

Bullet screamed past, this time to the left. I had avoided it, but at the cost of so violent a skid that I determined to take my chance and not repeat the manoeuvre. Two more bullets followed, but both flew wide. Instead of feeling any fear, I fell again into a state of apathy.

"Hal! hal! Mr. Morse, so you have given me a good run after all!" said Malpas' voice, a few yards behind. "I was beginning to fear that you would get to earth before I could try conclusions. Considering your forty years, you make an exceedingly game fox, and really deserve to get off."

I plucked the lamp off its bracket and hurled it behind me in the road, then my coat after it; anything to save weight.

"Really, Mr. Morse, you surprise me," continued my tormentor, in a tone which suggested that he was smiling mockingly; "you make rather free with lamps and coats. Not that it will do you any good. That little revolver practice was merely to let you know of my whereabouts. I can do a great deal better than that if I try. Dear me! what would the charming Mrs. Morse say if a decimal 330 were to strike her beloved husband in the back! It makes me laugh to see you wobbling along like a cross between a drowned rat and a clerk out enjoying a holiday scorch."

Wearily as I was, his taunts so maddened me that I squeezed out sufficient work to take myself out of earshot. For some reason, Malpas seemed to be losing ground, and the hiss of his car gradually faded into the patter of rain. My mind was made up. Could I but get the chance I would slip into the wood, which began shortly after the first bend in the road. Thanks to the previous ride I knew my bearings pretty accurately. I got round the corner well ahead of Malpas. An open gate lay ready to hand. Through it I rode, and pushed my cycle far into the dripping hazel and hornbeam. The rain fell off the trees in a regular deluge, soaking any dry portions of my clothing that remained. Water squelched in my shoes and obscured my glasses, so that I could scarcely see whither I was going.

Leaving the cycle flat on the ground, I worked my way toward the outside of the wood, where, screened by the bracken, I watched for the car. It did not appear as soon as I anticipated. The rain was thick enough to form a kind of mist. I hoped that Malpas would not notice that I had left the road until he had gone on a long distance. But the mud in the road betrayed me. Malpas saw at a glance the tracks leading into the wood, and brought his car to a standstill. He dismounted with something gleaming in his hand.

As he turned his face was toward me, and if ever I read the determination to commit murder it was there. I heard him pushing a way through the bushes, where the marks of my feet in the wet grass must have been plain enough. Should I trust to concealment, or spring upon him unawares and possess myself of the revolver? But what could a man, exhausted by twenty miles' furious riding, hope to do against one whose work had been nothing more severe than to manage a couple of handles?

So I lay quite still, hardly daring to move or breathe, lest the cracking of a twig should reveal my hiding place. Malpas soon found my cycle, and uttered a hoarse cry of triumph. Well he might, for it was my sole means of escape. The sole means? No! the motor car stood in the road. I knew how to start the mechanism. If Malpas wished to catch me he should have a turn at the cycle.

Before I was ten seconds older I had climbed into the car. But to my dismay all my efforts to start it were unavailing; probably Malpas had foreseen the manoeuvre. To stay where I was would be dangerous; but I did not mean to leave the car as I found it. Taking out my knife, I leaped down and cut two large slits in the back tyres. The air came out with a hiss loud enough to be heard a hundred yards off. I saw now what had delayed Malpas—my coat, small shreds of which still clung to parts of the machinery. No doubt the wheels had picked it up off the road and it had gradually been dragged into the cogs. There was no time to lose, so I went forward to treat the front tyres like the others.

Scarcely had my knife touched the rubber of one, when a bullet splashed into the back of the car, and made me look up. Thirty yards away Malpas was preparing for a second shot. With the agility born of necessity, I regained

the wood, closely pursued; but not before a sensation of hot iron passed across my right calf. I doubled back on my tracks, and soon found my cycle, which Malpas had not had time to injure. To snatch it up was the work of a moment. Hazels switched my face cruelly as I pushed through them, leaving at least one scar which I carry today as a memento. Before Malpas had cleared the wood I was fifty yards up the road riding for dear life. I got a glimpse of him kneeling on the grass with his left arm up. I crouched in the saddle so avoiding the bullet. Another struck the cycle somewhere behind. I heard fragments of lead scatter among the bushes, but my machine seemed none the worse. Then another and another; and I was out of range unharmed.

So once again I took my courage in both hands, as the Frenchmen say, and reasoned with myself. About fourteen miles more to go; a bleeding leg; muddy roads; rain beating down vigorously. Not a pleasant outlook indeed; but the pursuer had missed his best opportunity, and wasted the greater part of his ammunition. At most he started with twelve cartridges; ten of these were expended. He would be sure to reserve the other two for close quarters. Thank goodness I had managed to rip up his tyres. That meant a good many miles an hour off. Pont de l'Arche was close now, and once over the river, I should be in more thickly populated, and, therefore, for me, safer, country.

In the intense desire to gain even this much, I forgot thirst, pain and fatigue. Should the body disobey the will? No! I might drop dead, but not otherwise would I yield to this ever-increasing sense of exhaustion. The struggle between fixed resolve and physical fatigue resulted in a state of semi-torpor, from which I was rudely awakened by the cobbles of Pont l'Arche. A pest on that medieval invention of the devil, that foul blot on the splendid thoroughfares of France—a pave road! The jarring transmitted by the machine tortured my wounded leg, but it helped combat the stupor gradually clouding my senses. I remember crossing a long bridge over the river, then a shorter one, over a railway, and, longing for the speed of the train that rushed beneath as I passed. Then there came another of those fearful inclines. My head swam, there was buzzing in my ears; but I clenched my teeth and spurred the pedals desperately. The faculty of hearing seemed to desert me. My machine made no sound in the wind, and the pelting rain fell like shot into velvet—noiselessly.

"Ping! I heard that; the right handle grip flew into atoms. My hand must have been there a moment before. Malpas was at my heels. I dodged him from side to side like a rabbit, losing ground at every turn. The car came closer and closer. My hour was approaching.

"You devil!" screamed a voice, at my elbow, so it seemed. "You'd escape me, would you, by your dirty tricks! Yes, duck and dodge, and dodge and duck, as much as you like, but you won't be able to get out of the way of this messenger."

I knew that the last bullet would be soon dispatched. Many times I felt it grinding its way into my vitals. The suspense was awful, intolerable. By instinct I bent forward, with my head drooping over the handle-bar.

Then it came; but the flask in my hip-pocket proved a good friend in need. Malpas thought I was done for, and uttered a sound like a snarl of a wild beast. That cry restored my balance, mental and physical. His magazine was empty! He saw my pedal with renewed vigour, and in furious disappointment hurled his revolver, which, after whizzing close to my head, leaped gleaming along the road.

Men against man and oil now! Human muscle with petroleum gas! He tried to ride me down. How I kept ahead I can't imagine, unless it be that a special cherub is told off to help hunted men. Twice his wheels brushed my back tyre ever so slightly; twenty times I slipped in the treacherous mud.

We were on a down slope now, flying along at a tremendous pace. I gained little by little, a foot, a few yards, maybe. Still that accursed yellow thing thundered in, the rear, spitting and panting, like a demon thirsting for my life-blood. Its evil breath was upon me again. The hiss of the cylinder sounded clear even amid the crashing thunder. I gathered myself together for a supreme effort. Malpas saw me draw away, and howled in impotent fury,

Blood curdling were the curses he heaped upon the sluggish car. The driving rain filled my eyes with watery film, through which all looked mighty and uncertain. I managed to avoid a wagon full of chalk standing in the road. But as I passed a deafening crash split the heavens. I heard the terrified horse snort; then came the sound of collision and a dull thud.

I dismounted, mechanically, and looked back. The driver was trying to extricate his horse from the debris of wagon and motor-car. Chalk strewn thickly round testified to the violence of the impact; and five or six yards ahead a dark mass lay in the road.

I turned and walked back some paces to get a better view of this motionless object.

The glance sufficed to show that the race had been won—by me.—From "Short Stories."

Christmas comes but once a year, And when it comes—why, then it's here; But this of course we cannot say. They come, they go, they often stay, And merge into a nasty cough, Which we have trouble to drive off. Vain the attempt unless we procure A bottle of Woods' Great Peppermint Cure.

# GOOD SUNLIGHT SOAP

## Good friend on wash day.

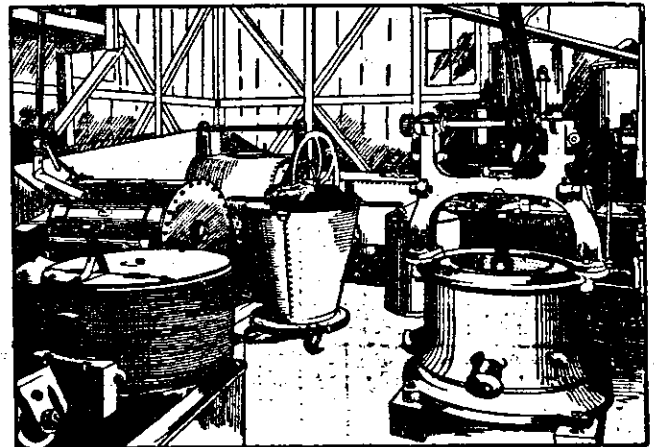
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