

Rubáiyát of a Motor Car

By
Carolyn Wells

Author of
Idle Idyls, Folly For The Wise,
A Nonsense Anthology, &c.



With illustrations by
Frederick Strothmann

New York
Dodd, Mead Company
1906

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¶To the crank that
makes the machine go

Rubáiyát of a Motor Car

Wake! For the “Honk,” that scatters into flight
The Hens before it in a Flapping Fright,
Drives straight up to your Door, and bids you Come
Out for a Morning Hour of Sheer Delight!

Come, fill the Tank, adjust the Valve and Spring,
Your Automobile Garments 'round you Fling;
The Bird Of Time wants but to get away;
(I think that name's a rather Clever Thing!)

And as the Corkscrew drawing out the Cork,
I crank my Car and try to make it work.
You know how little while we have to Ride;
And once departed, may go to New York.

Whether at Naishápúr or Babylon,
Whether the Car shall jerk or sweetly run,
The Wine of Life is in a Motor Trip,
(Though all the Parts keep breaking One by One!)



Why, if the Soul can know this Glorious Game,
All other Stunts seem dry and dull and tame;
 This is the ultimate, triumphant Joy,
Automobile Elation is its Name!

Would you your last remaining Thousands spend
About the Secret? Quick about it, Friend!

 A Hair perhaps divides This Make from That—
And on that Hair, prithee, may Life depend!

Now the New Year reviving old Desires,
The thoughtful Soul to Catalogues retires;

 He scorns his Last Year's Runabout, and to
The Newest, Biggest Touring Car aspires!

Each Year a Hundred Models brings, you say;
Yes, but who buys the Car of Yesterday?

 And every Mail brings in New Catalogues
That make a Last Year's Model fade away!



Waste not your Hour nor in the Vain pursuit
Of Demonstrators who will loud Dispute;
 “This one is Best, because it’s painted Red!”
“That One, because it has a Louder Toot!”

’Tis only a Beginner, young and green,
Who Thinks he wants an Odorless Machine;
 What Fragrance is to Rose or Violet,
So to the Motor-Car is Gasolene.

Some advocate Gear-Driven Cars, and Some
Sigh for a Jockey-pulley yet to come;
 Oh, crank your Car, and let the old thing Go!
Nor heed the Brake upon your Sprocket Drum.

’Tis but a Toy on which one spends a Pile,
And Brags about it for a Little While;
 Ambition rises—and the Foolish Man
Sighs, and prepares to buy Another Style.



They say The Lion and The Lizard keep
The Record for Hill-climbing, rough and steep;
I do not know those Makes. I'll hunt them up.
I'd like to Buy one, if they're not too Cheap.

You know, my Friends, with what a Brave Carouse
I put a Second Mortgage on my House
So I could buy a Great Big Touring-Car,
And run down Chickens, Dogs, and even Cows!

For it my Future Income did I owe,
And with mine own Hand wrought to make it go;
And this was all the Wisdom that I reap'd—
“We cost like Thunder and like Lightning go!”

And those “Accessories” Advertisements
That offer you Supplies at slight Expense;
You read them over, and they always make
Your own Belongings look like Thirty Cents.

Look to the Blowing Horn before us—“Lo,”
“Gaily,” it says, “Into the World I blow!”
Behold its lovely Bulb, and Sweet-toned Reed,—
(The most Expensive in the Garden Show!)

I had to have a Snakeskin Auto-Coat,
A Leather Foot-Muff, lined with Thibet Goat;
A Steering-Apron, and a Sleeping-Bag;
For these things Help a Motorer to Mote.



And then my Luncheon-Kit, and Hamper, swell,
Robbed me of Many a Hard-Earned Dollar! Well,

I often wonder what the Dealers buy
One-half so Easy as the Folks they Sell.

Myself when Young, did eagerly frequent
Garage and Club, and heard Great Argument

About it and about,—yet evermore
Came out more Addled than when in I went.

Indeed, with my big Car I've run so long
It seems to me there's Always something Wrong;

Faulty Ignition, or a Blown Out Shoe,
Or maybe the Compression is too Strong.

Then to the Laughing Face that lurks behind
The Veil, I lifted up mine Eyes to find

Two pouting Lips, demurely murmuring,
“I don't see why you Ever bought This Kind!”



Indeed, I've learned to treat it as a Joke
When Nuts work loose, or Carburetors choke;
And then, and then—the Spring, and then the Belt,
A Punctured Tire, or Change-Speed Lever broke!

A Look of Anguish underneath the Car,
Another Start,—a Squeak,—a Grunt,—a Jar!
The Aspiration Pipe is working loose!
The Vapor can't get out! And there you are!

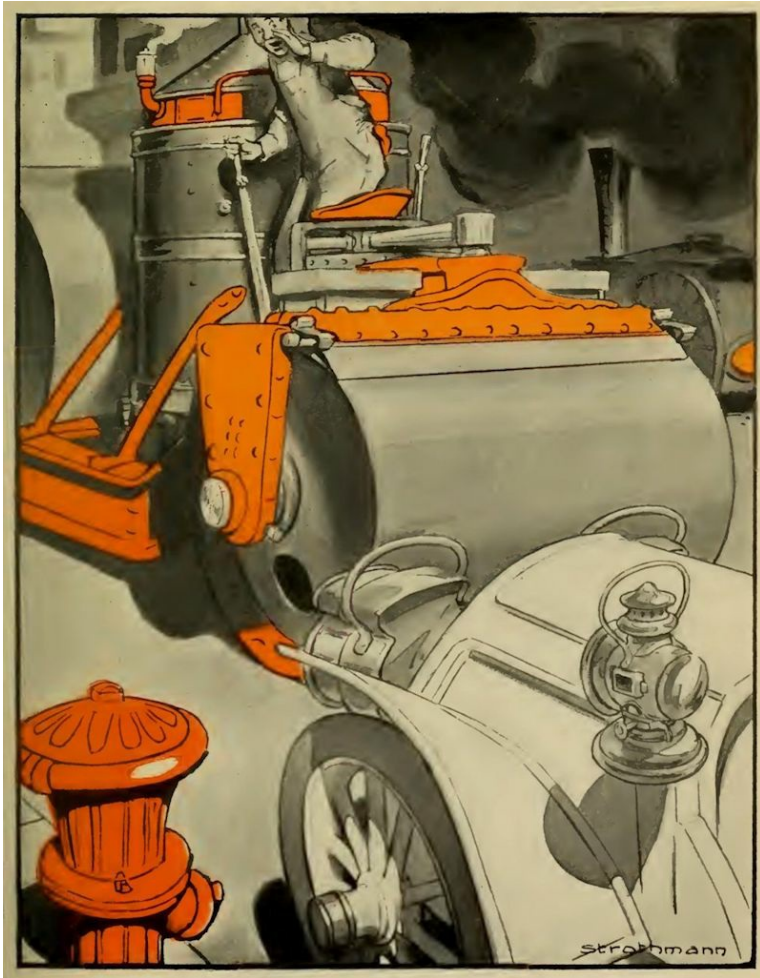
For I remember Stopping by the Way
To tinker up the old Machine one day,
And with a Reckless and Unbridled Tongue,
I muttered,—Well, I Wouldn't like to say!

Why, even Saints and Sages would have cuss'd
If, speeding through the World, their Tires had Bust!
Like Foolish People now, whose words of Scorn
Are utter'd while their Mouths are Stopt with Dust.



When suddenly, an Angel Shape was seen
Approaching in an Up-to-date Machine,
 Bearing a Vessel which he offered me,
And bid me smell of it. 'Twas Gasolene!

The Stuff that can with Logic Absolute
The Two-and-Seventy Jarring Parts confute;
 The Sovereign Alchemist that in a trice
A Drop of Oil will into Power transmute.



Whose Secret presence through the Motor's Veins
Running Quicksilver-like defies our pains;
Cutting up tricks from here to Jericho,—
We try to start the Car,—but it Remains!

Strange, is it not, that of the Myriads who
Have Empty Tanks and know not what to do,
Not one will Tell of it when he Returns!
As for Ourselves,—why, we Deny it too.

What! Out of Oily Nothing to invoke
A Powerful Something, born of Fire and Smoke!
An Unremitting Pleasure, if it goes;
An Everlasting Worriment, if broke.

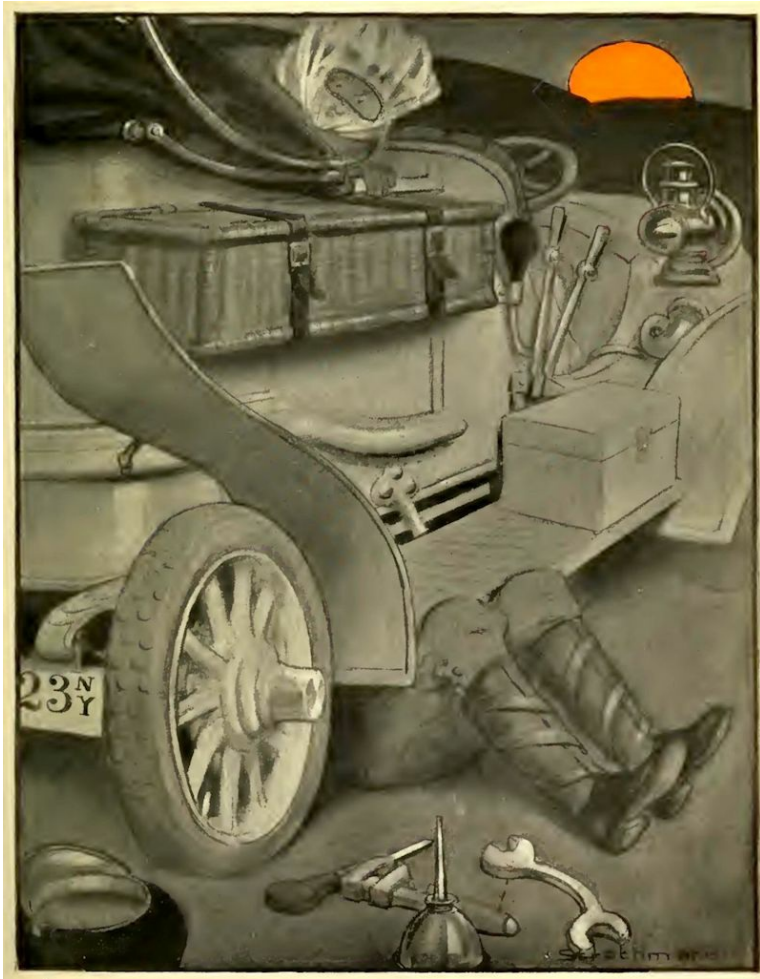
We are no other than a Moving Row
Of Automobile Cranks that come and go.
And what with Goggles and Tale-windowed Veils,
In Motoring Get-up, we're a Holy Show!



But helpless Pieces of the Game bestowed
Upon the Checker-board of Hill and Road;
Hither and Thither moved and sped and stopped,
And One by One back to the Garage towed.

The Car no Question makes of Ayes or Noes,
But Here or There as strikes its Fancy goes.

But the Bystander, offering Advice,
He knows about it all—He knows—He KNOWS!



And if in Vain down on the Stubborn Floor
Of Earth you lie. And weary, cramped and sore,

 You gaze to-day; you may be jolly sure
To-morrow 'twill be worse than 'twas before!

Yesterday's Troubles made you Mad for fair.
To-morrow's Trials too, will make you Swear.

 Crank! For you know not What's the hitch nor Why!
Crank! For you know not When you go, nor Where!

Each Morn a Thousand Troubles cause Delay.
Yes: but you left Some unfixed Yesterday;

 And this first Impulse that should bring the Spark—
Confound this old Igniter, Anyway!

You Thaw your Freezeless Circulation first;
Then mend your Puncture Proof Tire where it Burst.

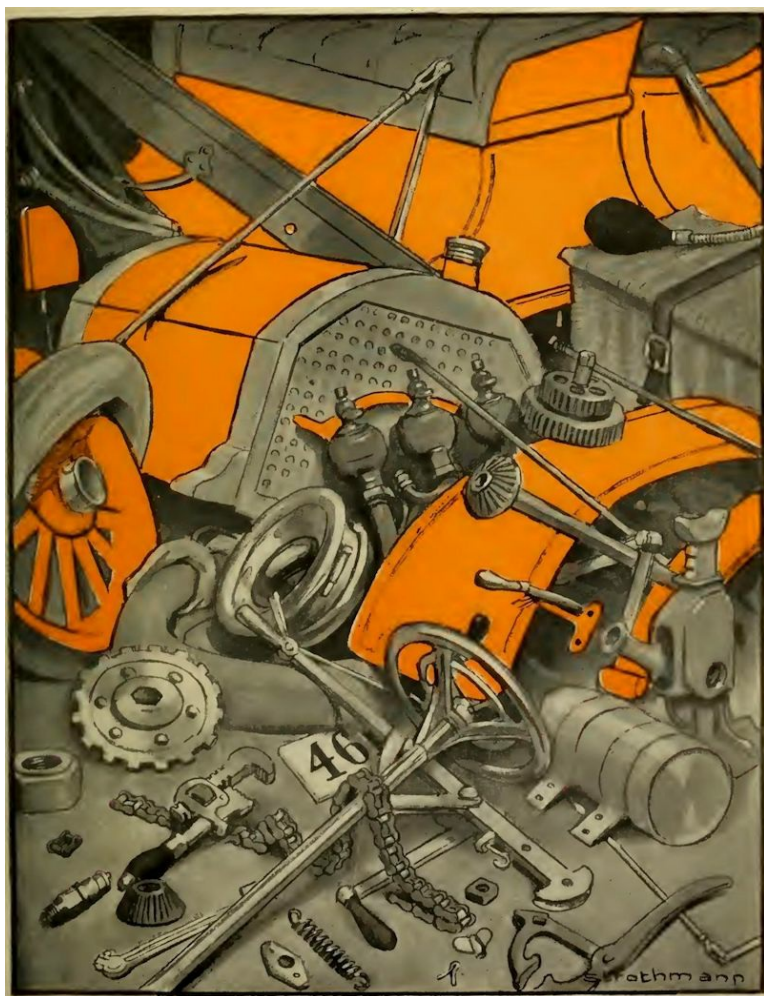
 Helpless you Skid upon your Anti-Skids,
But Starting a Self-Starter is the Worst!

Perhaps you get out your Repairing-Kit,
And try to Regulate the Thing a bit;

 You test the Coil, adjust the Shifting-Gear,—
And then it Goes? Not so you'd Notice it!

And that Inverted Man, who seems to lie
Upon the Ground, and Squints with Practis'd Eye.

 Lift not your Hands to him for Help. For he
As impotently works as you or I.



Ah, Love, could You and I with him conspire
To Fix this Sorry Scheme of Things entire,

Would we not take it all apart, and then
Remodel with no danger of Back-Fire?

Ah, make the most of Time we yet may spend
Before we too, into the Dust descend;

Dust unto Dust. Under the Car to lie,
Sans Coat, sans Breath, sans Temper, and—sans Friend!

And that Reviving Herb, whose Tender Green
Upon the Julep Cup is sometimes seen,

Ah, interview it lightly, for you know
You'll need your Wits to manage your Machine.

Ah, my Beloved, fill the Lamps that shed
A steady Searchlight on our Path ahead;

To-morrow!—Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Seven Thousand Dead.



Why, if your Car can fling the Dust aside,
And flying, through the Air of Heaven ride,
Were't not a Shame, were't not a Shame, I say,
Within Speed Limit, tamely to abide?

What! Without asking, stop our Speed immense?
And, without asking, Jailward hurried hence!
Oh, many a Cop of this Forbidding Mien,
Must rue the Memory of his Insolence!



And fear not lest a Smashup closing My
Account and Yours, Machines no more shall fly;
The Eternal Motorist has ever bought
Millions of Bubbles like ours, and will buy.

I sometimes think that every Shining Star
Is but the Tail Lamp of a Motor Car;
Which leap'd from Earth in its mad Ecstasy,
And into Space went Speeding Fast and Far.



And this I know. Though in a Magazine
Perfectly-running Motor Cars I've seen,
It's quite a Different Proposition when
They're on the Road, and filled With Gasolene!

The Moving Motor speeds, and having Sped,
Moves on. Nor all the Cries and Shrieks of Dread
Shall lure it back to settle Damage Claims;
Not even if the Victims are Half Dead!

And when at Last you've mastered Belts and Bolts,
When with no fear of Side-Slips, Jars or Jolts,
Your Sixty H. P. Racer licks up Miles
At Lightning Speed,—turn on a few more Volts!

Then in your Glorious Success exult!
When your Car plunges like a Catapult,
Sit tight! Hold hard! Pass Everything in Sight!
And you will be Surprised at the Result!



Transcriber's Notes:

Spelling, punctuation and hyphenation have been retained as in the original publication.
[The end of *Rubáiyát of a Motor Car* by Carolyn Wells]