

BRAVE AND BOLD

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A freight train was almost at the crossing, and, unless Motor Matt could check the runabout in its wild flight, it would surely be demolished by the onrushing locomotive.

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**A HOODOO MACHINE;
OR,
The Motor Boys' Runabout No. 1313.**

By STANLEY R. MATTHEWS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAR THAT WOULDN'T BEHAVE.

“Sufferin’ whirligigs, Pard Matt! Look at that bubble wagon! Is it trying to turn a handspring, or ‘skin the cat,’ or climb that telephone pole? I reckon the longhorn up front don’t know how to run the thing. Either that, or else he’s ‘bug’ with a big ‘B.’”

“I should say it’s the car that’s ‘bug,’ Joe. The driver seems to be trying to control the machine in the proper manner, but it won’t be controlled. What’s your notion of it, Billy?”

“Hoodoo car, Matt. Look at the number of her—thirteen thirteen. Double hoodoo. You couldn’t expect no chug wagon with such a tag to behave anything else than disgraceful. Lo and behold you, if she don’t turn turtle in the ditch before she goes many more miles then my name’s not Billy Wells. Watch ’er; keep your eye on ’er an’ I’ll bet you see something.”

The three boys were driving along the Jericho Pike well toward Krug’s Corner—Matt King, Joe McGlory, and Billy Wells. Billy belonged with a New York garage from which the boys had secured the touring car they were using that morning. He was a living road map, this Billy, and could go anywhere up-state, or over Long Island, or in Jersey on the darkest night that ever fell, and he knew every minute just where he was.

Matt was doing the driving, and Billy sat beside him as guide, counselor, and friend. In the back of the machine was McGlory.

That was Thursday. Matt and his chum were heeding a summons that carried them toward the Malvern Country Club, near Hempstead. After transacting their business at the Country Club—they did not know what it was, but believed it would not take them long—they were planning to return to Krug’s Corner for their noon meal, and then back to Manhattan by Jackson Avenue and the Williamsburg Bridge. But plans are easily made, sometimes, and not so easily carried out.

The day was bright, the roads were good, and the motor boys were enjoying themselves. Well along the Jericho Pike they had come up with a white runabout, two seats in front and a deck behind, and the actions of this car aroused their

curiosity to such an extent that Matt slowed down the big machine in order that he and those with him could follow and watch the performance.

There was only one passenger in the white car, and he was having his hands full.

The runabout would angle from one side of the road to the other, in apparent defiance of the way the steering wheel was held, and sometimes it would go its eccentric course slowly and sometimes with a rush—so far as those in the other car could see—without any change in the speed gear.

The driver of the runabout worked frantically to keep the machine where it ought to be, but the task was too much for him.

Once a telephone pole gave him a close shave, and once his unmanageable car gave a sidewise lurch that almost hurled it into a machine going the other way.

“What’s the matter?” Matt hailed.

The man in the runabout looked around with a facial expression that was far from angelic.

“If I knew what was the matter with this confounded car,” he cried in exasperation, “do you think I’d be side-stepping all over the road the way I am?” Then, muttering to himself, he humped over the steering wheel again.

“He’s happy—I don’t think,” chuckled McGlory. “The car’s getting on his nerves.”

“A car like that would get on anybody’s nerves,” commented Billy. “The number’s enough to set mine on edge. Thirteen’s unlucky, no matter where you find it. That’s right. And when you get two thirteens bunched together, you’ve sure got a combination that points a car for the scrap heap. I wouldn’t hold down the cushions in that roadster for all the money in New York. No, sir, that I wouldn’t,” and Billy shook his head forebodingly.

“Oh, splash!” scoffed Matt. “When a car fools around like that, Billy, there’s something wrong with its internal apparatus.”

“Matt,” went on Billy solemnly, “I’ve seen cars that hadn’t a thing wrong with ’em, but they was just naturally crazy and never’d run right. Steer ’em straight, an’ they’d go crooked; point ’em crooked, an’ they’d go straight; throw on the reverse, an’ they’d go for’ard; give ’em the third speed an’ they’d crawl; give ’em the first an’ they’d tear away like lightnin’—and all the while, mind you, the engine was running as sweet as any engine you ever see. The Old Boy himself takes charge of some cars the moment they’re sold and in a customer’s hands.

I've worked in a garage for five years, and I know."

Matt laughed. McGlory laughed, too, but not so mirthfully. The cowboy had a little superstition in his make-up and Billy's remarks had left a fleeting impression.

"Gammon, Billy, gammon," said Matt. "If a car is built right, and works right, it is going to run right. That stands to reason."

"A lot of things happen," insisted Billy, "that don't stand to reason. Now, take that runabout. The engine's working fine—from the sound of it. Eh?"

Matt admitted that, so far as the hum of the motor was concerned, the machinery seemed to be doing its part.

"Well, then," cried the triumphant Billy, "why don't the blooming car run like it ought to?"

"It's the steering gear that's wrong," Matt answered, "not the engine, or——"

Bang!

Just then the runabout blew up a forward tire. The machine tried to turn a somersault, and its passenger went over on the hood and tried to knock off one of the gas lamps with his head. When Matt brought the touring car to the side of the runabout, and halted, the man was on his feet, shaking his fist at the silent white tormentor.

"If I had a stick of dynamite," he declared wrathfully, "I'd blow this infernal machine to kingdom come! I've been fiddling around the Jericho Road for two mortal hours, and I could have made better time if I'd left the car and gone on afoot. But I'll hang to it, and make it take me where I'm going. By George, I'll not be beaten by a senseless contraption of tires, mud guards, and machinery."

Matt had jumped out of the touring car and was sniffing at the damaged tire.

"What makes that smell of gasoline?" he asked.

"I put in a tube this morning, and washed out the chalk with gasoline," said the man.

"Never use gasoline for cleaning the tubes," counseled Matt. "Get all the chalk you can from the outer tube, and then soak it in wood naphtha or ordinary alcohol. No wonder your tire blew up. You left gasoline in the shoe, and when it got hot, it mixed with a little air in the tube and something had to happen. Have you got another shoe?"

“Yes.”

“And a jack?”

“Of course. When a man goes out with a car like this he ought to carry a small garage around with him.”

“Well, we’ll help you get on the shoe.”

Matt and Billy worked. McGlory stood near, watching and talking with the owner of the car.

After the tire had been repaired, Matt looked over the runabout critically. Much to his amazement, he could find nothing wrong.

“It’s the double hoodoo,” whispered Billy; “that’s all that’s the trouble.”

“Much obliged to you,” said the man, cranking up. “Now we’ll see how she acts.”

He got in, went through the operations for a fresh start, but the runabout began backing. While the man shouted, and said things, the runabout backed in a circle around the big touring car, then dropped rearward down a shallow embankment at the roadside—and its passenger had another spill, out over the rear deck this time. For a second, he stood on his head and shoulders, then turned clear over and made a quick move sideways in getting to his feet. He was afraid, evidently, that the runabout was coming on top of him. But the car, almost in defiance of the laws of gravitation, hung to the side of the steep bank, its position nearly perpendicular.

“Speak to me about that!” gasped McGlory.

Matt was scared. From the top of the bank he stood staring while the man got out of the way.

“Are you all right?” Matt asked.

“No thanks to that fiendish machine if I am,” sputtered the man, laboring frantically up the slope. “It has tried to kill me in a dozen different ways since I left home with it. I’m done. Life’s too short to bother with such an infernal car as that.”

Fairly boiling with rage, he started along the road on foot.

“Wait a minute!” shouted Matt. “Where you going?”

The man turned.

“Krug’s,” he answered. “I’ll get a decent, respectable car there to take me on.”

“You can telephone to a garage from Krug’s,” suggested Billy, “and they can send some one to get the runabout home.”

“I’m done with the runabout, I tell you. It can stay where it is until the tires rot, for all of me.”

“I’ll agree to get it back to the city for you,” said Matt. “My name’s King, Matt King, and I’m staying at——”

The man’s rage subsided a little.

“You’re Matt King?” he inquired.

“Yes.”

“I understand, now, how you happen to know so much about tubes. They say you’re pretty well up in motors, too. Well, here’s where I give you the job of your life. Matt King, I make you a present of that runabout. Take it—but Heaven help you if you try to run it.”

Thereupon the man whirled around and strode off.

“Oh, I say,” yelled Matt, “you don’t mean it. Wait, and I’ll——”

But the man swung onward, paying no heed to what Matt was calling after him.

Matt King turned and peered in amazement at his cowboy chum.

“Sufferin’ tenderhooks!” exclaimed McGlory. “You’re loaded up with a bunch of trouble now, pard.”

“Come on,” urged Billy, moving toward the touring car with considerable haste.

“Don’t lay a finger on that runabout—don’t have a thing to do with it.”

But Matt was face to face with a proposition that caught his fancy. A refractory automobile! Never yet had he encountered a machine that had got the best of him. And this runabout couldn’t do it—he was positive of that.



CHAPTER II.

MATT KING'S RESOLVE.

"That man was so mad he was locoed," observed the cowboy.

"Certainly he was, Joe," agreed Matt. "If he hadn't been, he'd never have given away that machine. It's a powerful car and worth twenty-five hundred of any man's money."

"Don't tamper with it, Matt," implored Billy. "When that fellow gets over his mad spell he'll want the runabout back. Let him have it—and let him find it right where he left it."

"If he hadn't been worked up like he was," said Matt, "he wouldn't have given the car to me. I won't take it, of course, but Joe and I will use it to take us to the Malvern Country Club, and then back to Manhattan. By to-morrow that fellow will be looking for me and wanting his car back."

"You wouldn't think of such a thing as wanting to bother with that runabout!" gasped Billy, from his seat in the touring car.

"Yes, I would," answered Matt. "Why not?"

"The number—thirteen thirteen!"

"Bosh!"

"It's a hoodoo car."

"Never mind about that, Billy. You go on to Krug's Corner and get a stout rope. If you overtake the owner of the runabout you can give him a lift. See him, anyhow, and tell him we'll take the runabout to New York and that he can have it whenever he wants it."

"Don't do it!" begged Billy. "I've seen enough of these hoodoo cars to know they'll prove the death of somebody. Don't let that runabout prove the death of you!"

"Go get the rope, Billy," said Matt sharply, "and hustle back with it."

There was that in the voice of Matt King which proved that he had made up his mind, and that there was no shaking his determination. With an ominous movement of the head, Billy started for Krug's Corner.

“Pard,” remarked McGlory earnestly, “I reckon the runabout is heap bad medicine. Do you think you ought to mix up with it?”

“Are you going back on me, Joe?” asked Matt.

“Not so you can notice. I’d get on a streak of greased lightning with you, if you said the word, and help you ride it to the end of the One-way Trail, but I think this is too big an order for us. Sufferin’ thunderbolts! Why, pard, that car won’t mind the helm or do the thing it ought to do even when you pull the right thing. When it began to crawfish around the road, the reverse wasn’t on.”

“I don’t know about that. It’s on now,” and he looked down at the runabout. “I guess the man must have thrown on the reverse instinctively when the tire blew up. Think of rinsing the chalk from the outer tube with gasoline!” Matt laughed. “There was good cause for the tire going wrong, and there may be other good and sufficient causes for the machine’s sizzling around like it did. Anyhow, we’ll try it, and see how it will behave for us.”

“But how can we lay a course for the Malvern Country Club? Billy will have to show us.”

“Billy can tell us how to go, and we’ll get to the Country Club all right. Hello! What’s this?”

Matt began slipping and sliding down the slope at the side of the runabout. Just at the point where the driver of the car had taken his header, the young motorist picked up a long manila envelope, unsealed.

“I reckon that dropped out of the man’s clothes while he was upside down,” ventured McGlory.

“That’s a cinch,” said Matt. “There’s no address on the envelope, and no printed card in the corner, but it may be we can find the man’s name and address on the papers inside. If he won’t come for his car, we’ll take it to him.”

“I’m a Piute,” mumbled McGlory, “if I feel right about this runabout business.”

“Billy’s talk about hoodoo cars has got you on the run,” grinned Matt. “You’ll feel different when we’re slamming along the pike with the runabout under perfect control. It’s my opinion that man doesn’t know a whole lot about running a car.”

While Matt was moving here and there about the steep bank, making a few investigations of the “hoodoo” machine, Billy came racing back.

“There’s your rope, Matt,” said he, tossing a coiled cable into the road.

Matt crept warily up the bank to the front of the runabout.

“Did you see the man, Billy?” he asked.

“Sure I did. Let him ride with me for half a mile.”

“You told him what we were going to do?”

“I did. He says that if you get that car back to the city, and try to turn it over to him, he’ll have you arrested for assault with intent to do great bodily damage. He says the runabout is a powder mine, and liable to blow up at any minute. ‘Tell Matt King to keep it,’ he said, ‘providing he’s got the nerve.’ That’s the way he handed it to me. Take my advice,” Billy clamored desperately, “and leave it alone!”

“Joe and I are going to use it,” answered Matt. “Hand me an end of that rope, pard,” he added to the cowboy.

McGlory passed him the rope, and Matt made it secure to the front of the runabout.

“Back up, Billy,” called Matt, “and tie the other end of the rope to the touring car. You’ve got to give us a lift into the road.”

“What if something should happen?” demurred Billy.

“Nonsense!” said Matt impatiently.

“You can’t give the car back to that fellow if he won’t take it.”

“We’ll make him take it. He’s a very foolish man, and he’s going to feel differently when his temper cools.”

Billy, not in a very comfortable frame of mind, backed the touring car close to the edge of the bank. The rope was made fast, and Matt and McGlory went to the foot of the bank to push while the big machine pulled.

The attempt was successful. The runabout sputtered—perhaps defiantly—as it yielded to the tugging and rolled up the slope. Matt looked the machine over and could not find that it had suffered any by the slide down the slope.

“It’ll hang together till it gets you, Motor Matt,” observed Billy growlsomely. “That’s the way with these hoodoo cars. They never go to pieces till they kill somebody.”

“You’re too good a driver, Billy, to talk such foolishness,” returned Matt. “Now,

tell us how to get to the Malvern Country Club.”

“Ain’t I going with you?”

“Three of us couldn’t ride very comfortably in the runabout.”

“But hadn’t I better go along in the touring car so as to be handy in case of accidents?”

“Oh, Joe and I will get along. We’re not going to have any accidents if we can help it—and I feel pretty sure we can.”

Billy laid out the course the boys were to take with considerable detail. When he was through, Matt felt that he had the route clearly fixed in his mind.

“If the runabout’s too much for you,” Billy finished, “all you’ve got to do is to phone the garage, and I’ll come a-runnin’.”

“Where did you get the rope?” asked Matt.

Billy told him he had borrowed it at Krug’s.

“We’ll leave it there,” said Matt, “on our way past the Corner.”

“You may never get to Krug’s,” answered Billy, in extreme dejection.

“Pile in, Joe,” said Matt, “and we’ll throw in the clutch and scoot.”

McGlory, it must be admitted, climbed into the runabout in a way that proved his lack of confidence. Matt cranked up, listening with deep satisfaction to the smooth singing of the engine, and then got into the driver’s seat.

Billy, in the touring car, watched tremulously and waited. From his appearance, he was plainly expecting that the white car would turn a few cartwheels and perhaps land upside down in the middle of the road with Matt and McGlory underneath.

But nothing of the sort happened. Car No. 1313 moved off in the direction of Krug’s as nice as you please—moved on a hair line, with none of the distressing wobbling which characterized its previous performance with its owner at the wheel.

The cowboy gathered confidence. Looking behind, he waved his hat at Billy.

“Don’t whistle till you’re out of the woods!” yelled Billy.

He shouted something else, but his words faded out in the increasing distance.

“Speak to me concerning this!” laughed McGlory, straightening around in his

seat. "This little old chug cart is a false alarm, after all. It seems to understand that there's a fellow in charge who knows the ropes up and down and across. Fine!"

"We'll see the owner of the machine at Krug's," said Matt, "and get his address."

"But he can't have the runabout till we're done with it," protested McGlory.

"I should say not! We've sent Billy home, and that leaves us only this car to take us back. Ah, there's Krug's! We'll stop for a few minutes."

Matt tried to stop, but he couldn't. He went through all the motions for cutting off the flow of gasoline and switching off the spark. The clutch was out, but the engine still had the car, and the engine wouldn't stop.

An automobile was just coming out of the sheds. The runabout came within an ace of a head-on collision. Fortunately the steering gear still worked, and Matt scraped mud guards with the other car and he and his cowboy chum bounded on along the road.

McGlory yelled frantically. "Jump!" he cried; "let the old contraption run its blooming head off!"

But Matt wouldn't jump, and he wouldn't let his chum go over the flying wheels. Dazed and bewildered, he bore down on the brake.

The speed slackened, but they were half a mile beyond Krug's before the car made up its mind to stop. Then McGlory tumbled out, while Matt sat astounded, his arms folded over the steering wheel and such a look on his face as the cowboy had never seen there before.



CHAPTER III.

A DEMON IN CONTROL.

“Get out of that, pard! Get out!” McGlory was wild with apprehension, and sprang up and down at the roadside and waved his arms. “The way that car acts would make the hair stand up on a buffalo robe! What are you staying there for?”

“I’m trying to guess how that happened,” said Matt.

“Then stop guessing. You can guess till you’re black in the face and you’ll still be up in the air. Cut loose from that bubble wagon—that’s your cue and mine.”

“There’s a reason for the car acting as it does,” declared Matt, “and I’m going to get down to the bottom of the mystery. We might just as well put in a little time right here. It’s not a very long run to the Malvern Country Club, and we can waste another half hour without missing your appointment.”

“If you took my advice,” muttered McGlory, “you wouldn’t touch that machine with a ten-foot pole.”

There was a determined look on Matt’s face as he leaped into the road and began an exhaustive examination. He could find nothing wrong; nevertheless, he went over the ignition system carefully, step by step; then he took the carburetor to pieces, ran pins through the spray nozzle and sandpapered the float guides; and, after that, he went under the car, broke the gasoline connections and drew wires through the tubes.

The cowboy heaved a long breath of relief as Matt reappeared from under the car.

“Find anything out of whack, pard?” McGlory asked.

“Not a thing,” answered the mystified Matt.

“Then you’re about ready to admit there’s a demon in control of the car?”

“I don’t believe in demons.”

“If a car won’t stop when it ought to stop, and if it won’t go straight when you’re steering that way, and if it backs up when everything is set for going ahead, I’m a Piute if I don’t think there’s something else got a hand in running it.”

Matt was silent. He was facing a proposition that was new to him, but he was dealing with motor details with which he was perfectly familiar. Here was an ordinary four-cycle engine, and an ordinary float-feed carburetor; the transmission was of the common sliding-gear variety; the fuel tank was under the seat, and the gasoline was fed into the engine by gravity. Why was it that the different parts did not coöperate as they should?

“Come on, Joe,” said Matt, putting on the coat which he had laid off while at work, “we’ll go back to Krug’s and see if my tinkering has helped any.”

“I can’t pass up the invitation, pard,” returned McGlory, “but if any one else gave it to me, I’d say *manana*. Every minute we’re aboard that runabout, we’re sitting on a thunderbolt that’s not more than half tame. Here goes, anyhow.”

The cowboy climbed to his place, and Matt “turned the engine over” and got in beside him. Then they backed until the runabout was headed the other way, whereupon Matt changed speeds and they slid over the pike as easily as a girl tripping to market. No. 1313 behaved like the prince of cars. No one, from its present performance, could ever have dreamed that it was anything but the mildest-mannered little buzz wagon that had ever come out of the shop.

“I’m stumped,” declared McGlory. “She acts as though she had never thought of such a thing as taking the bit in her teeth. I reckon, pard, you must have done something that started her to working in the right way.”

“I’ll never be able to understand how she ran for half a mile without any gas in the cylinders or any spark to cause an explosion,” said Matt, as he came to a stop in front of Krug’s. “Return the rope, Joe,” he added, “and see if you can find the owner of the runabout.”

McGlory was gone for ten minutes. When he came back he reported that the man who had cut loose from the runabout was nowhere to be found, and that a fellow answering his description had been taken into a car by a friend and had motored off in the direction of Hempstead.

“Then,” said Matt, “we’ll stop thinking about the owner of the car and continue to use it just as though it belonged to us.”

They turned south from the Corner and moved away in the direction of Hempstead at a good rate of speed. The runabout kept up its excellent behavior, answering instantly Matt’s slightest touch on steering wheel or levers.

“You’ve got the best of her, pard,” observed McGlory. “When you hip-locked with her, after she ran away from Krug’s, you must have poked a wire into

something that was causing all the trouble.”

“I couldn’t have done that,” answered Matt. “Still, no matter what the reason, the car is acting handsomely now, and we’ll let it go at that. Read that telegram to me again, Joe.”

McGlory fished around in his pocket until he had brought up a folded yellow sheet. Opening it out, he read as follows:

““Meeting of syndicate in the matter of ”Pauper’s Dream“ Mine postponed from Wednesday night to Thursday night. Meet me eleven o’clock Thursday Malvern Country Club, near Hempstead, Long Island. Important.

““JOSHUA GRIGGS.””

The “Pauper’s Dream” Mine was located near Tucson, in Arizona. It was owned by a stock company, and the cowboy had a hundred shares of the stock. A friend of his, named Colonel Mark Antony Billings, had induced him to invest in the “Pauper’s Dream” when it was little more than an undeveloped claim. Development seemingly proved the claim worthless, and McGlory had been surprised, while he and Matt were in New York, to receive a letter stating that a rich vein had been struck, and that the colonel was planning to sell the property at a big figure to a syndicate of New York capitalists. Random & Griggs, brokers, in Liberty Street, were the colonel’s New York agents, and the meeting of the syndicate was to be held in their office.

Two bars of gold bullion from the “Pauper’s Dream” mill had been sent by the colonel to New York, and McGlory had been requested to get the bullion and exhibit it to the members of the syndicate at the meeting. Matt and McGlory had had a good deal of trouble with that bullion, and the cowboy was not intending to take it from the bank, to whose care it had been consigned, until three o’clock in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, this telegram from Griggs was taking the boys to the Malvern Country Club; but just why it was necessary for McGlory to talk with Griggs was more than either of the lads could understand.

“Griggs, I reckon,” said McGlory, as he returned the telegram to his pocket, “is one of the members of the firm of Random & Griggs.”

“That’s my guess,” returned Matt; “but, if he is, why couldn’t he talk with you at the office in Liberty Street instead of having you come all the way out here?”

“I’ll have to shy at that, pard. Maybe Griggs is a plutocrat, and is accustomed to having people jump whenever he cracks the whip. Like as not he didn’t want to go in to the office to-day and just shot that message at us to save him the trouble of going too far for a palaver.”

“He told you all it was necessary for you to know, in the message. The meeting was postponed from last night to to-night. What else is there that he could want to tell you?”

“Pass again. Maybe he wants to ask about the colonel’s health, or——”

The cowboy bit off his words suddenly. Without the least warning, the runabout had made a wild lunge toward the side of the road.

“She’s cut loose again!” yelled McGlory, hanging to the seat with both hands.

Matt was holding the steering wheel firmly. So far as he could see, there was not the least excuse for the car’s making that frantic plunge toward the roadside.

Just ahead of the machine was a railroad track, and the noise of an approaching train was loud in the boys’ ears. Matt was thinking that, if the runabout repeated the performance it had given at Krug’s Corner, he, and Joe, and the car, stood a grave chance of being hung up on the pilot of a locomotive.

Before he could disengage the clutch or give a kick at the switch, one of the forward wheels struck a boulder. The car jumped, throwing McGlory out on one side and Matt on the other.

As Matt fell, he caught at the two levers on the right of the driver’s seat and clung to them desperately. Although the car was running wild, with no hand on the steering wheel, yet it bounded away along the centre of the road, dragging Matt along with it.

With his elbows on the footboard, and the lower half of his body trailing in the dust, Matt endeavored again and again to get back on the running board and regain a grip on the steering wheel.

A freight train was almost at the crossing. Unless Matt could check the runabout in its wild flight, it would surely be demolished by the locomotive or else hurl itself to destruction against the sides of the swiftly moving box cars.

The situation was desperate to the last degree. Unless he could get hold of the steering wheel and regain his seat, nothing could be done to avert the threatening catastrophe. If he let go, and abandoned the runabout to its fate, he was in danger of being thrown under the racing wheels.

A demon of perversity seemed to possess the car and to be bent upon the destruction of Matt King.

Again and again the young motorist tried to reach the steering post with one hand and wriggled up onto the running board. Each attempt was unsuccessful until a lurch of the car helped in executing the manœuvre.

Hanging to the wheel, Matt threw himself over the upright levers, dropped into the driver's seat, disengaged the clutch and jammed both brakes home.

Even then he was in doubt as to whether he would succeed in stopping the car. If it continued mysteriously to refuse control, there was certain destruction for both Matt and the car against the side of the train, the box cars of which were already flashing over the crossing.

But the car stopped—stopped within a yard of the rushing box cars!

Matt dared not throw in the reverse, fearing the machine might move forward instead of backward, so he dropped into the road and lay there, panting and exhausted, while the freight rolled on.



CHAPTER IV.

THE MANILA ENVELOPE.

“Sufferin’ doom! I’m beginning to think Billy had a bean on the right number, pard, when he said this car would have to kill somebody before it settled down and acted as though it was civilized.”

Matt looked up and saw his cowboy chum. McGlory was rubbing a bruise on the side of his face and was carrying the long manila envelope in his hand.

“Why didn’t you let the car go to blazes?” demanded the cowboy. “What did you want to hang on to it for? The best place for the blamed thing is the junk pile.”

“I couldn’t let go without getting run over,” explained Matt, rising to his feet.

“Well, you’d feel a heap more comfortable under a pneumatic tire than you would under a train of box cars!”

McGlory’s face was white, and his voice trembled. The strain he had been under was just beginning to tell on him.

“The owner of the runabout,” he went on, “showed his good sense when he cut loose from it. The car’s like a broncho, Matt, and you never can tell when its fiendishness is going to break loose. If we had a keg of powder, I’m a Piegan if I wouldn’t scatter that sizz wagon all over this part of Long Island.”

McGlory glared savagely at the white, innocent-looking machine.

The freight train had passed, and Matt was leaning against the car and cudgeling his brains to think of some reason for the runabout’s acting as it did.

“It brought us out of Krug’s Corner as nice as you please,” he mused.

“Which is just the way it took us into Krug’s Corner,” proceeded the cowboy. “That’s the way the pesky thing works. First it lulls you into thinking it wouldn’t side-step, or buck-jump, or do anything else that was crooked or underhand for the world; then, when you think you’re all right, the runabout hauls off and hands you one. That’s the meanest kind of treachery—reaching out the glad hand only to land on you with a bunch of fives. There’s something human about that car, Matt.”

“Inhuman, I should say,” muttered Matt. “Well, it’s too much for me. Get in, Joe,

and we'll cross the track to those trees over there and rest up a little before we go on to the Malvern Country Club."

"Damaged much, pard?"

"Jolted some, that's all."

"Same here. I landed in the road like a thousand of brick. This is my first experience with a crazy automobile, and you can bet your moccasins it will be the last. I didn't know there was such a thing."

"There isn't," said Matt. "How can you put together a lot of machine and have anything but a senseless piece of mechanism?"

"I'm by, when you pin me right down, pard, but if this car isn't locoed, then what's the matter with it?"

"Something must go wrong."

"Goes wrong and then fixes itself," jeered the cowboy. "If you'd look the blamed thing over this minute, you wouldn't be able to find anything out of order."

Once more Matt started the car, and once more it acted like a sane and sensible machine, carrying the boys to the shade of the trees and stopping obediently to let them alight.

Matt flung himself down on the grass at the roadside and examined his watch to ascertain whether it had been injured. He found the timepiece in good condition.

"Ten-fifteen, Joe," he observed, replacing the watch in his vest and noticing that his chum was still carrying the manila envelope in his hand as he sat down beside him. "What are you holding that envelope for?" he inquired.

"I reckon I've gone off the jump myself, Matt," laughed McGlory. "It dropped out of my pocket when I fell into the road. I picked it up, but have been too badly rattled ever since to do anything but hold it in my hand."

McGlory was about to put it in his pocket when Matt suggested that he examine the contents and see if he could discover the name and address of the man who owned the runabout.

The cowboy pulled out a couple of papers. Unfolding one of them, he read some typewritten words and gave a gasp and turned blank eyes on his chum.

"What's wrong?" queried Matt.

"Listen to this," was the answer. "'Private Report on the Pauper's Dream Mine,

by Hannibal J. Levitt, Mining Engineer, of New York City.’ Wouldn’t that rattle your spurs, Matt?” cried McGlory. “The syndicate had an expert go out to Arizona and make an examination of the ‘Pauper’s Dream,’—you remember the colonel told me about that, in his letter. Here’s the report! It drops into our hands by the queerest happen-chance you ever heard of. Mister Man takes a header from a crazy chug cart, unloads the machine onto you, and then hustles for Krug’s, leaving the report behind. He’s not at Krug’s when we get there, so the report is left in our hands. This couldn’t have happened once in a million times, pard!”

Matt was rubbing his bruised shins and allowing the amazing event to drift through his brain. It was queer, there was no mistake about it. In fact, all the experiences of the boys that Thursday morning were on the “queer” order.

“You say,” said Matt, “that the document is headed ‘Private Report.’ Why should it be a private report if it is for the syndicate?”

“Private for the syndicate, I reckon.”

“Hardly that, Joe. Unless there’s some skullduggery that report ought to be public property—public enough so that it could go into a prospectus. What’s the other paper?”

McGlory opened the other document, and found it to be a letter from Colonel Billings, dated nearly a month previous.

“It’s a letter from the colonel, Matt,” the cowboy announced, “and is addressed to Levitt. The colonel says he will not pay Levitt the balance due until Levitt sends him the private report on the ‘Pauper’s Dream’ proposition.”

“Great spark plugs!” exclaimed Matt.

“What’s strange about that?” demanded McGlory. “If Levitt made an examination of the property he certainly expects pay for it.”

“But not from the colonel, Joe! Levitt was examining the mine for the syndicate, and he’s not entitled to any money from the colonel unless he’s doing shady work of some kind.”

“Speak to me about that!” muttered McGlory. “It looks as though we’d grabbed a live wire when we got hold of this yellow envelope.”

“I don’t like the way the business stacks up,” said Matt earnestly. “The owner of this troublesome runabout happens to be Hannibal J. Levitt, and he’s playing an unscrupulous double game. Glance through that report and give me the gist of

it.”

Eagerly—and a little apprehensively—McGlory looked through the private report. His face grew longer and longer as he read.

“Sufferin’ poorhouses!” he cried at last. “Levitt says, in this report, that the ‘Pauper’s Dream’ isn’t a mine, but a pocket, and that the pocket has been worked out. In other words, pard, my hundred shares of stock are worth just about what they’ll bring for scrap paper. And the colonel had me worked up till I thought I was going to be a millionaire! Riddle: Where was Moses when the light went out?”

McGlory fell back on the grass and kicked up his heels dejectedly.

“Can’t you see through the dodge your Tucson colonel is working, Joe?” asked Matt.

“Dodge?” echoed McGlory. “The ‘Pauper’s Dream’ is just a hole in the ground. We can’t any of us dodge that.”

“The colonel,” went on Matt quietly, “is paying Levitt to make a false report to the syndicate. To-night the syndicate meets and decides whether or not it will buy the ‘Pauper’s Dream.’ Levitt’s false report has already been submitted, I suppose, and read. You show up at the meeting with the two bars of bullion, and a sworn statement from the colonel that they came out of the ten-stamp mill on the ‘Dream’ during one week’s run. That clinches the proposition. The syndicate, relying on Levitt’s honesty, and, incidentally, on the colonel’s, pay over a big sum for a worthless hole in the ground, and——”

The cowboy leaped erect, flushed and excited.

“And the colonel,” he cried, “divides the proceeds among the stockholders! That gives me a big profit on my five hundred. Oh, well, I reckon I’ve got my dipper right side up during this rain.”

McGlory chuckled. Matt stared at him as though he hardly believed what he heard.

“Pard,” said Matt quietly, “it’s a game of out-and-out robbery.”

“That’s the syndicate’s lookout, not mine. If they want to drop half a million into that hole in the ground, what is it to me?”

“I don’t think you mean that, Joe,” said Matt, getting up. “We’ll go on to the Malvern Country Club and find out what Griggs has to say to you. We’ve got

plenty of time to figure the matter over before the Syndicate meets to-night.”

Matt’s face was set and determined, and there was a smouldering light in his gray eyes, which proved that he had nerved himself for some duty which might be disagreeable. McGlory was wrapped in thought—so concerned in his own affairs that he forgot Matt, forgot the treacherous nature of the runabout, forgot everything but the “Pauper’s Dream” and his chances for winning or losing a fortune.



CHAPTER V. THE UNEXPECTED.

The unexpected happened at least twice to the motor boys between ten-thirty and eleven o'clock that Thursday morning. First, they naturally expected to have trouble with the runabout, but it carried out its work handsomely and deposited them in the Malvern Country Club garage at precisely five minutes of eleven.

There was not much talk between the boys during the ride. McGlory was concerned with his "Pauper's Dream" reflections—and Matt had reflections of his own. Besides his thoughts, which were none too agreeable, Matt had to recall Billy's instructions for finding the way, and also to be on the alert for any sudden tantrum on the part of the runabout. But the tantrum did not develop, and the boys left the garage and made their way across the broad lawn of the clubhouse to a porch which extended along the front of the building.

"I'd like to see Mr. Joshua Griggs," said McGlory to a stout person wearing side-whiskers and knee breeches. The servant looked the boys over.

"Wot nyme?" he asked.

"Matt King and Joe McGlory—two nymes."

"'E's hexpecting you. This w'y, please."

The boys were ushered through a great apartment with a beamed ceiling and a fireplace that covered half of one end of the room, up a flight of broad stairs, and along a wide hall. Here the servant paused by a door and knocked. A mumble of voices, coming from the other side of the door, ceased abruptly.

"What's wanted?" demanded some one.

"Mr. McGlory hand friend, sir."

"Send 'em in."

The servant pushed open the door, drew to one side, and bowed the boys out of the hall. Then the unexpected happened for the second time.

There were two men in the room, and the atmosphere was thick with tobacco smoke and a reek of liquor. A box of cigars was on a table; also a decanter and two glasses, a bowl of cracked ice, and a bottle of "fizz" water.

A man was seated in a comfortable chair, rocking and smoking. This man was Hannibal J. Levitt, owner of the unmanageable runabout.

The other man was tall and gaunt. He wore a black frock coat and gray trousers, a flowing tie, and a big diamond in the front of his pleated white shirt. His hair was a trifle long and a trifle thin on the crown. A mustache spread widely from his upper lip; and a wisp of pointed beard decorated his chin.

This latter individual exploded a hearty laugh as McGlory recoiled and stared like a person in a trance.

“Howdy, son?” barked the man in the long coat, sweeping down on the cowboy and seizing his hand. “Something of a surprise, hey? Lookin’ for Griggs, by gad, and you find me!”

“Colonel!” gulped McGlory. “Speak to me about this! Why, I thought you were in Tucson?”

“Made up my mind at the last minute that I’d better trek eastward and make sure the deal for the ‘Dream’ went through.” He slapped McGlory on the back. “A fortune, my boy, for all of us, by gad! The ‘Dream’s’ a bonanza—gold from the grass roots down. But present your friend; present your friend.”

The colonel turned beamingly toward Matt.

“My pard, Matt King,” said McGlory. “Everybody has heard of him, I reckon.”

“You do me proud,” bubbled the colonel, seizing Matt’s hand and pumping his arm up and down. “A friend of McGlory’s is a friend of mine. Allow me”—and he turned toward Levitt, only to find Levitt leaning across the table, his jaws agape. “Well, well, well!” mumbled the colonel. “What’s flagged you, Levitt?”

“We’ve met before,” grinned Levitt.

“How’s that?”

“These are the young fellows to whom I gave that confounded runabout.”

“A conspiracy, by gad, to keep me from meeting McGlory! How’d you expect him to get here in a motor wagon you couldn’t run yourself?”

“I didn’t know who the lads were, colonel, or I’d have been more considerate. But”—and here he turned to Matt—“how *did* you do it?”

“We had plenty of trouble with the machine,” said Matt, “but we made it bring us.”

The situation was clearing. Levitt, at the time Matt and McGlory had met him that morning, was also on his way to the Malvern Country Club.

“Re-markable!” cooed the colonel. “But it’s a terrible land for dust, ain’t it?” He poured something from the decanter into the glasses. “Irrigate!” he said. “Advance by file, my young friends, and refresh the inner man.”

“None for me, colonel,” answered Matt, whose opinion of the colonel was dropping by swift degrees.

“That’s the way I stack up, too, colonel,” grinned McGlory.

The colonel looked horrified.

“From Arizona, Joseph,” he murmured, “and you won’t indulge? Ex-traordinary, I must say. Smoke?” And he indicated the box of cigars.

“No, colonel,” declined Matt.

A sheepish look crossed McGlory’s face as he met the colonel’s inquiring eye.

“I’m in line with my pard,” said he.

“Astounding!” gasped the colonel. “Both habits are reprehensible—exceedingly so. I honor you highly, my lads, but—ahem!—your shining example is one by which I may not profit.” He turned to the mining engineer. “The fire-water is before us, Levitt,” said he; “charge!”

Two hands gripped the glasses simultaneously, and a gurgling followed. The colonel dried his lips elaborately with a large yellow handkerchief.

“The day, Joseph,” he resumed, “is not far distant when you can own a private yacht, a racing stable, an imported car, and a lordly mansion. I have come personally to New York to drive the business through and clinch it. To-night we show the moneyed interests what we’ve got up our wide and flowing sleeves. Half a million in coin, my son, will rise to the bait like a speckled trout to the alluring fly. But be seated, be seated; let’s all be seated.”

Matt took a chair by an open window, and McGlory dropped into another at a little distance.

“The telegram I received, colonel,” observed the cowboy, “was signed ‘Joshua Griggs.’”

“Even so, my dear youth,” smiled the colonel, lowering himself into a chair and lifting his feet to the top of the table. “Mr. Griggs lives in Hempstead. I am

enjoying his hospitality, and he has put me up at this most delightful club. I arrived yesterday afternoon, and I yearned to clasp your honest palm before we met in Liberty Street to-night. Incidentally, I will relieve you of further responsibility in the matter of the bullion. Being somewhat fatigued after my long and arduous railroad journey, the Syndicate meeting was put off. To-night, however, we shall be there; and to-night, my son, we put our fortunes to the touch.”

The colonel was altogether too loquacious to suit Matt—too fluent and insincere. That he was entirely capable of engineering a huge swindle Matt felt sure. And Matt regretted to note that the colonel exerted a powerful influence over McGlory.

“Is this deal for the ‘Pauper’s Dream’ on the level, colonel?” inquired the cowboy.

A lighted bomb, suddenly dropped in front of the colonel and Levitt, would not have caused more consternation. The colonel’s feet fell from the table with a bang, and the mining engineer once more threw himself half-way across the table top.

There followed a period of silence. The colonel, after an odd look at Levitt, was first to speak.

“McGlory,” said he, “you are my friend, and I would take a good deal from a friend. Has my integrity ever been questioned? Have you any reason to believe that this mining deal is not on the level?”

“Shucks!” deprecated McGlory. “Is the syndicate anxious to buy a pocket that’s been worked out? Have they got so much money, these Syndicate fellows, that they want to drop some of it into a mine that’s a ‘dream’ in more senses of the word than one?”

This was another bomb. Levitt went white, and breathed hard. Colonel Billings drew a deep breath, studied McGlory’s face, and then looked at the ceiling. Then once more he was first to speak.

“My son,” said he, “you talk like a buck ’Pache with more tizwin aboard than is good for him. And yet you must be in your sober senses. What are your grounds for expressing yourself in that—er—preposterous manner? I wait to learn!”

“Well,” answered the cowboy, “when Levitt took his header from that runabout of his, on the Jericho Pike, a long yellow envelope dropped from his pocket _____”

“I breathe again!” interjected the colonel. “You found it, McGlory?”

“That’s the size of it.”

“And you read the contents of that yellow envelope?”

“Matt and I wanted to find out the name of the man who owned the runabout. That’s how we happened to read the ‘private report.’ It wasn’t good reading, colonel.”

“It was for private perusal by the inner circle, my son,” said the colonel. “Levitt and I were vastly worried over the loss of that report. I will trouble you for it, my boy.”

The colonel reached out his hand. McGlory took the envelope from his pocket, and was about to pass it over when Matt reached forward and caught it from his fingers.

“I beg your pardon,” said Matt, “but I was the one who found this envelope. I gave it to Joe when I threw off my coat, east of Krug’s Corner, to tinker with the runabout. I am going to take care of it.”

All four were on their feet—Matt determined, McGlory puzzled and bewildered, the colonel wrathful, and Levitt with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.



CHAPTER VI.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

“Well, by gad!” exclaimed the colonel, realizing suddenly what sort of a lad he had to deal with in Matt King.

“What’s that for, pard?” inquired McGlory.

“It don’t belong to you, or to McGlory, or to any one but me!” said Levitt. “If you try to keep that document, King, you’re nothing more nor less than a thief.”

The red ran into Matt’s face.

“Softly, softly,” breathed the colonel. “This talk of thieves, Levitt, is a little premature. Matt King is a friend of McGlory’s, and he could not be that if there was any yellow streak in his nature. No, by gad! We are all gentlemen here. King, sir, if that manila envelope contains papers belonging to our mutual friend, Levitt, you will return them to him, will you not?”

“After a while,” said Matt; “not immediately.”

The colonel seemed thunderstruck.

“You hear?” muttered Levitt, between his teeth. “He’s trying to play double with us, Billings! Those papers mean a whole lot to me, and I’m going to have them!”

The colonel’s mood underwent a change. Attempts at conciliation having failed, there now remained nothing but vigorous action. His first move was to pass rapidly to the door, turn a key in the lock, and drop the key into his pocket. Then he once more approached Matt.

“May I inquire, young man,” he bristled, “what you mean by this most remarkable conduct?”

“I’m trying to protect Joe and myself,” Matt answered.

“Protect? Protect yourself and Joe against what, in Heaven’s name?”

“Against being drawn into a criminal act by you and Levitt, and being compelled to take the consequences.”

“He talks like a fool!” snapped the mining engineer.

“He is misinformed, that’s all,” said the colonel.

“I’m not misinformed,” went on Matt sturdily. “These New York capitalists hired Levitt to go to Arizona and investigate the ‘Pauper’s Dream.’ He made two reports, one private and the other for the members of the Syndicate. One says the mine is no good, and the other, of course, gives it a glittering recommendation.”

“How do you know,” asked Levitt, his voice shaking with anger, “that the Syndicate’s report is different from the other?”

“Because Colonel Billings is paying you for making it,” replied Matt. “Would the colonel give you good money for handing that private report over to the Syndicate? Hardly. Colonel Billings is here to sell the mine.”

“How do you know Billings is paying me anything?”

“He has already paid you a little, and you came out here this morning to receive the rest of it. If that crazy runabout of yours hadn’t interfered, you’d have been able to turn the private report over to the colonel, and no one would ever have been the wiser.”

“How do you know all this?” Levitt’s voice was husky.

“There was a letter from the colonel in the envelope along with the report.”

“By gad!” Billings whirled on the mining engineer. “You don’t mean to say, Levitt,” he asked, “that you had so little sense as to keep that letter of mine?”

“Why shouldn’t I keep it? It was the only thing in the way of an agreement that I had with you.”

“Then”—and the colonel tossed his hands—“that lets in the search light on the two of us.”

“And we’ve caught a tartar in this meddling young whelp,” ground out Levitt, waving his hand toward Matt.

“He’s an intelligent youth, Levitt,” declared the colonel, “and amenable to reason. Let me talk with him. My dear young man,” said the colonel to Matt, “assuming that what you say about the report is true, in what way are you legally liable through association with Levitt and myself?”

“You’re trying to swindle a company of New York capitalists,” answered Matt, “and Joe and I, not knowing the deal was crooked, have already been dragged into it. If we allowed the plot to go on we would be equally guilty with you and Levitt, and we could be arrested and sent to prison.”

A tolerant smile crossed the colonel’s face.

“Suppose I assure you that there is not the remotest possibility of any of us going to prison,” said he; “will you give up that report and letter?”

Matt hesitated, not because his determination was wavering, but because he wanted to put his thoughts in the right words.

“It means a fortune to McGlory,” urged the colonel; “and what kind of a fellow are you to euchre a friend out of a fortune?”

“It’s not an honest fortune,” declared Matt, “and Joe can’t afford to accept it. Besides, what good would it do him if he found himself in the penitentiary for obtaining money under false pretenses?”

The colonel was beginning to lose patience.

“You’ve got less sense than any cub of your years I ever met up with!” he cried irritably. “How much money do you want for that report and letter? That’s your play, I reckon; and I’d rather shell out a hundred or two than have any trouble with you. How much do I bleed?”

The colonel measured Matt with wrathful and inquiring eyes.

“You haven’t money enough to buy me!” declared Matt.

“Aw, cut it short!” broke in Levitt savagely. “What’s the use of fooling with him any longer?”

“Wait!” cautioned the colonel. “McGlory,” he went on, to the cowboy, “what do you mean by lugging such a two-faced longhorn into a private and important council like this?”

“You’re wide of your trail, colonel,” said McGlory, with spirit. “There’s nothing two-faced about Matt King, and you can spread your blankets and go to sleep on that. He’s the clear quill from spurs to sombrero, and the best pard that ever rode sign with me. Don’t you make any mistake in taking his sizing.”

“Well, what is he trying to rope down and tie your bright prospects for?”

“He’s got more sense in a minute than I have in a year, and you can bet your boot straps he knows what he’s doing—even if I don’t.”

“You’re far wide of your trail, Joseph. Matt King is committing an illegal act this minute. He has property belonging to Levitt and refuses to give it up. He could be jailed for a thief. But we’re not going to jail him. We’ll just take that report and letter from him.”

“Then you’ll have to walk over me to do it, colonel!” asserted McGlory.

“By gad!” muttered the colonel. “You’ve got as little sense as he has.”

“Brainwork never was my long suit, but I’ve seen enough of Pard Matt to feel safe in banking on any notion that he bats up to me.”

“Bah!” giped the colonel. “I’ll talk with you later, McGlory, and take pains to show you the error of your way. As for Matt King, he’s a false friend. He’s jealous because you’re about to come into a fortune, and he’s doing all he can to shift the cut and leave you stranded.”

“That’s not true!” said Matt. “Joe knows me better than that.”

“Sure I do, pard. Come on, and let’s get out of here.”

The actions of the two men were threatening. McGlory started toward the door; but happened to remember that it was locked, and that the colonel had the key in his pocket.

“Cough up the key, colonel,” said the cowboy. “Don’t force me to yell and have up that fellow with the knee pants and the lilocks.”

“It will be better for you youngsters,” growled the colonel, “if you don’t raise a commotion. The surest way to see the inside of a lockup is by calling for help. Are you going to hand over those papers?” And he turned to Matt. “Last call.”

“I’ll return them,” said Matt, “but not till after that meeting to-night.”

He slipped the manila envelope into the breast of his coat. Having planned what he considered was the best move, the young motorist was never more resolute in seeking to carry it out. Even though he was retaining Levitt’s property, yet right and justice upheld him in doing so.

“By Jupiter,” murmured Levitt, his eyes flaming, “he’s intending to take that private report to the Syndicate meeting to-night! If he does——” He gulped on his words, finishing with a significant glance at Billings.

Matt was wondering how he and McGlory could get out of the room without making too much of a scene. He understood very well that the colonel could inaugurate a pursuit, in case he and his chum succeeded in getting away with the envelope and its contents, and that, for a time at least, any story the colonel and Levitt chose to tell would be accepted. Temporary advantage was all on the side of the colonel and the mining engineer.

“He won’t show that paper at the meeting, Levitt,” gritted the colonel, now

thoroughly aroused. "We're done fooling with him."

He stepped toward Matt from one side, while Levitt advanced from the other. The cowboy tried to push closer to his chum, but the colonel held him back. One of the colonel's hands went groping in the direction of a hip pocket. Matt guessed what the hand was after.

"The window, Joe!" he called.

Simultaneously with the words, the king of the motor boys whirled, pushed through the window, lowered himself swiftly from the sill, and dropped.

The colonel grabbed at the hands on the sill, but they pulled out from under his gripping fingers; then, looking downward, he saw the lithe, agile form of Matt King lift itself from a flower bed and fade from sight around a corner of the building.

Two young fellows with golf sticks were crossing the lawn and had witnessed Matt's drop from the window. Naturally they were surprised at the peculiar proceeding and stood looking up at the colonel.

"Catch him!" bawled the colonel; "he's a thief!"

That was enough. The two members of the Country Club darted away after Matt.

McGlory was making preparations to drop from the other window, but the colonel grabbed him at the critical moment and forced him into a chair.

"Off with you, Levitt!" the colonel called. "You can catch that young cub! And when you do overhaul him get the report and the letter at any cost."

As he finished the colonel flung the door key toward the engineer. The latter let himself out of the room and bounded excitedly down the stairs.



CHAPTER VII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

Matt hoped that McGlory would be able to follow him; but, if the cowboy found this to be impossible, then Matt would do his best to prevent the report from falling into the hands of the colonel and Levitt. That report was the one thing of vital importance. On it alone hinged the success or failure of the colonel's gigantic swindling operations. Matt must escape capture at any cost, in order to retain possession of the report.

The course of his flight carried him toward the rear of the Country Club grounds. He heard the colonel's shout to the young men just in from the golf links, and he knew there would be a pursuit. Of course Matt could explain the situation and perhaps escape legal complications, but if caught he would be compelled to give up the report.

He darted across a tennis court, leaped the net, dodged behind a clump of lilac bushes, and ran toward the edge of a grove that bordered the Country Club grounds on that side. Between the lilacs and the grove was a rustic pavilion. A flower bed was near the pavilion, and an old negro was kneeling beside the bed, his back toward Matt, and industriously pulling weeds. Matt had not much time to give to the negro, but hoped that he was giving his whole attention to his work. As he came around the pavilion Matt heard sounds which indicated that more pursuers were after him—these coming from the direction of the garage and the stables.

To reach the timber without being seen seemed hopeless, and Matt looked hurriedly around for some place in which he could secrete himself.

The floor of the pavilion was elevated some two feet or more above the surface of the ground. The opening between the floor and the ground was filled in with panels of close latticework. One of the panels was broken, and Matt dropped to his knees and crawled through it.

This was not as secure a hiding place as he would have selected, if he could have had his choice, but his emergency was such that he had no time to look farther.

Lying flat on the ground, so that his form would not be visible to his pursuers, Matt watched and waited.

The two young men with the golf sticks broke into view around the lilac bushes. They were closely followed by three others, employees of the club, evidently, for they wore overclothes. Matt recognized one of them as having been in the garage when he and McGlory left the runabout there.

The old negro had lifted himself to his feet and was facing the five pursuers. Freedom or capture for Matt depended upon what the old negro knew. Scarcely breathing, the king of the motor boys listened for what was to come.

“Say, uncle,” panted one of the young men from the links, “did you see a fellow running this way?”

“Ah did, suh,” replied the negro. “Ah was as close tuh him as whut me an’ yo’ is, boss.”

Levitt at that instant rushed around the bushes. He was in time to hear the negro’s answer to the question.

“Which way did he go?” Levitt demanded. “He’s a thief, and we’ve got to capture him and recover some stolen property. Which way did he run? Quick!”

The old darky turned and deliberately pointed away from the pavilion and to a point in the encompassing timber which led toward the road, well to the north of the clubhouse.

“Dat’s de way he went, boss,” said he, “an’, by golly, he went jess a-hummin’.”

“This way, men!” shouted Levitt, leaping off in the direction indicated by the negro.

The six pursuers disappeared at a run, and left Matt gasping with astonishment. Why had the old darky put them on the wrong track? It was preposterous to think that the negro had himself been deceived.

While Matt was turning the matter over in his mind, and puzzling his brain with it, the negro began to whistle softly and to limp in the direction of the pavilion. On reaching the broken panel of latticework, he leaned against the railing of the pavilion.

“How yo’ lak dat, Marse Matt?” he chuckled. “Didn’t Ah done send um on de wrong track, huh? En yo’ all thought Ah wasn’t lookin’ at yo’, en dat Ah didn’t know who yo’ was! Har, har, har!”

The darky laughed softly as he finished talking.

Matt’s wonderment continued to grow.

“Great spark plugs!” he muttered, recognizing an old acquaintance. “Is it—can it be—Uncle Tom?”

“Dat’s who Ah is, marse! Hit’s been a right sma’t of er while since Ah had de pleasuah ob seein’ yo’. De las’ time we was togedder was in Denvah. ’Membah all dem excitin’ times we had in Arizony, dat time dat Topsy gal en me was wif dat Uncle Tom’s Cabin comp’ny? Golly, I ain’t nevah gwineter fo’git dat! Who’s been doin’ yo’ mascottin’ lately, huh? ’Pears lak no one had, f’om de ha’d luck yo’ is in.”

Matt recalled Uncle Tom very vividly. The aged negro had belonged to a stranded company of players, and Matt had helped them out of their difficulties. But that had happened in the Southwest, and here was Uncle Tom about as far East as he could get. The world is not so large, after all, and many strange and unexpected meetings occur.

“I’m more surprised than I can tell, Uncle Tom,” said Matt, “to run across you, here on Long Island, and at a time when I certainly needed a friend. It may be that you can help me even more, but——”

“Ah’s pinin’ tuh do all dat Ah can fo’ yo’, Marse Matt,” interposed the darky earnestly.

“But,” went on Matt, “this is hardly a safe place for me. If the coast is clear I guess I’d better crawl out and get into the woods.”

“Yo’s right erbout dat, marse. Ah’s so plumb tickled tuh see yo’ dat I come mighty nigh fo’gittin’ yo’s bein’ hunted fo’. Wait twell Ah take er look erroun’.”

Uncle Tom stepped away from the pavilion and swept a keen glance over the grounds in that vicinity.

“De coast am cleah, Marse Matt,” he announced, returning to the side of the pavilion. “Yo come out an’ hike fo’ de woods, en Ah’ll foller yuh. Den we can talk a li’l, en you can tell me whut mo’ de ole man can do.”

Matt pushed through the broken lattice and gained the timber line at a point opposite the place where his pursuers had vanished. Here, for a time, he was safe, and he sank down behind a mask of brush. Uncle Tom was not long in reaching his side.

“Golly,” he beamed, looking Matt over, “but hit’s good fo’ sore eyes jess tuh see yo’, marse. Ah nevah expected nuffin’ lak dis. Mouty peculiah how folks meets up wif one anotheh sometimes, dat-er-way.”

“How did you happen to wander in this direction, Uncle Tom?” Matt asked.

“Mascottin’,” answered the old man gravely. “Ah be’n mascottin’ fo’ er prize fighteh. Terry, de Cricket, is whut he called himse’f, en Ah won a fight fo’ him in Denvah, en another in Kansas City; but in New Yawk Terry, de Cricket, done ’spected me tuh do all de wo’k, en he went down wif er chirp, en dey counted ten on him. Ah couldn’t help dat, but Terry he ’low Ah was losin’ mah mascottin’ ability, en he turned me loose. Topsy done got er job in er house in Hempstead, en Ah picked up dis place at de Country Club. But Ah doan’ like hit, marse. Ah’s er ole man, en hit’s backachin’ wo’k. Yo’ needs er mascot bad, en now’s de time tuh take me on.”

Uncle Tom was a humorous old rascal, and professed to believe that he possessed mystical powers as a luck bringer. He declared that he had helped Matt, and Matt humored him by letting him think so, giving him a few dollars now and then to help him keep body and soul together.

“I’m not in shape just now, Uncle Tom,” said Matt, “to hire a private mascot of your abilities. You see, I’m mixed up in a bit of trouble that I’ve got to work through alone.”

“Bymby, Marse Matt, mebbby yo’ all can make er place fo’ Uncle Tom?” pleaded the negro. “Jess remembah whut Ah’s done fo’ yo’ in de past. Ah nevah mascotted fo’ anybody dat Ah liked so well as yo’s’e’f. Dat’s right. Has yo’ got a dollah yo’ can let go of wifout material damage to yo’ own welfare?”

Matt extracted a five-dollar bill from his pocket and pushed it into the negro’s yellow palm. Uncle Tom’s gratitude was so intense it was almost morbid.

“Yo’s de fines’ fellah dat evah was,” he declared, grabbing Matt’s hand and hanging to it. “Dat’s de trufe. Ah’d raddah wo’k fo’ you fo’ nuffin dan fo’ some odders fo’ er millyun dollahs er day. Dat’s right. Yo’s de same ole Marse Matt, en yo’——”

“I haven’t much time to talk, Uncle Tom,” interrupted Matt. “When I left the clubhouse I had to drop from a second-story window. I made it all right, but I left a friend behind. My friend’s name is Joe McGlory. Do you think you could get word to him?”

“Shuah Ah can!” replied the old negro promptly. “What kin’ ob a lookin’ fellah is dat ’ar Joe McGlory?”

Matt described his chum’s appearance, and the darky listened closely.

“Find out,” Matt finished, “whether McGlory is still upstairs in the clubhouse. If he is I don’t suppose you can communicate with him, for you will have to do it privately. Providing you can get word to him, tell him to meet me in the grove at the roadside, a quarter of a mile north of the clubhouse. Got that?”

“Yas, I done got dat, marse.”

“If you can’t get word to McGlory inside of an hour, then you come and tell me, will you?”

“Yo’ knows, Marse Matt, yo’ can count on Uncle Tom. Ah’ll do whut yo’ say, en Ah’ll wo’k mah ole haid off mascottin’ fo’ yo’ while Ah’m doin’ it.”

The old darky slipped away through the edge of the timber, and Matt, none too sanguine, proceeded to lay a course for the spot where he hoped to be joined by his cowboy chum.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COLONEL TRIES PERSUASION.

For a few moments McGlory struggled in the grasp of Colonel Billings. He was excited, and angry over the way Matt had been treated, and he would not have hesitated to do the colonel an injury if he could thereby have escaped from the room and followed his pard.

“Quiet!” ordered the colonel sternly. “You don’t understand this thing, McGlory, or you wouldn’t be fighting to escape from me. I’m the best friend you ever had, if you only knew it.”

“Nary, you ain’t!” panted the cowboy. “My best friend just risked his neck dropping out of the window. You’re trying to get me into trouble, and Pard Matt is trying to keep me out. Take your hands off me, colonel!”

“I will, Joe, just as soon as you promise to sit still and hear what I have to say.”

McGlory reflected that it was too late to follow Matt, who was probably doing his best to evade Levitt and the others who were hot on his trail. The cowboy reasoned that he could find his chum later, and that there could be no harm in listening to what the colonel had to say.

“Go on,” said he curtly.

“You’ll stay right where you are until I’m done?” asked the colonel.

“Yes.”

Billings drew back, dropped into a chair, and laid a friendly hand on the cowboy’s knee. His voice changed, sounding the depths of friendly interest and personal regard.

“Joe,” he remarked, “ever since your father took the One-way Trail I’ve sort of felt that I was responsible for your welfare. I knew your father mighty well—better than any one else in Tucson, I reckon—and him and me was bosom friends.”

McGlory had no personal knowledge on this point, but he was willing to take the colonel’s word for it.

“If I can do anything for Joe,” the colonel went on, “I says to myself that I won’t

leave a stone unturned to do it. When the 'Pauper's Dream' proposition came under my management I knew I had the chance I wanted to turn your way. I sold you a hundred shares of the stock at five dollars a share, and we went on to develop the claim."

"And there wasn't any more gold in the shaft," spoke up the cowboy dryly, "than there was in a New England well."

"That's what everybody thought," returned the colonel, "but I knew better."

He got up, went to the table, and helped himself to a drink from the decanter.

"Better have a nip, son, eh?" he asked, as by an afterthought, before leaving the table.

"Not for me," replied McGlory stoutly. "Pard Matt don't believe in that sort of thing, and I get along better when I make his notions my own. I've found that out more than once."

The colonel sighed resignedly, but did not press the point. Returning to his chair, he continued his persuasions.

"I knew when I sold you that stock that there was a reef of rich gold ore under the 'Pauper's Dream.' I didn't want it found until the right minute. Those who had bought stock in the claim got scared. Some of them sold their stock back to me for a song. When I'd got enough of the stock to give me a controlling interest *I found the gold vein.*"

"That was a double play," said McGlory bluntly. "There wasn't anything fair about that, colonel."

"It was all fair. Some of the stockholders were trying to freeze me out. By letting them think there wasn't any gold in the 'Dream' I turned the tables and froze *them* out. It was simply a game of diamond cut diamond—and I was a little too sharp for my enemies. That was all right, wasn't it?"

McGlory thought the colonel had a fair excuse for acting as he had done.

"When we laid open that gold vein," pursued the colonel, "buyers flocked around the 'Pauper's Dream' like crows around a cornfield. They wanted to buy. I saw a chance to deal with this New York syndicate for big money, so I had the syndicate send out an expert to examine our property. Levitt came. I asked him to make out a true report for the syndicate and a private, false report for—other uses."

McGlory opened his eyes.

“I see I’ve got you guessing,” laughed the colonel gently. “This is how that private report came to be made out—that private report on which your misguided friend has built such a fabric of unjust suspicions. The men I had frozen out of the company began to threaten legal proceedings. The proceedings wouldn’t have amounted to that”—and the colonel snapped his fingers—“for those fellows hadn’t a leg to stand on; but do you know what they could have done? Why, they’d have tied up the mine for a year or two and prevented the sale to the syndicate. In order to get around that I hired Levitt to make out that fake report, and leave it where those soreheads could see it. Now my hands are free. The sale can be made to the syndicate, and we’ll all win a fortune—providing your misguided friend doesn’t take that cock-and-bull story of his to the meeting to-night.”

“Couldn’t you explain the matter to the syndicate, colonel, just as you have to me?” asked the cowboy.

“I could, yes; but they’d shy off. A little thing like that sometimes knocks a big deal galley-west. It’s best not to let any intimation of that fake report reach the ears of the syndicate until we have the syndicate’s money safely in our clothes. Young King means well—I’ll give him credit for that—but he’s shy a couple of chips this hand, and if he butts in we’re going to be left out in the cold. That’s all there is to it.”

“Why didn’t you explain this to Matt?”

“The explanation is for our own stockholders, and not for outsiders. A word, a whisper might leak through and reach the fellows who could block the deal. We mustn’t allow that. My boy, my boy”—and here the colonel became very gentle, very fatherly—“I’m doing the best I can for you. I’m trying to hand you a fortune, and you’ve got to help me—in spite of Pard Matt. It’s your duty to help me. You’ll never have such a chance to pick out a brownstone front on Easy Street, and you mustn’t let the opportunity slip through your fingers.”

To say that Joe McGlory was not influenced by the colonel’s words would be to say that he was not human. The cowboy wanted money, not for its own sake, but for the great things he felt he could do with it. Not the least of the cowboy’s desires was to help Matt in some of his far-reaching aims in the motor field. He accepted Billings’ story, and he reached out and gripped his hand heartily.

“I’m with you, chaps, taps, and latigoes!” he exclaimed. “But say, can’t I tell Pard Matt? If he knew——”

But the colonel was afraid of “Pard Matt.” The king of the motor boys had a brain altogether too keen.

“Not a word, not a syllable,” adjured Billings. “All that I have said, Joe, you must keep under your hat—until after the meeting to-night and until after the ‘Dream’ is sold. You must buckle in and help me and let Matt think what he will. Afterward, when the money is divided, you can show Pard Matt where he was wrong, and he’ll be glad to think that he did not interfere with us in our work.”

“But he’s going to interfere,” murmured McGlory. “Whenever Matt King sets out to do a thing he does it. That’s his style. He’s got the fake report, and he’ll use it at the meeting to-night—thinking he’s doing me a good turn.”

“I believe that Levitt will catch him,” asserted the colonel.

“You don’t know my pard as well as I do,” returned the cowboy dejectedly. “I wonder if I couldn’t——” McGlory paused.

“Couldn’t what?” urged the colonel.

“Never mind now. I’m going out and see if I can’t do something.”

Billings stared steadily at the lad for a moment.

“All right,” said he, “go and do what you can. Remember I have confidence in you, and you’re not to breathe a word regarding what we have talked about. I shall have to get to New York before three o’clock. The bank closes then, and I’ve got to get that bullion. I’ll have to start in a fast car by one. Come back and report to me before I leave.”

“I’ll do it,” replied the cowboy, hurrying out of the room.

The colonel chuckled, threw himself back in a chair, and lighted a cigar.

“Easy, easy, easy!” he muttered. “I can wrap McGlory around my fingers and not half try. Now, if King is captured, and if I can be sure he won’t meddle with me to-night, everything will be serene.”

The resourceful colonel accepted his worries calmly. He had too much dignity to take part in a foot race, so he remained in a comfortable chair by the window and waited for news.

McGlory was back in ten minutes. His face was glowing.

“Matt King dodged Levitt and all the rest who were trailing him,” he reported.

“What!” The colonel arose excitedly from his seat.

“Don’t fret, colonel,” grinned the cowboy, “it’s not so bad as that. An old darky who works around the club grounds helped Matt make his getaway. Matt asked him to tell me to meet him in the woods at the roadside, a quarter of a mile north. That’s where I’m going now. You’ll hear from me before one o’clock, colonel.”

“What are you going to do?” rapped out the colonel.

“Something that will make the deal a sure go. I haven’t time to talk much. *Adios*, for now.”

McGlory was away again like a shot, leaving the colonel wondering—and fretting a little.

A few minutes later Levitt came gloomily into the room.

“That young cub gave us the slip,” said he savagely, “and I never had such a run in my life. The fat’s in the fire, Billings.”

“Not so, my friend,” returned the colonel, his quick wit grasping something that looked like an opportunity. “Can you get hold of a man who will help you? Are you acquainted with any one about the club grounds who can be trusted to do a little brisk work and then keep quiet about it?”

“Well, yes. The man in the garage is known to me, and he’s out for anything that’s got a dollar in it. But what of it?”

The colonel’s plan was based on the information just communicated to him by McGlory. He went into the matter swiftly, but exhaustively, and when he had done the gloom had vanished from Levitt’s face.

“It will work, it will work,” murmured the mining engineer, rubbing his hands.

“Then go and work it,” said the colonel briskly.



CHAPTER IX.

WHAT AILS M'GLORY?

Matt King, in a clump of bushes a quarter of a mile north of the Malvern Country Club, watched the road and waited for his chum. He had not much hope that McGlory would join him, for he believed that the cowboy would be held a prisoner by the colonel.

What Matt was doing, in this particular matter, was all for his friend. McGlory had become entangled with a gang of confidence men, who were playing boldly for big stakes. Whether the dishonest game won out or failed, Joe McGlory must have nothing to do with it. If he profited by the crime he would be called on to suffer at the hands of the law; and, even if the law never reached him, his conscience would make him miserable all his life for the part he had played in such a huge swindling scheme.

Matt, at any cost to himself, meant to keep McGlory clear of Billings and his criminal work. What is a friend for if not to stand shoulder to shoulder with a chum and save his good name? This touched upon one of Matt's principles—one of his rules of conduct long ago formulated and steadily adhered to. And it was a code which had played a big part in his many successes.

Minute after minute slipped away, and then Matt's heart bounded as he heard a crunch of footsteps around a turn in the wooded road. It might be Uncle Tom who was coming, however, with a report of his failure to deliver the message to McGlory. Peering through the bushes, hoping against hope, Matt's fears suddenly subsided and an expression of thankfulness escaped his lips.

McGlory was coming!

Matt gave a low whistle. The cowboy answered it, and was soon at his friend's side, gripping his hands.

"Bully for you, old chap!" exclaimed McGlory. "I'd like to see the gang that could lay *you* by the heels when you make up your mind to get away."

"You saw Uncle Tom, then?"

"Sure, or I shouldn't be here. Old Ebony-face thinks you're about the whole works, from the way he talks. A lot of queer things have happened to-day, but

the queerest is your meeting Uncle Tom in this out-of-the-way corner of Long Island.”

“Wrong, Joe. The queerest—and the best—thing that’s happened is the way we picked up that private report of Levitt’s. We have to thank the crazy runabout for that.”

McGlory, although of a different opinion on that point since listening to the colonel’s persuasions, did not allow Matt to think that he disagreed with him.

“How did you make it?” the cowboy asked. “Uncle Tom didn’t tell me much about that. Principally he worked his bazoo letting me know what a great mascot he was, and how he used to pull luck your way down in Arizona.”

Matt, briefly as he could, told about the pavilion in the rear of the club grounds, and how Uncle Tom had sent his pursuers on the wrong track.

McGlory laughed delightedly. He was playing a part with an important point in view, and it was necessary to pull the wool over Matt’s eyes. A despicable part it was, for one who had benefited at Matt’s hands as had McGlory; but the cowboy was filled with the colonel’s specious arguments and crafty explanations, and believed that, when the dust of the affair had settled, and Matt knew everything, he would thank his cowboy chum for preventing him from making a big mistake.

“The colonel is a schemer, Joe,” declared Matt.

“You bet your spurs he is,” chuckled McGlory. “That’s the way they raise ’em out in Tucson. The only way to keep a fellow from getting ahead of you is to get ahead of him first.”

Matt did not approve of these sentiments, nor of the hearty admiration the cowboy seemed to have for them.

“Billings is scheming the best he knows how,” went on Matt, “to get himself into trouble, Joe, and he’s figuring to drag you into it.”

“But you’re figuring the other way,” answered McGlory, “and I’ll back your headwork against the colonel’s any old time. What are you planning to do now?”

“I’ll have to know, first, what the situation is at the clubhouse as regards yourself. How is that you happen to be at large?”

“Well, pard, the colonel couldn’t do anything with me, so he let me go. You’ve got the report, you know.”

The cowboy was weaving a tangled web. The farther he went in his deceptions

the more he was obliged to misstate the facts.

“You can go and come around the clubhouse,” continued Matt, “without being in any danger from the colonel and Levitt?”

“That’s the way of it.”

“Then our next move is to get back to Manhattan. And, of course, we’ll have to use the runabout.”

“Why, Matt, we may run off the other end of Long Island if we try to use that chug cart!”

“We’ve got to use it, just the same, and you’re the one to get it from the garage. The quicker we start on the return trip the better.”

“You’re going to be at that meeting to-night?”

“We’re both going to be there. You’re to offer the private report in evidence, and tell all about our adventures this morning. I guess that will spike the colonel’s gun and block his little game of wholesale robbery.”

“Then my fortune will go glimmering,” said Joe, but not with much concern.

“Better to let a questionable fortune go glimmering, pard,” answered Matt earnestly, “than to do a dishonest thing that would bother you all your life. And perhaps,” he added solemnly, “it might get you into jail.”

“Wow!” shivered the cowboy, feigning trepidation. “That’s an elegant prospect—I don’t think.”

“What’s more,” went on Matt, driving his suspicions home, “the colonel’s such a schemer that I doubt whether, if he should swindle the syndicate out of a lot of money, he ever turned over a penny of it to you or to any of the other original stockholders.”

This caused the cowboy an inward tremor. But he allowed the fear to pass. Colonel Billings was his father’s friend—he had said so himself; and the colonel felt a responsibility for his welfare—which is also what the colonel had said himself. In the light of the colonel’s persuasions the cowboy was taking his word in everything.

“Well,” remarked the cowboy, “the colonel is up against the real thing now. He’s due for such a slam as he never had before. We’re the boys to do it; eh, Matt?”

“We’ll make a stand for the right,” said Matt, “and work shoulder to shoulder to

win out. The colonel talks about a fortune. You and I can make plenty of money, Joe. I think we have proved that. The motors are mighty good friends to tie to, whether they're hitched to submarines, automobiles, or aëroplanes. We'll pin our faith to the explosive engine, and one of these days it will land us honestly in Easy Street."

The colonel, McGlory remembered, had mentioned "Easy Street." But not as Matt had done it. The longer the cowboy talked with his chum the more he hated himself for the part he was playing. If he talked with Matt too long McGlory was sure his purpose would slip from him, and that he would let out everything about the inner history of the colonel's manipulations of the "Pauper's Dream."

"I'd like to look inside that manila envelope once more, pard," said McGlory. "There's a part of that private report I didn't sabe, and I'd like to read it over again."

Matt King promptly drew the envelope from his pocket and passed it to his chum.

"It's evidence of the rascality of two men, Joe," remarked Matt, "and——"

McGlory sprang up quickly and stepped out into the road. He paused there, flashing his eyes up and down. Apparently he was looking for somebody or something, but really he was fighting with himself. He had reached the point where he must play up his scheme for all it was worth, or else turn his back on Billings and a fortune.

The cowboy felt sure he was about to do the right thing, but to put himself in a wrong light with his beloved pard for only a few days was proving a harder task than he had reckoned on. Abruptly he clinched his resolve. Slipping the manila envelope into his pocket, he turned to look at the apprehensive face of Matt among the bushes.

"What is it, Joe?" queried Matt. "Some one coming?"

"Some one going," replied the cowboy, "and it's me. You don't understand this, pard. Don't think too hard of me until you know everything."

Thereupon McGlory whirled and took to his heels, racing in the direction of the clubhouse.

Matt was so amazed he could not move or speak. What ailed McGlory? What did he mean?

"Joe!" he shouted, starting up from the bushes.

But the cowboy was already around the turn in the road and lost to Matt's astounded eyes.

While Matt King stood there, his mind nearly a blank, staring down the road and wondering, a sharp voice came from behind him.

"Quick on it, Kelly! Now's your chance!"

It was Levitt's voice. Matt turned, only to be confronted by the burly individual from the club garage. In a flash the man grabbed him and hurled him crashing to his back among the bushes.

"Steady, my lad!" threatened Kelly. "I don't want ter be any rougher with ye than I have ter, but orders is orders—an' they say you're a thief."



CHAPTER X. IN THE GARAGE.

Matt was so bewildered on account of McGlory's actions that he offered little resistance to Kelly and Levitt. Anyhow, the manila envelope had been taken from him, and Levitt—as Matt reasoned—had nothing to gain by the capture.

"Here's the rope, Kelly," said the mining engineer, coming close. "Better put it on him."

"You don't have to tie me," protested Matt. "I'm not a thief, Levitt, and you know it. I'm willing to go, and go quietly, wherever you want to take me. I guess I can explain the affair to the authorities so that I'll soon have my liberty."

Levitt gave him an odd look.

"We'll see about that," he answered. "Tie his hands, anyway, Kelly," he added.

Matt lay quietly while the rope was placed around his wrists. He was wondering why Levitt didn't search him for the report. To all appearances the engineer wasn't giving a thought to the document.

"I haven't that manila envelope, Levitt," said Matt. "If you've made a prisoner of me just to recover that you're having your trouble for nothing."

"I knew you didn't have the envelope," was the surprising answer. "McGlory got that. Kelly and I were close enough to hear him talking with you and to see him when he ran down the road. He fooled you that time, and no mistake."

There was growing bitterness in Matt's heart as he listened.

"You knew McGlory was to take the private report from me?" he asked.

"Well, Billings told me the cowboy had put up a deal of some kind."

"So McGlory had planned the scheme with Billings, had he?"

"Yes."

"And McGlory took the report to Billings?"

"That's where he went with it."

The breath hung in Matt's throat. His chum's treachery had been deliberately

planned and executed. McGlory was playing into the colonel's hands, and bringing about his own undoing. Naturally Matt inferred that his friend thought more of his prospective fortune than of his comradeship. Choosing the dishonest wealth, he had turned his back on his friend.

Sad and disheartened, Matt allowed Kelly to pilot him through the woods. With head down, the young motorist stumbled onward, more concerned with his sorrowful reflections than he was over the place to which he was being taken.

Suddenly Matt's forward movement was stayed, and he heard Levitt speaking:

"I'll look out for him, Kelly, and you go ahead and make sure that there's no one around."

Matt lifted his eyes. They were at the edge of the woods, immediately behind the garage.

While Levitt took charge of him, the prisoner saw Kelly cross the open space separating the timber line from the garage, and enter the building by a rear door. He came back presently, leaving the door ajar.

"Not a soul there, Levitt," said he. "Come on with him, and come quick."

Matt was hurried over the intervening space and into the garage. There were only two cars in the garage—the runabout and a large touring car—and not another person in sight.

Matt, pushed to the foot of a stairway leading to the second floor, was told to climb upward. He obeyed. At the top of the flight there was a door. Kelly pushed it open, drew Matt inside, and Levitt came after them.

"Are you sure you understand just what you're to do, Kelly?" inquired Levitt, in an anxious tone.

"Sure I do," answered Kelly. "There wasn't so much of it that I can't remember it all."

"Do your work faithfully and you'll never regret it."

Levitt drew back out of the room and closed the door behind him.

"Lay down on that bunk there, my lad," said Kelly, pointing to a cot at one side of the small room.

It was a room set apart for the man in charge of the garage, and was rudely but comfortably furnished.

Matt, still cast down by his cowboy chum's treachery, was as yet taking but little interest in what happened to him. He stumbled over upon the cot, glad of an opportunity to rest with some degree of comfort while his mind regained its normal powers and allowed him to think clearly of McGlory's case.

Kelly secured his feet with an end of the rope that bound his hands.

"I'm going to be as considerate of ye, King," observed Kelly, "as I can. No harm is intended to ye—if there was I wouldn't be helpin'. But ye've got to stay here for a while, an' orders is that ye're to remain quiet. The garage is more or less of a public place, an' yer confinement is to be private. If people happened to be below ye might yell. That wouldn't do, now, would it? I'm going to tie this piece of cloth over yer mouth jest to make sure ye don't say anythin' so loud it can be heard downstairs."

"Wait a minute, Kelly," said Matt. "Do you know anything about my chum, Joe McGlory?"

"Never a thing. He's the boy who came with ye in that runabout?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's not known to me at all. You're the lad that gave us that chase, and Levitt says you're a thief. Ye don't look it, now, but orders is to hold ye, an' that's what I'm doin'."

"You're helping Colonel Billings and Levitt carry out a big swindling game by this work, Kelly."

"So? Well, lad, I can't look out for other people. Number One—which is Kelly, d'ye mind—is enough fer me to take care of."

"If I'm a thief, why doesn't Levitt take me to Hempstead and have me locked up by the police?"

"Levitt doesn't want to disgrace ye by such a move. Bein' locked up by the police gives a lad a bad record. Ye're far an' away better off with me here. We're to be together three days, and——"

"Three days!"

"The same—no more, no less. We're going to get along like old cronies, if ye only behave. Now for the gag."

Matt submitted while the cloth was put in place. Barely had Kelly finished when a car was heard puffing into the big room below.

Kelly jumped to a round opening in the floor, near one end of the room. It was a stovepipe hole, but the pipe was missing.

“One of the members, my lad,” said Kelly, turning away from his observation of the room underneath and speaking in a guarded voice. “I’ll have to go and look after the car. But ye won’t get lonesome against the time I come back. Ye’ve plenty to think of, I take it, an’ that will use up yer time.”

Kelly went out, slamming the door, and Matt could hear him hurrying down the stairs.

Three days! Matt was to be kept in the garage for three days!

That, no doubt, was to prevent him from interfering with the colonel’s plans in New York.

The colonel had won McGlory over, and there would be no interference from him. But perhaps, even without that “private report,” Matt could do something with the syndicate. It might be that he could save the cowboy in spite of himself.

Matt had noticed, while he and the cowboy were in the clubhouse talking with the colonel, that the trickster from Arizona had a powerful influence over McGlory. The colonel had made good use of that influence, and had succeeded in turning the cowboy against his best friend.

The people who had brought the car into the garage had left. A mumble of talk had floated up through the stovepipe hole, and the prisoner was able to keep the general run of events that took place in the garage.

He could hear Kelly tinkering with the car that had just arrived. In the midst of the sounds he heard footfalls, and then a voice, lifted high:

“Hello! Where’s the man that runs this place?”

That was the colonel. Angry blood leaped in Matt’s veins as he listened.

“Here, sir,” responded Kelly.

“Is that big touring car of Griggs’ in shape for the road?”

“Fit as a fiddle, sir, an’ full up with oil and gasoline.”

Then followed cranking, and the sputter of an engine picking up its cycle; and, after that, the moving off of the car.

“The colonel’s away to New York,” thought Matt darkly. “He’s gone to get the two bars of bullion before the bank closes. That’s step number one in the big

robbery. I wonder if Levitt and McGlory are with him?"

For an hour or two longer Kelly was alone and busy in the garage. A tin clock hung on one wall of the bedroom, and from where Matt lay he was able to watch the moving hands.

"If I accomplish anything," Matt thought, "I shall have to reach New York by eight o'clock. How am I to get out of here and to the nearest railroad station?"

That was his problem, and it looked as though he would have to work it out unaided.

He tried to free himself of the ropes, but Kelly had tied them too securely. In order to work at them to better advantage, he swung his bound feet over the side of the cot and sat up. But the ropes defied every effort he made to release his hands.

With the idea of watching what took place in the garage, he slipped to his knees on the floor and then straightened out at full length. By rolling carefully, he succeeded in reaching the stovepipe hole.

His view was limited, but it commanded the broad doors leading into the big room. Kelly was working somewhere in the rear, and could not be seen.

Matt was about to roll away, when two figures appeared in the door. One was McGlory and the other was Levitt.

"Kelly!" shouted Levitt.

"Here!" answered Kelly, coming forward.

"Got a car we can use for a trip back to the city?"

"Only the runabout this young fellow came in."

"I'm a Piute," growled McGlory, "if I want to fool with destruction by ridin' in that."

"I feel the same way, McGlory," said Levitt, "but we've got to get to New York. If there's no other car we'll have to chance that one."

"Sufferin' trouble!" groaned McGlory. "It takes Pard Matt to get any kind of service out of that old flugee. You can't handle it, Levitt. I saw the kind of work you made of it. Can't we get a rig to take us to the railroad station?"

"There are no rigs here," answered Levitt. "It's either the runabout—or travel afoot."

“I’m a cowpuncher, and a cowpuncher ain’t built right for footwork. Well, let’s chance old Death and Destruction. We’ve got to be at that meeting, and we’ve five hours to get there. If the runabout don’t go backward more than it does ahead, I reckon we can make it.”

Levitt seemed as dubious over the attempt to ride in the runabout as was McGlory.

“Sure,” remarked Kelly, “she looks like a nice, easy-ridin’ little car. I’ve cleaned her, and oiled her, and pumped her full of fuel, and she ought to travel.”

“She ought to, that’s a fact,” said Levitt, “but I’m afraid she won’t. However, we’ve got to take a chance. Hop in, McGlory.”

Levitt speeded up the engine and threw in the clutch. The runabout moved quietly out of the garage.

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE TOM AGAIN.

Why hadn't McGlory and Levitt gone to the city with Colonel Billings?

This is the mental question Matt put to himself, and he was at a loss for a logical answer.

If McGlory and Levitt were hand and glove with the colonel in working out his nefarious scheme, then there was no reason in the world why they should not be traveling together—unless the big touring car used by the colonel had been loaded to its capacity. This did not seem possible.

Nor could it be that Levitt and McGlory were taking the runabout to get it out of Matt's way. They didn't want to use the car, and they had asked Kelly for another.

Matt, with his curiosity still unsatisfied, was on the point of rolling back to his cot, when some one else appeared in the doorway. Hope leaped within him when he recognized Uncle Tom.

Uncle Tom! Matt had forgotten all about the old negro.

"Marse Kelly, sah," piped Uncle Tom, "where is yo'?"

"Here," answered Kelly, coming forward. "What do you want?"

"Marse Partington, whut jess come in on his car, wants tuh speak wif yo' er minit, Marse Kelly. He done sont me tuh fotch yuh."

"What does he want?"

"He didn't say, suh. He jess say, 'Tom, yo' lazy niggah, run tuh de garage an' tell Kelly Ah wants tuh see him right off.' Dat's whut he say, an' ev'rybody knows Ah's de hardest wo'kin' man about de place. Lazy! Ah ain't so spry as I uster be, but, by golly, Ah's——"

"Where is Mr. Partington, Tom?" interrupted Kelly.

"Jess sta'tin' fo' de golf links, suh."

Kelly started, and Uncle Tom started with him. Matt's heart sank. If he could only have attracted the old negro's attention there would have been some one to

help him in making an escape.

While Matt lay on the floor, again furiously working at the ropes, Uncle Tom slipped stealthily back into the garage. His old rheumatic legs carried him with unusual rapidity out of sight toward the rear of the room, and Matt could hear him, a moment later, clambering up the stairs.

Brave old Uncle Tom! He knew of Matt's plight, and was coming to help him.

The door of the bedroom was unlocked, and the darky came hurriedly into the room. He was shaking with excitement, and lost not a moment hurrying to Matt's side.

"Marse Kelly would kill me daid ef he knew whut Ah was doin'," muttered the old negro. "We's got tuh hurry, Marse Matt. Marse Partington didn't want Marse Kelly, en dar's gwine ter be ructions when Kelly gits back."

With trembling fingers he plucked away the gag.

"Don't be scared, Uncle Tom," said Matt reassuringly. "Just get my hands loose and I'll take care of Kelly if he tries to interfere with us. I'll look after you."

"Ah's done lost mah job, Motah Matt," quavered Uncle Tom, as he worked at the rope around Matt's wrists. "Ah's done got tuh git away f'om dis club place er dat 'ar Kelly will prove de def ob me."

"You can go away with me," said Matt.

"But dey all owes me fo' dollahs fo' wo'k!"

"I'll pay you five times that, Uncle Tom, for what you're doing."

"Golly!" and the old negro's courage seemed to return; "five times fo' is fifty. Whatum Ah gwine tuh do wif fifty dollahs? Ah won't hab tuh wo'k no mo' fo' six mont's."

Uncle Tom's multiplication was of a weird variety, but Matt did not correct his mistake.

Finally the knots were loosened so that Matt could slip his hands from the encompassing coils, and he was but a minute more in freeing his feet.

"Now, then, Uncle Tom," cried he, "this way—as fast as you can come!"

He sprang to the door, Uncle Tom lurching after him.

"Doan' yo' git too fur away, Marse Matt," pleaded the negro. "Ef dat Kelly meets me alone by mahse'f, Ah's gwine ter be a daid niggah. Stay by me."

Matt lessened his pace so that Uncle Tom could follow him closely out of the room and down the stairs. They started to leave by the front of the garage, but, as ill luck would have it, Kelly, red and wrathful, leaped through the door directly in front of Matt.

“Fo’ de lan’ sakes!” wailed Uncle Tom, staggering limply back against the wall.

“Clear out by the rear door, Uncle Tom!” shouted Matt, picking up a heavy wrench from the floor.

Uncle Tom scrambled for the rear of the garage at a remarkable rate of speed.

Kelly swore.

“So this was that nigger’s game, was it?” he growled. “I knew something was up when I found Partington, and he said he hadn’t sent fer me! I’ll skin that black villain alive!”

“You’ll deal with me first, Kelly,” said Matt.

“Oh, you!” grunted Kelly. “Git back upstairs. It won’t take more’n a minute to wind up your clock!”

The garage man drew a revolver. That he happened to have the weapon spoke volumes for the responsibility he felt as the jailer for Motor Matt.

“Put up that revolver!” ordered Matt sternly.

“Here’s the way I put it up,” answered Kelly, lifting the weapon and pointing it full at Matt. “Up them stairs with ye, an’ no more ifs nor ands about it.”

“Look here, Kelly,” expostulated Matt, “you’re getting yourself into mighty deep water, and——”

Matt was talking for a purpose—and the purpose was to give him an opportunity to use the wrench. Suddenly he found his chance, and the heavy instrument shot forward and struck Kelly on the wrist of his lifted arm. A cry of pain escaped the man, and he reeled back, dropping the revolver.

Matt tried to spring past him, but Kelly, writhing with pain though he was, pulled himself together and struck out viciously with his left fist. Matt dodged quickly and evaded the blow. The next instant he had used his right fist with terrific force, hurling Kelly out of his way and depositing him on the floor in a heap.

How long Kelly sat on the floor, piecing together his scattered train of thought,

he did not know; but when his faculties returned to him, Matt was gone.

Kelly, muttering to himself and with both hands groping about his bruised forehead, staggered to the door and looked away in the direction of the road.

There was no one to be seen. Greatly shaken, Kelly stumbled back to a chair near a workbench and deposited himself in it.

“Felt like a batterin’-ram,” mumbled Kelly. “If I had been kicked by a mule it wouldn’t have knocked me out more’n what it did. Who’d have thought that lad had so much ginger in him? Whisht, now, while I think what’s to be done.”

Matt King’s escape, Kelly knew, ought to be communicated to Levitt, in some way, but how was it to be done? Levitt was between the clubhouse and New York in an automobile.

Ah, Kelly had it! He would call up Krug’s and tell some one there to lay for Levitt and bring him to the telephone.

Kelly, alert and eager to undo some of the damage that had been caused the plans of Levitt by Matt’s escape, hurried to the phone in the rear of the garage, and was soon connected with Krug’s.

“Any one there who knows Hannibal J. Levitt?” he asked.

“I’ll find out,” answered a voice from the other end of the wire.

“Well, hurry up!” implored Kelly. “I’m in a tearing rush.”

In about a minute—an hour it seemed to the impatient Kelly—another voice floated back along the wire.

“I know Mr. Levitt,” said the voice. “He was here this morning, but he’s not here now.”

“Sure he’s not there?” responded Kelly. “This is the garage at the Malvern Country Club—get that? Levitt left here in a runabout an hour ago, bound for New York. He ought to pass your place in a little while. Lay for him. If you can, get him to the phone and have him call up Kelly—Kelly at the Malvern Country Club garage, understand—it will be worth a fiver to Levitt. Have somebody watch for the runabout an’ flag Levitt. Will you?”

“Yes.”

Kelly, highly pleased with himself, hung up the receiver. Then he waited—waited an hour, two hours, three hours—waited until nightfall, till 7 o’clock, 8

o'clock, 9 o'clock came, but no call arrived from Krug's.

The reason was that Levitt did not pass Krug's Corner. It was the only route from the Malvern Country Club to New York—but, nevertheless, Levitt did not pass.

The white runabout passed, however, and it had two passengers.



CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING MYSTERY.

Matt, on leaving the garage, gave a hasty look around for Uncle Tom. The old negro was not in sight. Matt could not spend any time looking for him, in that particular place, and ran for the road, hoping to find Uncle Tom waiting for him farther on.

In this he was not disappointed. Well toward the place where Matt had had his memorable interview with his cowboy pard, the negro pushed out of the undergrowth.

“Marse Matt,” he chattered, “Ah’s been er-waitin’. Ah ’low’ed ye’d come dishyer way. Whut done happen tuh dat Kelly?”

“I got away from him,” Matt answered.

“By golly, Ah got away, too. Nevah run so fas’ en mah life. Five times fo’ is fifty. Yo’ all ain’t er-fo’ gittin’ dat, is yuh?”

“No, Uncle Tom; I’m not forgetting anything.”

Matt had nearly a hundred dollars in his pocket, and if he had not thought he was going to need considerable extra money for his trip back to the city he’d been given the negro nearly the whole of it.

“There’s your fifty, Uncle Tom,” said Matt. “You go to Hempstead and stay with Topsy until you can find another job.”

“Ah doan’ want no job twell Ah git out ob money, marse, en den Ah’s hopin’ ye’ll be ready tuh take me on as yo’ private mascot. Ah tells yuh, marse, yo’s monsus short on luck, seems lak. Yo’s had a powahful bad streak to-day. Where’d yo’ hab been ef it hadn’t been fo’ Ole Tom? Golly, Ah’s afeared tuh guess!”

“How did you know I was up there over the garage?”

“Ah seed yo’ when yo’ was brought intuh de garage, marse. Marse Whitmore, at de clubhouse, done sent me tuh ask Kelly somethin’, en Kelly wasn’t erroun’ de place. Ah waited; den Ah seed yo’ come in froo de back do’, yo’ han’s all tied lak dey was, en Ah jess scrooched down behin’ a car an’ waited twell yo’ was

took to Kelly's room. Den Ah went off tuh think whut all Ah was gwine tuh do tuh help yo'. Ah clean fo'got 'bout Marse Whitmore. Went tuh hunt him up, but he had done lef' de place where he was. De idee got intuh mah ole haid dat Ah could git Kelly away fom de garage by tellin' him somebody else wanted tuh see him, en Ah wo'ked hit out, yassuh. En she wo'ked, didn't she? Yo' knows 'bout dat. Say, marse, is five times fo' fifty er skiventy? 'Pears lak Ah ain't jess right en mah 'rithmetic."

"It's nearer fifty than seventy, Uncle Tom. If I could spare any more money, though, I'd give it to you."

"Yo's allers gen'rous lak dat, en dat's de reason Ah likes tuh mascot fo' yo'. When does yo' all think yo'll need me?"

"I can't tell that for a while, Uncle Tom. You go to Hempstead and stay with Topsy. That's the place for you. You're getting altogether too old to work."

"Huccome yo' lef' Denvah? Whar yo' all been, huh?"

"I've been in a good many places, Uncle Tom, since I left Denver. I'm certainly going to do something for you, Uncle Tom," answered Matt; "but I can't say just when."

"Ah's got fifty-five dollahs, marse, en hit'll las' me er long while, yassuh, but doan' yo' git de notion hit'll las' too long. When hit plays out Ah wants tuh wo'k fo' yo'."

"I'll have to hurry, Uncle Tom," said Matt. "You can stroll along to Hempstead and take your time; but I've got important business in New York."

"Yo's allers doin' somethin'. Nevah seed sich a fellah fo' bein' evahlastin'ly on de go. Ah'm gwine tuh root fo' yo', marse. 'Deed Ah is. When good luck come yo' way, jess yo' ricollect hit's Uncle Tom mascottin'. But Ah can do a heap bettah at dat ef Ah'm 'long clos' tuh yo'. Dishyer long-range mascottin' done li'ble tuh wind up on er snag. 'Membah dat, too."

"I'll remember everything, Uncle Tom," said Matt. "You stay in Hempstead with Topsy. Good-by."

"Good-by, Marse Matt."

Matt shook the darky's hand warmly, turned and hurried on along the road.

Uncle Tom was a grafter, but nevertheless Matt had a warm place in his heart for the old fellow. His peculiarities were all on the humorous side, and Matt could

have enjoyed his talk if circumstances had been different.

While Matt was striding onward, his thoughts keeping pace with his swift gait, he heard suddenly the hum of a motor in the distance.

All motors have the same sort of music. The tempo changes with work at the throttle, but a trained ear can follow the shifting gears; and, now and then, there's a man who will recognize his car by the croon of the engine alone.

It seemed to Matt that there was something familiar in the sound he heard.

The road, for a long distance at that particular point, lay in a straight stretch.

The car was coming toward Matt, but the trees on either side of the road made the approaching machine indistinct. Their boughs dropped low, and the deep shadows of the westering sun lay heavily across the thoroughfare.

Suddenly Matt caught a glimpse of white flashing in the gloom.

The runabout! ran his startled thought.

Yes, undoubtedly it was the strange hoodoo car that was approaching.

What did it mean?

Were Levitt and McGlory returning to the Country Club? Had they found the car more than they could manage, and were they taking it back to the garage?

This did not seem a satisfactory explanation, and yet Matt could think of nothing else.

At a halt in the middle of the road Matt waited for the car to draw near. If McGlory was in the machine, that was as good a time as any for a meeting and an explanation.

But the cowboy was not in the car, nor was Levitt, so far as Matt could see, or anybody else.

The car was on the reverse, and backing down the road, most marvelously keeping a straight line, although now and then lurching sideways a little and narrowly escaping the trunk of a tree at the roadside.

Here was a startling mystery!

What had happened to McGlory and Levitt?

While Matt wondered, he was making preparations to board the car and do his best to get it under control.

It was coming at a slow rate of speed, and to leap aboard would not be difficult.

When within a dozen feet of the young motorist, the car seemed to recognize an enemy and to attempt to turn aside.

Matt ran forward, stopped, executed a flying leap and gained the running board. Another moment and he was in the driver's seat and had brought the car to a halt.

The reverse gear was engaged, so the runabout had ample warrant for crawfishing along the road.

There was nothing in the car, however, that offered any clue to the mystery of what had become of the two who had taken the runabout from the Country Club garage.

Matt got down and made a hurried examination. The car was in as good condition as ever, and rebuffed his efforts at getting clues.

There was something uncanny about the machine. Matt admitted it to himself. It acted in a way that defied all explanation, at times, and that alone was enough to get on a chauffeur's nerves.

Perhaps Billy was right, and that the "double hoodoo," in some incomprehensible manner, was accountable for the car's tantrums.

So far as McGlory and Levitt were concerned, there was a possibility that the car had misbehaved so outrageously that they had put on the reverse and cast it adrift, to go where it would.

But there were other travelers in the road to think of. Levitt and McGlory would scarcely take chances of wrecking some other machine, or of running down a carriage, or some pedestrian.

Matt was deeply puzzled.

"Well," he thought, "I want a way to return to New York, and here it is. It meets me on the road, and I should be foolish not to take advantage of it. Quite likely Joe and Levitt have found other and more satisfactory means for reaching the city. I don't blame them for changing to another car, if they had the opportunity, or for taking a railroad train if they happened to be conveniently near one. There's no railroad very close to this place, though, and the runabout couldn't have come far, with no one in control."

There was enough gas in the cylinders so that the motor took the spark. The

runabout leaped ahead, perfectly obedient to Matt's hand.

As he swept along he looked and listened for some signs of McGlory and Levitt. He came upon the two missing passengers suddenly—and what he saw caused him to jam down hard on the brakes and leap from the car before it was fairly at a stop.



CHAPTER XIII.

IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES.

Joe McGlory was kneeling beside the road, tying a handkerchief bandage around the forehead of Levitt. The latter was sprawled out limply on the ground, his clothing torn and disarranged.

“What’s the matter, Joe?” asked Matt.

The cowboy’s face was pale, and the set lines of it indicated that he was himself in pain.

“That’s you, is it, pard?” he asked huskily.

For a useless question McGlory threw a good deal of feeling into it.

“Yes.”

“I might have known you’d come pounding along if I was in trouble. Levitt is badly hurt. He’s been unconscious ever since he dropped in the road. I can’t bring him back to his senses—but I haven’t been able to do much, being about half knocked out.”

Matt went down on his knees, laid a hand over Levitt’s heart, and then felt of his pulse.

“He’ll do, I think, Joe. Is he hurt anywhere else except in the head?”

“I don’t think so. He was thrown headfirst against the tree there.”

Matt lifted the bandage and surveyed the wound. The light was none too good, and he asked his chum to strike a match.

“It may be a fracture of the skull,” said Matt, replacing the bandage. “We’ve got to get him into the hands of a doctor.”

“Hempstead’s the nearest place, I reckon. It can’t be more than a mile from here.”

“We’ll go there.”

Riding on two seats, with an unconscious and wounded man to look after, was not going to be child’s play for Matt and McGlory—particularly as the cowboy was not in very good condition himself. Then, too, cramped as he was going to

be, Matt would have to look after the runabout. That might be an easy matter, and it might not. It all depended on how the runabout was going to act.

“Can you help me get him into the car, Joe?” asked Matt.

“I’m not good for much, Matt,” was the response; “but I’ll do what I can.”

“What’s the matter with you?”

“Just shaken up, I reckon. I’ve had a good many falls, but never one like that before.”

Matt, when Levitt was lifted, contrived to carry most of the burden. McGlory groaned when the limp form of Levitt was in the car, and grabbed at the car seat to support himself.

“Something has happened to you, old chap, besides a mere shaking up,” averred Matt. “I guess I’ll have to leave you at Hempstead with Levitt.”

“Nary, you don’t. I’ve got to get to that meeting.”

Matt made no answer to this. It brought up a subject which he was not yet ready to discuss.

“Get into the car, Joe,” said he. “Hold Levitt’s head up between your knees, if you can. I won’t be able to help support him—the car will take all my attention.”

“If this infernal contraption goes off the jump again,” scowled McGlory, “it’s liable to do for all of us.”

In a few moments they were loaded. The cowboy, braced in the seat, supported the upper half of Levitt’s body between his knees. This left Matt elbow room for running the car.

The runabout started off cleverly enough, and Matt believed it would act well for the short trip to Hempstead.

“How did the accident happen, Joe?” he asked, when they were well away.

“I wish somebody would tell me,” answered McGlory. “We were going along at not more than twenty-five miles an hour when, without any warning, it buck-jumped, and stopped dead. Levitt was thrown out sideways against the tree. I missed the trees, but took the roadside on my head and shoulders, as near as I can recollect. I was dazed for a couple of minutes, and when I rounded up my wits I saw Levitt unconscious, a dozen feet from where I was lying. That’s all. I was trying to tinker him up when you came along. Where did you pick up the

car?”

“A little way back on the road. It was on the reverse, and moving slowly.”

“How did it get on the reverse?”

“I don’t know.”

“Nor I. Sufferin’ brain twisters! The same thing happened on the Jericho Pike this morning, you remember.”

Matt was silent. Before either he or the cowboy could speak Levitt began to talk.

“Play the game, Billings! If you’re going to hocus the syndicate, you’ve got to pay me money enough to make it worth while. A quarter of the proceeds, Billings, or I give Random & Griggs my private report. That will cook your goose.”

McGlory gasped.

“He’s delirious,” said Matt.

“He—he thinks he’s talking with Billings,” said McGlory. “Speak to me about that!”

“It’s just as I told you, Joe,” went on Matt quietly. “Your colonel is out to make a big winning, and to make it dishonestly. If he——”

Levitt began again.

“You didn’t know I had that private report, did you?” A weird laugh came with the words. “I’m a bit foxy myself, colonel. The ‘Pauper’s Dream’ isn’t worth what it cost to put down the shaft. You haven’t any vein. There was a pocket, but the pocket has been worked out. You’ve got to come across with a pile if you make me suppress that private report.”

“I’m the biggest blockhead that walks the face o’ the earth!” declared McGlory. “I——”

Levitt interrupted him.

“Keep your eye on Matt King, Billings! If lightning hits us, that cub will be back of it!”

There was something grewsome about that limp form with its bandaged head, swaying between McGlory’s unsteady knees and mumbling villainous revelations.

For a while Levitt was silent, and the runabout glided through the outskirts of Hempstead and Matt inquired the way to the nearest doctor.

The car continued to remain on its good behavior, and carried its passengers steadily and safely to the walk in front of the doctor's office. Some bystanders helped carry Levitt in, and he was laid on a couch, very white and weak and continuing to mumble his delirious disclosures.

"What's the trouble with him?" inquired the doctor.

"Automobile accident," answered Matt briefly.

"They're always happening," commented the medical man grimly. "Who is he?"

"Hannibal J. Levitt. We'll have to leave him in your care, doctor. My friend and I have got to hurry on to New York to attend a meeting at eight o'clock to-night."

The doctor, busily examining Levitt, turned up a suspicious face.

"You'll have to tell me a little bit more about this man before you go," said he. "He may have been hurt in an automobile accident, or he may have been hit on the head with a sand bag."

"Sufferin' hold-ups!" muttered McGlory. "Do you take us for strong-arm men?"

Just at that moment a policeman entered.

"Heard there was an injured man brought in here, doc," said he.

The doctor explained—not only about the injured man, but about Matt's hurry to get away to New York.

The policeman also became suspicious. Matt, however, took him apart and went into a somewhat lengthy explanation. He told who he was, and managed to convince the officer of his identity. The name of Matt King was not unknown to the bluecoat, and he was prepared to take all that Matt said in good faith.

"It's all right, Doc," said the officer, as soon as Matt had finished talking; "these young fellows didn't have anything more to do with that man's condition than you or I. We'll look after Levitt. Badly hurt?"

"Yes."

"Seriously?"

"Not dangerously, if that's what you mean."

"Then we're free to go, are we, officer?" asked Matt.

“Sure. Skip whenever you’re ready. If I want you or your friend I’ll phone your New York hotel.”

Matt and McGlory, followed by the troubled eyes of the doctor, went out to the runabout. Before starting, Matt got the lamps to going.

“Now for Manhattan,” said he, climbing to his seat.

“Or the ditch,” added McGlory. “The way I feel now I don’t care much what happens to us.”

“That’s a funny way for you to feel, Joe,” said Matt quietly.

The car moved off in fine order—an exhibition which made Matt feel like congratulating himself.

“I’m entitled to my feelings, pard. For what I’ve done to-day you ought to cut me out of your herd.”

“You made a mistake——”

“A big one; and there was no excuse for it.”

“Yes, there was, Joe. There must have been.”

McGlory mumbled to himself and fell silent.

“You hadn’t got far along the road from the clubhouse,” said Matt, “when the accident happened. But you must have been gone an hour. If your pace was twenty-five miles an hour, how——”

“The car bothered us like Sam Hill,” cut in McGlory. “If it wasn’t one thing, it was two. Neither Levitt nor I was as good a hand at tinkering as you, and we had to hunt quite a spell before we located the troubles.”

“You found something wrong?”

“A dozen things!”

“That’s strange! When this runabout gets to acting up, it usually seems to be without any cause whatever.”

“Well,” finished the cowboy, “that explains how we were going twenty-five miles an hour, at the time the accident happened, and didn’t get any farther from the Malvern Country Club.”

After this there was another silence between the chums. McGlory was getting ready to explain, and Matt patiently waited.

CHAPTER XIV.

M'GLORY'S LESSON.

"Pard," said McGlory finally, "I've connected with a lesson this afternoon that's made the biggest kind of an impression on me."

"What sort of a lesson, Joe?" asked Matt.

"The kind that hits you plumb between the eyes like a bolt of lightning. Did you ever think you were smart, and then wake up and find yourself the biggest fool in seven states? No, I don't reckon you ever did. That's not the way Pard Matt is built."

"That's where you're wrong, Joe. I've been there. We all of us take a wrong course, now and then. We wouldn't be human if we didn't."

"Sufferin' horn toads! Why, I thought all along I was starrin' myself, and that I'd laugh at you in a few days for being the one who'd made the bobble."

"The trouble with you was, Joe, Colonel Billings had too much influence over you."

"He's got an oily tongue, Matt, and a brain that's a wonder. After you dropped from the window, the colonel nailed me and pinned me down in a chair. I was as mad as a hornet, and ready to give him a right hook to the jaw, or any other kind of a right-hander that would make him take the count. That's how I felt for about a minute—red-hot and boiling. But only for a minute. The colonel started his tongue, and I fell on his neck and shed tears of joy because he had singled me out to help feather-finger the kicks of the plutocrats. Not in those words, however. The colonel made it look like a just and warranted proceeding.

"The colonel allows Pard Matt is a blockhead, and that he's taken a few facts and used 'em as signboards for the wrong trail. The colonel admits hiring Levitt to make a bogus report; but the bogus report, according to the colonel, was the one we found, and not the other gilt-edged prospectus submitted to the syndicate."

"Why did he hire Levitt to make a report saying that the mine was no good?" inquired the amazed Matt.

"He didn't, pard; he only said he did. I find there's some sort of a difference between what the colonel really does and what he tells people he does. He knew

the 'Pauper's Dream' was rich, long before he sold me my stock. Then some of the stockholders who knew the same thing tried to freeze the colonel out. But the colonel was too wise. He sank the shaft without finding any gold—just to fool the stockholders who wanted to get rid of him. These fellows immediately sold out to the colonel, so that the colonel got hold of the majority of the stock. That means, of course, that he had the entire say about everything connected with the mine.

"As soon as he has the 'Pauper's Dream' cinched, Billings begins to hit the simon-pure, ne-plus-ultra gold-bearing vein. Buyers flock to the scene. The colonel picks out this syndicate of Random & Griggs' as the boys to get the mine. Levitt comes out to examine the mine for the syndicate. The stockholders who have been frozen out begin to grow restive, and to threaten legal complications. Then Billings shows his fine Italian hand by hiring Levitt to make out that report, saying the 'Dream' is a pocket, and that the pocket is empty. That's for the soreheaded stockholders to see, and they see it. So, in that way, legal complications are sidetracked while the colonel is selling the mine to the syndicate."

McGlory relapsed into silence for a mile, while the runabout behaved beautifully and drove long shafts of light from the search lamps into the growing dark.

"That," continued the cowboy, stirring, "is the yarn the colonel put up to me. I swallowed it. But, pard, I wanted to tell you. The colonel said you mustn't know a thing until after the deal was closed and the proceeds divided. As I figure it now, I reckon the colonel was afraid you'd jab a little horse sense into his yarn and puncture it. Anyhow, the truth remains that he made me believe I'd lose a fortune by telling you the truth about that private report. 'Tell your friend about it later,' says the colonel, 'and then have a good laugh with him over the way he was fooled.' So I smoothed down my rising feathers, laid low, and planned to sneak the private report on you all by myself.

"You know how I did that. You trusted me, and asked the old darky to tell me where you were. As soon as Uncle Tom had delivered your message, I rushed right off to the colonel and repeated it to him. Then I met you, executed my brilliant play, got the report, and delivered it to my good friend the colonel. He now has it in his pocket, or else he has burned it. Anyhow, you can bet a million against the hole in a doughnut that he don't show that report to the syndicate. The question is, pard, will those syndicate people believe you and me?"

"It won't matter much," answered Matt, "whether they do or don't. By jumping

in there and telling them the truth, we'll be placing ourselves on record."

"I see. Then, if they're skinned, we can read our titles clear and they'll have only themselves to blame. But, pard, what have you been up to since I worked through that brilliant trick and left you staring at me from the bushes?"

"I've been a prisoner in the loft over the garage," answered Matt.

"A prisoner?" echoed McGlory. "How was that?"

Matt told him the details.

"Oh, speak to me about that!" growled the cowboy. "Hannibal J. Levitt never mentioned the fact of your capture to me. If I'd known what had happened to you, pard, I'd have torn loose from the whole combination, fortune or no fortune. Why," sputtered McGlory, as reflection brought the hidden details more and more before him, "Levitt never could have made that play if I hadn't told Billings where I was to meet you! They got their heads together and worked it out."

"Why didn't you and Levitt ride into town with the colonel, Joe?"

"He thought it would be better for us to come by ourselves. He was 'way ahead of time, you know, and had to go to the bank before closing hours for the bullion. It wasn't necessary for Levitt and me to be around until time for the meeting. Oh, I've had a fine run for my auburn chip, and no mistake. I'll resign, here and now, from our partnership. The place for me is the range. Cattle punching is about the scope of my ability, and it ought to be the height of my ambition. Consider my resignation handed in, pard."

"Then," said Matt, "consider it declined. I won't accept it."

"Don't make any misplay now, old chap," begged McGlory. "I'm about as dependable as this crazy runabout. Sometimes I answer the control, but you've just seen how I can take the bit in my teeth and play hob with everything. I don't think you can trust me, pard."

"I don't know any one I can trust better, Joe," answered Matt.

"If you mean that, shake."

Their hands clasped for an instant, and McGlory stifled a groan and clutched at his side.

"Say," demanded Matt, "what's wrong with you?"

“All jarred to pieces. That fall did it. When you shook my right hand I thought I was coming apart.”

“I wish,” said Matt, “that I’d had the Hempstead doctor look at you.”

“Look at me? Well, I reckon he did. He looked at me as though he thought I was a sandbagger. And he came pretty near having it right, at that.”

“You know what I mean, Joe.”

“Sure, I do. But we didn’t have time. We may be late for the meeting as it is. The colonel has showed his bullion, and flashed that affidavit about its coming from the ‘Pauper’s Dream’ as the result of a week’s run, and perhaps the syndicate has been stampeded. We may be too late.”

“We’ll not be too late to go on record,” declared Matt.

“Tell me this, pard,” said the cowboy: “Why were you piking for New York at the time you met the runabout backing down the road with no one aboard?”

“I had started for the meeting in Random & Griggs’ office,” said Matt.

“You were going there just the same, eh?”

“Of course.”

“While I was doing everything I could to help the colonel get me into trouble, you were still hustling to keep me out of it?”

“I knew Billings had influenced you in some way, Joe.”

“That’s the sort of a fellow for a pard! Of course you’re the lad to tie to. The wonder is that you’re still willing to hang onto me.”

“Random & Griggs must be as badly deceived in the colonel as any one else,” observed Matt.

“He can pull the wool over any one’s eyes, that fellow!”

“He was stopping at Griggs’ house, and the broker had put him up at the Country Club.”

“That’s right! And how the colonel has used that Country Club! The members of the club will be tickled to death if they ever find it out. You can do something to that tinhorn, Kelly, if you want to.”

“I don’t want to. He was working for Levitt——”

“Just as I was working for the colonel, eh? Maybe he was as badly fooled, too.”

For some time McGlory leaned back in his seat and kept quiet. Matt was worried about him.

“How do you feel now, Joe?” he asked.

“I was just thinking,” answered McGlory, “that this hoodoo car is trying to make up for the tough times it has given us. It’s about the worst combination of cylinders, rubber tires, and spark plugs that was ever put together, but, for all that, if it hadn’t cut up a few tantrums on the Jericho Pike this morning we’d never have found out a thing about the colonel’s crooked work.”

“That’s so. It’s an ill wind that blows nobody good, pard.”

“While the car’s running good, Matt, crowd the speed limit. Let’s get to Liberty Street as soon as we can.”

Matt proceeded to follow out his chum’s suggestion.



CHAPTER XV.

HURLING A BOMB.

Half a dozen men were gathered in the private conference room of Random & Griggs' palatial brokerage offices in Liberty Street. One of these half dozen was the colonel. Another was Joshua Griggs. The remaining four were capitalists.

Colonel Mark Antony Billings was in his element. He had never looked more impressive than he did then. Levitt and McGlory had failed to arrive in time for the meeting, but they might come later. In any event, their presence was not of supreme importance.

In front of the colonel, on the mahogany table, sparkled the two bars of yellow bullion. They caught the gleams from the incandescent lights and reflected luring rays into the eyes of the capitalists.

The capitalists seemed greatly impressed. Griggs—the brokerage firm was to receive a very large commission if the mine was sold—wore a broad and amiable smile. The colonel was plausible and full of tact, answering questions promptly.

In the midst of the deliberations the quiet of Liberty Street was disturbed by the sputter of an automobile. For the most part, Liberty Street, in the vicinity of the brokers' offices, was a deserted cañon at that hour.

But if the automobile disturbed the quiet of the street, it did not disturb the deliberations of those in Random & Griggs' offices. It took a rap on the outer door to do that. Mr. Griggs himself answered the summons.

"McGlory and Levitt, colonel," he called.

Mr. Griggs had made a slight mistake. Hearing the name McGlory, and understanding that Levitt was expected with him, the broker had jumped at conclusions.

"The expert, gentlemen," smiled the colonel, addressing the capitalists, "whom you sent to investigate my little property. A very painstaking person, and reliable to the last degree. McGlory is one of our original stockholders; a young man—a mere lad, in fact—but sharp as a steel trap." The colonel lifted his voice. "Have them come right in, Mr. Griggs," he called.

Matt King and McGlory did not stand on the order. Supporting his chum by the arm, King and the cowboy passed into the conference room and stood under the astounded eyes of the colonel.

“Why,” said Mr. Isidore Sleipnitz, one of the moneyed men, “dot ain’t der expert, Levitt. Neider of ’em is Levitt.”

“But I’m McGlory,” said the cowboy, steadying himself by leaning against a table. Although his face was white, his eyes glowed with resolution and steadfast purpose. “Mr. Levitt was thrown from the automobile and injured. He’s now in a doctor’s office in Hempstead. This is my chum, Matt King. If he hadn’t picked me up I’d never have got here.”

The colonel, to put it colloquially, “smelled a rat.” Something was wrong, and he knew it.

“This meeting, gentlemen,” said he, “is not for outsiders. Mr. King is not a stockholder in the ‘Pauper’s Dream,’ nor, so far as I am informed, is he one of your syndicate. I think he had better withdraw.”

“I’m not going to withdraw,” said Matt, “until I tell these gentlemen of your crooked transactions in the matter of the mine you are trying to sell them. McGlory and I have come here for that purpose, and——”

“Silence!” roared the colonel, starting menacingly toward Matt. “Do you think, for a minute, you can blow in here and blacken my character in the eyes of these gentlemen?” Billings struck a pose, and shoved one hand into the breast of his long coat. “I am too well known,” he went on, “to suffer from the maunderings of a cub like you!”

“I’d like to put in a few maunderings of my own, colonel,” said McGlory. “I’ll have to hurry, too, for I got badly shaken up in that accident that knocked out Levitt. There were two reports——”

“Silence!” thundered the colonel. “Get out of here, McGlory! Clear out, I say, and take that other young scoundrel with you. If you don’t, I’ll call the police!”

Hiram McCormick, another of the capitalists, got up from his chair and raised his hand.

“This isn’t one of your Southwestern ‘rough-houses,’ colonel,” said he, “so please remember that. Roar less and listen more, will you? I am interested in hearing what these young men have to say.”

“If that’s the way you stack up,” clamored the colonel, grabbing his slouch hat

and his gold bullion from the table, "I'll make myself absent. I didn't come here to be insulted."

He started for the door. Before he could reach it the door of a telephone booth opened and a blue-coated man, with a star flashing on his breast, stepped in front of him.

The appearance of the policeman was a surprise to the colonel, Griggs, Matt, and McGlory. The four capitalists did not seem to think it anything out of the ordinary.

"Where—where did that man come from?" inquired Griggs.

Inasmuch as he was a member of the firm that occupied the offices, it might be supposed that he would have had knowledge of any policeman secreted about the premises. But it was plain he had not been informed of the presence of this particular officer.

Hiram McCormick was still on his feet. While the colonel was glaring at the policeman, Mr. McCormick observed calmly:

"Mr. Griggs, we shall have to ask your pardon for the presence of the officer. He slipped in, by my request, before the colonel came, and while you were in the board room."

"What's he here for?" inquired Griggs.

"That will appear later. Just now he is going to keep the colonel with us while these young men relieve their minds."

Colonel Billings understood that he was face to face with disaster—a disaster so comprehensive that he could not readily grasp it. Heeding a motion of the officer's hand, he dropped defiantly into a chair.

"Now, my lad," said McCormick to the cowboy.

McGlory jumped at once into his recital. Beginning away back in his New York experience, he told of the trouble he and Matt had had on account of the bullion; then, after showing the telegram which had been sent to him over the signature of "Joshua Griggs," he began narrating the adventures which had fallen to him and Matt on that eventful day. The colonel's double-dealing was shown up in all its ugly brazenness, and the cowboy finished by regretting that he had not the private report of Hannibal J. Levitt to offer in evidence.

"Perhaps," suggested Matt, "the colonel can show it to you, if it has not already

been destroyed.”

“The colonel,” spoke up that gentleman witheringly, “is not here to be bossed by a fellow of your stripe. Your wild and woolly stories seem to have made a hit with the representatives of capital, but they’re fakes, and everybody here will know they’re fakes, before many days.”

“Gentlemen,” put in Mr. Griggs, whose faith in the colonel was dying hard, “is it right to take the word of these boys against a man so well known throughout the Southwest as Colonel Billings?”

Colonel Billings waved his hand gently but firmly toward Mr. Griggs.

“Never mind me, sir,” said he. “The kid element seems to predominate in the meeting, and men of experience and reason are relegated to the background. Don’t disturb yourself on my account, I beg. There are other bidders for the ‘Pauper’s Dream.’ The mine will be snapped up before the week is over.”

“Mr. Griggs,” went on Hiram McCormick, “these young men have come here—one of them with everything to lose and nothing to gain by blocking the sale of the mine—and told us a most remarkable story of guile and duplicity. I may say, however, that neither I nor my associates are surprised. We have already had cause to suspect the colonel of double-dealing. Two experts were sent by us to examine the ‘Pauper’s Dream.’ In matters of this sort, it is best not to place all your faith in one man. Levitt went to the mine, made himself known to the colonel, and examined the prospect under his supervision. Perhaps it is not to be wondered at that the colonel bought him. But the second expert reached the mine in laborer’s clothes, and was hired by the colonel to ‘salt’ the breast of the ‘Pauper’s Dream’ tunnel. I have that man’s report here in my pocket. It only arrived to-day, but my friends of this projected syndicate have all read it. For this reason we feared we might have trouble with the colonel, and so we smuggled the policeman into the telephone booth.

“Colonel Billings,” and McCormick turned and leveled a hard look at the Arizona man, “your rascally game would not have succeeded, even had these lads not come here and told us of your knavery. We had you spotted. From now on you will be blacklisted in this town, and you will try in vain to float any other mining proposition on New York capital. Mr. Griggs was deceived in you, and he and his partner have our sympathy, and have not lost a particle of our good will; but as for you, if you are not out of the city within twenty-four hours we shall try and see just how much responsibility the law can put upon you for this day’s events. There is the door; close it from the outside.”

The colonel got up. Calmly he drew a canvas bag from his pocket, and deliberately placed his gold bars within it; then, holding the bag in one hand, he allowed the other to dart toward his hip—a move young King had seen before.

“Look out for him!” warned Matt.

The officer grabbed a revolver out of the colonel’s hand in just the nick of time. There was a brief struggle, but the colonel got the worst of it.

“I’ll play even with that cub of a Matt King,” the colonel was heard to breathe, “if it’s the last thing I ever do.”

“Take him out, officer,” said Hiram McCormick, in undisguised contempt, “and, of course, you’ll confiscate the weapon. This is not Arizona.”

None too gently the policeman hustled Colonel Billings out of the door. Hardly had they left when McGlory staggered, tossed his hands, and fell heavily into Matt’s arms.

Instantly there was a flurry of excitement in the office, Griggs, McCormick, and the others all hurrying forward to be of what assistance they could.

CHAPTER XVI.

LOST—A FORTUNE.

Joe McGlory drifted back to conscience amid surroundings that were entirely new to him. He was in a white iron bed. On one side of the bed stood a woman in a white cap and apron, and on the other side was a man in black. Over the foot of the bed leaned Matt, his anxious face clearing a little as McGlory opened his eyes.

“Ah!” murmured the doctor.

“Where am I?” inquired the cowboy.

“In the emergency ward of the City Hospital,” answered the doctor.

“I’ve got about as much right here as a maverick steer in a watermelon patch. Sufferin’ sister, what a jolt!”

A smile sneaked over the doctor’s face. The nurse turned her head. Matt laughed, highly delighted.

“He’ll be all right, don’t you think so, doctor?” Matt asked.

“A lad who can come out from under the influence of a narcotic with such a flow of spirits,” averred the doctor, “is bound to be all right.”

“What’s the matter with me?” the cowboy asked.

“A couple of broken ribs.”

“I thought I’d busted something! Say, Matt!”

“What is it, Joe?”

“The last I remember I was in the office of Random & Griggs. When was that?”

“Last night.”

The cowboy turned his head so he could see the sunlight coming through the window.

“And now it’s this morning?”

“Yes.”

“When will I get out of here, doc? This afternoon?”

“If you get out of here in less than two weeks you’ll do well,” said the doctor.

“Speak to me about that!” muttered McGlory.

“It’s all right, Joe,” said Matt. “I’ll be here every day to see you.”

“Sure you will. I couldn’t stand it if you stayed away. The old runabout got me, after all!”

“You were lucky to escape as well as you did,” spoke up the doctor. “You took a long automobile ride, after you were hurt,” he added severely, “and did a number of other things that were entirely unnecessary, and which aggravated your condition.”

“Correct, doc,” grinned McGlory; “I was aggravated a whole lot, and no mistake. Where’s the hoodoo car now, Matt?”

“Billy’s got it in the garage.”

“I wonder that Billy would have it there, considering how he feels about it.”

“Billy’s not the boss of the garage, Joe,” laughed Matt. “If he was, probably he’d refuse to give the car storage.”

“Hear anything from Hempstead?”

“Well, yes. Levitt is coming along as well as can be expected.”

“I don’t think you had better talk any more, my lad,” interposed the doctor.

“I’ll die if I don’t, doc,” declared McGlory. “Give me a little more rope, can’t you?”

“A little.”

“Where’s the colonel, Matt?” went on McGlory.

“No one knows, Joe. He was ordered out of town, and I guess he’s gone, or going.”

“He played hob with me, all right. How’s the syndicate?”

“You’d feel highly complimented if you could hear what they said about you.”

“What did they say about *you*?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Sure you don’t. You never remember what’s said about you, but whenever any one tips you off concernin’ a pard you keep it right on tap. What are you going to do for the two weeks I’m laid up?”

“Just hang around and wait for you to get well, I guess,” Matt laughed.

“Don’t hike out of town, will you?”

“No; I’m going to stay right here.”

McGlory looked at the doctor.

“He’s my pard, doc,” said he. “Matt’s his label, and he’s the clear quill any way you take him.”

“You both seem to stand pretty high in each other’s estimation,” smiled the doctor.

“I’m standing higher in his than I deserve.”

“Cut that out, Joe,” said Matt.

“I’ll cut it out and paste it in my hat so I won’t forget it. It’s the best lesson I ever had, and I’m going to profit by it. Lost—a fortune! That’s me. I was promised a place on Easy Street, and here I am in the hospital.”

McGlory chuckled.

“You may have lost a fortune, Joe,” said Matt, “but you’ve won something a whole lot better.”

“I have—two busted ribs and a couple of weeks’ lay-off. Oh, I’m a lucky dog!”

“Don’t fret about the ribs or the lay-off, Joe,” counseled Matt. “If you get to worrying, you may have to stay here longer than two weeks.”

“Funny how I shut my eyes in Random & Griggs’ office,” remarked McGlory, leaping from one subject to another with the abruptness of a person whose brain is still a little befogged, “and open ’em here. That was sure a hard ride from Hempstead in. I don’t know how I managed to hang on. I reckon it was my wish to play even with the colonel that held me up.”

“The colonel got his deserts, Joe,” said Matt.

“The syndicate was next to him all the time. Our chasing in to tell what we knew didn’t make such a terrible lot of difference.”

“It put us on record, that’s all. It’s mighty important, sometimes, to let people

know where you stand.”

“Correct, again. But listen. Didn’t Colonel Billings pull a gun on you, Matt, before he left the office? Seems to me I remember that.”

“He pulled a gun, Joe; but I don’t know what he intended to do with it.”

“Then I’ll put you next, pard. He intended to play even with you.”

“Or you,” answered Matt.

“Not me,” insisted Joe. “The colonel knows I haven’t got sense enough to make him much trouble. But he’s afraid of Matt King. Look out for him, pard.”

“The colonel has his orders to leave town, and——”

“That doesn’t mean that he’ll go. During the two weeks I’m holding down this nice little bed here, you keep both eyes skinned for Colonel Mark Antony Billings. He’s liable to show his hand when you’re not thinking he’s within a thousand miles of you. Pretty sudden, the colonel is. He sprang a surprise on us when we got to the Country Club and found him there to meet us instead of Joshua Griggs. That’s a sample of the way he does things, Matt. You look out for him.”

“That will do now,” said the doctor authoritatively. “You’ve talked more than you ought to.”

“When’ll you blow in here again, pard?” added McGlory, reaching out his hand.

“This afternoon.”

“That’s you. I’ve lost a fortune, pard, but I didn’t let you get away from me. We’re pards, same as per usual, and in spite of what happened at the Country Club?”

“Sure we are. That couldn’t make any difference, Joe.”

“It would have made a big difference with some fellows, but Matt King’s of a different calibre.”

“That’s what pards are for, Joe,” whispered Matt as he let go his chum’s hand, “to stand by each other.”

“Like you hung to me,” returned the cowboy, “and not the way I stood by you. Well, I’ve had my lesson, and we’ll let it go at that. *Adios!*”

Matt turned and left the ward, and the hospital. There were a lot of people in New York, but it seemed like a mighty lonesome place now that McGlory was

laid up for repairs.

The colonel, being a wise man, considered it good policy to get away from New York, and head for his favorite stamping grounds in the Southwest, for neither Matt nor Joe ever saw him again.

When Joe got well Matt had found something in his favorite line of motors to engage their attention, and with such a team of hustlers to drive things, the business could not be anything but a success.

THE END.

The next number (364) will contain "Pluck Beats Luck; or, Tom Talbot's Trials and Triumphs." By John L. Douglas.



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THE MISSING BOATS.

Reflecting the hues of the sunset sky lay Lake Menatee like a huge mirror.

Not a ripple stirred its placid surface.

The fading sunlight lent to its crystal depths the silver of its dying glory.

While along its shores the forest like an over-reaching shield outstretched its giant arms to cast weird, fantastic figures first on the white beach, and then out, out over the transparent bosom of the waters, going farther, faster and faster, deeper and darker, until the veil of twilight concealed the beautiful scene.

In the background the rugged Adirondacks kept watch and ward over the treasures below, and on their seamed and time-scarred forehead lingered the touch of sunlight long after the shadows of gloom had robbed Lake Menatee of its beauty.

Not a living creature was to be seen to give life to the solitude of nature.

Three boats drawn up on the white sand lay side by side, or at least within a few feet of each other.

They were merely common, flat-bottom rowboats.

There was nothing remarkable about them.

The water may have reached to the stern of one, but to not more than barely touch it.

Still a close observer might have seen it move, slightly it is true, but yet a movement perceptible.

Gradually it neared the water's edge, moved by an unseen power.

So slowly did it move that fully an hour must have passed before it had gained a foot.

Then the wind, which had died down at sunset, began to sweep across the lake.

Gently, at first, it stirred the water's tranquil surface, as if fearful of disturbing its repose.

Anon it grew stronger.

From the mountains it mustered its powers.

The sleeping waters were awakened.

In angry waves they beat the shores.

The rising tide lent its aid to the mysterious force urging the boat into its embrace.

Thus the boat was carried more rapidly away, and yet in the next two hours' time scarcely three feet was added to the space gone over.

It must have been past midnight, when, with a last quivering shock—a dying struggle, it seemed—and the boat swung clear from the sand.

A minute later it floated slowly away.

At this moment a crash in the thick bushes, growing a few rods from the shore, broke the calm and peaceful stillness of the night.

An instant later and the form of a man uprose from the gloom of his covert.

The moon was just peeping above the Adirondacks' dark crest, and it was light enough in the forest for one to have seen that the man was past the prime of life, though his stalwart form had borne the burden of years without losing its erectness.

He was somewhat roughly clad, and his long hair and flowing beard were unkempt. His eyes flashed brightly, but a puzzled look rested on his sun-bronzed face. His words, that fell involuntarily from his lips, furnished the key to his thoughts.

“Waal, I hev got to believe it now. But if that don't beat all nater, then my name an't Jarius Bede. See the thing swim along, and there an't been a living creetur near it since long afore sundown! I can swear to that, for I an't let my eye off on't in all that time. It is queer.”

As he finished his soliloquy the speaker went down to the shore, but he did not step upon the sandy beach.

“I won't do that,” he muttered, “for like as not I should find myself in the midst of that pond afore I could say Bob Bungles.”

There was nothing to explain the mystery he had witnessed. The other boats had not moved.

“Waal, waal. I'll trundle off hum,” concluded the mystified Jarius Bede; “but as

long as I stand up I know I shall never see the beat of that!”

Throwing his gun over his shoulder, for he was armed with a long, single-barreled old queen’s arm that had evidently seen its share of service, he left the place with long, loping strides, in the direction of home.

Ever and anon he glanced uneasily back, as if expecting that he was to be followed by some mysterious foe.

“Makes a feller feel queer. Hello! the boys are looking for me, I bet. I’m glad to see that light ennyway.”

A light was indeed visible in one of the valleys, and after ten minutes’ walk he came to a rude house, or cabin, around which could be seen a few acres of cultivated ground.

It was the house of one of the few settlers who had located in that wild, out-of-the-way region.

Entering without knocking, half a dozen persons sprang to their feet to greet him.

This family consisted of Jabez Bede, brother to Jarius, his wife, three strapping sons, and a buxom daughter of eighteen.

“Why, it’s only ’Rius!” exclaimed Dame Bede, with a look of relief, as if she had feared some danger.

“But where have you been all night, Jarius?” cried Jabez. “We were gettin’ a-worried ’bout yer.”

“Jabez, I hev made a diskivery!”

“What?” chorused the listeners in a breath.

“I told yer I shouldn’t kem back till I had l’arnt sumthin’, and I an’t, that, sure.”

“It is about Ralph, I know it is!” exclaimed Mary Bede, springing to his side with a glad look on her fair countenance. “What have you learned, uncle? Tell me, quick.”

“I can prove that he didn’t steal the boat,” was the triumphant reply.

“I knew that he didn’t. But tell us what you have learned.”

“Waal, waal, it’s cur’us, but it’s true. You know that the three boats were left down on the shore as usual. Waal, I hev been watchin’ them ever since an hour afore sundrop.”

“Why, Jarius Bede, and we here a-waitin’ and a-worritin’ ’bout yer.”

“Waal, it’s worth the time, I can tell yer.”

While Jarius Bede is telling what he has witnessed we would say that considerable excitement had been occasioned among the few settlers in that vicinity by the frequent disappearance of boats from the shores of the lake. No one could tell where they had gone, but they were as effectually lost as if the water had swallowed them up.

Finally, Mary Bede’s lover, Ralph Horn, was accused of stealing, or destroying them, which amounted to the same thing, so long as they were irretrievably lost.

We can understand now something of the eagerness with which she listened to Jarius’ story. When he had finished all were agape with wonder.

“Waal, I never!” exclaimed Jabez. “Who’d a-thought it?”

“And they will believe Ralph now?” asked Mary anxiously.

“They can’t help it, only we have got to prove it to them.”

“Yes, yes,” said her father. “How’ll we do that, ’Rius? It’s an orful story to believe.”

“Let them see fer theirselves. Guess if they hed been with me they’d a-thought somethin’ ’sides Ralph Horn was ’round movin’ that boat. But I must catch a wink of sleep now. In the mornin’ we’ll all go down and clear up the mystery.”

A few minutes later the light was extinguished, and the Bede family were in slumberland, though there may be a doubt in regard to one member. But we won’t call any names.

They were all astir early the next morning, and immediately after breakfast Jarius spread the news of his discovery.

It required no urging to get half a dozen to accompany him to the lake, besides the three Bede boys.

To the surprise even of Jarius, the boat he had seen leave the shore so mysteriously the night before was nowhere to be seen either upon the lake or on the shores.

The other two were just as they had been left.

“Let’s put one of them jest where the runaway was and then watch it.”

The idea was acted upon, and the entire party withdrew into the cover of the

growth to await the result.

A long, tedious watch followed, but to the disappointment of all, as well as the chagrin of Jarius, the boat remained as motionless as a rock. Not a first move was noticed.

“Wait a leetle longer,” whispered the puzzled Jarius; “I thought I seed it wink jest a bit then.”

Half an hour passed, and still the object of their vain watch had not been seen to stir.

“It’s cur’us,” muttered the leader; “but that other took an orful long time to start. Why I was here nigh ’bout six hours all told.”

“Mebbe it has to be night for it to move,” suggested one.

Be that the case or not, they watched until noon, when they abandoned the fruitless task, and the mystery of the missing boats was more unfathomable than ever.

Some vented their disappointment upon Jarius Bede, and others were silent, not knowing what to say.

Jarius was completely dumfounded, and well he might be.

“Tan’t any use to watch longer,” growled one. “We’ve been a set of fools. The idea of a boat’s moving! Jarius is mad, and we are fools. Come, we shall be the laughing-stock of all who hear of it. I’ll bet my gun Jarius got us down here on purpose for some game. If I thought he had——” and a latent look shone in his flashing eyes.

Jarius did not reply. He had enough to think of besides. Dropping upon his knees, he looked the boat over and over, and around it. He moved it, but it lay a dead weight upon the earth.

“It’s queer,” he muttered. “I can swear to what I saw with my own eyes, but I don’t understand it.”

He had regained his feet, and was about to leave the place, when suddenly something seemed to catch his attention and hold it.

Pointing to the edge of the water a moment later, he exclaimed:

“Look there, boys! See that sand move! There’s something under it! I—I have diskivered the mystery!”

Seizing one of the boat's paddles, Jarius quickly cleared away the sand where he had seen it move, when a large turtle was disclosed to their gaze.

Upon further search another was found buried deeper than its mate.

"Waal, waal, it's plain as daylight now. They were under that boat and moved it! T'others were moved in the same way. But we didn't get this one over the critters."

"Who'd a-thought!" ejaculated his brother, while the others were speechless with amazement.

"But where do they go to?" asked one, at last.

"I'll tell yer!" cried Jarius, as a new idea suddenly entered his head; "they drift down to the outlet and into Mad River. You know an empty boat would fare hard there; and we an't never looked there for them."

Mad River found its way through a narrow, rocky defile where few had ever penetrated, but an exploration into the wild region was rewarded by discovering the wrecks of two boats. Though the others were never found their disappearance was no longer a mystery.

Of course, Ralph Horn was cleared of all suspicion in the affair, and that fall there was a happy wedding at the Bede farm. We need not tell who the bride was, and we can't tell of "the years of happiness that followed," as story-tellers are wont to say, for it was only last week the marriage vows were spoken.



ESKIMOS TAKE TO REINDEERS.

A letter from Alaska in the *New York Sun* recently has the following interesting facts:

Of the twenty thousand reindeer under government supervision in Alaska about two thousand are above the Arctic Circle where the climate is much more severe than in their old feeding grounds in Siberia, from which they were carried by the United States revenue cutters some years ago. The reports of the local superintendents of reindeer herds will be forwarded in this, the second mail to leave the Arctic this year. These reports will show a very small increase in the herds.

The mortality among the fawns this last year was very great, owing to the blizzards which swept over the tundras in April and May when the fawning season was on. Newly born fawns, unable to stand up in the blinding storms and help themselves to nourishment, froze to death by hundreds within ten minutes after birth. Wolves and half-wolf dogs also killed many in some of the herds.

At present the herds are kept out on the open tundra near the sea, where there is no protection from the cutting blasts. District Superintendent A. N. Evans has arranged to have the deer taken inland next spring at least as far as the foothills, where the peculiar white moss on which the creatures feed is abundant, and where there is ample protection from the winds. It is hoped that this will save the fawns and prevent the heavy loss of the present year being repeated.

An encouraging feature of the work here, far from markets and utterly shut out from any considerable contact with white men, is the fact that the native is slowly but certainly coming to recognize the great possibilities of the reindeer industry. While every effort has been made to give as many natives as possible an interest in the herds by direct ownership of some of the deer, the owners of deer are still a very small minority.

So valuable has a government apprenticeship come to be considered that it has often been the deciding factor in determining the outcome of the dusky love affairs. "When you get some reindeer I will be your wife," says the Inuit maiden with the tattooed chin. These wise young ladies know that the ownership of deer carries with it as a usual thing three or four years of first-class government rations and piles of cloth and clothing which Uncle Sam throws

about in the Arctic with a generous hand. So among the natives there is developing a sort of reindeer aristocracy quite at variance with the old democratic, communistic ideas of the others who hold no property worth while, and who have not been favored by the government.

As only a limited number can be appointed apprentices every year, and thus draw government rations, many are now trying to get deer from other natives without waiting for government favors. In this few have succeeded, for the owners, recognizing their great value, are running the price of female reindeer skyward. With the destruction of the country's game and the rising standard of life among the natives the population will come more and more to depend upon the reindeer industry, which will doubtless develop rapidly.

Living in a savage state of society with no other domestic animal than the half-tamed malamoot dog, the process of teaching the Eskimo how to take care of deer has been slow. Severe measures have had to be resorted to in many cases to compel the natives to keep their dogs from the deer camp.

Also it has been found difficult to prevent those who have no deer from shooting the unfortunate animals that stray away from the herd. These are considered legitimate prey and until recently were hunted the same as caribou. This year, however, a great many of these stray deer have been picked up and put back into the herds which they had deserted.

It has thus been found necessary to put the native herder through a course of training. Those who get their deer directly from the government serve an apprenticeship of four years. They are bound by a written contract, the strict terms of which they cannot violate without peril of losing their annual allotment of reindeer and suffering discharge from the service.

During the first three years of their apprenticeship they receive in addition to the reindeer a generous supply of food free of charge. Cloth, clothing, traps, guns, and ammunition are also given to the fortunate apprentice, who soon becomes a person of consequence in the community. For these governmental favors the apprentice is supposed to take care of his own deer and to assist in caring for the government deer.

The work of the herder in a reindeer camp is not arduous, and seems to be especially attractive to the carefree native. Ordinarily the deer have a way of taking care of themselves that suits the native. Every day an apprentice drives the herd to some feeding ground, where they feed while the herder saunters about or hunts ptarmigan or other game near at hand.

If the moss is poor the deer may feed for six hours, at the end of which time they are driven back to the vicinity of the camp and allowed to remain there until the next feeding time, while the ease-loving servants of the government sleep or whittle fine old ivory into curios to be traded off on the ships for the tobacco which Uncle Sam overlooked in ordering the shiploads of supplies which annually find their way to the reindeer camps of Alaska.

True, there is other work to be done. Every spring along comes fawning season, and the deer herders have to stand watch day and night by turns. Now and then the long, wild note of the Arctic wolf is heard through the midwinter gloom and a constant watch must be kept by well-armed men. The repeating rifle made wolves so scarce, however, that dogs are by far the greatest source of danger.

It seems utterly impossible to train the malamoot dog to herd deer. At sight of a deer the tamest malamoot becomes as uncontrollable as though he had never known human restraint and were once more a plain wolf.

Besides guarding the herd occasionally from these dangers, there are sled deer to be trained, and every June there is a kind of round-up, when the young fawns are marked, along with all deer that have changed owners during the year. In the ear of each government deer a little aluminum button is riveted securely, but all private owners and herders have a mark which must be registered with the local superintendent and also at Washington. This mark is made by cutting the ear.

So far the native in the Far North has made almost no use of the wonderfully rich milk of the reindeer. This milk, which is as white as the Arctic snows, is at least ninety per cent. cream. In fact, it is practically all a rich, snow-white, sugary cream. It is the most nourishing milk in the world, but the government has so far supplied the camps with condensed milk, and the herders have preferred opening cans to milking deer.

Unlike the Laplander, the Eskimo does not make a pet of his favorite deer. When he wants to milk her she is lassoed and thrown down. When her legs are carefully tied with walrus skin strings and her horns are safely held by some stout friend, the process of milking begins. When the last drop is extracted the highly indignant animal is unlashd and allowed to get up and go about her business.

Sometimes a horn is knocked off or a leg broken before the struggling reindeer understands that she is to be milked and not branded or butchered. Under the circumstances the dairying feature of Arctic life is not very prominent, and the milkmaid's song is not welcomed by the wise little animals that have undergone

the torture of one milking.



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