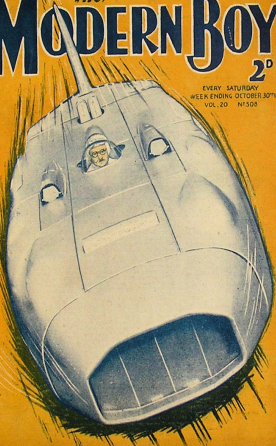


ANOTHER FINE STORY of THE RIO KID!

The
MODERN BOY
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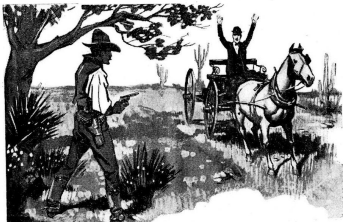
EVERY SATURDAY
WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 30TH 1952
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CAPTAIN EYSTON'S "THUNDERBOLT" IN ACTION!

Rustler's Secret

When he lured the rustler to his last hold-up, brought him in a prisoner, the Rio Kid gave the cowpunchers Surprise No. 1. And then they gasped again . . .!



Shot for Shot!

A SOUTHERN bullet came whistling, and the Rio Kid's stevedown spun on his head. The range was difficult, the riflemen perched high in the rocks, up the steep side of the gulf in the Hatchet Hills. The first bullet had missed by a yard, but the second left a clean round hole in the brim of the Kid's hat. And had the marksman been given time for a third shot, the life of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande would have come to a sudden end. But the Kid was off his mustang and hunting cover before the third shot came.

A bulging rock, at the foot of the steep scree, covered him from the fire from above, and the third shot, following fast, went wide.

A hundred cows were trampling down the rocky gulch in the Hatchets, driven by three punchers of the Lazy S Ranch. Mr. Carlson, foreman of the Lazy S—otherwise the Rio Kid—was riding behind the herd, quailing in stragglers, when the sudden attack came. The punchers, with the herd, were well ahead—the gunners above had let them pass, without a sign—the Rio Kid was his game! And he had come very near to getting his man. But the Kid's swiftness had saved him—and he crouched

"Hands up!" The man from the back bank and look at the scarred face under the stevedown, then shoot up his hands!

in cover, his mustang, riderless, clattering on down the gulch after the herd.

The punchers stared back, startled by the sudden blaze of rifle-fire. The Kid shouted to them:

"Beat it, you 'uns! You want to stop lead? Beat it, pronto!"

The foreman's word was law to the Lazy S bunch. Panhandle Pete, Tuba Dan, and Bill Saunders rode on with the herd, disappearing down a winding turn of the gulch. The Rio Kid was left to deal with his unseen enemy.

Fifty yards up the steep side of the gulch, the man with the rifle was watching for another chance. What got the Kid's goat was the fact that he could not get at the man. The steep side of the gulch rose almost like a wall. Climbing it at any time would have been a difficult proposition, and with a marksman watching above, even the Kid did not think of

it. Only the rock that bulged over him saved him from whizzing lead. To show himself was to ask for sudden death.

"I guess," murmured the Kid, "that that'll be Scar Face, the dog-goned rustler! That hombre sure has got a grouse agin me."

The tramping of hoofs died away in the direction of the plains. Silence followed, broken only by the cough of the wind in the pines. From the man above came no sound; but the Kid reckoned that a scarred face was peering down—that a rifle was waiting to throw lead at a sign of him.

It was the new foreman of the Lazy S who had hunted the rustlers of the Hatchets to their hide-out in the hills, and the gang had been wiped out—shot up or captured. Of all the lawless bunch, only the leader had escaped—the rustler whose strangely scarred face was known all through the valley of the Lariat river of Texas.

The Kid was not surprised that the scarred man was watching for him when he came with the punchers to drive away the stolen cows from the hide-out in the Hatchets. Neither was he sorry for the encounter. He reckoned that he was going to get Scar Face, and clean up the rustling gang to the last man.

***** By *****

RALPH REDWAY

Ten long minutes passed. Then the Kid pushed his hat, on the end of his quirt, a few inches beyond the ascending bulge of the rock. It was hardly revealed before a bullet smashed through the crown. Even as the steetion fell from the quirt, the Kid looked out of cover. He glimpsed a scarred face looking down from a ledge fifty yards up, a face as terribly scarred that it was ugly to the view. The Kid was back in cover before the rustler knew that he had shot a hat with no head in it. The Kid replaced his steetion on his head, his face grim. Getting at him up the steep wall of the gulch was impossible, but he figured that there were other ways. There was no trick of Indian warfare unknown to the boy outlaw, who had been hunted for his life by sheriffs and Texas Rangers.

On his hands and knees, the Kid wormed his way along the gulch, keeping in cover of the rocks all the time—slow, silent, infinitely cautious. Not till he was a hundred yards up the gulch did the Kid come to a halt.

Then, in cover of a clump of stunted pines, he drew himself to his feet, and looked up and back. On the high ledge, a steetion showed. Scar Face was still there, watching for the guy he never guessed had moved.

Coolly, quietly, the Kid clambered up the steep side of the gulch, until he reached a jutting spur of rock overlooking the ledge where the rustler crouched, and within easy range of a Colt. Lamenting one of his gains, the Kid brained it, on the scarred man and head.

It was only a sudden movement of the rustler that saved him. Impetuously he leaped over the ledge to scan the gulch. The Kid's bullet splattered on the rock an inch from him as he did so, the roar of the steetion awakening a thousand echoes in the silent hills.

Scar Face gave a sudden bound as fragments of rock, splintered by the bullet, struck him. He jumped up, stared wildly round, then leaped into a fissure of the rock behind the ledge. As he leaped, the Kid fired again, and a yell answered the shot as the rustler disappeared into the fissure.

"Winged!" exclaimed the Kid.

His second shot had grazed the leg of the rustler. There was a chance, at least, that Scar Face was stopped—and the Kid clambered along the rocky wall of the gulch, to reach the fissure into which the rustler had disappeared. But Scar Face was gone, the rugged uplands of the Hatchets swallowing him from sight and pursuit. But on the rocks, at the Kid's feet, were spots of blood from the rock that his bullet had made. The rustler had been hit, even if it was only a scratch.

Scar Face had escaped, but the Rio Kid told himself that he would get him yet.

Baiting the Trap!

"HARRIS!" said Morris Hall slowly.

"That guy, Handsome Harris?" assented the Kid.

The boss of the Lazy S sat in his

rockers on the piazza of the ranch-house smoking his after-breakfast cigar. Mr. Carfax, his new foreman, stood leaning on the rail. The rancher's bronzed face was very thoughtful in expression. His eyes, peering the Kid, followed a puncher who was leading a horse to the corral—a man with a dark, handsome face and alert black eyes, who walked with a slight limp. Mr. Hall's eyes lingered on Handsome Harris till he disappeared into the corral, then came back to his foreman.

"You trust Harris?" he asked sharply.

"An't he one of the bunch?" was the Kid's indirect answer.

"That cuts me ice. The Lazy S bunch is as good a crowd as any in Texas, I reckon," said the rancher. "But there's a nipper in the waddle, all the same, Carfax. The way the rustlers get the news made me figure that there's a spy on the ranch—and you are wise to it as much as I am. Wasn't that how you fixed it up to trap the Scar Face gang on the Apache range? And Handsome Harris is the guy I trust least in the Lazy S bunch."

The Kid smiled. He knew what no other guy on the Lazy S knew—that Handsome Harris was in cahoots with the rustlers in the Hatchet Hills. It was the trail of Handsome that led him to the hide-out of the Scar Face gang. But of that the Kid had said nothing—not even to his boss.

"I guess you better pick another man to ride to the bank at Hatchet, Carfax," went on Hall. "I'm sending word to the bank that I want five thousand dollars to pay for the bond that's coming down from Lariat to-morrow. What do you figure would happen if Scar Face got wind of it?"

The Kid laughed.

"I guess Scar Face would be after that bunch of greenbacks, prairie," he assented.

"Well, then, if Handsome's his side-kicker here, he'll get word fast enough, and he'll lay for the bank's messenger to-morrow," granted Morris Hall. "I guess that guy would be held up on the trail unless I send a bunch of punchers to see him through."

"Sure," assented the Kid. "But maybe a guy about my size might be riding that same trail, all ready to horn in if Scar Face come coveting around."

The rancher started, and fixed his eyes again on the Kid's smiling face.

"Send Harris to me?" he said abruptly.

"Sure," smiled the Kid, and swung away towards the corral, where Handsome Harris was rubbing down a long-limbed black bronco. The handsome puncher glanced at the Kid furtively from the corner of his eye.

The Kid's face was bland, revealing nothing of his thoughts. He knew that the black bronco had been left at the rustler's hide-out when Harris rode there with news, though the Lazy S bunch did not doubt the puncher's tale that S had been stolen by the rustlers. But of what the Kid knew on that point Handsome suspected nothing.

"I guess the boss wants you,

Harris," said the Kid earnestly, and the puncher nodded and tramped out of the corral.

Harris tramped up the steps into the piazza and stood before his boss. His limp was very perceptible as he did so.

"I guess I want a man to ride into Hatchet, Harris," said Mr. Hall. "But what's the matter with your leg?"

"Kirk from a cayuse," answered the puncher bradly. "I guess it won't worry me any if I got to ride."

The rancher drew a sealed envelope from his pocket.

"You get to hand that in at the bank," he said, "and I guess I want you to ride right back, Harris, without hanging around any of the Hatchet points, or shooting off your mouth to any of the guys there. You got me? I sure don't want all the Lariat valley to be put wise that I'm sending a special message to the bank."

"I got you, boss?"

Handsome Harris put the letter into the pocket of his chaps and went off. In his eyes there was a strange gleam as he strode back to the corral, led out the black bronco, and saddled up.

"Here, you, Harris!" called out Mr. Carfax, from the bankhouse. "What you aim to be doing with that cayuse? You're for cutting alfalfa this morning."

The handsome puncher glanced at him with a sneering grin.

"Me for Hatchet?" he retorted. "Boss' orders! You settin' up to give orders ag'in the boss, Mr. Carfax, now you're foreman?"

"Aw, can it!" snapped the Kid. "If it's boss' orders, git on your cayuse and ride, you pecky pigeon!"

Handsome shrugged his shoulders, mounted the black bronco, and rode out at the gate. He swung away at a gallop for Hatchet—the cowtown five or six miles from the Lazy S across the rolling prairie.

The Kid grinned after him. Unless he missed his guess, Handsome was going to get that letter open, cover a steaming can, in some hidden spot on his way to Hatchet, and he was going to get wise to it that Mister Hall had sent to the bank for five thousand dollars to pay for the bond from Lariat—and whatever Handsome was wise to Scar Face was soon wise to. And if Scar Face stopped the bank's messenger on the trail on the morrow, the Kid figured that it was going to be the last hold-up that Scar Face would ever stage in the valley of the Lariat.

Two on the Trail!

THE Rio Kid turned out of his bank the following morning at the first gleam of the sun. He aimed to mount and ride before the ranch was astir. A bite of cold flapjacks and a draught of clear water were breakfast enough for him, and he left his cabin boosted and spurred and headed for the corral to lead out the grey mustang and saddle up.

But early as the Kid was, he was not the earliest man on the ranch, for in the dim glimmer of the dawn Handsome Harris was leading his

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black bronco, already added, down to the gate. The Kid stared at him in surprise.

"Say, you, Harris!" he called. "Hold in a piece!"

The handsome puncher stared round at him in surprise. His hand slid, as if instinctively, towards a six-gun in his belt. But it stopped short of the gun. Handsome had tried that game with the Kid before, and was wise to it that when it came to shooting he was not in the same street with Mr. Carfax! Slowly his hand came away from the Colt, and he stood staring silently and savagely at the foreman of the Lazy S. Then, as the Kid came striding towards him, he made a sudden leap into the saddle, stuck spurs to the black bronco, and dashed away on the trail at a gallop.

The Kid stared after him with glaring eyes.

"Say, you hold in that cayuse!" he roared.

Handsome did not heed—did not look round. Bending low in the saddle, as if half-expecting a shot to follow him, he dashed away across the prairie, leaving the Kid staring in an angry astonishment.

The Kid was looked for an early ride to Hatchet that morning. He had to hit the cow town before the messenger left the bank. Handsome was the last man in the ranch whom he would have wished to see him go. He figured that the spy on the ranch had no suspicion of his game that day; but in a game for life or death with Scar Face, the rustler, a guy could not be too careful. And the Kid was puzzled.

He had no doubt that the spy had put Scar Face wise the previous day, and he reckoned that Scar Face would hold up the bank's messenger on the prairie trail that morning. But that Handsome Harris would ride in his company, he did not figure for a moment. Why, then, was the traitor puncher stealing away? It had the Kid guessing.

But, whatever his game—and the foreman of the Lazy S had to own up that he could not get it—he was not going to carry on in defiance of his foreman, if the Kid could stop him—and the Kid reckoned that he could. The black bronco was a good cayuse—but there was no cayuse in Texas that could show its heels to Side-Kicker. The Kid ran into the corral and called to the grey Mustang. Swiftly, he saddled him, and with a light touch of the quirt dashed out of the gateway. Handsome Harris had a start, but he was still in full view on the plain.

"Beat it, oh boss!" murmured the Kid, as the grey Mustang stretched to full gallop. "Beat it! I guess we got to catch that hombre; I ain't wise to his game, but he sure ain't getting by it nohow!"

Handsome Harris looked back. His dark face was convulsed with rage at the sight of his foreman riding on his trail, and drawing closer behind-foremost. The Kid waved his hand at him, and laughed, as he transferred on in pursuit. But he ceased to laugh,

and his face grew hard and grim, as the cruel creaking of the puncher's quirt came back to his ears—beating and lashing the black bronco into greater efforts of speed. It got the Kid's goat to see a guy ill-use a horse—and was that that had first caused him to dislike the handsome puncher. The Kid could forgive a guy who pulled a gun on him, but he could not forgive a guy who drove his cayuse with savage cruelty. His hand closed on a gun butt.

Bang! The bullet fanned the cheek of the hard-riding puncher, grazing the skin. Bang! The six-gun roared again, and the bullet fanned the other cheek. Either bullet would have crashed through the puncher's head, had the Kid wanted—but they went close enough to warn Handsome that his foreman was not to be trifled with. Bang! roared the six-gun, a third time—and the bullet passed between Handsome's arms and his body—taking a patch of skin from the arm as it passed. With a fierce curse, the puncher pulled-in his bronco. He had to halt, and he knew it.

Sitting the paining, foaming bronco, he waited for the Kid to ride up.

"You're riding without orders!" snapped the Kid. "and I guess I'm going to put you wise that you can't play that game on your foreman. Get off'n that cayuse!"

Savagely, silently, Handsome slid from the saddle. The Kid's scornful eyes gleamed at him.

"You dismounted skunk!" he said savagely. "You ain't fit to ride a critter, and you're sure looking it now. Stand clear of that cayuse!"

The Kid swung the black bronco's head round, and, with a crack of his quirt, sent the bronco galloping back towards the ranch.

"Doggone you—you leaving me without a critter—and me with a limping leg!" growled Harris.

"You said it!" snapped the Kid. "Head it back to the Lazy S, you yellow jello-wolf—and beat it pronto, where I lay my quirt round your hide, like you did with that bronco."

The Kid's quirt circled in the air. Harris had felt the weight of that quirt already—and he did not stay to argue with his foreman.

The Kid watched him go, half-regretting that he had not laid on the quirt. The puncher's stobson disappeared in the high grass, and the Kid watched his Mustang in the direction of Hatchet. The chase had led him far from the Hatchet trail—and he dashed across the prairie at full speed, heading for the cow town, dismissing Handsome from his mind.

But, if the Kid had known, Handsome Harris did not head it back to the Lazy S. He headed it far enough to get out of the Kid's sight—and that was all. After the Kid had vanished, Handsome changed his direction, and he tramped to the Hatchet trail.

From Under the Rug!

THE man who drove the buggy out of Hatchet was dressed in store clothes, and obviously did not pack a gun. He did not look like

a guy to do anything in a hold-up, but put up his hands and kept them up. Still, there was nothing about that buggy to indicate that a bag containing five thousand dollars was packed under the seat, and no one could know that the man from the bank was taking a bag of dollars to the Lazy S—unless, indeed, an spying eye had read Master Hall's note, carried by Handsome Harris the previous day.

It was a bright morning—but a cold wind blew down from the uplands of the Staked Plains—which was perhaps the reason why an immense buffalo-robe rug spanned over the knees of the driver. But when the vehicle was clear of the cow town, and bumping and jolting along the rugged prairie trail, the man who drove hunched down, with a faint grin on his face, and spoke—apparently addressing that sprawling buffalo-robe!

"Say, Mr. Carfax, you sure are packed like a bag in a rug!"

"I should smile!" came back a voice, muffled by the buffalo-robe. "But I guess I ain't here for long—and you don't want to chew the rag, feller. You want to keep dumb as a clam."

"You said it!" agreed the driver.

And he cracked his whip, and drove on in silence. Behind him, the cow town, nestling in a loop of the Lariat river, dropped out of sight, hidden by the rugged folds and ridges of the prairie. The trail lay across the open plain, passing here and there through belts and fringes of small timber—every one of which was a favorable spot for a hold-up, if any gun-man, aware of the dollars, was planning a hold-up that morning!

Two miles out of Hatchet, the trail ran through a straggling patch of post-oaks and prawns. And as the buggy jolted on, screened by the trees from the open prairie, a figure suddenly appeared ahead, a levelled six-gun looked the driver in the face, and a sharp voice roared:

"Halt! Hands up!"

The man from the Hatchet bank gave one look at the scarred face under the stobson hat, and dragged in his horse with almost indolent haste.

"Scar Face!" he breathed.

Even a gun-man would have jumped to obey that order, given under a levelled Colt, with the scarred face of the rustler glaring over it. The bank messenger was no gun-man. He held in his horse, brought the buggy to a halt, and immediately elevated his hands.

"Keep 'em up!" snapped Scar Face. The rustler strode nearer. He had a cayuse, it was hidden from sight in the timber. The man from Hatchet noted that he moved with a limp—all the Lariat valley knew that the foreman of Lazy S had got Scar Face in the leg. But that slight limp did not impair his activity. With the Colt still lifted in his right hand, he took the reins in his left, and latched them to a branch beside the trail. Then the gleaming black eyes, under the bulgy brows, fixed on the man who sat in the vehicle with his hands up.

"Hand over them dollars."

Rustler's Secret

Every guy then present on the Lacy S joined the crowd that stared at the buggy rattling down the trail.

"Scar Face!" roared Colorado.

"Cinched!" breathed Morris Hall.

With a clatter the buggy came to a halt in the gateway. A shouting crowd surrounded it. A dozen hands grasped the captured rustler and dragged him out. The man from the bank alighted, the bag of dollars in his hand. But nobody looked him or the dollars. All eyes were fixed on the scarred face of the desperado who had raided the cattle ranges for a year on end, and defied capture—till now! Hands grasped him on all sides. Colorado rushed away, and came back with a larist.

"You cinched him, Carfax!" said Mr. Hall. "I reckon there ain't no doubt now that Handsome was his egg on the ranch."

"I guess not, sir!" said the Kid. "He sure passed on the news to this guy, and Scar Face walked into it. That guy Handsome will hit the trail along with him for the calaboose at Hatcher."

"Handsome!" repeated a dozen voices.

"I guess I can put you 'uns wise now that it was Handsome I trailed to the hide-out in the Hatcher," drawled the Kid. "He sure was one of that bunch. Where is the gold-damned peck?"

"Handsome ain't on the ranch!" said Colorado. "I guess he lit out sly—his cayuse came in, but Handsome wasn't on that cayuse. Nobody here has seen Handsome this morning, Mr. Carfax."

"I guess we'll rope him in later!" said the Kid. "We got the kiggins, and I'll say that Seth Hawk will be powerful glad to see him at Hatcher."

"Seth Hawk nothing!" roared Colorado. "Ain't that galoot shot up two foremen of this ranch, and a

dozen other guys, too? I got a rope here—and I guess that a rope and a cottonwood is good enough for Scar Face."

And the horse-wrangler threw the loop of the lasso round the rustler's neck. There was a roar of approval from the Lacy S bunch. Morris Hall did not speak. But the Kid strode forward and grasped the rope.

"Let up!" he said. "No guy ain't going to be lynched on this here ranch, a'long as I'm foreman. I guess the law—"

"Doggone the law!" roared Colorado. "That coyote has shot up Lacy S guys, and he's going up on a rope. I'm telling you!"

"Lynch him!" roared the whole bunch.

The Kid's face set grimly. He shoved the horse-wrangler back, and dragged the lightning nose from the rustler's neck.

The next moment he gave a yell of astonishment, rebeld by all the bunch. With the dragging noise came the grisly, scarred skin, peeling off like a mask. For a second the Lacy S crowd gasped, stupefied—then they understood! The scarred face of the rustler, well known on every cattle range in the Indian valley, was a cunning mask that covered the man's face from his nostrils to his chin.

"A mask!" breathed Morris Hall. "And no guy was ever wise to it till now! Drag it off—let us see what Scar Face looks like without his mask!"

"Thunder!" gasped Colorado. "I'll say that that guy has had as no feelin'. He might have walked on this here ranch, and we'd never have knowed—with that face off'n him! But what—"

The mask peeled off the hidden face, and there was a gasp of stupefaction from the Lacy S crowd. For they knew that face correlated with rage

and fury. It was the dark, handsome face of a guy they all knew—with whom they had ridden the ranges and bunked in the bunkhouse.

"Handsome!" stuttered Colorado.

"Handsome Harris!" gasped the Kid.

"Harris!" breathed Morris Hall. He stared almost unbelievably at the rustler's face, revealed to all eyes by the peeling off of the closely fitting mask. "Harris—Scar Face, the rustler, one of my bunch—I guess this has got me beat!"

Handsome Harris glared round at the crowd of staring faces.

"Doggone you!" he grunted between his teeth. "I guess I got it coming to me, but I'd sure go up smiling if I could get that galoot Carfax first. I guess—"

"Lynch him!" roared the Lacy S bunch.

"By heck!" breathed the Kid. "It sure is Handsome. I guess I'm wise to it now, Handsome, how come I bet you that day at the hide-out in the Hatcher—and how I lost Scar Face on the prairie when I found you? I'll say you played a deep game—you sure have. But you're cinched, and it's you for the calaboose! Stand back, you guys—there ain't going to be no lynching on the Lacy S."

The Kid had his way. Handsome Harris, alias Scar Face the rustler, bound to a horse, rode the trail to Hatcher under guard. That trail was the last that Scar Face ever rode! From the calaboose of Hatcher, the desperado who had so long played a double game went to the Fate that awaited him!

And Fate has a kick in store for the Kid, to meet week's story. Guess Handsome came on his trail. It's a long-up whether he shall hold, or stay and leave things out!

Biggles Goes to War!

(Continued from page 21)

as he switched off, for such a landing as the one he had just made is always a strain on the nerves.

Ginger was already testing the motor-cycle by the time the others joined him in the cabin, and a few minutes saw the little earless vehicle standing under the wing of the machine that had brought it.

"All right, Algy, we'll get off," announced Biggles. "You know what to do. Stand by as long as things are quiet, but if there is trouble, beat it for home. If you have to go, watch the whole area when you come back in case for any unseen reason we cannot reach this particular field. Three flashes on the torch will locate us. It will also mean that you can get down where you see the flashes.

"If we are not back here by dawn, go home, and you'll have to use your discretion as to what to do after that. If you come back again after daylight, watch for a white handkerchief being waved. Is that all clear?"

"Perfectly," said Algy.

"Cheerio, then."

"Best of luck."

Biggles pushed the motor-bike off its stand and began to wheel it towards the road along the northern edge of the field. Ginger pushed from behind. It was by no means an easy task, particularly as they were some time finding a gap through the hedge, which was tangled and overgrown, but in the end they managed it and stood on the road, which they now saw was in a shocking state of disrepair.

"It doesn't look as though this part of the country is used very much, does it?" murmured Ginger, as he switched on the headlights.

"No, it's a pretty wild spot," agreed Biggles, as he started the engine.

"Get aboard."

Ginger blew on his hands as he straddled the luggage bracket.

"Strikes me we are going to find it a bit chilly by the time we get to Sharroes," he said. "O.K., chad, let her go."

As the motor-bike with its two riders moved down the road with slowly increasing speed, Biggles knew that they had started on one of the most difficult and dangerous tasks

they had ever undertaken; but he kept his thoughts to himself.

It seemed to Ginger that they were hours getting to Sharroes. Actually, they covered the forty miles to the Lovitmanian capital in about an hour and a half. The machine was capable of greater speed, but the roads were in a bad state, and Biggles pursued a policy of slow but sure. They met two or three cars, and an occasional wayfarer, none of whom caused them any anxiety or alarm. One or two pedestrians called out what was evidently the Lovitmanian equivalent of "Good-night," to which Biggles, not being able to speak the language, could only grant a reply.

But with their arrival in Sharroes he knew that their difficulties might begin at any moment, and here again their greatest handicap was ignorance of the language. For this reason he dared not park the motor-cycle in a garage, although they saw more than one, both in the outskirts of the city and in the main streets through which they presently passed. Finally, he left it in what looked like a public parking place in the big square in the centre of the town, where several cars