

MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

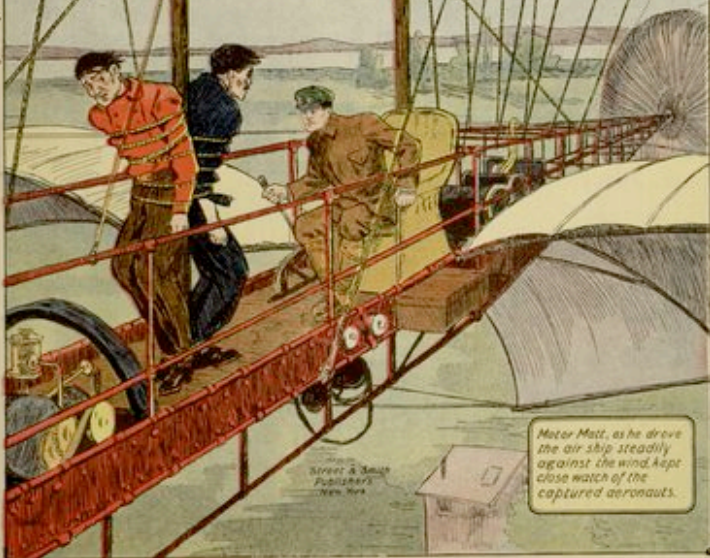
MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 9
APRIL 24, 1909

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR MATT'S
AIR SHIP

THE RIVAL
INVENTORS



*Motor Matt, as he drove
the air ship steadily
against the wind, kept
close watch of the
captured aeronauts.*

Published by
Street & Smith
Publishers
New York

MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

No. 9
APR. 24, 1909.

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR MATT'S AIR-SHIP

or

The Rival Inventors

By Stanley R Matthews

Street & Smith
Publishers — New York

© 1909 (unrenewed) and re-published in 2016.

MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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

No. 9. NEW YORK, April, 24, 1909. **Price Five Cents.**

Motor Matt's Air-Ship

OR,

THE RIVAL INVENTORS

CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER I. CAPTURING AN AIR-SHIP.</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>CHAPTER II. A QUEER FIND.</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>CHAPTER III. THE BALLOON HOUSE.</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>CHAPTER IV. THE KETTLE CONTINUES TO BOIL.</u>	<u>27</u>
<u>CHAPTER V. 2109 HOYNE STREET.</u>	<u>34</u>
<u>CHAPTER VI. CARL INVESTIGATES.</u>	<u>41</u>
<u>CHAPTER VII. JERROLD, BRADY'S RIVAL.</u>	<u>47</u>
<u>CHAPTER VIII. JEROLD'S GRATITUDE.</u>	<u>54</u>
<u>CHAPTER IX. ABOARD THE HAWK.</u>	<u>62</u>
<u>CHAPTER X. WILLOUGHBY'S SWAMP?</u>	<u>69</u>
<u>CHAPTER XI. A FOE IN THE AIR.</u>	<u>76</u>
<u>CHAPTER XII. BRADY CHANGES HIS PLANS.</u>	<u>83</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIII. INTO THE SWAMP.</u>	<u>90</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIV. A DESPERATE CHANCE.</u>	<u>97</u>
<u>CHAPTER XV. A DARING ESCAPE.</u>	<u>104</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVI. THE END OF THE MID-AIR TRAIL.</u>	<u>111</u>
<u>THE BIG CYPRESS.</u>	<u>121</u>

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.

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

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

Whipple, Needham, Grove, Harper and Pete, members of the Brady's air-ship gang of thieves.

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

CHAPTER I.

CAPTURING AN AIR-SHIP.

"Py shiminy grickets! Vat do you t'ink oof dot! See dere vonce, Matt. A palloon, or I vas a lopsder! Und vat a funny palloon it iss."

Motor Matt and his Dutch chum, Carl Pretzel, were sitting by a quiet country roadside, in the shade of some trees. Drawn up near them was a light touring-car.

The boys were several miles out of the city of Chicago, from which place they had started about the middle of the forenoon, and they had halted in that shady spot between Hammond and Hegewisch to eat the lunch they had brought with them. Carl had just finished the last piece of fried chicken when, happening to look skyward, he saw something that brought him to his feet with a jump. As he called to his chum, he pointed with the "drum-stick," at which he had been nibbling.

Matt's surprise was nearly as great as Carl's, and he likewise sprang up and gazed at the air-ship, which was coming toward them from the north and east, making smart headway against the wind.

"Great spark-plugs!" exclaimed Matt. "That's the first air-ship I ever saw."

"Vat's der tifference bedween a palloon und a air-ship?" asked Carl.

"Well, you can navigate an air-ship with the wind or against it, while a balloon is at the mercy of every current that blows. A round gas-bag and a basket is a balloon, Carl, but when you add a gasolene-motor and

a propeller you have an air-ship."

"Dot's blain enough. Der air-ship iss sky-hootin' dis vay to peat four oof a kindt. Say, it looks like a pig cigar. Vat a funny pitzness! Und you nefer seen vone pefore, Matt?"

"I never saw one that would travel successfully. This one, though, seems to be going in good shape."

"You haf seen palloons meppy?"

"More than I can count," said he. "I've been up in balloons a dozen times. When I was in the Berkshire Hills they used to have races, and start from Pittsfield. That's where I began making ascensions."

Carl dropped his wondering eyes to Matt for a moment.

"You vas der plamedest feller!" he exclaimed. "You haf tone more t'ings as any feller I ever see, und you nefer say nodding ondil it shlips oudt, like vat it toes now."

Motor Matt made no answer to this. Just then his attention was completely absorbed by the air-craft.

As near as he could judge, the cigar-shaped gas-bag was more than a hundred feet long. Beneath the bag was suspended a light framework. Midway of the framework was an open space, containing a chair in which sat the man who was handling the motor. Out behind the driver the framework tapered to a point, and at the end of this rearmost point was the whirling propeller. The glittering blades caught the sun in a continuous sparkling reflection, which made the air-ship appear to be trailed by a glow of fire.

Forward of the cockpit, or open space, was the motor. A rail ran around the cockpit.

There were two men in the car—the one in the

driver's seat and another in front of him, leaning over the rail. This second man seemed to be looking at the two boys, and to be waving his hand and giving directions to the driver.

Along the side of the gas-bag Matt was able to read the name "Hawk," printed in large letters.

The Hawk was about a hundred feet above the surface of the earth. A long rope depended from the car, and twenty or thirty feet of it dragged along the ground as the car moved.

"Vat's der rope for, Matt?" inquired Carl.

"If that was an ordinary balloon," replied Matt, "we'd call the rope a guide-rope. Usually the guide-rope helps to save gas and ballast. When you want a balloon to go up, you know, you throw out sand; when you want it to come down, you let out gas. That trailing rope acts as ballast. When the gas expands, and the ship wants to rise, part of the rope that trails is lifted from the ground and throws more weight on the car; and when the gas contracts, and the car shows a tendency to descend, more of the rope falls on the ground and takes just that much weight off the car."

"Dot's as clear as mud!"

"I can't understand why they've got a drag on the air-ship," muttered Matt. "I supposed the propeller and the steering-blades were enough to send such a craft wherever it was wanted to go."

As the Hawk came nearer, Matt's trained eyes and ears convinced him that the driver of the air-ship was a poor motorist. Evidently he did not understand the engine he was handling. The air-ship zigzagged erratically on its course, and the long bag ducked upward and downward in a most hair-raising manner. On top of that, Matt could hear one of the cylinders

misfiring.

The Hawk's drag-rope was trailing along the roadway. First it was on one side of the road, and then on the other, following the irregular swaying and plunging of the car.

"Come on, Carl!" called Matt, turning and running for the automobile. "If that rope strikes our car it may damage it. We've got to fend it off."

"Dose air-ship fellers vas mightdy careless!" answered Carl, hurrying after his chum. "Dot rope mightd knock town fences, und preak vinders, und do plendy more tamage."

"There isn't power enough at the other end of it to do much damage," Matt answered, posting himself at the rear of the automobile and watching the advancing rope with sharp eyes.

By that time the Hawk was almost over the boys' heads. The rope, of course, was dragging far out behind, and the trailing part of it bid fair to pass the car well on the right.

"Hello, there!" shouted the man at the rail of the Hawk, leaning far over and making a trumpet out of his hands.

He seemed to be excited, for some cause or other.

"Hello yourseluf, vonce!" called back the Dutch boy. "Keep a leedle off mit your rope—ve don'd vand it to make some drouples for us."

"The air-ship's out of control," the man shouted. "We can't stop the motor and the ship's running away! Grab the rope, hitch it to your automobile and tow us back to South Chicago. We'll give you a hundred dollars for your trouble. Be quick!"

"I like his nerf, I don't t'ink!" growled Carl. "He wants

to run off mit us und der pubble, und—"

"We can tow the air-ship, all right," cried Matt, "providing we can get the rope fast to the automobile. We'll have to take a half hitch with the trailing end of the rope around a tree, and bring the air-ship to a stop."

Matt started for the rope. As he bent down to lay hold of it, the car gave a lurch sideways and the rope was whisked out of his hands and was thrown directly against Carl's feet.

Carl grabbed it. At the same moment the air-ship took an upward leap, on account of the weight which Carl had taken off the car. This leap flung Carl into the air. He turned a frog-like somersault, hands and feet sprawled out, and came down with a thump, flat on his back.

"Whoosh!" he yelled, a good deal more startled than hurt, sitting up on the grass and shaking his fist at the bobbing craft overhead, "you dit dot on burpose! Vat's der madder mit you, anyway? Vat for—"

Carl forgot his fancied grievance watching Motor Matt. The latter, making another leap at the rope as it settled back again after overturning Carl, succeeded in laying hold of it.

He had the rope by the end, so that when he picked it up none of the weight was taken from the ship, and Carl's disastrous exploit was not repeated.

"Wrap it around a tree!" yelled the man at the air-ship's rail; "take a half-hitch around a tree!"

The man might just as well have saved his breath. That had been Motor Matt's plan, all along, and even as the aeronaut was shouting his instructions Matt was jumping for the nearest tree.

The young motorist had little time to make the rope fast. The whirling propeller was driving the Hawk onward against the wind at a fair rate of speed. Had there been no opposing wind, Matt would not have had time enough for the work ahead of him.

"Come on, Carl!" he shouted.

The Dutch boy stopped watching and made haste to lend a hand.

Matt was already at the trunk of the tree, but the rope had traveled onward so rapidly that he had less than a yard of it in his hands to work with.

Throwing himself on the opposite side of the tree, Matt laid back on the end of the rope. At that moment Carl reached his side, dropped near him and likewise took a grip on the free end of the drag.

"It's der fairst time," panted Carl, "dot I efer heluped make some captures mit an air-ship. Shinks! Look at dot, vonce!"

The driving propeller had forced the Hawk to the end of its leash. The boys, with only a half wrap of the rope around the trunk, felt the quick pull, but easily controlled it. The pull was steady, but, inch by inch, they worked more and more of the rope around the trunk until there was enough to make a knot.

"Dot's der dictet!" exulted Carl, scrambling erect. "Ve've got her tied like a pird mit vone foot. Now how ve going to ged her hitched ondo der car?"

"We'll have to find out what's the matter with the motor, up there," answered Matt, "and see if the power can't be shut off."

As he spoke, he got to his feet and walked down the road to a point directly under the air-ship.

CHAPTER II.

A QUEER "FIND."

Both passengers in the air-ship were now leaning over the rail of the suspended car.

"Hitch us on to your automobile," shouted the one who had been doing the driving, "and tow us back to South Chicago."

The offhand way in which the man spoke proved that he was lacking on the practicable side of his nature.

"That's a whole lot easier said than done," Matt called back. "It was only by a happenchance that we got your drag-rope tied to the tree. If you've got an anchor-rope up there, throw it down and we'll make it fast to the car before we cast off the other."

"That's the only long rope we've got," answered the man.

"Well," went on Matt, "you ought to be able to see what sort of a job we're up against. Your motor is pulling hard on the rope, and the moment we take the rope from the tree it will be jerked out of our hands. Don't you know how to run a gas-engine?"

"I know how to start a gas-engine," was the amazing response, "but I don't know how to stop it."

"Py shiminy grickets!" whooped Carl, "you vas a nice pair to shtart off mit a gasolene-air-ship. You vas in luck nod to make some landings on Chupiter, Mars or to hit a comic."

Matt likewise thought it was an odd situation, but believed it would be well to get the two helpless aeronauts down on terra firma before asking for an

explanation of their predicament.

"Do either of you know what the gasolene-tank is?" he asked.

The heads disappeared within the car for a moment, then one reappeared over the railing.

"Yes, we've found that, all right," said the man.

"And the carburettor—do you know where to look for that?"

"Is that the thing that makes the spark?"

Carl let off a howl of derision.

"Ach, du lieber, vat a ignorance! Der carpuretter makes der gas, dot makes der exblosions in der cylinter, dot moofs der biston dot makes der broPELLOR go 'roundt. I know dot meinseluf, efen dough I vasn't so pright like Modor Matt."

"There's a pipe leading from the gasolene-tank to the carburettor," continued Matt, "and there's a valve which should be worked by a lever. Close that valve and you'll shut off the supply of gasolene. When you do that, the motor will stop, and we can work down here to better advantage."

The head disappeared again and the car rocked and swayed as the two men scrambled around in it. Their ignorance, however, increased rather than lessened the difficulty. The misfiring of the one cylinder ceased and the motor took up its humming rhythm at an even faster speed. The fresh impetus of the propeller put a harder pull on the rope, and the strain bore sudden and unexpected results.

With a yell of dismay the driver of the machine leaned over the rail of the car. He had thrown off his hat and his coat was unbuttoned.

"We're making it worse!" he cried. "I wish to thunder you could come up here and—"

Just then the drag-rope, which could not have been properly fastened to the car, let go and dropped earthward in sinuous coils.

The man doubled farther over the rail in a futile and foolish effort to lay hold of it. Something fell from the pocket of his coat, fluttered through the air and landed in the top of a tree.

Matt noted the flight of the fallen object only incidentally, for the major part of his attention was taken up with the actions of the car.

The steering rudder had become elevated, and the air-ship started at a tremendous clip toward the clouds. The two aeronauts could be seen rushing around the car like mad. While the two boys watched, the rudder was brought down to a level; but something else had gone wrong, for the machine could not be maneuvered.

Swiftly the air-ship diminished to a mere speck in the southern sky, and then vanished altogether.

Carl turned a blank look at Matt and gave a long whistle.

"Dot proofs, Matt," said he, "dot id don'd vas goot pitzness to monkey mit t'ings you don'd know noddin aboutt. Oof dose fellers run into a shooding shdar dere vill be some fine smash oops."

"Why they ever ventured up in the air-ship, knowing so little about how to manage it, is a mystery."

Matt gave his head an ominous shake.

"Vat vill pecome oof dem?" queried Carl.

"If they can get the steering rudder to working, they

can drive the air-ship to the ground. Anyhow, the supply of gasolene will have to give out, in time, and then they may be able to come down."

"Dere iss somet'ing crooked aboutt dose fellers. Oddervise, dey wouldn't be vere dey are."

"Did you see something drop from the driver's pocket, Carl?"

"Nix. Iss dot vat habbened?"

"Yes. It landed in the top of that tree, over there."

"Meppy ve ged holt oof der t'ing und find oudt somet'ing aboutt who dose fellers vas, und for vy dey vent off for a fly mitoudt knowing how to manach der flyer?"

Matt proceeded to the foot of the tree in whose branches the fallen object had alighted. Lifting his gaze upward, he peered sharply into the foliage.

"I see it," he announced, pointing.

"Und me, too," said Carl. "It vas vite, und round, like a punch oof bapers rolled oop. How ve ged him down, hey? Meppy ve t'row some shticks ad him?"

Suiting his action to the word, Carl picked up clubs and stones and hurled them upward in an endeavor to dislodge the object. Finding that these efforts were unsuccessful, Matt threw off his coat and hat and climbed the tree.

The roll of papers was lodged far out in the fork of a branch. Standing on the branch, he jumped up and down on it and jarred the roll loose. Carl caught it deftly as it fell.

"Hoop-a-la!" he yelled; "here she vas, Matt. Come down a leedle vile ve look him ofer."

In a few moments Matt was again on the ground.

The roll, which Carl immediately handed to him, he found to contain a number of sheets wrapped compactly in a piece of white paper.

"I guess we'll open it and not stand on any ceremony," said Matt.

"Sure!" exclaimed Carl. "For vy nod?"

"It's not exactly the right thing to do. They're not our papers and we haven't any business tampering with documents that belong to some one else. Under the circumstances, though, and considering that the whole affair of the air-ship is a strange one, and that we may be able to help the two men in some way through the information the roll may contain, we'll have a look at it."

Going back to the place where they had eaten their lunch, the boys sat down and Matt opened the little bundle. A dozen blue prints of mechanical tracings were revealed. In the center of the roll was a sealed envelope, bearing no address or writing of any sort.

"Dere's nodding aboutt der plue prints to helup us know somet'ing," said Carl. "Oben der enfellup, Matt."

"No," returned Matt, "we can't do that. That would be going a little too far."

"Vell, ve got to do somet'ing oof ve findt outt who dose fellers vas."

"We'll wait, and give them a chance to claim their property."

"How dey vas going to glaim it, hey? Dey didn't dell us who dey vas, und ve ditn't dell dem our names."

"We know the air-ship came from South Chicago. I don't believe there are very many air-ships in that place, and if we inquire around a little we ought to be able to find out who owns the Hawk."

"Rightt you vas! Somevay, Matt, you always know vat to do ven eferypody else iss guessing. Shall ve ged indo der car und go pack to der pig city py vay oof Sout' Chicago?"

"That's our cue. If we can discover who owns the Hawk we'll leave these papers there for him."

Matt rolled up the envelope and the papers and stowed them safely away in his pocket.

"I know dere vas some niggers in der vood-pile, all rightt," averred Carl. "Two fellers vouldn't go off mit an air-ship dey don'd know how to run oof eferyt'ing vas like it ought to be."

"There may be a whole lot of sense in what you say, Carl," replied Matt, "and then, again, the explanation of the queer layout may be extremely simple. Don't get to imagining things, old chap, but coil up that rope and throw it into the car. We'll carry it back to South Chicago and leave it at the same place we leave this roll of blue prints."

While Carl was coiling up the rope, Matt gave his attention to the automobile. When Carl arrived and threw the rope into the tonneau, Matt was busy with the crank.

Presently they were in the car and headed back along the return course.

Hardly had they got under good headway, however, when a flurry of dust showed in the road ahead of them. As the wind blew the dust aside, a horse and buggy with two men broke into view.

In accordance with the rules of the road, Matt slowed down to make sure the horse did not take fright at the automobile. The horse was going at a run, and the men seemed to be excited.

The one who was driving drew rein as the rig came alongside the car.

"Say," shouted the men, "did you boys see an air-ship anywhere in this vicinity?"

"Yes," answered Matt. "It was going south."

"Then we're on the right track?"

"So far as we know; but the air-ship was unmanageable and—"

The men in the buggy did not wait to hear any more. The driver began plying his whip and the horse again leaped onward.

"Who were those two men?" yelled Matt, anxious for a little information.

"Thieves!" came the answer, as rig and passengers once more vanished in a cloud of dust.

CHAPTER III.

THE BALLOON HOUSE.

"Yah!" shouted Carl. "Vat I dell you, Matt? I knew dere vas somet'ing der madder! Dem two fellers vas t'ieves, und dey haf shtole der air-ship. Py shinks, dey haf got demselufs indo drouple, und it vas goot enough for dem. Vat you going to do?"

Matt had begun turning the machine in the road. When he had pointed it the other way, he started off at a swift pace on the trail of the two men in the buggy.

"We'll try and overhaul those two fellows," answered Matt, "and tell them what we know. The information we've picked up may be valuable to them."

"Dey don't vas endidled to it," averred Carl. "Vy ditn't dey shtop und ask us somet'ings? Anyvay, how can dey ketch a flying machine mit a horse und puggy? You mightd as vell dry to ketch a sky rocket mit a papy carriage."

"The Hawk will have to come down," said Matt, "and if those men are anywhere near it when it hits the earth they'll be able to recover the machine and catch the thieves."

"Oof der machine hits der eart' so hardt as vat I t'ink, it von't be vort' nodding, nor der t'ieves neider."

"There's a chance that the rascals will come down safely. If those men in the buggy had had their wits about them, they'd have hitched their rig to the fence and have jumped into the automobile. We could have hustled them over the ground four times as fast as they were going."

A few moments later the boys reached a place where

the road branched. The horse and buggy were not in sight along either road.

"Vich vay now?" queried Carl.

"It's all guesswork," answered Matt, "but it's always a pretty good plan to keep to the right," and, with that, he drove the car along the right-hand branch.

After five minutes of fast running, they had not overtaken the rig and it was still not to be seen anywhere ahead. The boys knew they had been traveling three or four times as fast as the two men were going, and that, if they were on the right track, the men should have been overtaken long before.

Disappointedly, Matt halted the car and turned it in the other direction.

"No use, Carl," said he. "Those men must have taken the left-hand fork instead of the right. They're too far away, now, for us to think of finding them. We'll hike for South Chicago."

"Dot's der pest t'ing dot ve can do," returned Carl. "Ve'll find der owner oof der Hawk und gif him der trag-rope und der bapers."

"We won't find him. He must have been one of those two men in the buggy. Probably we can find where he lives, though, and turn the rope and the papers over to some one who will give them to him."

"Meppy ve pedder take der shtuff to der bolice, hey? Oof der fellers vas t'ieves, dot enfellup mighdt gif der bolice a line on dem."

"There's something in that, too," muttered Matt. "We'll try to find the owner of the Hawk, though, before we call on the police."

An hour later, the boys came into South Chicago along a turnpike that passed the rolling mills. A man

on a motor-cycle was just coming out of a fenced enclosure near one of the mills, and Matt halted him for the purpose of making a few inquiries. From his looks, the man was of some consequence in the steel rail plant, and probably was well-informed as to affairs in South Chicago.

"Do you know of any one around here that has an air-ship?" asked Matt.

The question was something of a novelty, and the man laughed as he rested one foot on the ground and balanced his motor-cycle upright.

"I suppose air-ships will be thicker'n hops, one of these days," said he, "but just now they're about as seldom as hen's teeth. I understand there are a couple of men here who are working at air-ships—one of them came to the mills to see if he couldn't get some aluminum castings. He's got a balloon house about a quarter of a mile down the road, on the left. Drop in there and maybe you'll find the man—and the ship, too."

Matt thanked the man and followed him slowly as he sputtered off into town.

The balloon house, which was plainly visible from the road, was a long, high shed, and occupied a solitary position in the midst of a marshy field. The doors in one end of the shed, arranged in a series and reaching from ground to roof peak, were open.

Leaving the automobile at the roadside, the boys climbed a fence and made their way across the flat ground to the big house. On reaching the opened doors, one glance showed them that there was no air-ship in the shed.

On the earth floor, along one side of the great room, were two or three work benches and a litter of wood

and metal scraps. There was also, in the farther end of the chamber, a number of small tanks, presumably used for the manufacture of hydrogen gas. As the boys stood in the doorway, two brawny men showed themselves from behind these tanks. They wore greasy overclothes and their sleeves were rolled up.

"Get out of here!" yelled one of the men. "We don't allow any reporters around this shebang."

"We're not reporters," answered Matt, standing his ground. "Do you keep an air-ship here?"

"Well, that's what this big shed is for."

The two men came closer to the boys, one of them filling and lighting a cob pipe as he approached.

"Is the name of it the 'Hawk?'" went on Matt.

"Right again," said the man who had been doing the talking.

His eyes were like gimlets, and bored their way into Matt through narrow slits.

"Who's the owner of the Hawk?" asked Matt.

"I'm the owner, and my name's Hector Brady. If Jerrold has sent you here—"

"I don't know any one by the name of Jerrold. Who is he, and why should he send me here?"

The sharp little eyes continued to study Matt.

"Before I say anything more," answered Brady, "you'd better tell me a little about yourself."

"I don't know as that's necessary, or—"

"You'd know how necessary it is if you were inventing machines and trying to keep your appliances a secret. I'm not the only man in South Chicago that's perfecting an air-ship. A fellow named Jerrold has cut

into the same game, and he has some one nosing around here a good share of the time, trying to get wise to something. If Jerrold has sent you here—"

"He hasn't," broke in Matt. "I don't know Jerrold from Adam."

"What's your name?"

"King, Matt King."

Brady gave a jump.

"You don't mean to say you're the young Western phenomenon the Lestrangle people have brought to Chicago to run in that five-day automobile race that's turned on at the Coliseum to-morrow?"

"I'm one of their racers," answered Matt. "They have four more in the race besides me."

"Well, by thunder!" Brady stood off and regarded Matt as though he was a natural curiosity. "Why, you're no more than a kid! They had your picture in the paper, after that Kansas race, but you're a heap younger than I thought. I guess you've forgotten more about gasolene-motors than a whole lot of people ever knew."

"Oh, it isn't so bad as that. I came here to do you a good turn, Mr. Brady, and I can't see the sense of raking up my past history. Your air-ship has been stolen, hasn't it?"

"Stolen?" Brady gave another startled jump. "Not that anybody knows of. Why? What put that in your head?"

Matt was "stumped." He looked blankly at Carl and found that Carl had turned an equally blank look at him.

"Where is the Hawk now?" queried Matt.

"She went out on a trial spin with three men in the car. Expect her back any moment."

There was a shifty look in Brady's face, and he spoke in a fashion that aroused Matt's suspicions.

"Then the Hawk wasn't stolen and you didn't send two men with a horse and buggy to look for her?" queried Matt. "We saw the air-ship, but there were only a couple of men in the car and the machine was out of control. We tried to stop the craft by means of the drag-rope, but the rope broke loose and the Hawk got away. One of the men on board dropped a roll of papers out of his coat-pocket and we picked it up."

Brady looked at the other man. The glances they exchanged were significant, and both swore softly.

"Here's a purty kettle o' fish!" growled the fellow with the pipe. "What dy'ye s'pose has happened, Brady?"

Brady muttered something unintelligible, and whirled to Matt with a scowl.

"That roll of papers belongs to me," said he. "Just pass 'em over, King."

"I don't know whether I ought to give them to you, Mr. Brady, or to the police," answered Matt, making no move to take the roll from his pocket.

"Police!" exclaimed Brady. "What the blazes are you talking about? The fellow on that car was working for me, and the papers belong to me."

"Then you ought to be able to identify the roll," proceeded Matt, coolly. "What did it contain, Mr. Brady?"

"Just papers."

"Typewritten-papers?"

"Well, yes, some of them were typewritten."

"How were they tied up? In a piece of yellow paper?"

"That's it. Hand 'em over. It's queer they got lost out of the car in that way, but mighty lucky you picked 'em up."

"I guess you're thinking of the wrong roll," said Matt, coolly. "The one you've described isn't the one we found."

"Whether the description is right or wrong, the papers are mine, and I'll have 'em!"

Brady, in sudden temper, hurled himself at Matt. The other man, taking his cue from Brady, jumped for Carl and grabbed him by the arm.

"Hoop-e-la!" tuned up Carl. "Be jeerful, eferypody! Here's somet-ing vat ve ditn't oxbect!" And, with that, the Dutch boy began struggling and using his fists.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KETTLE CONTINUES TO BOIL.

Both Matt and Carl were well skilled in the art of self-defense. Matt, perhaps, was a shade more adept in the use of his fists. Neither of the lads, however, had been looking for violence, and the sudden attack of Brady and the other man had taken them by surprise.

The two men had plenty of muscle, and Brady was desperately determined to secure the roll of papers. The very fact that he was using force to accomplish his designs proved that he was not entitled to the papers. For that reason, Matt was determined to keep them away from him at all costs.

"Hold the Dutchman, Pete!" puffed Brady, hanging to the collar of Matt's leather coat and trying to get one hand into the inside pocket.

"Quiet, Dutchy," threatened Pete, as he and Carl swung back and forth across the big shed. "I'll strangle ye if ye ain't peaceable. Ye ain't got no sense, roughin' things up like—wow!"

At that instant, Carl landed a telling blow on the point of Pete's chin. A bushel of shooting-stars must have danced in front of Pete's eyes, for the jolt hurled him backward and caused him to claw the air in an attempt to keep his balance. He was not more than an instant getting the whip-hand of himself, and when he came out of his brief daze he was as mad as a hornet.

"I'll kill ye for that!" he yelled, and picked up a heavy hammer that lay on the floor.

Pete was between Carl and the open end of the shed; he was likewise between Carl and Matt and Brady. The

struggle had carried Pete and the Dutch boy down toward the middle of the balloon house.

Matt, out of the tails of his eyes, saw the dangerous position in which Pete's temper was placing Carl. The young motorist had been successfully fending off the attempt of Brady to get into his coat pocket; now, thinking Carl might need him, he undertook more aggressive measures.

An empty box, which had evidently been used as a seat, stood just within the big door. With a sudden lurch, Matt heaved himself against Brady and knocked him backward over the box.

As Brady felt himself falling, the instinct to save himself caused him to let go of Matt. The instant the young motorist found himself with the free use of his fists, he let drive at Brady and still further helped him over the box.

With a roar of anger, Brady doubled up on the floor. Matt whirled and darted for Pete, reaching that scoundrel just in time to catch the arm that was whirling the heavy hammer.

The hammer was wrenched away, and Matt cast it against the wall of the balloon house.

"Cut for it, Carl!" cried Matt. "Run for the road!"

"You bed my life!" wheezed Carl. "Dis blace don'd vas gedding fery comfordable."

Brady was picking himself up from the floor as the boys rushed past with Pete in hot pursuit.

"Get those papers!" yelled Brady.

"I'll git that Dutch kid if it costs me my life!" whooped Pete.

Brady rushed after Pete, and there was a chase

across the marshy meadow toward the road.

Carl was chunky of build and not nearly so good in a sprint as was Matt. Matt was in the lead on the rush from the balloon house, but, anticipating that Carl might have further trouble with Pete, he slackened his pace.

It was well that he did so. Pete was steadily gaining on Carl and would undoubtedly have overtaken him had Matt not executed a quick move with an empty salt barrel that lay in the line of flight.

At the right moment, Matt rolled the salt barrel in front of the enraged Pete. Pete's shins slammed against it, then he dropped on it and plowed up the mucky soil with the top of his head.

So far as the set-to was concerned, it was settled right there, Brady being so far in the rear that the boys were able to clear the fence and get into the automobile before he could come anywhere near them. As a matter of fact, Brady gave up the fight as soon as he had witnessed Pete's mishap with the barrel.

As the two chums glided away toward the more thickly settled part of South Chicago, they could look back and see Brady assisting the disgruntled Pete to an erect position. The barrel had been smashed, and Brady was scraping the mud off Pete with one of the staves.

"How you like dot, hey?" gloried Carl, standing up in the automobile and shaking his fist. "You vill know pedder der next time dan to make some foolishness mit Modor Matt und his bard. Yah, yah, yah!"

Carl wanted to be as tantalizing as he could, but the automobile was getting too far away. Sinking down in the seat beside Matt, the Dutch boy chuckled blithely.

"Dis has peen a pooty fine leedle trip, Matt," he

observed, "und has peen full oop mit oxcidement oof a nofel kindt, yah, so helup me. Dot's vat I like. I'll bed my life dose fellers t'ink dey vas fell on mit a brick house. Vat's der madder mit Prady, anyvays?"

"There's something queer about that air-ship affair," answered Matt, thoughtfully. "The two men who rode past us in that buggy said the pair in the car were thieves, but Brady didn't know anything about the Hawk's being stolen. Brady said, too, that there ought to have been three men in the car instead of two. The one who was missing may have been the driver. That would account for the poor work the other two were making with the engine."

"Ve can make some guesses," said Carl, shaking his head, "aber ve don'd know noddng. Dot roll oof bapers don'd pelong to Prady. Vell, oof dot's der gase, whose bapers vas dey?"

"That's a conundrum."

"Vill you dake dem py der bolice?"

"I've been thinking of that, and I believe I'll talk with Mr. Harkrider before I do anything more. He'll tell us just what to do, and I'm sure his advice will be good. You see, Carl, we're not entitled to the papers any more than Brady is, when you come to figure the thing down to a fine point. If the fellow who lost them out of the car turned up and claimed them, we'd have to give them to him."

Mr. Harkrider was superintendent for the Lestrangle Manufacturing Company, the Eastern representatives of the Jarrot Automobile Company of St. Louis. Following the Borden cup race, in Kansas, Matt had entered the services of the Jarrot people, and they had sent him to Chicago to take part in the five-day race at the Coliseum. While waiting for the race to start, Matt and Carl had had the use of any machine they wanted

in the Lestrangle garage, so they had put in their time riding around the city and out into the suburbs. That is how they happened to be on the road beyond South Chicago at the time the Hawk was running away with the two aeronauts.

Unusual experiences always seemed to gravitate toward Matt, and this air-ship affair was one of the most novel that had ever come his way. What it was leading up to, he did not know, but it was evident there was a whole lot more to the matter than appeared on the surface.

After a quick and uneventful run into Chicago, Matt drove the automobile into the Lestrangle garage and asked for Mr. Harkrider. To his disappointment, Mr. Harkrider had left for the day and would not return to the garage until the following morning.

"Well," said Matt, as he and Carl left the garage and proceeded toward their boarding house, "I guess the delay won't make much difference. I'll be busy with the race to-morrow, but you can take the papers, Carl, and do with them whatever Mr. Harkrider advises."

It was nearly supper time, and after the boys had had a wash, and a good meal, they went up to their room.

Close to eight o'clock, just as they were getting ready for bed, a rap fell on the door. Matt answered the summons and found a boy with a telegram.

The young motorist had been receiving a great many telegrams, since his Kansas victory, and supposed the message must be from some motor-car manufacturer who wanted to secure his services.

But he was destined to a surprise.

The telegram had been sent to the Lestrangle garage, and by the foreman there forwarded to the boarding place.

"Matt King, Care Lestrage Company, Chicago:

"Come immediately to twenty-one-naught-nine Hoyne Street, South Chicago. Important matter relative to runaway air-ship. I will pay your expenses.

"Hamilton Jerrold."

"More aboutt dot air-ship pitzness," muttered Carl. "Who vas dot Jerrold feller?"

"He must be the man that Brady told us about," said Matt. "Jerrold seems to be a rival of Brady's, in this air-ship matter, and the message looks like a good clue. It won't do any harm to follow it up, anyhow."

"Dere iss somet'ing about dot vat I don'd like," demurred Carl. "I got some hunches dere iss underhandt vork afoot."

"I know there's underhand work going on," said Matt, "but we've been rung in on the deal and have got to see it through. I'm curious to learn more about the affair."

"Meppy dot same curiosidy vill make you some drouples," suggested Carl. "You can't haf dot, ven der racing iss on do-morrow."

"The Jarrot people have several good men in the five-day race, so it won't make much difference if I'm not one of the drivers. Anyhow, I don't intend to be all day in South Chicago."

"It don'd look rightt for you to go pack dere alone," grumbled Carl. "I wouldn't be easy a minid."

"I am not going alone," laughed Matt. "You're going along, Carl."

The Dutch boy brightened at once and had no more

objections to offer.

"Ach, dot's tifferent! Ve vill shdart ad vonce. How ve go? On a pubble?"

"No, we'll take a railroad train. I don't want to go fooling with a car at this time of night."

"Is dere a train ve can ketch?"

"Lots of them. South Chicago is a suburb, and we can leave here every half hour. We ought to be back by midnight."

Without debating the matter further, the boys started forthwith.

CHAPTER V.

2109 HOYNE STREET.

Hoyme Street was easily found. A number of blast furnaces stood so near the house the two chums were looking for that the flames from their tall chimneys lighted up the surroundings so brilliantly that they were able to read the number over the door.

The house was a two-story frame structure. The gas and smoke from the neighboring iron mills had shriveled and scorched everything in that part of the town. Even by night, and under the glow of the furnaces, Hoyme Street had a dismal and dreary appearance.

No. 2109 was set well back from the sidewalk. Two branching wings, in front, made the house look like a deserted manufacturing plant. This impression was heightened by several broken windows.

There were no lights in the windows other than the reflected glare from the high chimneys.

"Whoosh!" muttered Carl, as he and Matt came close to the front of the house and read the number. "Dot's der blace, Matt, aber it don'd look pooty goot to me. Der feller vat lifs dere don'd got enough money, I bed you, to pay for sending dot delegram. Der hen oof drouple iss aboutt to hatch somet'ing."

"It may be," answered Matt, who likewise had a queer premonition of trouble, "but we've come this far and I'm going to see the thing through. If anything goes wrong in that house it will be on account of that roll of blue prints. I'll leave the roll with you, Carl, and you can stay outside. I won't be in the house more than fifteen minutes at most."

"Vell, you look a leedle oudt, Matt, dot's all. Oof somet'ing goes wrong mit you, led off a yell und I vill come gallywhooping."

"I don't think anything will go wrong with me if I haven't those papers in my pocket."

Carl shivered.

"Chee, but der leedle fires on der chimneys iss prighdt. Somet'ing aboutt dis blace gifs me a creepiness oof der skin. Be jeerful, be jeerful! Don'd shday in dere longer as den minids, Matt, oder I vas likely to t'row fits."

"I'll come out as soon as I can, Carl," answered Matt. "Don't fret. I'm able to take care of myself in a pinch."

"Oof you see der pinch fairst, yah, I bed you! Aber oof der pinch come ven you don'd vas looking, den vat?"

Matt laughed as he turned away, climbed a short flight of steps and drummed on the front door. He had to rap three or four times before his summons was answered.

A light showed itself through a fan-shaped transom over the door, and a hand could be heard fumbling with a rusty bolt. In a minute or so the door was drawn open and a girl stood revealed. She carried a lamp with a smoked chimney, and one of her slender hands protected the flame from the draft.

She was eighteen or nineteen years old, and, in spite of her coarse calico gown, she was extremely pretty. Her prettiness, however, was not what impressed Matt. The first thing he noticed was that the hand shielding the lamp was trembling. Lifting his eyes to the girl's face, he observed that she wore a frightened look.

"Does Mr. Jerrold live here?" Matt asked.

The girl stared at him; her lips moved, but no sound came through them. Matt repeated the question.

"Y-y-yes," faltered the girl.

"My name's King," answered Matt. "Mr. Jerrold sent me a telegram and asked me to come here to-night."

The girl leaned forward eagerly as though she would say something. Before she could speak, if she had intended to, a sound as of some one moving in the darkness behind her, caused her to draw back.

"Please come in," she said breathlessly.

Matt entered the hall. The girl closed the door behind him and then, with the lamp shaking in her hand, led him into a room off the hall.

The room was evidently a parlor, although its furniture was meager and shabby.

"Please sit down," said the girl, placing the lamp on a table. "Mr. B—Mr. Jerrold will be here in a few moments. Would you like to read while you're waiting?"

Matt started to decline, but the girl had already picked up a book from the table, opened it and was handing it to him.

He looked at her in astonishment. From her frightened face his eyes fell to the book that was quivering in her hand. There was an appeal in her manner which caused him to take the book.

"Thank you," said he.

The book was opened at the fly leaf. On the leaf was written the following:

"You are trapped. I would have warned you, if I

could, but he would have killed me. Now you are in the house, you can't get away. Do whatever you are told to do and all will be well. Lay the book back on the table, and don't let any one know what you have read here."

Matt was astounded. Trapped! And he had walked into the trap with his eyes wide open!

Who was the girl and why had she run the risk to warn him? And what good was her warning to do if he did not take advantage of it and make his escape?

"Now you are in the house, you can't get away."

He read those words again, and after he had read them he looked about the room curiously. There were two windows in the room and they were screened with thick curtains. Matt, however, could see no one. If the trap had been sprung where were the ones who had sprung it?

He realized that if he made an attempt to get out of the house now, those who had entrapped him would immediately conclude that the girl had given him a warning. Thus he would not only fail to get away, but would bring punishment upon the girl for her attempt to help him.

"Do whatever you are told to do and all will be well."

He read that over again and made up his mind that he would follow the advice. He laid the book back on the table, and, just at that moment, the girl re-entered the room.

"I have read that book," said he.

"Here's a newspaper," said she.

As she held the paper in front of him she pointed to an article, evidently intending that he should read it.

The girl was a mystery to Matt. From her manner

there was no doubt about her being anxious to do whatever she could to shield him.

Leaving the paper in his hands, she walked over to the table, opened the book and deftly extracted the fly leaf. Then she vanished from the room once more.

Matt drew his chair closer to the table so that he could get the full benefit of the dim light.

The first thing he noticed was that the paper was a week old. It was a Chicago daily. The column to which the girl had called his attention was headed, "Burglaries Continue! Astonishing Series of Robberies in South Chicago are Still Kept Up! Thieves Make Off With Loot and Leave Not a Clue Behind! Police Authorities Baffled! Latest Victims Hartz & Greer, Jewelers!"

Here followed an account dealing with a number of mysterious burglaries, but Matt, because of the danger in which he found himself, did not give the article the attention he would otherwise have done.

He did wonder, however, why it was that the girl had pointed out the article to him. While he was wondering, a step sounded in the hall and a form showed itself in the hall door.

The man was Brady!

Matt sprang up. Brady came into the room with an easy air and gave vent to a short laugh.

He was quite a different looking man when out of his greasy overclothes, but there was no doubting his identity. Matt's fist had left a bruise on the side of Brady's face, and the spot was covered with a square of court-plaster.

"Surprised?" queried Brady, dropping into a chair.

Before seating himself he was careful to draw the

chair in front of the hall door.

"Were you the one who sent me that telegram?" asked Matt.

"Guilty!" was the chuckling response. "You were expecting to meet Jerrold, eh? I was a little in doubt as to whether you'd bite at the bait, but took a chance. You're a mighty accommodating young fellow, King. Why, you came all the way out here, at this time of night, just to give Jerrold those papers! Didn't it strike you as being a little bit queer that Jerrold should have asked you to come and see him when it was his business to go and see you? And then, again, how did you think Jerrold got hold of your name and address? Oh, well, you've a lot to learn yet, my lad."

"I'm learning you pretty fast, Brady," said Matt. "You have fooled me, but you've gained nothing by it."

"I think I have," was the other's cool reply.

"You'll not get that bundle of papers."

"No? Haven't you got them with you?"

"I left them where they'd be safe."

"Then you suspected there was something a little off-color about that telegram?"

"Yes."

"Plucky boy! Nevertheless, you dropped into my trap, and that's the main thing. Those papers cost me a good deal of scheming, and if you were really thoughtful enough to leave them in a safe place, I'm mighty sorry."

"You can search me," said Matt, "if you're not willing to take my word."

"I'll search you quick enough."

"Then hurry up; I want to get away from here."

"Those papers are not the whole of it," went on Brady. "I want to make you a proposition, King. I need a motorist for the Hawk, and I think you'd about fill the bill. How would five hundred a month strike you?"

"Five thousand a month wouldn't strike me. In the first place, Mr. Brady, I don't like your methods and wouldn't work for you at any price; and, in the next place, I am already in the employ of the Lestrangle people."

"You'll work for me all right whether you like my methods or not." There was an ugly look in Brady's eyes and an ugly note in his voice. "You're just the sort of youngster I need, and now that I've got a grip on you I don't intend to let you get away."

"It takes two to make that sort of a bargain!"

Matt had edged around toward one of the windows with the intention of making a break through the door.

Brady got up.

"What are you waiting for, Pete?" he called.

Matt turned a quick gaze about him, wondering from which direction Pete was to appear. Then, quick as a lightning flash, the curtain behind him gave way and fell in smothering folds over his head and shoulders. Two brawny arms encircled him like the jaws of a vise.

He fought with all his strength, and tried to yell to Carl. But one effort was as ineffectual as the other.

Pete and Brady had him between them, and he was utterly powerless.

CHAPTER VI.

CARL INVESTIGATES.

Carl hated a "waiting" game. If there was anything going on, he liked to be right in the midst of it. On top of all this, he was vaguely suspicious of everything connected with that telegram.

When Matt went up and knocked on the door of the house, Carl was hoping the summons would not be answered; but when the door opened, and Matt disappeared inside the house, Carl's real worries began.

Pacing back and forth on the walk, the Dutch boy impatiently counted the seconds and checked off the minutes. No sound came from the building, and, after the light had vanished from the hall, not a ray was to be seen at any of the windows.

"I t'ink, py shiminy," muttered Carl to himself, "dot der fifdeen minids vas oop. Vell, I count off fife more schust for goot measure. After dot, oof Matt don'd come, I vill make some infestigations."

Owing to the lateness of the hour, and the obscure section of the town through which that part of Hoyne Street ran, no one passed the front of the house. Carl's solitary vigil was not relieved by the sight of any chance traveler.

Mentally he checked off another five minutes. During the counting he fancied he heard a noise in the house, but it was so muffled and indistinct he could not be sure. Matt did not show himself, and Carl started his investigations.

His first move was to run up the steps and pound on

the door. Although he made enough noise to wake the entire neighborhood, he couldn't bring anybody to the entrance. He tried the knob, but found the door fastened. Then he hurled his weight against the door in the hope of breaking it in. The door must have been in better repair than the rest of the house, for it withstood his attack with scarcely a shiver.

Carl's temper was always pretty close to the surface, and his failure to get into the house caused him to forget his forebodings on Matt's account and to get good and mad on his own.

"I vill find Matt oof I haf to preak down a vinder!" fumed Carl, jumping down from the steps and starting to run around the side of the house.

"Hello, there!" shouted a voice most unexpectedly from the sidewalk. "What're you up to, hey?"

Carl halted and looked around. In the glow of the furnace fires he saw a man standing in front of the house.

"Vat iss it your pitzness?" he snapped. "I'm going to ged indo dot blace oof I haf to preak holes in it!"

"I'll make it my business, quick enough!" called the other. "Come here, and be quick about it."

There was authority in the voice, and the command was accompanied by a backward sweep of the hand under a long coat. When the hand reappeared, there was a glimmering object clutched in the fingers. The light also glimmered on two rows of buttons on the speaker's coat.

"Ach, du lieber!" muttered Carl. "You vas an officer, hey?"

"Come here, quick!" ordered the man. "Tell me where that balloon came from. It seemed to rise from

around in this vicinity somewhere."

By that time, Carl had reached the walk. The officer pointed upward, and Carl's eyes, following the finger, saw an air-ship clearly outlined against the glow of the blazing chimneys. The cigar-shaped gas-bag and the pendent car stood out plainly. The front end of the air-ship was pointed upward, and it was vanishing swiftly into the night.

"Himmelblitzen!" gasped Carl. "Dot vas der Hawk! It must be der Hawk!"

"Hawk, eh?" returned the officer. "What do you know about it? The thing seemed to rise up in the air from around here."

"Iss dot so?" cried Carl, excitedly. "Vell, I ditn't see him, und dot's righdt. I vas drying so hardt as anyt'ing to ged indo der house."

"I heard you tryin' to break in the door. Don't you know it's against the law to do that?"

"I don'd care for der law! My bard vent indo dot house und left me to vait. Ven I vait plendy long enough for him und he don'd come, den I make some infestigations. No vone answers my knock on der door, und for vy iss dot?"

"You say a friend of yours is in the house?"

"Sure! Don'd I vas delling you?"

"When did he go in?"

"Haluf oof an hour ago—all oof dot."

The officer began questioning Carl and got from him pretty near the whole of the affair—Matt's name and occupation, the experience with the air-ship in the early part of the afternoon, nearly everything concerning the roll of papers, the receipt of the

telegram, and the night visit of the boys to South Chicago.

This policeman was an intelligent member of the force, and he at once concluded that here was a matter which called for official investigation.

"We'll get into the house and find out about your friend," said he. "Your yarn is a queer one, but has the true ring, and it's evident there's shady work of some kind going on."

"Shaty vork? Vell, you bed you! Vere iss Matt? Dot's vat I vand to know vorse as anyt'ing else. I ditn't vant him to go in dere, anyvay, aber ven he makes oop his mindt to do somet'ing, den it vas as goot as done und vat I say don'd cut some ice."

"If he's in there we'll get him," said the officer, decidedly.

As a preliminary to more drastic operations, he went up to the door and pounded on it with his night-stick. The summons, although several times repeated, was not answered. Thereupon the policeman and Carl, throwing their united weight upon the door, burst the bolt from its fastenings and tumbled into the hall.

The darkness of the interior was relieved only by the glare of the furnaces coming in at the transom. Silence reigned everywhere.

"I don'd like der looks oof t'ings," muttered Carl, forebodingly. "Dere don'd vas anypody ad home now, aber ven Matt come in dere vas plendy oof people here. Vat toes it mean, officer?"

"We'll try and find out what it means."

There was an electric dark lantern at the policeman's belt. Taking the lantern in his hand he switched on the light and sent a bright gleam into every nook and

corner of the hall.

No sign of Matt, nor of any of the occupants of the house, was revealed. There were only two or three rooms furnished on the lower floor, and none at all on the floor above. Every part of the house was searched, and the last place of all to pass under the policeman's and Carl's scrutiny was the shallow basement.

It was evident to both searchers that people had been in the house up to a very recent moment, for in one of the first-floor rooms there remained an odor of tobacco smoke, but there was no living person anywhere in evidence.

"Don'd dot peat ter tickens?" murmured Carl. "Matt come in der front door, und he ditn't come oudt oof it. Oof he vas daken away it must haf been py der pack oof der house. Meppy ve pedder haf a look ad der pack yardt?"

"Wait a minute," answered the officer.

Bending down he picked some object off the floor and examined it under the rays of the lantern. An exclamation of surprise and wonder fell from his lips.

"Vat it iss?" queried Carl.

"Here's the biggest kind of a find!" was the response. "Thunder! this must be my lucky night."

"How you figger dot?"

"This is a canvas bag."

"Yah, I see dot, aber it ditn't pelong by Matt und it don'd dell us nodding aboutt vere he vas."

"It's marked 'Hartz & Greer, Jewelers,'" went on the policeman, his voice shaking with excitement. "That's a firm doing business right here in South Chicago, and their store was burglarized mysteriously a little more

than a week ago. Some fifteen thousand dollars' worth of jewelry and diamonds were taken, and this," the officer shook the canvas bag, "*this* is the first clue any one has found to the robbers!"

"Shiminy Grismus!" muttered Carl. "Dis must haf been der blace vere der t'ieves hat deir hang-outd. Aber dot don'd got some interest for me. Vat I vant to know iss, vere iss Modor Matt? Dis pitzness iss gedding on my nerfs aboutd like dot odder time ven he tissaberead schust pefore der cup race. Shtick der pag in your bocket, officer, und led's haf some looks at der pack yardt."

The policeman, now wrapped heart and soul in the hunt, put the bag away in the breast of his coat.

The door leading into the back yard, as they had already discovered, was unlocked. The rear premises were enclosed by a high board fence, and the beacons that capped the neighboring chimneys lighted the enclosure sufficiently so that the lantern was not needed.

There was a very perceptible odor of gasoline in the back yard. The moment Carl sniffed it, he gave vent to a stifled yell and grabbed the policeman's arm with both hands.

"What's to pay now?" demanded the policeman.

"Der air-ship!" gasped Carl.

The officer threw a startled look at the sky.

"No, no, it ain'd oop dere," went on Carl. "It vas in dis pack yardt—yah, so helup me! Der gasoline used in der modor make der shmell. Don'd you ondershtand? Dey filled der tank here, und shpilled some oof der gasoline! Dose fellers haf run off from dis blace mit Matt, und dey have dook him along. Ach, himmelblitzen, vat a luck!"

CHAPTER VII.

JERROLD, BRADY'S RIVAL.

"Thunder!" cried the policeman, catching the Dutch boy's drift, "you're right, as sure as my name is Sam Harris! Your friend went off in that air-ship."

"He ditn't vent," protested Carl, in a temper, "he vas dook."

"Well, he was carried off in the thing, no matter whether he went of his own free will or was taken by force. If we each of us had a pair of wings we might follow the flyin' machine, but we ain't got 'em, so we'll have to do what we can on the ground."

"Dere iss a palloon house oudt on der roadt py der rolling mills," suggested Carl. "Meppy der Hawk vas dere. Dot's vere Prady keeps him ven he ain'd sky-hootin' t'roo der clouds. Meppy ve go und take a look at der palloon house, eh?"

"I know the place, and it won't do any harm to go there and look—but the fellow who ran off with your friend would be foolish to drop down there."

"Vell, foolish or nod, ve look efery blace vat ve can."

The balloon house was not a great way from that part of Hoyne Street, and Harris and Carl reached it after a cross-lots walk of five minutes.

They found the great doors open, but there was no air-ship in the place and no one on watch around it. Furthermore, an examination of the interior showed that an extensive clean-up had been made of the various tools which Matt and Carl had seen in the place during the afternoon. Everything of value had been removed.

Carl explained all this for the officer's benefit.

"It's a cinch the owner of the air-ship has changed his headquarters," commented Harris. "Brady, you say, the fellow's name is? Well, he's an inventor. One of his inventions is a patent 'jimmy'—which, of course, he wouldn't dare to patent. We've been watching his air-ship operations, here in South Chicago, but they seemed straight and legitimate enough."

"Do you know dot feller, Hamildon Jerrold?" asked Carl.

"Sure, I know him. He's all right, Jerrold is, although everybody looks on him as a harmless sort of crank."

"He don'd lif in dot blace vere der chimney fires iss?"

"No; he hangs out in a different part of town."

"Den, you see, it vas a put-oop chob all aroundt. It vas Prady, I bed you, vat sendt dot delegram, got Matt in a drap, und den flew off mit him in der Hawk. Meppy ve make a call on Jerrold?"

"I'll call up the department and report," said Harris, "so they can send another man on my beat while I'm fooling around on this case."

They hurried back into town and the officer unlocked one of the lamp-post boxes and reported to headquarters.

"All right," said he as he rejoined Carl. "Now we'll put in the rest of the night, if we have to. If Brady has had a hand in the robberies that have been going on here, this is liable to be good and profitable work for me."

Jerrold lived almost a mile from the place where Harris had done his telephoning. He had a large, rambling old house set far back in a dense mass of trees and shrubbery.

"He's a good deal of a hermit," explained Harris, as he and Carl proceeded along the walk to the front door. "A harmless old skate, but he's pretty broad between the eyes, at that."

It was after midnight, and, as might be supposed, the house was dark. A knock on the door brought a night-capped head from an upper window.

"Who's down there?" demanded a voice. "Is it you, Payne?"

"No, Mr. Jerrold," answered Harris, "it's a police officer. I've come to see you on important business."

"Have you found the Hawk?" cried Jerrold; "did you get back the plans those rascals stole from me?"

"Come down and let us in," said the officer. "We want to talk with you."

"Wait a minute."

The head was withdrawn and the window dropped. A little while later, the front door opened and Jerrold showed himself, carrying a candle. Carl recognized him as one of the two men who had been pursuing the Hawk in the buggy.

"Don'd you know me, Misdar Jerrold?" asked Carl.

The inventor stared at him and shook his head. Thereupon Carl explained where and when they had met. Jerrold's brows wrinkled in a frown.

Leading his callers into a small sitting room he asked them to sit down.

"What do you know about this fellow Brady, Jerrold?" asked Harris, by way of getting at the business in hand.

"I know he's a scoundrel!" declared Jerrold with emphasis. "He's a good mechanic, though, and in spite

of his shady record I took him on here to help me build my air-ship, the Eagle. After he had been with me for a while, I found he was stealing my ideas and building an air-ship of his own. Then I discharged him. Since then he's been attending to his own operations and I have been attending to mine. There are several important points about my machine, though, which Brady has been anxious to discover. He has tried to bribe Payne, the man who works for me, to give up a set of my blue prints, and he has tried to get them in other underhand ways. At about eleven o'clock, yesterday, three of Brady's men tried out-and-out robbery. That safe was forced"—Jerrold pointed to a small steel safe in one corner of the room—"and the roll of blue prints taken out. Payne and I were in the workshop at the time. We had just put the finishing touches to the Eagle and were inflating the bag for a trial. I heard a suspicious sound from the house and ran into this room. One of the thieves had just cleared an open window, another was getting out and the third was making ready to go. I had a wrench in my hand and I hurled it at the man in the room. He dropped without a groan. Payne came, just then, and we went after the other two. Brady's air-ship was waiting for them in the rear of the house, and the two robbers got into it and were away before we could catch them. Payne and I got a horse and buggy, as quick as we could, but by that time the air-ship was no more than a speck in the sky, off to the south. We followed, keeping the course the air-ship had taken. The men aboard didn't seem to know how to handle the craft very well, and I was hoping some accident would happen, that the craft would come down and that I would be able to get back my blue prints."

Jerrold halted for a little, his face flaming with anger and indignation.

"I haven't my patents, yet," he went on, in a few

moments, "and haven't even been able to establish a caveat, so, you see, if Brady should get ahead of me at the patent office he would snatch a fortune out of my hands. For," and here the inventor threw back his head with laudable pride, "I claim to have invented an airship that can be used for commercial purposes—the first machine of the kind that will successfully navigate the air against the strongest wind that blows. But if that scoundrel Brady takes from me the fruits of my toil, I shall be ruined!"

Jerrold's body slumped forward in his chair, and he crouched there in an attitude of extreme dejection.

"Where's the fellow you knocked down with the wrench?" asked Harris, his professional mind dealing with the more practicable aspects of the case.

"When Payne and I got back to the room, after pursuing the other two rascals to the Hawk," answered Jerrold, "the man had vanished. I suppose he recovered from the effects of the blow and took himself off."

"He vas der feller vat drove der modor in der Hawk," explained Carl, "und ven he vas pud down und oudt, der odder fellers made poor vork oof triving der machine. Aber dot ain'd vat I got on my mindt, schust now." Carl pulled the roll of blue prints from his pocket. "Dere, Misdere Jerrold," said he, "iss vat you lost. Take it mit der gombliments oof Modor Matt—my bard who iss gone I don'd know vere. Oof you hat shtopped a leedle in der puggy, und toldt us vat I haf heardt schust now, den, by shinks, you vould haf got der bapers pack a long dime ago."

A cry of delight broke from Jerrold's lips. For a moment he stared at the roll, then swooped down on it with both hands, caught it away from Carl and began removing the wrapper with trembling fingers.

"Here they are, here they are," he crooned joyfully, pawing the blue prints over and counting them, one by one; "they're all here, and—"

He stopped short and stared blankly at the envelope, which had fallen out of the blue-prints and dropped on the carpet.

"What's that?" asked Harris.

"I don't know," replied Jerrold; "it's nothing of mine and wasn't in the safe, to my recollection, at the time the blue prints were taken."

"Well, it may be yours, for all that. If it was in the roll, it stands to reason it must have been in the safe. Better open it. Probably you can tell from the contents whether it is yours or not."

Harris picked up the envelope and handed it to Jerrold. The latter took it from him with a puzzled expression on his face.

"I'm pretty sure this isn't mine," said he, turning the envelope over and over.

"Well, you've got to be absolutely sure," returned Harris.

Jerrold, thus urged, tore open the envelope, drew out the sheet and cast his eyes over it.

"No," he declared, "it doesn't belong to me. The thieves must have put it in with the blue prints."

"Let's have a look at it," said the officer.

Drawing closer to the candle, Harris proceeded to read the letter. While he read, his face brightened and a look of surprise and exultation rose in his eyes.

"Another clue, and a hot one!" he cried. He whirled on Carl. "With this as a guide," he went on, "it's dollars to doughnuts we can trace your friend and get him

away from that scoundrel, Brady!"

"Ach, vat a habbiness!" expanded Carl. "Readt it outt to me, Harris, und be kevick ad it."

CHAPTER VIII.

JERROLD'S GRATITUDE.

"The letter," explained Harris, "was written by Brady, and was evidently entrusted to the men in the Hawk for delivery to some one else. It's full of pointers, and a slicker bit of evidence it would be hard to find. And to think how it dropped into the hands of Motor Matt! The whole affair sounds like a 'pipe.'"

"Tell me about that!" cried Jerrold, his shock of joy having passed and left him leisure for other things. "Who is this Motor Matt, and how did he happen to get hold of the blue prints?"

"Ve vill go ofer dot lader, Misder Jerrold," said Carl, impatiently. "Schust now, dough, I vant to hear vat der ledder say. Readt him oudt, Harris! I vas so uneasy ofer it I don'd vas able to sit shdill."

"It's addressed to a man called Whipple," went on Harris, "and here's the way it runs:

"Grove, Needham and Harper, with one of my improved jimmies, are going to make another try for those blue prints of Jerrold's. If they get them—and I think they can, for our plans are well laid—they'll carry the papers to Willoughby's swamp in the Hawk and leave them with you. We will quit our operations in South Chicago, clean out the balloon house (I have already sold the building for old lumber) and make our future headquarters in the swamp. It will be safer there. After we improve the Hawk according to Jerrold's plans, we will have a ship in which we can go anywhere, and with which we can do

anything. All we need is a competent motorist—Harper's good enough for an amateur, but we need a professional. I'll try and bring one with me, when I come. Meanwhile, until I show up at the swamp, I want you to take good care of the blue prints.

"H. B."

A great light dawned on Carl during the reading of the letter—a light so strong that it left him blinking.

"Py chimineddy," he gurgled, "I know now vy dot Prady run off mit Matt! He say in der ledder dot he wants some brofessional to run dot air-ship. Vell, Matt knows more as anypody aboutt modors, und so Prady dook him off. Vat a high-hantet pitzness! Und Prady has captured a hornet oof he dit pud know it! He vill t'ink he has a handtful ven he dries to make Matt vork for him."

"From this," proceeded Harris, waving the letter, "it seems that Brady had already laid his plans to quit South Chicago. In the letter, over his own signature, he admits sending three of his men to steal the blue prints. By a chance, and owing to the course of events in keeping the driver of the air-ship from getting away with the other two thieves, this roll and the letter dropped into the hands of Motor Matt. Undoubtedly, Motor Matt has been taken to Willoughby's swamp."

"Und vere iss dot?" asked Carl.

"I know about the swamp," went on Harris, "for I helped some Chicago officers run down a couple of escaped prisoners there, once. It's a bad hole, but there is a sort of island in the middle of it that has been the resort of criminals for a good many years. To get through the water, and mud, and tangled bushes to the island is a hard job for any one who has to go on foot. Still, it can be done. Brady and his men, of course, can

use the Hawk, and all they have to do is to sail through the air and drop down where they want to go. The difficulties of the swamp won't bother them at all. The place is about four miles from Lake Station, Indiana."

"Vell," said Carl, eagerly, "led's go dere. Der kevicke vat ve go, der kevicke vat ve can helup Matt. He iss my bard, und he needs me now."

The Dutch boy got up and started for the door. Bounding from his chair, Jerrold overtook him and grabbed his arm.

"Wait!" he commanded, "I've only got a faint grasp of the situation, but from what I can figure out you're going to need me. First, though, I want to hear all about this Motor Matt. He has done a whole lot for Hamilton Jerrold, and Jerrold is a man who always tries to pay his debts. Tell me how the blue prints got into the hands of Motor Matt."

"Aber ve vas in a hurry!" cried Carl. "Villoughpy's svamp iss a goot vays off, und—"

"You'll save time in the end by losing a little here and now," averred Jerrold, drawing Carl to a chair and pushing him down into it. "Go on! Give me the whole of it, between you, and be quick."

There was a compelling note in the inventor's words and manner, that demanded attention. Carl yielded and struck into an explanation of the events of the preceding afternoon. Whenever his impatience led him to skip any of the details, Harris, who recognized the advantage of letting Jerrold know everything, picked up the ignored detail and made Carl go over it.

Jerrold's interest and excitement increased as he listened. When Carl described how he and Matt had fought with Brady and Pete at the balloon house and kept them from getting the blue prints, Jerrold clapped

his hands and shouted "Bravo!" And when Carl told of the bogus telegram that had brought the boys to South Chicago, Jerrold's face clouded with indignation and anger.

"Motor Matt," declared Jerrold, when Carl had finally finished, "has done a lot for me, and he's going to find that Hamilton Jerrold knows how to be grateful. I agree with Harris that there is hardly a doubt but that Brady has taken young King to Willoughby's swamp. Brady wants the young motorist for the Hawk, and intends to have him, whether or no. According to Harris, the swamp's a difficult place to get at for those not equipped with an air-ship. That's where I come in. This way, friends!"

With that, the inventor caught up his candle and led the way through the house and out at a back door.

By then it was nearly three o'clock, and the very darkest part of the night. A gust of wind blew out the candle, which had been about as effective as a glow-worm, and the three were left at the foot of the rear steps staring at a fluttering expanse of canvas.

The canvas formed a sort of V-shaped tent, long and high and secured with many guy-ropes. Because of the darkness it was difficult to get any kind of an idea as to the size of the tent, but that was a minor point.

"I'll have to get a lantern," said Jerrold. "Wait a minute."

"I've got a dark lantern, Jerrold," interposed Harris, "and I guess that will do."

"Fine!" exclaimed Jerrold, as Harris switched on the current and swung the beam of light around him. "This way," the inventor added, and ducked through the end of the tent.

In the gloomy interior a weird sight was disclosed—

something so new and novel as to send an uncanny sensation along the nerves of Carl and Harris.

Here was another cigar-shaped gas-bag, and another suspended car. The car itself was stationary, but the bag, because of the drafts that surged through the tent, was bobbing and swaying like some monster, anxious to be unleashed.

The flickering gleam from the dark lantern could only disclose a part of the air-ship at a time.

"Ach," muttered Carl, "dot makes my nerfs shake und shake like anyt'ing. Sooch a horrible t'ing vat it iss!"

"That's because you're not familiar with such a craft," said Jerrold. "Payne and I have worked over it for years, and only yesterday saw the completion of our labors. It was six o'clock last night before the bag was fully inflated. We had to use common illuminating-gas, too, and the not more buoyant hydrogen. I have called the air-ship the 'Eagle,' and if you sweep that light along the side of the bag you will see the name."

This was a bit of byplay that took time and was utterly needless, but a great pride throbbed in the inventor's words, and even the smallest detail of the air-ship was fraught with the utmost importance to him.

"Everything about the craft," Jerrold went on, "is of the very best. The motor is the lightest, strongest and most powerful ever constructed. The car will carry half a dozen, easily. Sand-bags are suspended from each end of the gas-bag. When I pull in the sand-bag at the front end, the equilibrium is displaced, the bag points upward, and the propeller forces the air-ship to rise. So, when I wish to descend, I pull in the sand-bag at the rear point of the bag. When both bags are hanging loose, the Eagle swims in the air on an even keel. Now,

the steering rudder, which also helps in maneuvering the ship, is a little idea of my own and—"

"Ach, hang der shdeering rutter!" broke in Carl, impatiently. "Harris und I haf got to go afder Matt und ve can't vait aroundt here any longer. Ve haf got to go py dot svamp, und—"

"Exactly!" broke in the inventor. "The Eagle, fully inflated and with a tank full of gasoline, is waiting for a trial spin in the morning. I have the honor to propose that we use the craft now, proceed to Willoughby's swamp and rescue Motor Matt. That will save time, and a whole lot of hardships in forcing your way through mud and water and tangled brush in order to reach the island."

Harris had already gathered the inventor's idea, even before he began putting it into words; Carl, however, had not anticipated the suggestion, and he was dazed by it.

"You mean to dake us py der svamp in der Eagle?" he asked, in some trepidation.

"Yes."

"Ach, himmel! I nefer rode mit a air-ship. Vill I be seasick py it?"

"I don't think so. You see, I have never navigated an air-ship myself, but I'll bank on the Eagle doing its work. I can run the engine."

"Vat oof it shouldt durn oopside town mit us vile ve vas a mile in der air?"

"I'll guarantee it won't do that."

"Vell, vedder or nod," said Carl, "I am going afder my bard. Oof der tangers vas greadt, I take dem; und oof dey vasn't so greadt, den I take dem, too. Matt vouldt do more as dot for me, yah, I bed you!"

Harris was also afflicted with doubts.

"The ground has always been good enough for me, Jerrold," said he, "and whenever I get my feet off it and go up any distance I have a bad case of vertigo. If I should get dizzy and fall off the car—"

"You won't," interrupted the inventor; "people never get dizzy in balloons."

"You're sure it won't tip over and spill us out?"

"Positive."

"You don't know much about it yourself, you know, having never been up in it."

"That scoundrel, Brady, has used the Hawk with fair success, and the Hawk is modeled on the same lines as the Eagle, only the Eagle has improvements which Brady was not able to get hold of and put on his own machine. Shall we go to the rescue of Motor Matt? Come, my friends, time is flying."

"Und ve ought to be flying, too," said Carl, now eager to make the ascension.

"I'll take a chance," observed Harris.

"Good!" applauded Jerrold.

The next moment he had vanished in the darkness and could be heard pulling at some ropes. In less than a minute the entire top of the tent fell away, revealing the stars.

"Get into the car," said Jerrold, "there, just forward of the driver's seat."

With the aid of his lantern Harris picked out the place where he and Carl were to stow themselves, and they climbed into the car as directed.

Immediately after that, Jerrold got over the rail and

took his seat at the levers. It was impossible to see just what he was doing, but the clank of a lever came from his vicinity and slowly the front of the gas-bag began to point upward.

"Now we're ready," called the inventor.

The popping of a motor began and gradually gathered into a swift murmur.

"And now we're off," added Jerrold. "Stay right where you are and don't change your positions unless I tell you."

The whirl of the propeller started, and the house and shrubbery began slipping away from under those in the car.

"Ach, du lieber!" gasped Carl. "Der eart' vas falling away from us. I vill say my brayers forvarts, packvarts und sidevays, oof it vill helup any."

"I've got a bad case of rattles, myself," admitted Harris. "But it's for your pard, my boy."

"You bed my life!" returned Carl, "aber I never dit anyt'ing pefore for dot bard oof mine dot dook so mooch nerf as vat dis toes. I vill shud my eyes, und you dell me, please, ven ve reach der svamp!"

CHAPTER IX.

ABOARD THE HAWK.

Taken at a disadvantage and with two brawny ruffians ranged against him, Motor Matt was unable to make any defense. As he lay on the floor, head and shoulders still swathed in the window-curtain, one of his antagonists held him while the other bound his hands and feet with a rope. He was then lifted and carried for some distance. Naturally he could have no idea where or in what direction he was being carried.

A few steps were descended and he heard a door softly closed. The cool air of outdoors laved his hands—he was sensible of that, although the hot stuffiness of the curtain prevented the night air from reaching his face.

He was lifted over something, he did not know what, and laid down in cramped quarters. A conversation was going on around him, but in tones so low he was not able to distinguish the words. He fancied that he heard the girl's voice, although his head was so muffled he could not be sure.

Presently the unmistakable explosions of a motor came to him.

"Brady is taking me away somewhere in an automobile," he thought, and wondered where Carl was that he could not see the machine.

A moment later he felt a gentle, swaying motion as though he was being gently swung in a hammock.

Several minutes passed, and then Brady's voice spoke, in a tone so loud that Matt was able to hear what he said.

"Take the curtain off his head, Pete, and untie him. It's time he took hold here. Keep your revolver handy for use in case he gets obstreperous. He's full of ginger and will have to be tamed."

Matt felt some one working at his cords. They were stripped away quickly, and the curtain whisked from his head. He jumped up, the floor under him swinging with the quick move and almost upsetting him.

"Careful, there!" warned Brady. "Where do you think you are, anyhow?"

Matt was dumfounded. Overhead was the long gas-bag of the Hawk. In front of him, at the mechanism of the machine, sat a dusky form which he recognized as belonging to Brady. Brady's hands were on the levers.

With a shout of anger Matt jumped toward Brady, the car lurching and swaying with his frantic movements.

"Stand where ye are!" came the husky, threatening voice of Pete, from behind. "Do as I tell ye, King, or I'll shoot."

Matt turned around. Standing with his back braced against an upright timber that held the car to the oval ring under the gas-bag was Brady's burly assistant. He held a dark object in his hand and Matt knew it must be a revolver.

"Where are you taking me?" demanded Matt.

"Turn around this way," said Brady. "Now that you know what'll happen to you if you get too hostile, maybe we can have a bit of a talk together."

"Don't shoot!" implored a feminine voice; "I don't want to have any shooting, dad!"

The voice came from a bundle on the floor, close to where Pete was standing. By looking sharply, Matt was

able to see a white, ghost-like face hovering against the rail.

The girl had been brought along with them! Matt was glad, for her sake, that he had not got into a rough-and-tumble with Brady.

Without seeming to pay the girl more than passing attention, the young motorist turned toward the man in the chair.

"Well?" said he, crisply. "What have you got to say about this, Brady? I guess you could be arrested for what you've done, all right."

Brady laughed.

"How's a policeman coming up here to get at me?" he asked. "An air-ship is a great thing for a fellow who wants to turn a few tricks in spite of the law."

"That's your game, is it? Well, what have you to gain by running off with me? I told you I didn't have that roll of papers."

"I'm out the blue prints, but I'm in a good motorist. I'll not be able to improve the Hawk according to Jerrold's plans, but I guess I've got hold of a driver that's good enough to make up for most of the improvements."

"If you think I'm going to drive this car for you," said Matt, "you're away off in your calculations."

"That's what you think now, but you'll change your tune before long," said Brady, easily. "I know this air-ship pretty well, and I installed the motor. All it needed for that was a good machinist and a good inventor. I'm not a good driver, though, and I've picked you for the job. The offer I made back at the house goes. Five hundred a month. Pretty good pay, eh, for a boy of your age?"

"I don't care how much you offer, Brady. As I have already told you, no amount of money could hire me to work for you. You're a scoundrel, clear through. What you've done to-night proves it.

"Bear a little to the left, Brady!" called Pete, who was evidently on the lookout. "You're getting too far to the north."

Brady moved one of the levers, and the ease and certainty with which the air-ship swung to the new direction brought Matt's admiration uppermost. Never had he been able to resist the lure of untried machinery, and here was an experience so novel that it carried him out of his troubled environment, so to speak. For a moment, suspended in that starlit void and swimming noiselessly through the night, he yielded himself to the fascinations of the new experience.

"How powerful a motor have you?" he asked.

"Ten horse-power," answered Brady, "and it weighs forty pounds."

"How do you steer the machine up and down, and right and left?"

"That's where I've got the bulge on Jerrold. One rudder with two cross-section planes does all of that. This lever here—I don't know whether you can see it or not from where you stand—gives the up and down 'dip' to the rudder that makes the machine rise or fall. By moving the lever right or left, the air-ship turns in the corresponding direction."

"Take me back," ordered Matt, "and land me at the place where you took me from."

"You've got a picture of me doing that!" scoffed Brady. "Now that I've caught you, I'm going to keep you, see? You're just the sort of a lad I need in my

business. Grove and Needham, when they finally got back to South Chicago with the air-ship, told me all about you. If I'd known what I do now at the time you called at the balloon house, I'd have taken a different tack."

A muttered imprecation came from Pete. He was thinking of his fall over the barrel.

"Those fellows got back without breaking their necks, did they?" queried Matt.

"Just about. When they told me what had happened, I sent off that telegram."

"We might just as well look this thing square in the face, Brady," said Matt. "You've acted the part of a scoundrel in your dealings with me, and you haven't gained anything by it. If you don't turn back and put me down in South Chicago, I'll make more trouble for you than you can well take care of."

"I'll take my chances on that, my bantam. I like your spirit, and we're going to get along fine. Just cast in your lot with mine, and I'll make a rich man out of you. In the Hawk we can travel all over this continent, from Hudson Bay to Patagonia. Where men never went before, we can go. No mountain range is so high that we can't cross it, and no desert is so barren that we can't wing our way comfortably over it."

Matt stared at the dark figure in the chair. If any honest man had talked to him in that way, the young motorist would have been tempted to become an aeronaut, for he could see plainly the possibilities of a serviceable air-ship; but as for Brady, he was a criminal, and that cut him off from any consideration on Matt's part.

The young motorist sank down on his knees and looked over the side of the car. They were perhaps a

thousand feet in the air. Houses, villages, dark expanses of timber and lighter stretches of meadow swept past them, moving out from under the car like a dark panorama.

Driving an automobile at speed was like flying, but here was flying itself. The new sensation gripped Matt and thrilled him in every nerve.

"How are we heading, Pete?" called Brady.

Pete was leaning over the opposite side of the car, looking forward.

"I'm jest tryin' to git my bearin's, Brady," he answered. "It's so pesky dark it's hard to make out jest where we are."

Matt stole a look at Pete's back. The hand gripping the revolver lay on the rail. By one quick move Matt could have snatched the weapon. As the idea swept through his mind he cautiously changed his position.

Just then a soft hand rested on his and he saw the girl's face pressed close.

"Don't do anything desperate!" she whispered, imploringly. "Do whatever dad says—it will be better for you. When we get to where we're going, I'll help you escape, and—"

"I think, Brady," called Pete, "that ye're still too fur to the north. Better shift a leetle more to the left. I won't be sartin, though, that I'm right."

"I ought to be there on the lookout," answered Brady. "Come here, King, and take the engine."

The girl's words had influenced Matt powerfully. On top of that was the alluring prospect of handling a new machine.

"I'll take the engine for a while, Brady," said he,

getting up, "but you're to remember I'll not hire out to you."

"All I ask is for you to handle the motor," replied Brady. "You'll come to your oats quick enough, I'll gamble on that. You watch King, Pete," he added to the other man, "and make sure he sends the Hawk where I tell him to. If he tries to send her anywhere else, you know what to do."

"That's no josh," answered Pete.

Brady left the chair and went forward. Matt dropped into the vacant seat and began studying the various levers with his groping hands.

CHAPTER X.

WILLOUGHBY'S SWAMP.

Pete kept his weapon prominently displayed, and through the gloom Matt could see the ruffian's arm partly lifted as though ready on the instant to bring the firearm into use. This alert attitude on Pete's part, however, was more for show than for anything else—at least, Matt so regarded it. Brady was not anxious to go to desperate extremes with Matt, especially since he wanted him as driver for the air-ship.

Brady, taking up a position where he could peer ahead, was scanning the dim landscape sharply.

"Swing her to the left!" he called.

Matt instantly applied the steering lever. Instead of swinging to the left, however, the Hawk made a half-turn to the right.

Up came the revolver. With a sharp cry, the girl reached up and caught Pete's arm.

"To the *left*, I said!" roared Brady.

"You'll have to give me the chance to learn the machine," answered Matt, coolly, as he continued working the lever and brought the Hawk around to the proper course. "These levers are new to me. When we steer an auto we do it with a wheel."

"I thought ye knowed all about motors," jeered Pete.

"I know something about motors," replied Matt, "but not the first thing about air-ships."

As near as Matt could judge, they were proceeding at a speed of something like thirty miles an hour. He

speeded up the engine a little and was surprised at the smoothness with which it worked. The propeller hummed in a low, husky drone that was quite different from the song of the cylinders.

He moved the steering lever backward a couple of notches. Immediately the rudder was tilted and the Hawk began to climb upward.

"Stop that!" yelled Brady. "We're high enough. What are you trying to do?"

"Learning the machine," answered Matt, and threw the lever forward.

The front end of the gas-bag tipped downward, and the air-ship slid toward the earth with a suddenness that almost threw Brady over the rail.

"That'll do you!" he whooped. "Get her on a level again, and be quick about it. You can handle the machine, all right, and I don't want you to do anything but what you're told."

"All right," said Matt quietly.

For five minutes longer they continued to swim onward through the air. A long string of lights shot across the gloomy landscape below them, and a whistle came upward from the earth with startling distinctness.

"There goes a train, whistlin' fer Lake Station," remarked Pete.

"We'll be over the town in a minute," said Brady, "and then it won't be long until we get to the swamp."

"What swamp?" asked Matt.

"Never ye mind," was Pete's surly rejoinder. "Ye're here to obey orders an' not ask any fool questions."

"I don't think it very foolish for a fellow to ask where

he's being taken."

"Mebby not, but ye ain't findin' anythin' out, see?"

Matt had been doing a good deal of guessing about Carl. What would his chum do? What was he doing then? He felt pretty sure that Carl would get into the house and go through it from cellar to roof.

But Matt knew that Carl had a good sensible head in cases of emergency. Now and again the Dutch boy's temper was apt to make trouble with his reasoning, but in the long run Carl could always be counted on to do the right thing.

So Matt was not worrying very much about his chum. Carl would take good care of the blue prints and ultimately they would find their rightful owner.

"Ha!" exclaimed Brady, suddenly, "there's the signal! I'll go back and take charge of the motor while we make the landing, Pete, and you take the lookout."

Matt gave place to Brady and then stood at the rail, watching developments curiously.

Below the air-ship was a great splotch of black shadow, stretching away on all sides as far as the eye could reach. Evidently this was the swamp. The Hawk was sailing across the swamp toward a big fire that glowed in the distance.

With Brady steering and Pete directing, the Hawk approached closer and closer to the fire.

"Drop 'er, Brady!" Pete presently called; "we're close on the island."

The nose of the air-ship ducked downward and, for perhaps twenty seconds, she raced earthward; then Brady diminished the speed of their descent by slow degrees.

Matt, braced on the sloping floor of the car, watched the fire apparently come up toward them. A little later he was able to make out three human figures against the firelit background below, and a bare little plateau took vague form under his eyes.

He watched the landing keenly, and noted how Brady suddenly shifted the steering rudder so as to bring the Hawk on an even keel, the lower supports of the car just grazing the ground.

The three figures by the fire ran close.

"How's everything, Brady?" cried a voice.

"Finer than silk," called back Brady. "Stand by to catch the ropes, you fellows."

The murmur of the motor ceased, the revolving propeller came to a stop, and Pete flung out two ropes, one on each side of the car.

The ropes were caught by the men on the ground, a bight of each was thrown around a stout stake driven into the earth at an angle, and the air-ship was drawn down and safely moored.

Matt was now able to understand why Brady had taken his place as driver for the landing. Not only was the method of making a landing new to Matt, but there was also danger, unless one was familiar with the place, of scraping the trees that covered the swamp and hemmed in the cleared space called the "island."

Matt started to spring over the rail of the car.

"Stop, King!" cried Brady. "You don't want to make a bolt for the timber and get mired in the swamp, do you? Just remember you're still under orders. Take him to the roost, Needham, you and Whipple. Better tie him up until he gets used to the place and to our society. He's a bit strange, here, and none too willing

to stay."

"Did you bring the loot, Brady?" called one of the men.

"Sure! This is moving-day with us and you didn't think I was going to leave all that stuff on Hoyne Street, did you? Get out of the car, King," he went on, to Matt. "Whipple and Needham will take care of you."

Two of the three men had stepped to the side of the car. In the light of the fire, which was blazing at a safe distance from the air-ship, Matt discovered that Needham and Grove had been the two aeronauts who had had such hard luck with the Hawk during the preceding day.

Needham, who, with Whipple, was facing Matt and waiting for him to get over the air-ship's rail, gave a husky laugh.

"We got out of that scrape, all right," said he, "even if we did lose our drag-rope."

"And you got me into another scrape," said Matt. "You fellows will pay for this!"

"Chirp low, young feller," warned Whipple, catching him by the arm as he gained the ground; "your cue is to make friends with us an' not bluster about what ye're goin' ter do. There's five husky men here, an' we're all surrounded by a swamp that would mire ye up ter the eyes if ye tried ter git through it. Oh, I reckon ye won't git away ter make any of us pay fer anythin'! This way, an' step lively."

With Needham and Whipple on each side of him and hanging to an arm, Matt was led across the open space, past the fire, and to the door of a small, roughly built shanty. A little way off there was another building, fully as small but apparently somewhat better built.

"This here's the roost," announced Whipple, "an' it's where ye're ter pass the rest o' the night. Come in, an' come peaceable."

It was part of Matt's plan, hastily formed on the air-ship just after the girl had spoken to him, to accept passively whatever came his way—at least for a time. The girl had said that she would help him escape, and there was that about her which had awakened his confidence. Not only that, but there was also something in the girl's face that had aroused his sympathy. She had a history, he was sure, and one that was far from pleasant.

There were five cots in the "roost," and Matt was told to lie down on one of them.

"Harper used to sleep there," remarked Needham, as Matt stretched himself out on the hard bed, "and the deuce only knows where poor old Harper is now. You're taking his place, King, and so it's only right you should have his cot."

It was on Matt's tongue to say that Needham had another guess coming, but he held his peace. He would not show too much of the hostile side of his feelings until he had had a chance to talk with the girl.

"What's the use of tying me," expostulated Matt, as ropes were being put in place around his wrists and ankles, "if it's impossible for me to get away?"

"Orders," answered Whipple, curtly.

After Matt was made secure, Whipple and Needham went out of the hut. The young motorist had had a trying day, and even his exciting situation was powerless to keep the sleep from his eyes. He dozed off, while his thoughts were trying to straighten out the queer tangle in which events had bound him. He roused up for a moment when Pete, Whipple,

Needham and Grove came into the hut and dropped down on their cots, but almost immediately he went to sleep again.

It seemed as though he had hardly closed his eyes the second time before he was awakened by a light hand pressed upon his forehead. The other cots in the room were empty, it was morning, and the girl was standing beside him.

"I have brought your breakfast," said she, in a low voice. "We can talk a little, but will have to be quick. Dad, or some of the men, may come in here at any second! There's a lot that you've got to know, and—"

She was interrupted by the sharp explosion of a firearm outside. Stifling a cry, she whirled from the cot and ran to the open door.

CHAPTER XI.

A FOE IN THE AIR.

"What is it?" asked Matt, struggling up on the cot.

No revolver had caused the report he had heard. From the sound he knew that a rifle had been fired.

A babel of excited voices now came to him from without, accompanied by sounds of running feet diminishing rapidly in the distance. Then came another report, and another, both from a more distant point than the first.

The girl stepped through the doorway and was looking upward.

"Take off these ropes!" called Matt. "Let me get out there and see what is going on!"

The girl turned and reentered the hut. Her face wore an expression of the utmost concern.

"No," said she, "I can't release you just now. If dad was to come and find that I'd set you free, he would suspect me at once and that would spoil my plans."

"But what was the cause of that shooting?" persisted Matt.

"There's another air-ship over the island—"

"Another air-ship?" echoed Matt.

"Yes. It must be Jerrold's, although how he ever found out where dad was is more than I know. Dad and the rest were shooting at the air-ship with rifles."

"I'll bet it's somebody who's come looking for me!" exclaimed Matt. "If your father and his gang should kill anybody—"

"They won't," interrupted the girl, confidently; "dad knows better than to do anything of that kind. They'll try to put a bullet or two into the gas-bag of the air-ship and frighten Jerrold away."

"Go and take another look," said Matt, anxiously. "See what they're doing."

The girl glided to the doorway again.

"The other air-ship is moving off," the girl reported, with a measure of relief in her voice, as she came back. "I think the bullets must have injured the propeller, or some of the machinery, for the air-ship is moving very slowly and seems to be in trouble."

"Did you see how many were aboard?"

"There were three in the car—one of them was Jerrold, and he was managing the motor."

"The other two," asked Matt, eagerly, "do you know who they were?"

"One of them was in uniform, and looked like a policeman. The other was short and thick-set and looked like a German."

"Carl!" exclaimed Matt, jubilantly. "Good old Carl! How did he ever find out where I was, I wonder?"

"I'll bet dad is trying to guess the same thing," said the girl. "He'll be badly cut up over this. But it's no more than he ought to expect," she added. "Whenever a man breaks the law he'll have to pay for it, sooner or later."

"What has your father been doing?" asked Matt.

"I came to talk with you about that. While I'm giving you your breakfast, I'll tell you my plans. Dad, and all the rest except Whipple, are off in the swamp, somewhere, keeping track of Jerrold's air-ship, and

that will give us a chance."

Matt swung his bound feet over the edge of the cot, and while he sat there the girl drew a chair close and began giving him his breakfast.

"Dad has been doing a lot of criminal things," said the girl, "and all he built that air-ship for was to make it easy for him to rob people and get away without being found out. Didn't you guess that when I showed you that article in the paper? I thought you might."

"I've been mighty thick-headed," answered Matt, between mouthfuls, "and I never thought the thing through that far. Possibly it's because so much has been happening to me since I went into that place on Hoyne Street."

"It's nearly broken my heart having dad act like he's been doing," said the girl, her lips quivering. "If mother had lived she'd have kept dad straight, but when she died dad just seemed to go to the dogs. He has tried to make the people in South Chicago think he was just an honest inventor, but, even at that, he stole all his ideas from Jerrold. That balloon house, that he built out of some of the proceeds of his first robbery, was put up for what they call a 'blind.' With a big house like that, out in plain sight, dad felt that everybody would think his work was open and aboveboard. When he committed any robberies, the Hawk was taken from the shed in the dead of night, and Harper would steer it for the place they were to rob. The blackest kind of a night was always selected, and only flat-topped buildings were robbed. You see, the air-ship would alight on the roof, and dad and the rest would break into the building from the top. When they left they always went in the same way they came, and the police were puzzled because they could not find any clues in the lower part of the buildings."

"It was a slick scheme," commented Matt.

"That's the way Hartz & Greer's place was robbed," proceeded the girl. "Dad and the rest got fifteen thousand dollars' worth of goods from Hartz & Greer, and for more than a week the stuff has been hidden in that house on Hoyne Street. But now dad has left South Chicago for good and all. He's afraid the police are beginning to suspect him, and that Jerrold might try to do something on account of those stolen blue prints."

It was perfectly plain to Matt that the girl's recital of these crimes, in which her father had played the leading part, was anything but easy for her. She was talking from a sense of duty, and Matt honored and admired her for the stand she was taking.

"It doesn't seem possible," said he, gently, "that Brady is your father."

"But he is," she answered brokenly, "and he has brought shame and disgrace on me. But what could I do? Dad knows how I feel about his actions, and he has watched me and kept me away from other people ever since he began his stealing. When you came to the house, last night, it was the first chance I have had to tell what I know. I overheard dad and Pete planning what they were going to do if you came, and—and I hoped you would come, although I knew you would never leave the house until you were taken away as dad's prisoner. I felt sure, though, that I could help you to escape, and I feel even more sure of that now than I did before."

"What is your name?" asked Matt, his eyes full on the girl's face.

"Helen," she answered.

"What are your plans, Helen?" he asked.

"My plan," she went on, "is for you to get away from the swamp in the Hawk, and to take the stuff stolen from Hartz & Greer with you. That will stop everything, for dad will be perfectly helpless without the air-ship. Then, too, you can return the stolen diamonds and jewelry to Hartz & Greer, and that will go far toward righting one wrong. When you are back in South Chicago, you can send the police here and—and they can capture dad and the rest."

Matt had finished eating and the girl had put aside the dishes. Suddenly she broke down and hid her face in her apron. For a few moments she sobbed convulsively.

Small wonder her feelings overcame her! In carrying out her ideas of right and justice, she had planned to give her own father into the hands of the law.

"You're a noble girl, Helen!" declared Matt. "But how am I to get away in the air-ship and to take the stolen property with me?"

"You already know how to run the machine," said the girl, recovering herself a little and looking up, "and when the right time arrives I will come here and take off your ropes. As for the stolen property, I will see to it that that is put in the car before you start. There will be danger in what you do, but, from what I have heard, you know how to win out in spite of it."

"I will run any risk to get away from here," returned Matt, gravely, "but when I go you must go with me. This is no place for you—with such a thieving gang!"

"I must stay here," the girl said resolutely. "Even though I am sending my father to prison I want to be with him to the last. If something isn't done," she continued passionately, "he will go on and on, constantly from bad to worse, and perhaps some time"—her face blanched as she spoke—"he might

receive worse than a prison sentence. It is the only way to save him."

It was clear that Helen Brady had spent much time in thinking out and planning her present course, and how much mental anguish and bitterness of spirit her conclusion had cost her, only she could know.

"I am ready to do whatever you want me to," said Matt, "and if you think it best to stay here, all right. I still believe, though, you ought to leave this place with me."

"No, no," she replied firmly. "I have thought it all out a dozen times, and I have made up my mind as to what it is right for me to do. You must get away from here in the air-ship. With the Hawk taken away from him, dad will be helpless."

"Haven't you any friends or relatives to whom you could go?" asked Matt.

"I have relatives on my mother's side, but they won't have anything to do with dad or me—simply because dad is what he is. They have asked me to leave dad and come to them, but I know my place and what it is right for me to do."

A brief silence fell between the two, during which Matt turned the queer problem over in his mind.

"When do you think your plan can be carried out?" he asked presently.

"It has got to be soon, if at all," she answered. "I don't know what effect this appearance of Jerrold's air-ship over the swamp will have on dad, but I hope it won't interfere with my plans. We'll have to wait a little while and see. Whipple is watching the Hawk now, and —"

Just at that moment a heavy step was heard outside.

A man appeared in the doorway, stared in at Matt and the girl for an instant, and then strode into the hut.

The man was Brady, and his face was black as a thundercloud.

"What're you doing here so long?" he cried angrily to the girl. "Clear out! I've got something I want to talk over with King."

With a supplicating look at her father, the girl got up and passed out of the hut.

CHAPTER XII.

BRADY CHANGES HIS PLANS.

"You've played the devil with me, and no mistake!" scowled Brady, whirling on Matt the moment the girl was gone.

"I don't see how you make that out," said Matt. "You're the one that's made all the trouble, Brady."

Brady's little eyes glittered as they rested on Matt. For a few moments he paced angrily back and forth across the hut.

"How in thunder," he cried suddenly, "did Jerrold ever manage to get a line on me? He was over the swamp, a short time ago, with his air-ship, and he'd have landed here if we hadn't driven him off. Jerrold knows where I am, and he has the means of getting to the island. We've crippled his craft, though, and he's had to haul off for repairs. While he's gone, I've got to change my plans, somehow, and be ready for him when he comes back. That Dutch kid who was with you at the balloon house yesterday was in the car of the air-ship, and there was also a policeman along. How did that come?"

"You know as much about it as I do, Brady," replied Matt. "I disappeared from that Hoyne Street house, last night, and I suppose my chum has been getting clues about me and following them up. That's the kind of a lad he is."

"Where did he get any clues that would bring him out here?"

"Give it up."

Brady took a few more turns across the room,

presently halting in front of Matt.

"You didn't bring that roll of blue prints to Hoyne Street, last night," said he. "Where did you leave it?"

"Left it out in front of the house," grinned Matt.

Brady started.

"In front of the house?" he echoed.

"Yes."

"Cached?"

"Certainly."

"Under the sidewalk?"

"No; in the pocket of my Dutch pard."

Brady stared incredulously. Then he swore.

"That Dutchman was out in front all the while you were in the house?"

Matt nodded.

"He came with me from Chicago. I got to thinking there might be a trap in the house, and that some one was there who wanted the blue prints, so I made up my mind that it would be a wise move to leave Carl out in front, and to let him keep the roll."

"That chum of yours must have seen the Hawk when she climbed out of the back yard," growled Brady, "but how in the fiend's name was he able to get Jerrold and the Eagle and follow us? It was dark, and we had a long start of them."

"One guess is as good as another," said Matt, calmly. "I told you you'd get yourself into trouble if you tried to make a prisoner of me. The best thing you can do now is to send me back to South Chicago in the air-ship."

"Think I'm a fool?" snarled Brady. "It may be that

you're all that stands between me and my men and capture. I'll hang onto you, King, and I'll let that Dutch pard of yours know that if Jerrold don't keep away from this swamp with his air-ship you're going to connect with your finish. It's neck or nothing with me, now, and I'll go any length to keep myself out of the 'pen.' I've laid out a fine campaign for the Hawk, and I don't intend to have all my plans nipped in the bud, right at the start-off."

"I suppose," said Matt, scathingly, "that your campaign is one of robbery, and that you're going to make a pirate ship out of the Hawk?"

"That's where you put your finger on the right button!" declared Brady. "I'm going to be a freebooter, and take my toll wherever I can find it. It's easy to swoop down on a lot of spoil, pick it up and make off with it. And what can the law do?" He laughed mockingly. "Policemen will have to have wings to get anywhere near me."

"And that's what you wanted me for, is it?" cried Matt, indignantly; "to drive the Hawk around through the air and help out your villainous plans! I would let you kill me first."

"Rot! I'm going to stick to my original intentions, but there's got to be something of a change in my immediate plans. We've all got to pull out of here and to take what plunder we've got cached in the swamp. The Hawk will have to make three or four trips, and they must be made before Jerrold and his air-ship can interfere with us. If Jerrold fixes up his air-ship and comes back, we'll just tell him what will happen to you if he lingers in the vicinity of the swamp. I'm banking on that to send him packing again, and to keep him out of sight until I can make a change of base. You'll go away on the Hawk's first trip, and it will probably be only half an hour before you can start."

Brady started for the door, but halted before he reached it and faced around.

"Either one of two things happened to put that Dutchman and Jerrold on my track," said he. "Either Harper has been caught, and has told what he knows, or else a letter I gave Needham to deliver to Whipple, here in the swamp, has fallen into the hands of the police. It don't make much difference, though, how Jerrold got next to our hang-out. The main thing is that he knows where we are, and that you will be put in a mighty tight corner if he keeps on trying to make trouble for me. That's about all, King. I want you to understand what you're up against and be ready for whatever happens. I'm not going to have my plans knocked galley-west just as I'm on the point of launching them."

With another black scowl, expressive of his savage determination, Hector Brady strode out of the hut.

Matt was beginning to understand why Helen preferred to see her father in prison rather than free to carry out his campaign of lawlessness. Possessing a practical air-ship like the Hawk, Brady could commit untold depredations and snap his fingers in open defiance of the law.

The young motorist shuddered to think of the scoundrel's comprehensive plans, and of the part he had intended to make his prisoner play in them.

Helen's reasoning was logical, and the expedient she had suggested was as simple as it was effective. By taking the Hawk away from Brady she would make it impossible for him to follow out his nefarious schemes. The beautiful simplicity of the countercheck aroused Matt's admiration.

But how was the countercheck to be brought about? The appearance of Jerrold's air-ship over the swamp

had made doubly difficult the work the girl was counting upon having done. Not only that, but the coming of the Eagle had increased Matt's peril. There was no doubt in the young motorist's mind but that Brady would go to any extreme in order to keep himself and his companions from being captured.

All these different aspects of the situation floated through Motor Matt's mind swiftly. Two or three minutes after Brady had left the hut, and while Matt was still considering the problem that confronted the girl, Helen herself stole in through the door.

Her face was haggard, but her eyes were bright and full of resolution.

"You shouldn't be here," protested Matt. "Your father suspected something when he found you with me a little while ago and ordered you away. What if he should come back and see you here again?"

"I don't think he'll come back, but I've got to take the risk, even if he does." The girl spoke quickly and steadily and made her way swiftly to Matt's side. "Dad has changed his plans—I was listening to all he said, out there at the back of the hut. He's going to use the Hawk to take us all away from the swamp, and *you're going to go on the Hawk's first trip!* That means that we must do what we can, at once. If we fail now, everything is lost."

She was breathlessly eager, but her calmness at such a moment surprised Matt. Lifting her hands she took a small poniard from the bosom of her dress, bent down and severed the cords that secured Matt's hands. Then, with one downward stroke of the keen blade, she freed his feet.

"Where are your father and the rest of the men?" asked Matt.

Before she answered, Helen glided to the door and took a cautious look outside.

"Some of the stolen goods have been hidden among the bushes of the swamp," said she, returning to Matt. "You are to be sent away with the loot, on the first trip, and dad himself will have to take you. He, and everybody except Whipple, have gone to the swamp. Whipple has a rifle and is guarding the Hawk. Whatever we do, Matt, we've got to do in a hurry. The bag of goods taken from Hartz & Greer is behind this hut," she pointed to an unglazed opening in the rear wall as she spoke. "While the rest are in the swamp, I will go to the Hawk and talk with Whipple, getting around on the other side of him so that his back will be in this direction. While I am holding his attention, you will creep up on him from behind and, between us, we will try and get the rifle. It's a desperate chance, but we will do the best we can."

"You're a brave girl, Helen!" declared Matt.

"I'm doing what I think is right, and that always helps a person's courage. I'm more worried about you than I am about myself. If anything should go wrong—if anything should happen to you because of the help you are giving me—"

For the first time her voice faltered. Matt reached out and caught her hand reassuringly.

"Don't fret about me," said he. "There won't be any trouble about my getting the best of Whipple, with you to help. Is the Hawk all ready for a flight? I mean is there plenty of gasoline in the tank, and plenty of oil?"

"Yes, dad has seen to that. So far as the air-ship is concerned, it is ready to carry you quickly and safely out of the swamp. Now I will steal out of the hut and talk with Whipple."

Once more she started for the door. Hardly had she reached it, however, when she drew back with a gasp of consternation. Turning, she beckoned to Matt.

"Too late!" she whispered, her voice sharp with anguish and disappointment. "Oh, why have they come just at this time!"

Matt glided quickly to her side and peered out through the half-opened door.

What he saw was well calculated to discourage him and the girl.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTO THE SWAMP.

Needham, Pete, Grove and Brady had not been long carrying out their work of recovering the cached goods. They were returning from the edge of the bushy timber, ascending the slight elevation of the "island" on their way to the Hawk, each bearing an armful of plunder.

In his stealings, Brady had not bothered with bulky articles but had confined himself to "lifting" smaller and richer loot. The stuff was all in small sacks.

As the men walked past the "roost" on their course to the air-ship, Matt and the girl withdrew from the door to avoid being seen. Through a crack in the wall, however, they were able to keep close track of what went on.

On reaching the Hawk, the bundles were deposited on the ground. Whipple, leaning on his rifle, stood watching while the bags were heaped up at the side of the air-ship.

For a few moments the villainous crew had their heads together in close and earnest conversation. Now and again their eyes were lifted aloft, evidently on the alert for some sign of the Eagle. Brady, it could be seen, did most of the talking. Suddenly, after a sharp scrutiny overhead, Brady whirled around and started for the hut.

"He's coming after you!" half sobbed the girl.

"What's the reason I can't escape through that window in the rear wall," asked Matt, hurriedly, "and take refuge in the swamp?"

The idea seemed to electrify the girl.

"I hadn't thought of that," she whispered, catching his arm and starting for the window. "The back of the hut is close to the trees and bushes on this side of the island, and I know something about the reefs of dry ground running through the swamp in the vicinity of this place. Come!" she added; "we must hurry."

Her despair had vanished in a flash, and her steadiness and resolution had all come back. She climbed through the window and, as Matt followed, she was picking up a small bag that had stood close to the rear wall.

Without speaking, and once more clasping his arm, she hurried him into the tangled bushes that came up to within a few feet of the hut. There, screened by a dense thicket, they paused to note further developments.

Their position, of course, rendered it impossible for them to see the front of the hut, but they were so close they could hear Brady's oath of astonishment and alarm when he discovered that Matt was missing.

The next moment Brady could be seen rushing around the side of the hut and a little way in the direction of the group standing beside the Hawk.

"He's gone!" roared Brady. "The cub's got loose and skipped!"

The rest were roused into frantic activity.

"I'll sw'ar he didn't git out while I was watchin' the Hawk," cried Whipple. "Anyways, he can't be fur off."

"Hustle around!" fumed Brady. "Get into the swamp, every man-jack of you, and find that whelp wherever he is. I wouldn't have him get clear for a thousand, cold!" All the gang forthwith became exceedingly busy.

They darted off in various directions, and Brady himself, accompanied by Grove, started for the side of the island from which Matt and the girl were watching.

"We'll have to get away from here!" breathed the girl, turning. "Follow me, Matt, and be careful where you step. If you're not careful, you may find yourself mired in the swamp."

"Trust me for that," answered Matt. "I'll carry this," he added, taking the bag from the girl's hands.

The swamp, into which they were now headed, presented a matted tangle of undergrowth growing among the trees. Through the bushes could be seen a glimmer of stagnant water, and the whole place seemed as dank and loathsome as a tropical jungle.

The girl picked her way carefully, parting the bushes ahead of her and stepping from hummock to hummock. Finally they reached a little bare uplift of dry earth, and halted to listen. They could hear nothing of pursuit, and the girl drew a long breath of relief.

"Dad don't know that I've explored this swamp," said she. "I have lived on the island for nearly six months—dad used to keep me here while he was doing his thieving in South Chicago, so I wouldn't be able to tell what I know and give him away, I guess."

She sank down on the flat piece of turf for a few moments' rest. The ground, although dry, shivered under them as they moved, and seemed every moment as though about to give way beneath their weight and let them down into the morass.

"This is a treacherous-looking place," remarked Matt, peering off into the trees and bushes that hemmed them in on every side.

"It's all of that," replied the girl.

"It would be easy for a person to get lost."

"Not easy for me, as I know it too well."

"If I can get away in the Hawk," went on Matt, after a brief silence, "this will make it necessary for you to go with me."

"Why?" she queried, lifting her wide, dark eyes to his.

"Can't you understand? Your father and his men will discover that you are not on the island, and they will suspect that you helped me out of the hut. What will your father do when he finds that out?"

A shiver swept through the girl's slight form.

"I suppose he will half kill me," she answered. "But I shall stay with him. I am his daughter, and it's my duty to be with him to the end."

"You mustn't be foolish," said Matt, inclined to get out of patience. "You're carrying your idea of duty to your father altogether too far."

"I've thought it all out," she answered firmly, "and my mind is made up. Please don't try to argue with me. It may not be possible for you to get away in the air-ship now," she added, with a sigh of regret. "If you can't, I will try and get you through the swamp. I don't know anything about it, though, after we get a little away from the island."

"Then," proceeded Matt, not giving up his argument that Helen Brady should go away with him, "your father will be madder than ever when he finds out you have taken the goods stolen from Hartz & Greer."

"That's what I expect, but it's right that the stuff should be returned. A person ought to have principles, Matt, and I don't think a person amounts to much if he or she can't stand a little suffering on account of their

principles."

"That's right, too," muttered Matt.

"There's fifteen thousand dollars' worth of diamonds and jewelry in that bag," Helen went on, "and Hartz & Greer have offered a reward of twenty-five hundred to any one who will return the property."

"That money will go to you," said Matt, promptly. "It's right that it should. Look at the risks you're taking to have it put into the hands of its rightful owners again! Some time, Helen, you will be rid of your father, and then the money will come handy."

She was gazing at him steadily, and there was something of rebuke in her eyes.

"You don't mean that, Matt," said she, quietly.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Would it be right for me to take a reward for returning property my own father had stolen?"

Matt was amazed by the simple directness of the girl's reasoning. And she was right, entirely right. Nevertheless it took one of fine character to reason and to act as the girl was doing.

"If you succeed in getting away with the bag," Helen continued, "I want you to give it back to the rightful owners. Tell them it comes from Hector Brady's daughter, and that she hopes they will not be too hard on her father."

"You bet I'll tell them," said Matt. "What's more, I'll get through this swamp on foot, if I have to, and I'll consider it a mighty fine thing to lug the bag along and turn it over to Hartz & Greer."

"I felt sure you'd help me," murmured the girl. "There was something in your face that told me you

could be depended on the moment I looked at you at the door of that Hoyne Street house."

"Then the impression was mutual," said Matt. "If I hadn't read honesty in your face, along with a desire to help me, I'd have made a rush out of that room in the Hoyne Street place the moment I read your warning on the fly leaf of the book."

"It was well you didn't do that. You'd have been caught. Pete was behind the window curtain all the time. That was why I had to write what I wanted you to know, and call your attention to it indirectly. If you had—"

The girl was interrupted by a distant rustle of bushes. Stifling the words on her lips, she sprang erect.

"Dad's coming this way," she whispered. "I don't think he has the least idea where we've gone, but he seems to be blundering in the right direction. We'll have to hurry on."

Once more they resumed their flight, Matt carrying the bag and carefully following in his companion's footsteps.

The way became increasingly difficult, and the bushes even denser than they had been at the point where they had entered the swamp. Then, too, the hummocks which offered them foothold became farther apart so that it was necessary to leap almost blindly through the brush in getting from one to another.

Occasionally they halted and listened, but were unable to hear any sound behind them to indicate that Brady and Grove were still on the right track.

Just as Matt was congratulating himself that they had again eluded their pursuers, a cry from the girl, muffled but full of distress, reached him.

Between him and her a screen of bushes intervened, and the cry had come a moment after she had taken a headlong plunge through the leafy tangle.

Not knowing what could have happened, and fearing the worst, Matt shifted the bag to his other arm, drew his leather cap well down over his forehead so that the visor would protect his eyes, and leaped boldly after the girl.

By good luck, rather than by any calculation on his part, he landed on a shaking hummock, and found that Helen had plunged into the watery morass.

Dropping the bag, he reached down, grasped her about the waist and dragged her from the clutching grip of the swamp.

"We'll have to go back," were the girl's first words, as he held her on the narrow foothold.

"Why?" he asked.

She waved her hand in the direction toward which they were going.

An open space, clear of trees and bushes, lay before them—a veritable quagmire with not a place in all its extent where they could set their feet.

They would have to go back! With Brady and Grove on one side of them, and this impassable bog on the other, it looked as though they had been caught between two fires.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DESPERATE CHANCE.

Once more the girl was plunged into despair.

"We'll have to give up," she whispered, tearfully. "We have tried hard, but luck is against us. For several minutes we have been traveling over ground I know nothing about. When I saw that open stretch of swamp, my heart failed me and I fell off the firm ground. You see what a horrible place this is, Matt!"

"Isn't there any way to get around to the other side of the island?" he asked.

"Yes, we could have done that, but I was trying to take you as far as I could toward the other edge of the swamp."

"We'll have to give that up, now, and work our way around the island."

"In going back," faltered the girl, "we may meet dad and Grove!"

"We must take the chance," he answered; "there's nothing else for it."

"And in going around the island," proceeded the girl, dejectedly, "we may meet some of the others who are looking for us."

"That's another risk we will have to run. Come on," he continued, picking up the bag. "I'll lead the way back."

"You've got a way about you," said Helen, "that gives a person courage."

"A fellow would be a pretty poor stick," returned

Matt, "who couldn't keep his nerve with a girl like you to help him."

Helen's dress was torn by the bushes, and her hands and face were scratched and bleeding; but she seemed to mind her physical discomforts very little, so eager was she to have Matt's escape prove successful.

Listening intently for any sounds made by Brady and Grove, Matt and the girl started back over the course they had recently covered.

They had not gone far when the sounds they feared came to them. As they stood together and listened, they could hear Brady and Grove talking back and forth. Their voices, and the crashing of the bushes, were growing rapidly in volume, and proved that they were coming closer.

The girl began to tremble. Matt pressed her hand reassuringly. Off to the right of the course they had been following his quick eye detected a foothold among the matted bushes. He pointed it out to his companion.

"Get there, quick!" he whispered.

She leaped for the spot at once, and he was not slow in following her. Then, crouching down, they peered through the thicket.

Brady came jumping into sight, clutching a revolver in his hand.

"I'm positive I heard something ahead, Grove!" he cried.

"It must be King, then," answered Grove, floundering along in the rear. "He's been makin' a better hike of it through this blasted swamp than I ever thought he could."

"There's an open stretch farther along," went on

Brady, grimly. "That'll stop him, and we'll have him in a few minutes."

Brady leaped out of sight, and Grove likewise jumped past and vanished.

The girl had scarcely breathed while the two men were so close to them.

"Now we've got a chance," whispered Matt. "While they're going on toward that open part of the swamp, we'll get back toward the island and double around it."

"We won't have to go far, now," rejoined the girl, her hopes rising, "before we can turn to the right and start around the island."

Matt continued to lead the way back, making the best time he possibly could. When the girl called softly to him, he stopped.

"Here's where we turn," said she. "I'd better go ahead from now on."

He waited for her to gain his side, then followed as she continued to make her way onward through the bewildering tangle. Time and again Matt, if alone, would have lost his bearings, but Helen, being on familiar ground, was never for one moment at a loss.

Their one fear now was that they should encounter some of the others who were searching, but they heard nothing to cause them the slightest uneasiness.

At last, after half an hour of tiring work, Helen drew to a halt.

"We're about opposite the place where the air-ship is moored," said she.

"That's where we want to be," answered Matt. "Make for the edge of the island, Helen, as close to the air-ship as you can get."

Once more the girl started off. The bushes thinned perceptibly as they came closer and closer to the solid ground. This rendered the going easier, and it also enabled Matt and the girl to make less noise in getting through the undergrowth. In nearing the island they redoubled their caution, and when they finally reached a spot from which they could look out and take in the situation in the vicinity of the "roost" and the air-ship, they congratulated themselves on the care they had exercised.

They were not more than a dozen feet from the place where the Hawk was secured.

Two rifles were leaning against the car, and two of the men—Grove and Needham—were sitting on the ground, occasionally looking aloft.

Brady, Whipple and Pete were no where in sight.

"We must have crippled that air-ship of Jerrold's pretty badly," Needham was saying. "If King hadn't made this delay for us, the Hawk would have been well away on her first trip."

"That kid is a slippery customer," growled Grove. "The old man is riled for fair over the way he's cuttin' up."

"What's the use o' botherin' with him? The thing to do is to cut out o' this an' leave King in the swamp."

"I reckon Brady'd do that, if it wasn't for the bag of loot King seems to have taken along with him."

Both men had thrown off their hats, and Grove was nursing a number of scratches on his face and hands.

"We had a rough time of it," said he, "an' the old man sent me back to find out if any of the rest had had any success. If King had been found, I was to fire a signal-shot with one of the rifles."

"Hang the luck, anyhow!" snorted Needham. "It was the worst thing Brady ever done when he tangled up with King. The lad has a will of his own, an' I knew well enough he'd never take hold an' help us out runnin' the motor."

"King has got more backbone than any fellow of his age I ever saw, and that's a fact. The girl must have helped him. And that's another place where Brady has been lame, all along. He ought to have sent the girl away, somewhere. She hasn't got any business hanging out with a gang like this."

While Matt had been watching and listening, he had been turning over several plans in his mind. Here was a chance, albeit a desperate one, for getting hold of the air-ship.

He turned to the girl.

"Helen," he whispered, "I'm going to see if I can't capture the Hawk."

"You can't," she returned, fearfully. "Grove and Needham are armed and—and they'll shoot."

"They can't shoot if I get hold of those rifles first," went on Matt, still speaking in guarded tones.

"How will you do that?"

"Their backs are toward us. I'll creep as close to the Hawk as I can, then, if they hear me, as they probably will, I'll make a rush for the guns."

The girl was silent for a moment.

"There's nothing else to be done," she whispered, at last. "Count on me, Matt, to do whatever I can to help."

"You keep back, Helen," he counseled. "If I succeed in getting the guns, I won't need your help; if I don't, your help would do little good. Here I go."

Slowly and cautiously Matt crept out of the bushes. The car of the air-ship was between him and the men, and this served to screen him, up to a certain point; but the two rifles were leaning against the opposite side of the car, and in order to lay hold of them he would either have to go around the long framework, or else cross the car. He made up his mind to take the latter course.

Without being discovered, he managed to reach the side of the car; then, just as he was rising to step over the rail, Needham caught sight of him.

With a wild yell Needham gained his feet. The yell brought Grove up like a shot. For an instant, the two rascals were paralyzed by the unexpected appearance of Matt. Their moment of inaction afforded the young motorist just the opportunity he needed.

Flinging himself into the car, and across it, he snatched the rifles away from the rail, just as the hands of Grove and Needham were outstretched to take them.

One of the weapons he flung behind him.

"Nail him!" cried Grove; "down him, before he gets a chance to shoot!"

Needham, no less than Grove, realized the necessity of capturing Matt. Matt, however, had no intention of using the remaining rifle on either of the two men; neither did he have it in mind to let them get away, or rough-handle him.

As the two rushed forward, Matt flung the rifle to his shoulder, and his gray eye sparkled menacingly along the barrel.

"Keep off!" he warned, swaying the muzzle of the gun back and forth so as to keep both men under it; "keep away from me and stand right where you are! I

mean business, right from the drop of the hat, and you fellows might as well understand it."

CHAPTER XV.

A DARING ESCAPE.

The menace of the steady gray eye and the swaying gun muzzle were enough for Grove and Needham.

"Here's a go!" growled Needham, casting a yearning look around him toward the timber.

"I'm going to make a 'go' of it, all right," averred Matt, grimly, "no two ways about that. What are you doing with your right hand, Needham?"

Needham's hand had wandered toward his hip. Matt was watching both scoundrels so sharply that not a move they made escaped him.

Needham brought his hand around in front of him.

"What are you trying to do, King?" queried Grove, evidently seeking to gain time and give Brady, Pete or Whipple a chance to come on the scene.

"I'm trying to get away from this place," replied Matt, "and I've not much time to waste in talk. I guess you know that fully as well as I do."

Still keeping the rifle trained on the two men, he climbed out of the car to the ground.

"Now," he went on, "I'll tell you fellows what you're to do, and then we'll be able to work quicker. You will both get into the car, and get in together so that I can cover you more easily with this one gun. Needham will then place his back against the upright timber that helps suspend the car from the hoop—and mind you take the timber farthest from the driver's seat. On the bottom of the car there's a coil of small rope. With that, Grove will tie Needham to the upright. Is that

clear?"

"Why, what the blazes—" began Grove, but Matt cut him short.

"There's no time for talk, I tell you!" he called, sharply. "Brady and the other two may show up here, and I'm going to have this work done before that happens."

"But—"

"Get into the car!"

Matt's finger flexed ever so slightly upon the trigger of the gun. The watchful eyes of Grove and Needham detected the movement and both made haste to tumble into the car.

"I'd give a farm to know what you've got up your sleeve," growled Needham, as he backed slowly against the upright timber.

"Move more quickly," warned Matt, "or you'll find what I've got in this gun. I used to be in Arizona, and I know how they deal with matters of this sort down there. They're not in the habit of wasting so many words as I'm doing. Pick up that rope, Grove," he added, "and get busy with it. Mind you tie hard knots! No fast-and-loose plays at this stage of the game."

Grove was a bit languid in his operations, and as he worked he gave more attention to the quarters from which Brady, Pete and Whipple might be expected than he did to the tying of Needham.

"Grove," called Matt, sternly, "I'm not going to bother much more with you! Move faster, and pass some of that rope around Needham's arms. I don't want his hands left free. Pull the coils tighter."

After a fashion, Grove got his comrade tied.

"Will that do you?" he demanded, gruffly, turning to glare at Matt.

"That will answer. Now turn your back to Needham's."

"Say, by thunder I'm not going to stand for—"

"Turn your back!"

Matt shoved the muzzle of the rifle toward Grove's breast, and the man made haste to place himself against the upright piece of the car's framework.

It was Matt's intention, then, to drop the rifle and proceed with the tying of Grove himself, but the girl suddenly appeared and climbed into the car.

"I'll do the rest, Matt," said she, picking up the loose end of the rope.

Matt had planned to have the girl remain in the thicket, taking no part in his operations; but she had different ideas.

Grove and Needham both glared at the girl.

"The old man will make you sorry for this!" fumed Grove.

"I expect he will," replied the girl. "He has made me sorry for a lot of things lately."

Around and around the bodies of the two men Helen coiled the rope. Then, when she had come to the end of it, she made it fast with a knot.

Pausing a moment after she had finished, she drew a revolver out of Needham's hip-pocket and dropped it on the driver's seat.

"You had better have that in your own hands, Matt," said she, quietly. "It will be easier to handle than the rifle."

"Don't get out of the car, Helen," called Matt, as the girl was about to climb over the rail. "You can't stay here after this."

"I can and I must."

Her resolve to remain with her father was unshaken; but there was a bright light in her eyes which Matt had not seen there before. Evidently the success that was attending Matt's plans to get away with the air-ship had lifted a grievous load from her spirits.

Walking around the car, Helen picked up the bag which they had taken with them into the swamp.

"This must go with you, Matt," she continued, pushing the bag under the driver's seat, "along with the rest of the stuff piled up on the ground there."

While she was on that side of the car she cast off the mooring-rope and flung it into the air-ship.

Matt dropped the rifle and released the rope on the other side.

The Hawk was now in readiness to take to flight. With nothing to hold it, the gas-bag began to feel the effects of the wind that was blowing and to move about in answer to the faint gusts. But it rode on an even keel, for its buoyancy had to be accelerated by the propeller before it would rise, or could be maneuvered.

The girl had started toward the bags, heaped up on the ground. Before she could reach them, however, a loud yell from the opposite side of the island caused her to halt in consternation.

"Dad!" she cried, wildly; "he's coming!"

"Brady! This way, quick!"

The clamoring whoops went up from Needham and Grove as they struggled fiercely to free themselves.

Matt, seeing that there was not an instant to be lost, leaped into the car and tilted the steering-rudder at an angle which would carry the air-ship upward.

"Come along!" he shouted to the girl as he started the engine. "Get into the car, Helen!"

"Hurry, hurry!" screamed the girl, running directly away from the car and in the direction of Brady and Pete, who were making for the Hawk at a run.

A pang of regret ran through Matt at the thought of leaving Helen Brady behind to bear the brunt of her father's anger; but there was no time for argument. He started the propeller, and the Hawk began to move up the airy incline toward the tops of the trees that walled in the edge of the "island."

The struggles of Matt's two prisoners became desperately frantic. So violently did they wrestle with their bonds that the car tipped and swayed dangerously. Matt had no time to give to them, just then, being wholly wrapped up in the maneuvering of the Hawk.

He gave the rudder a further tilt, throwing the air-ship to an angle that caused Grove's feet to slip from under him, so that only the support of the rope and the upright held him to his place.

"Shoot!" he bellowed. "Why don't you blaze away at him, Brady?"

Brady had evidently held his fire, hoping to get the air-ship back without injury; and, even now, as his rifle and Pete's began to crack murderously, the target of their bullets was Matt.

Two or three of the leaden spheres zipped past Matt's head, missing him by the narrowest of margins. Strangely enough, however, Matt was more worried about the harm the bullets might do the gas-bag, or the

machinery, than he was about any damage they might do him.

Faster and faster he speeded up the engine, and the Hawk raced toward the clouds. She cleared the tops of the trees, gained the clear sky, and, at a height of five hundred feet, was brought to an even keel.

Then, and not till then, did Matt venture a look below. He was just in time to catch one fleeting glimpse of those he had left behind on the "island." What he saw aroused his anger and indignation.

Helen, still true to her resolve to help Matt, had seized hold of her father's rifle and was struggling to keep him from using it. The minute figures were strangely clear, and Matt saw Brady lift his fist and strike the girl down. Then the tops of the trees interposed and cut off the unpleasant sight. Matt faced about, a steely glint in his gray eyes.

"Here's a fine lay out!" Grove was clamoring, far gone with chagrin and baffled rage. "One kid, single-handed, captures two of us and runs off with the air-ship, right under the noses of Brady and the rest! Oh, well, we're entitled to all we get out of this. We don't deserve anything better."

"You'll get something more than you expect," said Matt, picking up the revolver and pushing it into his pocket, "if you don't stop squirming around like that. It's hard to steer when you're rocking the car in such a fashion. You fellows are my prisoners, so make the best of it."

"Yes," growled Grove, "and us two aeronauts will have a fine tale to tell when you take us where you're going to. You've stolen this car. That'll cook your goose for you."

"Brady," answered Matt, "can have his air-ship back

whenever he wants to show up and claim it."

There followed a brief silence, during which Matt noted that the wind was brisk, and from the north, and exulted over the speed the Hawk developed in the teeth of it.

Needham was first to break the silence.

"If I had my hat, and was able," said he, craning his head around to get a look at Matt, "I'd take it off to you."

The lad in the driver's seat made no response. He was hurrying toward South Chicago.

Where was the Eagle? The skies in every direction were clear and the other air-ship was nowhere to be seen.

Motor Matt, as he drove the air-ship steadily against the wind, kept close watch of the captured aeronauts.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE END OF THE MID-AIR TRAIL.

The failure of Carl, Harris and Jerrold to make a landing on the "island" has already been recorded.

They had seen the Hawk, moored at one edge of the cleared space, and they had seen Brady and the others; but, of course, it had been impossible for them to see anything of Matt. The young motorist, at that time, was bound hand and foot and lying on the cot in the hut.

With bullets flying around them and threatening injury to the Eagle, it was not policy to remain hovering over such a nest of desperate scoundrels very long.

"We'll get out of here," cried Harris, angrily, "and come back with men and guns enough to give those fellows a taste of their own medicine. Don't let any harm come to the air-ship, Jerrold. We're going to need her, later."

Just as Harris finished speaking, a bullet slapped into the motor and the machinery at once began to go wrong.

"Too late," responded Jerrold grimly; "they've already nipped us."

"Py chimineddy," roared Carl, "I vish I hat somet'ing vat I could shoot mit ad dem fillains!"

Limping and staggering, Jerrold managed to urge the Eagle out of harm's way.

"She won't drop on us, will she?" asked Harris, looking anxiously downward at the tree-tops.

"No," replied Jerrold, "the gas-bag is uninjured, so we can't fall; and the motor is working, too, after a fashion, and that enables us to make a slow rate of speed. But there will have to be some repairs before we can do anything more with the air-ship."

"Where'll we go to make them? Back to South Chicago?"

"Lake Station is nearer. We'll come down there and ascertain the extent of the damage. It may be that we shall have to go back to South Chicago if the injury is at all serious."

"All right," acquiesced Harris. "I'll be able to do some telephoning and get a few more men out here from headquarters. I'll have them bring rifles, and then we'll give Brady a set-to that he'll remember."

"I ditn't see Matt in der blace," mourned Carl.

"He may have been there," said Harris. "There were two sheds, and they may be keeping your chum a prisoner in one of them."

"Vell, vile ve're away fixing oop der Eagle, meppy dose fellers pack dere vill fly off mit demselufs in der Hawk. Oof dey do dot, den ve vill have some drouple for our pains."

"We shall have to keep watch of the sky in the direction of the swamp," said Jerrold. "By doing that we can tell whether or not the Hawk gets away."

Carl made that his work.

"I don'd know how I can see mit der naked eye ven ve ged py Lake Sdation," he remarked.

"We'll have to hunt up a spyglass, or a pair of binoculars," suggested Harris.

"Vat oof der Hawk moofs pefore we ged dem?"

"Then we'll be up against it, and no mistake."

There was a lot of excitement in the little town of Lake Station when a real, sure enough air-ship descended close to the blacksmith shop. The whole population gathered and stared.

While Jerrold was busy tinkering with his crippled motor, Carl succeeded in finding an old-fashioned spyglass and climbed with it to the top of the highest building in town. There he perched himself on the edge of the roof and watched continually in the direction of Willoughby's swamp.

Meanwhile, Harris had been talking with police headquarters in South Chicago. As a result, three officers were detailed to catch the first train for Lake Station.

The repairs to be made to the Eagle were somewhat extensive, and taxed the capacity of the blacksmith shop. Had Jerrold been in his own workroom he could have fixed up the motor more easily and quickly, but to take the Eagle back to South Chicago would have resulted in a loss of time.

Hour after hour the inventor labored, helped by the blacksmith and eyed with wonder by the townspeople. The detail of officers arrived, and they could do nothing but wait until the Eagle was ready to carry them to the "island" in the swamp. Any attempt to reach the "island" on foot was hardly to be considered.

While Jerrold's labors were nearing completion, a yell from Carl called the attention of Harris.

"What's the matter with you?" he shouted.

Carl was dancing around on the roof top, waving the spyglass frantically.

"Come oop!" he cried, wildly. "Der Hawk is gedding

away mit itseluf! Ach, plazes, vat a luck!"

Harris made haste to reach the top of the building where Carl had been patiently waiting and watching.

"Pud der spyglass to your eye, Harris," said Carl, "und look off to der nort'. Ach, dose fellers haf made some ged-avays, und I bed you dey have dook Matt along!"

With the glass at his eye, Harris swept the horizon in the direction indicated by Carl. Finally he found what he was looking for—an oblong blot gliding through the heavens and proceeding in a northerly direction.

"That's the Hawk, all right," said he, in a tone of intense disappointment, "but why is it heading in that direction?"

"Prady wouldn't dare go pack by Sout' Chicago," said Carl. "I bed you somet'ing for noddin' he has got anodder hang-outd in dot tirections. Ach, vat vill I do for dot bard oof mine?"

Gloomily the two descended from the roof, and Carl returned the spyglass to its owner.

Half an hour later the Eagle was ready for flight, and the officers and Carl got aboard. It was decided to proceed to the swamp and look over the "island" and then, if nothing of importance developed, to return to South Chicago.

The Eagle's motor, apparently, worked as well as ever, and the four miles separating Willoughby's swamp from Lake Station were covered in record time.

As they neared the "island" the officers made ready to use their guns. There was no hostile demonstration, however, and not a soul was anywhere in sight. The Eagle descended, and the officers, accompanied by the anxious Carl, proceeded to make a search.

They found nothing but two meagerly furnished houses, apparently recently deserted. Silence reigned everywhere, ominous of events that had happened.

"Vell," said Carl, gloomily, "dis means dot I haf got to do some more looking for Modor Matt. Der gang haf made off mit him some more, und I vas so tisappointed as I can't dell."

For that matter, they were all disappointed—Jerrold in particular. Motor Matt had served Jerrold well, and the inventor had been anxious to make him some repayment in kind.

But there was nothing left for the air-ship party to do but to point the Eagle toward home. As the air-ship passed the rolling mills and came close to the balloon house where Brady had formerly housed the Hawk, it was observed by those in the car that the doors of the big building were closed, and that two officers had mounted guard in front of them.

"That means something," muttered Harris. "Drop lower, Jerrold, so I can talk with those two cops."

Jerrold descended until the top of the car was nearly on a level with the balloon house, and Harris leaned over the guard rail.

"Hello!" he called. "What are you fellows doing there?"

"Watching the air-ship," was the astounding answer.

"Do you mean to say that Brady's air-ship is in that balloon house?"

"Sure."

"Has Brady been captured?"

"Why, no. You went after him, didn't you?"

"We went after him, but he and his men fired on us

and damaged our motor. We went to Lake Station to fix the machinery, and while we were there we caught sight of the Hawk, through a spyglass, making north. As soon as we could, we started for the swamp, but there was no one there. Naturally, we supposed that Brady and his gang had made their escape, and it's mighty surprising to hear that the Hawk is back in its old cage and didn't bring Brady along."

"The Hawk brought Motor Matt—"

Carl gave a yell and nearly fell out of the car.

"Motor Matt?" he shouted. "Vas you shdringing me, oder iss it shdraight goots?"

"I'm giving it to you straight," answered the officer on the ground. "Motor Matt got away from the swamp and brought two prisoners with him, in the Hawk. They were two of the men who robbed Jerrold of his plans."

"Zum lauderbach haben, mich shtets—" began Carl, singing loudly and then interrupting himself to gloat. "Dot's my bard vat dit dot! Yah, so! Leedle Motor Matt who iss always doing t'ings vat you don'd oxbect. He has shtarred himseluf some more, you bed you! Vere iss Motor Matt now, officer?" Carl called down.

"He took a train into Chicago—said he was behind his schedule for that five-day race. The two prisoners are at police headquarters."

"Well, by thunder!" muttered Harris, mopping his face with a red handkerchief, "that Motor Matt must be a regular young phenomenon!"

"I never heard of anything to beat him!" averred Jerrold.

"Und you nefer vill!" declared Carl. "He iss vone oof dose fellers vat can't be peat."

"You might take us to police headquarters, Jerrold," suggested Harris.

"Und you mighdt shtop on der vay py der railroadt sdation," piped Carl. "I vant to ged py Chicago so kevick as der nation vill led me."

When Carl next saw Matt, the young motorist was spinning around the great oval in a Jarrot machine, which he knew so well and had driven to victory in Kansas. The five-day race was not for one driver alone, but several drivers were to be at the steering wheel of each car. Matt had reached the Coliseum just in time to take his place in the racing schedule.

Every time Matt whirled around the oval, Carl had something to say to him, but it was not until evening that the boys were able to get together for a talk.

They decided between them that Brady, and those whom Matt had left on the "island," must have made their escape from the swamp by a secret route known only to themselves.

Where Harper, the driver of the Hawk was, was likewise a mystery to the police.

Matt had turned the bag of loot stolen from Hartz & Greer over to the police with instructions to say that it was recovered by Miss Brady, and that no reward would be accepted for its return.

"How you tink dot air-ship pitzness is, anyvays, Matt?" asked Carl, when the boys had had their talk out and were ready to crawl into bed.

"I *like* it," answered Matt, enthusiastically, "and I wish I could have more of it!"

His wish was destined to fulfillment, for, as events proved, his thrilling work in South Chicago and at

Willoughby's swamp was but the beginning of a series of air-ship experiences. Matt may have congratulated himself with the thought that he was through with Hector Brady, but Brady was by no means done with Matt—as will be made clear in the story to follow.

THE END.

The next number (10) will contain:

Motor Matt's Hard Luck

OR,

THE BALLOON-HOUSE PLOT

An Old Friend—A Trap—Overboard—Rescued—Buying the Hawk—Matt Scores Against Jameson—At the Balloon House—The Plot of the Brady Gang—Carl is Surprised—Helen Brady's Clue—Jerrold Gives His Aid—Grand Haven—The Line On Brady—The Woods by the River—Brady a Prisoner—Back in South Chicago.

MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

NEW YORK, April 24, 1909.

TERMS TO MOTOR STORIES MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

(Postage Free.)

Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

3 months	65c.
4 months	85c.
6 months	\$1.25
One year	2.50
2 copies one year	4.00
1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money-order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage-stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

Ormond G. Smith, }
George C. Smith, } *Proprietors*

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

THE BIG CYPRESS.

The rifle cracked and the piece of boiler plate, which had been erected as target against the bank fifty yards away, fell shattered like a pane of glass.

"How's that, Colonel Fearon?" coolly inquired the young fellow, who had fired the shot, as he turned to the tall, sallow-faced man who stood beside him.

A curious expression crossed the latter's face, but he answered quickly, "Amazing, Rutherford! Simply astonishing. I could never have believed such a thing possible. A pom-pom shell could hardly have smashed the plate more effectually."

The boy—he was hardly more—laughed. "I thought it would startle you, colonel. Will you feel justified in sending me up to Washington?"

"I reckon that's the place for you to go to, Rutherford. The war department'll need that new bullet of yours in their business. You mean to tell me you invented that bullet all by yourself?"

"I did, colonel. You see, I was always fond of dabbling in chemistry and the idea for this came to me one day when I was at work in my father's store. I didn't worry about it much, until the poor old man went broke, and then it struck me there was money in it. It was the mayor of our town, Orangeville, told me to come to you. He said that you could give me the proper introductions."

"He was right," said Colonel Fearon. "I can fix you up with the proper people. Let me have a shot."

Lionel Rutherford handed the colonel a cartridge, which outwardly looked precisely similar to an ordinary rifle cartridge. He then walked across the

lawn of fine Bermuda grass, put a fresh piece of steel plate in position, and came back.

The colonel fired, and, as before, the tough steel simply sprang to pieces and lay in scattered fragments on the grass.

"I reckon there's more money in this than in keeping store," said the colonel thoughtfully. "Rutherford, I'll be pleased if you'll stay here at my house for a day or two till I can write to the proper people."

Young Rutherford thanked him warmly and the two walked back toward the long, low, wide verandaed house.

Late that night the colonel and his son, Randal Fearon, sat together in the well-appointed smoking room and talked earnestly in low tones.

"There's thousands in it, father," said the younger man sharply. "Thousands!"

"I know that as well as yourself," returned the other irritably. "But the invention's not yours or mine."

"What's Rutherford?" sneered Randal. "Here he is, a fellow who's never known anything of life, who's lived all his days in a little one-horse backwoods town, and now he's going to roll in riches while we are on the edge of bankruptcy."

He paused, and glanced at his father, who sat fidgeting uneasily. The colonel, fine-looking man that he was, was as weak-willed as his tall, thin, sharp-faced son was strong.

"A real nice scandal there'll be when we go smash," went on Randal Fearon. "Think of the headlines. 'Fraudulent Bankruptcy. Prominent Floridian lives beyond his means.' How the yellow press'll revel in it!"

Again the colonel moved uneasily. "I don't see how

you're going to get the specifications from him, anyhow," he said at last.

"You leave that to me," replied Randal with sneering emphasis.

"Look you here, Randal, I won't have any violence." For once Colonel Fearon spoke decidedly.

"I guess you needn't worry your head about that," answered Randal. "I've got the whole plan cut and dried. You've asked him to stay?"

"Yes," said the colonel. "He will stay."

Randal laughed as if pleased. "That's all right. Tomorrow we'll settle it, Pete Dally and I."

"How?"

"I'll tell you in the morning. Don't worry yourself. As you are so anxious to avoid it, I promise you there shall be no violence."

Randal chuckled in ugly fashion as he got up, flung the stump of his cigar into the fireplace, and, lighting a small hand lamp, left the room.

"How much farther have we got to go before we run into any of this game you talked about, Mr. Fearon?" asked Rutherford as he stopped and wiped the perspiration from his streaming face.

"I thought we'd have seen a buck before now," replied Randal Fearon. "We don't often have to come this far into the Big Cypress to find game, do we, Pete?"

"No, sah; we gen'rally finds it quite clos' to the aidge of de swamp," said Pete, who was a burly, square-shouldered negro with a face as black as ebony.

Rutherford was rather puzzled. That morning Randal Fearon had suggested that it would be very good fun to go shooting in the Big Cypress, a huge tract of wild, swampy forest, the edge of which was about five miles from Colonel Fearon's place.

"You might try the effect of some of your explosive bullets," Randal had suggested; and Rutherford had laughed and said that there wouldn't be much left of any game smaller than a buffalo or an elephant if struck by one of his projectiles.

All the same, being a keen sportsman, he had willingly agreed to the shoot. What puzzled him was that they should have tramped for hours through this steaming bush, which reeked with signs of game, and yet not seen a single thing to shoot at.

"Don't you worry. We shall find deer soon," said Randal when Rutherford expressed his astonishment. "We're getting near a good place now. I reckon we'd better stop and eat our dinner first. Pete, make a fire."

Pete Dally dropped the big haversack he was carrying over his broad shoulders, and obeyed. In a very few minutes a fire was blazing, and the fragrant fumes of frying bacon and strong coffee filled the close, steamy air. Lionel Rutherford, tired by the long tramp and the hot-house atmosphere of the jungle, enjoyed the meal greatly.

After they had finished they marched on again. They had left the pine trees behind, and were pushing along a narrow track through a forest of great ilex, bastard oak, and magnolia. The undergrowth was of saw palmetto, growing in huge, impenetrable clumps, among which the muddy track wound in and out.

The scent of yellow jasmine was almost stifling, but the only life visible was an occasional cardinal bird with its vivid crimson plumage, or a stub-tailed water

moccasin which raised its triangular, copper-hued head with an ugly hiss and dragged itself sluggishly out of sight among the tangled herbage.

The path was so narrow that they were compelled to walk in single file. Randal made Pete lead the way. More than once the negro had tried to drop behind, but each time Randal roughly ordered him to push ahead.

The silence of the swamp grew as oppressive as the intense heat. It began to get upon young Rutherford's nerves.

"A tough place to get lost in," he said at last.

Randal turned quickly. There was a queer expression on his sharp face as he replied:

"Yes, pretty bad, I reckon."

Somehow, Rutherford fancied there was something sinister in his tone.

"I don't like the chap," he thought to himself. "I wish I hadn't come." Then common sense got the better of his fears. "It's the place, not the people, that's worrying me. These big hamaks are worse than a desert. There you can see the sky; here it's like one great, green prison."

"Look out, sah. Dah's a wild cat in dat tree," suddenly hissed Pete Dally, and slipped out of the path into the thicket. "Quiet or youse done frighten him."

Rutherford, all excitement, slipped his rifle from his shoulder.

But Randal barred his way. He was standing still, peering up into the tree indicated.

"Where? I don't see it," he exclaimed harshly.

"Dere it am, sah. On dat big fork," declared Pete,

pointing. And then as Randal stepped forward, the negro slipped back round a clump of palmetto, and Rutherford felt a hand fall sharply on his arm, while these words were whispered in his ear:

"Dat man mean you no good, sah. Watch me, an' doan' do what he say."

He turned in amazement, but Peter was already gone. He had glided back, and was standing at Randal's elbow, pointing out the exact spot where he alleged he had seen the cat.

But there was no cat there now, and Rutherford wondered if there ever had been. Randal cursed Pete angrily, and once more they moved forward.

Rutherford, more worried than he cared to own even to himself, followed, as before, the last of the little procession.

It was getting late and the bullfrogs had begun to bellow harshly in unseen pools in the forest. But there was no decrease in the sullen heat. Not a breath stirred the moist, stagnant air, and the farther they went the thicker grew the tangled vegetation till there was no longer any sign of a path. In unbroken silence the three forced their way through primeval forest.

Presently trees broke away, and they stood upon the muddy marge of a reedy lagoon, across the stagnant waters of which the low sun cast a lurid light.

"Here we are," said Randal Fearon sharply. "This is where the deer come down to drink. You wait, Rutherford, in the bushes here, and you'll soon get a shot. Pete and I will take up our places on the far side. Then whatever comes some of us will get a buck."

"Watch me, and don't do what he says." Pete's words were ringing in Rutherford's ears. He cast a glance at the negro. Pete made a quick sign, which the English

boy took to mean that he was to follow instead of remaining.

Next moment Randal had plunged off through the palmetto with Pete at his heels.

"What's it all mean?" muttered Rutherford angrily. "Is Fearon fooling me, or is it Pete? Of the two, I infinitely prefer the nigger. I'll do what he says."

He left his shelter, and moved as quietly as possible on the track of the other two.

Sure enough, they did go round the pool! Rutherford began to wonder if he was wrong; whether Pete for some unknown reason was fooling him.

The going was dreadful. The ground below the almost impenetrable palmetto was deep mud. Swarms of mosquitoes rose and stung viciously. Lionel was afraid that the crashing of the parted bushes would betray him.

He knew he was falling a long way behind, and panic seized him that he might lose the others. Though young Rutherford had lived all his life in America, yet he had never been in a big swamp like this. The store had kept him busy.

At last he reached the spot which Randal had pointed out as his own shooting station. To his horror, there was no one there. Randal and Pete had both disappeared. He was alone in the tangled heart of this monstrous swamp, and knew that without help he could never hope to find his way out.

After the first moment of panic Lionel Rutherford pulled himself together. He had plenty of pluck. He rapidly considered the situation. For some reason best known to himself Randal Fearon wished to abandon him, to lose him in the swamp. But he himself had no idea of dying of hunger, fever, or snakebite in this

impenetrable wilderness. He had two courses open—go back and try to find his way out along the trail they had come by, or follow after Randal and Pete.

There were no objections to the first. It was a very long way, and it was doubtful if he could find it even in broad daylight. As it was, it would be dark in an hour. Besides, Pete had certainly meant him to follow.

Randal must mean to spend the night in the swamp. That was clear. Therefore he must have some camping place.

"I'll follow," muttered the boy between set teeth, and started off.

Though the sun was not yet down, it was already dusk beneath the thick shade of the towering timber, and in the half light the trail was most difficult to follow. The others had long ago passed out of hearing.

The night life of the swamp was waking. Enormous owls hooted weirdly, then came the thundering bellow of a bull alligator, and presently above all these the ghastly, half-human shriek of a panther calling to its mate.

Stumbling and struggling, Lionel hurried on. In a little he came to a thick belt of tall saw grass. The two pairs of footmarks entered it, but the trails beyond were so confused with the passage of deer and other animals that the boy recognized with a shock that he could not follow the human footsteps.

Very near despair, he turned back. No, he could not find Randal's trail. He stopped. "I'm done!" he muttered hopelessly, and stood straining his ears for any sound of his former companions.

Just then, as he was almost giving up, he caught sight of a morsel of something white stuck on a broken stem beside the trail. It was a tiny piece of paper, and

on it, marked with a muddy finger tip, an arrow pointing in a certain direction.

"Pete!" exclaimed Lionel joyfully. A load rolled off his mind. Marking the direction carefully, he pushed on fast. Now he was on the lookout, he found other signs; a broken twig, a stick, laid in the path.

Darkness fell rapidly. There is little twilight in Florida.

"They can't go much farther," he said. He was right. In a very short time the dull glow of a fire showed where the others had camped.

"What shall I do?" he asked himself. "Go right up and tackle Randal Fearon? No; he'd have some excuse ready, and I'd only get Pete into trouble. I must wait till Randal goes to sleep."

The mosquitoes were savage. Young Rutherford, tired and hungry, found it maddening to wait in the damp gloom, and watch Randal gorge on the supper which Pete cooked. Nearly two hours passed before Randal, having finished a cigar, rolled himself, head and all, in a blanket and lay down.

A few minutes more, and a snore told Rutherford it was safe to venture closer.

Pete heard him, and glided out. The black man chuckled silently when he saw the boy. "Reckoned you'd be along, sah. You foun' de sign Pete lef' for you. Now de firs' thing is you eat. Den we talk."

He put corn, bread, and bacon into Rutherford's hands, and the boy made a hearty meal.

"Now, sah," said Pete. "You see what dat man want to do. He lose you in de swamp, den go home, say you fell in de water and was drowned. Den he an' his dad, dey take dat blow-up bullet ob yours an' sell him."

Lionel Rutherford was aghast. He had never dreamed of such wickedness.

"But we beat dem," went on Pete, with a chuckle. "I like you, an' I hate dat Randal."

"What can we do?" asked Lionel eagerly.

"Why, we play de same trick on him he try play on you. We take all de stuff, go off, an' leab him. He no more find his way out of de Big Cypress dan you. Only Pete know de trails."

"That won't do, Pete," returned Lionel sharply. "I won't be any party to murder."

Pete was amazed. He expostulated strongly.

"No, I'll tell you what we will do, Pete. We'll go off and hide, and let him think he's lost. We'll follow and watch, and when he's got the soul nearly scared out of him we'll find him again. See?"

Pete saw. He chuckled again in high good humor. "Dat's a very fine game, sah. We play dat to-morrow morning. Now I take de things away, an' when Randal wake he find no breakfast, no Pete, no nothing."

"He done lost hisself, sure pop!" declared Pete.

It was nine o'clock next morning, and Lionel Rutherford and the negro had been following Randal for more than an hour.

His language when he woke up and found Pete gone had been something appalling.

Having found that this did no good, he had started off back along the track they had come by on the previous day, but in less than ten minutes he was off it; and the two, who followed at a discreet distance, had watched his growing fury and fright when he found

himself quite lost in the pathless depths of the wilderness.

"He can't go dat way much furder," observed Pete. "He gettin' down in de deal bad swamp. He go in up to his fool neck if he don't be keerful."

Sure enough the quaking muck-land broke beneath the young scoundrel's weight, and in he went. With a yell of fright he caught at a branch, pulled himself out, and staggered back.

"What's he going to do now?" whispered Lionel.

"Reckon he going climb dat tree an' see whar he am."

Pete was right. Randal began shinning up the stem of a tall, slender tree by the water's edge, the only one which seemed to give a possible view of any of the surrounding country. No doubt he thought he might spot the trail from the summit.

Rutherford, who had been staring hard at the tree, suddenly clutched Pete's arm. "What's that thing up in the branches just above him?" he asked sharply.

Pete took a long stare. "By golly, sah, it am a snake! An' a mighty big one, sure!"

Rutherford started forward, slipping a cartridge into his rifle.

"Don't shoot, sah," whispered Pete. "Dat ain't no poison snake. It am only a old white oak snake."

"Looks like an ugly customer," muttered Lionel.

At this moment Randal reached the first boughs and stood up. The movement alarmed the snake, which raised its ugly head and hissed sharply.

Randal heard the hiss, and, turning, saw the reptile. He gave a scream of terror, and almost lost his hold. Then he backed rapidly on to a branch which actually

overhung the creek.

"Time to end this now," said Rutherford, raising his rifle. "I shall shoot the snake."

Pete seized his arm. "De snake won't hurt him, sah. But dey will."

He pointed to the water. The big alligator had seen Randal, and silently moved up till it was just beneath him. Another of almost equal size had also risen to the surface. Yellow eyes agleam, the hideous brutes were watching for this rash intruder upon their domain.

At the very instant there was a snapping crackle. The bough on which Randal cowered was breaking. And the wretched man, clinging vainly for a hold, had caught sight of the huge reptiles below. He screamed till the forest resounded with his agonizing cries.

He snatched at the branches above, but could reach only twigs, which broke in his grasp. He was falling clean into the open jaws of the alligators.

If Rutherford's rifle had been loaded only with an ordinary cartridge nothing could have saved Randal. It was just pure luck that he had flung one of his explosives into the breach.

Simultaneous with Randal's fall the rifle spoke. The bullet caught the nearest alligator on the side of the head, and the air was full of mangled fragments of flesh and bone.

Into this horrible geyser Randal dropped heavily and vanished.

Next moment he rose again, and struck out madly for the bank.

"I can't shoot again," cried Lionel. "I should kill him if I did."

"Dere ain't no need to," said the negro. "You done scared de stuffin' out ob dat oder gator."

"Thank goodness he's safe," exclaimed Lionel as Randal scrambled ashore and fell in a heap on the bank. "Now we'd better get him home."

Pete laughed. "Yes, sah. I reckon he done had enough ob de Big Cypress."

When Randal came round Rutherford soon realized he had no more to fear. The fellow's nerve was broken. He shivered and trembled like a frightened child.

They took him home, and then Lionel went boldly to Colonel Fearon, and told him the whole story plump and plain. When he had finished the colonel sat speechless. His face was gray and pinched.

Lionel looked at him. "I shan't make any trouble for you," he said coolly. "All I want is those introductions. Write them now, and I'll take them myself to Washington."

Without a word the colonel obeyed.

Lionel Rutherford is now a rich and rising man. Pete is his faithful major-domo. Whenever Lionel gets a holiday the two go off down south for a week or two of shooting. But they never again penetrated the desolate depths of the Great Cypress.



LATEST ISSUES



BUFFALO BILL STORIES

The most original stories of Western adventure. The only weekly containing the adventures of the famous Buffalo Bill. **High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.**

405—Buffalo Bill and the Rope Wizard; or, A Tie-up with the Riata King.

406—Buffalo Bill's Fiesta; or, At Outs with the Duke of Cimarron.

407—Buffalo Bill Among the Cheyennes; or, The Rescue of Paquita.

408—Buffalo Bill Besieged; or, Texas Kid's Last Trail.

409—Buffalo Bill and the Red Hand; or, The Ranch of Mystery.

410—Buffalo Bill's Tree-Trunk Drift; or, The Cold Game "Gent" from Red Tail.

411—Buffalo Bill and the Spectre; or, A Queer Layout in Spook Cañon.

412—Buffalo Bill and the Red Feathers; or, The Pard Who Went Wrong.

413—Buffalo Bill's King Stroke; or, Old Fire-top's Finish.

414—Buffalo Bill, the Desert Cyclone; or, The Wild Pigs of the Cumbres.

415—Buffalo Bill's Cumbres Scouts; or, The Wild Pigs Corralled.

BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY

All kinds of stories that boys like. The biggest and best nickel's worth ever offered. **High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.**

321—Madcap Max, The Boy Adventurer; or, Lost in the Land of the Mahdi. By Frank Sheridan.

322—Always to the Front; or, For Fun and Fortune. By Cornelius Shea.

323—Caught in a Trap; or, The Great Diamond Case. By Harrie Irving Hancock.

324—For Big Money; or, Beating His Way to the Pacific. By Fred Thorpe.

325—Muscles of Steel; or, The Boy Wonder. By Weldon J. Cobb.

326—Gordon Keith in Zululand; or, How "Checkers" Held the Fort. By Lawrence White, Jr.

327—The Boys' Revolt; or, Right Against Might. By Harrie Irving Hancock.

328—The Mystic Isle; or, In Peril of His Life. By Fred Thorpe.

329—A Million a Minute; or, A Brace of Meteors. By Weldon J. Cobb.

330—Gordon Keith Under African Skies; or, Four Comrades in the Danger Zone. By Lawrence White, Jr.

331—Two Chums Afloat; or, The Cruise of the "Arrow." By Cornelius Shea.

THE BEST OF THEM ALL!!

MOTOR STORIES

We knew before we published this line that it would have a tremendous sale and our expectations were more than realized. It is going with a rush, and the boys who want to read these, the most interesting and fascinating tales ever written, must speak to their newsdealers about reserving copies for them.

MOTOR MATT sprang into instant favor with American boy readers and is bound to occupy a place in their hearts second only to that now held by Frank Merriwell.

The reason for this popularity is apparent in every line of these stories. They are written by an author who has made a life study of the requirements of the up-to-date American boy as far as literature is concerned, so it is not surprising that this line has proven a huge success from the very start.

Here are the titles now ready and also those to be published. You will never have a better opportunity to get a generous quantity of reading of the highest quality, so place your orders now.

No. 1.—Motor Matt; or, The King of the Wheel.

No. 2.—Motor Matt's Daring; or, True to His Friends.

No. 3.—Motor Matt's Century Run; or, The Governor's Courier.

No. 4.—Motor Matt's Race; or, The Last Flight of the "Comet."

No. 5.—Motor Matt's Mystery; or, Foiling a Secret Plot.

No. 6.—Motor Matt's Red Flier; or, On the High Gear.

No. 7.—Motor Matt's Clue; or, The Phantom Auto.

No. 8.—Motor Matt's Triumph; or, Three Speeds Forward.

No. 9.—Motor Matt's Air-Ship; or, the Rival Inventors

**No. 10.—Motor Matt's Hard Luck; or, the Balloon
House Plot**

TO BE PUBLISHED ON MAY 3rd

**No. 11.—Motor Matt's Daring Rescue; or, the Strange
Case of Helen Brady**

TO BE PUBLISHED ON MAY 10th

**No. 12.—Motor Matt's Peril, or, Cast Away in the
Bahamas**

TO BE PUBLISHED ON MAY 17th

**No. 13.—Motor Matt's Queer Find; or, Secret of the
Iron Chest**

TO BE PUBLISHED ON May 24th

No. 14.—Motor Matt's Promise; or, Wreck of the Hawk

**No. 15.—Motor Matt's Submarine; or, Strange Cruise
of the Grampus**

**No. 16.—Motor Matt's Quest; or, Three Chums on
Strange Waters**

**No. 17.—Motor Matt's Close Call; or, the Snare of Don
Carlos**

No. 18.—Motor Matt in Brazil; or, Under the Amazon

32 LARGE SIZE
PAGES

SPLENDID COLORED
COVERS

PRICE, FIVE CENTS

At all newsdealers, or sent, postpaid, by the publishers upon
receipt of the price.

STREET & SMITH, *Publishers,* NEW YORK

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS of our Weeklies and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Fill out the following Order Blank and send it to us with the price of the Weeklies you want and we will send them to you by return mail. **POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.**

_____ 190

STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Dear Sirs: Enclosed please find

_____ *cents for which send me:*

TIPTOP Nos _____
WEEKLY, . _____

NICK " _____
CARTER _____
WEEKLY, _____

DIAMON " _____
D DICK _____
WEEKLY, _____

BUFFALO Nos _____
BILL . _____
STORIES, _____

BRAVE " _____
AND _____
BOLD _____
WEEKLY, _____

MOTOR " _____
STORIES, _____

Name _____ Street _____
 City _____ State _____

