the information that his services were not needed.

For the rest of the distance to his home the major leaned back in his seat and said nothing. When they

reached a street which was close to the place where he boarded, Matt wanted to get out, but the major shook his head mysteriously, and they rode on. In due course the car halted in front of the small building which served for a garage, and the major told Mike to leave the car outside and to go in "and bring out the other machine."

"I've got something I want to show you, King," said Woolford, getting out of the car, "and that's the reason I brought you here. If you're the kind of a lad I believe you are, the surprise I'm going to spring on you will keep you in Phoenix for that race with Prescott."

The major's mysterious manner aroused Matt's curiosity; then, a few minutes later, his curiosity was eclipsed by astonishment and admiration. Through the open door of the garage Mike was rolling a span new motor-cycle!

Motors were Matt's hobby. Anything driven by a motor had always appealed to him, but motor-cycles and motor-cars captured his fancy beyond anything and everything else in the motor line.

"Great hanky-pank!" he exclaimed, as the machine, glossy and bright in every part, was brought to a stop between him and the major.

"Like the looks of her?" laughed the major.

"She's a fair daisy and no mistake!" cried Matt delightedly.

The mass of compact machinery would have been puzzling to a boy who knew nothing about gasoline motor-cycles, but Matt's sparkling eyes went over the beautiful model part by part.

"It's one of the latest make and not being generally sold, as yet," explained the major, still smiling at the unfeigned pleasure the sight of the mechanical marvel

was giving Matt. "Notice the twin cylinders? Seven horse-power, my boy. Think of that! Why, you could scoot away from a streak of lightning on that bike. What do you think of her name, eh?"

On the gasoline-tank, back of the saddle, the word *Comet* was lettered in gold.

"A good name for a racer," cried Matt, "and I'm Dutch if I ever saw anything to equal her. She's a jim-dandy, major."

"I reckon you know how to ride one of the things, eh? Jump on and try her a whirl."

"May I?" returned Matt, as though he thought the major's invitation too good to be true.

"Sure!" laughed the major jovially. "She's full of gasoline and all you have to do is to turn it on and throw in the spark."

Matt mounted while Mike steadied the machine; for a few moments he worked the pedals and then, with a patter of sharp explosions, he turned on the power and was off up the road like a bird on the wing.

It was a short spin, but the joy of it was not to be described. Every part of the superb mechanism worked to perfection. Matt tried it on the turns, tried it on a straightaway course, tried it in every conceivable manner he could think of, and the machine answered promptly and smoothly to his every touch. When he returned to the major and Mike, Matt's face was glowing with happiness and excitement.

"How does she run?" asked the major.

"It's the slickest thing on wheels!" returned Matt enthusiastically. "I never saw anything finer."

"How would you like to own her?"

Matt had got down from the saddle and Mike was steadying the machine. The major's words staggered the lad.

"Own her?" cried Matt; "I?"

"Why not?" The major leaned toward him and dropped a hand on his shoulder. "The *Comet* goes to the winner of the bicycle-race. You can own her, King, if you want to!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RABBITT'S FOOT.

Major Woolford wanted Matt in that bicycle-race. He hadn't any idea why the boy hung back at the try-out, or why he was thinking of leaving town, but in showing him the prize that went to the victor he had played a trump card.

Matt's bosom swelled as he eyed the beautiful machine, and his mind circled about ways and means for staying in Phoenix until the Phoenix-Prescott athletic meet. What Matt had received for his bicycle, together with what little money he already possessed, was barely sufficient to land him in Denver. If he stayed on in Phoenix, and used up some of this money for living-expenses, he might have a motor-cycle when he was ready to leave the place, but how was he to get to Denver?

Even as he put the question to himself, quick as a flash the answer came: "Ride the *Comet* to Denver, to Chicago, to New York—wherever you want to go!" The idea electrified the boy.

"I'll be in that race, major," he cried, turning to the president of the athletic club, "*and I'll win the prize!*"

"Sure you will!" exclaimed the delighted major. "I reckoned you'd stay as soon as you saw what the prize was to be. A lad who likes motors as well as you do wouldn't let a machine like that get away from him."

"Who races for Prescott?" asked Matt.

"A local celebrity called Newton O'Day. Perry beat O'Day in the bicycle-race last year, and although I hear O'Day has developed a phenomenal burst of speed

since then, I shouldn't wonder if Perry could repeat the trick."

"Then you don't really need me, major?" said Matt.

"You bet we do! Perry is so crooked he can't walk around the block without running into himself. I might trust him as a last resort, but it would certainly have to be that. The two clubs come together two weeks from to-day, and you're down for our side in the bicycle event, King, with Perry for second choice in case anything should happen to keep you away. But you don't want to let anything happen; see?" The major talked with great earnestness and laid a confiding hand on Matt's shoulder. "After what happened at the park this afternoon it might be just as well for you to step high, wide and handsome, and keep eyes in the back of your head. We're counting on you, don't forget that." The major turned to his driver. "Take King's machine back into the garage, Mike," he added. "We're going to turn it over to him in a couple of weeks."

"You bet you are, major," averred Matt, "if racing will win it."

He walked to his boarding-place with a bounding heart, and seemed to be stepping on air. Ever since motor-cycles had been on the market he had dreamed of owning one. Now there was a chance that his dream would come true, and that he was to own a seven-horse-power marvel, fleet as the wind. Small wonder the boy was elated.

The machinery of the *Comet* was controlled by the grip on the handle-bars, and by various flexible twists of the wrist. Matt's game arm had suffered somewhat through manipulating the grip control, but by the time the *Comet* was his he knew his arm would be as well as ever.

Matt lodged on First Avenue, in the home of a

woman who had lost her husband in a mining explosion, and had been compelled to take boarders for a living. He had a pleasant front room on the second floor, and when he bounded up-stairs and burst into his private quarters he was a little bit surprised to find Chub there. There was an ominous look on Chub's freckled face.

"Somebody died and left you a million?" inquired Chub. "You look as chipper as an Injun squaw with a string of new beads."

"Well," laughed Matt, "I do feel just a little hilarious."

"It must have tickled you a whole lot to pull out of that smash by the skin of your teeth," muttered Chub. "Shucks, Matt, I never saw a fellow that takes things like you do."

"It's twice as easy to laugh at your troubles, Chub, as to throw a fit and pull a long face. All a fellow needs is to get the knack. But I've had something else to help me buck up," and Matt, as he flung himself into a chair, proceeded to tell his chum about the motorcycle, and about his decision to stay in Phoenix for the athletic-club contests.

Chub's face brightened. Ever since he had learned that Matt was going to leave town he had been more or less gloomy, and the knowledge that he was to remain for the big meet was mighty cheering.

"Bully!" exclaimed Chub. "You'll win that motorcycle hands down—provided you're not interfered with."

"I'll not be interfered with, Chub," returned Matt confidently. "For heaven's sake, don't go and make a wet blanket out of yourself. What's on your mind, anyhow? You're as blue as a whetstone."

Chub's face had gloomed up again. With hands jammed into his trousers pockets and with legs outstretched he slouched back in his chair and grunted savagely.

"They can't fool me, nit," he growled. "A pistol went off when you were passing the lower end of the grand stand, and that's what busted the tire. There's only one chap in school who could shoot like that, and he's the only one, aside from Dace Perry, who'd try to do you any dirt. You know who I mean—Tom Clipperton."

"That's mighty slim evidence for a charge against Clipperton, Chub," said Matt gravely. "Don't be rash."

"Rash!" muttered Chub. "You don't want to shut your eyes to what Clip can do, Matt. He's never been more than half-tamed, and has a standing grouch at everybody on account of his blood. I nagged him some this morning, and he was ripe for anything when I whaled away with that rock. And then to have him get the notion that *you* threw it. Oh, gee!" Chub's discontent was morbid. "Say," he went on, "when Susie and I and Perk were coming from the track we met Clip going home with Perry, Spangler, Tubbits Drake and that bunch. I waltzed over and told Clip that he was off his mark a little about that rock, and that I, little Reddy Mac, was the author of that slam."

"You didn't?" exclaimed Matt.

"Don't you never think I didn't. But what good did it do? They gave me the frozen laugh, the whole gang of 'em, and Perry said it was a raw blazer of a play, and that I couldn't succeed in putting myself between you and trouble. Now, Matt; Perry, Spangler, Drake and the others *know* I let fly with that stone, and they're letting Clip think the other way so as to make him take you off Perry's hands."

Matt was thoughtful for a minute. "Well, what of it?"

he asked presently.

"What of it?" repeated Chub. "Oh, gee-whiskers! Can't you see what it means to have a real Injun in war-paint, like Clip, camped on your trail? Take it from me, Matt, it means trouble for you between now and the day of the race."

"All right," said Matt cheerfully, "I've had trouble before."

"Not the sort Clip, with Perry and that cross-country team back of him, will hand out to you. Seems like I'm always making a mess of things," Chub snorted. "That's the way Johnny Hardluck spars up to me. I get in a few whole-arm jabs and then, just as everything looks rosy, there's an error, and fate gets past my guard. This day's a sample. I begin with powder and sulfuric acid, hit Clip below the belt with a reference to his Injun blood, and then land on him with a corker of a rock intended for Perry. It wouldn't be so bad, Matt, if *you* didn't come in for the consequences."

"Never mind me," laughed Matt. "I'm big for my size and old for my age, and I've always been able to take precious good care of number one. I'm sorry for Clip. His mixed blood worries him, and Perry knows how to keep him all worked up. But nobody knows just what happened at the try-out, so don't do any wild guessing, Chub, and, above all, keep your guesses to yourself."

"I know what happened at the try-out," asserted Chub, "and there's no guess about it, either. Clip is superstitious. Remember that rabbit's foot, mounted on a silver band, he always carries as a luck-bringer?"

Everybody in the school knew about Clip's rabbit's foot. He had carried it the year before when he had beaten Vance Latham, the Prescott champion, in the mile race.

"What about that?" asked Matt, wondering what the luck-bringer had to do with the affair at the track.

"You know how the grand stand is built, out at the park," pursued Chub. "Any one can get under it and look out onto the track between the board seats. If any one wanted to, he could climb the timbers, rest the barrel of a revolver on a board and make a good shot at any one on the track. That notion struck me before I left the park this afternoon, and I stole away to do a little investigating. I'm beginning to think Sherlock Holmes is a back number compared to me. Look here what little Reddy Hawkshaw found under the stand and close to the lower end!"

Chub jerked his right hand out of his pocket and flung an object at Matt. The latter caught it deftly. It was a silver-mounted rabbit's foot, attached to a piece of fine steel chain.

Matt drew in a quick breath and turned his startled eyes on Chub.

"*Now* what have you got to say?" inquired Chub. "I'm the original, blown-in-the-bottle trouble-maker, but you can bet I haven't gone wrong on *this*!"

CHAPTER IX.

MATT SHOWS HIS COLORS.

Looking down on Matt and Chub from one of the walls were four lines carefully printed on a big white card. It was Matt's work, the printing; and the four lines had been in his room at Uncle Jonas King's in the old house in the Berkshires.

"Let me win if I may when the game's afoot;
Let me master my Fate when I choose her:
Playing square with myself in the fight, my boy,
If I fail let me be a good loser."

From Chub's triumphant face, Matt's eyes wandered to the lines on the card and dwelt there for a time.

"I guess you can't get around that rabbit's foot, Matt," said Chub, "and I guess Major Woolford can't, either. Clip has been settled on for the mile race with Prescott this year same as he was last, but you take it from me the major won't have anything to do with him when I show him that rabbit's foot and tell him where I found it. And maybe," finished Chub, "he'll scratch Dace Perry's entry, too, for it's a dead open-and-shut they were both in this. Perry, though, didn't figure on having your wheel jump across in front of his and cause a smash-up."

Matt, with that rabbit's-foot charm as an eye-opener, saw through the whole dastardly proceeding. Crafty Dace Perry was egging Clipperton on, thus "playing even" with Matt at little cost to himself.

"What did Perry hope to gain by having Clip shoot a bullet into my tire?" queried Matt musingly.

"If you'd taken a header from the bicycle, and broken a leg or an arm, that would have put you out of the running. Perry would have been cock of the walk in the bike event, and Clip could have soothed himself with the reflection that he'd squared up for that rocky deal he thought you gave him this morning. But we can fix 'em! Let's go and have a talk with the major, Matt."

In his eagerness Chub reached for his hat.

"I guess we won't," said Matt.

"Shucks!" gasped Chub; "you're not going to show up that pair and make 'em take their medicine?"

"I'm not going to give Tom Clipperton a black eye when Perry is the one most to blame, and when the whole thing is the result of a misunderstanding. We can't say anything about Perry without bringing Clip into it. And I'm not sure," Matt added, "that it's advisable to air the thing, anyway. All Prescott would be tickled to hear of the bickering, and every person in Phoenix who loves clean sport would be disgusted. I'll take care of the rabbit's foot, and we'll let the whole matter rest and not tell any one anything about it. You've kept quiet so far, haven't you, Chub?"

"Yes, mum as a church mouse; why, I didn't even tell Susie or Perk. I had a mind to bat it up to Clip, Perry and the rest when I tackled 'em on the way from the track, but thought I hadn't better. The whole gang might have jumped me and taken the rabbit's foot away. But, look here. You don't mean this, do you?"

"You bet I do mean it, Chub. If you're a chum of mine you'll do as I tell you."

Chub heaved a sigh like a boiler-explosion. "Another spoke in little Chub's wheel," he muttered. "There's never any telling which way you're going to jump, Matt, or how. You know what Perry is. Professor Todd

don't know he's mixing with Dirk Hawley, the gambler, and fellows of that sort; but he is, and he's going wrong."

Matt recalled what the major had said concerning Perry, and about the little confidence he had in him. Was this because Perry associated with blacklegs, and particularly with Dirk Hawley?

"What Perry is doing doesn't make any difference with what we're to do, Chub," said Matt. "Clip is only a tool of Perry's, and some day he's going to find out how he's being made a catspaw. When that time comes, Perry will have a little trouble on his own hands."

"All right, Matt," said Chub, getting up, "have it your own way. It's pretty near supper-time, and I've got to hike. Will you be over this evening? Maybe I'll get into communication with Delray, up at the Bluebell."

"If I get time I may run over," answered Matt, "but don't look for me."

Just as Chub was about to lay his hand on the door-knob a knock fell on the panel. He opened the door and found Mrs. Spooner, the landlady, outside. There was an odd look on Mrs. Spooner's face.

"There's a man down-stairs as wants to see Matt," said she. "He come in one of them gasoline wagons, an' Matt may be as surprised to hear as I am to tell him that it's—*Hawley, the gambler!*"

Mrs. Spooner's voice sank to a frightened whisper.

"Dirk Hawley!" muttered Chub, staring at Matt. "Sugar, what in tunket can the blackleg want with you?"

Matt was as much surprised as were Mrs. Spooner and Chub. He did not even know the man, although he had seen him many times, and had heard a good deal

about him that was not to his credit.

"I'm puzzled to know why he's coming to see me," muttered Matt, taking a look at the motor-car through the window. "Have him walk up, Mrs. Spooner, and I'll find out what he wants."

Chub hesitated a moment as though he would like to stay for the interview, but finally he left, passing Hawley on the stairs.

Dirk Hawley owned one of the largest gambling-dens in Phoenix, and was reputed to be worth a mint of money. He wore fierce diamonds, had a racing-stable and cut a wide swath among the gambling fraternity. He stepped blandly into Matt's room, and took his sizing for a moment with keen, shifty eyes.

"You don't know me, I reckon," said he loudly, "but it's dollars to doughnuts I ain't a stranger to you for all that. Ask anybody and they'll tell you Dirk Hawley's a good sport to tie to. Rise to that? Dirk Hawley never goes back on his friends. I've come here to get acquainted with you, King, and to make a friend of you." He put out his hand. "Shake," he added.

"I don't care to shake," answered Matt. "We're not traveling the same way, Mr. Hawley, and I don't know what good it would do for us to get acquainted."

Hawley drew down the lid of his right eye and chuckled.

"No? Well, there's nothing flatterin' about that, but I like your frankness, hang me if I don't. Now, I'm going to drop down in one of these nice easy chairs and tell you just how much more I can do for you in a day than Woolford could in a month."

Picking out the biggest chair, he sank into it; then, extracting a gold-mounted cigar-case from his pocket, he extended it toward Matt. Matt shook his head.

Hawley chuckled again, extracted a fat cigar and slowly lighted it.

"I'm no hand for beating about the bush, King," he proceeded, studying the lad as he talked; "when I know what I want, I go right ahead and make my play, straight from the shoulder. Ain't that right? Sure. Now, I reckon you know I ain't one of these goody-goody sports. Woolford plays the racing-game for the game itself, but I play it for that—and for somethin' else. If it was only the game that made a hit with me, I wouldn't be ridin' around in a ten-thousand-dollar motor-car, or makin' a pleasure out o' business, same as I do. Understand? Who was it started Paddy Lee, the fastest hundred-an'-twenty-yard man that ever come down the cinder-path? Why, me. I discovered Paddy, and he's over in England now, taking money away from the Britishers hand over fist. Candy, just candy. Now, say, mebbly you ain't next, but I've been watchin' you ever since you hit Phoenix. That's right. I've got an eye for a likely youngster, and if you want a friend to push you, for a part of the stakes you can pull down, why not try me out? This is the first time I ever went at a man like this—mostly, they come to me, an' are tickled to death if I take any notice of 'em. But here I am, flat-footed, askin' you to let me take your athletic future in my hands and make you a world-beater. What do you say?"

Matt was not expecting anything like this. For a moment it took his breath. Misinterpreting the boy's silence, Hawley fairly radiated genial confidence.

"Catchin' on, first clatter out of the box!" he murmured admiringly. "Always knew you had a head on you. And what good's a runner or a bicycle-racer without a head? Tush! From the minute a chap is on his mark till he comes in a winner, he has to use his brains as well as his heels. Now, King, if you and I

hook up, it's a professional I'm going to make you; see? You'll go in for big things and shake the biggest plum-tree. My ideas o' what's right and proper, though, have got to govern. You're a young hand, while I cut my teeth on a hand-book at the Sheepshead races. I become your manager, right from the snap of the pistol, and I begin by keepin' you out of small-fry contests. You can't race in the Phoenix-Prescott meet. I'll just send you to a friend o' mine up in Denver to put you in trainin' for a big bicycle-race at the Coliseum in Chicago; an' jest to ease up your feelin's for scratchin' your entry in the Phoenix-Prescott side-show, I tucks five hundred of the long green in your little hand and sends you north to-morrow. What say?"

Matt was "stumped." The longer Hawley talked the more astounded Matt became. Just what Hawley wanted to do with him the boy did not know, but he gleaned enough to understand that he'd have to turn his back on a whole bunch of cherished "principles" if he fell in with the gambler's desires.

"I guess you've got into the wrong pew, Mr. Hawley," remarked Matt. "I haven't any desire to help you shake plum-trees, and if I ever went into racing for a business you're the last man I'd pick out to see me through."

"Ain't my money as good as anybody else's?" flared Hawley, losing some of his amiability.

"I'm not talking about money. What I want to say is that you and I can't hitch up worth a cent."

"That's how you stack up, is it?" returned Hawley. "Well, look here"—he drew a roll of bills out of his pocket—"there's five hundred in that roll and it's all yours if you go to Denver to-morrow and stay there for a month."

Matt had a thought just then that touched him like a

live wire.

"You're trying to keep me out of that Phoenix-Prescott contest, Mr. Hawley," said he, with a square look into the gambler's eyes. "What sort of an ax have you got to grind, anyhow?"

Dirk Hawley got up, shoved the roll of bills into his pocket, and moved to the door.

"You're too wise for your own good, my bantam," he sneered. "Perry pretty near hits it off in what he tells me about you. If you think you're going to ride in that bicycle-race you've got another guess coming. Just paste that in your little hat and keep your eye on it."

Then, with an angry splutter, Dirk Hawley let himself out of the room and slammed the door. A few moments later Matt heard his big motor-car puffing away from the curb.

CHAPTER X.

A CHALLENGE.

For several days Matt pondered over that queer talk he had had with Dirk Hawley. All he could make out of it only left him more mystified than ever. It seemed certain that Hawley had mentioned putting Matt into training for big racing-events merely as a ruse to get him to Denver. The gambler wanted to keep him out of the Phoenix-Prescott race, and was willing to spend \$500 in order to do so. But what was his reason?

Even though Dirk Hawley had plenty of money he would not let go of \$500 unless he expected to get value-received for it. There was a possibility that, as a friend of Dace Perry's, Hawley wanted to get Matt out of the race in order to give Perry a show. However, Perry would hardly spend \$500 in order to win a \$250 motor-cycle; and certainly the gambler would not put up the money for him. It all looked very dark and very mysterious to Matt.

The gambler's threat did not bother him in the least; and he was so self-reliant that he did not take the matter of Hawley's visit to the major. Had he, at that time, the remotest inkling of what Hawley's real purpose was, he would have acted differently and told the major everything. But when this knowledge came to Matt, events happened which made it impossible for him to go to Major Woolford and lay bare the gambler's scheme.

Although Perry had beaten O'Day, the Prescott rider, in the bicycle-race the year before, and Matt knew very well he could beat Perry, yet Matt was taking no chances. O'Day was working hard and, it was said, had developed phenomenal speed. In order to make

assurance doubly sure, Matt went into active training at once. The major furnished him a good racing-wheel, and morning and evening he was out with it.

A youngster named Penny, who was in his first year at the high school, had a one-cylinder motor-cycle, and Matt got him to act as pace-maker. Every afternoon Penny and Matt were at the track. For his morning spin, Matt went out alone.

Perry, also, was taking hold of the practise-work in vigorous style. He was out as much as Matt was, and often Matt saw Hawley's motor-car setting the pace for him.

Perry did some remarkable stunts in the wake of that six-cylinder machine. Results were more spectacular than valuable, however. With the body of a big touring-car to split the air and act as a wind-break, it would have been strange if Perry had not made a good showing.

For his training Matt dug out of his trunk the leather cap, coat and leggings for which he had had no use since leaving the motor-factory in Albany. This cumbersome clothing hampered him somewhat, but he knew that if he could do well in that he would be able to work much better when stripped for the contest with O'Day.

"Perry has taken to practise just as though he was to be the big high boy in that bicycle-race," remarked Chub. "He was only second choice, and what's he working so hard for when he knows you're going to hold down the Phoenix end against O'Day?"

"Probably he wants to be fit for the race of his life in case anything happens to me," said Matt.

"Well, you take care that nothing happens to you, Matt," cautioned Chub.

During all this time Matt saw very little of Clipperton. Whenever they met, which they were bound to do occasionally, Clipperton threw back his shoulders and scowled blackly. Ratty Spangler, Tubbits Drake and a few more of Perry's friends not only kept their hostile attitude toward Matt, but influenced some of the other students to come over to their side. But Matt was not lacking for friends. Splinters formed himself into a committee of one and passed around a true version of the affair by the canal. Splinters, of course, knew nothing about the matter of the rock, but he knew enough to turn the best boys in the school against Perry.

The Prescott Athletic Club, with several hundred Prescott rooters, was to come to Phoenix by special train on Saturday forenoon. On the afternoon of Friday, the day preceding the "big meet"—as all loyal Phoenix and Prescott people called the athletic event—Matt got back from the track to find a letter waiting for him on the table in his room.

Mrs. Spooner explained that she had found the missive pushed under the front door, and hadn't the least idea who had left it. Matt stared when he opened the letter and began to read. It was from Tom Clipperton, and was very much to the point.

"Matt King: You think you're a better man than I am. I'll give you another guess. We can settle our differences in one way. Man to man. Come alone to the place where you threw me into the canal. Make it 9 o'clock to-night. Either I'll give you the worst thrashing you ever had, or you'll give one to

"Tom Clipperton.

"P.S.—There's a moon."

"It's a challenge," muttered Matt grimly. "I don't

want to fight the fellow—it will only make a bad matter worse. I'll have to, though, unless I can talk with him and tell him a few things he'll believe. Clip is not half bad at heart, and if he'd only get rid of some of his foolish notions, and stay away from Perry, he'd make a mighty good chum."

Crumpling up the note, Matt threw it into a wastebasket.

"I'll have to give him a licking, though, if he won't have it any other way," he added under his breath.

The McReady home was only a little way from the place of meeting selected by Clipperton. It was about half-past seven when Matt left Mrs. Spooner's, intending to call on Chub, and leaving in time to meet Clipperton on the bank of the canal at nine.

Chub and Susie were at home, but Welcome Perkins was in town, taking his part in the general excitement preceding what was to be a red-letter day in the annals of Phoenix. Chub was in front of his wireless apparatus, for the accommodation of which a corner of the kitchen had been set apart. Flashes were coming brightly in the spark-gap between the two brass balls of the home-made apparatus.

Chub had begun his experiments in message-sending with an ordinary telegraph-instrument, which he had manufactured himself. One end of the wire had been in the laboratory and the other in the kitchen. After Susie had learned the code, and was able to operate the key, Chub used to take fifteen minutes wiring his sister for something which he could have gone after in almost as many seconds.

Following the telegraph-instrument came experiments in wireless work, in conjunction with an old telegraph-operator who was watchman at the Bluebell Mine, twenty miles away. Many weeks passed

before Chub finally got his materials together, and assembled the instruments and erected the necessary wires at home and at the Bluebell. Delray, the operator-watchman at the Bluebell, helped Chub as much as he could at that end of the line, and Matt was constantly called upon for advice as failure succeeded failure. Now, for the first time since he had begun operations, Chub was in extended communication with Delray, and his delight as he worked the key and the sparks flew between the terminals, was scarcely to be measured.

"Bully!" cried Chub, as he sat back in his chair, "this is the first time the Arizona ether has ever been stirred up like Del and I are doing it now. I asked him if he wasn't coming to the fun to-morrow afternoon. Let's see if he got it."

Chub had hardly finished speaking before the sounder began to click. Chub bent forward with an eager, satisfied look on his face, and Susie stood with bowed head reading the message as it came through.

"He can't come," said Chub; "says he'd give a good deal to see Matt beat O'Day, but that there's no one to relieve him, and he'll have to stay at the Bluebell. He's the only man up there now, you know, Matt. To-morrow night, about this time, I guess you'll be shooting along on the *Comet*, eh?"

"I'm going to win that race, Chub," answered Matt, with quiet confidence.

"Wish I was as sure of inventing a flying-machine as I am that you're going to beat out O'Day."

"Is that what you're going to do next—invent a flying-machine?" laughed Matt.

"Either that or build an automobile."

"Build an automobile," suggested Susie; "you won't

have so far to fall if anything gives out."

Just then Chub thought of something he wanted to say to the Bluebell and jumped for the key. Matt talked with Susie for a little while, but kept quiet about his expected meeting with Clipperton. When he left, he proceeded the length of the front walk and passed through the gate, in order to give Susie, who was watching him, the impression that he was going back to town. He could turn back along the canal just below the bridge, and so come to the place where Clipperton would be waiting for him. On his way to the canal he most unexpectedly ran into Welcome Perkins, who was burning the air in the direction of home.

"Whoop!" cried Welcome fiercely, "it's a wonder ye wouldn't look where ye're goin'—runnin' inter a one-legged ole pirate like a cyclone. Where's yer eyes, anyway? Think I ain't got nothin' else to do but—Shade o' Gallopin' Dick! Why, if it ain't Matt King—jest the very feller I wanted to see. There's the horriblest thing a-goin' on, pard, ye most ever heard of! I got so heathen mad I come purty nigh fallin' from grace, drorin' ole Lucretia Borgia an' damagin' every one in sight. Nobody knows what a rip-roarin' ole fury I am when I cut loose, or—"

"What's on your mind, Welcome?" said Matt, trying to pin the old man down to more facts and less language.

"That's what I'm a-tellin' ye," fluttered Welcome. "Rushed around to Mrs. Spooner's—fine ole lady, Mrs. Spooner, but she's scart of me. Soon's she saw who it was a-rappin' on the door she screams frightful, an' wouldn't talk with me till I'd got off the porch." Welcome sniffed plaintively. "That's what a blood-curdlin' past'll do fer a man. Don't you never turn into a hootin', tootin' road-agent, Matt, or—"

"I'll turn into something worse than that," broke in Matt, "if you don't tell me what you're trying to. Now, then, make another start."

"Mrs. Spooner she says you ain't there, an' I reckons ye've gone to see Chub," went on Welcome, "so off I comes this way. Whisper," he sputtered in Matt's ear, excitedly, and drew him close to the fence at the roadside. "This is so tur'ble it won't bear tellin' above yer breath."

CHAPTER XI.

FOUL PLAY.

"I don't b'leeve in gamblin'," whispered Welcome, "an' bettin' is next door to knockin' a human down an' goin' through his pockets; but that's what Dirk Hawley is doin'—bettin' right an' left two to one, three to one, any odds he can git, that"—and here Welcome grabbed Matt's arm in a convulsive grip and brought his face close to Matt's—"O'Day'll win that race to-morrer! Ain't that scandalous? An' him a Phœnix man!"

"Of course Hawley will bet," said Matt, "that's his business. I don't believe in it, and I know Major Woolworth don't, but you can't keep it from figuring in athletic contests like those to-morrow. The major plays the game for the game itself, while Hawley plays it for what he can get out of it."

"That ain't all," breathed Welcome. "If Hawley was bound to bet I thought he ort to be bettin' on the best man—which is you. My, my, but I got in a twitter over the way Hawley was actin', an' I a'most hate to tell ye how I cut loose, Matt."

"Tell it, Welcome," urged Matt; "I'll try not to be shocked."

"Well," and the old man gulped on the words as though they came hard, "I met that Spangler boy on the dark street alongside Hawley's place an'—an'—well, I was so chuck full o' that ole pirate feelin' I jest pulled Lucretia Borgia, pushed 'er in his face, an' axed him real cross what Hawley was doin', an' why. The Spangler boy gits the shakes right off, an' his teeth chatters as he unloads the news. Perry is bettin' on O'Day himself, an' Hawley has fixed it so's you won't

race, Matt, an' Perry's agreed to throw the race. That's what the Spangler boy told me, an' he got down on his knees an' begged me not to let Hawley or Perry know where I got the information. What d'ye think o' that?"

Matt was startled. He might easily have inferred that Welcome was making a mountain out of a mole-hill, as he was too apt to do, but for the fact that there was evidence to support Welcome's story.

Hawley had tried to get Matt out of town so he would not take part in the race. This, of course, was to throw the Phoenix chances of winning into Perry's hands, and thus make sure that O'Day would win. Perry's training had been only a "bluff" in order to make Phoenix people believe that he was preparing to do his best in case he had the opportunity to race with O'Day.

The whole contemptible plot drifted through Matt's brain. The one thing that puzzled him was how Hawley had planned to keep him out of the race. Here it was almost the eleventh hour and Hawley had not yet made any move to keep Matt off the track—excepting, of course, that offer of a \$500 bribe.

"Somethin' has got to be did!" declared Welcome in an explosive whisper. "It's up to you, pard."

"Look here, Welcome," said Matt earnestly, "you leave this whole thing to me, and don't breathe a whisper of what you have found out to any one, not even to Chub. I'll do everything that's necessary."

"But, say—"

"Not a word. Go on into the house, calm your turbulent spirit and let me handle the difficulty. I'm going to some place now, and can't stop here any longer. Mum it is, mind!" and Matt hurried on to the canal.

Just below the bridge he waited until he heard the

pat, pat of Welcome's wooden pin on the McReady front walk, then he turned to the left, vaulted over a fence and started along the canal through the cottonwood-trees.

Suddenly he paused, an idea plunging lightning-like through his brain. Was that letter of Tom Clipperton's merely a lure? Had Clipperton written it for the purpose of getting him into the hands of a gang of roughs who would so handle him that he would be a candidate for the hospital rather than the track on the following day?

Standing there on the canal-bank, with the moonlight sifting through the cottonwood branches in silver patches, Matt King did some hard thinking.

He had always entertained a certain amount of respect for Tom Clipperton. He believed that Clipperton was square, and that there were some things he would not do even while under the influence of Dace Perry—and this in spite of what had happened at the try-out.

Matt would have welcomed the chance to make Clipperton his friend, for he believed there was more real manhood in the quarter-blood than in Perry and all the rest of his followers put together. The question with Matt now was, should he carry his trust in Clipperton to the limit, and go on to the appointed place where he expected to find him alone?

Matt King was absolutely fearless. Whenever he believed in a thing he always had the courage of his convictions. It was so now. Having reached a decision, he continued on through the moonlight. As he stepped into the small open space where the clash had occurred two weeks before, a form untangled itself from the shadow of the trees and came toward him. It was Clipperton.

"You've come," said Clipperton, in a voice of satisfaction. "I didn't know whether you would or not. Thought you mightn't have the nerve. Throw off your coat."

"Don't be in a rush, Clipperton," answered Matt. "I'm going to give you all the satisfaction you want before we leave here, but I'd like to talk a little before we get busy."

"What's the good of talk? Either you're going to get a good licking or I am. Let's see which."

"We'll see which in about two minutes. When we faced each other in this place nearly two weeks ago, you came here with Perry. I told all of you why Perry came—"

"Perry told us, too. I'm taking Perry's word, not yours."

"Of course," said Matt dryly. "Perry stands pretty high with you now, but there's going to be a change. You must know, Clipperton, that I have faith in you or I wouldn't be here to-night. It would be easy for you to have a gang in ambush and beat me up so I wouldn't be able to leave my bed for a week—"

A snarl rushed from Clipperton's lips. "If you think I'm enough of an Indian to do that—"

"I don't."

"Didn't I trust you, too? You could have brought McReady along. Are you going to strip?" There was angry impatience in Clipperton's voice.

"There was a mistake about that rock," Matt went on coolly. "It wasn't thrown at you, but at Perry."

"Perry says different. That you threw it at me."

"Perry is careless with the truth. Before we begin, let

me give you your rabbit's foot. If you ever needed it, you're going to need it now."

Matt held out his hand. Clipperton said something and recoiled a step; then, slowly, he advanced and took the luck-bringer from Matt's fingers.

"Where'd you get this?" asked Clipperton.

"It was found under the grand stand where you dropped it when you fired at my wheel."

Clipperton was silent, standing rigid and erect in the moonlight. There was a queer gleam in his eyes as he fixed them on Matt.

"How many have you told that to?" he demanded.

"Not one. If I had, you wouldn't be in that mile run to-morrow."

As Matt finished speaking Clipperton leaped forward abruptly. "Look out!" he called.

Thinking Clipperton was going to attack him, Matt squared away and put up his hands. At that moment he was seized from behind and hurled to the ground.

"Stand off!" he heard Clipperton yell furiously. "He's here to fight me! What does this—"

"Shut up, you fool!" threatened a voice, and was followed by a rush of feet in Clipperton's direction.

Matt was struggling with all his might, but there were four boys crushing him down and strangling him to prevent outcry. Who the boys were he could not see, as there were handkerchief masks over their faces.

"Quick!" muttered a voice. "Where's that rope?"

Matt was turned roughly on his face, several hands fumbling at his wrists and ankles and at least one pressing a cloth, soaked with some drug, to his

nostrils.

Presently, as in a dream, he felt himself lifted and borne hurriedly away. His senses were rapidly leaving him, and he had no idea as to what direction he was being taken. There was a mumble of voices in his ears and sounds of stumbling feet. Presently he was lifted and crumpled into a cushioned seat. A *chug chug* of a starting engine came faintly to his ears, and he felt a swift forward movement of the seat on which he was lying. The cloth was still covering his face and stifling him. Then, a moment more, everything became a blank.

CHAPTER XII.

COOL VILLAINY.

It was several hours before Matt regained consciousness. His first tangible feeling was one of nausea. Opening his eyes, he found himself in a bare little room, lighted by a candle planted in its own drippings on the hard earth floor.

Matt's hands and feet were tied, and his limbs felt terribly numb and cramped. As his wits slowly returned, he began to note his surroundings more in detail.

The walls of the room were of adobe clay, but they had caved in in several places and parts of the thatched roof had fallen to the floor. The litter of clay and tule thatching had been brushed aside to leave the center of the room clear.

On the floor near Matt lay his leather cap. Close to the sputtering candle, squatting tailor-fashion, a doubled elbow on one of his knees and a black pipe in his fingers, was a resolute-looking man in cowboy clothes. Alongside of him lay a broad-brimmed hat and a coiled riata.

"Where am I?" called Matt.

The man turned his grizzled face in Matt's direction.

"Oh, ho!" he chuckled. "Come back ter earth, have ye? I was allowin' it ort ter be time. Whar be ye? Why, ye're in a deserted Mexican *jacal* in the foot-hills o' the Phoenix Mountains, about twenty miles from the capital of Arizony Territory. Anythin' else ye're pinin' ter know?"

"Who brought me here?" demanded Matt.

"You was brought in one o' them hossless kerriges, bub. That was a hull lot o' style, now, wasn't it? I've heern tell that lots o' people pays five dollars an hour ter ride in them benzine buggies, but you got yer ride fer nothin'. Ain't ye pleased?"

"This is no time for foolishness," said Matt. "I was dragged away from Phoenix against my will, and the best thing you can do is to take these ropes off me and let me go."

"The best thing fer you, mebby, but not exactly the best thing fer myself, not hardly. Jest lay thar an' be as comfortable as ye can, bub. We'll git along fine if ye're only peaceable. I'm goin' ter let ye go, bumby."

"By and by? When will that be?"

"After them races are over in Phoenix."

Matt's freshly awakened brain was just beginning to get a grasp of the situation.

"This is Hawley's doing!" he cried. "He had me captured, there on the bank of the canal, and brought out here in his machine! This is his scoundrelly way for keeping me out of that bicycle-race. Who are you?" Matt asked angrily.

"Me?" grinned the cowboy; "oh, don't worry none about that. I'm only jest the feller that helps. Roll over an' go ter sleep. I'll sit up an' see that nothin' comes in ter pester ye."

"There's a way to take care of people like you and Hawley," threatened Matt. "If you want to save yourself trouble, you'll release me."

"Waal, I don't figger it jest that way, bub," drawled the cowboy. "To let ye go afore Saturday night would be a mighty short cut ter trouble fer yours truly."

"But I'm to ride in that bicycle-race to-morrow!"

"Ter-day, bub, not ter-morrer. That bicycle-race is ter-day, since it's some little past midnight. We passed the fag-end o' Friday clost ter an hour ago. Yep, I understood ye was goin' ter race with O'Day at four o'clock p. m. But ye've changed yer mind about that."

"I haven't changed my mind," answered Matt desperately.

"Then somebody else changed yer mind fer ye, which don't make a particle o' difference, seein' as how ye can't help yerself. Good night, bub. I'll jest set here an' smoke an' doze an' make shore that nothin' don't happen. The man as got me ter do this was powerful pertickler about that."

There was nothing to be gained by talking with the fellow—Matt was not slow in making up his mind to that. The terrible pains he had felt when he had first opened his eyes were leaving him slowly, and this afforded him some comfort. Turning a little in order to make his position more easy, he closed his eyes and fell to thinking.

When he went to that place on the canal to meet Clipperton he had walked into a trap—but it was not a trap of Clipperton's setting. Hawley—and Perry, perhaps—had, as usual, used Clipperton as a tool. Matt was positive of this from the way Clipperton had acted when the trap was sprung. There were things about that challenge of Clipperton's which he did not understand, and probably never would understand until some one of his enemies explained the matter to him.

But, with the passing of recent events, fresh light was thrown upon the story told by Welcome Perkins. If Matt could not get back to Phoenix before 4 o'clock, Saturday afternoon, Perry would ride against O'Day—and Major Woolford's club would lose the bicycle-race.

Incidentally, Hawley's scheming would enable him to win a lot of money.

The betting part of Hawley's schemes Matt cared little about. What he did worry over was Major Woolford's disappointment, and the fact that the *Comet* would go to O'Day—and go to him unfairly. Besides, Matt had set his heart on having the *Comet* for his own, and all his future plans clustered about his ownership of that splendid machine. He must get away, he *must!* By hook or crook he was in duty bound to get back to Phoenix in time for the bicycle-race, and to confront Hawley and Perry and foil their villainous plans. But how was he to escape?

Carefully he began tugging at the ropes about his wrists. They were discouragingly tight, and he soon discovered that he could do nothing with them. While he was racking his brain in an endeavor to think of something that would serve his turn, the craving of his tired body for rest and sleep gradually overcame him and his thoughts faded into slumber.

When he opened his eyes again it was broad day. The sun must have been two or three hours high, for its beams were shining in through an opening in the eastern wall that had once served as a window.

"Mornin', bub," drawled the voice of the cowboy. "Had a fine snooze, didn't ye? An' ye jest woke up in time fer grub. I've had my snack, an' I kin give my hull attention ter passin' ye yours."

The cowboy began fishing some crackers and cheese out of a paper bag.

"Can't you take the ropes off my hands while I eat?" asked Matt.

"Waal, I'd like ter, mighty well, seein' as how I'm the most obligin' feller by natur' you most ever set eyes on,

but I give my promise that I wouldn't take them ropes off'n yer hands until sundown. 'Course ye wouldn't have a feller go back on his word, would ye?"

There was no satisfaction to be got out of the fellow, and Matt was obliged to wriggle to a sitting posture and have his jailer feed him. From time to time the cowboy would press a canteen of water to his lips.

Matt had a good appetite and he ate heartily, feeling that if he found a chance at attempting anything he could not do his best on an empty stomach.

"Thar ain't much variety to this here grub," apologized the cowboy, "but thar's plenty of it an' it does me proud ter see ye eat so hearty. I'm twicet as glad ter see ye chipper as I would be ter see ye down in the mouth."

"I try to be a good loser," said Matt.

"That's you! Bicycle-races ain't all thar is in this world."

"What time is it?"

"I ain't got no watch, but I kin figger purty clost by the sun." Stepping to the doorway the cowboy cast a critical glance at the cabin's shadow. "Half-past eleven, bub," he went on, turning back into the room, "is what I make it."

A thrill of dismay passed through Matt's nerves. Half-past eleven and the bicycle-race, the last event on the list, was to be at four o'clock! Only four hours and a half!

And there was Matt, a prisoner, and twenty miles from Phoenix!

"You seem to be a pretty good fellow," said Matt eagerly, "and why is it you can help Hawley in this cool villainy of his? That bicycle-race means a lot to me! I

don't know how much Hawley is paying you to keep me here, but if you will let me go, and give me a few weeks to pay it, I will double the money."

The cowboy shook his head. "I'm some pecooliar, thataway," he observed. "When I give my word I'll do a thing, you can bank on it I'm right thar with the goods. Now, if ye had a million, which it ain't in reason a boy yore age would have, an' if ye offered me half of it, I'd shore spurn yer money. When I hire out I goes ter the highest bidder, an' I sticks thar like a wood-tick ter a yaller dog. Sorry, bub, but that's the way I stack up."

There was no beating down the cowboy's resistance. He was there to do the work Hawley had paid him for, and nothing could swerve him from what he believed to be his duty.

Apparently not caring to have any further conversation with Matt, the cowboy began walking back and forth in the room, whistling to himself and now and then humming a snatch of song. Finally he sat down, picked up his coiled riata and began braiding the brushy end of the rope and overlaying it with twine.

The minutes passed. For a time Matt tried to count them, his heart all the while growing heavier and heavier. This was a time when it was hard indeed to be a "good loser."

There was a tremendous rivalry between the two athletic clubs—a rivalry in which the separate towns that claimed them took active part. In the contests the year before the Prescott club had got the better of the Phoenix club in the matter of points. Phoenix had won the one-mile dash, the broad jump, the bicycle-race and the hammer-throw, but Prescott had cleaned up all the other events. Matt knew how eager the major was to have Phoenix get the better of the rival town,

and the loss of the bicycle-race, which counted high in the final summing-up, might turn the scale in favor of Prescott.

In his mind, as he lay helpless there on the floor of that abandoned *jacal*, the boy pictured the throngs of people moving along Washington Street toward the park. He heard the horns, the megaphones, the band, and he saw the white and blue of Phoenix High waving defiance to the red and white of Prescott High. Above everything came the school yells, and he stifled the groan that rose to his lips. He ought to be there, and he was twenty miles away! Yes, it *was* hard to be a good loser.

The cowboy must have divined something of what was going on in Matt's mind, for, as he laid aside his repaired riata and got up, he looked toward Matt.

"I'm sorry, bub, honest," said he, "but thar ain't a pesky thing I kin do except watch ye till sundown. Why, I ain't even got a hoss here. It's clost to two o'clock, now, an' if ye was loose ye couldn't git ter Phoenix in time fer that bicycle-race."

Matt made no reply. He could not trust himself to speak. The cowboy picked up the water-canteen and tried to drink, but the canteen was empty.

"I'm goin' ter the spring, bub," he remarked, starting for the door. "It ain't fur, an' I'll be back in a few minits. I'm dryer'n the desert o' Sahary, an' I reckon you wouldn't mind havin' a drink neither."

With that he left the room and vanished around the wall of the hut. Matt could hear his thin-soled, high-heeled boots crunching the sand as he moved away.

It was then that something happened which fairly took Matt's breath. A face appeared in the door—a swarthy face set sharply in lines that suggested a fierce

strain and failing strength. Two gleaming black eyes looked in at the boy on the floor. The next moment a dusty form staggered into the room, reeled across the floor to Matt and went down on its knees.

"Clipperton!" whispered Matt, scarcely knowing whether he was awake or dreaming.

Without a word Clipperton began cutting at the ropes with a jack-knife. Slash, slash. It was quickly done, the severed coils falling from Matt's wrists and ankles.

"Come!" breathed Clipperton huskily. "Time is short. The man will be back."

Matt was groggy on his feet. Clipperton, none too steady himself, contrived to support him to the door. Once outside they started hurriedly across the bare hills, Matt speechless with the wonder of it all.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLUEBELL.

The two boys got out of sight in a swale before the cowboy returned from the spring. Looking back, just before they dropped from view of the *jacal*, they were unable to see anything of the man.

Taking Matt's arm, Clipperton drew him along the swale, then over the western bank of it and into a shallow valley between two low hills.

"It's nearly two o'clock," Clipperton was muttering. "Twenty miles—four o'clock. We'll get a horse at the Bluebell. You can make it if you *ride*."

"Where did you come from, Clipperton?" asked Matt.

"Phoenix."

"How did you come?"

"On foot. Didn't dare look for a horse. Afraid they'd find out and stop me."

Matt halted and laid a hand on Clipperton's arm.

"Did you come out here, all the way from Phoenix, on foot, to help me?" he asked quietly.

"Why not?" flamed Clipperton. "I got you into the trouble. I was afraid you might think I knew what Perry and the rest were doing. I didn't. It was a put-up job, but I didn't know until too late. I—I could kill Perry! He told me to write that letter. Said he'd keep his hands off and stay away. You saw how he did it."

Swirling hate poured out with the words. Clipperton was breathing hard and talked in husky gasps.

"You were to do that mile race at two o'clock," said Matt.

"I did a twenty-mile race; somewhat earlier."

"Why, that race was as good as a hundred dollars to you!"

"If I win this it'll please me more."

"You've won it, Clip," said Matt, in a low tone. "You've got me away from that hut."

"I haven't won it!" cried Clipperton. "It's won when you face the starter on your wheel and cut out Perry. The coyote!"

"You've found out about Perry?"

Clipperton muttered something in a savage undertone. Matt put out his hand and Clipperton clasped it quickly.

"I guess we understand each other, Clip," said Matt. "How far away is the Bluebell?"

"At the end of this valley. Hurry. You've *got* to get to Phoenix in time."

"I don't see how I can, even with a horse."

"You can. You *must*!"

They made their way down the valley as fast as they could, Matt's benumbed limbs slowly regaining their strength, and Clipperton keeping up by sheer force of will. From time to time they gazed behind them, but they could see nothing of the cowboy. If he was looking for them he was evidently searching in the wrong direction.

"How did you find out where I had been taken, Clip?" queried Matt.

"Tubbits Drake knew," replied Clipperton. "I went to

him early this morning. I made him tell me. Then I started. It was a long twenty miles. I had to wait at the hut until the man went away. If he hadn't gone when he did he would have had to fight. Perry, Drake, Spangler and three men furnished by Hawley captured you. They were hiding by the canal all the time, Hawley's motor-car brought you out here. Hawley wasn't with it. He sent his driver. I was a fool. But I know a few things *now*."

By the time Clipperton had finished, he and Matt had come to the end of the valley. Rounding the base of one of the hills an ore-dump broke into view, surmounted by a derrick. From the top of the derrick swung one of the aerial wires of Chub's wireless telegraph-line.

A few yards from the foot of the derrick was a small house. A man in his shirt-sleeves sat tilted back in a chair in the shade. He was watching the two boys curiously as they hastened toward him.

"Hello, neighbors!" he called, when they had come close. "Kind of queer to see a couple of lads loose in these hills on foot. What are you— Jumping Jerushy!" the man suddenly exclaimed. "If it ain't Matt King! Why, I thought—"

"I know what you thought, Delray," said Matt hurriedly. "I was abducted from Phoenix last night in order to keep me out of the race. I was being held a prisoner—"

"At Pedro Garcia's old *jacal*," interpolated Clipperton.

"And Clip, here, got me away," went on Matt. "I have to get to Phoenix by four o'clock."

Delray whistled. "Mebby you could do it if you had wings, Matt," said he. "Why, it's nearly two o'clock,

and there's twenty long miles between here and Phoenix. That's a deuce of a note. Abducted by Hawley! Thunder! What did he do that for?"

"Let him take your horse," cried Clipperton, sinking down in the shade. "He can make it!"

"Horse?" echoed Delray. "I haven't got a horse. There isn't a horse this side of the Arizona Canal, eight miles away. Give it up, Matt. There'll be bicycle-races after you're dead and gone."

A half-stifled groan broke from Clipperton's lips. Matt and Delray, looking toward him, saw that he had his face in his hands.

"What's the matter with him, Matt?" asked Delray.

"I've lost the race for King," said Clipperton, lifting his haggard face. "I did it! But I got to him as quick as I could. Perry—I—I—" The words died huskily away on Clipperton's lips and he finished by shaking his fist menacingly in the direction of Phoenix.

Matt walked over to Clipperton.

"You didn't lose the race for me, Clip," said he, "and I want you to understand that here and now. You were no more to blame for it than the man in the moon. I ought to have—"

Matt halted abruptly. In front of him was the derrick, the lightning-rod point of Chub's aerial wire glistening in the sun. He whirled and jumped like a madman for Delray.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" cried Delray, "have you gone dippy, Matt?"

"Is that wireless apparatus working?" shouted Matt.

"It was, last night."

"If it's working now," went on Matt excitedly,

"maybe I can put this trick through yet. Get at your key, Delray! Try and get Chub."

"What the blazes—" Delray stared. "Say, Matt, do you think I can send you through to Phoenix by wireless?"

"Get Chub!" yelled Matt. "Don't stand there like a stick, Delray. Get Chub, I tell you! I'll tell you what to say when you get him. There's a chance, a *chance!*"

While the dazed Delray went into the house and sat down at his sending-key, Matt hovered frantically around him. The minute Delray touched the key the Hertzian waves got busy, crackling and flashing between the two polished balls of the terminals.

"I don't know why you think I can get anybody in Phoenix this afternoon, Matt," complained Delray. "The whole town must have emptied itself into the park. It's a safe guess, anyhow, that Chub will be there."

Matt's heart went down into his shoes. He hadn't thought of that. Of course, Chub would be at the track! Chub was there to see Matt win the motor-cycle! Oh, the irony of fate!

Clipperton thrust his drawn face in at the door. His eyes glowed with a hope which was past his understanding.

Delray rattled the key and the flashes quivered back and forth between the balls, jumped off the lightning-rod tip at the top of the derrick and darted in every direction with the swiftness of thought.

Suddenly the sounder began to click. "What's this, what's this?" mumbled Delray, bending over the relay instrument and listening intently. Scarcely breathing, Matt and Clipperton kept their eyes on Delray's face. "Why, it's Susie McReady!" exclaimed Delray. "Matt

King is missing—Chub and Perk at the park hunting for him—everybody in town hunting—Susie came back to the house to ask me to hunt—now, what do you think of that? Talk about luck! But what good is it going to do? That's what gets me."

"Tell Susie I'm here," said Matt; "tell her I was abducted from Phoenix last night to keep me out of the race; tell her to call up Major Woolford on the phone at the park; tell her to have the major lay quick hands on Ed Penny and send him along the Black Cañon road on the *Comet* as fast as he can come; have Susie tell the major to tell Penny that everything depends on the record he makes between Phoenix and the Bluebell, and that I'll walk along the Black Cañon road to meet him and save a little time. Shoot 'er through! Hustle, old chap."

"Oh, tell, tell, tell!" groaned Delray. "Why, you're talking like a house afire. Here goes."

Click, click, clickety-click, sang the key, the crackle of the spark keeping a merry accompaniment. Delray repeated the message. As he was finishing, Matt started for the door.

"Wait," called Delray, "here's an answer." The sounder began to click and then stopped dead. "No, there ain't," muttered Delray; "something's slipped a cog and the home-made machine is out of commission. Anyhow, Matt, she held together until we got your message through. Go it, and good luck to you!"

Matt was already through the door and striking a bee-line for the Black Cañon road, which ran past the derrick. Clipperton had caught his second wind and was following him.

CHAPTER XIV.

COMING OF THE "COMET."

Matt hardly dared hope for success. There was a chance—perhaps one chance in a hundred—that everything would work as it should, and Penny arrive along the Black Cañon road with the *Comet* in time for Matt to make such a run into Phoenix as was never heard of before. But when Matt thought of the many things on which success hinged, his heart stood still before the very audacity of his thought of winning out.

In the first place, everything depended on the quickness with which a number of intricate details were accomplished in Phoenix—and all these were left in the hands of a girl! True, Susie McReady was a girl in a hundred, quick-witted, and able to hustle in a pinch, but it was not to be supposed that she could do as well as Chub would have done.

Then, Susie would have to take chances getting Major Woolford on the phone. In the crowd at the park it might be impossible to find the major for an hour—and it was quite likely a loss of ten minutes would spell disaster. But if Susie *could* get the major on the phone, Matt knew that the energetic president of the Phoenix Club would move heaven and earth to find Penny and start him along the Black Cañon road.

The major, too, would delay the start of the bicycle-race as long as he could. Prescott, however, if it saw a chance to pull off the race without Matt, was allowed to insist, under the rules governing the contests, that the starter bring the racers to the mark on the dot.

As the difficulties before him piled steadily up under Matt's mental view, he halted his pace, almost

discouraged by the outlook. Clipperton toiled up alongside of him.

"You shouldn't have tried to chase along with me, Clip," said Matt. "You're pretty near all in, old man. Jupiter! but you've made a record this day!"

"You can make a better one," panted Clipperton. "I want you to make good. But how are you going to? Put me next."

Matt explained about Chub's wireless line, about the seven-horse-power motor-cycle which could do sixty-five miles an hour on the high speed if a rider was reckless enough and had the right kind of a road, and he finished by giving the situation at the Phoenix end of the route.

Clipperton's eyes snapped and sparkled. He had been born to champion forlorn hopes, and certainly this idea of Matt's was desperate enough to make the biggest kind of a hit with him.

"Great!" he muttered breathlessly. "If you win it will be the biggest thing on record. Won by wireless, and a jump of twenty miles on the *Comet*. Fine! Motor Matt, Mile-a-minute Matt, King of the Wheel. Say, you're a wonder."

"Not so you can notice it, Clip, not yet. Just now, all I can do is to hope for the best."

For some time they continued on through the hills, finally reaching a high part of the road which gave them a view of a flat stretch of desert leading away to the Arizona Canal.

There were several canals in Salt River Valley and contiguous to Phoenix, all constructed for irrigation purposes. It was the "Town Canal" that ran past the McReady home, and between that and the Arizona Canal there was still another of the artificial streams.

The Arizona Canal, however, formed the outpost of the waterways.

Pausing on the "rise," Matt and Clipperton peered across the glimmering yellow sands. A fork in the road lay below them.

"The branch goes to Pedro Garcia's old *jacal* and beyond," said Clip. "Look!" he added excitedly.

Matt followed Clip's extended finger with his eyes. Off along the branch road, trudging slowly toward the main trail, a distant form could be seen.

"The cowboy!" muttered Matt. At that distance he could not identify the figure, but intuition told him who it must be.

"Yes," returned Clipperton grimly. "He thinks we started for Phoenix."

"What time is it now, Clip?"

"We're four miles from the Bluebell. It's taken us an hour. So it must be nearly three."

"Sixteen miles from Phoenix and only a little more than an hour left! I'm expecting too much, Clip. Susie has had an hour to find the major and get Penny started this way with the *Comet*. Somebody hasn't been able to make good and I guess I'm let out."

"No!" shouted Clip. "What's that coming this way? See!"

Clipperton pointed along the main road where it ran in a light streak across the desert. A cloud of dust, more like a column of smoke than anything else, was sweeping toward the hills.

Matt held his breath as he gazed. The dust cloud seemed fairly to jump at them; then, suddenly, the wind whipped it aside, and brave Ed Penny, glorious

old Penny, could be seen crouching upon the saddle of the *Comet*. He was shooting for the hills like a cannon-ball.

"Hurrah!" yelled Clipperton, jerking off his cap and throwing it into the air. "Motor Matt is going to win!"

The *Comet* took the "rise" like a bird on the wing. Penny, covered with dust and half-blinded, halted only when he heard Matt's voice calling to him. Clip sprang to support the machine while Penny got off.

"That you, King?" queried Penny, dizzy and staggering.

"Yes!" shouted Matt, gripping the brave fellow's hand. "Bully boy, Penny! How's everything at the park?"

"Panic! Mile race lost because Clip wasn't there. All Phoenix wild because King is missing. Major red-headed. Jerked me out of the high-school bunch and snatched me into town in his automobile; threw me onto the *Comet* and offered me twenty-five dollars if I'd get the machine to you inside of an hour, and fifty dollars if you got to the park in time for the race. Jinks, but that machine is a dandy!"

Matt and Clip were lifting the *Comet* around. Clip held the machine while Matt rose to the saddle.

"Wait!" roared Penny; "don't start yet."

"Why not?" asked Matt.

"Hawley is coming! See that dust? Pull the *Comet* out here beside the road and crouch down so we can't be seen when the dust blows away. The driver of the car may take the other road at the forks."

Here was startling news—news that might snatch success out of Matt's hands just when the prospect of victory seemed brightest.

Another dust cloud was coming. As the three boys drew aside and crouched down the cloud dissipated slightly and through it they could see Dirk Hawley's motor-car, hitting nothing but high places and reaching for the hills like a streak.

"He saw the major grab me and rush me away from the park," explained Penny, referring to Hawley. "His driver and another man were in the car besides himself. They took after me. I led them by a quarter of a mile at the bridge over the Arizona Canal. They stopped there and the man in the tonneau with Hawley got out. The whole bunch means trouble! What's Hawley got to do with this, anyhow?"

"He's got a lot to do with it," muttered Matt, "but I haven't time to explain now. Ah, look at the cowboy, Clip!"

The cowboy, who was coming across fairly high ground, could be seen waving his arms. Evidently he saw the motor-car and recognized those who were in it.

"That does the trick!" whispered Clipperton excitedly. "Hawley was coming along the Bluebell trail. The cowboy is drawing them into the other road. Luck! That will clear the way so you can get past on the *Comet*. Wait until the car is close to the cowboy. Then make a rush."

"For heaven's sake," begged Penny, "beat him in, Matt! The *Comet* can do it."

"The *Comet* is going to do it," said Matt, between his teeth.

All three of the boys watched while the motor-car flung itself up the gentle slope toward the cowboy.

"Now!" said Clip, starting up and laying hold of the *Comet*.

They trundled the machine back into the road and Matt got into the saddle and laid hands on the grip-control.

"Ready?" cried Penny.

"Let her go!" answered Matt.

Penny and Clip gave him a shove. *Pop, pop, pop*, snapped the motor, the explosions presently coming so fast that they sounded like a dull roar. Off went the exhaust, and Motor Matt slipped down the slope like a brown streak, kicking the dust up behind him.

"He'll win, he'll win!" cried Clipperton. "The men in the motor-car see him. The cowboy is getting into the front seat alongside the driver. They can't head him! Hurrah for Motor Matt!"

Hawley and those with him had seen the sliding streak rushing down from the hill and making for the canal. There was a scramble about the motor-car, a frantic cranking-up and jumping start on the high-gear. But it was plain to the two boys on the hill that Matt would pass the forks of the road before the car and its passengers could get there.

Penny danced around excitedly.

"Why did Hawley drop that man off at the bridge?" he fumed. "That's what I can't understand. That man at the bridge spells trouble with a big T. What's Hawley butting into this game for, anyway?"

"He's been plunging on O'Day," answered Clip. "He knows O'Day loses if Matt gets to the park in time. Of course, he wants to stop him. Put two and two together, Penny."

"That's right, Clip," explained Penny. "It's up to Matt, now."

"Leave it to him. The game couldn't be in better

hands."

Then, with staring eyes, Clip and Penny watched the two dust flurries. The cloud kicked up by the *Comet* passed the forks of the road a full minute ahead of the fog raised by the motor-car.

"Three groans for Hawley!" chortled Clip.

"But that man at the bridge," groaned Penny. "He sure is worrying me."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FLIGHT OF THE "COMET."

Matt King was on his mettle. Phoenix was sixteen miles away, and he had, as he figured it, forty minutes to get there and make his way to the park. Could he do it? He *could* and would!

The presence of Hawley in his crack machine added an element of danger, but Matt knew in his soul he could slide away from the motor-car as a jack-rabbit slips clear of a bounding greyhound.

He saw the dust-fog of the coming car as he whirled past the forks of the road. It was jumping at him with terrific speed, and he saw the chauffeur and the cowboy in front of the big machine and Hawley in the tonneau, standing and leaning over their heads in his excitement and determination.

If Matt got clear, Dirk Hawley stood to lose a lot of money; and to touch the gambler in his pocketbook was to touch him in his tenderest spot.

Matt laughed as he rushed onward. He felt that the race was his, barring accidents; and the *Comet* was brand-new, and careful handling made accidents a remote possibility.

Seven horses were purring in the cylinders, whirling the racing tires, and showing heels such as seven horses never showed before. The steady murmur of the machine filled Matt's heart with exultation. He was flying, and the tires seemed scarcely to touch the ground they covered. Cactus, rock, greasewood brush shot toward him and were lost behind.

At the start he was four miles from the bridge over

the Arizona Canal; now the bridge lay before him at the foot of a long slope with a slight curve at the end. In two minutes he would be there!

As the dust was left behind, he saw a dim figure standing by the bridge. Then he remembered what Penny had said about Hawley dropping one of his passengers at that point, and a sudden fear shot through Matt's nerves. The man waved his hand, ducked downward and disappeared under the canal. In the space of a breath, almost, he reappeared and dashed back toward the roadside. Then on Matt's startled ears there burst the dull *boom* of an explosion. Under his eyes the bridge seemed to rise up and drop back into the canal.

Matt slowed down, his heart in his throat and his nerves in rags. Hawley had left that man behind to blow up the bridge, well knowing that Matt could not pass the chasm on his motor-cycle, and that the nearest bridge he could reach was miles away.

The whirr of the car behind him grew loud and louder in his ears, and above it came yells of triumph. Dazed and feeling himself all but beaten, Matt nevertheless continued on toward the wrecked bridge.

The next moment he saw something that aroused his hopes. One stringer was left, spanning the gulf from bank to bank—a square timber that offered possibilities, albeit dangerous ones. A nail in the stringer would mean a bursted tire! Even a sliver might cause damage that would stop the *Comet's* flight. Gritting his teeth Matt speeded up the machine, tore down the slope and took the end of the timber at a bound.

The motor-car was close and he dared not look behind him. Every faculty had to be centered upon that narrow, dangerous path over which he was rushing at

perilous speed. He could not see what the cowboy was doing, nor know how a scant forty feet of rope fell short, for the cowboy, past master at throwing the lariat, had leaned forward over the long bonnet and made a cast.

"A thousand dollars if you stop that boy!" Motor Matt heard this yelled fiercely in Hawley's voice, and behind him the noose fell short!

If there were nails or slivers in that square timber, the rubber tires missed them. Matt gained the opposite side of the canal and sped up the bridge approach. The man who had set off the explosion leaped into the road, swinging his arms and shouting; then very suddenly he leaped out again, for the hundred-and-fifty-pound motor-cycle was coming toward him at deadly speed. Matt was abreast of the man and beyond him in the space of a heart-beat, and he stole a quick look behind.

Dirk Hawley had overreached himself. His evil machinations had resulted in destroying the bridge, but he had foiled himself and not the daring youngster who had taken a bold risk and crossed the gap. The motor-car was at a dead stop on the other side of the canal, and a baffled group of three surrounded it and called wild words to the man on the other side.

A loud laugh escaped Matt's lips and dwindled behind him in a mere wisp of sound. He was safe! Now his race was against time alone.

Fortunately there were few travelers on the Black Cañon road. The traveling for that part of the day had mostly been done, and people from all the ranches were at the park. He had to slow down and turn out for a Mexican wood-hauler, and the few other people he passed gave him a wide berth and watched wonderingly as he whizzed by.

Alfalfa-fields sped past him, and the cottonwood-trees lining the roadside ditches trooped behind so quickly that they became a mere blur. The road was like asphalt and rubber tires never had better going.

Like a dart Matt hurled onward, minute after minute, ranch-houses doing strange dances as he met and left them. Before he fairly realized it he was turning into Grand Avenue and plunging along beside the street-car track. Into the Five Points he whirled, striking pavement that appreciably increased his gait. The stores seemed deserted, and only here and there could a man be seen on the streets. A yellow cur pranced yipping out at him, then whirled with his tail between his legs and ran howling from the monster that devoured distance with the combined speed of a dozen dogs.

Turning into Washington Street, Matt found himself with a straight-away stretch clear to the park. There was more travel here, for this was the main thoroughfare of the town. Every store and shop was dressed in bunting. Matt must have been recognized as he raced, for everything got out of his way, and more than one cheer went up as he flickered by.

In passing the Court House Plaza he caught the time from the face of the big clock. Six minutes of four! He opened her out a little more, and the *Comet* ate up the miles as she had not yet done. Mile-a-minute Matt! He was true to the name, now, and Phoenix had never been traversed from end to end as he was doing it.

Presently he was in the outskirts of the city, another minute and he was close to the park fence, another and he had slowed down for the wagon-gate. The man on duty there recognized him and leaped aside.

"Hoop-a-la!" roared the man, waving his hat. "In with you! Not a minute to spare."

Toward the race-course he guided the *Comet*. Everywhere the edge of the great oval was black with people. Like wild-fire the word traveled, "King is coming! Here comes King! Bully for King!"

Close to the dressing-rooms Matt pulled up. The major was there, Chub was there, Susie was there—and Perk. They *knew* he would arrive, and they had everything ready.

"Oh, you!" howled the delighted Chub, throwing his arms about Matt and pulling him out of the saddle. "King of the Motor Boys, that's what you are."

Susie grabbed him and, in her excitement, landed an ecstatic kiss on his dusty face.

"Motor Matt!" she cried, waving the high-school colors. "Now will Prescott High be good?"

"Shade o' Gallopin' Dick!" yelled Welcome, doing an odd war-dance on his wooden pin. "He's my pard, he is! Watch me soothe my turbulent soul with a grip o' his honest pa'm."

Matt was torn from the selfsame grip by Major Woolford.

"You're the boy!" said the major. "No time to lose, for the starter is calling the men for the race. Here's your wheel. No time to change your clothes, but you can peel off your coat. McReady, help with his shoes."

Matt threw off his cap and coat. Chub had unlaced one shoe and Susie the other. Matt kicked out of them and into lighter foot-gear. Then, with time for hardly a word, he grabbed the racing-wheel that was waiting for him, and made his way to the track.

"Matt King is entered to race for Phoenix in the one-heat one-mile bicycle contest," the starter was yelling through a megaphone. "As King is not here, and as,

according to the rules, the race starts at four sharp, Phoenix substitutes her second choice, Dace—"

"King is here!"

It was the booming voice of Major Woolford, just crossing the track to take his place in the judges' stand.

Simultaneously with the words, Matt, in his nondescript racing-attire, made his way along the track toward the tape.

There followed a breathless pause. Although the word had gone around that King was coming, the Prescott rooters tried to treat it as a canard. They didn't want King.

Dace Perry, as Matt walked toward him, reeled back from his machine. His face went white as death, and a hopeless look arose in his eyes. Without a word he caught his machine by the handle-bars and made for the paddock. His thunderstruck adherents, Spangler, Drake and the others, were waiting to offer what consolation they could give.

Following the breathless pause, a veritable roar went up from the grand stand and all around the track. It was a Phoenix roar, of course, and it was Phoenix people who stood on their seats, threw up hats and shook canes and handkerchiefs. The high-school boys, clustered together, let loose with their triumphant yell. Colors were waved—Phoenix colors—and the flags of Prescott High were temporarily retired.

"King, King, King-King-King!" chanted Phoenix High, in unison.

"Oh, he ain't so much!" came a feeble wail through a megaphone. "Hold your shouting until after the race!"

"Drown him!" whooped Phoenix. "Send him to the asylum! Back, back to the padded cell!"

O'Day took Matt's sizing with a troubled eye, then clenched his teeth. He would do his best—but he had doubts. A half-confidence is worse than no confidence at all.

"Buck up, O'Day!" implored the Prescott rooters. "You can do the trick! Don't let him throw a scare into you. *He's ridden twenty miles and he must be about all in!*"

That last was the key-note. When O'Day heard it he brightened. Matt was in from a trying trip, just in, and he had to go the round on a pound of crackers and cheese! But Prescott didn't know him.

The two racers took their places, hugged by a couple of men at the saddles.

"All ready?" *Bang!*

Matt was hurled down the track. For the first time since he had left Clip and Penny his feet were busy, more than busy.

CHAPTER XVI.

MOTOR MATT, KING OF THE WHEEL!

There have been walkaways and walkaways, but never before such a walkaway as King had over O'Day, the crack cyclist from Prescott. For Matt all that had gone before seemed only to have paved the way for the best that was in him. He was "on his toes" every second, and left O'Day at the quarter; at the half O'Day was twice the length of his wheel behind and pedaling like mad; at the three-quarters O'Day was hopelessly in the rear and working his feet in a mechanical way, merely as a matter of duty. Matt crossed the tape a winner by fifteen feet and Prescott put its head in its hands and groaned.

Phoenix swarmed down from the grand stand and tumbled over fences all around the oval. The Phoenix high-school boys charged down upon the victor, yanked him off his machine, took him on their shoulders and galloped up and down the track.

"Rah! 'rah! 'rah! Do or die!

Phoenix! Phoenix! Phoenix High!"

Prescott made up its mind it had better go home. The special train left at six, anyway, and the bicycle-race closed the list of events. Phoenix was a winner on points, although losing the one-mile sprint on account of the absence of Clipperton, one of the shorter dashes and the hammer-throw.

Poor old Welcome, howling for joy, tried in vain to tear his way through the high-school crowd and get at Matt. Susie, her face glowing with happiness, watched

the conquering hero as he was bounced and slammed about on the shoulders of Splinters and a few more of the seniors. The governor, forcing his way through the throng, reached up to grasp Matt's hand.

"Well done!" cried the governor. "You're a marvel, King—not merely because you got the best of O'Day but on account of the way you got here from the Bluebell to do it."

Matt flushed. His honors, falling thick upon him, were embarrassing, and he would rather have taken himself off to some quiet spot and clasped just a few friendly hands.

"This is yours, King," called Major Woolford blithely, pointing to the *Comet*, now well groomed after her dusty trip, and sparkling like a brand-new dollar. "Will you ride it home or shall we send it?"

"Send it, major!" cried Chub, "he's going home with us!"

A little later Matt, finally tearing himself away from his adoring friends—and nearly every one seemed to be his friend now—got into a carryall with Chub, Susie and Welcome Perkins and was driven to the McReady home.

While Susie was getting the meal ready, Matt sat in the place of honor and recounted all that had happened to him since he had left his friends on the preceding evening.

Just as he finished, Tom Clipperton showed himself in the doorway.

"Heard you were here, King," said he hesitatingly. "Penny and I rode in with a freighter. It was all over but the yelling by then. I'm mighty glad you won out."

Clip would have turned away from the open door

had Chub not jumped for him and dragged him inside.

"No, you don't, Clip," said Chub. "We're going to have a feast here, and you're invited. Besides, I've got something to say to you. In the eyes of the McReady outfit, and of old Perk, the ex-heathen, you stand as high as Bunker Hill monument. Now, listen. I threw that rock down by the canal, and I threw it at Perry—"

"I know," answered Clip. "Got it out of Drake."

"Are we pards? If I've ever said anything you don't like, I ask your pardon. How's that? Shucks! I'm so plumb happy this afternoon I want to be at peace with all creation. Shake!"

Chub extended his hand, and Clipperton, with a slow, quiet smile rarely seen on his face, caught the same heartily.

"I've been foolish," said Clip, shaking hands all around. "It takes experience to show us some things. I've had a heap of experience since last night. But I don't want to butt in. It's your supper-party—"

"Get away if you can!" snorted Chub, "I—"

The sounder in the corner began to click. Chub broke off abruptly and leaped for the machine.

"Dry up, all of you!" he cried. "Delray's telling me something."

"He must have fixed the machine, then," said Matt. "It went wrong a little just after we had got through with it at the Bluebell."

"She's all right now, anyway. Listen to this: Delray wants to know if Matt got here in time for the race. Watch me knock the tar out of the ether in sending him the news!"

Chub grabbed the key and rattled away at it until the

spark-gap was fairly blue.

"I reckon that will put *him* next," laughed Chub; "hear what he's sending now—it's just one word—'Hooray!'"

A few minutes later a jolly party sat around the dining-table. Matt interrupted the flow of conversation to do a little justice to one who had not, as yet, been prominently mentioned.

"I want to propose a toast," said he, "and we'll drink it in Adam's ale—standing, if you please."

The party arose and picked up their water-glasses.

"I give you Miss Susie McReady," said Matt, "without whose efficient aid I should never have been able to get here from the Bluebell or to meet O'Day!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled Welcome Perkins, pounding with his wooden leg.

Susie blushed crimson and sank into her chair.

"Just a minute, before you sit down," said Chub. "Allow *me* to give you Tom Clipperton, who was jointly responsible with Miss McReady for the success of Motor Matt. Tom Clipperton, the fastest boy on the mile and the twenty miles in Phoenix High or any other school!"

This was greeted with cheers and it could be seen that Clip was mightily pleased. A warm glow smoldered in his dark eyes.

"Jest one more," piped Welcome, "an' keep on yer feet. I'm givin' ye ole Lucretia Borgia, who's more dangerous than what she looks—I mean, looks more dangerous than what she is. Lucretia Borgia, notches an' all, pards!"

A roar of laughter greeted this toast.

"Now, it's my turn," said Clip. "Take this one from me. I give you Matt King. A firm friend and a generous foe. Mile-a-minute Matt, King of the Motor Boys! Motor Matt, the best ever!"

Bedlam was at once let loose, and Welcome Perkins made a noise like a menagerie at feeding-time. Matt, raising his hand, kept his friends on their feet.

"I want to give you just one more, pards," said he, "and what Clip said about a 'generous foe' reminds me of the duty. I give you O'Day, Dace Perry, Ratty Spangler and Tubbits Drake. What's the use of holding any sort of a grouch at this joyous time? If they can't be friends of ours, let's treat them honestly as foes. Will you take them?"

A scowl had leaped to Clipperton's face. The toast was intended for him, for his was a nature that rarely forgave an injury. Perry had gained his enmity and Matt was seeking to bridge the gulf to the extent of keeping Clip from taking the offensive and doing something he might be sorry for.

"They say that Perry lost a pile of money backing O'Day," said Chub, breaking an embarrassing silence, "and that he's head over heels in debt to Hawley. This has been a rough day for Perry."

"He brought it on himself," growled Clipperton. "He made a fool out of me. I owe him something. Man to man I want to pay the debt."

"Will you drink the toast, Clip?" asked Matt, fixing his eyes on the shining orbs of the quarter-blood.

"I—I wish I was more like you, King," faltered Clip.

"O'Day, Perry, Spangler and Drake," went on Matt. "Will you take them, pards?"

Every glass was lifted but Clipperton's. He continued

to look at Matt, then slowly raised his glass to his lips.

It was a trifling thing, perhaps, but for Tom Clipperton it meant much.

THE END.

The next number (2) will contain another rousing motor story, in which Matchless Matt and some of his friends figure, and a stirring drama is unfolded in a fashion to delight the reader. It will be entitled:

MOTOR MATT'S DARING; OR, TRUE TO HIS FRIENDS.

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THE MAN-HUNTER.

Jack Percival started when an ugly black face peered through the long grass not two yards from where he sat, and his hands stole cautiously toward the butt of his rifle. 'Twas seven weeks since he had seen a man, black or white, other than his chum, Paul Armstrong, but he felt no overwhelming rapture at the breaking of the monotony. When one is in a country inhabited only by cannibals, it is surprising how strong the love of solitude becomes.

Before him he could see the mountain of darkness thrusting its flat peak into the clear blue of the African sky; on every side the jungle closed him in like a wall—a dense mass of greenery spangled with flaming flowers. For the rest, he was encompassed by a most unutterable silence, and a hideous misshapen visage, black as coal, was staring at him from beyond the tangle of monkey-ropes that hung from the yellow-wood trees.

Jack was no greenhorn, and he kept perfectly cool, although he was expecting every instant to feel an assegai piercing his breast. Turning his eyes from the direction of the ebon face, he fixed them thoughtfully on the camp-fire, as if oblivious to the presence of the motionless native. But all the time his right hand was creeping, creeping toward the rifle that lay within easy reach.

It was nerve-shaking work, and he could not repress a gasp of relief as his gripping fingers closed upon the stock. The moment had come for action. With a lightning movement, he covered the impassive face beyond the curtain of monkey-ropes, and his

forefinger was hard pressed upon the trigger as he bounded to his feet.

"Now, then, you black beast!" he hissed angrily. "What you think of that, eh? No soup for you to-night, old chap! I've got the drop on you, and I mean to keep it. Cooee!"

He ended his sentence with a long-drawn Australian yell, and it was answered immediately by another from the gloomy interior of the jungle. Jack had expected the aborigine to make an attempt to escape, but he did nothing of the sort. Parting the trailing creepers with both hands, he continued his scrutiny with as much interest as if the young man had been the first specimen of his kind to penetrate into the region.

"Makes me feel like the fat lady in a side-show," Jack muttered, shifting uneasily beneath this intent regard. "I wonder what's up with the beggar? Ah, here's Paul!"

Paul it was. He came leaping cheerfully through the undergrowth, with a brilliant-plumaged paroquet slung over his shoulder, his gun swinging in one hand. For a second he halted in amazement as he caught sight of the unwelcome visitor, and then, dropping the bird, he advanced warily, his firearm raised for action.

"Where on earth did you get that, Jack?" he whispered. "Is it tame?"

"Blessed if I know. He simply crept up and peered at me through the monkey-ropes, and he hasn't said as much as a word yet."

Paul, who had a tolerably wide acquaintance with the natives of the interior, surveyed the black wonderingly. He was a gigantic figure of a man, clothed only in a breech-clout, and armed with a wooden-pointed assegai. In appearance he was a cross between a full-blooded Zulu and a Kafir, but he

seemed to possess all the immobility of an Indian chief.

"A new breed," Paul announced, in a puzzled way. "All the other natives that I have tumbled across would have left their assegais as a sort of visiting-card before this. I'll try him with a bit of Seleke. He looks like them, to my mind, and I've heard yarns about their trekking into the interior to escape the persecution of the Zulus—don't blame 'em, either."

Lowering his rifle, he turned to the black man, who had gravely squatted down upon the ground, with his bare hands upturned as a sign of peace.

"Greeting, child of the Seleke," he said solemnly. "Have you any wish to lay before the white travelers who venture into your domains?"

The native's face lighted visibly at sound of the Seleke tongue, and he made reply in the same language, although in a slightly different dialect.

"Greeting, white men from the sun! You are welcome, and doubly welcome, to the realm of Moshesh, chief of the Dumalas. You are sent for a purpose, godsmen, and I am sent to pray you to break your march at the village of N'koto, not a noon's march from here."

Both Paul and Jack surveyed him suspiciously.

His friendliness was both unexpected and extraordinary to any one cognizant, as they were, with the customs of the African of the interior.

True, they might have some surviving veneer of civilization, being an offshoot from the Selekes, but it was a very slender thread of safety to trust to.

"We are sent for a purpose, are we?" Paul muttered. "For the purpose of being converted into black man's

pork pie, I suppose. Jack, what on earth are we to do with this chap? He's getting on my nerves. I wish he'd move, and not look so much like a stuffed monkey."

"Ask him what he wants," proposed the other. "If we kick him out, he'll be potting at us with that sardine-opener."

Nodding, Paul turned to the native again.

"What are you called, O child of the Seleke?" he asked, reverting to the man's own dialect.

"I am called N'tshu Gontze," was the dignified response.

"The dickens you are! Sounds like a kind of fish," interjected Jack, who would have joked in the face of a simoon. "Ask him what his grandfather's name is, Paul."

"Why is our presence desired in the kraal of your chief?" Paul continued, maintaining his gravity by an effort, and frowning at his irrepressible comrade. He knew that a Seleke whose dignity has been tampered with is a more unpleasant companion than an enraged orang-otang.

"We are the victims of a terrible scourge, and we would seek the lightning-rods of the brave white princes to aid us," Gontze answered earnestly. "In a month our numbers have been decreased by dozens. Every other night a man, a woman, or a child perishes, and we are powerless to help ourselves. We dare not hunt, our women scarce dare to venture beyond the bounds of N'koto, and we starve for want of food."

The two hunters listened to this impassioned harangue with close attention.

It not only explained the native's curious appearance, but, if true, it was a guarantee of their own safety.

"We are not willing to break our march without reward," Paul returned, after a short interval of thought. "The Selekes are rich; they have much gold, and the white men need it in their kraals."

Gontze nodded.

"It is known. Follow me, godsmen from the sun, and you shall be feasted and rewarded royally."

Paul, who was quick in coming to a decision, nodded assent.

In addition to the prospect of a rich haul of gold or ivory, from which he was by no means averse, the sporting fever had awakened in his blood at the prospect of a bout with a man-eating tiger, as he had surmised the terror of N'koto to be, and, having assisted Jack to stamp out the ashes of the fire, he signified to Gontze their readiness to follow.

The man turned on his heel and strode into the jungle. The two lads hastily gathered together their goods, and silently followed the track he made.

It was late evening when the thatched roofs of N'koto came in view, and the sun was painting the sky with a dye of crimson, touching the trees with rosy fingers, and transforming the crocodile streams to pools of blood. A strange silence fell for a few minutes, as though every living thing in the jungle lay frightened by the gathering gloom. Then the night fell suddenly, and they were struggling through pitch-darkness, relieved only by the red glare of the fading sunglow in the western horizon.

The village had been erected in a clearing made in the very heart of the forest, and was surrounded by a

high stockade of tree trunks. Within, the darkness was dispelled by the flare of a hundred torches, and, as the two white men and their guide approached, the central gate opened and a party of men burst into view, all shouting like demons, and thrashing the ground with their torches as they capered to and fro, filling the air with wreaths of smoke and flying sparks.

"They are trying to frighten something—a lion, probably," Paul whispered to Jack, who was rather scared by the frenzied uproar. "Haven't you noticed Gontze lately? He has been nearly frightened out of his skin for the last half-mile."

Paul's conjecture proved a correct one.

The instant that the white men had passed through the gateway the turmoil ceased as if by magic, and the Selekes hurried after them, as though, like Tam o' Shanter, they had seen the evil one at their heels.

It was an impressive scene within the compound. The way to the royal kraal was lined by three hundred men and women, all decked in gay plumes and brightly colored garments woven of dyed grasses, and the lights of the torches glittered on spear-points and greasy skins with weird effect, which was enhanced by the guttural thud-thud of the tom-toms and the eery, demoniac blast of cowhide horns.

When they entered the kraal of Moshesh, however, the uproar ceased abruptly, and in the midst of intense stillness they walked across the rush-covered floor to where the chief was seated upon a throne of buffalo-ropes. He was an elderly, white-haired man, with a circlet of ivory upon his brow, as a symbol of his authority. He seemed even more civilized than the tribe, and as Paul and Jack bowed before him he addressed them in fluent English.

"Welcome, white men! May you live forever, and remember always the kraal of Moshesh with happiness! Be you seated."

The two hunters obeyed in silence, knowing that it would not be etiquette to speak until food had been placed before them. Moshesh, descending from his throne, squatted before them in a very unkinglike manner, and they were soon partaking of roast monkey, pressed betel-nuts, and similar dishes, to which they had become inured by custom.

The repast concluded, Moshesh, who had eaten enough for four ordinary men, rolled over so that he could lean his fat back against the wall, and in a few melancholy sentences conveyed to his guests the story that had already been told in part by Gontze.

The substance of his recital was that, a month previously, the headman of the village had mysteriously disappeared, and as—the chief said gravely—he was very useful, a search-party had been organized by the bereaved relatives. During the hunt they had come upon the lair of a monster lion, and one of the party had paid the penalty with his life.

The lion, in a few days, had proved not only to be a man-eater, but a man-hunter. If a Seleke ventured alone beyond the stockade, he was seldom seen again, and two men had been snatched literally from the very gates. Hunting was at an end; they could only go for their water in a strong body and at a great risk, and were, in fact, living in a state of siege, while the man-hunter slowly but surely diminished their numbers, with a cunning and ferocity that proved him to be the dwelling-place of a very evil spirit indeed. If they organized a hunt, he disappeared entirely, and, said Moshesh, they were at their wit's end when they heard that the mighty white hunters, with their lightning-

rods, had honored the country of the Seleke with their distinguished presence.

Paul, who was the spokesman, allowed the chief to bring his rambling recital to an end before he spoke.

"We have been on the march all day and are weary," he said then. "But in the morning we will rid you of this scourge." He spoke as though he had only to raise his hand and the thing would be done. "But, O Moshesh, if it find favor in your sight, we would crave a reward for the loss of our time."

"Two golden tusks shall be yours," the chief rejoined, with an air of indifference. "It is well. May my guests sleep long and happily, free from the spirit of evil dreams, and awake with the strength of fourscore lions. I have spoken."

He made a signal, and three men came forward to conduct the white hunters to the hut that had been allotted to them. In spite of the strangeness of their quarters, they were soon wrapped in deep slumber, secure in the fact that their mission would protect them from the rapacity of the Selekes.

At ten o'clock the next morning the hunt set forth. Conquering his fears, Moshesh had made the occasion a species of celebration, and the Selekes had turned out almost en masse to witness the destruction of the beast that had terrorized them for so long.

Gontze, who appeared to possess as much bravery as all the rest of the tribe put together, had constituted himself guide, as he was aware of the exact situation of the animal's lair.

For half an hour they walked on through the jungle, which grew more and more impenetrable as they progressed, until they were forced to have a party of

men with knives to carve a way through the undergrowth.

"We near the spot, Strongarm," Gontze murmured presently, pointing to a cross hacked in the wood of a date-palm. "I placed that mark there myself when I was here before, knowing that the creepers spread themselves faster than one can cut them down. The lion's lair is through there."

He paused as he spoke, pointing with outstretched arm to a dim, mysterious glade that lay directly ahead. It was a wild, bushy kloof, covered by a maze of Kafir bean, acacia, spekboem, geranium, plumbago, euphorbia, and a score of other growths to which no man can put a name. Shielded from the hot rays of the copper-colored sun, it looked cool and delightful to the eye, but the party of Selekes shrank back at Gontze's words, surveying the place with a horror that was half-superstitious.

"So that is where my lord lives, is it?" Paul muttered, as he stooped to peer along the dim aisles of jungle, starred with flowers like candles in some vast cathedral. "I see no sign of a spoor."

"Said I not that the weeds grow almost visibly, O Strongarm?" Gontze, to whom the remark was addressed, returned. "The lion gorged himself two suns ago, and still lies sleeping. The grass has covered his spoor."

Paul Armstrong nodded, and stepped aside to confer with his chum.

They were both anxious to obtain the two golden tusks that the chief had promised them, and they wanted to make sure of the man-eater at the first shot, if possible. If they allowed him to escape from his lair, it might be days before they could entice him within firing distance again.

However, their plan of campaign was soon formed, and they returned to the place where they had left Gontze, to find that the chief, with most of his retainers, had drawn off and left them to their own devices, a fact for which they were duly thankful. Three of the Selekes had been left behind—Gontze and two other men, who had evidently been picked for their strength, to judge by their gigantic stature.

"I am going to walk up to the lair and entice the beast out," Paul said calmly. "My friend will be seated up in a tree, and will pop off Mr. Man-eater as he passes. You three had better be up in the trees, too; only don't stick those assegais into me by accident, please."

The Seleke listened in amazement to this proposition.

"But the white man is surely mad!" he broke out, in dismay, so soon as he could speak. "It is sure death to walk up to the lair!"

"It will take a lively lion to catch me, in this maze of trees," Paul answered carelessly. "You'd better hurry up, I think, or the lion might take a fancy to come out before we are ready."

Jack Percival was already settling himself, with a grimly determined air, in the tree that Paul had indicated, and at a word from Gontze, who still shook his head dismally, the two natives followed suit, clambering into a tree on the opposite side of the glade, and holding their assegais ready for instant use.

Waving his hand to Jack, Paul gripped his rifle firmly, and stepped carefully through the tangle of weeds that carpeted the kloof. Before he had gone far he came suddenly upon a cavernous opening in the clay bank, around the mouth of which hundreds of bones were strewn, picked to an ivory whiteness by the

voracious driver-ants, which swarmed in hordes, like poor relations, about the entrance to the great beast's den.

With his heart thumping wildly, Paul paused to listen, shuddering at the noisome odor that was wafted to his nostrils. From within he could hear the sound of deep, harsh breathing, varied occasionally by a long-drawn snore.

Stooping, he picked up a great chunk of earth and flung it with all his force into the cavern. He heard the dull thud of its fall distinctly, followed by the patter of the spreading fragments, and then a cry rose to his lips, but was resolutely stifled.

The noise of the lion's snoring had ceased!

In spite of himself, he shrank farther and farther from the mouth of the lair, and it was only by a tremendous effort of will that he could prevent himself from taking to his heels in precipitate flight. He could hear a soft pad-pad of velvety footsteps, and the rattling of dry bones one against the other. Then suddenly came a roar louder than thunder, and before Paul could move a step a tawny form flashed into view, as the lion, with one tremendous spring, bounded toward him.

There was no time to fire. Flinging his rifle aside, he fled like the wind, straight for the spot where his friend was waiting. Another roar from behind seemed to shake the forest to its foundations, and he put all his strength into a mighty effort to distance the great beast that was overtaking him with enormous leaps. Then a cry of agony burst from his lips as, catching his toe in a trailing creeper, he went headlong to the earth.

In spite of the suddenness of the shock, he never lost consciousness for a moment. He felt a heavy, evil-smelling body come crashing down onto his own, and

his right arm was seized in a grip that brought a shout of agony from between his clenched teeth. Next instant the man-eater lifted him into the air with as much ease as if he had been a baby, and stood gazing round in splendid defiance, its tail lashing slowly from side to side.

"I'm afraid to shoot from here, Paul. I'm coming down."

Paul heard Jack's voice as in a dream. He was beginning to feel faint with the pain of his crushed arm, but he did not mean to die without a struggle. Stealthily drawing his hunting-knife, he raised it in the air to the full extent of his arm and plunged it up to the hilt in the lion's side, aiming for the heart.

Phat! Phat!

The sharp report of a rifle seared his brain, as Jack, stealing up behind, gave the brute both barrels in quick succession. Simultaneously with the detonations, as it seemed, the grip of those cruel jaws relaxed, and even as he fell back in a dead faint he had a vision of the Selekes plunging their assegais again and again into the quivering body of the man-hunter.

THE RAT CRUSADE.

"The crusade against rats, begun in Norway a few years ago, is gradually extending over the world. For many months San Francisco has been waging remorseless warfare upon the rodent dwellers of the city, and several hundred thousand of the pests have been destroyed. The persons who are active in directing the slaughter predict that if the other cities of the State can be induced to assist, California can be entirely cleared of rats in the course of a couple of years.

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