

MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

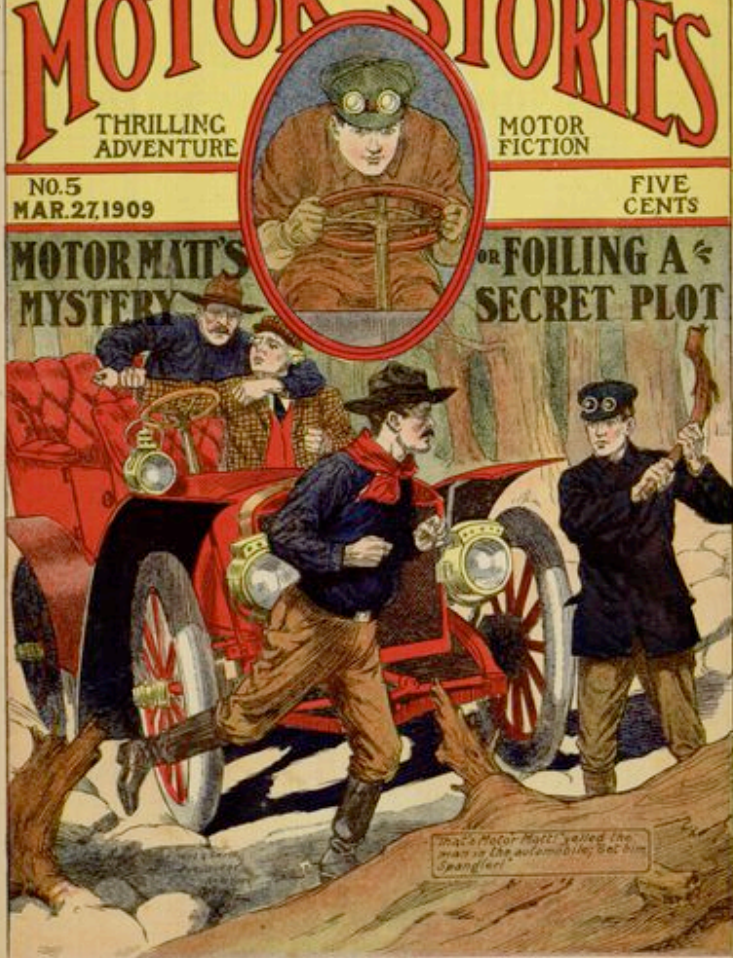
MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 5
MAR. 27, 1909

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR MAT'S
MYSTERY

OR FOILING A
SECRET PLOT



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MOTOR MATT'S MYSTERY

or

Foiling a Secret Plot

By Stanley R Matthews

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THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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Motor Matt's Mystery

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CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

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

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

James Q. Tomlinson, the jeweler from Denver, who seems to have troubles of his own, and about whose identity there is more or less confusion.

Trymore,
Hank,
Spangler, } a trio of sporting gentlemen who believe in hunting big game, and who consider themselves experts in the line of choice gems.

Pringle, once honest Carl's pardner in vaudeville, but latterly engaged in a far less honorable business.

Gregory, a chauffeur.

Hop Loo,
Charley Sing, } the two eccentric laundrymen of Ash Fork.

CHAPTER I.

A DUTCHMAN IN TROUBLE.

Whiz, bang!

"Dutchee boy no good! Have gotee mon, no makee pay. Whoosh! Allee same cheap skate!"

Whiz, *bang*, clatter, *bang*!

"Vat's der madder mit you, hey? You vas grazier as I can't tell! Py shiminy grickets, oof you hit me mit a flad-iron I vill mad be as some hornets. Shtop a leedle, und I vill—"

There followed a wild yell, a pandemonium as though Bedlam had been turned loose, and then a heavy fall and sudden quiet.

Motor Matt, just turning into the yard of a small adobe house, heard the tremendous uproar and came to a startled halt.

Hop Loo, a Chinese laundryman, lived in the house, and Matt was just coming after his week's wash.

Under a cotton-wood tree in the yard, some fifteen feet from the house, was a wash-tub mounted on a couple of chairs. Between the tree and a corner of the house, and running thence to a post set at right angles with the adobe wall, was a line strung with clothes.

Charley Sing, who worked for Hop Loo, was at the tub, up to his elbows in hot suds.

The racket in the house had claimed Charley's attention just as it had caught Matt's. Pulling his hands out of the wash-water, Charley dried them on his kimono, jerked the wash-board out of the tub, and, holding it by one leg for use as a weapon, stole toward

the open door of the adobe.

Matt had been so situated that he could look into the house and catch a restricted view of what was going on. The thumping had been caused by flat-irons striking against the inner walls, each one being nimbly dodged by a fat youth of decidedly odd appearance. Hop Loo, who was ironing, had shrilly piped his denunciation of the fat boy; the latter had replied; and Hop Loo, failing to make a bull's-eye with the flat-iron, had sprung at the boy. The latter, with an astonishingly quick move, considering his size, had grabbed a rack of ironed clothes and hurled it in Hop Loo's way. Thereupon Hop Loo had turned a somersault over the clothes, and was now standing on his head very quietly in a wood-box.

"Meppy you t'ink I vas a Vandefeller, or Rockybilt," cried the fat boy, breaking the silence, "but you bet my life you got anodder guess coming. You make me some drouples, by shinks, und I don'd like dot. Goot-py, Hob Loo! Sorry dot I can't vait undil you ged right-site-oop, aber I haf pitzness in some odder blaces, und vill broceed to fly my kite!"

The fat boy turned and wobbled through the door. Matt, now that he had a good look at him, began to laugh.

"Dutchman" was written all over the boy's face. He had a mop of carrot hair, and on top of it was a little plaid cap that looked as though it was lost in the wilderness. His ample dimensions were covered with a suit whose pattern consisted of a very "loud" plaid, and under the open coat could be seen a crimson vest that made even more noise than the rest of his apparel.

As this ponderous vision ambled through the door, it was met by Charley Sing and the wash-board.

"Ged oudt oof my vay!" yelled the fat Dutch boy.

"Oof you don'd, py shiminy, somet'ing is going to take blace vat is nod on der pills."

Charley, grimly determined, whirled the wash-board and let drive with it. The strength he put into the blow caused the board to leave his hands. The Dutchman dropped, the wash-board flew over his head and hit Hop Loo, who had up-ended himself and was just returning to the attack, in the pit of the stomach.

"Wow!" gurgled Hop Loo, catching his middle with both hands and doing a wild dance in his straw sandals.

Charley Sing was now thoroughly aroused. Jabbering in frantic "pidgin," he proceeded to make front on the Dutchman.

The latter, continuing to display his surprising agility, ducked sideways between Hop Loo and Charley Sing, and rushed in the direction of the cottonwood. Charley followed him with such speed that his pigtail stood straight out behind him, and the sandals flew right and left from his rapidly moving feet.

The German boy circled around the wash-tub. Charley would have circled, too, only his toes caught in a wringer that was lying on the ground, and he pitched heavily against the chairs that held the tub.

A catastrophe followed.

The tub went down, and Charlie turned a handspring in the hot suds and came up covered with foam and wet clothes.

"Whoosh!" he spluttered; "killee Dutchee boy! Allee same debble! Makee go topside!"

Falling over against the tree, he began clearing the soap-suds out of his eyes and throat. He looked like an animated drying-post, and the Dutch boy, in spite of

his troubles, began to haw-haw wildly.

By that time, however, Hop Loo had recovered his wind, grabbed up a stick of stove-wood, and was bearing down on the fat Teuton with blood in his eye.

The youth saw him coming, whirled, and ran into the clothes-line. His weight ripped the line from the tree and the house-corner, and when he went on he carried it with him, the dried clothes flapping like so many distress-signals.

Perhaps the boy traveled a dozen yards. At the end of that distance, he got tangled in the rope, went down and rolled over and over, completely wrapping himself up in a choice assortment of laundry.

It is hard to tell what Hop Loo would have done when he came up with that fluttering heap that was twisting and writhing on the ground. He had the stick of wood in his hand and much bitterness in his heart, but if he struck too hard he would make a bad matter worse by damaging some of the linen. Besides, when Hop Loo got ready to take revenge, Matt was standing between him and the helpless Dutchman.

"Easy there, Hop Loo!" cried Matt.

"You no stopee China boy!" howled Hop Loo, dancing all around Matt and trying to get at the bundle. "Dutchee boy spoilee heap washee, makee plenty touble. Me sendee topside, you bettee!"

Grabbing Hop Loo's waving arm, Matt deftly relieved the yellow fist of the billet of wood.

"Hold up, Hop Loo," said he soothingly; "let's get down to cases on this thing and find out what's wrong."

"By jim' Klismus," shrilled Hop Loo, "he tly beatee China boy! No makee pay fo' launly! Kickee up plenty

lumpus. No likee!"

"Vell, der olt rat-eader! I vas drying to tell him some t'ings und he vouldn't lis'en. He made me more drouples as you can guess, und pegan drowing me at all der flad-irons in der blace."

Matt looked around. The Dutch boy had managed to scramble to his feet and paw his head free of the clothes. A red undershirt was draped gracefully over his right shoulder, and he was completely swathed in other garments and clothes-pins.

Matt grinned. The sight was too much for him.

"Meppy id's funny," said the Dutch boy, with a wink, "aber der Chink ain't enchoying himseluf so as any vone can nodice."

"Who are you?" asked Matt.

"Carl is der lapel vat I tote, Carl Pretzel."

"Do you owe the Chinaman money?"

"Vell, I vas pusted, und I vanted him to vait undil I get some chobs, und he got mad und pegun drowing t'ings. He vould haf drowed der kitchen stof ad me, only it vas hotter as he could hantle. My, my, vat a grazy Chink id iss."

"How much does he owe you, Hop?" inquired Matt.

"Fiftyfi' cent fo' launly," answered the Chinaman, "two dol' fo' spoilee clothes," and he waved a discouraged hand at the garments on the ground and at the overturned wash-tub. "Two fiftyfi', you savvy? Him one piecee bad Dutchee boy."

"How much is my laundry?" asked Matt.

"Fortyfi'."

"That makes three dollars," said Matt, pulling some

money from his pocket. "Take it, Hop, and call the account square. Now run in and get Carl's laundry and mine while I'm getting him out of his tangle."

The three silver dollars soothed the Chinaman's injured feelings, and he turned and vanished into the house.

"Say," cried Carl, "you vas a pooty goot feller! Vat's your name, hey?"

"Matt King."

"You lif in Ash Fork?"

"No; I'm just here waiting for a man I'm anxious to see."

"Vell, dot's my fix. I'm likewise vaitin' for a man dot I vant do see mit a club. He's aboutt my size, only not kevite so goot looging as me, und pigger oop an' down as I am der odder vay. His name iss Pringle. He vas a pad egg, I tell you dot. Can you tell me vere dot feller iss?"

Matt shook his head.

"Never heard of him, Carl," he answered.

"Chonny Hartluck has been hitting me like anyt'ing," sighed Carl, as Matt stripped away the last of the clothes-line, "und you peen der fairest friendt I haf hat since I don'd know. Shake vonce."

Carl put out his hand, and Matt grasped it cordially.

"How you t'ink I efer pay you pack dot money, Matt?" asked Carl.

"I'm not thinking much about it, one way or the other," said Matt. "No great loss, Carl, if you never pay it back."

"You vas a fine feller, und ve vill go some place und I

will tell you somet'ing."

Just then Hop Loo showed himself with two bundles of laundry. Matt took one, and Carl the other, and they left at once for the main part of the town.

There was joy in the faces of Hop Loo and Charley Sing as the Dutch boy departed, and they immediately began bringing order out of their demoralized "plant."

When they were out of the yard, and bound along the road, Carl Pretzel threw back his head and began to laugh.

"You seem to get a good deal of fun out of your troubles, Carl," remarked Matt, who had developed a deep interest in his odd companion.

"Dot's me!" guffawed Carl. "Id iss easy to be jeerful ven luck is comin' your vay, aber you bed you it takes a pooty goot feller to be jeerful ven it ain't. So dot's vy I laff mit meinseluf. I peen more jeerful now, schust because I vas blayin' in der vorst luck vat efer habbened, und I bed you someding for nodding it ain't eferypody vat could do dot. Now, oof I—"

Carl never finished his remark. The boys had been walking in the center of the road, and Matt suddenly heard a sound behind them and almost on their heels.

"Look out!" he yelled, grabbing Carl by the arm and giving him a jerk toward the roadside.

CHAPTER II.

THE RUNAWAY AUTO.

"Vat's der madder?" gasped Carl, as he came to a staggering halt.

"Look!" cried Matt, pointing.

An automobile—a big, red touring-car—rolled past the boys. If they had not jumped just when they did it would have run them down. It had come without warning, other than the muffled noise caused by its machinery, and Matt had been so taken up with the talk of his new acquaintance that he had not heard the car's approach until the last moment.

"Vy didn't he honk?" sputtered Carl.

"He?" flung back Matt, staring, and hardly able to believe his eyes. "Why, there wasn't any one to honk!"

This amazing statement was literally true. As the car passed them, the boys could see that there was no one in either of the front seats, or in the tonneau. The car had no passengers, *and was running itself!*

"Vell, py chimineddy!" murmured Carl, aghast.

The car was not going at a high rate of speed—perhaps fifteen miles an hour—but, even at that gait, it was rapidly leaving a wide gap between it and the boys.

Matt was nonplused, but he side-tracked his bewilderment in a hurry and tried to think of some means for overtaking the runaway auto and bringing it to a halt. This must be done before the car reached town, or there would surely be an accident.

Matt flashed his eyes about him. Houses were few and far between in that part of the settlement, but, as

luck would have it, a horse was standing in front of a dwelling on the right of the road.

Without losing a moment, Matt rushed to the horse, jerked the bridle-reins over the top of a post, clambered into the saddle and dug out after the red car.

Carl was yelling and talking excitedly, but Matt had no attention to pay to him, and the Dutch boy's words soon died out in the distance.

For several miles that road into Ash Fork was perfectly straight. The runaway car, however, was heading for a bend where trees and telephone-poles would surely wreck it unless it was halted or turned.

As Matt, with the horse on the keen jump, came closer to the car, he saw that the steering-wheel had been lashed by a rope. Attached to one of the top-irons on the right side of the front seat, the lashing engaged the spokes of the steering-wheel and crossed to the top-iron on the left. This fastening held the wheel rigid, and kept the car on a straight course.

How to drop from the saddle of the running horse and into the car was a point that Matt turned over in his mind as he raced. He had not many seconds in which to mark out a line of action—and he did not need many.

Pushing the horse to top speed, Matt passed the car; then, with a quick jerk on the reins, he brought the horse to a slower pace, tumbled out of the saddle, caught his footing in the road and flung himself at the running-board as the car came abreast of him.

He was jolted considerably, although no particular damage was done, and got into the tonneau with a wild scramble. By then the car was dangerously close to the bend, and Matt threw himself across the back of the

front seat and into the driver's position. With lightning quickness he cut off the power and threw on the emergency brake. The machine halted, but with a telephone-pole almost between the front wheels!

With a deep breath of relief, Matt stood up to see what Carl was doing. The fat Dutchman was trying to head off and stop the horse. The animal, as soon as Matt had dropped from the saddle, had whirled back along the road. Not a little frightened, the horse seemed now about to turn in Matt's direction in order to escape Carl.

Hastily cutting away the wheel-lashing with his knife, Matt sprang from the car and ran back, so he and Carl could keep the horse between them. This move was successful, and the Dutch boy, by an exercise of marvelous agility for one of his build, managed to grab the horse by the bits.

"Vat shall I do mit him, Matt?" cried Carl.

"Take him back to the place where I got him, Carl," called Matt, "then bring that laundry of ours and come to the car. There's a mystery here that we've got to look into."

Matt's wild ride on horseback, and his capture of the car, had not brought a single person out of the squat little adobe houses sprinkled along the road. For the most part, the houses were inhabited by Chinamen, and they had little curiosity for the Melican man's devil-wagon; not enough, at least, to let the stopping of the car draw them from their own affairs.

Matt looked the machine over with an admiring eye. It was a fine late model, with six cylinders under the long hood. From the amount of dust with which the machine was covered it seemed to have come a long distance. The tires, however, were in excellent condition, the gasoline-tank was half full, and there

was still a good supply of oil.

Familiar as Matt was with motor vehicles, he knew the car must have cost five or six thousand dollars. Why was such a valuable machine loose in the road? Who was the owner? And *where* was the owner?

Getting into the tonneau, Matt searched for something that would offer a clue to the mystery. He could find nothing. He was just straightening up after his unsuccessful examination when Carl came along.

"Py chiminy," puffed Carl, "I nefer heardt oof anyt'ing like dot! Matt, you vas a great feller. Dot's rightd. Oof you hatn't done vat you dit, I bed you somet'ing der modor-car vould haf peen a lot oof junk. Yah, so. Vere you learn how to run audomopiles, hey?"

"Used to work in a motor factory," answered Matt. "What do you think of this lay out, Carl?" he asked. "Here's a fine big touring-car running itself along the road, no clue to the owner, and the steering-wheel lashed to keep it on a straight line!"

Apparently the question was too difficult for Carl. Thoughtfully he tossed the two bundles of laundry into the tonneau, walked around in front and opened the bonnet. The beautiful mechanism disclosed brought an admiring cry from the Dutch boy's lips.

"Py shinks," he murmured, "you don'd find cylinters like dot in cheap cars, Matt!"

"What do you know about cylinders?" demanded Matt, opening his eyes at this new side of the Teuton's character.

"Vell," and Carl ran his fingers through the mop of hair, "meppy I don'd know how to dake a car apart und put him togedder again, aber I t'ink yah. I vorked vonce in some factories meinseluf—pefore I got foolish und vent on der stage mit Pringle. You bed you I know

der carpuretter from der spark-plug, but I don'd got der nerf to make a drifer."

Carl had been through experiences about which Matt was anxious to learn, but, for the present, the mystery of the red car claimed his entire attention.

"Why should any one want to cut a car like this adrift?" queried Matt.

"Dat's more as I know," answered Carl, closing the bonnet, "aber led's be jeerful, Matt. Oof fife t'ousant tollars comes rolling into our hants, all py itseluf, for vy shouldn't ve be jeerful?"

"This car don't belong to us, Carl, just because we happened to stop it."

"Vell, oof you hatn't shtopped it it vouldn't haf been vort' nodding! Und der feller vat hat it didn't vant it, or he vouldn't haf let it go. So helup me, I t'ink it pelongs py us. I vant to go py Tenver. Vere do you vant to go?"

"I came from Phoenix to Ash Fork, two weeks ago, with a letter of recommendation to a wealthy cattleman who has just bought a big automobile and wants a driver. I had my eye on the job, Carl, but the cattleman hasn't shown up. He lives here, though, and I'm waiting for him. If it wasn't for that, I'd just as soon pull out for Denver, myself."

"I don'd got some money," said Carl, "und along comes der audomopile und say, 'Chump in, boys, und led me dake you py Tenver!' Und I, in der jeerful vay vat I haf, make some remarks aboutt 'Vy nod?'"

Matt went around to the front and began cranking.

"Well, jump in," said he, coming back and getting into the driver's seat; "we're going to start."

"For Tenver?" cried Carl.

"Hardly," laughed Matt, backing away and turning the car in the road; "we're off along the back trail to look for the touring-car's owner."

"Vell, meppy he don'd vant it?"

"Then, if we find him, we'll give him a chance to say so."

"How you t'ink ve vas goin' to find him?"

"This car hasn't been abandoned very long, nor very many miles back on the road. You see, the road is straight for only a few miles, and the car, with the wheel lashed as it was, could only travel along the straight track. If it had been abandoned *before* it was put on the straight track, it would have been in the ditch."

"You know more in a minit as I in a year know, Matt," said Carl, heaving a long breath, "und dot's all about it. Ve vill look for der owner, und I vill shdill be jeerful efen oof he dakes der car und makes me valk by Tenver, yah, so. It vas some pig mysderies, anyvay; py chimineddy, it vas der piggest vale oof a mysdery vat efer come my vay."

Motor Matt agreed with Carl. Somewhere along the straight stretch of road ahead of them he felt sure the key to the mystery would be found.

And what would it reveal?

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN AT THE ROADSIDE.

Back past Hop Loo's adobe Matt drove the car, and on into the open country. For five or six miles the road ran as straight as an arrow, and was almost as level and smooth as a boulevard. Ahead of them, as they moved forward, the boys could see the marks left by the wheels when the car had passed over the road headed toward town. No other pneumatic tires had left a trail in the dust.

"I bed you somet'ing, Matt," remarked Carl, "dot dis car don'd pelong py Ash Fork."

"There's only one car owned in Ash Fork," said Matt, "and that belongs to the cattleman I came to the town to see. From the looks of the road, no car has come into town or gone out of it for several hours, except this one. Keep a sharp watch on your side of the road, Carl. We've got to find the place where the car stopped while the driver was lashing the wheel and getting out."

"Py shinks, I haf peen vatching as sharp as some veasels, aber I don'd see nodding."

Matt was covering the back trail slowly, so that no clues which might have been left in the road could get away from his keen eyes.

For a long time neither he nor Carl saw anything of importance; and then, suddenly, when they were about four miles from town, Matt's sharp glance showed him something that caused him to bring the car to a quick stop.

"Vat it iss?" asked Carl excitedly.

"Get down and I'll show you," answered Matt.

When they were both in the road, beside the car, Matt pointed to a spot close to the wheel-marks left by the car on its trip into town.

"Py shinks," muttered Carl, pushing his fingers through his carroty hair in a puzzled way, "dot looks schust like some feller had t'rowed a bag der car off. Dose marks in der dust look schust like dey vas made mit some pags."

"It must have been a bag that could move, then," said Matt.

"Huh?" queried Carl, his bewilderment growing.

Matt showed him how the broad mark in the dust had moved toward the roadside.

"And that bag, as you call it, Carl," continued Matt, "wasn't thrown out. If I'm figuring this thing right, it *fell* out."

"Hoop-a-la!" exulted Carl admiringly, "you vas some Sherlock Holmes, I bed you. How you make dot figuring, anyvay? I know as mooch as you, meppy, oof I could only t'ink oof it. You tell me somet'ing, und den I know."

Matt stepped toward the side of the road opposite from that where the broad, flat mark ran toward the edge.

"You see, Carl," he explained, "this road isn't quite so level here. There's a bit of a ridge, and when the car came into town, the wheels on the left side went over that ridge, tilting the machine to the right. What you call the bag dropped over the right side and into the road."

"Yah, so! Und ven it hit der road it moofed mit itseluf. Funny pitzness. Der furder vat ve go, der less

vat ve know, hey? Vat next, Matt?"

"We'll follow the trail and see where it leads."

"Sure! Aber ve don'd vant to go too far away from der car. Some goot-for-nodding fellers might come along und shnook it on us."

"I don't think we'll have to go very far, Carl."

"Veil, be jeerful. Vatefer ve findt, Matt, schust be jeerful. Oof I can't go py Tenfer in dot car it vill be a plow in der face; aber vatch und see how I took it."

Low bushes lined the roadside. Matt, not paying much attention to Carl's last remarks, was moving off in the direction of the bushes, following the strange broad trail.

Parting the branches at the outer edge of the thicket, he moved into the tangled undergrowth. Carl, who was pushing along behind him, saw him stoop down and disappear below the tops of the bushes. The next moment, the Dutch boy heard a startled exclamation, and Matt straightened up quickly. His face, which he turned toward Carl, had gone suddenly white.

"Come here, Carl!" he called.

"You findt der moofing pag, hey?" asked Carl, floundering through the brush.

Then, a second later, Carl's face also blanched.

Coming close to Matt, and looking down, he saw the form of a man curled up in a little cleaned space in the thicket. The man's hat lay beside him, and about his forehead was tied a blood-stained handkerchief. His face was pallid and deathlike, and his eyes were closed.

"Himmelblitzen!" whispered Carl. "Iss he deadt, I vonder?"

Matt knelt down and laid a hand on the man's

breast; then, lifting up one of his limp wrists, he pressed his fingers against the pulse.

"He's alive," said Matt.

"Den it wasn't a pag vat tropped oudt oof der car—"

"It was this man," cut in Matt. "He was sitting in the driver's seat. When the car pitched to the right he was too weak to hold himself in, so he fell into the road."

"Und hurt his head ven he fell!"

"No, he must have hurt his head before he fell. It wasn't so very long ago, Carl, that he took his header from the car, and that bandage must have been around his temples for two or three hours, at least."

"Den vat? Oof he vas too veak to shtay py der car, how he tie der veel like vat it vas?"

"He must have been running the car and steering. Feeling his strength going, he lashed the wheel in order to keep the machine on a straight course. Probably he hoped the car would get him into town."

"How you t'ink he vas hurt?"

"Give it up. It looks like foul play to me."

"Ach, blitzen! Dot's schust vat I say: Der more vat ve hunt aroundt der less vat ve find oudt."

The man was well dressed, and thirty-five or forty years old.

"Anyhow," said Matt, "he must have been the owner of the car. I shouldn't wonder if some one had robbed him."

"Den der roppers didn't know deir pitzness, Matt," returned Carl. "See dot pig, goldt chain in his vest! Und look at here vonce." Carl bent over and pulled a fine gold watch from the vest pocket. "Vat vas der

roppers t'inking aboutt ven dey held der feller oop und didn't take dis? Und den, again, dere iss der car. Vy didn't dey shdeal dot, hey? No, I bed you, it vasn't roppers. It vas somet'ing else vat gif dot poor feller a crack on der headt."

"Some one may have *tried* to rob him, Carl," said Matt. "The car is a fast one, and it's easy to guess that he got away."

"Vell, meppy. My prain vas all in kinks und I don'd know noddings aboutt it."

"The quickest way to find out what happened is to get the man to Ash Fork and into a doctor's hands. We ought to do that, anyway, and the quicker we do it the better. Let's take him and put him in the tonneau."

"Dot's der talk!"

Matt stepped to the man's head and started to lift him by the shoulders. As the limp form was slowly raised something dropped out of hip pocket.

"Py chimineddy!" exploded Carl. "Vait a leedle, Matt. See vat iss dis."

Matt waited while Carl stooped and picked up an object that glittered in the sunlight.

"A revolver!" exclaimed Matt

"Yah, so! Der feller vent heeled mit himseluf. Meppy he vas expecding drouble?"

"That may be! or, if he was touring through this part of the country, it would only have been a wise policy to carry arms. Any bullets in the gun, Carl?"

The Dutch boy examined the weapon.

"Dere iss doo empty shells und four goot vones," he announced. "He must haf fired a gouple oof dimes."

"Well, drop the gun in your pocket and let's get him to the car."

Thereupon the unconscious form was picked up and carried out of the thicket and into the road. Close to the car the burden was laid down while the tonneau door was opened.

"After the man fell from the car," said Matt, "he had to drag himself into the bushes."

"Vy was dot? Oof he hat shtaid in der roadt somepody who vas passing vould haf seen him."

"He may have had his reasons for getting out of sight. Anyhow, the only way for us to get to the bottom of this thing is by taking the man to town and having a doctor look after him."

When Carl had opened the door and thrown the two packages of laundry from the seat into the bottom of the car, the boys picked the man up again and heaved him into the tonneau.

While he was being lifted something else dropped out of his pockets and fell on the foot-board with a muffled *thump*.

"Iss dot anoder gun?" puffed Carl, who was in the tonneau and fixing the man on the seat.

"Not exactly," answered Matt, taking the object from the running-board and holding it up.

It was a small green bag.

"See vat iss inside already," suggested Carl. "Meppy it vill gif us a line on who der feller iss."

The bag was of heavy silk, and its mouth was closed with a silken cord. To open the bag took only a moment, and Matt thrust in his hand and drew out several small spheres about the size of so many peas.

They were dark in color and cast off a lustrous gleam in the sun's rays.

Matt stared at the little objects in amazement.

"Chee grickets!" grunted Carl. "Vy he vas carrying pills in a silk pag? He must be a great feller!"

"Pills!" exclaimed Matt. "You're 'way wide of the mark, Carl. These are not pills, but pearls—black pearls, the rarest gems that come out of the sea. There—there's a fortune in this green bag!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

The effect of Matt's announcement on Carl was startling. The Dutch boy, of course, might be supposed to evince some surprise at finding the bag of pearls, but his amazement went so deep it left him speechless. More than that, his astonishment grew rather than lessened.

"Bearls!" he whispered, as soon as he could find his voice, staring strangely at Matt over the side of the tonneau. "Iss dot vat you say, Matt—bearls?"

"Yes," answered Matt excitedly, counting the contents of the bag. "There are twenty of them, Carl, and I know that black pearls bring a big price."

"Veil, by shinks und den some!" wheezed Carl. "Vouldn't dot knock you slap-sided? Bearls! Und vat vas dot t'ing I findt me in Pringle's room. Say, Matt, I got to shpeak mit you, rightd away!"

"We've got to take care of the man, Carl," returned Matt, closing the silk bag and stowing it carefully in his pocket. "This is a big thing we're up against, and we've got to handle it right. Make the man as comfortable as you can. I'll go back after his hat and then we'll hustle him into Ash Fork."

Carl went about his work mechanically, his face full of wonder. Matt returned to the place where the man had been found, picked up his automobile-cap and gave a hasty look around for anything else that might have been dropped. Failing to find anything, he returned quickly to the car.

"You better stay in the tonneau, Carl," suggested

Matt, "and keep the man from being jarred off the seat."

"I vant to talk," said Carl; "py chimineddy, I got to shpeak mit you aboutt vat has habbened mit me. I don'd ged der time since der Chinks blayed tag mit me, und—"

Matt was cranking the machine. As he came around and crawled into the front seat, he looked back to see that everything was all right.

"You can talk while we run into town, Carl," said he, throwing in the clutch and manipulating the side lever.

"Pefore you ged to going too fast," said Carl, leaning over the back of the seat and pushing a scrap of paper under Matt's eyes, "read dot."

There were only a few words on the sheet, and Matt read them almost at a glance. What he read thrilled him on the instant.

"Pearls on the way. Break loose and meet us as per letter sent you at Albuquerque."

It was the one word, "pearls," that sent an electric shock through Matt's nerves.

"Where'd that note come from?" he asked, keeping his eyes ahead on the road.

"Dot's all vot Pringle left pehindt," answered Carl, putting the note back in his pocket. "Ven he flew der coop he took mit him der trunk mit eferyding else vat he hat. Yah, so. Ven I knocked py his room in der morning, I don'd ged no answer. I knock some more, und den I findt me der door vas oben, und I valk in mit meinseluf. No Pringle. No trunk. No noddin aber schust dot paper lying on der floor. Pringle hat vamoosed. He took vat money dere vas, und my shdreet clodings, so I hat to vear my stage make-ooop."

"Where were you and Pringle at the time?"

"Py Flagstaff."

"What were you doing in Flagstaff?"

"Ve vas a knockaboutt moosickal team. Yah, so. Ve use a shlap-shtick, und make some monkey-doodle pitzness, und I blay der zillyphone, und der drompone, und der moosickal glasses, und der sleigh-pells. Pringle he blow der horn und plinkety-plunk der pancho. Ve vas vorkin' our vay agross der gontinent py San Francisco, vere ve blay a circuit in vaudeville. Aber Pringle he pull out mit himseluf, und I vas left in some lurches. I go on py Ash Fork, and t'ink meppy Pringle come up from Phœnix, so I vait py Ash Fork. Vell, he leaf me doo shirts und dree pairs oof socks, und vile I peen in Ash Fork vaiting, I dake dem py Hop Loo. Ach, I haf some pooty pad dimes vile I vait for Pringle, aber I vas jeerful. Now I t'ink meppy he don'd vas in Phœnix ad all, und dot he vas in Tenver. Dere iss somet'ing in dot note aboutt bearls. Ve findt bearls in dot leedle pag. Funny, ain't dot? For vy iss id, Matt?"

Matt couldn't answer that question. The mystery was deepening.

"Somebody sent that note to Pringle, Carl, and he cut loose from you."

"Yah, so. He cut loose from me und he dook eferyt'ing vat I haf. He vas a pad egg, you bed you. Oof I ketch him vonce, I make him t'ink he vas hit mit some cyclones!"

"The fellow who wrote that note may not have meant that these pearls in the bag were 'on the way.'"

"Meppy nod, aber it looks doo keveer for a habbenchance. It gif me a cholt, Matt, ven you saidt dose t'ings vas bearls, und I recollectioned vat vas saidt in der note about bearls. Meppy Pringle und some

odder pad egg dry to holt dis feller oop und dake der pag away from him."

"That may be. How is the man now?"

"Aboutt der same like he vas."

Matt had been driving the car at a smart clip, and they had taken the turn in the road and were reaching out for the main street of the town.

There was a doctor's office across the street from the hotel, and Matt drew up in front of it. Some loungers on the sidewalk, observing the unconscious form in the tonneau, began crowding around the car and asking questions.

"I don't know what's the matter," said Matt. "We found this car running away and picked up the man from the roadside. Is the doctor in?"

The doctor himself looked from a second-story window and answered the question. Some of the bystanders helped remove the man from the tonneau and carry him up the stairs to the doctor's office. Matt and Carl followed.

"Keep quiet, Carl," whispered Matt to the Dutch boy; "don't tell any of these people what we've found. That information will have to go to the officers."

"Sure t'ing," returned Carl, with a wink. "I know more as you t'ink, Matt. Ve ought to ged a rake-off on dot pag. Id would be easy to be jeerful mit a rake-off."

The unconscious man was laid down on a couch in the doctor's office, and the room was cleared of all the morbidly curious people. Only Matt and Carl were left with the doctor.

The latter, busily stripping away the blood-stained bandage, kept up a running fire of talk as he worked.

He wanted to know all about the runaway car, how it had been stopped, just where the man had been found, whether he had been unconscious ever since he was picked up, and so on.

Carl let Matt answer the questions, and Matt was glad that none of the doctor's remarks brought up anything about the pearls.

"His injury is not serious," said the doctor. "His forehead has been grazed by a bullet. A tight squeak, but in a case like this a miss is always as good as a mile."

"Why is he unconscious?" queried Matt.

"Just weak from loss of blood. We'll bring him around in a jiffy, and then he can tell all about what happened to him."

The doctor proceeded to cleanse the man's wound, and to put on a fresh bandage. Then, holding up his head, he forced a stimulant between his lips.

"He must be a wealthy man," remarked the doctor, his eyes on the watch-chain and the good clothes. "But what does a wealthy man want to be pounding around the country for—especially a country like this—all by himself?"

Before either Matt or Carl could hazard a guess, the man gave a slight start and opened his eyes. For an instant he stared blankly into the faces of the doctor and the boys, muttered something, and tried to get up.

"I wouldn't do that," said the doctor. "You're weak, yet. Wait till you get a little strength. Here, drink some more of this."

The man took another swallow of the stimulant, and seemed to get better control of himself.

"How did I come here?" he asked.

Matt, obeying a gesture from the doctor, told how the car had been stopped, and how he and Carl had gone back along the road and found the man unconscious among the bushes.

For a minute or two after hearing Matt's explanations the man lay silent and thoughtful.

"If you did all that," said he to Matt finally, "you must know how to run a car."

Matt nodded.

"I used to work for a motor company in Albany," he answered, "and they had me give demonstrations. I had to know all about cars and take out a license."

A queer gleam arose in the man's eyes.

"I am James Q. Tomlinson, of Denver," said he, "and have been touring Southern California and Arizona for my health. With my chauffeur, I came up from Yuma in the 'Red Flier,' and the chauffeur was taken sick at the Needles. Am expecting to pick up a friend in Flagstaff. The friend is waiting there for me, and I thought I would drive the car through to Flagstaff from the Needles myself. I found I didn't know as much about it as I thought I did. However, I managed to peg along.

"Early this morning, about twenty miles out of Ash Fork, I was set upon by three masked men. They ordered me to stop, but I opened up the machine and made a run past them. The scoundrels fired at me, and one of their bullets grazed my head. I was stunned for a moment, but managed to keep my senses and hold the automobile in the road. Had an idea that I could get to Ash Fork, but somehow I kept growing weaker and weaker. It became hard for me to manage the steering-wheel, so I tied it with a rope; then, all at once, the car tilted, and I was thrown out.

"I can remember falling into the road, and crawling to some bushes where I could be out of the hot sun. After that my wits left me, and I remember nothing more until now."

A knock fell on the door of the outer office. The doctor excused himself for a moment and went out, closing the door of the private office behind him.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Tomlinson's manner changed quickly. Thrusting a hand into his pocket, he withdrew it with a cry of alarm. Then he fixed upon Matt and Carl a suspicious look.

"Did you boys see anything of a bag, a little green silk bag?" he demanded.

Matt took the bag from his pocket and handed it to him.

"It dropped out of your coat as we were lifting you into the car," said he.

A gasp of relief went up from the man.

"Do you know what it contains?" he queried, opening the bag with trembling fingers.

"Pearls," said Matt, "twenty black pearls."

Assuring himself that the pearls were all in the bag, Tomlinson closed it and pushed it into his pocket.

"These pearls are worth thirty thousand dollars," said he, in a guarded tone. "You boys are honest, and will be rewarded, but say nothing to anybody about the bag. Understand?"

Matt nodded, and just then the doctor came in with a roughly dressed individual whom he introduced as a deputy sheriff.

CHAPTER V.

MATT GETS A JOB.

"What's the trouble here?" asked the deputy sheriff. "I hear that Matt King and the Dutchman brought you to town in an automobile, Mr. Tomlinson, and that you have been robbed."

"Not robbed," replied Tomlinson. "I was shot at, and wounded slightly, but the car was too fast for the thieves and I got away."

"Where 'bouts was this?"

"About twenty miles west of Ash Fork. I don't think it would do you any good to go after the rascals, though."

"I reckon not. They're prob'ly a good long ways from where they tried to hold you up. You wasn't hurt very bad, eh?"

"It wasn't serious at all. I feel pretty weak, but I'll soon get over that. It's necessary for me to go on to Flagstaff to-night, or early to-morrow morning."

"You'd better rest up for three or four days, anyhow, Mr. Tomlinson," admonished the doctor.

"Haven't the time. As I told you, there's a friend waiting for me at Flagstaff." Tomlinson's tone was decided, and he turned to Matt. "So your name is King," he asked, "Matt King?"

"Yes," answered the young motorist.

"Are you the Motor Matt I've been hearing about, down Phoenix way?"

"I've been living in Phoenix for a while, and that's

what they call me down there."

"What are you doing in Ash Fork?"

"Came here looking for a job."

"Good! I need a driver for my car, and will pay you one hundred dollars a month and expenses. Is it a go?"

Matt jumped at the chance. This was not the job he had been expecting to get, but it seemed fully as good as anything he could pick up in Ash Fork. Besides, there was a prospect of getting to Denver, and he had long had that city in his mind's eye.

"I'll take it," said Matt. "Where do we go after leaving Flagstaff?"

"Right back to Colorado," answered Tomlinson. "I guess this will stop my knocking around. I went away for my health, and now I'll go back to Denver for the same reason." He took a roll of bills from his pocket, stripped off a twenty-dollar bank-note and handed it to Matt. "Here's some money, King," said he. "Look after the Red Flier and have her all ready to start early tomorrow morning. How much do I owe you, doctor?" he added.

"Oh, a ten will about square us," answered the doctor, and must have pocketed more money for less work than he had done for some time.

"Help me to the hotel, will you?" asked Tomlinson, of the deputy sheriff. "I'm not very steady on my legs, yet."

"Sure," said the officer readily.

"Schust a minid, oof you blease," spoke up Carl. "Oof you vas going to Tenver, Misdere Domlinson, vat's der madder mit ledдинг me rite along? Dot's vere I vant to go, und I don'd haf some money to ged dere."

Tomlinson looked Carl over for a moment.

"Well," said he, "I don't know why I shouldn't. I owe you something, anyhow."

Carl brightened perceptibly. He had taken a great liking to Matt, in the few hours he had known him, and was glad that they were both going to Denver together.

Tomlinson was assisted out of the office by the deputy sheriff, the doctor opening the doors obsequiously ahead of them. When the doctor returned to Matt and Carl he was rubbing his hands and smiling.

"I'll bet you boys don't know what that man is," said he. "Why, he's one of the biggest wholesale jewelers in the West, and he's got more money than you can count. This was a lucky day's work for you."

"Vell," returned Carl grimly, "it don'd open oop like it. He gifs me a rite py Tenver for vat I dit, und he gifs Matt a chob like vat he could ged anyvere for der same money. Domlinson iss an olt skinflint."

"Tut, tut," said the doctor reprovingly. "Before you get through with him you'll find that he does the right thing by you."

"Have you ever seen him before, doctor?" asked Matt.

"No, but I've read a lot about him in the Denver newspapers. You chaps are in for a streak of luck."

"Dot's vat I peen vaidin' for, all right," said Carl, as he and Matt left, "aber I got some hunches dot I'm goin' to keep rightd on vaidin', und being jeerful schust to show vat goot shtuff a Pretzel iss made of."

When they got down on the walk, Carl laid a hand on Matt's arm.

"How would you like to lend me a leedle more money, Matt?" he asked. "You see, I owe a fife-tollar board-pill in town und it iss pedder dot I pay it pefore I hike. I can't gif you nodding but my vort dot I pay him back, shdill you alretty took some chances on me, und you mightd as vell took a few more."

"There you are, Carl," laughed Matt, handing him the money. "I wouldn't want you to go along with us if you didn't have your debts paid. I'm getting a hundred a month, now, and I'll stand back of you until you find a job of your own."

"You vas a pully poy," answered Carl, "und ve will be fast friendts so long as you like."

"That suits me," answered Matt heartily, "right up to the handle."

They shook hands cordially, and while Carl went off to square his board-bill Matt gave his attention to the Red Flier.

Now that Matt had charge of that fine big car, he was conscious of a feeling of pride as he stood off and surveyed the superb machine. From now on the car was to be under his care, and to run under his hands. Motors were his hobby, particularly gasoline-motors, and he was never so happy as when he had something to do with them.

He wondered a little why a wealthy wholesale jeweler should be traveling about the Southwest in a touring-car with no more baggage than Mr. Tomlinson had with him. But that was Mr. Tomlinson's business, and Matt was so wrapped up in the six-cylinder machine that he gave little attention to anything else.

His first move was to begin an examination of the car to see that everything was in proper shape. The cylinders and valves under the hood claimed his first

care; then he examined the water-tank, the sparking-apparatus, and finally came to the point where he wanted a look at the gear. This was reached by a trap in the tonneau, and he pulled up a rubber mat in order to get at the opening.

Under the mat he found something besides the trap-door. The object was a letter, which might have got under the mat by mistake or have been put there for the purpose of secreting it.

Matt picked the letter up and gave it closer scrutiny. It had passed through the mails, and had been posted in Flagstaff several days before. The address, in a scrawling hand, read, "Mr. James Trymore, Brockville, A. T."

Brockville was the next station west of Ash Fork. The address was evidence enough that the letter did not belong to Tomlinson; but, if not, how did it happen to be in the car?

There was a chance that the missive belonged to Tomlinson's chauffeur, who had been left sick at the Needles. Thinking that this was the way of it, Matt started to put the letter in his pocket. At that moment the deputy sheriff came across the street from the hotel.

"Well, King," said he jovially, bracing up alongside the car, "you've feathered your nest in good shape. Tomlinson is loaded down with money and you've done a big thing for him to-day."

"Think so?" queried Matt.

"Wisht I was as sure I was goin' to make a million as I am of that."

"Did you talk with Mr. Tomlinson any?"

"Well, a little."

"Did he tell you the name of his other chauffeur?"

"No, I can't remember that he did."

"Are you acquainted over in Brockville?"

"Know about everybody in the town."

"Who's Trymore, James Trymore?"

The effect of that question on the deputy sheriff was amazing. He gave a jump and his eyes narrowed as they peered at Matt.

"What did you ask me that for?" he demanded.

"Because I wanted to know."

"Look here, son, have you got a line on that feller, or have you jest seen one of the notices?"

"What notices?"

"Why, I got a letter through the mails, from Denver, not more'n three days ago, saying that a crook named Denny Jerome, otherwise Denver Denny, otherwise James Trymore, had escaped from jail and was believed to be somewhere in this part of the country. How'd you hear about him?"

Matt was not taking the deputy sheriff into his confidence merely on that showing. Parrying his curiosity with some offhand remark, Matt pushed the letter into his pocket and went on with his examination of the car.

His mind was full of all sorts of surmises. Why should a letter addressed to a Denver crook be in Mr. Tomlinson's car? Matt began to think that the day's proceedings, taken all together, had a queer look. Perhaps his new job wasn't going to be as pleasant a one as he had imagined.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCERNING THE LETTER.

Carl came back in time to help Matt clean the dust and dirt off the Red Flier, to replenish the oil, fill the water-tank and strain a full supply of gasoline into the fuel-chamber. The car was then backed into an unused barn connected with the hotel, and the boys washed the dirt off their hands and faces and went in to supper.

Mr. Tomlinson did not show himself down-stairs. His meal was carried to his room.

Carl babbled continually while he and Matt were eating, but Matt had very little to say in reply. His mind was busy with the letter.

When they had finished supper, Matt and Carl went up to their own room. Inasmuch as the Red Flier was to make an early start for Flagstaff, the following morning, Matt had invited the Dutch boy to spend the night with him.

As soon as they were in the room, and Matt had closed and locked the door, he drew up a chair close to Carl's and began telling him, in a low voice, about what he had found under the rubber mat in the tonneau.

"Py shinks!" exploded Carl, "dere iss unterhandt vork going on, Matt, I bed you!"

"Not so loud, Carl," cautioned Matt. "I don't know where Tomlinson's room is, but it may be next to this one."

"You t'ink he knows somet'ing aboutt dot?" whispered Carl, in amazement.

"He may, and he may not. I don't know what to think. Anyhow, the letter doesn't belong to him, and I'm going to read it and see what it has to say. If it contains any information worth while, I've got to tell the deputy sheriff."

"Sure!" returned Carl. "It's funny dot you don'd read it pefore."

"I've been thinking about it, and trying to figure out what I had better do. If James Trymore is a Denver crook, I can't understand how a letter to him got into Mr. Tomlinson's car."

"Dere's monkey-doodle pitzness somevere," muttered Carl, shaking his head ominously. "Vell, let's see vat dot ledder say, den ve know pedder vat to do."

The letter was short, but its contents were amazing.

"Jim: Got your note this morning. Glad to hear the pearls are on the way. Count on me. Will cut loose from Wienerwurst to-night, check trunk through to the Needles and leave on night train, getting off at Brockville and meeting you there.

Pringle."

"Pringle!" gurgled Carl. "Py shiminy grickets, dot's der feller vat run away und took all vat I hat! Vell, vell! Wouldn't dot gif you a twist!"

"This note," murmured Matt, as several things dawned on his mind, "was written in answer to the one you found on the floor of Pringle's room, the morning you discovered he had skipped."

"Sure!" averred Carl. "Dot's as blain as anyt'ing. Und Pringle say somet'ing aboutt der beards, doo. Say, look here vonce! I bed you dot Drymore und Pringle put oop some chobs to rop Domlinson oof dose beards, und

Domlinson vas doo sharp for dem. He sailed away from der roppers und dey don'd ged nodding! Vell, led's be jeerful. I like pooty goot to see dot kind oof luck hit Pringle, afder vat he dit py me. Yah, you bed you!"

Carl couldn't see very far ahead. But Matt could, and he began to open up a line of speculation that took Carl's breath.

"The question is, Carl, how did that letter get under the rubber mat in the tonneau of the Red Flier? Tomlinson says he didn't stop, when the robbers commanded him to, but hit it up and sailed away from them. Now, if Trymore had that letter, and if he and Pringle were the robbers, how could the letter get out of Trymore's pocket and into the car? That had to happen in some way."

"I'm oop a shtump," admitted the puzzled Carl, shoving his fingers through his hair. "I nefer vas mooch oof a feller ad guessing oudt cornundums. Vat you t'ink, Matt?"

"I think Tomlinson must have been mixed up in it, in some way."

"How could dot be?" returned Carl. "Domlinson iss a rich man, und he vouldn't haf nodding to do mit fellers like Drymore und Pringle. Pesides, Domlinson hat der bearls. He vouldn't vant to go into a game vere he vas to rop himseluf!"

"You don't catch my idea at all, Carl," whispered Matt excitedly. "Maybe this fellow who calls himself Tomlinson isn't the real Tomlinson at all! Maybe he's some one else, and just posing as Tomlinson!"

"Aber der toctor say dot Domlinson iss a real feller, und dot he lifs in Tenver, und dot he read aboutd him in der Tenver bapers."

"That may all be," went on Matt. "I don't mean to say

that there isn't any one by the name of Tomlinson, or that he isn't a rich man, and hasn't a jewelry-store, and all that. If Tomlinson is a jeweler, he might naturally be on the lookout for pearls. Trymore may have found out he had that fortune in black pearls, and have put up a deal to get hold of them. That's the way it looks to me from what evidence we have. But, for all that, the man we brought in may not be Tomlinson, but one of the thieves who got the pearls!"

Carl fell back in his seat with a gasp. His brain was whirling with the startling surmises Matt had evolved.

"Meppy you vas rightd, Matt," Carl finally returned, "aber you don'd know nodding for sure. Oof you tell der deputy sheriff, und make some misdakes, den you lose your chob, und ve bot' lose a shance to ged to Tenver. Be jeerful, pard, und don'd go und do someding dot you'll be sorry vat you done."

"I'm going to find out whether Tomlinson—or the man who says he's Tomlinson—put that Trymore letter under the mat. If we find that he did it, then we'll know he must be one of the robbers, and not Tomlinson at all. If we find he didn't, then it's a cinch he's straight goods."

"How you do dot, Matt?"

"Well, we'll steal out to the barn and put the letter where I found it. Then we'll watch and see if Tomlinson goes after it. If Tomlinson is mixed up in this business, he'll be thinking about it, and he'll know that letter is under the mat. He'll be wondering if I got hold of it, and he'll be anxious to sneak down and find out. See?"

"Sure!" approved Carl. "Dot's a fine biece oof pitzness. Ve'll take der ledder down und put him vere he come from—aber vait schust a leedle. Dere iss somet'ing yet in der writing vat I don'd undershtand."

With the letter open in his hand, Carl ran his finger over some of the words.

"Vill cut loose from Wienerwurst'," read Carl. "Vat dit Pringle mean by dot?"

Matt laughed softly. Carl was as good as a circus, now and then.

"Why," answered Matt, "he means that he'll cut loose from *you*. Which is just what he did."

"Yah, so," said Carl grimly. "Dot's a new vone. Wienerwurst! I fix him for dot vone oof dose days. Anyvay, led's be jeerful. Pringle ain'd so mooch himseluf. Den look, vat I see again. 'Vill check trunk drough to der Needles.' He means py dot, meppy, dot der trunk, mit vat I got insite, has gone on to der Needles. Vell, pympy I ged dot trunk. Yah, you bed you! 'Wienerwurst!' Ach, du lieber!"

Carl threw the letter away from him and got up.

"Pringle make some monkey-doodle pitzness mit me, und you bed you I do der same mit him."

Matt picked up the letter, returned it to the envelope, and he and Carl cautiously opened the door and let themselves out into the hall. Making as little noise as possible, they descended to the outside door, passed into the dark street, turned the corner of the hotel and made for the barn.

It was about eight o'clock, and everything was gloomy and silent in the vicinity of the hotel.

"Meppy you pedder shtrike some lights, hey?" suggested Carl, following Matt into the blank darkness that reigned in the makeshift garage.

"No, we don't have to do that," said Matt. "I know right where the machine is, and a light might give us away. You stand in the door, Carl, and I'll put the letter

where I found it and be with you again in a brace of shakes."

"Vell, hurry oop. Oof Domlinson vas to come vile ve vas here, den ve vould be der vones vat got fooled."

Matt, with the location of the Red Flier firmly fixed in his mind, groped his way through the gloom and came to the front of the machine. With one hand sliding over the bonnet, he reached the side of the car, opened the tonneau door and stepped to the foot-board.

Just at that moment, while he was bending over with the letter in his hand, a pencil of light leaped suddenly out of the gloom and rested full on him.

Straightening up suddenly, he whirled his face into the light.

For an instant his eyes were blinded, and he could see nothing.

"Quick!" he heard a husky voice mutter from somewhere in the darkness. "Down him and grab that letter!" The next instant a fist leaped out of the gloom and into the ray of light. Matt dropped downward, falling off the foot-board.

The fist hit him a glancing blow on the shoulder, and he toppled backward. At the same moment the letter was snatched out of his hand.

"Py shinks," came the voice of Carl, "vat vas going on, anyway? Who you fellers vas? Keep away from me, or—"

Running feet had sounded along the barn floor. While Carl was talking, some one ran into him and knocked him flat with a quick blow.

As the boy went down, two men bounded over him.

Carl was up almost as soon as he was down. Some one else was coming, and he flung out his hands and made a grab.

"Vaid a leedle!" he puffed savagely. "I got *you*, anyvay, und—"

"Let go, Carl!" came Matt's excited voice. "Take after those two men! See who they are, if you can!"

Carl gasped and withdrew his hands.

"Vell, oof it ain'd Matt!" he muttered. "So many t'ings vas habbeneng, all in a punch, dot I peen all mixed oop in my mindt!"

With that, Carl rushed away in the direction taken by Matt.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TWO HORSEMEN.

The attack in the barn was so utterly unexpected and so suddenly made that Matt and Carl hardly realized what had happened until it was all over. Although a little dazed by the whirl of events, and still partly blinded by the gleam from the dark lantern, the king of the motor boys had his wits about him.

The letter was gone, but that was no great loss. The value of the letter lay in the use Matt had intended to make of it, by discovering who had placed it under the rubber mat in the tonneau. Such a discovery would have given the young motorist a clue as to who "James Trymore" really was.

Neither Matt nor Carl were very much damaged by their rough experience. In their rush from the barn they were only a few yards behind the men who had attacked them, and they would have been right on the others' heels if Carl had not made a mistake and caught hold of Matt just at the moment when there was no time for delay.

Matt, who was in the lead, heard a sound of running around the side, and toward the rear, of the barn. Flinging away in that direction, he came out on an alley, with the sounds he had been following abruptly blotted into silence. While he stood there, wondering which way the men had gone, a pounding of horses' hoofs jumped out of the stillness, somewhere to the left. He turned barely in time to see the forms of two mounted men melting away in the blank darkness.

Matt was disappointed. He had not expected to overtake the men, but he had hoped to come close

enough so that he could get a fairly good look at them.

"Who vas dem fellers, anyway, und vat vas der mix-ooop aboutt?" came the voice of Carl as he pushed toward Matt through the gloom.

"That's too deep for me, Carl," returned Matt. "There were two of them, and they had their horses in the alley. One of them grabbed that Trymore letter just as I was going to put it in the car."

"Vell, der ledder don'd amount to nodding. Ve know vat it hat on der insite, und dot's plenty for us. Be jeerful."

"I guess I'll have to revise my opinion of Tomlinson. Neither of those horsemen could by any possibility have been him, and it's a cinch they were in the barn to get that letter. We blundered into their hands too slick for any use! As things look now, Carl, Tomlinson is straight goods."

"I t'ink he vas some skinflints, all righdt, aber dot's der vorst vat can be saidt oof Domlinson. Dose two fellers vas de vones vat dry to rop der car, hey?"

"They must have been."

"Und meppy vone vas Pringle! Der tinhorn vat cut loose from Wienerwurst! Say, I vish I could haf hanted him a cholt in der slats. I could blay ragdime moosic all ofer dat feller."

"We'll go back and take a look at the Red Flier," said Matt, "and make sure those two men haven't done anything to put the car out of business. This is a mighty puzzling proposition we're up against, and I can't make head or tail out of it. If Tomlinson didn't have anything to do with that letter, I can't understand how it got into the bottom of the tonneau. And if he was the one who put it there, why did those men come after it?"

"Tough luck, Matt, aber take it jeerfully," counseled Carl. "I haf hat more money come into my hants since I peen hooked oop mit you dan I efer t'ought I would ged a look ad in all my life. Dot's righdt. Dot pig ret car comes rolling righdt oop to us, invitationing us to grab holt und keep it—vich ve don'd. Den ve findt t'irty t'ousant tollars' vort oof beards vich likewise say for us to cash dem in, go off py ourselufs und be rich und jeerful—vich also ve don'd. Oudt oof all dose shances, you pull down a huntert-tollar chob und I get a rite py Tenver. Ach, himmel!" and Carl heaved a long sigh.

Paying no attention to his comrade's regrets, Matt had been making his way back to the barn door. The excitement in and around the barn had not claimed the notice of any one in the hotel or on the street. What racket there was had been confined to a limited space and had evidently not been heard by the townspeople.

"Close the door, Carl," said Matt, as the Dutch boy followed him into the barn. "I saw a lantern on the wall, when we brought the machine in, and I'll light it while we look around."

Carl shut the door, and Matt struck a match, found the lantern, and lighted it.

"Nopody heardt vat vent on here," remarked Carl, while Matt was moving about the Red Flier. "Ve couldt haf peen laidt oudt for keeps mitoudt addracting any addention. Vy, oof dose fellers had wanted to, dey could haf shtole der car, py chiminy!"

"There ought to be some way to lock the barn," said Matt, "but, as there isn't, I have a notion to bunk down on the tonneau seat for the rest of the night."

"Oof you do dot," asserted Carl, "I will keep along mit you."

"That would be foolish. All I want to do is to watch

and see that those two horsemen don't come back."

"Two to watch is pedder as vone, Matt," answered Carl firmly. "Is der Red Flier hurt anyvere?"

"I can't see that the machine has been tampered with at all." He stepped around in front and "turned over" the engine. "Everything appears to be just as we left it," he added, "so I am compelled to think that those two horsemen rode into town after that letter."

"Und Domlinson didn'd know a ting aboutt it, hey?"

"That's the way it looks. Of course, it's hard to under—"

Matt bit off his words abruptly and whirled around from the front of the machine. A crunch of footsteps could be heard outside, cautiously approaching the barn door.

Swiftly Matt extinguished the light, caught Carl by the arm and pulled him across the barn and into a box-stall. There they crouched down and peered out.

"By shinks!" whispered Carl. "A lod oof t'ings vas habbenin' to-nightt. Dose two fellers vas comin' pack! How ve ketch dem, hey?"

"Hist!" warned Matt.

Just then the barn door opened, and a dark form could be seen against the lighter background of the doorway.

The man slipped into the barn stealthily and pulled the door shut behind him. It was impossible for the boys to see him very plainly, and after the door was closed they could not see him at all.

While they crouched breathlessly in the box-stall they heard a sound of fumbling movements, then the scratching of a match. Two hands could be seen, one

holding the match and the other a piece of candle. When the candle was lighted the face of the man was brought out with positive distinctness.

It was Tomlinson!

Carl, fairly shaking with suppressed excitement, gripped Matt's arm. Taking the hand from his arm, Matt pressed it to signify that they were to remain where they were, and watch and see what happened.

Having lighted his candle, Tomlinson raised erect and peered about him through the gloom. Rest and food had brought back most of his strength, and he moved toward the car quickly and carefully.

Following down the right side of the machine, he opened the tonneau door, stooped and pulled up the rubber mat. The next moment a disappointed exclamation came from him.

Throwing the mat aside, he searched frantically, getting down on his knees in the tonneau and then carrying his hunt to the forward part of the machine.

He was all of five minutes bobbing around in the machine, and when he got out of it, and stood for a moment in front of the car, there was an ugly and perplexed look on his face.

Muttering to himself, he pinched out the candle, flung it away from him, turned, and went through the door.

"Pinch me vonce!" murmured Carl, with a long breath. "Meppy I vas treaming."

"You're wide-awake, Carl," said Matt grimly, "and so am I. What do you think of that?"

"I don'd know vat to t'ink, und dot's all aboutd it. Dere's been nodding but funny pitzness efer since you shtopped der car ven it vas running away mit itseluf—

schust vone keveer t'ing afder some more. Chiminy plazes! I feel like I vas going pughouse. Domlinson come afder dot ledder, too."

"Sure he did."

"Und dose odder fellers vas afder it."

"No doubt."

"Und dose odder fellers got it—"

"And Tomlinson will think I was the one who took it, and that I am keeping it."

"Vat you t'ink, Matt? Vill you go und tell der deputy sheriff?"

"No. What we have discovered we will keep to ourselves. We don't know enough, yet, to lodge a complaint against anybody."

"Ve'll go on to Tenver mit Domlinson?"

"Yes, and keep our eyes and ears open every foot of the way. I've got a hunch that we'll find the key to this mystery somewhere between Ash Fork and Flagstaff. You go on up to the room, Carl, and go carefully. I'll sleep in the Red Flier. The car will be fairly comfortable for one, and it wouldn't be for two. Besides, it will be better if some one occupies our room."

Carl protested a little, but was finally prevailed upon to carry out Matt's suggestion. Matt got into the car and doubled up on the rear seat.

His mind was so full of the queer developments of the mystery that it was a long time before he went to sleep. However, he dozed off at last and did not open his eyes again until, in the early morning, he was aroused by the opening of the barn door.

As he started up quickly in the tonneau, the face of

Tomlinson met him.

Tomlinson was startled by the sight of Matt, and leaped back in consternation; then, recovering himself, he came on into the barn and drew near the machine.

There was flaming suspicion in his eyes and a fierce look on his face.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE ROAD.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Tomlinson.

"Watching your car," replied Matt.

"How long have you been here?"

"Most of the night."

"Did anything happen? Did—"

Tomlinson snapped off the words and glared. Matt was astounded at his manner.

"I should say something did happen!" said Matt. "Before turning in, I came out here to make sure the machine was all right. You see, Mr. Tomlinson, there's no lock on the door, and I was worried a little. It was well I came. Two men rushed out of the barn, and I followed them. They had horses hitched in the alley, and they got away."

"Are you giving it to me straight?" demanded Tomlinson, peering steadily into Matt's eyes.

"Certainly I am."

"Did you get a good look at those men?"

"No, it was too dark. They got away on their horses before I had a chance to get very near them."

Tomlinson was thoughtful for a few moments. He was wondering, no doubt, if Matt was pursuing the intruders while he was in the barn looking for the letter. Evidently he made up his mind that Matt knew nothing about his night visit to the barn, and it seemed equally evident that he believed the two men had got the letter. The fierce expression vanished from his face

and he became more amiable.

"After that," said he, "you were afraid the machine might be tampered with, and so you came here and stayed all night?"

"That's the way of it, Mr. Tomlinson," replied Matt.

"I'm glad to know that I've got such a careful and discreet driver. I was worried about the car myself, and came out here, during the evening. I saw no one around, though, and suppose, at that time, you were chasing the two men. Wonder what they wanted here?"

"Perhaps they were two of the men who tried to hold you up," suggested Matt.

"What object would they have in coming here?"

"That's hard to tell. They might have wanted to injure the car just to get even with you."

Tomlinson shook his head.

"That would have been a foolish move," said he, "and I can't believe that was their object. Well," he added briskly, "it doesn't much matter. We'll get away from Ash Fork in less than an hour. Come in to breakfast. The landlord promised to have an early one for us."

"How are you feeling, sir?" Matt inquired, as they walked toward the hotel.

"First-rate," said Tomlinson; "almost as good as ever. Where's the Dutchman?"

"He spent the night in my room."

"Who is he? A friend of yours?" Tomlinson spoke carelessly, but it was clear to Matt that the question had more significance than he cared to make it seem.

"Yes, he's a friend," Matt answered. "He's been playing in hard luck lately. He and a man named

Pringle were doing a turn in vaudeville. Pringle got out between two days, when he and his partner were in Flagstaff, and took about everything Carl had."

"Hard lines!" muttered Tomlinson. "Well, he helped me, and I'm glad to be able to do something for him."

Carl was coming down-stairs just as Matt and Tomlinson entered the hotel office. He seemed surprised to see Matt and the owner of the car together, but was clever enough to keep his feelings from Tomlinson.

All three went into the dining-room and ate a hurried meal. When it was done, Matt brought down a grip which contained all his reserve wardrobe, packed his bundle of laundry away in it and stowed it in the bottom of the tonneau. The rest of the tonneau Tomlinson appropriated for his own use.

It was seven o'clock when the Red Flier, guided by Matt's skilful hands, swept out of Ash Fork and pointed for Flagstaff. Carl, more "jeerful" than he had been for a long time, occupied the seat on Matt's left. Matt was not familiar with the road, but Tomlinson furnished him with a road-map and Carl kept the map open and followed the course with his eyes, from time to time giving Matt directions.

They had left Ash Fork no more than a mile behind when Tomlinson, braced in a corner of the tonneau, broached a subject which was vastly interesting to both boys.

"You lads," said Tomlinson, "are probably wondering about those pearls. You see, I am a wholesale jeweler, in Denver, and rare gems like those are directly in my line. They're from the Gulf of California, and were picked up by a La Paz Mexican, who brought them into Yuma. Hearing that I was in Yuma, the Mexican came to me and offered the pearls for sale. I bought them at

a bargain. I asked you to say nothing about the pearls in Ash Fork, because, if it were known I had such valuable property about me, some one might lay a plan to hold us up. That's what happened the other side of Ash Fork, and it was an experience I don't care to have repeated."

"It's hardly safe to carry such valuable property around with you in this part of the country, Mr. Tomlinson," remarked Matt.

"No one knows that better than I do," the other answered, "hence my desire to keep the matter quiet."

"Why didn't you send the pearls to Denver by express, after you got them in Yuma?" asked Matt.

The question seemed to surprise Tomlinson.

"I was careless, I suppose," he answered, after a brief pause.

"Anyhow," went on Matt, "after your narrow escape on the road to Ash Fork, I should think you would have got the pearls into the hands of the express company as soon as you could."

"I pay you a hundred a month to look after this car," said Tomlinson sharply, "and not to offer suggestions as to how I run my business."

Carl rolled his eyes at Matt, and a slow grin worked its way over his fat face. Matt himself felt like grinning, for he was putting these questions for a purpose. Tomlinson's answers were hardly calculated to allay any suspicions that might be forming in Matt's mind.

At that time the Red Flier had dipped into a piece of road that skirted the foot of a mountain. According to the road-map, the course circled around the uplift to a point on the opposite side.

The mountain was low, oblong in shape, and covered

with pine timber. Carl, stealing a covert look behind, now and then, saw that Tomlinson was staring at the tree-covered slope with uneasy eyes.

"This is a good road, King," said Tomlinson presently, "and I think it would be well to let the car out. A better place than this for a hold-up could hardly be imagined, and—"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a thumping of hoofs was heard in the trail behind.

"Hold up, there!" yelled a voice; "wait!"

Matt took one look rearward. Two mounted men were behind—rough-looking fellows in slouch-hats and blue flannel shirts. It was plain that they had ridden into the road from the timber, probably intending to get ahead of the car, but making a miscalculation.

"Hit 'er up!" cried Tomlinson, crouching down in the tonneau. "Those are two of the men who tried to rob me before! Dig out, King! Don't let any grass grow under this car now!"

Matt advanced the spark, and sent the Red Flier ahead at a furious speed. The horsemen were armed, but made no attempt to shoot. They spurred wildly, and slapped their horses with their hats, but, of course, a six-cylinder machine could walk away from anything on hoofs. In less than a minute the two men were out of sight.

Matt, keenly watching the road and keeping steady hands on the steering-wheel, was wondering if those were the same men who had been prowling about the barn the night before. He judged that they were, and he wondered at their foolish attempt to try to chase the Red Flier and bring the car to a halt from the rear.

Three minutes later, and while they were still making for the point of the mountain, Tomlinson

leaned over the back of the seat and gave a surprising order.

"Stop her, King! I'm going to get out here."

"Going to get out!" echoed Matt, cutting off the power and clamping on the brake. "If you do, those fellows will capture you."

"You don't understand," went on Tomlinson, stepping down from the tonneau. "Those fellows are after me, and I ought to have kept right on with these pearls and not laid over in Ash Fork last night. That gave them a chance to get ahead of us and lay a trap."

"Trap?" queried Matt.

"That's it. This road winds around to the other side of the mountain. See that gap up there?"

Tomlinson pointed up the wooded slope to a place where the ridgelike uplift was broken.

"Do you understand what those scoundrels can do, King?" pursued Tomlinson. "They can ride through that gap and get to the other side of the mountain ahead of us. I don't want to be in the car when that happens—and if I'm not in the car the chances are it won't happen. I'll climb up and get through the gap myself, and you pull up and wait for me after you get a mile beyond the gap on the other side. Understand? That's the only way we can fool those fellows. If we turn back toward Ash Fork, they'll get me, and if I stay in the car and go around the end of the mountain the result will be the same. They can watch, from up there, and make the move that's best calculated to help them; but, by getting out, I can dodge through the timber on foot and we'll all give them the go-by. Wait for me a mile beyond the gap, on the other side," he repeated, and started up the slope.

Matt stared at Carl for a moment.

"Be jeerful," grinned Carl. "Ve nefer know vat's going to habben, dis trip, so it iss pedder dot ve take eferyt'ing as it comes. Domlinson must know vat he's aboutt."

"It looks to me as though he was getting into more trouble than if he had stayed with the car," muttered Matt. "He has some hard climbing ahead of him, for one who's been through what he has. However, I've got my orders, and here goes."

There was enough gas in the cylinders so that the Red Flier took the spark without cranking, and the boys rolled on around the end of the mountain and doubled back on the opposite side.

The road continued good, but the roadside was covered with jagged stones and it would have been impossible for the car to have turned out if any wagons had been met going the other way.

On this side of the uplift the trail bore off from the bottom of the slope, but it was easy to keep an eye on the gap and calculate the point where Tomlinson had told Matt to stop and wait for him.

As Matt figured it, there was a good two miles yet before that point would be reached, and he let the car out, once more, in order to hurry over the distance.

But he had hardly got under full headway before he shut off the gasoline and got busy with the foot-brake.

"Py chimineddy!" cried Carl; "dose fellers haf plocked der road!"

That was the exact condition of affairs. A pine-tree, growing close to the trail, had been felled in such a manner as to fall across it at right angles, making it impossible for the car to proceed. It was also impossible for the car to go around the tree, on account of the rocky ground at the trailside.

Wondering what the two ruffians hoped to gain by this move, Motor Matt leaped down from his seat and went forward to investigate the situation.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

Matt had no more than reached the tree when he heard a sound of scrambling behind him. Just as he whirled about to see what was going on, a husky yell rang out.

"I'll take care o' the Dutchman, Spangler. You nail the other 'un!"

Simultaneously with the words a big, ruffianly-looking fellow sprang into the tonneau of the car, grabbed Carl as he was about to rise and pulled him over the back of the seat with an arm about his throat. There was another man on the ground, moving warily in Matt's direction.

These were the two scoundrels who had chased the car on the other side of the mountain, there was no doubt about that. They had made their counter-move exactly as Tomlinson had surmised. But why had they made it, now that Tomlinson was not with the car? And where were their horses?

It seemed clear that they had made a quick ride through the gap, and had reached the trailside and hidden behind the bushes, ready to make a capture as soon as the tree had stopped the boys and before they could take the back track. And what was the use of it all, now that Tomlinson had got away with the pearls?

These thoughts flashed through Matt's mind with the swiftness of lightning. A dead branch had been broken from the pine-tree in its fall. Matt grabbed at it and began waving it around his head.

"Keep away from me!" he cried, to the fellow who

was closing in on him.

The ruffian, seeing the snapping gray eyes and the whirling club, paused undecidedly.

"That's Motor Matt!" yelled the man in the automobile; "get him, Spangler!"

"Oh, blazes!" snarled the man. "If ye think I'm goin' to walk inter that club, Hank, ye've got another guess comin'. I'll git him, though."

Spangler threw a hand behind him and jerked a revolver from his hip pocket.

"Now, younker," said he, leveling the weapon, "drop yer club an' be reasonable. I'd hate like sin ter cut ye off in yer youth an' bloom, but Hank an' me ain't here fer the fun o' the thing, not nowadays."

Matt could see with half an eye that the man meant business, and that he would be quick to use the revolver if he had to. If the two ruffians were after the pearls, they would probably leave Matt and Carl and go away as soon as they found out they were on the wrong track. Then, if ever, was the time to do a little talking.

"What do you want?" asked Matt, throwing the club away and leaning back against the tree.

"You seen anything of a green bag?" asked Hank, still hanging to Carl.

"I've seen it, yes," answered Matt. "If that's what you want, we haven't got it."

"Where is it? Don't you lie to me—it won't be healthy for you."

"Mr. Tomlinson has got the bag," said Matt.

The man on the ground gave a jump and began to swear.

"Do you mean to say," shouted the man in the car, "that the *hombre* who was in this car with you didn't have that bag?"

"Yes, he's the one. His name's Tomlinson. He's in the jewelry business, in Denver."

An odd expression crossed the faces of the two men. Then Spangler began to laugh.

"What d'ye think o' that, Hank?" he demanded. "Tomlinson! He said his name was Tomlinson! Waal, wouldn't that rattle yer spurs?"

"You say he had the bag?" went on Hank.

"Yes," said Matt.

"They didn't try to take it away from him in Ash Fork?"

"No. Why should they, if it belonged to him?"

"What became of—er—Tomlinson?"

"He got out of the car on the other side of the mountain. He thought you'd cross over through the gap, and head us off."

This information put both men in a swearing temper.

"If he's on foot anywhere within a dozen miles of us," growled Hank, "we'll get him. Come on, Spangler! Spurs and quirts, while we run the coyote down."

Releasing the half-strangled Carl, Hank leaped out of the car. Together they started for the trailside, and the wooded slope leading to the gap.

But they were not gone, yet. Just as they began to mount the slope, Spangler gave vent to an angry yell.

"Look thar, Hank," he roared, pointing along the road beyond the tree. "*Now* who's played it low-down

on us?"

Matt ran back to the car and climbed up to the front seat. From that elevation he was able to look off and see what it was that had claimed Hank's frantic attention.

Carl was already staring across the tree and into the distance. Two mounted men were galloping up the road, one of them leading a horse with an empty saddle.

One of the men was Tomlinson; the other was—

"Pringle!" muttered Carl; "py chiminy grickets, dere goes dot feller vat shkipped mit all vat I hat!"

Hank and Spangler were furious.

"They're makin' off with our hosses!" bellowed Spangler.

"And they've got the pearls!" added Hank.

"We got ter ketch 'em!" stormed Spangler. "We got ter pick up hosses some'rs an' git holt of 'em!"

He started to run along the slope in the direction the horses were going.

"Come back here, you fool!" ordered Hank. "We couldn't overhaul them in a thousand years, on foot."

"What'll we do?" flung back Spangler. "We kain't stand here an' watch 'em go skyhootin' off with our hosses an' them pearls. Of all the Injun plays I ever heerd of, this takes the banner!"

Hank was already retracing his way down the slope.

"We'll take the automobile!" he yelled, over his shoulder. "We'll be climbing right on top of 'em in a brace of shakes."

"Dot means us, Matt!" exclaimed Carl. "You do vat

dey say, und py chimineddy I vill catch oop mit dot Pringle feller! Wienerwurst! I'll make him t'ink I vas vorse as dot!"

With revolvers in their hands, Spangler and Hank came plunging for the car.

"Snake us out of this, Motor Matt!" shouted Hank. "Lay us alongside that outfit ahead, and see how quick you can do it!"

"Can't do it," answered Matt. "You fellows have blocked the road."

In their excitement, neither Hank nor Spangler had thought of the tree. It was a case of their own weapons being turned against them. The ruffians let loose their billingsgate again, but only for a moment.

"Get out here, you two," shouted Hank, "and help us snake the log out of the way. I reckon the four of us will be plenty."

Carl piled out briskly, and Matt followed. Spangler and Hank worked like beavers, and after a two minutes' struggle the way was cleared.

"Now for it!" panted Hank, rushing back to the car. "All in, everybody! If you try any tricks with the machinery, Motor Matt," he finished savagely, "I'll make a lead-mine out of you. Top speed!"

It was an odd situation, take it all around. Matt was being forced to help the would-be robbers, but his suspicions of Tomlinson, since his talk with Spangler and Hank, had reached a point where he was more than willing to do his best to overhaul the men ahead.

Carl, of course, was thinking only of Pringle, and of what Pringle had done to him.

The Red Flier leaped onward with a bound, Matt leaning over the wheel and coaxing the six cylinders

up, notch by notch, to their limit of power.

Hank was in front with Matt. Behind them, standing in the tonneau, gripping the seat-back and leaning over their heads, were Carl and Spangler.

"Gif her all she vill shtand, Matt!" cried Carl. "Hit her oop like anyding! Tear off der miles so kevick as dey nefer vas yet!"

"Whoop-ya!" yelled Spangler. "We'll purty near git thar afore we start! Talk about yer travelin'—why, this here's like bein' shot out of a gun!"

"That fellow isn't Tomlinson, you say?" shouted Matt to the man beside him.

"No more than I am!" answered Hank.

"Is he Denver Denny, otherwise James Trymore?"

"You've hit it!"

A light had suddenly dawned on Matt. Denver Denny was playing a bold game, and the stakes were \$30,000 worth of black pearls. Although Matt was helping Spangler and Hank, yet there was a hope, deep down in his heart, that he might somehow be able to worst all the robbers and recover the pearls for the man who owned them.

But where was that man?

While all this fighting was going on for the possession of the pearls, what had become of James Q. Tomlinson, of Denver?

CHAPTER X.

A SHIFT IN THE SITUATION.

Matt had never done any more rapid-fire thinking than he did then. While Carl and Spangler, carried away by the excitement of the chase, were yelping frantically and throwing themselves around in the tonneau, and while Hank was growling and threatening, Motor Matt was driving mechanically and turning the situation over in his mind.

Pringle, Trymore, Hank, and Spangler were all concerned in the robbery of Tomlinson. Trymore, in some way yet to be explained, must have got hold of the pearls and have tried to get away with them and leave his pals in the lurch.

Hank, Spangler, and Pringle had been trying to get hold of Trymore, and had felled the tree and laid that trap where the road wound around the mountain. Pringle had been left with the horses while Hank and Spangler made their attack on the car; by getting out, as he had done, Trymore had checkmated his pals, had found Pringle and the horses, and the two had made it up between them to hustle away with all the live stock and leave Hank and Spangler tied up with the automobile on the wrong side of the tree.

All this, at least, represented Matt's quick guess at the situation, built upon certain things he knew and others which he took for granted.

Trymore and Pringle had about five minutes' start of the Red Flier; but the motor-car, under Matt's skilful control, was registering fifty miles an hour by the speedometer on the dashboard. If Trymore and Pringle kept to the road, they must surely be overtaken in

short order.

Spangler was the first to sight the horsemen.

"Thar they are, by thunder!" he cried, in savage exultation, "we're goin' a dozen feet to their one, an' we'll smash right inter 'em, in half a minit."

"We'll empty the saddles, that's what we'll do!" said Hank, through his teeth. "We'll teach that brace of come-ons to play lame duck with us!"

Out of the tails of his eyes Matt saw Hank draw a revolver; and over his shoulder leaned Spangler with another weapon.

The young motorist, no matter how desperate the situation, did not intend to allow any successful shooting from the Red Flier. Quick as a flash, he steered the car over a roughened part of the road. During the shake-up that followed, the aim of the two ruffians was disconcerted, and their shots went wild.

Trymore and Pringle, goading their horses frantically, were doing their utmost to get away from their vengeful comrades. They knew, however, that if they kept to the road it would be only a matter of seconds before they were overhauled. The whistle of the bullets impelled a quick change of tactics, and they turned from the trail and took to the timber. By this move, they screened themselves from the weapons of the pursuers, but got into country where they would have to travel more slowly.

In the haste with which this fresh maneuver was executed, the led horse got away.

"Consarn 'em!" exclaimed Hank. "If they think they're going to get away by pulling off such a game as that, they're going to get fooled. Stop the car!" he added, to Matt.

Matt slowed down to a halt. Before the Red Flier had been brought to a standstill, Hank and Spangler were over the side, Hank catching the loose horse and spurring after the fugitives, and Spangler floundering after him on foot.

Presently, pursued and pursuers vanished, and Matt and Carl sat in the car and wondered what was going to happen next.

"You bed my life," fumed Carl, "I hope dey ged Pringle."

The Dutch boy was so deeply concerned over Pringle that he had lost sight of the more important points of the situation.

"They're crooks, all four of them," said Matt. "They stole the pearls from Tomlinson, in the first place, and now they're trying to beat each other out of them."

"Und Domlinson don'd vas Domlinson afder all?" inquired Carl.

"The fellow who called himself Tomlinson is Denver Denny, *alias* James Trymore. Didn't you hear what Hank and I said to each other, a few minutes ago, Carl?"

"I don'd hear nodding but schust some yells made py dot odder feller. Vell, vell! Led's all dry und be jeerful. Der deputy sheriff hat dot news aboutt Tenver Tenny in his bocket all der time, und he heluped der crook across der shdreet, und made him comfordable py der hodel, und dit eferyt'ing he could for him! Ach, Drymore vas a shrewrd sgoundrel, I bed you."

"He's a bold one!" declared Matt.

"Vere iss der real Domlinson alretty? Und how dit Drymore ged der audomopile?"

"That's what we've got to find out, Carl."

"It vas a pig orter."

"But we're going to fill it—and get back the pearls, too."

Carl shook his head.

"I like to t'ink dot, aber it don'd vas bossiple. How ve do anyt'ing ven ve shday here mit der car? Drymore von't come pack."

"I think he will," said Matt confidently. "I'll bet something handsome that Hank and Spangler make that mountain too hot to hold Trymore, and that he comes rushing for the car. Trymore won't know that we've found out who he is, and he'll try to keep on with the Tomlinson rôle. We'll let him think we're fooled, then capture him and recover the pearls."

"Dot vas some pright itees," returned Carl admiringly, pulling down his fiery vest and smoothing the wrinkles out of it, "aber my vone pitzness in life, schust now, iss to ketch Pringle und ged py Tenver. It seems like ve vas gedding furder und furder away from Tenver all der time. You t'ink ve pedder shday rightd here, Matt?"

"Trymore saw us here last," answered Matt, "so it will be here that he comes to find us."

"Und oof ve can ged away mit him und mit der bearls," said Carl, "ve vill fool der odder roppers, aber I don'd ged no shance ad Pringle. 'Wienerwurst!' He say it in der note. Pympy, vone oof dose tays, I make him know vich iss der sausage. Yah, so!"

Matt had been listening for sounds of the flight and pursuit. They had died out, shortly after the quartet of thieves had disappeared, but Matt was confident that he would hear them again.

The contour of the mountain was such, at that place,

that it would be impossible for Trymore and Pringle to cross to the other side. They would have to make along the slope, trusting to luck to dodge Hank and Spangler and get back to the trail. Unless they were captured, it was a foregone conclusion that Trymore and Pringle would try to reach the car.

Inasmuch as Hank was mounted, he would be able to press the fugitives hard.

While the boys waited and watched, they heard the distant report of a revolver. The dull echoes, ringing through the woods, were taken up by a faint yell.

"Somepody vas shot!" cried Carl excitedly. "Oof it vas Pringle, I don'd ged him; und oof id vas Drymore, ve don't ged der bearls."

"Listen!" said Matt. "Somebody is coming this way."

There was a crashing of brush up the slope, growing louder by swift degrees. Matt sprang out, cranked up the engine, and hurriedly got back into the car.

"Vat now?" queried Carl.

"I'm going to turn around," said Matt, "and be ready to rush Trymore back to Ash Fork. He's coming—I'm sure of it. That means that we capture him and recover the pearls. A big day's work, Carl!"

"Meppy ve ged some rake-offs, den, hey?" returned Carl. "Ve don'd got mooch luck so far, oudt oof dis shake-ooop."

Matt, having turned the Red Flier, brought the machine to a halt and sprang out to be ready with the crank. If Trymore came, with Hank hot at his heels, not a second could be lost in getting away.

The scrambling noise was still coming down the mountainside, growing louder and louder, but with no one breaking into view. As Matt stood by the front of

the machine, trying to follow the sound with his eyes, he saw a horseman appear in an opening among the timber. It was Hank. He slid across the open space like a streak, bound down the slope and evidently in pursuit of Trymore.

Just as Hank disappeared, a form tore through the bushes close to the trailside and rushed for the car.

"Help!" cried the man. "Get me out of this or I'll be killed."

Poppety-pop! spluttered the engine, as Matt bent to the crank.

"Pringle!" shouted Carl; "oof it ain'd Pringle I vas a geezer! Oh, be jeerful, eferypody. Come, Pringle, come to me! I peen vaiding here, und somepody else vas vaiding pehindt, aber meppy you pedder dake shances mit me."

A thrill of disappointment ran through Matt. He was expecting Trymore with the pearls, and now to be forced to run away with Pringle looked like losing out on the whole proposition.

But there could be no lingering with the hope of ultimately securing Trymore. Hank and Spangler would be quick to understand the possibilities of the car, in Trymore's case, and they might puncture a tire, or do some other damage to eliminate the machine.

Pringle, caught between two fires, did not hesitate to take his chances with Carl. With a wild leap he slammed himself on the foot-board and against the tonneau. Carl had the door open, and laid hold of him and dragged him in.

Matt, smothering his disappointment, slid into his seat and started the car.

At that moment, Hank plunged out of the timber.

"Here, you!" he yelled to Matt. "Wait! I want that fellow!"

"You can't have him," shouted Matt, and jumped to the high gear.

Then away they went, covering the back trail as rapidly as they had gone over it the other way.

CHAPTER XI.

A SURPRISE.

Hank made a desperate attempt to overhaul the car. In fact, he tried so hard to capture Pringle that Matt wondered at it. Why should he give so much attention to the fellow when the man he and Spangler wanted most was still on the mountainside?

Hank goaded his horse to top speed, shouted threats, and even smashed the tail lamp with a bullet before the Red Flier could get out of the way. No other damage was done, and Matt drew a long breath of relief when the angry robber was safely left behind.

Meanwhile things had been happening in the tonneau. Carl's idea of revenge was to take his troubles out of Pringle's hide, and he was going about it with considerable violence. The body of the car rocked from side to side on the chassis under the fierce turmoil in the tonneau.

"Wienerwurst, hey?" sputtered Carl, rolling Pringle over on the seat. "You cut loose from Wienerwurst, hey? I make you t'ink it tifferent, you lopster!"

"Leave go o' me. Pretzel!" cried Pringle. "I'll eat you, if you don't, an' that's what. Say, you monkey—"

"Monkey!" gurgled Carl. "Dot's somet'ing more. Pringle und Pretzel, der moosickal team haf bust oop! Und now come der firevorks. How you like dot, hey? Und dot, und dot! Dose vas my gompliments. Wienerwurst hants dem to you mit jeerfulness."

Thump, smack, bang! went Carl's fists.

Matt, having made sure that there was now no danger to be apprehended from Hank, halted the car

and leaned over the back of the seat to take a hand in the squabble himself.

"That'll do, Carl!" he cried, grabbing the Dutch boy by the collar as he pummeled the form on the leather cushions.

"I hafen't paid him all vat I owe him yet," shouted Carl.

"That's enough, anyway. Leave him alone. If—"

"Dere he goes!" screamed Carl; "und look—look vat he's got in his hant alretty!"

The moment Matt dragged the Dutch boy from his late partner, the latter had leaped from the seat, grabbed something that had fallen from his pocket, and had sprung down from the car. As he leaped away, Matt saw that the object in his hand was *the green silk bag!*

Pringle had been saved from Hank, and he was now anxious to save himself from Carl and Matt. With a flying leap from the car, Matt made after him.

A sharp run followed. Pringle was no match for the athletic Motor Matt. Catching up with him at the end of a fifty-yard dash, the young motorist grabbed the fellow by the arm and jerked him to a halt.

Pringle was a slab-sided, beak-faced youth with buttermilk eyes. Merely a glance at him was enough to show Matt that he was thoroughly unreliable.

"No more fighting," said Matt sharply, snatching the bag from Pringle's hand. "Back to the car with you, on the double-quick."

"That ain't yours," snarled Pringle, referring to the bag.

"Nor yours, either," answered Matt. "I'm taking

charge of it for Tomlinson."

This remark about Tomlinson seemed to take Pringle's breath.

"Who's Tomlinson?" he asked, trying to play the innocent.

"You know."

"Some one's been stringing you."

"You're trying it now, Pringle, but it won't work."

Carl, leaning out of the tonneau, was waving a revolver.

"Py shiminy, Matt," he called, "here I vas heeled all der time und forgot aboutt it. Dis gun pelongs mit der Drymore feller. Shtep away vile I draw some beads on dot gangle-legged hide-rack, vat you got along."

"Put that up!" said Matt sternly. "If it went off, I'd be in as much danger as Pringle. That rope that was used to lash the wheel is wrapped around the foot-rest in the tonneau. Get it, and we'll tie Pringle's hands."

"What are you mutts trying to do?" demanded Pringle. "You ain't got no call to handle me like this."

"Oh, no, I guess nod!" taunted Carl, pulling Pringle's hands to his back and getting busy with the rope. "You vas a fine sbecimen oof a tinhorn, hey. Wienerwurst! Vell, I vas more oof a hot tamale as dot, hey?"

"What do you want to knock a partner like this for, Dutch?" demanded Pringle. "Just because I had to pull my freight without getting your permission? Aw, you make me tired!"

"See here," said Matt sharply, as Pringle was made to get into the tonneau, "there's no use of your trying to play possum with us, Pringle. We know all about what you've done—not only to Carl, but to Tomlinson. You'll

go to Yuma, all right. Just now we're going to take you to Ash Fork and leave you, and the pearls, with the deputy sheriff."

This announcement took the wind out of Pringle's sails. The white ran into his face, and he sank back and stared helplessly from Carl to Matt.

At that moment the pounding of a motor was heard along the road in the direction of Ash Fork. In that region, where automobiles were few and far between, the sound claimed Matt's instant attention.

The other car was coming like the wind. It was a high-powered runabout with a single rumble-seat behind. There were two passengers—one a big man in cap and dust-coat, and the other a businesslike driver in leather fixings and goggles.

The runabout was new, as could easily be seen, and there was an extra tire in irons at the driver's side.

At that point in the road passing was easy, and the runabout surged by without decreasing speed.

"Look out ahead!" shouted Matt, making a trumpet of his hands.

But his warning didn't even win a backward glance from the big fellow with the driver. The dust the runabout kicked up soon screened the car from sight. A few moments later, the dust whisked out of view around the point of the mountain.

"Chiminy grickets, dot feller vas going some!" exclaimed Carl. "He don'd vas on speaking-derms mit anypody to-day, I guess."

"I'll bet that's the fellow I came to Ash Fork to see about a job," said Matt. "He answers the description, all right, but from the looks of things he's got a driver."

"Vich leds you oudt," returned Carl. "Dis odder chob

oof yours ad a hundert tollars a mont I don'd t'ink vill last. Meppy ve don'd ged py Tenver, neider. Vat a luck it iss! Aber be jeerful. Pringle iss here," and Carl reached over to nudge Pringle in the ribs.

"Cut it out!" scowled Pringle. "What can I do to get clear of this?"

"You can go py Ash Fork fairst, und den py Yuma. Dot vill led you oudt in den years, meppy."

"Rub it in! Oh, by all means!"

"Do you want to tell us what you know?" asked Matt, facing Pringle.

"Will it put me in deeper, or help me out?" returned Pringle.

"It won't do you any harm. We know a good deal about this business, as it is. For instance, Pringle, you got a note from Denver Denny telling you that the pearls were on the way—"

"Dere id iss," said Carl, pushing the note in front of Pringle's eyes. "Look him ofer, den you know ve don'd make some pluffs."

"You answered the letter from Flagstaff," went on Matt, "and sent it to Brockville, saying you were glad the pearls were on the way and that you would meet Trymore at that place."

"Und dere iss dot vone, too—only ve don'd got it," put in Carl. "Dot's der vone vere you say someding aboutt Wienerwurst, vich iss me."

"No," said Pringle, "I know you don't got it. Hank got it. You're real cute in that red vest. It's almost like we were in the lime-light, doing the sketch. Quite a line you lads have got on me. But I wouldn't linger around here. That other benzine buggy is coming back, and Hank's up front. Spang's behind, too, and they're

reaching out for us."

Pringle was turned partly around in the tonneau, so that his eyes could command the road in the rear. Matt took a quick glance toward the point of the mountain.

Pringle was right! The runabout was charging along the trail like a thunderbolt. The big man in the dust-coat had vanished. In his place sat Hank, and behind Hank was Spangler.

Hank had a revolver in his hand and was pointing it at the driver, holding him to his work.

"Ach, du lieber!" whooped Carl. "Pull away, Matt! Dey're afder us."

Matt turned over the engine in record time, jumped for his seat and started.

CHAPTER XII.

ESCAPE.

It was easy for Matt to guess what had happened. Hank and Spangler had stopped the other car—by rolling the tree across the road again, or in some other way—and had taken possession of the runabout. The scoundrels were in luck to have such a car come their way at just that time.

Being a lighter machine than the touring-car, and fully as powerful, Matt knew that Hank and Spangler had the advantage. The two scoundrels were in desperate earnest, there could be no doubt about that. They had risked much for the pearls and would not let them slip through their fingers now if they could help it.

Pringle was as anxious to get away from the runabout as were Matt and Carl. If Hank and Spangler caught him, their vengeance would be swift and terrible. Pringle's easiest way out of the difficulty was to stay with the two boys.

Although the country through which the road ran was bluff and rough, yet the road itself traveled the level places and was hard and firm.

Matt speeded up the engine to the limit and drew out every ounce of power.

"Dey're gaining!" shouted Carl; "dey're coming oop on us, Matt! Vell, I t'ink dis is our hoodoo tay, anyvays."

"Tear her to pieces!" cried Pringle. "Is this the best you can do? It will be all day with me if Hank comes alongside!"

They were doing fifty-five miles an hour, and Matt knew that they could not do any better, no matter what happened. He was hoping for something to turn up—that was all that could help them now.

Carl thought that was their hoodoo day, but he had occasion to change his mind.

"Somet'ing iss going wrong mit der odder machine, Matt!" he called. "Dey're preaking down, I bed you."

"That's what!" came from Pringle. "Hank acts as though he wanted to kill the driver. Is the driver making a play, or has something really slipped a cog? They're at a standstill."

Matt decreased the Red Flier's speed and looked back.

The driver of the other car was on the ground and both Hank and Spangler were standing over him with drawn guns.

"Judging from what the driver is doing," said Matt, "it can't be a tire they've blown up. Water in the carburetter, perhaps. If that's the case, they'll be after us like a singed cat in less than a minute."

A bend in the road hid those in the touring-car from a view of their enemies behind. The road curved back and forth, through that part of the hills, and Matt was just making ready to let the Flier out again when Pringle made a suggestion.

"You can't give them the slip on a straightaway run, can you?" he called.

"No," answered Matt.

"And if they're only hung up for two or three minutes they'll catch us?"

"Easy."

"Well, I don't want to be hooked by that outfit, and I know a way we can dodge 'em."

"How?"

"Right ahead, on the left, there's a gully in the hills. You can go through it from end to end, easy enough, and at the farther end there's another road. Duck into that gully, quick!"

This seemed like a good move to Matt. He pulled the Red Flier down to the low gear.

"Oof you vas drying to make us some drouples, Pringle," warned Carl, "you vill ged vorse as you have hat yet."

"Aw, splash!" snorted Pringle. "What do you take me for? I was helpin' Denny to skip with the pearls, and Hank would kill me for that, if he could. I'm a lot more anxious to dodge him than you fellows are. Take the gully! I know what I'm talking about. I was through the place with Hank and Spang this morning."

Matt's keen eyes were already surveying the gully, and the ground that lay between the mouth of it and the road. The other car could be heard coming, and there was scant time for making a decision. A turn with the steering-wheel headed the Flier for the opening, and she glided in between the sloping walls of the narrow swale.

Hardly was the car out of sight when the runabout came ripping along in a cloud of dust. None of those aboard saw the Red Flier, but had their eyes on the next turn of the trail.

"Fooled!" laughed Pringle huskily. "If you take my advice, you'll keep going through the gully. As I just said, there is another good road beyond."

This advice seemed good to Matt, for, if they had

pushed out into the road again and headed the other way, they might soon find the runabout once more behind them.

The bed of the gully was sandy, but there were no sharp stones or anything else to injure the tires. Proceeding carefully, Matt kept the car headed for the other road.

"I got a bottle of corn-juice in my back pocket," said Pringle, after a while, "and I feel the need of a nip. How about having one, all around?"

"Not for me," returned Matt promptly.

"Und nod for you, neider, Pringle," said Carl. "You vas too mooch oof a feller for der booze, und dot's vat's blayed der tickens mit you."

"How did you come to hook up with Hank, Spangler, and Trymore?" asked Matt.

"If I put you next," replied Pringle, "I expect you to do what you can for me."

"I'll do that—only I want the truth."

"That's what you'll get, right off the bat. I'm down, and you've got the pearls, and Hank and Spang are hot on my trail. I've all to win by putting you wise, and I don't see how I've got anything to lose.

"This Denny Jerome, otherwise Denver Denny, otherwise James Trymore, and some others, is an old pal of mine. We used to turn a knockabout spiel behind the footlights on a little two-by-four Western circuit; but Denny got to selling gold bricks to Jaspers and quit on me. I did a little with him, on the side, but the pace was too swift for my nerve. Denny got jugged, and made a getaway, and a friend told him that Tomlinson had picked up some pearls down in Yuma, and was to bring them back to Denver in his touring-

car. That looked like good picking for Denny, and he slid for Brockville, A. T., and sent Hank to Yuma to see whether Tomlinson was really going to tote the pearls along with him or have the sense to put them through to Denver by express.

"Hank's the wise boy, all right, and he not only discovered that Tomlinson was just as foolish as he was made out to be, but picked up the road they were taking from Tomlinson's chauffeur. Hank then took the train for Brockville, Denny sent word to me, and I pulled out to join him and Hank and Spang.

"We laid for the touring-car beyond Ash Fork—stopped it by rolling a big stone into the road. Tomlinson and his driver showed fight, and Denny got a bit of a gouge in the block. He seemed all right, though, and pulled himself together in time to relieve Tomlinson of the silk bag.

"Close by that place where we blocked the trail there's an old adobe hut between two hills. From the looks of it, no one has lived there for a hundred years. The play was for Hank, Spang, and little Bright-eyes to take Tomlinson and the chauffeur to the hut and leave them there, neatly roped. Well, we did it; then, when we flocked back to the road, we found that this nice big car was gone and Denny gone with it. Strange as it may seem, Denny had forgot to leave the pearls.

"Oh, well, the air was blue for a while. Then, after Hank and Spang had taken their oaths they'd get the pearls and Denny's scalp along with 'em, we soldiered along toward Ash Fork, hugging the hills all the way. We went into camp in a dry-wash close to town, and when evening settled down, Hank sneaked into the burg and came back with a hot clue. The Red Flier was in the hotel barn, and Denny was in the hotel. The question was, did Denny have the pearls in his clothes, or had he hid 'em around the automobile? It looked

like a raw play for him to keep the pearls in his pocket and run the risk of being caught with the goods, and we were all thinking he must have put 'em in the buzz-wagon.

"Hank and Spang went into town on their horses to have a look through the barn. Just as they had given up trying to find the pearls, some one came in and went to the machine while some one else stood in the door. Hank had a dark lantern—all of Denny's belongings he'd left with us—and he flashed it on the chap by the car. The fellow had a letter. Spang got it. They went after pearls and came back with the paper-talk I'd sent to Spang at Brockville. Then there was more language, and more swearing about what we'd do to Denny when we dropped onto him.

"There were only two ways Denny could go out of Ash Fork. One road was back toward the place where Tomlinson was held up. We knew he wouldn't go that way. The other road headed for Flagstaff. Hank stole an ax and we moved along the Flagstaff road early in the morning. We rode through this gully—that's how I came to know about it—and we crossed the mountain through the crack in the top of it and dropped a tree across the trail. Then we went up into the gap, where we could see a mile or two in every direction, and spotted the car when it came along with our absent-minded pal.

"Hank and Spang rushed down with their horses, just throwing a bluff in order to make sure the car got around the mountain to the tree. After that, Hank and Spang came up the hill, left their horses with me, and scrambled down to a lot of bushes.

"I was holding three horses in the gap. See? Then, all at once, who shows up but Denny. I was for yelling to Hank and Spang, but Denny stops me. He had the pearls, he says, and I might as well have half of 'em.

What's the use of letting Hank and Spang in on a good thing when we could have it all to ourselves? Well, I went him one. Denny got onto one horse, and I got onto the other and led the third. You're wise, I guess, that we counted on getting away while that buzz-wagon was hooked to the tree; consequently, we were scared stiff when we heard it climbing after us.

"We took to the timber. What else could we do? The led horse parted company with me, Hank caught it, and then he pushed us hard. My horse tumbled; that left me on foot. All Denny and I had been thinking about was getting back to the car and making you fellows get us out of our hole. We might have made the raffle, I guess, if Denny hadn't played out and tumbled from his saddle. That hurt in the head must have weakened him some; anyhow, he laid on the ground as stiff as a mackerel. Not being able to do anything for Denny, I guessed I'd do what I could for Bright-eyes, so I stopped to get the silk bag. Came pretty near stopping too long, because some one took a shot at me, and I guess I jumped twenty feet.

"Hank was after me, and Hank was on his horse. What's more, Hank had seen me taking the silk bag. I knew right off it was a nip-and-tuck race, with the chances in favor of a man called Pringle getting nipped. Well, I traveled. When I reached a high place and couldn't go on my feet I laid down and rolled over. That's how I got to the car, and was warmly greeted by Pretzel. You know the rest. Is the spiel worth anything?"

Matt, while steering the car through the gully, had been following Pringle closely.

"I'm willing to let you go, Pringle," said he, "providing you take us to the place where you left Tomlinson and his chauffeur, and providing neither of them is hurt."

"Und broviding," added Carl, "you gif me pack vat you dook dot vas mine."

"You're on, both of you!" said Pringle. "I didn't think my dope would bring all that. Ahead of the car is the end of the gully, and just over the end is that nice road I was telling you about. That road will take us past the adobe hut and keep us out of Ash Fork all the way. It might be well to push the pace, though. Now that Hank and Spang have got a machine of their own, they may get the notion that we'll try to do something for James Q. Tomlinson, and make a play to block us."

The unfortunate jeweler had been in Matt's mind all the time, ever since the mystery had cleared enough so he could understand what had happened.

In order to reach the road Pringle described, it was necessary to climb the gully-bank. The climb was a stiff one, but Matt put the Red Flier at it without loss of a moment.

There was warm work ahead—and it would be warmer if Hank and Spang tried to block proceedings with the runabout.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HUT IN THE HILLS.

The Red Flier made fine work of the climb, rounding the crest of the gully-bank in excellent form. The road they were after lay in plain sight, with smooth ground between.

"Which way now, Pringle?" asked Matt, when they had reached the trail.

"Turn to the right," answered Pringle. "You and your new partner are in luck, Pretzel," he added, when the turn was made and the car was skimming along toward the adobe hut and Tomlinson. "You'll cut a fine large cake when you break in on Mr. Gotrocks and tell him he's saved, and that you're prepared to hand him all the pearls in the bag. Wish I had you for the next twenty-four hours, Dutch."

"Oof you hat blayed skevare mit me, Pringle," replied Carl, "you vouldn't haf peen in sooch a mix. I always t'ought you vas a pad egg, aber you know how to blay der panjo."

"Sure, and we make a good team. How'll it be if I meet you in Brockville, after I get away, and we hit up Needles with the sketch? All the stuff's at Needles."

"Say, I vouldn't haf nodding more to do mit you. I'm for Tenver so kevick as I can ged dere."

"Well, be jeerful, be jeerful."

"Schust vatch my shmoke a leedle und see. Vill you send my shtuff py Tenver?"

"I will, so help me!"

"You vill—I don'd t'ink. You check der trunk, hey?"

"Sure."

"Vere iss der check?"

"In my jeans. Going to frisk me for it?"

Carl pushed his hand into Pringle's trousers pocket, and dug up a brass tag.

"Vell," said he, "you dit tell der trut'. I vill keep der sheck, Pringle, und ven I got some time I vill sendt it on und have der paggage come to me ad Tenver."

"What about my stuff? You ain't going to hog the whole business, are you?"

"Vell, oof you know anypody in Tenver, I vill leaf your shtuff any blace vat you say."

"Andy Hickman has a saloon there. Leave it with him. What's the use of keeping me tied any longer? You might just as well take off the rope."

"Not until we see how we find things in the hut in the hills," said Matt.

"Yah," agreed Carl, "meppy you vas sdringing us. How ve know dot undil ve findt it oudt?"

"Have I strung you any, so far?" protested Pringle.

"It vas all righdt, so far, aber somet'ing mightdt come oop farder on. Hey, Matt?"

"That's right, Carl," answered Matt. "We'll keep him a prisoner until we find Tomlinson."

This road, like the one they had left, angled about through the hills. They passed one vehicle—a buckboard with two passengers—going in the other direction.

The horses attached to the buckboard were not used to automobiles, and shied badly. Matt slowed to a stop while the driver of the team was going past.

"Seen anything of another automobile, mister?" called Matt.

"Nary, I haven't," answered one of the men, "although I hear Lem Nugent, o' Ash Fork, has been blowin' himself fer one o' the things."

The horses danced past on their hind legs, and Matt started up again.

"There's the Fork," announced Pringle, a few minutes later, nodding his head toward the left. "This is as near as we come to the town."

They were forging along rising ground, just then, and the huddle of buildings that represented the town lay below them, and about a mile away.

"How far is the hut from here, Pringle?" asked Matt.

"Twenty-five miles, I should say, at a rough guess," was the answer. "We'll cross the railroad in another mile, and after that you'd better look for buzz-wagon tracks in the dust. If you see any, then you can bank heavy that Hank and Spang are ahead of you."

"Couldn't they go the other road?"

"They could, but they wouldn't. They'd make a nice picture running through town, Hank with a gun at the driver's head, wouldn't they? Nix. They'll keep in the background as much as they can—and this road is pretty well back. They don't want to be seen by anybody but us, just now, Hank and Spang don't."

"Does this road run into the Ash Fork trail?"

"Yep—a mile t'other side of the hut. The hut's between the two roads, close to this and not so close to the other. If the hut had been closer to the other road, maybe Hank, Spang, and I would have heard Denny when he cut loose from us with this car."

The Red Flier descended a slope just then, crossed the railroad-track, and climbed another slope beyond.

Matt was worrying about the other car. There were no tracks in the road, so it was certain the runabout hadn't passed that way as yet, but there was plenty of time for it to reach the road and catch up with the Red Flier.

The one thing to do was to travel at speed, forestalling possible interference from Hank and Spang by getting well ahead of them.

During the rest of the trip, which Matt made at the top gait, no travelers or vehicles were met. The twenty-five miles were covered in thirty minutes, and when Pringle called on Matt to stop, he brought the Red Flier to a standstill at a place where the hills rose steeply on each side of the trail.

"Here we are," said Pringle.

"The hut is on the left side of the road?" queried Matt.

"Through that gouge," and Pringle, with a nod, indicated a break in the hills. "Going to take me along?"

"I guess I can find the place, all right," answered Matt. "You can stay here with Carl until I see if things are as you say."

"What if Hank and Spang come along?"

Matt turned to the Dutch boy.

"You have that revolver, Carl," said he, "and if you see the other car, or hear it, fire a signal. I'll not be gone any longer than I can help."

"I vill keep a sharp lookoudt, you bed you," answered Carl, "und I vill shoot oof I vant you. Mach schnell,

Matt, for I haf der feeling in my pones dot somet'ing iss going crossvays."

Without pausing for further talk, Matt ran into the passage between the hills. A hundred feet carried him through it and out upon a little plateau. Here there was a spring, a thicket of manzanita, and a small ruin of a house. Opposite the point where Matt came upon the plateau was another narrow valley, leading toward the east and apparently communicating with the other road.

Hurrying to the house, Matt stepped through an unclosed breach in the mud wall that had once served for a door. The gloomy interior blinded him for a space and it was impossible for him to see any one.

"You scoundrel!" cried an impassioned voice. "Untie these ropes and let us go at once. You will save yourself trouble if you do that, and give me back that bag of pearls. There's law in this country yet, and I'll make it my business to see that it reaches you."

Gradually, as Matt's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he made out the forms of two men seated on a bench along one of the walls.

"Are you Mr. Tomlinson, of Denver?" inquired Matt, stepping toward the man who had spoken.

"My name, sir," was the haughty reply. "How long are you going to leave us here, without a mouthful of food and no water to drink? By gad, you'll suffer for this!"

"You're mistaken, Mr. Tomlinson," said the young motorist. "I'm not one of the robbers, and had nothing to do with putting you here. By a stroke of luck I have been able to recover your pearls and to find out where you were. Your car is waiting in the west road, and I am here to release you and take you to Ash Fork."

This startling news left Tomlinson speechless for a moment.

"You—you have come to release us?" he returned.

"Yes," and Matt, with an open knife in his hand, passed to the bench and began severing the cords that held Tomlinson and his chauffeur to the hard seat.

The prisoners had been in their cramped positions all night, and when the ropes fell away, so numb were their limbs that they could hardly hold themselves upright.

"Give us some water," begged Tomlinson.

There was a canteen lying on the floor. Matt picked it up, found that it was full, and uncapped it and held it to Tomlinson's lips.

"The villains that brought us here," spoke up the chauffeur, "left that canteen, but they never stopped to figure out how we were to get at it with our hands tied."

"They were willing, Gregory," said Tomlinson, "to let us starve and die, right here. I never thought a set of men could be such inhuman wretches. But who are you, young man?"

"My name is King, Matt King," replied the youth.

"You say that by a stroke of luck you were able to get my pearls and find out where I had been left? I wish you would explain how—"

"I haven't time to explain anything, just now, as we may be interfered with by the robbers at any moment. They have stolen a fast motor-car and are chasing us. If you and your chauffeur are able to walk, Mr. Tomlinson, we'd better get to the west road as soon as we can. The thieves—"

A noise at the door caused Matt to whirl in that direction. He was astounded to see Spangler standing in the entrance.

CHAPTER XIV.

BACK TO THE CAR.

There was but one place where Spangler could have come from, and that was the east road. The stolen car must have been driven along the direct trail leading to Ash Fork and have stopped so as to let Spangler out at the nearest point to the hut.

As Matt turned on the ruffian, Tomlinson and Gregory started up from the bench.

"There's one of the rascals!" exclaimed Tomlinson.

Spangler, for a moment, had shown evidences of surprise. Getting quick control of himself, he pushed into the hut and started for Matt.

"Waal, my bantam," he sneered, "I reckon ye didn't make sich a clean gitaway, arter all. Here's where ye git what's comin' if ye don't fork over that bag. Hurry up with it! Ye've made us a heap o' trouble an' we ain't allowin' ter put up with any more o' yer foolishness."

"Why, you infernal scoundrel," cried Tomlinson wrathfully, "you're my prisoner! Put down that revolver, or—"

"Oh, you say moo an' chase yerself!" scoffed Spangler. "I got bizness with young King, here, an' if you butt in ye're goin' ter git hurt. I'll take them pearls," he added to Matt, "an' I'll take 'em *now*."

Spangler was only one against three, but he was armed, and two of the men he faced were worn out with the physical suffering they had endured. The ruffian was counting confidently on having things his own way, and Matt was wondering how he could checkmate him.

Hank must be somewhere around. Probably, Matt reasoned to himself, Hank was in the east road keeping guard of the driver of the stolen car.

"Your lease of liberty is short," fumed Tomlinson; "I'll spend my last dollar, if I have to, in bringing you and the rest of your infernal gang to book."

"Fer the last time, King!" growled Spangler, moving his revolver significantly. "I've chinned all I'm goin' ter about that bag. Either pass it over or take what's comin'."

Matt had got around behind the bench. He had done this in a casual manner so as not to arouse Spangler's suspicions. Just as the ruffian finished, Matt kicked the bench against his legs.

Spangler staggered back. He did not lose his balance, but, in order to keep from falling, he had to throw up his arms.

This was the opportunity Matt wanted. Like a flash he jumped over the bench and his right fist shot out in a blow straight from the shoulder.

It was no light tap, for the young motorist put all his heart and science into that darting right-hander. Spangler was caught on the point of the jaw and driven against the crumbling adobe wall. The revolver fell from his hand, and Matt pounced upon it and brought it level with Spangler's breast.

"By gad!" cried the admiring Tomlinson. "What do you think of that, Gregory? Did you ever see anything neater than that? King, you're a wonder! Bravo!"

"He's quicker'n chain lightning!" averred Gregory.

Spangler was having recourse to his usual tactics whenever things went wrong with him, and was swearing like an army teamster.

"That will do, Spangler!" said Matt sternly. "Swearing never helped anybody and it's not going to help you. Stow it."

"I'll have yer life fer this, my buck," gritted Spangler, rubbing the point of his jaw, and glaring.

"Not right away you won't," returned Matt coolly. "Step around to the other wall. We want to pass that door, and you're too close to it."

"If ye think ye're goin' ter make a clean gitaway," scowled Spangler, as he moved across the room, "ye've got a surprise ahead o' ye. Ye kain't bump Hank as easy as ye bumped me."

"What are you going to do, King?" asked Tomlinson.

"Get away from here as quick as we can," answered Matt.

"Aren't you going to take that scoundrel along, now that we've captured him?"

"No, it's impossible."

"Impossible?" echoed Tomlinson incredulously. "Why, we've got him right in our hands."

"His partner is close by, in another road, and his partner has a faster car than your Red Flier, Mr. Tomlinson. We've got to get away from here in a hurry. Take my word for it. There's no time to talk about it. Hurry out, you and Gregory, and make for the west road. I've got a friend there watching the car."

"But—"

"Hurry!"

There was a compelling note in Matt's voice that caused Gregory to catch hold of his employer's arm and pull him toward the door.

"He knows what he's talking about, Mr. Tomlinson," said Gregory. "Here's a chance for you to get away, and get back your pearls and the car. The boy has shown that he has pluck and sense, and we'd better do what he says."

This logic overcame Tomlinson's objections, and the two passed out of the hut.

Matt backed after them.

"Ye better leave that gun," called Spangler.

"I'll leave it," answered Matt, "just as soon as it's safe. Where's Hank?"

"Ye'll find him quick enough!" was the grim response.

Getting through the door, Matt turned and hurried after Tomlinson and Gregory.

Tomlinson was bareheaded. He wore an automobile-coat that reached to his heels, but there was no coat or vest underneath it. The missing garments, it seemed clear, had been appropriated by the scheming Trymore.

"If we could have taken that villain with us," fretted Tomlinson when Matt came up with him and Gregory, "we would have had at least one of the gang. Now they'll all go scot-free."

"We've got to think of ourselves, first and foremost," said Matt. "If you and Gregory escape, and you get your car and your pearls, the sheriff can go after the gang."

"But see what they did to me!" went on Tomlinson querulously, opening his dust-coat and showing himself stripped to the shirt. "The rascal I wounded took part of my clothes, my watch, pocketbook, and some personal papers. Then, to throw us into that

miserable hovel as though we were dogs? Gad, it makes my blood boil to think of it."

"You might take the pearls," said Matt, and handed him the bag. "If you could travel a little faster—"

"Can't go any faster!" declared Tomlinson. "We haven't had anything to eat or drink for nearly twenty-four hours, and my hands and feet feel like sticks. I'm anxious to know how you managed to get these pearls, King—"

"I'll tell you all about that just as soon as we get to Ash Fork."

Matt's anxiety was intense. He felt sure that Hank was doing something, and the thought bothered him. Tomlinson and Gregory were creeping along, gathering strength with every minute, yet not fast enough to suit Matt.

"I was foolish ever to carry these pearls with me," went on Tomlinson, "but I expected to dispose of part of them to a dealer in Albuquerque, and thought I could take the lot that far in the automobile. How did the robbers know I had them? That's what I can't understand."

"Did you write to Denver that you had secured the pearls and were going to carry them with you as far as Albuquerque?" asked Matt.

"Yes, but—"

"Then the news must have got out there. I happen to know that a Denver man was back of the plot to steal the gems. There was a leak in your Denver office. How long did you stay in Yuma, Mr. Tomlinson?"

"Ten days."

"That gave the Denver man plenty of time to lay his plans. You bought the pearls from a Mexican who

came to Yuma from La Paz?"

"Where did you find that out?"

"Is it the truth?"

"Yes."

"Well, that shows there must have been some one in your Denver office who told what you were doing. The information I just gave you came from Denver Denny, the fellow you wounded at the time of the robbery."

"By gad, I'll overhaul my office force from the errand-boy up, as soon as I get back home!"

"A good idea."

"That robbery was the most barefaced proceeding you ever heard of! Gregory and I were spinning along toward Ash Fork, never dreaming of trouble, when we were halted by a big stone in the road. Gregory got out and had just rolled the stone out of the way, when four men rushed at us. I had a revolver and I blazed away. One of the villains staggered—but he couldn't have been very badly hurt, for he pulled himself together and came at me. Two of them laid hold of Gregory, and two laid hold of me; then one of them—the fellow I wounded—stayed with the car while the other three took Gregory and me to that wretched hut. If I live, I'll make every one of those men answer for what they've done! How such a robbery could take place, on a public road, in broad day, is something I can't—"

Tomlinson's rambling remarks were interrupted by a sound that brought Matt's heart into his throat. Two revolver-shots, in quick succession, came from the west road!

That meant that Carl saw trouble of some sort coming the way of the red car.

"Run!" yelled Matt, dropping the revolver and

grabbing Tomlinson by the arm: "you've got to run! Catch hold of him on the other side, Gregory. You'll be captured again if we don't hike out of this in short order."

Gregory was a younger man than Tomlinson and had withstood their recent physical discomforts much better. He and Matt, between them, contrived to rush the Denver man toward the road.

They did not have much farther to go, and when they broke through the little gap Carl greeted them with a wild shout:

"Der odder car! It vas coming, Matt, coming like a house afire!"

CHAPTER XV.

A RACE AND A RUSE.

Carl, as he yelled his startling announcement, was standing up in the tonneau and pointing toward the place where the west and east roads came together, a mile farther on.

The stolen runabout, while Spangler had been at the hut, had doubled the fork of the trail. Running along the east road it had put about and was now charging along the west.

The Red Flier was facing the direction from which the runabout was coming, and would have to be turned.

"Get Tomlinson aboard, Gregory!" shouted Matt, dropping the Denver man's arm and springing to the front of the machine.

Frantically he turned the lever, then jumped for the driver's seat.

By that time, Gregory had got Tomlinson into the back of the Flier, and had scrambled for a place alongside of Matt.

"Can you run 'er?" he asked.

"Watch me," flung back Matt.

To make a turn, in that narrow roadway, called for plenty of skill, but it was accomplished swiftly. By the time the nose of the Red Flier was pointed the other way, however, the runabout was dangerously close.

Hank was still in front with the captive driver, and still overawing him with the revolver. Matt bent to his levers and steering-wheel. For him there was nothing

but the road in front—his eyes saw nothing else.

But how could they hope to win that race, with a better car against them?

"She can do sixty," cried Tomlinson, from behind. "You know her, Gregory! Perhaps you'd better take the wheel."

Gregory had been watching Motor Matt sharply.

"King can forget more about driving a car than I ever knew, Mr. Tomlinson," said he. "Leave the thing as it is. If any one can get us out of this, it's King."

The Red Flier was going like the wind.

"Watch behind, Carl!" shouted Matt.

"Sure," answered Carl, "you bed you. Py shinks! Der odder car is slowing down aboutt vere ve vas. Ah, ha! Dere comes Spangler, oudt oof der blace vere you come, und he chumps by der car. Now dey're rushing ad us again! Himmel, how dey vas purnin' der vind! No use, Matt. Der Red Flier ain'd in it mit dot odder car."

"How's she going, Gregory?" cried Tomlinson.

Gregory bent forward over the speedometer.

"Fifty-eight," he answered.

No car ever worked more sweetly than did the Red Flier. She hummed like a swarm of bees, and Matt's trained ear told him that the machinery was working to perfection.

"She can do sixty!" again shouted Tomlinson. "We mustn't let the scoundrels overhaul us now! Five hundred dollars for you, King, if you keep us away from them!"

"Oof anypody can do dot," yelled Carl, "id vas Modor Matt. Hoop-a-la, Matt! Hid 'er oop, hid 'er oop! Ve

don't want to get ketched any more dan vat Tomlinson does."

"They're gaining, they're gaining!" cried Pringle.

He had freed his hands himself, accomplishing it the moment Gregory had hustled Tomlinson into the tonneau. If Tomlinson or Gregory recognized Pringle as one of the robbers, they failed to say anything about it in the general excitement.

But if Tomlinson was urging Motor Matt onward, the desperate Hank was doing no less with the driver of the runabout. And Hank's urging carried with it a threat of life and death.

Foot by foot, steadily and relentlessly, the runabout drew closer to the touring-car. With frenzied eyes Tomlinson watched the closing gap. Presently the racer behind was so close that those in the Flier could see the grimly resolute look on Hank's face, and could hear the fierce words with which he threatened the man under his revolver-point.

"Who's got a revolver?" cried Tomlinson desperately.

"Here you vas!" Carl answered, and handed over the gun he had in his pocket.

"It's mine!" exclaimed Tomlinson, as he took the weapon.

"Ve got it from der feller vat heluped rop you."

It was hardly a time for explanations, but Carl made that one mechanically—for his thoughts were elsewhere.

Tomlinson lifted the gun, training it on the occupants of the car behind. Hank saw the move but never flinched.

"I wouldn't do that," he shouted. "We don't want to

kill you, Tomlinson. That isn't part of the game. We want those pearls, and we're not going to be euchered out of them after all this fuss."

Then Spangler, from the rumble, leaned forward over the front seat of the runabout. He had picked up his own weapon from the place where Matt had dropped it, or else he had taken a second six-shooter from Hank's pocket. He leveled the gun at Tomlinson.

"Pull that trigger an' I'll fill ye fuller o' holes than a pepper-box!" he cried.

Gregory, reaching over from the front, caught Tomlinson's arm and jerked it down.

"You're mad, Mr. Tomlinson!" said he. "Don't take such a risk."

"What's our pace?" demanded Tomlinson, his iron-gray hair snapping about his face with the speed of their flight.

"Fifty-nine!"

"Then the other car is doing better than a mile a minute! A thousand dollars for you, King, if you land me, with those pearls, safe in Ash Fork!"

The hot blood went dancing through Motor Matt's veins. Could he do it? Reason told him that the feat was impossible, but—

A thought at that instant leaped through his alert brain. There was a chance—a long chance.

"Slide into this seat, Gregory!" he cried. "Careful, now. I'll hang to the wheel while you get under me."

"What are you going to do?" demanded the astonished Gregory.

"The best I can—and trust to luck."

A note of thrilling determination rang in Motor Matt's voice.

Gregory crawled and scrambled over the front of the lurching car and got into the driver's seat. Matt, relinquishing the wheel, went on his knees in the seat vacated by Gregory.

"Pringle," called Matt, leaning into the tonneau, "you have a bottle in your pocket?"

"Yes, I—"

"Give it here."

Pringle pulled a quart bottle from his pocket. It was half-full of liquor.

Matt drew the cork and spilled the whisky into the road; then, again on his knees, he studied the car behind.

The driver of the runabout was holding his car to a steady line. The left-hand wheels tracked the road a point two feet to the left of the trail of the Red Flier.

Standing in the car and bracing himself with his left hand, Matt raised the empty bottle in his right.

Crash!

The bottle, broken to fragments in the road, offered a danger-point for the car behind. The speed of the Flier had scattered the jagged glass, but most of it had gone to the place Matt had in mind.

Hank, hearing the crash, instinctively divined what had happened.

"To the right, to the right!" he roared, brandishing his revolver in the driver's face.

But the speed of the runabout was so great that swerving the car, before the danger-zone was reached,

was out of the question.

One of the front tires hit the broken glass and instantly there came a sharp "pop." The runabout slewed around and the driver cut off the power and put on the brakes just in the nick of time to avoid a bad accident.

The Red Flier glided onward, leaping away from its defeated rival like a glittering streak.

Tomlinson, overcome with the tension of the struggle, collapsed in his seat with a breathless, "By gad."

"King," exulted Gregory, "you're the best ever!"

"Hoop-a-la!" gloried Carl, in a frenzy of delight. "Meppy Modor Matt ditn't do somet'ing dot time! Oh, I bed you! Be jeerful, eferypody, be jeerful! Modor Matt has safed der tay und von a t'ousand tollars. Yah, yah, yah!" and Carl flopped to an about face and shook his clenched fist at the car behind, now almost out of sight.

"Wonderful!" cried Tomlinson. "King, how did you ever manage to think of that?"

"How does he efer manage to t'ink oof eferyt'ing, hey?" asked Carl. "He has his headt mit him all der time. Dot's vy he cuts so mooch ice verefer he goes! Oh, he vas a pully-poy, you bed my life!"

"Well," said Tomlinson, "I'll not forget this."

"There's Ash Fork," spoke up Pringle suddenly, pointing to the right. "Just across the railroad-track there's a road leading down to the place. I guess you better stop here and let me out."

"Stop, Gregory," said Matt. "Pringle isn't going into town with us."

"Yes, he is!" averred Tomlinson, bristling. "He was one of the four men who held us up. I didn't recognize him at first, but I do now. Don't stop, Gregory."

"Mr. Tomlinson," said Matt, facing about, "I promised Pringle he should have his freedom if he told us what the robbers had done with you. But for the information he gave us, we would never have been able to get you away from that hut. I think he's entitled to something, don't you?"

"Is that the way of it?" asked Tomlinson.

Matt assured him that it was.

"Then," went on Tomlinson, "if you promised him his freedom, Matt, Gregory had better stop."

The car halted and Pringle, highly elated, jumped to the ground.

"Don't forget to leave my stuff where I told you, Pretzel," he called.

"Vell, I von't," answered Carl; "und don'd you forged to leadt some tifferent lives oder you vill findt yourseluf pehindt der pars yet."

"Oh, blazes! Say, I'll be wearing diamonds while you're still doing stunts back of the footlights."

"You vill be vearing shdripes, dot's vat."

"By-by, Wienerwurst!"

Carl gurgled and tried to get out of the car. Matt grabbed him and threw him back in his seat.

"Never mind, old chap," he said. "You're well rid of that fellow, and you ought to be thankful."

"I don'd like dot Wienerwurst pitzness," grunted Carl. "He vas rugging it in too mooch, py shinks. Don'd he vas der vorst pad egg vat you efer see?"

Just then Gregory switched on the spark, and the Red Flier glided into the branch road with the town well in sight.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN ASH FORK.

Once more the Red Flier found shelter in the hotel barn, and once more James Q. Tomlinson was quartered in the hotel. But, of course, it was a different James Q. Tomlinson.

One of the first things Matt did, as soon as he had helped Gregory take care of the Red Flier, was to hunt up the deputy sheriff and tell him what had happened. If there was ever a dumfounded man in Arizona, that man was the deputy.

"Well, thunder an' kerry one!" said he. "Ain't I the bright boy, though? Why, I helped that Denver Denny across the street from the doctor's office, did everythin' I could to make him comfortable, and—oh, gadhook it all! He played me for fair, and no mistake! But I reckon you was a bit fooled yourself, eh?"

"For a while, yes," answered Matt. "But you'd better get busy. Denver Denny is out there on the mountain, and Hank and Spangler are back on the west road with a stolen car. If you hustle you may be able to capture the whole gang—or three of them, anyhow."

"That's me, on the jump."

Ten minutes later the deputy sheriff had collected a posse, and had split the force into two detachments. One party went toward the place where the stolen car had been left, and the other headed along the Flagstaff trail.

As a matter of fact, which may as well be stated in this place, neither detachment accomplished anything.

The owner of the runabout, Lem Nugent, arrived in

town on foot, late that afternoon, full of wrath, footsore, and weary.

"Hang the blooming luck, anyhow!" said he, to a group of loungers in front of the hotel. "Got held up for my new car—two fellows snaked it right out from under me. There was a tree across the trail, and of course we had to stop. Next I knew a revolver was looking at me from both sides. I had to get out, and the two hold-up boys went away in the runabout, taking Henry along to run the car for them. As for me—whoosh! I walked into town. Never liked walking much, anyhow. And where's my new runabout? That's what I want to know. Henry's with it, wherever it is."

But Lem Nugent was mistaken. Henry wasn't with the car, at that moment, but was hoofing it into Ash Fork from the hills, glad to have his scalp with him.

He reported to his employer an hour after the theft of the runabout had been described by its owner.

"They made me chase a red touring-car," said Henry, "kept a gun poked into my ribs all the time an' said they'd blow holes in me if I didn't do the right thing. What they thought was the right thing, and what I thought, was some different, but guns was trumps an' they had the best hands. First time we chased the red car the machinery of the runabout went wrong, and the other machine got away from us. Came pretty near getting shot, then, as the strong-arm boys thought I'd made the runabout go wrong a-purpose.

"When we got ready to do some more scorching, the other car had given us the slip. We kept chasing around, and finally dipped over a divide into that east road, a couple o' miles beyond the Fork. By and by we stopped at a place where a feller called Spangler got out and lost himself in a swale. Hank and me jogged on to where the west road come into the other trail, an'

turned back along that course. We was to pick up Spangler on the new road, after he'd done something or other, I don't know what.

"Well, unexpectedlike, we sighted the red car. That was our signal to whoop it up, takin' Spangler in behind on the fly. Then we had a race an' no mistake. It would have been our race, too, if the young fellow in the red car hadn't busted a bottle in the trail and spoiled a tire for us. Say, that was the slickest move I ever saw made!

"It took us half an hour to get on a new tire, and by that time, of course, the red car was safe in Ash Fork. Hank made me give him lessons in handling the runabout, then told me to go home and say that he and Spangler liked the machine so well they was going to keep it."

The cattleman swore roundly; and likewise declared that he'd spend the price of a new car getting the old one back.

Tomlinson remained in Ash Fork for two days, recovering from his trying experiences. And when he finally went on to Albuquerque he went by train. As for the Red Flier, the arrangement he had made to have the car taken on developed in a conversation he had with Matt a few minutes before he got aboard the steam-cars.

Matt was at the station with Tomlinson and Gregory, for both were going to Albuquerque by train.

"Here's what I owe you, Matt," said the Denver man, pressing a roll of bills into the young motorist's hand. "A thousand dollars, and I call it cheap, considering the great service you rendered me. The Red Flier will have to come on to Albuquerque, but I don't care to travel with her myself, and I want Gregory to go with me. I'll give you an extra hundred, Matt, if you'll bring

the car through. I shall be in Albuquerque for some time, and you can jog along at your leisure. What do you say? If you have anything else on hand, and feel that you can't do it, don't hesitate to say so. Henry, Nugent's driver, will take the Red Flier to Albuquerque, if you can't. But, frankly, I'd rather trust the car in your hands."

"I'll do it," said Matt. "You see, I want to get to Denver myself, and I'll be able to get over a long lap of the run on the trip."

"Good!" exclaimed Tomlinson, with a look of relief. "You're going to Denver, you say?"

"That's my intention."

"What are you going to do there?"

"Something with motor-cars—I can't tell just what, at the present time."

"You'd make a good driver for a racing-car. You've got nerve, and steadiness, and presence of mind. How'd you like a job of that kind?"

Matt's eyes sparkled.

"That would suit me right down to the ground, Mr. Tomlinson," said he.

"Then I think I can help you. A friend of mine is a manufacturer of automobiles, and I know he's looking for a good driver for his racing-machines. If you say so, I'll write him from Albuquerque."

"I'd be obliged to you if you would, Mr. Tomlinson," returned Matt.

"All right, then. You can count on me to give you a good recommendation."

Just then the train came along, Tomlinson and Gregory shook hands with Matt and Carl, and were

soon pulling out of Ash Fork.

"Vell, vell!" murmured Carl, staring after the disappearing train, "you vas some lucky poys, Matt. Meppy I vill be lucky, too, oof I shtay hooked oop mit you."

"Nothing would please me better, old chap," said Matt heartily, "than to have you trail along with me."

"Und go mit you py Albuquerque, und den py Tenver?"

"Sure!"

"Hoop-a-la!" jubilated Carl, gripping Matt's hand.

THE END.

The next number (6) 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 Red Flyer

OR,

ON THE HIGH GEAR

A Dutchman in Trouble—The Runaway Auto—The Man at the Roadside—The Mystery Deepens—Matt Gets a Job—Concerning the Letter—The Two Horsemen—On the Road—In the Hands of the Enemy—A Shift in the Situation—A Surprise—Escape—The Hut in the Hills—Back to the Car—A Race and a Ruse—In Ash Fork.

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A YOUNG MARINER'S PERIL.

By RUFUS HALL.

Day after day the poisonous malarial vapors from thickets and jungles, combined with the heat of an equatorial clime, told even upon some of the hardy sailors and marines who had been sent from the sloop of war *Trenton* to protect a party of engineers away up in the Gaboon country of Lower Guinea, near the mountains, in Western Africa.

In a tent where the marines were encamped, they had put little Jack Winton, the lieutenant's nephew, a boy of fourteen, ill with a fever; and, one morning, as he lay there, with burning cheeks and parched lips, a vision of big red cherries, smooth and round, kept rising in fancy before his wistful eyes. His delirious mutterings were of these cherries, and his hands now and then crossed and recrossed his pillow, as if he thought the fruit must be there.

Then it was that Will Worth, a marine private of sixteen, hearing him, made up his mind to hunt for what he knew the invalid coveted—a cherrylike fruit, to be found among the glens and ravines of the mountains—and to bring some, as a pleasant surprise, to the sufferer. Without mentioning his purpose to any one, he left the camp, being at present off duty, and sped on his way.

Mr. Dale, a youthful ensign, noticing how hurriedly he plunged into the upland thicket ahead, suspected that he meant to desert. His lieutenant had already found fault with him for one soldier's desertion, and he did not relish the idea of another reprimand of this

sort. He, therefore, resolved to follow the lad, watch him, and, if he went far, order him back to the camp.

Entering the thicket, he moved rapidly on. The foliage and the brush became denser as he proceeded. He heard the tapping and humming of bees in the hollows of trees. In and out of the great bell-shaped flowers around him they flew, spitefully buzzing at the big green gnats in their way. Hundreds of large white lilies, enormous tulips, and wild roses brightened the shrubbery. High above hovered the scarlet cardinal-bird, sounding its shrill "fife." Below, the hook-nosed falcon boldly confronted the youth, as if inclined to dispute his progress.

At last he caught sight of Worth down in the jungle, on the opposite side of a deep ravine, which he had evidently reached by a roundabout direction through brambles and vines leading past the front of the chasm. Down where he was could be seen gleaming in profusion the small red globes of the cherrylike fruit he had come to gather for his sick little comrade.

The ravine was evidently hundreds of feet in depth, the bottom hidden by the black shadows from the jungle on both sides.

A few yards below Worth the chasm, which was about eighteen feet wide, was crossed by a tree-trunk—a mere sapling, eight inches thick—probably all that remained of a former bridge.

The trunk was smooth, except within five feet of the end nearest the boy, where there was a clipped branch. This end was in a sort of long hollow, overhung by tough roots.

The ensign cautiously descended on his side of the ravine and watched Worth until he had filled a haversack at his side with the "cherries" and was about

to ascend, when he called out sharply:

"That fruit will make you a poor meal, my boy, if you mean to desert!"

The startled lad looked across the gorge, saw the ensign, and answered, much hurt by the officer's suspicion:

"I had no intention of deserting, sir. I came here after the fruit for Jack Winton."

"Now, upon my word," said the ensign, who was a good fellow at heart, "I believe you, Worth, and am sorry I made the mistake of suspecting you. Those 'cherries' are just the things for little Jack."

Worth was going to respond, when behind and above him he fancied he heard a low, guttural voice. Turning and looking up, he saw two humanlike but fierce eyes shining amid a thick, dark screen of interlacing vines.

"Who's there—a 'Pongwe?" he inquired, thinking one of the natives of the Mpongwe tribe had been watching him pick the fruit.

There was no reply to his question. But the leafy bower rustled, and now from out the dark screen there rose an awful roar, that was echoed to the chasm's very depths.

From among the concealing vines stepped forth a hideous monster, which the boy at first thought was a chimpanzee, but which, from its black color and ferocious aspect, he concluded must be a gorilla.

Nearly erect it stood, beating its breast with its hands.

Being a greedy lover of fruit, it glared in a fierce, remonstrative way at the lad's full haversack, as if enraged at his having come to pluck the "cherries" it

wanted entirely for its own use.

The animal, about five feet high, was covered with black hair, had very broad shoulders and enormous hands, while its stomach bulged as if nearly filled to bursting with the "cherries" it had been eating, the red stain of which was all about its mouth.

The diabolical face, with its great flat nose and projecting open jaws, the latter disclosing two enormous hooked lower teeth and a row of smaller ones above as sharp as a saw, was thrust slightly downward, showing the encircling edges of the hair on its head so distinctly defined as to give it the grotesque appearance of wearing a sort of big furry cap.

It was plain that the brute meant to attack the boy. In fact, it suddenly raised one of its big paws and, with a rush, came crashing toward him through the shrubbery.

Unfortunately he had left his musket, thinking it would be in his way, near the edge of the ravine above. But his bayonet was by his side in its sheath. He drew the steel, and, flourishing it before him, retreated toward the tree-trunk that extended across the chasm.

He had once heard a hunter say that the gorilla, unlike the common monkey, is not a very skilful climber. Neither would it, he thought, attempt, for the same reason, to follow him should he creep out on the horizontal sapling.

But just as he got close to the tree the ferocious brute, uttering a terrible roar, aimed a blow at him with its uplifted paw.

He held up his bayonet.

It was dashed from his grasp, but not before the point had inflicted a wound in the monster's arm. So

great was the strength of this hairy arm that that single blow must have lacerated the boy's side had not the big paw fallen upon his cartridge-box.

The force of the stroke whirled him over upon his back, knocking him into the hollow in which rested the end of the tree-trunk. He quickly pushed himself under the tough roots overhanging the hollow.

The gorilla, bending over, looked at its wounded arm, lapped it, and pressed it against its breast, all the time growling as if with blended pain and wrath. Then, using both its left paw and its teeth, it commenced to tear away the protecting roots above the lad, with the probable intention of dealing him a finishing blow.

Its strength was so enormous that the earth broke and flew in all directions as the animal shook, pulled, and bit at the roots. Worth, knowing that these would soon give way, expected to be finally torn to death by the infuriated beast.

Meanwhile, the young ensign on the other side of the ravine had been watching for a chance to shoot at the gorilla with the long double-barreled pistol he had with him, which he had drawn from his belt.

But the boy and his assailant were, from the first, so close to each other that he did not dare to fire, lest the bullet should strike his comrade.

He now ran his gaze along the sapling that bridged the chasm. The slender tree was covered with a green, slippery slime. He doubted if he would be able to creep over it, but he saw no other way of attempting to get within close enough range of the fierce beast to shoot it without risk of hitting Worth. Therefore, replacing his pistol in his belt, he started, crawling along on his hands and knees.

It was a daring venture. The horizontal tree was

probably more than two hundred feet above the bottom of the chasm. If he lost his balance, certain death awaited him; he would be precipitated into the black depths so far below.

On he went. As he proceeded, the narrow trunk shook with his weight. When he had reached its center, it bent, oscillated, and one of his knees slid off the slippery surface.

He felt himself going over. His distended eyes were turned downward toward the dark, yawning gulf beneath, into which he expected to fall headlong.

But the thought now occurred to him of throwing himself flat upon his breast along the sapling and of hugging it with his arms.

He did so, and the action saved him. Cautiously he then regained his former position and crept on. At length he reached the clipped branch, within five feet of the end of the tree. The gorilla had nearly torn away all the roots that protected Worth. It seemed about to raise its left paw to deal him a fatal blow. The young officer knew he had no time to lose.

He clutched the stumped branch with his left hand, drew his pistol, and, aiming as well as his position would admit of, he fired. The bullet inflicted a flesh-wound in the monster's side. With a roar that shook the air to the chasm's very depths, the brute turned, saw its assailant, and threw itself toward him, resting its big stomach on the sapling. Up went its mighty left paw, and down it came slantingly toward the officer's head.

Worth uttered a cry of dismay. He expected to see the ensign killed and dashed from the tree's trunk into the black pit of the ravine, hundreds of feet below.

It was a critical moment.

Had Dale drawn his head back, the great paw would still have reached him, have struck his neck, and sent him to his doom.

But instead of attempting in his present cramped position any backward movement, he threw his head and shoulders forward.

Thus the big paw clove, with a whirring sound, the empty air above him, and, placing the muzzle of his pistol between the monster's eyes, he fired.

The brute, as the bullet passed through its brain, slid away from the tree, then clawed wildly at the air with both hands, uttered one loud, humanlike scream, and went whirling down into the black abyss of the ravine.

The ensign crept to land and helped Worth from the hollow. The boy had been badly, though not seriously, injured by the force of the gorilla's blow upon his cartridge-box, which had thus been jammed, as if with the stroke of a sledge-hammer, against his body. As with his rescuer's assistance he limped back toward the camp, now and then carefully adjusting his broken haversack so that the "cherries" in it might not drop out, he warmly thanked his companion for saving his life.

"Don't mention it," was the answer. "I am glad enough to have been able to do something for you toward making up for my mistake of suspecting that you meant to desert."

It was a joyful surprise to little Jack Winton when Worth brought the "cherries" to him. They were of great benefit to the fever-stricken lad, whose health began to improve the moment he had partaken of them.

The ensign had made light of his rescue of Worth, and had advised him not to mention so "trifling a

matter," as he termed it, to his comrades.

The boy, fearing that the knowledge of it would tend to unduly excite the invalid, said nothing about it until Jack was fully recovered from his illness, when he gave him an account of the whole affair. The little fellow made it known to his uncle, the lieutenant; and Dale's promotion, not long after, was, perhaps, partly due to this circumstance.

Worth, who had never dreamed of being favored for the slight service he had rendered his sick comrade, now attracted the notice of his commander. The latter, perceiving his unvarying good conduct, soon made him a corporal, from which position he eventually won his way to a higher rank.

SWANS CARRIED OVER NIAGARA FALLS.

All naturalists and many sportsmen will recall the great destruction of swans which took place in March, 1908, at Niagara Falls. A great flock of these large and beautiful birds was carried down the river and over the falls, and an authoritative account of the occurrence recently appeared in a paper by James Savage, of Buffalo, N. Y., printed in the bulletin of the Buffalo Society of Natural History, says *Forest and Stream*.

While the whistling swan occurs regularly along the Niagara River, it is always a rare migrant, and would scarcely ever be captured were it not for the fact that it often floats down the river to injury or death at the great cataract. Observers declare that scarcely a year passes without one or more swans going over the falls. About twenty made the fatal plunge in March, 1906, and five in the same month, 1907, but no such destruction of swans has been known as took place on March 15, 1908, when more than 100 were destroyed.

During the greater part of the day a severe rain-storm prevailed. About eleven o'clock in the morning, between showers, William Leblond, of Niagara Falls, Ontario, was engaged in removing from the ice bridge a temporary structure that had been used during the winter season as a souvenir and refreshment-stand, when he was startled by a loud cry. Turning around, his attention was first attracted to a swan struggling in the water at the upper end of the ice bridge; but, on looking toward the falls, he saw a great company of swans in distress coming toward the bridge. The scene was a sad one for any bird-lover to contemplate.

These splendid birds, helpless after their terrible

plunge over the cataract, were dashed against the ice bridge by the swift current, amid cakes of loose ice which were constantly coming down from the upper river. Some had been killed outright by the falls. Others, unable to fly because of injury to their wings, attempted to stem the rushing waters, but here their wonderful swimming powers were of no avail. They were soon imprisoned in the ice, where their pitiful cries were heartrending.

The game-laws of Ontario will permit the taking of geese and swan in the spring until April 30, and it was not long before men and boys, armed with guns and sticks, availed themselves of the privilege and became the chief factors in the closing scene of nature's great tragedy—the sacrifice of the swans.

As soon as he learned of the occurrence, Mr. Savage visited Niagara Falls, and from his investigation concluded that the number of swans taken March 15 was 102. On the morning of March 18 two more were taken at the ice bridge, and a third was picked up alive on the shore. It was secured by Mr. Savage and photographed. Placed in the zoological collection in Delaware Park, Buffalo, it recovered. Eleven more swans were taken later, and some others were seen which, though apparently carried over the falls, were still able to take wing and fly away.

But swans are not the only water-fowl that are in danger from Niagara. On March 18, 1908, Mr. Savage saw a handsome male canvasback come down against the ice bridge. It appeared to be unable to fly. On the same day he saw a golden-eye duck struggle out of the foaming water below the Horseshoe Falls and reach the shore. It made no attempt to escape when picked up, and seemed unable to walk or fly. Later, however, it recovered and did fly off.

Of the swans which went over the falls, many afterward appeared on the table. A number were preserved by the taxidermists of Niagara Falls and Toronto. A group of five appears in the museum of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences. Mr. Savage saw not less than fifty of these dead birds and looked them over carefully, thinking that perhaps there might be among them a trumpeter swan, but none was found. Mr. Savage believes that fully one-third of the 116 swans taken would have survived if given proper care, but the impulse to kill was stronger than the spirit to save, and not even a pair of these unfortunate birds was rescued from nature's doom and restored to nature's freedom.

PARA RUBBER AND ITS GATHERING.

Rubber is collected by the natives in Brazil, who gather the thick, creamlike sap which oozes from the hatchet-cut in the bark of the rubber-trees. It is received in tiny cups of clay or tin, several of which are emptied daily into pots and carried where the sap is coagulated and "cured." The flow of sap from each tapping lasts but a few hours, and the tree must be bled in fresh places daily.

The total yield from the most vigorous tree does not exceed three or four pints in a season, and a considerable percentage of this is lost by evaporation.

In the camps the Para rubber sap is coagulated over a fire of Uricuri palm-nuts, built under an earthen pot, something like a slender-necked jug without a bottom. A paddle is dipped into the thick sap, and then, holding it in thick smoke, it is deftly turned in the operator's hands until a thin layer of rubber is formed. An hour's work at this would produce a lump, the foundation of a biscuit weighing five or six pounds. When the biscuit has reached a weight of twenty-five pounds or more, it is slit open, the paddle removed, and the rubber hung up to dry. Rubber thus gathered and cured is the finest known.

From the forest the rubber is sent down the stream on crude boats, later being placed on the steamers which ply the Amazon. When Manaos, the second largest city in the Amazon country, is reached, the rubber is boxed, though this is often left until its arrival at Para, at the mouth of the Amazon River. Manaos is 1,200 miles from the sea, so that considerable time is consumed in bringing the rubber

to its shipping-point to foreign lands. At Para it is placed in the ocean liners destined for New York or some of the European countries.

QUEER CALIFORNIAN TRADERS.

The queerest "traders" in all vast California are the odd little animals known as "trade rats."

They never steal, but give miscellaneous articles in exchange for what they take.

A paste-pot left overnight in an assay office was found in the morning filled with the oddest collection of rubbish.

This was the work of trade rats. They had stolen the paste, and left in exchange a piece of stick, a length of rope, some odds and ends of wire, and an unbroken glass funnel.

A trade rat's nest, found in an unoccupied house, was composed of iron spikes laid in perfect symmetry, with the points outward. Interlaced with the spikes were two dozen forks and spoons and three large butcher-knives.

There were also a quantity of small carpenters' tools, and a watch, of which the outside casing, the glass, and the works were all distributed separately—to make a good show!

We are unable to state what this particular trade rat left in exchange for all this "loot."

BURROWING FISHES.

In Brazil are to be found fishes, eel-like in form, which burrow in the mud during seasons of drought. In wet weather this curious class of fish stores up in its system a reserve of fat, and then, when the dry season arrives and the rivers dry up, it constructs a deep tubular burrow, in which it doubles up, with head and tail together. The mouth of the burrow is closed with a most ingeniously constructed mud flap, through which are several small perforations, which permit the animal to breathe air directly, as it is also one of the few species gifted with both lungs and gills. While enclosed in its nest, the fish is frequently dug out by the natives, who highly prize its flesh. In the period of incubation it lives upon the reserve of fat accumulated during the rainy season. When the early rains soften the soil, the fish emerges from its burrow and resumes its aquatic existence.

TURN RIVER TO MINE ITS BED.

The tunnel to turn the Trinity River from its channel so that the river-bed may be mined for gold is now in 1,150 feet. The total length will be 1,400 feet. The tunnel cuts across a bend two miles above Lewiston. The Trinity River Mining Company has a crew of eight men at work. The tunnel is being dug 8×10 feet in size. When it is cut through the hill at that size it will be enlarged to 10×12 feet, making it big enough to carry the whole river at ordinary stages. The water will be used at the tunnel outlet to run low-pressure turbines, furnishing power for mining purposes. The river-bed is known to be rich in gold. Over a mile of the bed can be mined when the river is turned through the tunnel less than one-third of a mile in length.

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