

Tom Swift and his Great Searchlight

Victor Appleton

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Tom Swift and His Great Searchlight
or
On the Border for Uncle Sam

CHAPTER I. A SCRAP OF PAPER

"Tom, did you know Andy Foger was back in town?"

"Great Scott, no, I didn't Ned! Not to stay, I hope."

"I guess not. The old Foger homestead is closed up, though I did see a man working around it to-day as I came past. But he was a carpenter, making some repairs I think. No, I don't believe Andy is here to stay."

"But if some one is fixing up the house, it looks as if the family would come back," remarked Tom, as he thought of the lad who had so long been his enemy, and who had done him many mean turns before leaving Shopton, where our hero lived.

"I don't think so," was the opinion of Ned Newton, who was Tom Swift's particular chum. "You know when Mr. Foger lost all his money, the house was supposed to be sold. But I heard later that there was some flaw in the title, and the sale fell through. It is because he couldn't sell the place that Mr. Foger couldn't get money to pay some of his debts. He has some claim on the house, I believe, but I don't believe he'd come back to live in it."

"Why not?"

"Because it's too expensive a place for a poor man to keep up, and Mr. Foger is now poor."

"Yes, he didn't get any of the gold, as we did when we went to the underground city," remarked Tom. "Well, I don't wish anybody bad luck but I certainly hope the Fogers keep poor enough to stay away from Shopton. They bothered me enough. But where did you see Andy?"

"Oh, he was with his crony, Sam Snedecker. You know Sam said, some time ago, that Andy was to pay him a visit, but Andy didn't come then, for some reason or other. I suppose this call makes up for it. I met them down near Parker's drug store."

"You didn't hear Andy say anything about coming back here?" and the young inventor's voice was a trifle anxious.

"No," replied Ned. "What makes you so nervous about it?"

"Well, Ned, you know what Andy is—always trying to make trouble for me, even sneaking in my shop sometimes, trying to get the secret of some of my airships and machinery. And I admit I think it looks suspicious when they have a carpenter working on the old homestead. Andy may come back, and—"

"Nonsense, Tom! If he does you and I can handle him. But I think perhaps the house may be rented, and they may be fixing it up for a tenant. It's been vacant a long time you know, and I heard the other day that it was haunted."

"Haunted, Ned! Get out! Say, you don't believe in that sort of bosh, do you?"

"Of course not. It was Eradicate who told me, and he said when he came past the place quite late the other night he heard groans, and the clanking of chains coming from it, and he saw flashing lights."

"Oh, wow! Eradicate is getting batty in his old age, poor fellow! He and his mule Boomerang are growing old together, and I guess my colored helper is 'seeing things,' as well as hearing them. But, as you say, it may be that the house is going to be rented. It's too valuable a property to let stand idle. Did you hear how long Andy was going to stay?"

"A week, I believe."

"A week! Say, one day would be enough I should think."

"You must have some special reason for being afraid Andy will do you some harm," exclaimed Ned. "Out with it, Tom."

"Well, I'll tell you what it is, Ned," and Tom led his chum inside the shop, in front of which the two lads had been talking. It was a shop where the young inventor constructed many of his marvelous machines, aircraft, and instruments of various sorts.

"Do you think some one may hear you?" asked Ned.

"They might. I'm not taking any chances. But the reason I want to be especially careful that Andy Foger doesn't spy on any of my inventions is that at last I have perfected my noiseless airship motor!"

"You have!" cried Ned, for he knew that his chum had been working for a long time on this motor, that would give out no sound, no matter at how high a speed it was run. "That's great, Tom! I congratulate you. I don't

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wonder you don't want Andy to get even a peep at it."

"Especially as I haven't it fully patented," went on the young inventor. He had met with many failures in his efforts to perfect this motor, which he intended to install on one of his airships. "If any one saw the finished parts now it wouldn't take them long to find out the secret of doing away with the noise."

"How do you do it?" asked Ned, for he realized that his chum had no secrets from him.

"Well, it's too complicated to describe," said Tom, "but the secret lies in a new way of feeding gasoline into the motor, a new sparking device, and an improved muffler. I think I could start my new airship in front of the most skittish horse, and he wouldn't stir, for the racket wouldn't wake a baby. It's going to be great."

"What are you going to do with it, when you get it all completed?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet. It's going to be some time before I get it all put together, and installed, and in that time something may turn up. Well, let's talk about something more pleasant than Andy Foger. I guess I won't worry about him."

"No, I wouldn't. I'd like to see the motor run."

"You can, in a day or so, but just now I need a certain part to attach to the sparker, and I had to send to town for it. Koku has gone after it."

"What, that big giant servant? He might break it on the way back, he's so strong. He doesn't realize how much muscle he has."

"No, that's so. Well, while we're waiting for him, come on in the house, and I'll show you some new books I got."

The two lads were soon in the Swift homestead, a pleasant and large old-fashioned residence, in the suburbs of Shopton. Tom brought out the books, and he and his chum poured over them.

"Mr. Damon gave me that one on electricity," explained the young inventor, handing Ned a bulky volume.

"Bless my bookmark!" as Mr. Damon himself would say if he were here," exclaimed Ned with a laugh.

"That's a dandy. But Mr. Damon didn't give you THIS one," and Ned picked up a dainty volume of verse. "'To Tom Swift, with the best wishes of Mary—'" but that was as far as he read, for Tom grabbed the book away, and closed the cover over the flyleaf, which bore some writing in a girl's hand. I think my old readers can guess whose hand it was.

"Wow! Tom Swift reading poetry!" laughed Ned.

"Oh, cut it out," begged his chum. "I didn't know that was among the books. I got it last Christmas. Now here's a dandy one on lion hunting, Ned," and to cover his confusion Tom shoved over a book containing many pictures of wild animals.

"Lion hunting; eh," remarked Ned. "Well, I guess you could give them some points on snapping lions with your moving picture camera, Tom."

"Yes, I got some good views," admitted the young inventor modestly. "I may take the camera along on some trips in my noiseless airship. Hello! here comes Koku back. I hope he got what I wanted."

A man, immense in size, a veritable giant, one of two whom Tom Swift had brought away from captivity with him, was entering the front gate. He stopped to speak to Mr. Swift, Tom's father, who was setting out some plants in a flower bed, taking them from a large wheel barrow filled with the blooms.

Mr. Swift, who was an inventor of note, had failed in his health of late, and the doctor had recommended him to be out of doors as much as possible. He delighted in gardening, and was at it all day.

"Look!" suddenly cried Ned, pointing to the giant. Then Tom and his chum saw a strange sight.

With a booming laugh, Koku picked up Mr. Swift gently and set him on a board that extended across the front part of the wheel barrow. Then, as easily as if it was a pound weight, the big man lifted Mr. Swift, barrow, plants and all, in his two hands, and carried them across the garden to another flower bed, that was ready to be filled.

"No use to walk when I can carry you, Mr. Swift," exclaimed Koku with a laugh. "I overtook you quite nice; so?"

"Yes, you took me over in great shape, Koku!" replied the aged inventor with a smile at Koku's English, for the giant frequently got his words backwards. "That barrow is quite heavy for me to wheel."

"You after this call me," suggested Koku.

"Say, but he's strong all right," exclaimed Ned, "and that was an awkward thing to carry."

"It sure was," agreed Tom. "I haven't yet seen any one strong enough to match Koku. And he's gentle about it,

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too. He's very fond of dad."

"And you too, I guess," added Ned.

"Well, Koku, did you get that attachment?" asked Tom, as his giant servant entered the room.

"Yes, Mr. Tom. I have it here," and from his pocket Koku drew a heavy piece of steel that would have taxed the strength of either of the boys to lift with one hand. But Koku's pockets were very large and made specially strong of leather, for he was continually putting odd things in them.

Koku handed over the attachment, for which his master had sent him. He held it out on a couple of fingers, as one might a penknife, but Tom took both hands to set it on the ground.

"I the female get, also," went on Koku, as he began taking some letters and papers from his pocket. "I stop in the office post, and the female get."

"Mail, Koku, not female," corrected Tom with a laugh. "A female is a lady you know."

"For sure I know, and the lady in the post office gave me the female. That is I said what, did I not?"

"Well, I guess you meant it all right," remarked Ned. "But letter mail and a male man and a female woman are all different."

"Oh such a language!" gasped the giant. "I shall never learn it. Well, then, Mr. Tom, here is your mail, that the female lady gave to me for you, and you are a male. It is very strange."

Koku pulled out a bundle of letters, which Tom took, and then the giant continued to delve for more. One of the papers, rolled in a wrapper, stuck on the edge of the pocket.

"You must outcome!" exclaimed Koku, giving it a sudden yank, and it "outcame" with such suddenness that the paper was torn in half, tightly wrapped as it was, and it was considerable of a bundle.

"Koku, you're getting too strong!" exclaimed Tom, as scraps of paper were scattered about the room. "I think I'll give you less to eat."

"I am your forgiveness," said Koku humbly, as he stooped over to pick up the fragments. "I did not mean."

"It's all right," said Tom kindly. "That's only a big bundle of Sunday papers I guess."

"I'll give him a hand," volunteered Ned, stooping over to help Koku clear the rug of the litter. As he did so Tom's chum gave a gasp of surprise.

"Hello, Tom!" Ned cried. "Here's something new, and I guess it will interest you."

"What is it?"

"It's part of an account of some daring smugglers who are working goods across the Canadian border into the northern part of this state. The piece is torn, but there's something here which says the government agents suspect the men of using airships to transport the stuff."

"Airships! Smugglers using airships!" cried Tom. "It doesn't seem possible!"

"That's what it says here, Tom. It says the custom house authorities have tried every way to catch them, and when they couldn't land 'em, the only theory they could account for the way the smuggling was going on was by airships, flying at night."

"That's odd. I wonder how it would seem to chase a smuggler in an airship at night? Some excitement about that; eh, Ned? Let's see that scrap of paper."

Ned passed it over, and Tom scanned it closely. Then in his turn, he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" inquired his chum.

"Great Scott, Ned, listen to this! 'It is suspected that some of the smugglers have'—then there's a place where the paper is torn—in Shopton, N.Y.'" finished Tom. "Think of that, Ned. Our town here, is in some way connected with the airship smugglers! We must find the rest of this scrap of paper, and paste it together. This may be a big thing! Find that other scrap! Koku, you go easy on papers next time," cautioned Tom, good naturedly, as he and his chum began sorting over the torn parts of the paper.

CHAPTER II. A SPY IN TOWN

Tom Swift, Ned Newton and Koku, the giant, are busy trying to piece together the torn parts of the paper, containing an account of the airship smugglers. I will take the opportunity of telling you something about the young inventor and his work, for, though many of my readers have made Tom's acquaintances in previous books of this series, there may be some who pick up this one as their first volume.

Tom lived with his father, also an inventor of note, in the town of Shopton, New York state. His mother was dead, and a Mrs. Baggert kept house. Eradicate was an eccentric, colored helper, but of late had become too old to do much. Mr. Swift was also quite aged, and had been obliged to give up most of his inventive work.

Ned Newton was Tom Swift's particular chum, and our hero had another friend, a Mr. Wakefield Damon, of the neighboring town of Waterford. Mr. Damon had the odd habit of blessing everything he saw or could think of. Another of Tom's friends was Miss Mary Nestor, whom I have mentioned, while my old readers will readily recognize in Andy Foger a mean bully, who made much trouble for Tom.

The first book of the series was called "Tom Swift and His Motor-Cycle," and on that machine Tom had many advances on the road, and not a little fun. After that Tom secured a motor boat, and had a race with Andy Foger. In his airship our hero made a stirring cruise, while in his submarine boat he and his father recovered a sunken treasure.

When Tom Swift invented a new electric run-about he did not realize that it was to be the speediest car on the road, but so it proved, and he was able to save the bank with it. In the book called "Tom Swift and His Wireless Message," I told you how he saved the castaways of Earthquake Island, among whom were Mr. and Mrs. Nestor, the parents of Mary.

Tom Swift had not been long on the trail of the diamond makers before he discovered the secret of Phantom Mountain, and after that adventure he went to the caves of ice, where his big airship was wrecked. But he got home, and soon made another, which he called a sky racer, and in that he made the quickest flight on record.

With his electric rifle Tom went to elephant land, where he succeeded in rescuing two missionaries from the red pygmies. A little later he set out for the city of gold, and had marvelous adventures underground.

Hearing of a deposit of valuable platinum in Siberia, Tom started for that lonely place, and, to reach a certain part of it, he had to invent a new machine, called an air glider. It was an aeroplane without means of propulsion save the wind.

In the book, "Tom Swift in Captivity," I related the particulars of how he brought away two immense men from giant land. One, Koku, he kept for himself, while the other made a good living by being exhibited in a circus.

When the present story opens Tom had not long been home after a series of strange adventures. A moving picture concern, with which Mr. Nestor was associated, wanted some views of remarkable scenes, such as fights among wild beasts, the capture of herds of elephants, earthquakes, and volcanos in action, and great avalanches in the Alps. Tom invented a wizard camera, and got many good views, though at times he was in great danger, even in his airship. Especially was this so at the erupting volcano.

But our hero came swiftly back to Shopton, and there, all Winter and Spring, he busied himself perfecting a new motor for an airship—a motor that would make no noise. He perfected it early that Summer, and now was about to try it, when the incident of the torn newspaper happened.

"Have you got all the pieces, Tom?" asked Ned, as he passed his chum several scraps, which were gathered up from the floor.

"I think so. Now we'll paste them together, and see what it says. We may be on the trail of a big mystery, Ned."

"Maybe. Go ahead and see what you can make of it."

Tom fitted together, as best he could, the ragged pieces, and then pasted them on a blank sheet of paper.

"I guess I've got it all here now," he said finally. "I'll skip the first part. You read me most of that, Ned. Just as you told me, it relates how the government agents, having tried in vain to get a clew to the smugglers, came to the conclusion that they must be using airships to slip contraband goods over the border at night."

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"Now where's that mention of Shopton? Oh, here it is," and he read:

"It is suspected that some of the smugglers have been communicating with confederates in Shopton, New York. This came to the notice of the authorities to-day, when one of the government agents located some of the smuggled goods in a small town in New York on the St. Lawrence. The name of this town is being kept secret for the present."

"It was learned that the goods were found in a small, deserted house, and that among them were letters from someone in Shopton, relating to the disposal of the articles. They refuse to say who the letters were from, but it is believed that some of Uncle Sam's men may shortly make their appearance in the peaceful burg of Shopton, there to follow up the clew. Many thousands of dollars worth of goods have been smuggled, and the United States, as well as the Dominion of Canada custom authorities, say they are determined to put a stop to the daring efforts of the smugglers. The airship theory is the latest put forth."

"Well, say, that's the limit!" cried Ned, as Tom finished reading. "What do you know about that?"

"It brings it right home to us," agreed the young inventor. "But who is there in Shopton who would be in league with the smugglers?"

"That's hard to say."

"Of course we don't know everyone in town," went on Tom, "but I'm pretty well acquainted here, and I don't know of a person who would dare engage in such work."

"Maybe it's a stranger who came here, and picked out this place because it was so quiet," suggested Ned.

"That's possible. But where would he operate from?" asked Tom. "There are few in Shopton who would want to buy smuggled goods."

"They may only ship them here, and fix them so they can't be recognized by the custom authorities, and then send them away again," went on Ned. "This may be a sort of clearing-house for the smugglers."

"That's so. Well, I don't know as we have anything to do with it. Only if those fellows are using an airship I'd like to know what kind it is. Well, come on out to the shop now, and we'll see how the silent motor works."

On the way Tom passed his father, and, telling him not to work too hard in the sun, gave his parent the piece of paper to read, telling about the smugglers.

"Using airships! eh?" exclaimed Mr. Swift. "And they think there's a clew here in Shopton? Well, we'll get celebrated if we keep on, Tom," he added with a smile.

Tom and Ned spent the rest of the day working over the motor, which was set going, and bore out all Tom claimed for it. It was as silent as a watch.

"Next I want to get it in the airship, and give it a good test," Tom remarked, speeding it up, as it was connected on a heavy base in the shop.

"I'll help you," promised Ned, and for the next few days the chums were kept busy fitting the silent motor into one of Tom's several airships.

"Well, I think we can make a flight to-morrow," said the young inventor, about a week later. "I need some new bolts though, Ned. Let's take a walk into town and get them. Oh, by the way, have you seen anything more of Andy Foger?"

"No. and I don't want to. I suppose he's gone back home after his visit to Sam. Let's go down the street, where the Foger house is, and see if there's anything going on."

As the two lads passed the mansion, they saw a man, in the kind of suit usually worn by a carpenter, come out of the back door and stand looking across the garden. In his hand he held a saw.

"Still at the repairs, I guess," remarked Ned. "I wonder what—"

"Look there! Look! Quick!" suddenly interrupted Tom, and Ned, looking, saw someone standing behind the carpenter in the door. "If that isn't Andy Foger, I'll eat my hat!" cried Tom.

"It sure is," agreed Ned. "What in the world is he doing there?"

But his question was not answered, for, a moment later, Andy turned, and went inside, and the carpenter followed, closing the door behind them.

"That's queer," spoke Tom.

"Very," agreed Ned. "He didn't go back after all. I'd like to know what's going on in there."

"And there's someone else who would like to know, also, I think," said Tom in a low voice.

"Who?" asked Ned.

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"That man hiding behind the big tree across the street. I'm sure he's watching the Fogger house, and when Andy came to the door that time, I happened to look around and saw that man focus a pair of opera glasses on him and the carpenter."

"You don't mean it, Tom!" exclaimed Ned.

"I sure do. I believe that man is some sort of a spy or a detective."

"Do you think he's after Andy?"

"I don't know. Let's not get mixed up in the affair, anyhow. I don't want to be called in as a witness. I haven't the time to spare."

As if the man behind the tree was aware that he had attracted the attention of our friends, he quickly turned and walked away. Tom and Ned glanced up at the Fogger house, but saw nothing, and proceeded on to the store.

"I'll wager anything that Andy has been getting in some sort of trouble in the town he moved to from here," went on Tom, "and he daren't go back. So he came here, and he's hiding in his father's old house. He could manage to live there for a while, with the carpenter bringing him in food. Say, did you notice who that man was, with the saw?"

"Yes, he's James Dillon, a carpenter who lives down on our street," replied Ned. "A nice man, too. The next time I see him, I'm going to ask him what Andy is doing in town, and what the repairs are that he's making on the house."

"Well, of course if Andy has been doing anything wrong, he wouldn't admit it," said Tom. "Though Mr. Dillon may tell you about the carpenter work. But I'm sure that man was a detective from the town where Andy moved to. You'll see."

"I don't think so," was Ned's opinion. "If Andy was hiding he wouldn't show himself as plainly as he did."

The two chums argued on this question, but could come to no decision. Then, having reached Tom's home with the bolts, they went hard at work on the airship.

"Well, now to see what happens!" exclaimed Tom the next day, when everything was ready for a trial flight. "I wish Mr. Damon was here. I sent him word, but I didn't hear from him."

"Oh, he may show up any minute," replied Ned, as he helped Tom and Koku wheel the newly-equipped airship out of the shed. "The first thing you'll hear will be him blessing something. Is this far enough out, Tom?"

"No, a little more, and then head her up into the wind. I say, Ned, if this is a success, and—"

Tom stopped suddenly and looked out into the road. Then, in a low voice, he said, to Ned:

"Don't move suddenly, or he'll suspect that we're onto his game, but turn around slowly, and look behind that big sycamore tree in front of our house Ned. Tell me what you see."

"There's a man hiding there, Tom," reported his chum, a little later, after a cautious observation.

"I thought so. What's he doing?"

"Why he—by Jove! Tom, he's looking at us through opera glasses, like that other—"

"It isn't ANOTHER, it's the same fellow!" whispered Tom. "It's the spy who was watching Andy! I'm going to see what's up," and he strode rapidly toward the street, at the curb of which was the tree that partly screened the man behind it.

CHAPTER III. QUEER REPAIRS

Quickly Tom Swift crossed the space between the airship, that was ready for a flight, and the tree. The man behind it had apparently not seen Tom coming, being so interested in looking at the airship, which was a wonderful craft. He was taken completely by surprise as Tom, stepping up to him, asked sharply:

"Who are you and what are you doing here?"

The man started so that he nearly dropped the opera glasses, which he had held focused on the aeroplane. Then he stepped back, and eyed Tom sharply.

"What do you want?" repeated our hero. "What right have you to be spying on that airship—on these premises?" The man hesitated a moment, and then coolly returned the glasses to his pocket. He did not seem at all put out, after his first start of surprise.

"What are you doing?" Tom again asked. He looked around to see where Koku, the giant, was, and beheld the big man walking slowly toward him, for Ned had mentioned what had taken place.

"What right have you to question my actions?" asked the man, and there was in his tones a certain authority that made Tom wonder.

"Every right," retorted our hero. "That is my airship, at which you have been spying, and this is where I live."

"Oh, it is; eh?" asked the man calmly. "And that's your airship, too?"

"I invented it, and built the most of it myself. If you are interested in such things, and can assure me that you have no spying methods in view, I can show you—"

"Have you other airships?" interrupted the man quickly.

"Yes, several," answered Tom. "But I can't understand why you should be spying on me. If you don't care to accept my offer, like a gentleman, tell me who you are, and what your object is, I will have my assistant remove you. You are on private property, as this street is not a public one, being cut through by my father. I'll have Koku remove you by force, if you won't go peaceably, and I think you'll agree with me that Koku can do it. Here Koku," he called sharply, and the big man advanced quickly.

"I wouldn't do anything rash, if I were you," said the man quietly. "As for this being private property, that doesn't concern me. You're Tom Swift, aren't you; and you have several airships?"

"Yes, but what right have you to—"

"Every right!" interrupted the man, throwing back the lapel of his coat, and showing a badge. "I'm Special Agent William Whitford, of the United States Customs force, and I'd like to ask you a few questions, Tom Swift." He looked our hero full in the face.

"Customs department!" gasped Tom. "You want to ask me some questions?"

"That's it," went on the man, in a business-like voice.

"What about?"

"Smuggling by airship from Canada!"

"What!" cried Tom. "Do you mean to say you suspect me of being implicated in—"

"Now go easy," advised the man calmly. "I didn't say anything, except that I wanted to QUESTION you. If you'd like me to do it out here, why I can. But as someone might hear us—"

"Come inside," said Tom quietly, though his heart was beating in a tumult. "You may go, Koku, but stay within call," he added significantly. "Come on, Ned," and he motioned to his chum who was approaching. "This man is a custom officer and not a spy or a detective, as we thought."

"Oh, yes, I am a SORT of a detective," corrected Mr. Whitford. "And I'm a spy, too, in a way, for I've been spying on you, and some other parties in town. But you may be able to explain everything," he added, as he took a seat in the library between Ned and Tom. "I only know I was sent here to do certain work, and I'm going to do it. I wanted to make some observations before you saw me, but I wasn't quite quick enough."

"Would you mind telling me what you want to know?" asked Tom, a bit impatiently. "You mentioned smuggling, and—"

"Smuggling!" interrupted Ned.

"Yes, over from Canada. Maybe you have seen something in the papers about our department thinking

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airships were used at night to slip the goods over the border."

"We saw it!" cried Tom eagerly. "But how does that concern me?"

"I'll come to that, presently," replied Mr. Whitford. "In the first place, we have been roundly laughed at in some papers for proposing such a theory. And yet it isn't so wild as it sounds. In fact, after seeing your airship, Tom Swift, I'm convinced—"

"That I've been smuggling?" asked Tom with a laugh.

"Not at all. As you have read, we confiscated some smuggled goods the other day, and among them was a scrap of paper with the words Shopton, New York, on it."

"Was it a letter from someone here, or to someone here?" asked Ned. "The papers intimated so."

"No. they only guessed at that part of it. It was just a scrap of paper, evidently torn from a letter, and it only had those three words on it. Naturally we agents thought we could get a clew here. We imagined, or at least I did, for I was sent to work up this end, that perhaps the airships for the smugglers were made here. I made inquiries, and found that you, Tom Swift, and one other, Andy Foger, had made, or owned, airships in Shopton."

"I came here, but I soon exhausted the possibility of Andy Foger making practical airships. Besides he isn't at home here any more, and he has no facilities for constructing the craft as you have. So I came to look at your place, and I must say that it looks a bit suspicious, Mr. Swift. Though, of course, as I said," he added with a smile, "you may be able to explain everything."

"I think I can convince you that I had no part in the smuggling," spoke Tom, laughing. "I never sell my airships. If you like you may talk with my father, the housekeeper, and others who can testify that since my return from taking moving pictures, I have not been out of town, and the smuggling has been going on only a little while."

"That is true," assented the custom officer. "I shall be glad to listen to any evidence you may offer. This is a very baffling case. The government is losing thousands of dollars every month, and we can't seem to stop the smugglers, or get much of a clew to them. This one is the best we have had so far."

It did not take Tom many hours to prove to the satisfaction of Mr. Whitford that none of our hero's airships had taken any part in cheating Uncle Sam out of custom duties.

"Well, I don't know what to make of it," said the government agent, with a disappointed air, as he left the office of the Shopton chief of police, who, with others, at Tom's request, had testified in his favor. "This looked like a good clew, and now it's knocked into a cocked hat. There's no use bothering that Foger fellow," he went on, "for he has but one airship, I understand."

"And that's not much good," put in Ned. "I guess it's partly wrecked, and Andy has kept it out in the barn since he moved away."

"Well, I guess I'll be leaving town then," went on the agent. "I can't get any more clews here, and there may be some new ones found on the Canadian border where my colleagues are trying to catch the rascals. I'm sorry I bothered you, Tom Swift. You certainly have a fine lot of airships," he added, for he had been taken through the shop, and shown the latest, noiseless model. "A fine lot. I don't believe the smugglers, if they use them, have any better."

"Nor as good!" exclaimed Ned. "Tom's can't be beat."

"It's too late for our noiseless trial now," remarked Tom, after the agent had gone. "Let's put her back in the shed, and then I'll take you down street, and treat you to some ice cream, Ned. It's getting quite summery now."

As the boys were coming out of the drug store, where they had eaten their ice cream in the form of sundaes, Ned uttered a cry of surprise at the sight of a man approaching them.

"It's Mr. Dillon, the carpenter whom we saw in the Foger house, Tom!" exclaimed his chum. "This is the first chance I've had to talk to him. I'm going to ask him what sort of repairs he's making inside the old mansion." Ned was soon in conversation with him.

"Yes, I'm working at the Foger house," admitted the carpenter, who had done some work for Ned's father. "Mighty queer repairs, too. Something I never did before. If Andy wasn't there to tell me what he wanted done I wouldn't know what to do."

"Is Andy there yet?" asked Tom quickly.

"Yes, he's staying in the old house. All alone too, except now and then, he has a chum stay there nights with him. They get their own meals. I bring the stuff in, as Andy says he's getting up a surprise and doesn't want any of

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the boys to see him, or ask questions. But they are sure queer repairs I'm doing," and the carpenter scratched his head reflectively.

"What are you doing?" asked Ned boldly.

"Fixing up Andy's old airship that was once busted," was the unexpected answer, "and after I get that done, if I ever do, he wants me to make a platform for it on the roof of the house, where he can start it swooping through the air. Mighty queer repairs, I call 'em. Well, good evening, boys," and the carpenter passed on.

CHAPTER IV. SEARCHING FOR SMUGGLERS.

"Well, of all things!"

"Who in the world would think such a thing?"

"Andy going to start out with his airship again!"

"And going to sail it off the roof of his house!"

These were the alternate expressions that came from Tom and Ned, as they stood gazing at each other after the startling information given them by Mr. Dillon, the carpenter.

"Do you really think he means it?" asked Tom, after a pause, during which they watched the retreating figure of the carpenter. "Maybe he was fooling us."

"No, Mr. Dillon seldom jokes," replied Ned, "and when he does, you can always tell. He goes to our church, and I know he wouldn't deliberately tell an untruth. Oh, Andy's up to some game all right."

"I thought he must be hanging around here the way he has been, instead of being home. But I admit I may have been wrong about the police being after him. If he'd done something wrong, he would hardly hire a man to work on the house while he was hiding in it. I guess he just wants to keep out of the way of everybody but his own particular cronies. But I wonder what he is up to, anyhow; getting his airship in shape again?"

"Give it up, unless there's an aero meet on somewhere soon," replied Ned. "Maybe he's going to try a race again."

Tom shook his head.

"I'd have heard about any aviation meets, if there were any scheduled," he replied. "I belong to the national association, and they send out circulars whenever there are to be races. None are on for this season. No, Andy has some other game."

"Well, I don't know that it concerns us," spoke Ned.

"Not as long as he doesn't bother me," answered the young inventor. "Well, Ned, I suppose you'll be over in the morning and help me try out the noiseless airship?"

"Sure thing. Say, it was queer, about that government agent, wasn't it? suspecting you of supplying airships to the smugglers?"

"Rather odd," agreed Tom. "He might much better suspect Andy Foger."

"That's so, and now that we know Andy is rebuilding his old airship, maybe we'd better tell him."

"Tell who?"

"That government agent. Tell him he's wrong in thinking that Andy is out of the game. We might send him word that we just learned that Andy is getting active again. He has as much right to suspect and question him, as he had you."

"Oh, I don't know," began Tom slowly. He was not a vindictive youth, nor, for that matter, was Ned. And Tom would not go out of his way to give information about an enemy, when it was not certain that the said enemy meant anything wrong. "I don't believe there's anything in it," finished our hero. "Andy may have a lot of time on his hands, and, for want of something better to do, he's fixing up his aeroplane."

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed Ned. "There's that agent now! He's going to the depot to get a train, I guess," and he pointed to the government man, who had so lately interviewed Tom. "I'm going to speak to him!" impulsively declared Ned.

"I wouldn't," objected Tom, but his chum had already hastened on ahead, and soon was seen talking excitedly to Mr. Whitford. Tom sauntered up in time to hear the close of the conversation.

"I'm much obliged to you for your information," said the custom officer. "but I'm afraid, just as you say your chum felt about it, that there's nothing in it. This Foger chap may have been bad in the past, but I hardly think he's in with the smugglers. What I'm looking for is not a lad who has one airship, but someone who is making a lot of them, and supplying the men who are running goods over the border. That's the sort of game I'm after, and if this Andy Foger only has one aeroplane I hardly think he can be very dangerous."

"Well, perhaps not," admitted Ned. "But I thought I'd tell you."

"And I'm glad you did. If you hear anything more. I'll be glad to have you let me know. Here's my card," and

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thanking the boys for their interest Mr. Whitford passed on.

Tom and Ned gave the noiseless airship a test the next day. The craft, which was the stanch Falcon, remodeled, was run out of the shed, Koku the giant helping, while Mr. Swift stood looking on, an interested spectator of what his son was about to do. Eradicate, the old colored man, who was driving his mule Boomerang, hitched to a wagon in which he was carting away some refuse that had been raked up in the garden, halted his outfit nearby.

"I say, Massa Tom!" he called, as the young inventor passed near him, in making a tour of the ship.

"Well, Rad, what is it?"

"Doan't yo'—all want fo' ma an' Boomerang t' gib yo'—all a tow? Mebby dat new—fangled contraption yo'—all has done put on yo' ship won't wuk, an' mebby I'd better stick around t' pull yo'—all home."

"No, Rad, I guess it will work all right. If it doesn't, and we get stuck out a mile or two, I'll send you a wireless message."

"Doan't do dat!" begged the colored man. "I neber could read dem wireless letters anyhow. Jest gib a shout, an' me an' Boomerang will come a—runnin'."

"All right, Rad, I will. Now, Ned, is everything in shape?"

"I think so, Tom."

"Koku, just put a little more wind in those tires. But don't pump as hard as you did the other day," Tom cautioned.

"What happened then?" asked Ned.

"Oh, Koku forgot that he had so much muscle, and he kept on pumping air into the bicycle wheel tires until he burst one. Go easy this time, Koku."

"I will, Mr. Tom," and the giant took the air pump.

"Is he going along?" asked Ned, as he looked to see that all the guy wires and stays were tight.

"I guess so," replied Tom. "He makes good ballast. I wish Mr. Damon was here. If everything goes right we may take a run over, and surprise him."

In a little while the noiseless airship was ready for the start. Tom, Ned and Koku climbed in, and took their positions.

"Good luck!" Mr. Swift called after them. Tom waved his hand to his father, and the next moment his craft shot into the air. Up and up it went, the great propeller blades beating the air, but, save for a soft whirr, such as would be made by the wings of a bird, there was absolutely no sound.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom. "She works! I've got a noiseless airship at last!"

"Say, don't yell at a fellow so," begged Ned, for Tom had been close to his chum when he made his exulting remark.

"Yell! I wasn't yelling," replied Tom. "Oh, I see what happened. I'm so used to speaking loud on the other airships, that make such a racket, that I didn't realize how quiet it was aboard the new Falcon. No wonder I nearly made you deaf, Ned. I'll be careful after this," and Tom lowered his voice to ordinary tones. In fact it was as quiet aboard his new craft, as if he and Ned had been walking in some grass-grown country lane.

"She certainly is a success," agreed Ned. "You could creep up on some other airship now, and those aboard would never know you were coming."

"I've been planning this for a long time," went on our hero, as he shifted the steering gear, and sent the craft around in a long, sweeping curve. "Now for Waterford and Mr. Damon."

They were soon above the town where the odd man lived, and Tom, picking out Mr. Damon's house, situated as it was in the midst of extensive grounds, headed for it.

"There he is, walking through the garden," exclaimed Ned, pointing to their friend down below. "He hasn't heard us, as he would have done if we had come in any other machine."

"That's so!" exclaimed Tom. "I'm going to give him a sensation. I'll fly right over his head, and he won't know it until he sees us. I'll come up from behind."

A moment later he put this little trick into execution. Along swept the airship, until, with a rush, it passed right over Mr. Damon's head. He never heard it, and was not aware of what was happening until he saw the shadow it cast. Then, jumping aside, as if he thought something was about to fall on him, he cried:

"Bless my mosquito netting! What in the world—"

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Then he saw Tom and Ned in the airship, which came gently to earth a few yards further on.

"Well of all things!" cried Mr. Damon. "What are you up to now, Tom Swift?"

"It's my noiseless airship," explained our hero. "She doesn't make a sound. Get aboard, and have a ride."

Mr. Damon looked toward the house.

"I guess my wife won't see me," he said with a chuckle. "She's more than ever opposed to airships, Tom, since we went on that trip taking moving pictures. But I'll take a chance." And in he sprang, when the two lads started up again. They made quite a flight, and Tom found that his new motor exceeded his expectations. True, it needed some adjustments, but these could easily be made.

"Well, what are you going to do with it, now that you have it?" asked Mr. Damon, as Tom once more brought the machine around to the odd man's house, and stopped it. "What's it for?"

"Oh, I think I'll find a use for it," replied the young inventor. "Will you come back to Shopton with us?"

"No, I must stay here. I have some letters to write. But I'll run over in a few days, and see you. Then I'll go on another trip, if you've got one planned."

"I may have," answered Tom with a laugh. "Good-bye."

He and Ned made a quick flight home, and Tom at once started on making some changes in the motor. He was engaged at this work the next day, when he noticed a shadow pass across an open window. He looked up to see Ned.

"Hello, Tom!" cried his chum. "Have you heard the news?"

"No, what news? Has Andy Foger fallen out of his airship?"

"No, but there are a whole lot of Custom House detectives in town, looking for clews to the smugglers."

"Still at it, eh? Shopton can't seem to keep out of the limelight. Has anything new turned up?"

"Yes. I just met Mr. Whitford. He's back on the case and he has several men with him. They received word that some smuggled goods came to Shopton, and were shipped out of here again."

"How, by airship?"

"No, by horse and wagon. A lot of cases of valuable silks imported from England to Canada, where the duty is light, were slipped over the border somehow, in airships, it is thought. Then they came here by freight, labeled as calico, and when they reached this town they were taken away in a wagon."

"But how did they get here?"

"On the railroad, of course, but the freight people had no reason to suspect them."

"And where were they taken from the freight station?"

"That's what the customs authorities want to find out. They think there's some secret place here, where the goods are stored and reshipped. That's why so many detectives are here. They are after the smugglers hot-footed."

CHAPTER V. THE RAID

Tom Swift dropped the tool he was using, and came over to where Ned stood, his chum having vaulted in through the open window.

"Ned," said the young inventor, "there's something queer about this business."

"I'm beginning to think so myself, Tom. But just what do you mean?"

"I mean it's queer that the smugglers should pick out a place like Shopton—a small town—for their operations, or part of them, when there are so many better places. We're quite a distance from the Canadian border. Say, Ned, where was it that Mr. Fogger moved to? Hogan's alley, or some such name as that; wasn't it?"

"Logansville, this state, was the place. I once saw Tom Snedecker mail Andy a letter addressed to there. But what has that to do with it?"

Tom's answer was to turn to a large map on the wall of his shop. With a long stick he pointed out the city of Logansville.

"That isn't very far from the Canadian border; is it, Ned?" he asked.

"Say, what are you driving at, Tom? It's right on the border between New York and Canada, according to that map."

"Well, that's a good map, and you can be sure it is nearly right. And, look here. There's the town of Montford, in Canada, almost opposite Logansville."

"Well?"

"Oh, nothing, only I'm going to see Mr. Whitford."

"What do you mean, Tom?"

"I mean that the something queer part about this business may be explained. They have traces of the smugglers sending their goods to Shopton to be re-shipped here, to avoid suspicion, probably. They have a suspicion that airships are used to get the goods over the Canadian border at night."

"But," broke in Ned, "the government agent said that it was across the St. Lawrence River they brought them. Montford is quite a distance from the river. I suppose the smugglers take the goods from the river steamers, land them, pack them in airships, and fly across with them. But if you're trying to connect the Foggers, and Logansville, and Montford with the smugglers, I don't see where it comes in with the St. Lawrence, and the airships, Tom."

"Forget that part of it for a while, Ned. Maybe they are all off on airships, anyhow. I don't take much stock in that theory, though it may be true."

"Just think of the Foggers," went on Tom. "Mr. Fogger has lost all his money, he lives in a town near the Canadian border, it is almost certain that smuggled goods have been shipped here. Mr. Fogger has a deserted house here, and—see the connection?"

"By Jove, Tom, I believe you're right!" cried his chum. "Maybe the airships aren't in it after all, and Andy is only making a bluff at having his repaired, to cover up some other operations in the house."

"I believe so."

"But that would mean that Mr. Dillon, the carpenter is not telling the truth, and I can't believe that of him."

"Oh, I believe he's honest, but I think Andy is fooling him. Mr. Dillon doesn't know much about airships, and Andy may have had him doing something in the house, telling him it was repair work on an airship, when, as a matter of fact, the carpenter might be making boxes to ship the goods in, or constructing secret places in which to hide them."

"I don't believe it, Tom. But I agree with you that there is something queer going on in Shopton. The Foggers may, or may not, be connected with it. What are you going to do?"

"I'm first going to have a talk with Mr. Whitford. Then I'm going to see if I can't prove, or disprove, that the Foggers are concerned in the matter. If they're not, then some one else in Shopton must be guilty. But I'm interested, because I have been brought into this thing in a way, and I want it sifted to the bottom."

"Then you're going to see Mr. Whitford?"

"I am, and I'm going to tell him what I think. Come on, we'll look him up now."

"But your noiseless airship?"

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"Oh, that's all right. It's nearly finished anyhow, I've just got a little more work on the carburetor. That will keep. Come on, we'll find the government agent."

But Mr. Whitford was not at the hotel where he and the other custom inspectors had put up. They made no secret of their presence in Shopton, and all sorts of rumors were flying about regarding them. Mr. Whitford, the hotel clerk said, had gone out of town for the day, and, as Ned and Tom did not feel like telling their suspicions to any of the other agents, they started back home.

"I understand they're going to search every house in Shopton, before they go away," said the clerk to the boys. "They are going to look for smuggled goods."

"They are; eh?" exclaimed Colonel Henry Denterby, who had fought in the Civil War. "Search my house; eh? Well I guess not! A man's house is his castle, sir! That's what it is. No one shall enter mine, no matter if he is a government official, unless I give him permission, sir! And I won't do that, sir! I'll be revolutionized if I do! No, sir!"

"Why, you haven't any smuggled goods concealed, have you, Colonel?" slyly asked a hotel lounge.

"Smuggled goods? What do you mean, sir?" cried the veteran, who was something of a fire-eater. "No, sir! Of course not, sir! I pay my taxes, sir; and all my debts. But no government spy is going to come into my house, and upset everything, sir, looking for smuggled goods, sir. No, sir!"

Some were of one opinion, and some another, and there was quite a discussion underway concerning the rights of the custom officers, as the boys came out of the hotel.

Likewise there was talk about who might be the guilty ones, but no names were mentioned, at least openly.

"Let's go past the Foger house on our way back," proposed Ned, and as he and Tom came in front of it, they heard a pounding going on within, but saw no signs of Andy or the carpenter.

"They're keeping mighty close," commented Tom.

The two boys worked that afternoon on the new airship, and in the evening, when Ned came over, Tom proposed that they make another attempt to see Mr. Whitford.

"I want to get this thing off my mind," spoke the young inventor, and he and his chum started for the hotel. Once more they passed the Foger house. It was in darkness, but, as the two lads stood watching, they saw a flash of a light, as if it came through a crack in a shutter or a shade.

"Some one is in there," declared Tom.

"Yes, probably Andy is getting his own supper. It's queer he wants to lead that sort of a life. Well, everyone to their notion, as the old lady said when she kissed the cow."

They stood for a few minutes watching the old mansion, and then went on. As they passed down a lane, to take a short cut, they approached a small house, that, in times past, had been occupied by the gardener of the Foger estate. Now, that too, was closed. But, in front of it stood a wagon with a big canvass cover over it, and, as the lads came nearer, the wagon drove off quickly, and in silence. At the same time a door in the gardener's house was heard to shut softly.

"Did you see that?" cried Ned.

"Yes, and did you hear that?" asked Tom.

"They're carting stuff away from the old gardener's house," went on Ned. "Maybe it's there that the smugglers are working from! Let's hurry to see Mr. Whitford."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom in a whisper. "I've got one suggestion. Ned. Let's tell all we know, and what we think may be the case, but don't make any rash statements. We might be held responsible. Tell what we have seen, and let the government men do the rest."

"All right. I'm willing."

They watched the wagon as it passed on out of sight in the darkness, and then hurried on to see Mr. Whitford. To say that the custom officer was astonished at what the boys related to him, is putting it mildly. He was much excited.

"I think we're on the right trail!" he exclaimed. "You may have done a big service for Uncle Sam. Come on!"

"Where?" the boys asked him.

"We'll make a raid on the old Foger home, and on the gardener's house at once. We may catch the rascals red-handed. You can have the honor of representing Uncle Sam. I'll make you assistant deputies for the night. Here are some extra badges I always carry," and he pinned one each on the two young men.

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Mr. Whitford quietly summoned several of his men to his hotel room, and imparted to them what he had learned. They were eager for the raid, and it was decided to go to the Foger home, and the other house at once, first seeking to gain an entrance to the mansion.

Accompanied by Tom and Ned, Mr. Whitford left the hotel. There were few persons about, and no attention was attracted. The other agents left the hotel one by one, and in the darkness gathered about the seemingly deserted mansion.

"Stand ready now, men," whispered Mr. Whitford. "Tom, Ned and I will go up the steps first, and knock. If they don't let us in I'm going to smash the door. Then you follow."

Rather excited by what was about to take place, the two chums accompanied the chief custom agent. He rapped loudly on the door of the house, where only darkness showed.

There was a moment of silence, and then a voice which Tom and Ned recognized as that of Andy Foger, asked:

"What do you want?"

"We want to come in," replied Mr. Whitford.

"But who are you?"

"Uncle Sam's officers, from the custom house."

Tom distinctly heard a gasp of surprise on the other side of the portal, and then a bolt was drawn. The door was thrown back, and there, confronting the two lads and Mr. Whitford, were Andy Foger and his father.

CHAPTER VI. THE APPEAL TO TOM

"Well, what does this mean?" asked Mr. Foger in indignant tones, as he faced the custom officer and Tom and Ned. "What do you mean by coming to my house at this hour, and disturbing me? I demand an answer!"

"And you shall have it," replied Mr. Whitford calmly. He was used to dealing with "indignant" persons, who got very much on their dignity when accused of smuggling. "We are here, Mr. Foger, because of certain information we have received, and we must ask you to submit to some questions, and allow your house to be searched."

"What! You question me? Search this house? That is an indignity to which I will not submit!"

"You will have to, Mr. Foger. I have ample authority for what I am doing, and I am backed by the most powerful government in the world. I also have plenty of help with me."

Mr. Whitford blew his whistle, and at once his several deputies came running up.

"You see I am well prepared to meet force with force, Mr. Foger," said the chief agent, calmly.

"Force! What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that I have certain information against you. There has been smuggling going on from Canada into the United States."

"Canada? What have I to do with Canada?"

"You don't live far from there," said Mr. Whitford significantly. "Airships have been used. Your son has one, but I don't believe that figured in the game. But two friends of mine saw something to-night that made me decide on this raid. Tom and Ned, tell Mr. Foger what you saw."

The agent stepped back, so that the two lads could be seen. There was another gasp of surprise, this time from Andy Foger, who had remained in the background.

"Tom Swift!" gasped the bully.

"Tell them what you saw. Tom," went on the agent, and Tom and Ned by turns, relayed the incident of the wagon load of goods driving away from the gardener's house.

"This, with what has gone before, made us suspicious," said Mr. Whitford. "So we decided on a raid. If you are not willing to let us in peaceably, we will come by force."

"By all means come in!" was the unexpected reply of Mr. Foger, as he stepped back, and opened wider the door. "Andy, these are some friends of yours, are they not?"

"Friends? I guess not!" exclaimed Andy with a sneer. "I won't even speak to them."

"Not much lost," commented Tom with a laugh.

"Search the house!" ordered Mr. Whitford sharply.

"I'll show you around," offered Mr. Foger.

"We can find our way," was the curt rejoinder of the chief agent.

"The place is deserted," went on Mr. Foger. "My son and I are just living here until certain repairs are made, when I am going to make another effort to sell it."

"Yes, we knew it was being repaired, and that your son was staying here," said Mr. Whitford, "But we did not expect to see you."

"I—er—that is—I came on unexpectedly," said Mr. Foger. "You may look about all you wish. You will find nothing wrong here."

And they did not, strange to say. There was considerable litter in many of the rooms, and in one was Andy's airship in parts. Clearly work was being done on that, and Mr. Dillon's story was confirmed, for tools, with his initials burned in the handles, were lying about.

The custom men, with Tom and Ned, went all over the house. Andy scowled blackly at our hero, but said nothing. Mr. Foger seemed anxious to show everything, and let the men go where they would. Finally a tour of the house had been completed, and nothing of a suspicious nature was found.

"I guess we'll just take a look at the roof, and see that airship platform your son is going to use," said Mr. Whitford, in rather disappointed tones, when he had found nothing.

"It isn't started yet," said Andy.

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But they all went up through a scuttle, nevertheless, and saw where some posts had been made fast to the roof, to provide a platform foundation.

"I'll beat you all to pieces when I get flying," said the bully to Tom, as they went down the scuttle again.

"I'm not in the racing game any more," replied Tom coldly. "Besides I only race with my FRIENDS."

"Huh! Afraid of getting beat!" sneered Andy.

"Well. I guess there's nothing here," said Mr. Whitford to Mr. Foger, as they stood together in the front room.

"No, I knew you'd find nothing, and you have had your trouble for your pains."

"Oh, Uncle Sam doesn't mind trouble."

"And you have caused me much annoyance!" said Mr. Foger sharply.

"I'm afraid we'll have to cause you more," was the agent's comment. "I want to have a look in the gardener's house, from where Tom Swift saw the load going away."

"There is nothing there!" declared Mr. Foger quickly. "That is, nothing but some old furniture. I sold a lot of it, and I suppose the man who bought it came for it to-night."

"We'll take a look," repeated the agent, "I am very fond of old furniture."

"Very well," responded the bully's father, as he eyed Tom and Ned blackly.

He led the way out of the house, and soon they stood before the small cottage. It was dark, and when Mr. Foger unlocked the door he turned on the gas, and lighted it.

"I left the gas on until all the furniture should be taken out," he explained. "But you will find nothing here."

It needed but a glance about the place to show that only some odds and ends of furniture was all that it contained.

"Where does this door lead to," asked Mr. Whitford, when he had made a tour of the place.

"Nowhere. Oh, that is only down into the cellar." was the reply. "There is nothing there."

"We can't take anything for granted," went on the agent with a smile. "I'll take a look down there."

He descended with some of his men. Tom and Ned remained in the kitchen of the cottage, while Andy and his father conversed in low tones, occasionally casting glances at our heroes. Once Tom thought Mr. Foger looked apprehensively toward the door, through which the custom men had descended. He also appeared to be anxiously listening.

But when Mr. Whitford came back, with a disappointed look on his face, and said there was nothing to be found, Mr. Foger smiled:

"What did I tell you?" he asked triumphantly.

"Never mind," was the retort of Uncle Sam's man. "We are not through with Shopton yet."

"I'm sorry we gave you so much trouble on a false clew," said Tom, as he and Ned left the Foger premises with Mr. Whitford, the other deputies following.

"That's all right, Tom. We have to follow many false clews. I'm much obliged to you. Either we were on the wrong track, or the Fogers are more clever than I gave them credit for. But I am not done yet. I have something to propose to you. It has come to me in the last few minutes. I saw you in your airship once, and I know you know how to manage such craft. Now there is no question in my mind but what the smugglers are using airships. Tom, will you undertake a mission for Uncle Sam?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean will you go to the border, in your airship, and try to catch the smugglers? I can promise you a big reward, and much fame if we catch them. An airship is just what is needed. You are the one to do it. Will you?"

CHAPTER VII. A SEARCHLIGHT IS NEEDED

For a few moments after the custom officer had made his appeal, Tom Swift did not reply. His thoughts were busy with many things. Somehow, it seemed of late, there had been many demands on him, demands that had been hard and trying.

In the past he had not hesitated, but in those cases friendship, as well as a desire for adventures, had urged him. Now he thought he had had his fill of adventures.

"Well?" asked Mr. Whitford, gently. "What's your answer, Tom? Don't you think this is a sort of duty—call to you?"

"A duty—call?" repeated the young inventor.

"Yes. Of course I realize that it isn't like a soldier's call to battle, but Uncle Sam needs you just the same. When there is a war the soldiers are called on to repel an enemy. Now the smugglers are just as much an enemy of the United States, in a certain way, as an armed invader would be."

"One strikes at the life and liberty of the people, while the smugglers try to cheat Uncle Sam out of money that is due him. I'm not going to enter into a discussion as to the right of the government to impose duties. People have their own opinion as to that. But, as long as the law says certain duties are to be collected, it is the duty of every citizen, not only to pay those dues, but to help collect them. That's what I'm asking you to do, Tom."

"I don't want to get prosy, or deliver a lecture on the work of the custom house, Tom, but, honestly, I think it is a duty you owe to your country to help catch these smugglers. I admit I'm at the end of my rope. This last clew has failed. The Fogers seem to be innocent of wrong doing. We need your help, Tom."

"But I don't see how I can help you."

"Of course you can! You're an expert with airships. The smugglers are using airships, of that I'm sure. You tell me you have just perfected a noiseless aircraft. That will be just the thing. You can hover on the border, near the line dividing New York State from Canada, or near the St. Lawrence, which is the natural division for a certain distance, and when you see an airship coming along you can slip up in your noiseless one, overhaul it, and make them submit to a search."

"But I won't have any authority to do that," objected Tom, who really did not care for the commission.

"Oh, I'll see that you get the proper authority all right," said Mr. Whitford significantly. "I made you a temporary deputy to-night, but if you'll undertake this work, to catch the smugglers in their airships, you will be made a regular custom official."

"Yes, but supposing I can't catch them?" interposed our hero. "They may have very fast airships, and—"

"I guess you'll catch 'em all right!" put in Ned, who was at his chum's side as they walked along a quiet Shopton street in the darkness. "There's not an aeroplane going that can beat yours, Tom."

"Well, perhaps I COULD get them," admitted the young inventor. "But—"

"Then you'll undertake this work for Uncle Sam?" interrupted Mr. Whitford eagerly. "Come, Tom, I know you will."

"I'm not so sure of that," spoke Tom. "It isn't going to be as easy as you think. There are many difficulties in the way. In the first place the smuggling may be done over such a wide area that it would need a whole fleet of airships to capture even one of the others, for they might choose a most unfrequented place to cross the border."

"Oh, we would be in communication with you," said the agent. "We can come pretty near telling where the contraband goods will be shipped from, but the trouble is, after we get our tips, we can't get to the place before they have flown away. But with your airship, you could catch them, after we sent you, say a wireless message, about where to look for them. So that's no objection. You have a wireless outfit on your airships, haven't you, Tom?"

"Yes, that part is all right."

"Then you can't have any more objections, Tom."

"Well, there are some. For instance you say most of this smuggling is done at night."

"Practically all of it, yes."

"Well, it isn't going to be easy to pick out a contraband airship in the dark, and chase it. But I'll tell you what

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"I'll do, Mr. Whitford, I feel as if I had sort of 'fallen down' on this clew business, as the newspaper men say, and I owe it to you to make good in some way."

"That's what I want—not that I think you haven't done all you could," interposed the agent.

"Well, if I can figure out some way, by which I think I can come anywhere near catching these smugglers, I'll undertake the work!" exclaimed Tom. "I'll do it as a duty to Uncle Sam, and I don't want any reward except my expenses. It's going to cost considerable, but—"

"Don't mind the expense!" interrupted Mr. Whitford. "Uncle Sam will stand that. Why, the government is losing thousands of dollars every week. It's a big leak, and must be stopped, and you're the one to stop it, Tom."

"Well, I'll try. I'll see you in a couple of days, and let you know if I have formed any plan. Now come on, Ned. I'm tired and want to get to bed."

"So do I," added the agent. "I'll call on you day after to-morrow, Tom, and I expect you to get right on the job," he added with a laugh.

"Have you any idea what you are going to do, Tom?" asked his chum, as they turned toward their houses.

"Not exactly. If I go I'll use my noiseless airship. That will come in handy. But this night business rather stumps me. I don't quite see my way to get around that. Of course I could use an ordinary searchlight, but that doesn't give a bright enough beam, or carry far enough. It's going to be quite a problem and I've got to think it over."

"Queer about the Fogers; wasn't it, Tom?"

"Yes, I didn't think they were going to let us in."

"There's something going on there, in spite of the fact that they were willing for an inspection to be made," went on Ned.

"I agree with you. I thought it was funny the way Mr. Foger acted about not wanting the men to go down in the cellar."

"So did I, and yet when they got down there they didn't find anything."

"That's so. Well, maybe we're on the wrong track, after all. But I'm going to keep my eyes open. I don't see what Andy wants with an airship platform on the roof of his house. The ground is good enough to start from and land on."

"I should think so, too. But then Andy always did like to show off, and do things different from anybody else. Maybe it's that way now."

"Perhaps," agreed Tom. "Well, here's your house, Ned. Come over in the morning," and, with a good-night, our hero left his chum, proceeding on toward his own home.

"Why, Koku, haven't you gone to bed yet?" asked the young inventor, as, mounting the side steps, he saw his giant servant sitting there on a bench he had made especially for his own use, as ordinary chairs were not substantial enough. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing happen YET," spoke Koku significantly, "but maybe he come pretty soon, and then I get him."

"Get who, Koku?" asked Tom, with quick suspicion.

"I do not know, but Eradicate say he hear someone sneaking around his chicken coop, and I think maybe it be same man who was here once before."

"Oh, you mean the rivals, who were trying to get my moving picture camera?"

"That's what!" exclaimed Koku.

"Hum!" mused Tom. "I must be on the look-out. I'll tell you what I'll do, Koku. I'll set my automatic camera to take the moving pictures of any one who tries to get in my shop, or in the chicken coop. I'll also set the burglar alarm. But you may also stay on the watch, and if anything happens—"

"If anything happens, I will un-happen him!" exclaimed the giant, brandishing a big club he had beside him.

"All right," laughed Tom. "I'm sleepy, and I'm going to bed, but I'll set the automatic camera, and fix it with fuse flashlights, so they will go off if the locks are even touched."

This Tom did, fixing up the wizard camera, which I have told you about in the book bearing that title. It would take moving pictures automatically, once Tom had set the mechanism to unreel the films back of the shutter and lens. The lights would instantly flash, when the electrical connections on the door locks were tampered with, and the pictures would be taken.

Then Tom set the burglar alarm, and, before going to bed he focused a searchlight, from one of his airships,

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on the shed and chicken coop, fastening it outside his room window.

"There!" he exclaimed, as he got ready to turn in, not having awakened the rest of the household, "when the burglar alarm goes off, if it does, it will also start the searchlight, and I'll get a view of who the chicken thief is. I'll also get some pictures."

Then, thinking over the events of the evening, and wondering if he would succeed in his fight with the smugglers, providing he undertook it, Tom fell asleep.

It must have been some time after midnight that he was awakened by the violent ringing of a bell at his ear. At first he thought it was the call to breakfast, and he leaped from bed crying out:

"Yes, Mrs. Baggert, I'm coming!"

A moment later he realized what it was.

"The burglar alarm!" he cried. "Koku, are you there? Someone is trying to get into the chicken coop!" for a glance at the automatic indicator, in connection with the alarm, had shown Tom that the henhouse, and not his shop, had been the object of attack.

"I here!" cried Koku, "I got him!"

A series of startled cries bore eloquent testimony to this.

"I'm coming!" cried Tom. And then he saw a wonderful sight. The whole garden, his shop, the henhouse and all the surrounding territory was lighted up with a radiance almost like daylight. The beams of illumination came from the searchlight Tom had fixed outside his window, but never before had the lantern given such a glow.

"That's wonderful!" cried Tom, as he ran to examine it. "What has happened? I never had such a powerful beam before. There must be something that I have stumbled on by accident. Say, that is a light all right! Why it goes for miles and miles, and I never projected a beam as far as this before."

As Tom looked into a circle of violet-colored glass set in the side of the small searchlight, to see what had caused the extraordinary glow, he could observe nothing out of the ordinary. The violet glass was to protect the eyes from the glare.

"It must be that, by accident, I made some new connection at the dynamo," murmured Tom.

"Hi! Lemme go! Lemme go, Massa giant! I ain't done nuffin'!" yelled a voice.

"I got you!" cried Koku.

"It's an ordinary chicken thief this time I guess," said Tom. "But this light—this great searchlight—"

Then a sudden thought came to him.

"By Jove!" he cried. "If I can find out the secret of how I happened to project such a beam, it will be the very thing to focus on the smugglers from my noiseless airship! That's what I need—a searchlight such as never before has been made—a terrifically powerful one. And I've got it, if I can only find out just how it happened. I've got to look before the current dies out."

Leaving the brilliant beams on in full blast, Tom ran down the stairs to get to his shop, from which the electrical power came.

CHAPTER VIII. TOM'S NEWEST INVENTION

"I got him, Mr. Tom!"

"Oh, please, good Massa Swift! Make him leggo me! He suah am squeezin' de liber outer me!"

"Shall I conflict the club upon him, Mr. Tom?"

It was Koku who asked this last question, as Tom came running toward the giant. In the strange glare from the searchlight, the young inventor saw his big servant holding tightly to a rather small, colored man, while the camera, which was focused full on them, was clicking away at a great rate, taking picture after picture on the roll of films.

"No, don't INFLICT nor CONFLICT the club on him, Koku," advised Tom. "Who is he?"

"I don't know, Mr. Tom. I was in hiding, in the darkness, waiting for him to come back. He had been here once before in the evening, Eradicate says. Well, he came while I was waiting and I detained him. Then the lights went up. They are very bright lights, Mr. Tom."

"Yes, brighter than I expected they would be. I must look and see what causes it. So you detained him, did you, Koku?"

"Yes, and what exposition shall I make of him?"

"What DISPOSITION?" corrected Tom, with a laugh. "Well, did he get any chickens, Koku?"

"Oh, no, I was too tight for him."

"Oh, you mean too fast, or quick. Well, if he didn't get any, I guess you might let him go. I have too much to attend to, to bother with him."

"Oh, bress yo' for dat, Massa Tom!" cried the negro, whom Tom recognized as a worthless character about the town. "I didn't go fo' to do nuffin', Massa Tom. I were jest goin' t' look in de coop, t' count an' see how many fowls mah friend Eradicate had, an' den—"

"Yes, and then I tie you!" broke in Koku.

"You collared him, I guess you mean to say," spoke Tom with a laugh. "Well, I guess, Sam," speaking to the negro, "if YOU had counted Rad's chickens HE couldn't have counted as many in the morning. But be off, and don't come around again, or you might have to count the bars in a jail cell for a change."

"Bress yo' honey. I won't neber come back."

"Shall release him?" asked Koku doubtfully.

"Yes," said Tom.

"And not reflect the club on him?"

The giant raised his club longingly.

"Oh, Massa Tom, protect me!" cried Sam.

"No, don't even REFLECT the club on him," advised the young inventor with a laugh. "He hasn't done any harm, and he may have been the means of a great discovery. Remember Sam," Tom went on sternly, "I have your picture, as you were trying to break into the coop, and if you come around again, I'll use it as evidence against you."

"Oh, I won't come. Not as long as dat giant am heah, anyhow," said the negro earnestly. "Besides, I were only goin' t' count Eradicate's chickens, t' see ef he had as many as I got."

"All right," responded Tom. "Now, Koku, you may escort him off the premises, and be on the lookout the rest of the night, off and on. Where's Rad?"

"He has what he says is 'de misery' in his back so that he had to go to bed," explained the giant, to account for the faithful colored man not having responded to the alarm.

"All right, get rid of Sam, and then come back."

As Tom turned to go in his shop he saw his aged father coming slowly toward him. Mr. Swift had hastily dressed.

"What is the matter, Tom?" he asked. "Has anything happened? I heard your alarm go off, and I came as quickly as I could."

"Nothing much has happened, father, excepting a chicken thief. But something great may come of it. Do you

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notice that searchlight, and how powerful it is?"

"I do, Tom. I never knew you had one as big as that."

"Neither did I, and I haven't, really. That's one of my smallest ones, but something seems to have happened to it to make it throw out a beam like that. I'm just going to look. Come on in the shop."

The two inventors, young and old, entered, and Tom quickly crossed to where the wires from the automatic dynamo, extended to the searchlight outside the window of his room. He made a quick inspection.

"Look, father!" he cried. "The alternating current from the automatic dynamo has become crossed with direct current from the big storage battery in a funny way. It must have been by accident, for never in the world would I think of connecting up in that fashion. I would have said it would have made a short circuit at once."

"But it hasn't. On the contrary, it has given a current of peculiar strength and intensity—a current that would seem to be made especially for searchlights. Dad, I'm on the edge of a big discovery."

"I believe you, Tom," said his father. "That certainly is a queer way for wires to be connected. How do you account for it?"

"I can't. That is unless some one meddled with the connections after I made them. That must be it. I'll ask Rad and Koku." Just then the giant came in. "Koku, did you touch the wires?" asked Tom.

"Well, Mr. Tom, I didn't mean to. I accidentally pulled one out a while ago, when I was waiting for the thief to come, but I put it right back again. I hope I did no damage."

"No, on the contrary, you did a fine thing, Koku. I never would have dared make such connections myself, but you, not knowing any better, did just the right thing to make an almost perfect searchlight current. It is wonderful! Probably for any other purpose such a current would be useless, but it is just the thing for a great light."

"And why do you need such a powerful light, Tom?" asked Mr. Swift. "Why, it is of extraordinary brilliancy, and it goes for several miles. Look how plainly you can pick out the trees on Nob's Hill," and he pointed to an elevation some distance away from the Swift homestead, across the woods and meadows.

"I believe I could see a bird perched there, if there was one!" exclaimed Tom enthusiastically. "That certainly is a wonderful light. With larger carbons, better parabolic mirrors, a different resistance box, better connections, and a more powerful primary current there is no reason why I could not get a light that would make objects more plainly visible than in the daytime, even in the darkest night, and at a great distance."

"But what would be the object of such a light, Tom?"

"To play upon the smugglers, dad, and catch them as they come over the border in the airship."

"Smugglers, Tom! You don't mean to tell me you are going away again, and after smugglers?"

"Well, dad, I've had an offer, and I think I'll take it. There's no money in it, but I think it is my duty to do my best for Uncle Sam. The one thing that bothered me was how to get a view of the airship at night. This searchlight has solved the problem—that is if I can make a permanent invention of this accident, and I think I can."

"Oh, Tom, I hate to think of you going away from home again," said his father a bit sadly.

"Don't worry, father. I'm not going far this time. Only to the Canadian border, and that's only a few hundred miles. But I want to see if I can cut the current off, and turn it on again. When a thing happens by accident you never know whether you can get just exactly the same conditions again."

Tom shut off the current from the dynamo, and the powerful beam of light died out. Then he turned it on once more, and it glowed as brightly as before. He did this several times, and each time it was a success.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom. "To-morrow I'll start on my latest invention, a great searchlight!"

CHAPTER IX. "BEWARE OF THE COMET!"

"Well, Tom, what are you up to now?"

Ned Newton peered in the window of the shop at his chum, who was busy over a bench.

"This is my latest invention, Ned. Come on in."

"Looks as though you were going to give a magic lantern show. Or is it for some new kinds of moving pictures? Say, do you remember the time we gave a show in the barn, and charged a nickel to come in? You were the clown, and—"

"I was not! You were the clown. I was part of the elephant. The front end, I think."

"Oh, so you were. I'm thinking of another one. But what are you up to now? Is it a big magic lantern?"

Ned came over toward the bench, in front of which Tom stood, fitting together sheets of heavy brass in the form of a big square box. In one side there was a circular opening, and there were various wheels and levers on the different sides and on top. The interior contained parabolic curved mirrors.

"It's a SORT of a lantern, and I hope it's going to do some MAGIC work," explained Tom with a smile. "But it isn't the kind of magic lantern you mean. It won't throw pictures on a screen, but it may show some surprising pictures to us—that is if you come along, and I think you will."

"Talking riddles; eh?" laughed Ned. "What's the answer?"

"Smugglers."

"I thought you were talking about a lantern."

"So I am, and it's the lantern that's going to show up the smugglers, so you can call it a smuggler's magic lantern if you like."

"Then you're going after them?"

This conversation took place several days after the raid on the Foger house, and after Tom's accidental discovery of how to make a new kind of searchlight. In the meantime he had not seen Ned, who had been away on a visit.

"Yes, I've made up my mind to help Uncle Sam," spoke Tom, "and this is one of the things I'll need in my work. It's going to be the most powerful searchlight ever made—that is, I never heard of any portable electric lights that will beat it."

"What do you mean, Tom?"

"I mean that I'm inventing a new kind of searchlight, Ned. One that I can carry with me on my new noiseless airship, and one that will give a beam of light that will be visible for several miles, and which will make objects in its focus as plain as if viewed by daylight."

"And it's to show up the smugglers?"

"That's what. That is it will if we can get on the track of them."

"But what did you mean when you said it would be the most powerful portable light ever made."

"Just what I said. I've got to carry this searchlight on an airship with me, and, in consequence, it can't be very heavy. Of course there are stationary searchlights, such lights as are in lighthouses, that could beat mine all to pieces for candle power, and for long distance visibility. But they are the only ones."

"That's the way to do things, Tom! Say, I'm going with you all right after those smugglers. But where are some of those powerful stationary searchlights you speak of?"

"Oh, there are lots of them. One was in the Eiffel Tower, during the Paris Exposition. I didn't see that, but I have read about it. Another is in one of the twin lighthouses at the High-lands, on the Atlantic coast of New Jersey, just above Asbury Park. That light is of ninety-five million candle power, and the lighthouse keeper there told me it was visible, on a clear night, as far as the New Haven, Connecticut, lighthouse, a distance of fifty miles."

"Fifty miles! That's some light!" gasped Ned.

"Well, you must remember that the Highlands light is up on a very high hill, and the tower is also high, so there is quite an elevation, and then think of ninety-five million candle power—think of it!"

"I can't!" cried Ned. "It gives me a head-ache."

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"Well, of course I'm not going to try to beat that," went on Tom with a laugh, "but I am going to have a very powerful light." And he then related how he had accidentally discovered a new way to connect the wires, so as to get, from a dynamo and a storage battery a much stronger, and different, current than usual.

"I'm making the searchlight now," Tom continued, "and soon I'll be ready to put in the lens, and the carbons."

"And then what?"

"Then I'm going to attach it to my noiseless airship, and we'll have a night flight. It may work, and it may not. If it does, I think we'll have some astonishing results."

"I think we will, Tom. Can I do anything to help you?"

"Yes, file some of the rough edges off these sheets of brass, if you will. There's an old pair of gloves to put on to protect your hands, otherwise you'll be almost sure to cut 'em, when the file slips. That brass is extra hard."

The two boys were soon working away, and were busy over the big lantern when Mr. Whitford came along. Koku was, as usual, on guard at the outer door of the shop, but he knew the custom officer, and at once admitted him.

"Well, Tom, how you coming on?" he asked.

"Pretty good. I think I've got just what I want. A powerful light for night work."

"That's good. You'll need it. They've got so they only smuggle the goods over in the night now. How soon do you think you'll be able to get on the border for Uncle Sam?"

"Why, is there any great rush?" asked Tom, as he noticed a look of annoyance pass over the agent's face.

"Yes, the smugglers have been hitting us pretty hard lately. My superiors are after me to do something, but I can't seem to do it. My men are working hard, but we can't catch the rascals."

"You see, Tom, they've stopped, temporarily, bringing goods over the St. Lawrence. They're working now in the neighborhood of Huntington, Canada, and the dividing line between the British possessions and New York State, runs along solid ground there. It's a wild and desolate part of country, too, and I haven't many men up there."

"Don't the Canadian custom officers help?" asked Ned.

"Well, they haven't been of any aid to us so far," was the answer. "No doubt they are trying, but it's hard to get an airship at night when you're on the ground, and can't even see it."

"How did they come to use airships?" asked Tom.

"Well, it was because we were too sharp after them when they tried to run things across the line afoot, or by wagons," replied the agent. "You must know that in every principal city, at or near the border line, there is a custom house. Goods brought from Canada to the United States must pass through there and pay a duty."

"Of course if lawless people try to evade the duty they don't go near the custom house. But there are inspectors stationed at the principal roads leading from the Dominion into Uncle Sam's territory, and they are always on the lookout. They patrol the line, sometimes through a dense wilderness, and again over a desolate plain, always on the watch. If they see persons crossing the line they stop them and examine what they have. If there is nothing dutiable they are allowed to pass. If they have goods on which there is a tax, they either have to pay or surrender the goods."

"But don't the smugglers slip over in spite of all the precautions?" asked Ned. "Say at some lonely ravine, or stretch of woods?"

"I suppose they do, occasionally," replied Mr. Whitford. "Yet the fact that they never can tell when one of the inspectors or deputies is coming along, acts as a stop. You see the border line is divided up into stretches of different lengths. A certain man, or men, are held responsible for each division. They must see that no smugglers pass. That makes them on the alert."

"Why, take it out west, I have a friend who told me that he often travels hundreds of miles on horseback, with pack ponies carrying his camping outfit, patrolling the border on the lookout for smugglers."

"In fact Uncle Sam has made it so hard for the ordinary smuggler to do business on foot or by wagon, that these fellows have taken to airships. And it is practically impossible for an inspector patrolling the border to be on the lookout for the craft of the air. Even if they saw them, what could they do? It would be out of the question to stop them. That's why we need some one with a proper machine who can chase after them, who can sail through the air, and give them a fight in the clouds if they have to."

"Our custom houses on the ground, and our inspectors on horse back, traveling along the border, can't meet

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the issue. We're depending on you, Tom Swift, and I hope you don't disappoint us."

"Well," spoke Tom, when Mr. Whitford had finished. "I'll do my best for you. It won't take very long to complete my searchlight, and then I'll give it a trial. My airship is ready for service, and once I find we're all right I'll start for the border."

"Good! And I hope you'll catch the rascals!" fervently exclaimed the custom official. "Well, Tom, I'm leaving it all to you. Here are some reports from my deputies. I'll leave them with you, and you can look them over, and map out a campaign. When you are ready to start I'll see you again, and give you any last news I have. I'll also arrange so that you can communicate with me, or some of my men."

"Have you given up all suspicion of the Fogers?" asked the young inventor.

"Yes. But I still think Shopton is somehow involved in the custom violations. I'm going to put one of my best men on the ground here, and go to the border myself."

"Well, I'll be ready to start in a few days," said Tom, as the government agent departed.

For the next week our hero and his chum were busy completing work on the great searchlight, and in attaching it to the airship. Koku helped them, but little of the plans, or of the use to which the big lantern was to be put, were made known to him, for Koku liked to talk, and Tom did not want his project to become known.

"Well, we'll give her a trial to-night," said Tom one afternoon, following a day of hard work. "We'll go up, and flash the light down."

"Who's going?"

"Just us two. You can manage the ship, and I'll look after the light."

So it was arranged, and after supper Tom and his chum, having told Mr. Swift were they were going, slipped out to the airship shed, and soon were ready to make an ascent. The big lantern was fastened to a shaft that extended above the main cabin. The shaft was hollow and through it came the wires that carried the current. Tom, from the cabin below, could move the lantern in any direction, and focus it on any spot he pleased. By means of a toggle joint, combined with what are known as "lazy-tongs," the lantern could be projected over the side of the aircraft and be made to gleam on the earth, directly below the ship.

For his new enterprise Tom used the Falcon in which he had gone to Siberia after the platinum. The new noiseless motor had been installed in this craft.

"All ready, Ned?" asked Tom after an inspection of the searchlight.

"All ready, as far as I'm concerned, Tom."

"Then let her go!"

Like a bird of the night, the great aeroplane shot into the air, and, with scarcely a sound that could be heard ten feet away, she moved forward at great speed.

"What are you going to do first?" asked Ned.

"Fly around a bit, and then come back over my house. I'm going to try the lantern on that first, and see what I can make out from a couple of miles up in the air."

Up and up went the Falcon, silently and powerfully, until the barograph registered nearly fourteen thousand feet.

"This is high enough," spoke Tom.

He shifted a lever that brought the searchlight into focus on Shopton, which lay below them. Then, turning on the current, a powerful beam of light gleamed out amid the blackness.

"Jove! That's great!" cried Ned. "It's like a shaft of daylight!"

"That's what I intended it to be!" cried Tom in delight.

With another shifting of the lever he brought the light around so that it began to pick up different buildings in the town.

"There's the church!" cried Ned. "It's as plain as day, in that gleam."

"And there's the railroad depot," added Tom.

"And Andy Foger's house!"

"Yes, and there's my house!" exclaimed Tom a moment later, as the beam rested on his residence and shops. "Say, it's plainer than I thought it would be. Hold me here a minute, Ned."

Ned shut off the power from the propellers, and the airship was stationary. Tom took a pair of binoculars, and looked through them at his home in the focus of light.

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"I can count the bricks in the chimney!" he cried in eagerness at the success of his great searchlight. "It's even better than I thought it was! Let's go down, Ned."

Slowly the airship sank. Tom played his light all about, picking up building after building, and one familiar spot after another. Finally he brought the beam on his own residence again, when not far above it.

Suddenly there arose a weird cry. Tom and Ned knew at once that it was Eradicate.

"A comet! A comet!" yelled the colored man. "De end ob de world am comin'! Run, chillens, run! Beware ob de comet!"

"Eradicate's afraid!" cried Tom with a laugh.

"Oh good mistah comet! Doan't take me!" went on the colored man. "I ain't neber done nuffin', an' mah mule Boomerang ain't needer. But ef yo' has t' take somebody, take Boomerang!"

"Keep quiet, Rad! It's all right!" cried Tom. But the colored man continued to shout in fear.

Then, as the two boys looked on, and as the airship came nearer to the earth, Ned, who was looking down amid the great illumination, called to Tom:

"Look at Koku!"

Tom glanced over, and saw his giant servant, with fear depicted on his face, running away as fast as he could. Evidently Eradicate's warning had frightened him.

"Say, he can run!" cried Ned. "Look at him leg it!"

"Yes, and he may run away, never to come back," exclaimed Tom. "I don't want to lose him, he's too valuable. I know what happened once when he got frightened. He was away for a week before I could locate him, and he hid in the swamp. I'm not going to have that happen again."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to chase after him in the airship. It will be a good test for chasing the smugglers. Put me after him, Ned, and I'll play the searchlight on him so we can't lose him!"

CHAPTER X. OFF FOR THE BORDER

"There he goes, Tom!"

"Yes, I see him!"

"Look at him run!"

"No wonder. Consider his long legs, Ned. Put on a little more speed, and keep a little lower down. It's clear of trees right here."

"There he goes into that clump of bushes."

"I see him. He'll soon come out," and Tom flashed the big light on the fleeing giant to whom fear seemed to lend more than wings.

But even a giant, long legged though he be, and powerful, cannot compete with a modern airship—certainly not such a one as Tom Swift had.

"We're almost up to him, Tom!" cried Ned a little later.

"Yes! I'm keeping track of him. Oh, why doesn't he know enough to stop? Koku! Koku!" called Tom. "It's all right! I'm in the airship! This is a searchlight, not a comet. Wait for us!"

They could see the giant glance back over his shoulder at them, and, when he saw how close the gleaming light was he made a desperate spurt. But it was about his last, for he was a heavy man, and did not have any too good wind.

"We'll have him in another minute," predicted Tom. "Give me a bit more speed, Ned."

The lad who was managing the Falcon swung the accelerating lever over another notch, and the craft surged ahead. Then Ned executed a neat trick. Swinging the craft around in a half circle, he suddenly opened the power full, and so got ahead of Koku. The next minute, sliding down to earth, Tom and Ned came to a halt, awaiting the oncoming of Koku, who, finding the glaring light full in his face, came to a halt.

"Why, Koku, what's the matter?" asked Tom kindly, as he turned off the powerful beams, and switched on some ordinary incandescents, that were on the outside of the craft. They made an illumination by which the giant could make out his master and the latter's chum. "Why did you run, Koku?" asked Tom.

"Eradicate say to," was the simple answer. "He say comet come to eat up earth. Koku no want to be eaten."

"Eradicate is a big baby!" exclaimed Tom. "See, there is no danger. It is only my new searchlight," and once more the young inventor switched it on. Koku jumped back, but when he saw that nothing happened he did not run.

"It's harmless," said Tom, and briefly he explained how the big lantern worked.

Koku was reassured now, and consented to enter the airship. He was rather tired from his run, and was glad to sit down.

"Where to now; back home?" asked Ned, as they made ready to start.

"No, I was thinking of going over to Mr. Damon's house. I'd like him to see my searchlight. And I want to find out if he's going with us on the trip to the border."

"Of course he will!" predicted Ned. "He hasn't missed a trip with you in a long while. He'll go if his wife will let him," and both boys laughed, for Mr. Damon's wife was nearly always willing to let him do as he liked, though the odd man had an idea that she was violently opposed to his trips.

Once more the Falcon went aloft, and again the searchlight played about. It brought out with startling distinctness the details of the towns and villages over which they passed, and distant landmarks were also made plainly visible.

"We'll be there in a few minutes now," said Tom, as he flashed the light on a long slant toward the town of Waterford, where Mr. Damon lived.

"I can see his house," spoke Ned a moment later. He changed the course of the craft, to bring it to a stop in the yard of the eccentric man, and, shortly afterward, they landed. Tom who had shut off the searchlight for a minute, turned it on again, and the house and grounds of Mr. Damon were enveloped in a wonderful glow.

"That will bring him out," predicted Tom.

A moment later they heard his voice.

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"Bless my astronomy!" cried Mr. Damon. "There's a meteor fallen in our yard. Come out, wife—everybody—call the servants. It's a chance of a lifetime to see one, and they're valuable, too! Bless my star dust! I must tell Tom Swift of this!"

Out into the glare of the great searchlight ran Mr. Damon, followed by his wife and several of the servants.

"There it is!" cried the odd man. "There's the meteor!"

"First we're a comet and then we're a meteor," said Ned with a laugh.

"Oh, I hope it doesn't bury itself in the earth before I can get Tom Swift here!" went on Mr. Damon, capering about. "Bless my telephone book. I must call him up right away!"

"I'm here now, Mr. Damon!" shouted Tom, as he alighted from the airship. "That's my new searchlight you're looking at."

"Bless my—" began Mr. Damon, but he couldn't think of nothing strong enough for a moment, until he blurted out "dynamite cartridge! Bless my dynamite cartridge! Tom Swift! His searchlight! Bless my nitro-glycerine!"

Then Tom shut off the glare, and, as Mr. Damon and his wife came aboard he showed them how the light worked. He only used a part of the current, as he knew if he put on the full glare toward Mr. Damon's house, neighbors might think it was on fire.

"Well, that's certainly wonderful," said Mrs. Damon. "In fact this is a wonderful ship."

"Can't you take Mrs. Damon about, and show her how it works," said Mr. Damon suddenly. "Show her the ship."

"I will," volunteered Tom.

"No, let Ned," said the eccentric man. "I—er—I want to speak to you, Tom."

Mrs. Damon, with a queer glance at her husband, accompanied Ned to the motor room. As soon as she was out of hearing the odd gentleman came over and whispered to the young inventor.

"I say, Tom, what's up?"

"Smugglers. You know. I told you about 'em. I'm going after 'em with my big searchlight."

"Bless my card case! So you did. But, I say, Tom, I—I want to go!"

"I supposed you would. Well, you're welcome, of course. We leave in a few days. It isn't a very long trip this time, but there may be plenty of excitement. Then I'll book you for a passage, and—"

"Hush! Not another word! Here she comes, Tom. My wife! Don't breathe a syllable of it to her. She'll never let me go." Then, for the benefit of Mrs. Damon, who came back into the main cabin with Ned at that moment, her husband added in loud tones:

"Yes, Tom it certainly is a wonderful invention. I congratulate you," and, at the same time he winked rapidly at our hero. Tom winked in return.

"Well, I guess we'll start back," remarked Tom, after a bit. "I'll see you again, I suppose, Mr. Damon?"

"Oh yes, of course. I'll be over—soon," and once more he winked as he whispered in Tom's ear: "Don't leave me behind, my boy."

"I won't," whispered the young inventor in answer.

Mrs. Damon smiled, and Tom wondered if she had discovered her husband's innocent secret.

Tom and Ned, with Koku, made a quick trip back to Shopton, using the great searchlight part of the way. The next day they began preparations for the journey to the border.

It did not take long to get ready. No great amount of stores or supplies need be taken along, as they would not be far from home, not more than a two days' journey at any time. And they would be near large cities, where food and gasoline could easily be obtained.

About a week later, therefore, Mr. Whitford the government agent, having been communicated with in the meanwhile, Tom and Ned, with Koku and Mr. Damon were ready to start.

"I wonder if Mr. Whitford is coming to see us off?" mused Tom, as he looked to see if everything was aboard, and made sure that the searchlight was well protected by its waterproof cover.

"He said he'd be here," spoke Ned.

"Well, it's past time now. I don't know whether to start, or to wait."

"Wait a few minutes more," advised Ned. "His train may be a few minutes behind time."

They waited half an hour, and Tom was on the point of starting when a messenger boy came hurrying into the

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yard where the great airship rested on its bicycle wheels.

"A telegram for you, Tom," called the lad, who was well acquainted with our hero.

Hastily the young inventor tore open the envelope.

"Here's news!" he exclaimed,

"What is it?" asked Ned.

"It's from Mr. Whitford," answered his chum. "He says: 'Can't be with you at start. Will meet you in Logansville. Have new clew to the Fogers!'"

"Great Scott!" cried Ned, staring at his chum.

CHAPTER XI. ANDY'S NEW AIRSHIP

Tom Swift tossed a quarter to the messenger boy, and leaped over the rail to the deck of his airship, making his way toward the pilot house.

"Start the motor, Ned," he called. "Are you all ready, Mr. Damon?"

"Bless my ancient history, yes. But—"

"Are you going, Tom?" asked Ned.

"Of course. That's why we're here; isn't it? We're going to start for the border to catch the smugglers. Give me full speed, I want the motor to warm up."

"But that message from Mr. Whitford? He says he has a new clew to the Fogers."

"That's all right. He may have, but he doesn't ask us to work it up. He says he will meet us in Logansville, and he can't if we don't go there. We're off for Logansville. Good-bye dad. I'll bring you back a souvenir, Mrs. Baggert," he called to the housekeeper. "Sorry you're not coming, Rad, but I'll take you next time."

"Dat's all right, Massa Tom. I doan't laik dem smuggler-fellers, nohow. Good-bye an' good luck!"

"Bless my grab bag!" gasped Mr. Damon. "You certainly do things, Tom."

"That's the only way to get things done," replied the young inventor. "How about you, Ned? Motor all right?"

"Sure."

"Then let her go!"

A moment later Ned had started the machinery, and Tom, in the pilot house, had pulled the lever of the elevating rudder. Whizzing along, but making scarcely any sound, the noiseless airship mounted upward, and was off on her flight to capture the men who were cheating Uncle Sam.

"What are you going to do first, when you get there, Tom?" asked Ned, as he joined his chum in the pilot house, having set the motor and other apparatus to working automatically. "I mean in Logansville?"

"I don't know. I'll have to wait and see how things develop."

"That's where Mr. Foger lives, you know."

"Yes, but I doubt if he is there now. He and Andy are probably still in the old house here, though what they are doing is beyond me to guess."

"What do you suppose this new clew is that Mr. Whitford wired you about?"

"Haven't any idea. If he wants us to get after it he'll let us know. It won't take us long to get there at this rate. But I think I'll slow down a bit, for the motor is warmed up now, and there's no use racking it to pieces. But we're moving nicely; aren't we, Ned?"

"I should say so. This is the best all-around airship you've got."

"It is since I put the new motor in. Well, I wonder what will happen when we get chasing around nights after the smugglers? It isn't going to be easy work, I can tell you."

"I should say not. How you going to manage it?"

"Well, I haven't just decided. I'm going to have a talk with the customs men, and then I'll go out night after night and cruise around at the most likely place where they'll rush goods across the border. As soon as I see the outlines of an airship in the darkness, or hear the throb of her motor, I'll take after her, and—"

"Yes, and you can do it, too, Tom, for she can't hear you coming and you can flash the big light on her and the smugglers will think the end of the world has come. Cracky! Its going to be great, Tom! I'm glad I came along. Maybe they'll fight, and fire at us! If they have guns aboard, as they probably will have, we'll—"

"Bless my armor plate!" interrupted Mr. Damon. "Please don't talk about such hair-raising things, Ned! Talk about something pleasant."

"All right," agreed Tom's chum, and then, as the airship sailed along, high above the earth, they talked of many things.

"I think when we sight Logansville," said Tom, after a while, "that I will come down in some quiet spot, before we reach the city."

"Don't you want to get into a crowd?" asked Ned.

"No, it isn't that. But Mr. Foger lives there you know, and, though he may not be at home, there are probably

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some men who are interested in the thing he is working at."

"You mean smuggling?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that. At the same time it may have leaked out that we are after the smugglers in an airship and it may be that Mr. Whitford doesn't want the Fogers to know I'm on the ground until he has a chance to work up his clew. So I'll just go slowly, and remain in the background for a while."

"Well, maybe it's a good plan," agreed Tom.

"Of course," began Tom, "it would be—"

He was interrupted by a shout from Koku, who had gone to the motor room, for the giant was as fascinated over machinery as a child. As he yelled there came a grinding, pounding noise, and the big ship seemed to waver, to quiver in the void, and to settle toward the earth.

"Something's happened!" cried Ned, as he sprang for the place where most of the mechanism was housed.

"Bless my toy balloon!" shouted Mr. Damon. "We're falling, Tom!"

It needed but a glance at the needle of the barograph, to show this. Tom followed Ned at top speed, but ere either of them reached the engine room the pounding and grinding noises ceased, the airship began to mount upward again, and it seemed that the danger had passed.

"What can have happened?" gasped Tom.

"Come on, we'll soon see," said Ned, and they rushed on, followed by Mr. Damon, who was blessing things in a whisper.

The chums saw a moment later—saw a strange sight—for there was Koku, the giant, kneeling down on the floor of the motor room, with his big hands clasped over one of the braces of the bed-plate of the great air pump, which cooled the cylinders of the motor. The pump had torn partly away from its fastenings. Kneeling there, pressing down on the bed-plate with all his might, Koku was in grave danger, for the rod of the pump, plunging up and down, was within a fraction of an inch of his head, and, had he moved, the big taper pin, which held the plunger to the axle, would have struck his temple and probably would have killed him, for the pin, which held the plunger rigid, projected several inches from the smooth side of the rod.

"Koku, what is the matter? Why are you there?" cried Tom, for he could see nothing wrong with the machinery now. The airship was sailing on as before.

"Bolt break," explained the giant briefly, for he had learned some engineering terms since he had been with Tom. "Bolt that hold pump fast to floor crack off. Pump him begin to jump up. Make bad noise. Koku hold him down, but pretty hard work. Better put in new bolt, Mr. Tom."

They could see the strain that was put upon the giant in his swelling veins and the muscles of his hands and arms, for they stood out knotted, and in bunches. With all his great strength it was all Koku could do to hold the pump from tearing completely loose.

"Quick, Ned!" cried Tom. "Shut off all the power! Stop the pump! I've got to bolt it fast. Start the gas machine, Mr. Damon. You know how to do it. It works independent of the motor. You can let go in a minute, Koku!"

It took but a few seconds to do all this. Ned stopped the main motor, which had the effect of causing the propellers to cease revolving. Then the airship would have gone down but for the fact that she was now a balloon, Mr. Damon having started the generating machine which sent the powerful lifting gas into the big bag over head.

"Now you can let go, Koku," said Tom, for with the stooping of the motor the air pump ceased plunging, and there was no danger of it tearing loose.

"Bless my court plaster!" cried Mr. Damon. "What happened, Tom?"

As the giant arose from his kneeling position the cause of the accident could easily be seen. Two of the big belts that held down one end of the pump bed-plate to the floor of the airship, had cracked off, probably through some defect, or because of the long and constant vibration on them.

This caused a great strain on the two forward bolts, and the pump starter! to tear itself loose. Had it done so there would have been a serious accident, for there would have been a tangle in the machinery that might never have been repairable. But Koku, who, it seems, had been watching the pump, saw the accident as soon as it occurred. He knew that the pump must be held down, and kept rigid, and he took the only way open to him to accomplish this.

He pressed his big hands down over the place where the bolts had broken off, and by main strength of muscle

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he held the bed-plate in place until the power was shut off.

"Koku, my boy, you did a great thing!" cried Tom, when he realized what had happened. "You saved all our lives, and the airship as well."

"Koku glad," was the simple reply of the giant.

"But, bless my witch hazel!" cried Mr. Damon. "There's blood on your hands, Koku!"

They looked at the giant's palms. They were raw and bleeding.

"How did it happen?" asked Ned.

"Where belts break off, iron rough-like," explained Koku.

"Rough! I should say it was!" cried Tom. "Why, he just pressed with all his might on the jagged end of the belts. Koku you're a hero!"

"Hero same as giant?" asked Koku, curiously.

"No, it's a heap sight better," spoke Tom, and there was a trace of tears in his eyes.

"Bless my vaseline!" exclaimed Mr. Damon, blowing his nose harder than seemed necessary. "Come over here, Koku, and I'll bandage up your hands. Poor fellow, it must hurt a lot!"

"Oh, not so bad," was the simple reply.

While Mr. Damon gave first aid to the injured, Tom and Ned put new bolts in place of the broken ones on the bed-plate, and they tested them to see that they were perfect. New ones were also substituted for the two that had been strained, and in the course of an hour the repairs were made.

"Now we can run as an aeroplane again," said Tom. "But I'm not going to try such speed again. It was the vibration that did it I guess."

They were now over a wild and desolate stretch of country, for the region lying on either side of the imaginary line dividing Canada and New York State, at the point where the St. Lawrence flows north-east, is sparsely settled.

There were stretches of forest that seemed never to have been penetrated, and here and there patches of stunted growth, with little lakes dotted through the wilderness. There were hills and valleys, small streams and an occasional village.

"Just the place for smuggling," observed Tom, as he looked at a map, consulted a clock and figured out that they must be near Logansville. "We can go down here in one of these hollows, surrounded by this tangled forest, and no one would ever know we were here. The smugglers could do the same."

"Are you going to try it?" asked Ned.

"I think I will. We'll go up to quite a height now, and I'll see if I can pick out Logansville. That isn't much of a place I guess. When I sight it I'll select a good place to lay hidden for a day or two, until Mr. Whitford has had a chance to work up his clew."

The airship machinery was now working well again, and Tom sent his craft up about three miles. From there, taking observations through a powerful telescope, he was able, after a little while, to pick out a small town. From its location and general outline he knew it to be Logansville.

"We'll go down about three miles from it," he said to his chum. "They won't be likely to see us then, and we'll stay concealed for a while."

This plan was put into operation, and, a little later the Falcon came to rest in a little grassy clearing, located in among a number of densely wooded hills. It was an ideal place to camp, though very lonesome.

"Now, Ned, let's cut a lot of branches, and pile them over the airship," suggested Tom.

"Cover over the airship? What for?"

"So that in case anyone flies over our heads they won't look down and see us. If the Foggers, or any of the smugglers, should happen to pass over this place, they'd spot us in a minute. We've got to play foxy on this hunt."

"That's so," agreed his chum; and soon the three of them were busy making the airship look like a tangled mass of underbrush. Koku helped by dragging big branches along under his arm, but he could not use his hands very well.

They remained in the little grassy glade three days, thoroughly enjoying their camp and the rest. Tom and Ned went fishing in a nearby lake and had some good luck. They also caught trout in a small stream and broiled the speckled beauties with bacon inside them over live coals at a campfire.

"My! But that's good!" mumbled Ned, with his mouth full of hot trout, and bread and butter.

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"Yes, I'd rather do this than chase smugglers," said Tom, stretching out on his back with his face to the sky. "I wish—"

But he did not finish the sentence. Suddenly from the air above them came a curious whirring, throbbing noise. Tom sat up with a jump! He and Ned gazed toward the zenith. The noise increased and, a moment later, there came into view a big airship, sailing right over their heads.

"Look at that!" cried Tom.

"Hush! They'll hear you," cautioned Ned.

"Nonsense! They're too high up," was Tom's reply. "Mr. Damon, bring me the big binoculars, please!" he called.

"Bless my spectacles, what's up?" asked the odd gentleman as he ran with the glasses toward Tom.

Our hero focused them on the airship that was swiftly sailing across the open space in the wilderness but so high up that there was no danger of our friends being recognized. Then the young inventor uttered a cry of astonishment.

"It's Andy Foger!" he cried. "He's in that airship, and he's got two men with him. Andy Foger, and it's a new biplane. Say, maybe that's the new clew Mr. Whitford wired me about. We must get ready for action! Andy in a new airship means business, and from the whiteness of the canvas planes, I should say that craft was on its first trip."

CHAPTER XII. WARNED AWAY

"Tom, are you sure it's Andy?"

"Take a look yourself," replied the young inventor, passing his chum the binoculars.

"Bless my bottle of ink!" cried Mr. Damon. "Is it possible?"

"Quick, Ned, or you'll miss him!" cried Tom.

The young bank clerk focused the glasses on the rapidly moving airship, and, a moment later, exclaimed:

"Yes, that's Andy all right, but I don't know who the men are with him."

"I couldn't recognize them, either," announced Tom. "But say, Ned, Andy's got a good deal better airship than he had before."

"Yes. This isn't his old one fixed over. I don't believe he ever intended to repair the old one. That hiring of Mr. Dillon to do that, was only to throw him, and us, too, off the track."

Ned passed the glasses to Mr. Damon, who was just in time to get a glimpse of the three occupants of Andy's craft before it passed out of sight over the trees.

"I believe you're right," said Tom to his chum. "And did you notice that there's quite a body, or car, to that craft?"

"Yes. room enough to carry considerable goods," commented Ned. "I wonder where he's going in it?"

"To Logansville, most likely. I tell you what it is, Ned. I think one of us will have to go there, and see if Mr. Whitford has arrived. He may be looking for us. I'm not sure but what we ought not to have done this first. He may think we have not come, or have met with some accident,"

"I guess you're right, Tom. But how shall we go? It isn't going to be any fun to tramp through those woods," and Ned glanced at the wilderness that surrounded the little glade where they had been camping.

"No, and I've about concluded that we might as well risk it, and go in the airship. Mr. Whitford has had time enough to work up his clew, I guess, and Andy will be sure to find out, sooner or later, that we are in the neighborhood. I say let's start for Logansville."

Ned and Mr. Damon agreed with this and soon they were prepared to move.

"Where will you find Mr. Whitford?" asked Ned of his chum, as the Falcon arose in the air.

"At the post-office. That's where we arranged to meet. There is a sort of local custom house there, I believe."

Straight over the forest flew Tom Swift and his airship, with the great searchlight housed on top. They delayed their start until the other craft had had a chance to get well ahead, and they were well up in the air; there was no sight of the biplane in which Andy had sailed over their heads a short time before.

"Where are you going to land?" asked Ned, as they came in view of the town.

"The best place I can pick out," answered Tom. "Just on the outskirts of the place, I think. I don't want to go down right in the centre, as there'll be such a crowd. Yet if Andy has been using his airship here the people must be more or less used to seeing them."

But if the populace of Logansville had been in the habit of having Andy Foger sail over their heads, still they were enough interested in a new craft to crowd around when Tom dropped into a field near some outlying houses. In a moment the airship was surrounded by a crowd of women and children, and there would probably been a lot of men, but for the fact that they were away at work. Tom had come down in a residential section.

"Say, that's a beauty!" cried one boy.

"Let's see if they'll let us go on!" proposed another.

"We're going to have our own troubles," said Tom to his chum. "I guess I'll go into town, and leave the rest of you on guard here. Keep everybody off, if you have to string mildly charged electrical wires about the rail."

But there was no need to take this precaution, for, just as the combined juvenile population of that part of Logansville was prepared to storm, and board the Falcon, Koku appeared on deck.

"Oh, look at the giant!"

"Say, this is a circus airship?"

"Wow! Ain't he big!"

"I'll bet he could lift a house!"

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These and other expressions came from the boys and girls about the airship. The women looked on open-mouthed, and murmurs of surprise and admiration at Koku's size came from a number of men who had hastily run up.

Koku stepped from the airship to the ground, and at once every boy and girl made a bee-line for safety.

"That will do the trick!" exclaimed Tom with a laugh. "Koku, just pull up a few trees, and look as fierce as Bluebeard, and I guess we won't be troubled with curiosity seekers. You can guard the airship, Koku, better than electric wires."

"I fix 'em!" exclaimed the giant, and he tried to look fierce, but it was hard work, for he was very good natured. But he proved a greater attraction than the aircraft, and Tom was glad of it, for he did not like meddlers aboard.

"With Koku to help you, and Mr. Damon to bless things. I guess you can manage until I come back, Ned," said the young inventor, as he made ready to go in to town to see if Mr. Whitford had arrived.

"Oh, we'll get along all right," declared Ned. "Don't worry."

Tom found Mr. Whitford in one of the rooms over the post-office. The custom house official was restlessly pacing the floor.

"Well, Tom!" he exclaimed, shaking hands, "I'm glad to see you. I was afraid something had happened. I was delayed myself, but when I did arrive and found you hadn't been heard from, I didn't know what to think. I couldn't get you on the wireless. The plant here is out of repair."

Tom told of their trip, and the wait they had decided on, and asked:

"What about the new clew; the Fogers?"

"I'm sorry to say it didn't amount to anything. I ran it down, and came to nothing."

"You know Andy has a new airship?"

"Yes. I had men on the trail of it. They say Andy is agent for a firm that manufactures them, but I have my doubts. I haven't given up yet. But say, Tom, you've got to get busy. A big lot of goods was smuggled over last night."

"Where?"

"Well, quite a way from here. I got a telegram about it. Can you get on the job to-night, and do some patrol work along the border? You're only half a mile from it now. Over there is Canada," and he pointed to a town on a hill opposite Logansville.

"Yes, I can get right into action. What place is that?"

"Montford, Canada. I've got men planted there, and the Dominion customs officials are helping us. But I think the smugglers have changed the base of their operations for the time being. If I were you I'd head for the St. Lawrence to-night."

"I will. Don't you want to come along?"

"Why, yes. I believe I'm game. I'll join you later in the day," Mr. Whitford added, as Tom told him where the Falcon was anchored.

The young inventor got back to find a bigger crowd than ever around his airship. But Koku and the others had kept them at a distance.

With the government agent aboard Tom sent his craft into the air at dusk, the crowd cheering lustily. Then, with her nose pointed toward the St. Lawrence, the Falcon was on her way to do a night patrol, and, if possible, detect the smugglers.

It was monotonous work, and unprofitable, for, though Tom sent the airship back and forth for many miles along the wonderful river that formed the path from the Great Lakes to the sea, he had no glimpse of ghostly wings of other aircraft, nor did he hear the beat of propellers, nor the throb of motors, as his own noiseless airship cruised along.

It came on to rain after midnight, and a mist crept down from the clouds, so that even with the great searchlight flashing its powerful beams, it was difficult to see for any great distance.

"Better give it up, I guess," suggested Mr. Whitford toward morning, when they had covered many miles, and had turned back toward Logansville.

"All right," agreed Tom. "But we'll try it again to-morrow night."

He dropped his craft at the anchorage he had selected in the gray dawn of the morning. All on board were

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tired and sleepy. Ned, looking from a window of the cabin, as the Falcon came to a stop, saw something white on the ground.

"I wonder what that is?" he said as he hurried out to pick it up. It was a large white envelope, addressed to Tom Swift, and the name was in printed characters.

"Somebody who wants to disguise their writing," remarked Tom, as he tore it open. A look of surprise came over his face.

"Look here! Mr. Whitford," he cried. "This is the work of the smugglers all right!"

For, staring at Tom, in big printed letters, on a white sheet of paper, was this message:

"If you know what is good for you, Tom Swift, you had better clear out. If you don't your airship will burned, and you may get hurt. We'll burn you in mid-air. Beware and quit. You can't catch us."

"THE COMMITTEE OF THREE."

"Ha! Warned away!" cried Tom. "Well, it will take more than this to make me give up!" and he crumpled the anonymous warning in his hand.

CHAPTER XIII. KOKU SAVES THE LIGHT

"Don't do that!" cried Mr. Whitford.

"What?" asked Tom, in some surprise.

"Don't destroy that letter. It may give us a clew. Let me have it. I'll put a man at work on that end of this game."

"Bless my checkerboard!" cried Mr. Damon. "This game has so many ends that you don't know where to begin to play it."

The government man smoothed out the crumpled piece of paper, and looked at it carefully, and also gazed at the envelope.

"It's pretty hard to identify plain print, done with a lead pencil," he murmured. "And this didn't come through the mail."

"I wonder how it got here?" mused Ned. "Maybe some of the crowd that was here when we started off dropped it for the smugglers. Maybe the smugglers were in that crowd!"

"Let's take a look outside," suggested Mr. Whitford. "We may be able to pick up a clew there."

Although our friends were tired and sleepy, and hungry as well, they forgot all this in the desire to learn more about the mysterious warning that had come to them during the night. They all went outside, and Ned pointed to where he had picked up the envelope.

"Look all around, and see if you can find anything more," directed the custom agent.

"Footprints won't count," said Tom. "There was a regular circus crowd out here yesterday."

"I'm not looking for footprints," replied Mr. Whitford, "I have an idea—"

"Here's something!" interrupted Mr. Damon. "It looks like a lead weight for a deep-sea fishing line. Bless my reel. No one could do fishing here."

"Let me see that!" exclaimed Mr. Whitford eagerly. Then, as he looked at it, he uttered a cry of delight. "I thought so," he said. "Look at this bit of cord tied to the weight."

"What does that signify?" asked Tom.

"And see this little hole in the envelope, or, rather a place that was a hole, but it's torn away now."

"I'm not much the wiser," confessed Ned, with a puzzled look.

"Why, it's as plain as print," declared the government agent. "This warning letter was dropped from an airship, Tom."

"From an airship?"

"Yes. They sailed right over this place, and let the letter fall, with this lead weight attached, to bring it to earth just where they wanted it to fall."

"Bless my postage stamp!" cried Mr. Damon. "I never heard of such a thing."

"I see it now!" exclaimed Tom. "While we were off over the river, watching for the smugglers, they were turning a trick here, and giving us a warning into the bargain. We should have stayed around here. I wonder if it was Andy's airship that was used?"

"We can easily find that out," said Mr. Whitford. "I have a detective stationed in a house not far from where the Fogers live. Andy came back from Shopton yesterday, just before you arrived here, and I can soon let you know whether he was out last night. I'll take this letter with me, and get right up to my office, though I'm afraid this won't be much of a clew after all. Print isn't like handwriting for evidence."

"And to think they sailed right over this place, and we weren't home," mourned Tom. "It makes me mad!"

But there was no use in regretting what had happened, and, after a hot breakfast in the airship, with Mr. Damon presiding at the electrical stove, they all felt more hopeful. Mr. Whitford left for his office, promising to send word to Tom as to whether or not Andy was abroad in the airship during the night.

"I wonder if that 'Committee of Three' is Andy and these two fellows with him in the airship?" asked Ned.

"Hard telling," responded his chum. "Now for a good sleep. Koku, keep the crowd away while we have a rest," for the giant had indulged in a good rest while the airship was on patrol during the night.

Not so much of a crowd came out as on the first day, and Koku had little trouble in keeping them far enough

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away so that Tom and the others could get some rest. Koku walked about, brandishing a big club, and looking as fierce as a giant in a fairy tale. It was afternoon when a message came from Mr. Whitford to the effect that Andy's airship was not out the previous night, and that so far no clues had developed from the letter, or from any other source.

"We'll just have to keep our eyes open," wrote Mr. Whitford. "I think perhaps we are altogether wrong about the Foggers, unless they are deeper than I give them credit for. It might be well to let the smugglers think you are frightened, and go away for a day or so, selecting a more secluded spot to remain in. That may cause them to get bolder, and we may catch them unawares."

"That's a good plan. I'll try it," decided Tom. "We'll move to-morrow to a new location."

"Why not to-night?" asked Ned.

"Because it's getting late, and I want to circle about in daylight and pick out a good place. Morning will do all right."

"Then you're not going out to-night?"

"No. Mr. Whitford writes that as goods were smuggled over last night it will hardly be likely that they will repeat the trick to-night. We'll have a little rest."

"Going to mount guard?" asked Ned.

"No, I don't think so. No one will disturb us."

Afterward the young inventor wished that he had kept a better watch that night, for it nearly proved disastrous for him.

It must have been about midnight that Tom was awakened by a movement in the airship.

"Who's that?" he asked suddenly.

"Koku," came the reassuring reply. "Too hot to sleep in my bunk. I go out on deck."

"All right, Koku," and Tom dozed off again.

Suddenly he was awakened by the sound of a terrific scuffle on deck. Up he jumped, rushing toward the door that led from his sleeping cabin.

"What is it! What's the matter!" he cried.

There came the sound of a blow, a cry of pain, and then the report of a gun.

"Bless my cartridge belt!" cried Mr. Damon.

"What's the matter? Who is it? What happened?" yelled Ned, tumbling out of his bunk.

"Something wrong!" answered Tom, as he switched on the electric lights. He was just in time to see Koku wrench a gun from a man who stood near the pedestal, on which the great searchlight was poised. Tossing the weapon aside, Koku caught up his club, and aimed a blow at the man. But the latter nimbly dodged and, a moment later leaped over the rail, followed by the giant.

"Who is he? What did he do?" cried Tom after his big servant. "What happened?"

"Him try to shoot searchlight, but I stop him!" yelled back Koku, as he rushed on in pursuit. With a leap Tom sprang to the switch of his lantern, and sent a flood of light toward where Koku was racing after the intruder.

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CHAPTER XIV. A FALSE CLEW

Full in the glare of the powerful beam from the light there was revealed the giant and the man he was pursuing. The latter neither Tom, nor any one on the airship, knew. All they could see was that he was racing away at top speed, with Koku vainly swinging his club at him.

"Bless my chicken soup!" cried Mr. Damon. "Is anything damaged, Tom?"

"No, Koku was too quick for him." yelled the youth, as he, too leaped over the rail and joined in the pursuit.

"Stop! Stop!" called Koku to the man who had sought to damage the great searchlight. But the fellow knew better than to halt, with an angry giant so close behind him. He ran on faster than ever.

Suddenly the stranger seemed to realize that by keeping in the path of the light he gave his pursuers a great advantage. He dodged to one side, off the path on which he had been running, and plunged into the bushes.

"Where him go?" called Koku, coming to a puzzled halt.

"Ned, play the light on both sides!" ordered Tom to his chum, who was now on the deck of the airship, near the wheels and levers that operated the big lantern. "Show him up!"

Obediently the young bank clerk swung the searchlight from side to side. The powerful combined electric current, hissing into the big carbons, and being reflected by the parabolic mirrors, made the growth of underbrush as brightly illuminated as in day time. Tom detected a movement.

"There he is, Koku!" he called to his giant servant. "Off there to the left. After him!"

Raising his club on high, Koku made a leap for the place where the fugitive was hiding. As the man saw the light, and sprang forward, he was, for a moment, in the full glare of the rays. Then, just as the giant was about to reach him, Koku stumbled over a tree root, and fell heavily.

"Never mind, I'll get him!" yelled Tom, but the next moment the man vanished suddenly, and was no longer to be seen in the finger of light from the lantern. He had probably dipped down into some hollow, lying there hidden, and as of course was out of the focus of the searchlight.

"Come on, Koku, we'll find him!" exclaimed Tom, and together they made a search, Mr. Damon joining them, while Ned worked the lantern. But it was of no avail, for they did not find the stranger.

"Well, we might as well go back," said Tom, at length. "We can't find him. He's probably far enough off by this time."

"Who was he?" panted Mr. Damon, as he walked beside Tom and Koku to the airship. Ned had switched off the big light on a signal from the young inventor.

"I don't know!" answered Tom.

"But what did he want? What was he doing? I don't quite understand."

"He wanted to put my searchlight out of commission," responded our hero. "From that I should argue that he was either one of the smugglers, or trying to aid them."

And this theory was borne out by Mr. Whitford, who, on calling the next morning, was told of the occurrence of the night. Koku related how he had found it uncomfortable in his bunk, and had gone out on deck for air. There, half dozing, he heard a stealthy step. At once he was on the alert. He saw a man with a gun creeping along, and at first thought the fellow had evil designs on some of those aboard the Falcon.

Then, when Koku saw the man aim at the big searchlight the giant sprang at him, and there was a scuffle. The gun went off, and the man escaped. An examination of the weapon he had left behind showed that it carried a highly explosive shell, which, had it hit the lantern, would have completely destroyed it, and might have damaged the airship.

"It was the smugglers, without a doubt," declared Mr. Whitford. "You can't get away from this place any too soon, Tom. Get a new hiding spot, and I will communicate with you there."

"But they are on the watch," objected Ned. "They'll see where we go, and follow us. The next time they may succeed in smashing the lantern."

"And if they do," spoke Tom, "it will be all up with trying to detect the smugglers, for it would take me quite a while to make another searchlight. But I have a plan."

"What is it?" asked the government agent.

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"I'll make a flight to-day," went on the young inventor, "and sail over quite an area. I'll pick out a good place to land, and we'll make our camp there instead of here. Then I'll come back to this spot, and after dark I'll go up, without a light showing. There's no moon to-night, and they'll have pretty good eyes if they can follow me, unless they get a searchlight, and they won't do that for fear of giving themselves away.

We'll sail off in the darkness, go to the spot we have previously picked out, and drop down to it. There we can hide and I don't believe they can trace us."

"But how can you find in the darkness, the spot you pick out in daylight?" Mr. Whitford wanted to know.

"I'll arrange same electric lights, in a certain formation in trees around the landing place," said Tom. "I'll fix them with a clockwork switch, that will illuminate them at a certain hour, and they'll run by a storage battery. In that way I'll have my landing place all marked out, and, as it can only be seen from above, if any of the smugglers are on the ground, they won't notice the incandescents."

"But if they are in their airship they will," said Mr. Damon.

"Of course that's possible," admitted Tom, "but, even if they see the lights I don't believe they will know what they mean. And, another thing, I don't imagine they'll come around here in their airship when they know that we're in the neighborhood, and when the spy who endeavored to damage my lantern reports that he didn't succeed. They'll know that we are likely to be after them any minute."

"That's so," agreed Ned. "I guess that's a good plan."

It was one they adopted, and, soon after Mr. Whitford's visit the airship arose, with him on board, and Tom sent her about in great circles and sweeps, now on high and again, barely skimming over the treetops. During this time a lookout was kept for any other aircraft, but none was seen.

"If they are spying on us, which is probably the case," said Tom, "they will wonder what we're up to. I'll keep 'em guessing. I think I'll fly low over Mr. Foger's house, and see if Andy has his airship there. We'll give him a salute."

Before doing this, however, Tom had picked out a good landing place in a clearing in the woods, and had arranged some incandescent lights on high branches of trees. The lights enclosed a square, in the centre of which the Falcon was to drop down.

Of course it was necessary to descend to do this, to arrange the storage battery and the clock switch. Then, so as to throw their enemies off their track, they made landings in several other places, though they did nothing, merely staying there as a sort of "bluff" as Ned called it.

"They'll have their own troubles if they investigate every place we stopped at," remarked Tom, "and, even if they do hit on the one we have selected for our camp they won't see the lights in the trees, for they're well hidden."

This work done, they flew back toward Logansville, and sailed over Andy's house.

"There he is, on the roof, working at his airship!" exclaimed Ned, as they came within viewing distance, and, surely enough, there was the bully, tinkering away at his craft. Tom flew low enough down to speak to him, and, as the Falcon produced no noise, it was not difficult to make their voices heard.

"Hello, Andy!" called Tom, as he swept slowly overhead.

Andy looked up, but only scowled.

"Nice day; isn't it?" put in Ned.

"You get on away from here!" burst out the bully. "You are trespassing, by flying over my house, and I could have you arrested for it. Keep away."

"All right," agreed Tom with a laugh. "Don't trespass by flying over our ship, Andy. We also might have a gun to shoot searchlights with," he added.

Andy started, but did not reply, though Tom, who was watching him closely, thought he saw an expression of fear come over the bully's face.

"Do you think it was Andy who did the shooting?" asked Ned.

"No, he hasn't the nerve," replied Tom. "I don't know what to think about that affair last night."

"Excepting that the smugglers are getting afraid of you, and want to get you out of the way," put in the custom official.

That night, when it was very dark, the Falcon noiselessly made her way upward and sailed along until she was over the square in the forest, marked out by the four lights. Then Tom sent her safely down.

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"Now let 'em find us if they can!" the young inventor exclaimed, as he made the craft fast. "We'll turn in now, and see what happens to-morrow night."

"I'll send you word, just as soon as I get any myself," promised Mr. Whitford, when he left the next morning.

Tom and Ned spent the day in going over the airship, making some minor repairs to it, and polishing and oiling the mechanism of the searchlight, to have it in the best possible condition.

It was about dusk when the wireless outfit, with which the Falcon was fitted, began snapping and cracking.

"Here comes a message!" cried Tom, as he clapped the receiver over his head, and began to translate the dots and dashes.

"It's from Mr. Whitford!" he exclaimed, when he had written it down, and had sent back an answer, "He says: 'Have a tip that smugglers will try to get goods over the border at some point near Niagara Falls to-morrow night. Can you go there, and cruise about? Better keep toward Lake Ontario also. I will be with you. Answer.'"

"What answer did you send?" asked Ned.

"I told him we'd be on the job. It's quite a little run to make, and we can't start until after dark, or otherwise some of the smugglers around here may see us, and tip off their confederates. But I guess we can make the distance all right."

Mr. Whitford arrived at the airship the next afternoon, stating that he had news from one of the government spies to the effect that a bold attempt would be made that night.

"They're going to try and smuggle some diamonds over on this trip," said the custom agent.

"Well, we'll try to nab them!" exclaimed Tom.

As soon as it was dark enough to conceal her movements, the Falcon was sent aloft, not a light showing, and, when on high, Tom started the motor at full speed. The great propellers noiselessly beat the air, and the powerful craft was headed for Lake Ontario.

"They're pretty good, if they attempted to cross the lake to-night," observed the young inventor, as he looked at the barometer.

"Why so?" asked Ned.

"Because there's a bad storm coming up. I shouldn't want to risk it. We'll keep near shore. We can nab them there as good as over the lake."

This plan was adopted, and as soon as they reached the great body of water—the last in the chain of the Great Lakes—Tom cruised about, he and Ned watching through powerful night glasses for a glimpse of another airship.

Far into the night they sailed about, covering many miles, for Tom ran at almost top speed. They sailed over Niagara Falls, and then well along the southern shore of Ontario, working their way north-east and back again. But not a sign of the smugglers did they see.

Meanwhile the wind had arisen until it was a gale, and it began to rain. Gently at first the drops came down, until at length there was a torrent of water descending from the overhead clouds. But those in the Falcon were in no discomfort.

"It's a bad storm all right!" exclaimed Tom, as he looked at the barometer, and noted that the mercury was still falling.

"Yes, and we have had our trouble for our pains!" declared Mr. Whitford.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I believe that we have been deceived by a false clew. The smugglers probably had no intention of getting goods across at this point to-night. They saw to it that my agent got false information, believing that we would follow it, and leave the vicinity of Logansville."

"So they could operate there?" asked Tom.

"That's it," replied the agent. "They drew us off the scent. There's no help for it. We must get back as soon as we can. My! This is a bad storm!" he added, as a blast careened the airship.

CHAPTER XV. THE RESCUE ON THE LAKE

For a time the Falcon shot onward through the storm and darkness, for Tom did not want to give up. With but a single shaded light in the pilot house, so that he could see to read the gauges and dials, telling of the condition of the machinery in the motor room, he pushed his stanch craft ahead. At times she would be forced downward toward the angry waters of Lake Ontario, over which she was sailing, but the speed of her propellers and the buoyancy of the gas bag, would soon lift her again.

"How much longer are you going to stay?" called Ned in his chum's ear—called loudly, not to be heard above the noise of the airship, but above the racket of the gale.

"Oh, I guess we may as well start back," spoke Tom, after a look at the clock on the wall. "We can just about make our camp by daylight, and they won't see us."

"It won't be light very early," observed Mr. Whitford, looking in the pilot house from the cabin, just aft of it. "But there is no use waiting around here any more, Tom. They gave us a false clew, all right."

"Bless my police badge!" cried Mr. Damon. "They must be getting desperate."

"I believe they are," went on the custom officer. "They are afraid of us, and that's a good sign. We'll keep right after 'em, too. If we don't get 'em this week, we will next. Better put back."

"I will," decided the young inventor.

"It certainly is a gale," declared Ned, as he made his way along a dim passage, as few lights had been set aglow, for fear of the smugglers seeing the craft outlined in the air. Now, however, when it was almost certain that they were on the wrong scent, Tom switched on the incandescents, making the interior of the Falcon more pleasant.

The giant came into the pilot house to help Tom, and the airship was turned about, and headed toward Logansville. The wind was now sweeping from the north across Lake Ontario, and it was all the powerful craft could do to make headway against it.

There came a terrific blast, which, in spite of all that Tom and Koku could do, forced the Falcon down, dangerously close to the dashing billows.

"Hard over, Koku!" called Tom to his giant.

As the airship began to respond to the power of her propellers, and the up-tilted rudder, Tom heard, from somewhere below him, a series of shrill blasts on a whistle.

"What's that?" he cried.

"Sounds like a boat below us," answered Mr. Whitford.

"I guess it is," agreed the young inventor. "There she goes again."

Once more came the frantic tooting of a whistle, and mingled with it could be heard voices shouting in fear, but it was only a confused murmur of sound. No words could be made out.

"That's a compressed air whistle!" decided Tom. "It must be some sort of a motor boat in distress. Quick, Mr. Whitford! Tell Ned to switch on the searchlight, and play it right down on the lake. If there's a boat in this storm it can't last long. Even an ocean liner would have trouble. Get the light on quick, and we'll see what we can do!"

It was the work of but an instant to convey the message to Ned. The latter called Mr. Damon to relieve him in the motor room, and, a few seconds later, Ned had switched on the electricity. By means of the lazy-tongs, and the toggle joints, the bank clerk lifted the lantern over until the powerful beam from it was projected straight down into the seething waters of the lake.

"Do you see anything?" asked Mr. Damon from the motor room, at one side of which Ned stood to operate the lantern.

"Nothing but white-caps," was the answer. "It's a fearful storm."

Once more came the series of shrill whistles, and the confused calling of voices. Ned opened a window, in order to hear more plainly. As the whistle tooted again he could locate the sound, and, by swinging the rays of the searchlight to and fro he finally picked up the craft.

"There she is!" he cried, peering down through the plate glass window in the floor of the motor room. "It's a small gasolene boat, and there are several men in her! She's having a hard time."

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"Can we rescue them?" asked Mr. Damon.

"If anybody can, Tom Swift will," was Ned's reply. Then came a whistle from the speaking tube, that led to the pilot house.

"What is it?" asked Ned, putting the tube to his ear.

"Stand by for a rescue!" ordered Tom, who had also, through a window in the floor of the pilot house, seen the hapless motor boat. The men in it were frantically waving their hands to those on the airship. "I'm going down as close as I dare," went on Tom. "You watch, and when it's time, have Koku drop from the stern a long, knotted rope. That will be a sort of ladder, and they can make it fast to their boat and climb up, hand over hand. It's the only plan."

"Good!" cried Ned. "Send Koku to me. Can you manage alone in the pilot house?"

"Yes," came back the answer through the tube.

Koku came back on the run, and was soon tying knots in a strong rope. Meanwhile Ned kept the light on the tossing boat, while Tom, through a megaphone had called to the men to stand by to be rescued. The whistle frantically tooted their thanks.

Koku went out on the after deck, and, having made the knotted rope fast, dropped the end overboard. Then began a difficult feature of airship steering. Tom, looking down through the glass, watched the boat in the glare of the light. Now coming forward, now reversing against the rush of the wind; now going up, and now down, the young inventor so directed the course of his airship so that, finally, the rope dragged squarely across the tossing boat.

In a trice the men grabbed it, and made it fast. Then Tom had another difficult task—that of not allowing the rope to become taut, or the drag of the boat, and the uplift of the airship might have snapped it in twain. But he handled his delicate craft of the air as confidently as the captain of a big liner brings her skillfully to the deck against wind and tide.

"Climb up! Climb up!" yelled Tom, through the megaphone, and he saw, not a man, but a woman, ascending the knotted rope, hand over hand, toward the airship that hovered above her head.

CHAPTER XVI. KOKU'S PRISONER

"Bless my knitting needles!" cried Mr. Damon, as he looked down, and saw, in the glare of the great light, the figure of the woman clinging to the swaying rope. "Help her, someone! Tom! Ned! She'll fall!"

The eccentric man started to rush from the motor room, where he had been helping Ned. But the latter cried: "Stay where you are, Mr. Damon. No one can reach her now without danger to himself and her. She can climb up, I think."

Past knot after knot the woman passed, mounting steadily upward, with a strength that seemed remarkable.

"Come on!" cried Tom to the others. "Don't wait until she gets up. There isn't time. Come on—the rope will hold you all! Climb up!"

The men in the tossing and bobbing motor boat heard, and at once began, one after the other, to clamber up the rope. There were five of them, as could be seen in the glare of the light, and Tom, as he watched, wondered what they were doing out in the terrific storm at that early hour of the morning, and with a lone woman.

"Stand by to help her, Koku!" called Ned to the giant.

"I help," was the giant's simple reply, and as the woman's head came above the rail, over which the rope ran, Koku, leaning forward, raised her in his powerful arms, and set her carefully on the deck.

"Come into the cabin, please," Ned called to her. "Come in out of the wet."

"Oh, it seems a miracle that we are saved!" the woman gasped, as, rain-drenched and wind-tossed, she staggered toward the door which Tom had opened by means of a lever in the pilot house. The young inventor had his hands full, manipulating the airship so as to keep it above the motor boat, and not bring too great a strain on the rope.

The woman passed into the cabin, which was between the motor room and the pilot house, and Ned saw her throw herself on her knees, and offer up a fervent prayer of thanksgiving. Then, springing to her feet, she cried:

"My husband? Is he safe? Can you save him? Oh, how wonderful that this airship came in answer to our appeals to Providence. Whose is it?"

Before Ned got a chance to answer her, as she came to the door of the motor room, a man's voice called:

"My wife! Is she safe?"

"Yes, here I am," replied the woman, and a moment later the two were in each other's arms.

"The others; are they safe?" gasped the woman, after a pause.

"Yes," replied the man. "They are coming up the rope. Oh, what a wonderful rescue! And that giant man who lifted us up on deck! Oh, do you recall in Africa how we were also rescued by airship—"

"Come on now, I got you!" interrupted the voice of Koku out on the after deck, and there was a series of thumps that told when he had lifted the men over the rail, and set them down.

"All saved!" cried the giant at last.

"Then cut the rope!" shouted Tom. "We've got to get out of this, for it's growing worse!"

There was the sound of a hatchet blow, and the airship shot upward. Into the cabin came the dripping figures of the other men, and Ned, as he stood by the great searchlight, felt a wave of wonder sweep over him as he listened to the voices of the first man and woman.

He knew he had heard them before, and, when he listened to the remark about a rescue by airship, in Africa, a flood of memory came to him.

"Can it be possible that these are the same missionaries whom Tom and I rescued from the red pygmies?" he murmured. "I must get a look at them."

"Our boat, it is gone I suppose," remarked one of the other men, coming into the motor room.

"I'm afraid so," answered Ned, as he played the light on the doomed craft. Even as he did so he saw a great wave engulf her, and, a moment later she sank. "She's gone," he said softly.

"Too bad!" exclaimed the man. "She was a fine little craft. But how in the world did you happen along to rescue us? Whose airship is this?"

"Tom Swift's," answered Ned, and, at the sound of the name the woman uttered a cry, as she rushed into the motor room.

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"Tom Swift!" she exclaimed. "Where is he? Oh, can it be possible that it is the same Tom Swift that rescued us in Africa?"

"I think it is, Mrs. Illingway," spoke Ned quietly, for he now recognized the missionary, though he wondered what she and her husband were doing so far from the Dark Continent.

"Oh, I know you—you're Ned Newton—Tom's chum! Oh, I am so glad! Where is Tom?"

"In the pilot house. He'll be here in a moment."

Tom came in at that juncture, having set the automatic steering gear to take the ship on her homeward course.

"Are they all saved?" he asked, looking at the little group of persons who had climbed up from the motor boat. "Mr. Damon, you had better make some hot coffee. Koku, you help. I—"

"Tom Swift!" cried out Mr. and Mrs. Illingway together, as they made a rush for the young inventor. "Don't you know us?"

To say that Tom was surprised at this, would be putting it mildly. He had to lean up against the side of the cabin for support.

"Mrs. Illingway!" he gasped. "You here—were you in that boat?"

"Yes, it's all very simple. My husband and I are on a vacation for a year. We got fever and had to leave Africa. We are staying with friends at a resort on the lake shore. These are our friends," she went on, introducing the other gentlemen.

"We went out for a trip in the motor boat," the missionary continued, "but we went too far. Our motor broke down, we could get no help, and the storm came up. We thought we were doomed, until we saw your lights. I guessed it was a balloon, or some sort of an airship, and we whistled; and called for help. Then you rescued us! Oh, it is almost too wonderful to believe. It is a good thing I have practiced athletics or I never could have climbed that rope."

"It is like a story from a book!" added Mr. Illingway, as he grasped Tom's hand. "You rescued us in Africa and again here." I may say here that the African rescue is told in detail in the volume entitled, "Tom Swift and His Electric Rifle."

The shipwrecked persons were made as comfortable as possible. There was plenty of room for them, and soon they were sitting around warm electric heaters, drinking hot coffee, and telling their adventures over again. Mr. and Mrs. Illingway said they soon expected to return to Africa.

Tom told how he happened to be sailing over the lake, on the lookout for smugglers, and how he had been disappointed.

"And it's a good thing you were—for our sakes," put in Mrs. Illingway, with a smile.

"Where do you want to be landed?" asked Tom. "I don't want to take you all the way back to Logansville."

"If you will land us anywhere near a city or town, we can arrange to be taken back to our cottage," said one of the men, and Tom sent the airship down until, in the gray dawn of the morning, they could pick out a large village on the lake shore. Then, in much better condition than when they had been saved, the rescued ones alighted, showering Tom and the others with thanks, and sought a hotel.

"And now for our camp, and a good rest!" cried the young inventor, as he sent the airship aloft again.

They reached their camp in the forest clearing without having been observed, as far as they could learn, and at once set about making things snug, for the storm was still raging.

"I don't believe any of the smugglers were abroad last night," remarked Mr. Whitford, as he prepared to go back into town, he having come out on horseback, leaving the animal over night in an improvised stable they had made in the woods of boughs and tree branches.

"I hope not," replied Tom, but the next day, when the government agent called again, his face wore a look of despair.

"They put a big one over on us the night of the rescue," he said. "They flew right across the border near Logansville, and got away with a lot of goods. They fooled us all right."

"Can you find out who gave the wrong tip?" asked Tom.

"Yes, I know the man. He pretended to be friendly to one of my agents, but he was only deceiving him. But we'll get the smugglers yet!"

"That's what we will!" cried Tom, determinedly.

Several days passed, and during the night time Tom, in his airship, and with the great searchlight aglow, flew

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back and forth across the border, seeking the elusive airships, but did not see them. In the meanwhile he heard from Mr. and Mrs. Illingway, who sent him a letter of thanks, and asked him to come and see them, but, much as Tom would liked to have gone, he did not have the time.

It was about a week after the sensational rescue, when one evening, as Tom was about to get ready for a night flight, he happened to be in the pilot house making adjustments to some of the apparatus.

Mr. Damon and Ned had gone out for a walk in the woods, and Mr. Whitford had not yet arrived. As for Mr. Koku, Tom did not know where his giant servant was.

Suddenly there was a commotion outside. A trampling in the bushes, and the breaking of sticks under feet.

"I got you now!" cried the voice of the giant.

Tom sprang to the window of the pilot house. He saw Koku tightly holding a man who was squinting about, and doing his best to break away. But it was useless. When Koku got hold of any one, that person had to stay.

"What is it, Koku!" cried Tom.

"I got him!" cried the giant. "He sneaking up on airship, but I come behind and grab him," and Koku fairly lifted his prisoner off his feet and started with him toward the Falcon.

CHAPTER XVII. WHAT THE INDIAN SAW

"Hello!" cried Tom. "What's up, Koku?"

"Him up!" replied the giant with a laugh, as he looked at his squirming prisoner, whose feet he had lifted from the ground.

"No, I mean what was he doing?" went on Tom, with a smile at the literal way in which the giant had answered his question.

"I wasn't doing anything!" broke in the man. "I'd like to know if I haven't a right to walk through these woods, without being grabbed up by a man as big as a mountain? There'll be something up that you won't like, if you don't let me go, too!" and he struggled fiercely, but he was no match for giant Koku.

"What was he doing?" asked Tom of his big servant, ignoring the man. Tom looked closely at him, however, but could not remember to have seen him before.

"I walking along in woods, listen to birds sing," said Koku simply, taking a firmer hold on his victim. "I see this fellow come along, and crawl through grass like so a snake wiggle. I to myself think that funny, and I watch. This man he wiggle more. He wiggle more still, and then he watch. I watch too. I see him have knife in hand, but I am no afraid. I begin to go like snake also, but I bigger snake than he."

"I guess so," laughed Tom, as he watched the man trying in vain to get out of Koku's grip.

"Then I see man look up at balloon bag, so as if he like to cut it with knife. I say to myself, 'Koku, it is time for you to go into business for yourself.' You stand under me?"

"I understand!" exclaimed Tom. "You thought it was time for you to get busy."

"Sure," replied Koku. "Well, I get business, I give one jump, and I am so unlucky as to jump with one foot on him, but I did not mean it. I go as gentle as I can."

"Gentle? You nearly knocked the wind out of me!" snarled the prisoner. "Gentle! Huh!"

"I guess he was the unlucky one, instead of you," put in Tom. "Well, what happened next?"

"I grab him, and—he is still here," said Koku simply. "He throw knife away though."

"I see," spoke Tom. "Now will you give an account of yourself, or shall I hand you over to the police?" he asked sternly of the man. "What were you sneaking up on us in that fashion for?"

"Well, I guess this isn't your property!" blustered the man. "I have as good a right here as you have, and you can't have me arrested for that."

"Perhaps not," admitted Tom. "You may have a right on this land, but if you are honest, and had no bad intentions, why were you sneaking up, trying to keep out of sight? And why did you have a big knife?"

"That's my business, young man."

"All right, then I'll make it MY business, too," went on the young inventor. "Hold him, Koku, until I can find Mr. Damon, or Ned, and I'll see what's best to be done. I wish Mr. Whitford was here."

"Aren't you going to let me go?" demanded the man.

"I certainly am not!" declared Tom firmly. "I'm going to find out more about you. I haven't any objections to any one coming to look at my airship, out of curiosity, but when they come up like a snake in the grass and with a big knife, then I get suspicious, and I want to know more about them."

"Well, you won't know anything more about me!" snarled the fellow. "And it will be the worse for you, if you don't let me go. You'd better!" he threatened.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Koku," said Tom. "Maybe you'd better tie him up. You'll find some rope in the motor room."

"Don't you dare tie me up!" blustered the prisoner.

"Go ahead and tie him," went on Tom. "You'll be free to guard the ship then. I'll go for Ned and Mr. Damon."

"Tie who up? What's the matter?" asked a voice, and a moment later the government agent came along the woodland path on his horse. "What's up, Tom? Have you captured a wild animal?"

"Not exactly a wild animal. Mr. Whitford. But a wild man. I'm glad you came along. Koku has a prisoner." And Tom proceeded to relate what had happened.

"Sneaking up on you with a knife; eh? I guess he meant business all right, and bad business, too," said Mr.

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Whitford. "Let me get a look at him, Tom," for Koku had taken his prisoner to the engine room, and there, amid a storm of protests and after a futile struggle on the part of the fellow, had tied him securely.

Tom and the custom officer went in to look at the man, just as Ned and Mr. Damon came back from their stroll in the woods. It was rapidly getting dusk, and was almost time for the start of the usual flight, to see if any trace could be had of the smugglers.

"There he is," said Tom, waving his hand toward the bound man who sat in a chair in one corner of the motor room. The young inventor switched on the light, and a moment later Mr. Whitford exclaimed:

"Great Scott! It's Ike Shafton!"

"Do you know him?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Know him? I should say I did! Why he's the man who pretended to give one of my men information about smugglers that drew us off on the false scent. He pretended to be for the government, and, all the while, he was in with the smugglers! Know him? I should say I did!"

A queer change had come over the prisoner at the sight of Mr. Whitford. No longer was Shafton surly and blustering. Instead he seemed to slink down in his chair, bound as he was, as if trying to get out of sight.

"Why did you play double?" demanded the government agent, striding over to him.

"I—I—don't hit me!" whined Shafton.

"Hit you! I'm not going to hit you!" exclaimed Mr. Whitford, "but I'm going to search you, and then I'm going to wire for one of my men to take you in custody."

"I—I didn't do anything!"

"You didn't; eh? Well, we'll see what the courts think of giving wrong information to Uncle Sam with the intent to aid criminals. Let's see what he's got in his pockets."

The spy did not have much, but at a sight of one piece of paper Mr. Whitford uttered a cry of surprise.

"Ha! This is worth something!" he exclaimed. "It may be stale news, and it may be something for the future, but it's worth trying. I wonder I didn't think of that before."

"What is it?" asked Tom.

For answer the custom officer held out a scrap of paper on which was written one word.

ST. REGIS.

"What does it mean," asked Ned, who, with Mr. Damon, had entered the motor room, and stood curiously regarding the scene.

"Bless my napkin ring!" said the odd man. "That's the name of a hotel. Do you suppose the smugglers are stopping there?"

"Hardly," replied Mr. Whitford with a smile. "But St. Regis is the name of an Indian reservation in the upper part of New York state, right on the border, and in the corner where the St. Lawrence and the imaginary dividing line between New York and Canada join. I begin to see things now. The smugglers have been flying over the Indian Reservation, and that's why they have escaped us so far. We never thought of that spot. Tom, I believe we're on the right track at last! Shafton was probably given this to inform him where the next trick would be turned, so he could get us as far away as possible, or, maybe prevent us leaving at all."

An involuntary start on the part of the prisoner seemed to confirm this, but he kept silent.

"Of course," went on Mr. Whitford, "they may have already flown over the St. Regis reservation, and this may be an old tip, but it's worth following up."

"Why don't you ask him?" Tom wanted to know, as he nodded toward Shafton.

"He wouldn't tell the truth. I'll put him where he can't get away to warn his confederates, and then we'll go to the reservation. And to think that my man trusted him!"

Mr. Whitford was soon in communication with his headquarters by means of the wireless apparatus on Tom's airship, and a little later two custom officers arrived, with an extra horse on which they were to take their prisoner back.

"And now we'll try our luck once more," said Mr. Whitford as his men left with Shafton securely bound. "Can you make the reservation in good time, Tom? It's quite a distance," and he pointed it out on the map.

"Oh, I'll do it," promised the young inventor, as he sent his powerful craft aloft in the darkness. Then, with her nose pointed in the right direction, the Falcon beat her way forward through the night, flying silently, with the great searchlight ready for instant use.

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In comparatively short time, though it was rather late at night, they reached the St. Lawrence, and then it was an easy matter to drop down into the midst of the reservation grounds. Though the redmen, whom the state thus quartered by themselves, had all retired, they swarmed out of their cabins as the powerful light flashed back and forth.

"We want to question some of the head men of the tribe," said Mr. Whitford. "I know some of them, for on several occasions I've had to come here to look into rumors that tobacco and liquor and other contraband goods dear to the Indian heart were smuggled into the reservation against the law. I never caught any of them at it though."

With guttural exclamations, and many grunts of surprise, the redmen gathered around the big airship. It was too much even for their usual reserve, and they jabbered among themselves.

"How Big Foot!" greeted the custom officer, to one Indian who had an extremely large left foot. "How!"

"How!" responded the Indian, with a grunt.

"Plenty much fine air-bird; eh?" and the agent waved his hand toward the Falcon.

"Yep. Plenty much big."

"Big Foot never see bird like this; eh?"

"Oh sure. Big Foot see before many times. Huh!"

"What! Has he seen this before?" asked Tom.

"No. Wait a minute," cautioned Mr. Whitford. "I'm on the track of something. Big Foot see air-bird like this?" he questioned.

"Sure. Fly over Indians' land many times. Not same as him," and he nodded toward Tom's ship, "but plenty much like. Make heap noise. Come down once—break wheel mebbly. Indians help fix. Indians get firewater. You got firewater in your air-bird?"

"No firewater, but maybe we've got some tobacco, if you tell us what we want to know, Big Foot. And so you've seen air-birds flying around here before?"

"Sure, Heap times. We all see," and he waved his hand to indicate the redmen gathered around him.

There came grunts of confirmation.

"We're getting there!" exclaimed Mr. Whitford to Tom. "We're on the right track now. Which way air-birds come, Big Foot?"

"Over there," and he pointed toward Canada.

"Which way go?"

"Over there," and he pointed toward the east, in the direction of Shopton, as much as anywhere.

"That's what we want to know. Tom, we'll just hang around here for a while, until one of the smugglers' airships pass over head. I believe one is due to-night, and that's why Shafton had that paper. It was sent to him to tip him off. He was sneaking up, trying to put your airship out of commission when Koku caught him. These Indians have used their eyes to good advantage. I think we're on the trail at last."

"Baccy for Big Foot?" asked the redman.

"Yes, plenty of it. Tom, give them some of Koku's, will you? I'll settle with you later," for the giant had formed a liking for the weed, and Tom did not have the heart to stop him smoking a pipe once in a while. With his usual prodigality, the giant had brought along a big supply, and some of this was soon distributed among the Indians, who grunted their thanks.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE PURSUIT

"What plan have you in mind?" asked Tom of Mr. Whitford, when some of the Indians had gone back to their shanties, leaving a few staring curiously at the airship, as she rested on the ground, bathed in the glow of her electric lights.

"Well, I think the best thing we can do is just to stay right here, Tom; all night if need be. As Big Foot says, there have been airships passing overhead at frequent intervals. Of course that is not saying that they were the smugglers, but I don't see who else they could be. There's no meet going on, and no continental race. They must be the smugglers."

"I think so," put in Ned.

"Bless my diamond ring!" exclaimed Mr. Damon. "But what are you going to do when you see them overhead?"

"Take after them, of course!" exclaimed Tom. "That's what we're here for; isn't it Mr. Whitford?"

"Yes. Do you think you can rise from the ground, and take after them in time to stand a chance of overhauling them, Tom? You know they may go very fast."

"I know, but I don't believe they can beat the Falcon. I'd rather wait down here than hover in the air. It isn't as dark as it was the other night, and they might see us with their glasses. Then they would turn back, and we'd have our trouble for nothing. They've actually got to cross the border with smuggled goods before the law can touch them; haven't they?"

"Yes, I couldn't arrest them on Canadian territory, or over it. I've got to get them on this side of the border. So perhaps it will be as well to lie here. But do you suppose you can hear them or see them, as they fly over?"

"I'm pretty sure I can. The sound of their motor and the whizz of the propellers carries for some distance. And then, too, I'm going to set the searchlight to play a beam up in the air. If that gets focused on 'em, we'll spot 'em all right."

"But suppose they see it, and turn back?"

"I don't believe they will. The beam will come from the ground straight upward you know, and they won't connect it with my ship."

"But that fellow who was sneaking up when Koku caught him, may find some way to warn them that you have come here," suggested Ned.

"He won't get much chance to communicate with his friends, while my men have him," said Mr. Whitford significantly. "I guess we'll take a chance here, Tom."

So it was arranged. Everything on the airship was gotten ready for a quick flight, and then Tom set his great searchlight aglow once more. Its powerful beams cut upward to the clouds, making a wonderful illumination.

"Now all we have to do is to wait and watch," remarked Tom, as he came back from a last inspection of the apparatus in the motor room.

"And that is sometimes the hardest kind of work," said Mr. Whitford. "Many a time I have been watching for smugglers for days and nights at a stretch, and it was very wearying. When I got through, and caught my man, I was more tired than if I had traveled hundreds of miles. Just sitting around, and waiting is tiresome work."

The others agreed with him, and then the custom officer told many stories of his experiences, of the odd places smugglers would hit upon to conceal the contraband goods, and of fights he had taken part in.

"Diamonds and jewels, from their smallness, and from the great value, and the high duty on them when brought into the United States, form the chief articles of the high class smugglers," he said. "In fact the ones we are after have been doing more in diamonds than anything else, though they have, of late, brought much valuable hand-made lace. That can be bought comparatively cheap abroad, and if they can evade paying Uncle Sam the duty on it, they can sell it in the United States at a large profit."

"But the government has received so many complaints from legitimate dealers, who can not stand this unfair competition, that we have been ordered to get the smugglers at any cost."

"They are sharp rascals," commented Mr. Damon. "They seem to be making more efforts since Tom Swift got on their trail."

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"But, just the same, they are afraid of him, and his searchlight," declared Mr. Whitford. "I guess they fancied that when they took to airships to get goods across the border that they would not be disturbed. But two can play at that game."

The talk became general, with pauses now and then while Tom swept the sky with the great searchlight, the others straining their eyes for a sight of the smugglers' airships. But they saw nothing.

The young inventor had just paid a visit to the pilot house, to see that his wheels and guiding levers were all right, and was walking back toward the stern of the ship, when he heard a noise there, and the fall of a heavy body.

"Who's that?" he cried sharply. "Is that you, Koku?"

A grunt was the only answer, and, as Tom called the giant's name the big man came out.

"What you want, Mr. Tom?" he asked.

"I thought you were at the stern," spoke Tom. "Someone is there. Ned, throw the light on the stern!" he called sharply.

In a moment that part of the ship was in a bright glare and there, in the rays of the big lantern, was stretched out Big Foot, the Indian, comfortably sleeping.

"Here! What are you doing?" demanded Mr. Whitford, giving him a vigorous shake.

"Me sleep!" murmured Big Foot. "Lemme be! Me sleep, and take ride to Happy Hunting Grounds in air-bird. Go 'way!"

"You'll have to sleep somewhere else, Big Foot," spoke the agent with a laugh. "Koku, put him down under one of the trees over there. He can finish his nap in the open, it's warm."

The Indian only protested sleepily, as the giant carried him off the ship, and soon Big Foot was snoring under the trees.

"He's a queer chap," the custom officer said. "Sometimes I think he's a little off in his head. But he's good natured."

Once more they resumed their watching. It was growing more and more wearisome, and Tom was getting sleepy, in spite of himself.

Suddenly the silence of the night was broken by a distant humming and throbbing sound.

"Hark!" cried Ned.

They all listened intently.

"That's an airship, sure enough!" cried Tom.

He sprang to the lever that moved the lantern, which had been shut off temporarily. An instant later a beam of light cut the darkness. The throbbing sounded nearer.

"There they are!" cried Ned, pointing from a window toward the sky. A moment later, right into the glare of the light, there shot a powerful biplane.

"After 'em, Tom!" shouted Mr. Whitford.

Like a bird the Falcon shot upward in pursuit noiselessly and resistlessly, the beam of the great searchlight playing on the other craft, which dodged to one side in an endeavor to escape.

"On the trail at last!" cried Tom, as he shoved over the accelerator lever, sending his airship forward on an upward slant, right at the stern of the smugglers' biplane.

CHAPTER XIX. IN DIRE PERIL

Upward shot the Falcon. With every revolution of her big propellers she came nearer and nearer to the fleeing craft of the supposed smugglers who were using every endeavor to escape.

"Do you think you can catch them, Tom?" asked Mr. Whitford as he stood at the side of our hero in the pilot house, and looked upward and forward to where, bathed in the light of the great search-lantern, the rival craft was beating the air.

"I'm sure we can—unless something happens."

"Bless my overshoes! What can happen?" asked Mr. Damon, who, after finding that everything in the motor room was running smoothly, had come forward. Ned was attending to the searchlight. "What can happen, Tom?"

"Almost anything, from a broken shaft to a short-circuited motor. Only, I hope nothing does occur to prevent us from catching them."

"You don't mean to say that you're actually going to try to catch them, do you, Tom?" asked the custom officer, "I thought if we could trail them to the place where they have been delivering the goods, before they shipped them to Shopton we'd be doing well. But I never thought of catching them in mid-air."

"I'm going to try it," declared the young inventor. "I've got a grappling anchor on board," he went on, "attached to a meter and windlass. If I can catch that anchor in any part of their ship I can bring them to a stop, just as a fisherman lands a trout. Only I've got to get close enough to make a cast, and I want to be above them when I do it."

"Don't you think you can catch them, Tom?" asked Mr. Damon.

"Well, I'm pretty sure I can, and yet they seem to have a faster biplane than I gave them credit for. I guess I'll have to increase our speed a little," and he shifted a lever which made the Falcon shoot along at nearly doubled speed.

Still the other airship kept ahead, not far, but sufficiently so to prevent the grappling anchor from being tossed at her rail.

"I wonder if they are the smugglers?" questioned Mr. Damon. "It might be possible, Tom, that we're chasing the wrong craft."

"Possible, but not probable," put in Mr. Whitford. "After the clew we got, and what the Indians told us, and then to have a biplane come sailing over our heads at night, it's pretty sure to be the one we want. But, Tom, can't you close up on 'em?"

"I'm going to try. The machinery is warmed up now, and I'll send it to the limit."

Once more he adjusted the wheels and levers, and at his touch the Falcon seemed to gain new strength. She fairly soared through the air.

Eagerly those in the pilot house watched the craft they were pursuing. She could be seen, in the glare of the big searchlight, like some bird of gloom and evil omen, fluttering along ahead of them.

"They certainly have a fine motor!" cried Tom. "I was sure I could have caught up to them before this."

"How do you account for it?" asked Mr. Damon.

"Well, they're flying a good deal lighter than we are. They probably have no load to speak of, while we carry a heavy one, to say nothing of Koku."

"Diamonds aren't very heavy," put in Mr. Whitford grimly. "I think they are smuggling diamonds to-night. How I wish we could catch them, or trace them to where they have their headquarters."

"We'll do it!" declared Tom.

"Bless my stars! They've gone!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Damon. "They've disappeared, Tom, I can't see them."

It was indeed true. Those in the pilot house peering ahead through the darkness, could not get a glimpse of the airship they were pursuing. The beam of the searchlight showed nothing but a black void.

All at once the beam shifted downward, and then it picked up the white-winged craft.

"They went down!" cried Tom. "They tried to drop out of sight."

"Can't you get them?" asked Mr. Whitford.

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"Oh, yes, we can play that game too. I'll do a little volplaning myself," and the young inventor shut off the power and coasted earthward, while Ned, who had picked up the forward craft, kept the searchlight playing on her.

And now began a wonderful chase. The smugglers' craft, for such she proved later to be, did her best to dodge the Falcon. Those managing the mechanism of the fleeing airship must have been experts, to hold out as they did against Tom Swift, but they had this advantage, that their craft was much lighter, and more powerfully engined as regards her weight. Then, too, there were not so many on board, and Tom, having a combined balloon and aeroplane, had to carry much machinery.

It was like the flight of two big birds in the air. Now the smugglers' craft would be mounting upward, with the Falcon after her. Again she would shoot toward the earth, and Tom would follow, with a great downward swoop.

Ned kept the great lantern going, and, though occasionally the craft they were after slipped out of the focus of the beams, the young bank clerk would pick her up again.

To the right and left dodged the forward airship, vainly endeavoring to shake off Tom Swift, but he would not give up. He followed move for move, swoop for swoop.

"She's turning around!" suddenly cried Mr. Damon. "She's given up the flight, Tom, and is going back!"

"That's so!" agreed Mr. Whitford. "They're headed for Canada, Tom. We've got to catch 'em before they get over the Dominion line!"

"I'll do it!" cried Tom, between his clenched teeth.

He swung his airship around in a big circle, and took after the fleeing craft. The wind was against the smugglers now, and they could not make such good speed, while to Tom the wind mattered not, so powerful were the propellers of the Falcon.

"I think we're gaining on them," murmured Mr. Damon.

Suddenly, from the engine room, came a cry from Ned.

"Tom! Tom!" he shouted, "Something is wrong with the gas machine! She registers over five hundred pounds pressure, and that's too much. It's going up, and I haven't touched it!"

"Mr. Damon, take the wheel!" exclaimed the young inventor. "I've got to see what's wrong. Hold her right on their trail."

Tom sprang to the motor room, and one glance at the gas generating machine showed him that they were in dire peril. In some manner the pressure was going up enormously, and if it went up much more the big tank would blow to pieces.

"What is it?" cried Ned, from his position near the light.

"I don't know! Something wrong."

"Are you going to give up the chase?"

"I am not. Stick to the light. Koku, tell Mr. Damon to hold her on the course I set. I'll try to get this pressure down!" And Tom Swift began to work feverishly, while his ship rushed on through the night in danger, every moment, of being blown to atoms. Yet the young inventor would not give up, and descend to earth.

CHAPTER XX. SUSPICIOUS ACTIONS

The chase was kept up, and Tom, when he had a chance to look up at the speed register, as he labored frantically at the clogged gas machine, saw that they were rushing along as they never had before.

"Are we catching them, Ned?" he cried to his chum, who was not far away, playing the powerful light on the smugglers' craft.

"I think we're coming closer, but it's going to be a long chase. I don't see why we can't close up on 'em."

"Because they've got a very fast ship, Ned, and they are flying much lighter than we are. But we'll get 'em!"

"How are you making out with that gas machine?"

"Well, I'm doing all I can, but I can't seem to get the pressure down. I can't understand it. Some of the pipes must be clogged with a carbon deposit. I ought to have cleaned them out some time ago."

Ned gave a hasty glance at the gauge which showed the gas pressure. It registered six hundred pounds now, having risen a hundred in a short time.

"And she'll go up, sure, at eight hundred," murmured Ned, as he held the light steadily on the smugglers' aircraft. "Well, if Tom sticks to the chase, I will too, but I think it would be better to go down, open up everything, and let the gas escape. We could get the rascals later."

Tom, however, did not seem to think so, for he kept on with his task, working away at the pipes, trying to force the obstruction out, so that the gas from the generator would flow into the bag. At the same time he tried to shut off the generating apparatus, but that had become jammed in consequence of the pipe clogging, and the powerful vapor continued to manufacture itself automatically in spite of all that Tom could do.

The only safe way out of the danger, unless he could remove the obstruction, was to descend to earth, and, as Ned had said, open every outlet. But to have done that in mid-air would have been dangerous, as the large volume of gas, suddenly liberated, would have hung about the airship in a cloud, smothering all on board. If they were on the earth they could run away from it, and remain away until the vapor had blown off.

"Is Mr. Damon keeping her on the course, Ned?" asked Tom, pausing a moment to get his breath after a series of frantic efforts.

"Yes, and I think we're closing in on them a little."

"That's good. Are they still headed for the border?"

"Yes, I guess they're going to take no chances to-night. They're going right back to Canada where they came from."

"Well, we'll be hot after 'em. Whistle through the tube, and tell Koku to come here and give me a hand. He's with Mr. Damon in the pilot house."

Ned sent the message, and then gave his whole attention to the light. This was necessary, as the smugglers were resorting to dodging tactics, in an endeavor to escape. Now they would shoot upward, and again toward the earth, varying the performance by steering to the right or left. Ned had constantly to shift the light to keep them in focus, so that Mr. Damon could see where to steer, but, with all this handicap, the eccentric man did very well, and he was never far out in his judgment.

"By Jove!" suddenly murmured Tom, as he tried once more in vain to open a clogged valve. "I'm afraid we can't do it. Koku, lend a hand here!" he exclaimed as the giant entered. "See if you can twist this wrench around, but don't break off the handle, whatever you do."

"Me shove," replied the giant simply, as he grasped the big wrench.

Once more Ned glanced at the pressure gauge. It showed seven hundred pounds now, and there was only a margin of safety of one hundred pounds more, ere a terrific explosion would occur. Still Tom had not given the order to descend to earth.

"Are you going to make it, Tom?" asked the government agent, anxiously, as he stood over the young inventor.

"I—I think so," panted Tom. "Are we near the Dominion line,"

"Pretty close," was the discouraging answer. "I'm afraid we can't get 'em before they cross. Can you use any more speed?"

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"I don't know. Ned, see if you can get another notch out of her."

With one hand Ned reached for the accelerator lever on the wall near him, and pulled it to the last notch. The Falcon shot ahead with increased speed, but, at the same instant there came a gasp from Koku, and the sound of something breaking.

"There! He's done it!" cried Tom in despair. "I was afraid you'd be too strong for that wrench, Koku. You've broken off the handle. Now we'll never be able to loosen that valve."

Ned gave one more glance at the pressure gage. It showed seven hundred and fifty pounds, and the needle was slowly moving onward.

"Hadn't we better descend," asked Mr. Whitford in a low voice.

"I—I guess so," answered Tom, despairingly. "Where are we?"

Ned flashed the light downward for an instant.

"Just crossing over the St. Regis Indian reservation again," he replied. "We'll be in Canada in a few minutes more."

"Where are the smugglers?"

"Still ahead, and they're bearing off to the right."

"Going toward Montford," commented the government man. "We've lost 'em for to-night, anyhow, but they didn't get their goods landed, at any rate."

"Send her down, Ned!" exclaimed Tom, and it was high time, for the pressure was now within twenty-five pounds of the exploding point.

Down shot the Falcon, while her rival passed onward triumphantly in the darkness. Ned held the light on the smugglers as long as he dared, and then he flashed it to earth to enable Mr. Damon to pick out a good landing place.

In a few moments Tom's silent airship came to rest on a little clearing in the forest, and Tom, with Ned's help, at once opened every outlet of the gas machine, a thing they had not dared do while up in the air.

"Come on, now, run, everybody!" cried Tom. "Otherwise you'll be smothered!"

They leaped from the craft, about which gathered the fumes of the powerful gas, as it hissed from the pipes. Running a hundred yards away they were safe, and could return in a few minutes.

"We're in Canada," remarked Mr. Whitford, as they came to a halt, watching the airship.

"How do you know?" asked Ned.

"As we landed I saw one of the stone boundary posts," was the answer. "We're on English territory, and we can't touch the smugglers if we should see them now."

"Well, we'll soon be back in Uncle Sam's land," declared Tom. "We can go back on board the Falcon to sleep shortly. Jove! I wish I could have caught those fellows!"

"Never mind, we'll get 'em yet," counseled Mr. Whitford.

Waiting until he was sure all the vapor had disappeared, Tom led the way back to the Falcon. No great harm had been done, save to lose considerable gas, and this could be remedied. Tired and disappointed from the chase, they sought their bunks, and were soon asleep. In the morning Tom and Ned began work on the clogged pipes.

This work was nearly accomplished by noon, when Mr. Damon, coming back from a stroll, announced that they were but fifteen minutes walk from the St. Lawrence River, as he had seen the sparkling waters from a neighboring hill.

"Let's go over and have a look at it," proposed Ned. "We can easily finish this when we get back. Besides, Tom, we don't want to get to our regular camp until after dark, anyhow."

The young inventor was willing, and the two lads, with Mr. Whitford, strolled toward the historic stream. As they drew near the bank, they saw, anchored a little distance out, a small steamer. Approaching it, as if she had just left the shore at a point near where our friends stood, was a gasoline launch, containing several men, while on shore, in front of a small shanty, stood another man.

This latter individual, at the sight of Tom, Ned and Mr. Whitford, blew a shrill whistle. Those in the launch looked back. The man on shore waved a red flag in a peculiar way, almost as the soldiers in the army wig-wag signals.

In another moment the launch turned about, and put for shore, while the lone man hurried back into the hut.

"Hum!" remarked Tom. "Those are queer actions."

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"Suspicious actions, I should say," said Mr. Whitford. "I'm going to see what this means."

CHAPTER XXI. MR. PERIOD ARRIVES

Greatly interested in what was about to take place, and not a little suspicious, our friends stood on the bank of the river and watched the motor boat returning. As it reached a little dock in front of the hut, the man who had waved the red flag of warning came out, and talked rapidly to those in the power craft. At the same time he pointed occasionally to Tom, Ned and the government agent.

"This is getting interesting," remarked Mr. Whitford. "We may have accidentally stumbled on something important Tom."

"See, they're signalling to the steamer now," spoke Ned, and, as he said this, his companions looked, and noted the man from the hut waving a white flag, in a peculiar manner. His signals were answered by those on the vessel anchored out in the stream, and, a little later, black smoke could be seen pouring from her funnel.

"Looks as if they were getting ready to leave," spoke Tom.

"Yes, we seem to have started things moving around here," observed Ned.

"Or else we have prevented from moving," remarked the custom agent.

"What do you mean?" Tom wanted to know.

"I mean that these men were evidently going to do something just as we arrived, and spoiled their plans. I would say they were going to land goods from that schooner. Now they are not."

"What kind of goods?" asked Ned.

"Well, of course I'm not sure, but I should say smuggled goods."

"The smugglers!" cried Tom. "Why, they can't be smugglers, for we are on Canadian territory. The river isn't the dividing line between the Dominion and the United States at this point. The St. Lawrence lies wholly in Canada here, and the men have a right to land any goods they want to, dutiable or not."

"That's just it," put in Mr. Whitford. "They have the right, but they are afraid to exercise it, and that's what makes me suspicious. If they were doing a straight business they wouldn't be afraid, no matter who saw them. They evidently recognize us, by description, if by no other means, and they know we are after smugglers. That's why they stopped the bringing of goods from that vessel to shore. They want to wait until we are gone."

"But we couldn't stop them from landing goods, even if they know we are working for Uncle Sam," declared Tom.

"That's very true, but it is evidently their intention, not only to land goods here, which they have a perfect right to do, but to send them into the United States, which they have not a right to do without paying the duty."

"Then you really think they are the smugglers?" asked Ned.

"I'm pretty sure of it. I think we have stumbled on one of the places where the goods are landed, and where they are loaded into the airships. This is the best luck we could have, and it more than makes up for not catching the rascals last night. Now we know where to get on their trail."

"If they don't change the place," observed Tom.

"Oh, of course, we've got to take that chance."

"Here's one of them coming over to speak to us, I guess," remarked Tom in a low voice, as he observed the man, who had waved the flag approaching. There was no doubt of his intention for, as soon as he came within talking distance, the stranger called out:

"What are you fellows doing here?"

"Looking at the river," replied Mr. Whitford, calmly.

"Well, you'd better find some other place for a view. This is private property, and we don't like trespassers. Get a move on—get out!"

"Are we doing any harm?" asked the agent.

"I didn't say you were. This is our land, and we don't like strangers snooping around. That's all."

"Particularly when you are going to land some goods."

"What do you mean?" gasped the man.

"I guess you know well enough," was Mr. Whitford's reply.

The man suddenly turned, and gave a shrill whistle. Instantly, from the hut, came several men who had been

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in the motor boat. One or two of them had weapons.

"I guess you'd better go now," said the first man sharply. "You're not in the United States now, you know."

"It's easy to see that, by the POLITENESS of the residents of this section," put in Tom.

"None of your back talk! Get away from here!" cried the man. "If you don't go peaceably—"

"Oh, we're going," interposed Mr. Whitford calmly. "But that isn't saying we won't come back. Come on, boys. We'll get over on Uncle Sam's territory."

The group of men stood silently watching them, as they filed back through the woods.

"What do you make of it?" asked Tom of the agent.

"I'm positive that I'm right, and that they're the smugglers. But I can't do anything on this side of the line. If ever I can catch them across the border, though, there'll be a different story to tell."

"What had we better do?" inquired Ned.

"Go back to our airship, and leave for Logansville. We don't need to land until night, though, but we can make a slow trip. Is the gas machine all right again, Tom?"

"Practically so. If that hadn't gone back on me we would have had those fellows captured by this time."

"Never mind. We did our best."

It did not take Tom and his chum long to complete the repairs, and soon they arose in the air.

"Let's take a flight over where those fellows are, just to show them what we can do," proposed Ned, and Tom and Mr. Whitford agreed to it. Soon they were circling over the hut. The launch was just starting out again, when a cry from the man who seemed to be a sort of guard, drew the attention of his confederates to the noiseless airship.

Once more the launch was turned about, and sent back to shore, while those in it shook their fists at Tom and his friends.

"We can play tag with 'em up here!" chuckled Ned.

"There's the small vessel that pulled up anchor a while ago," remarked Mr. Whitford, pointing to the vessel which had steamed around a wooded point. "They thought we had gone for good, and they were getting ready to land the stuff. Well, we'll know where to head for next time, when we watch for the smugglers at night."

Realizing that nothing more could be done, Tom sent his airship toward the camp, just outside of Loganville. But he did not land until after dark, when, making out the spot by means of the electric lights, which were set aglow automatically at dark, he descended.

"We won't try anything to-night," said Mr. Whitford. "I doubt if the smugglers will themselves, after their experience last night. I'll get into town, see some of my men, and come out here to-morrow night again."

Tom and Ned spent the following day in going carefully over the Falcon, making some slight repairs. The great searchlight was cleaned and adjusted, and then, as dusk came on once more Tom remarked:

"Well, we're ready for 'em any time Mr. Whitford is."

Hardly had he spoken than the tramp of horses' feet was heard coming along the bridle path through the woods, and a voice was heard to exclaim:

"There, now, I understand it perfectly! You don't need to say another word. I know it may be against the regulations, but I can fix that. I'm the busiest man in the world, but I just had to come up here and see Tom Swift. It's costing me a thousand dollars, but the money is well spent. Now don't interrupt me! I know what you're going to say! That you haven't time to bother with moving pictures. But you have! I must have some moving pictures of your chase after the smugglers. Now, don't speak to me, I know all about it. You can't tell me anything. I'll talk to Tom. Are we most there?"

"Yes, we're here," answered Mr. Whitford's voice, and Tom fancied the government agent was a bit puzzled by his strange companion.

"Bless my shoe string!" gasped Mr. Damon.

"Him picture man!" cried Koku.

"Mr. Period!" exclaimed Tom. "I wonder what he is doing here?" and the next moment the excitable little man, for whom Tom had run so many risks getting marvelous moving pictures, with the wizard camera, entered the clearing where the airship was anchored.

CHAPTER XXII. HOVERING O'ER THE BORDER

"Well, Tom, you see I couldn't get along without you," exclaimed Mr. Period, as he rushed forward and grasped Tom's hand, having alighted in rather an undignified manner from the horse that he had ridden. "I'm after you again."

"So I see," remarked our hero. "But I'm afraid I can't—"

"Tut! Tut! Don't say that," interrupted the moving picture man. "I know what you're going to say. Don't do it! Don't go back on me, Tom! Have you the wonderful moving picture camera with you."

"I have, Mr. Period, but—"

"Now! Now! That'll do," broke in the excitable little man. "If you have it, that's enough. I want you to get me some films, showing you in chase of the smugglers. They'll be great to exhibit in our chain of theatres."

"How did you know I was here?" asked Tom. "Easily enough. I called at your house. Your father told me where you were. I came on. It cost me a thousand dollars—maybe more. I don't care! I've got to have those films! You'll get them for me; won't you?"

"Well, I—"

"That's enough! I know what you're going to say. Of course you will! Now how soon may I expect them. They ought to make a good run. Say in a week?"

"It all depends on the smugglers," said Mr. Whitford.

"Yes, yes! I understand, of course. I know! This friend of yours has been very kind to me, Tom. I looked him up as soon as I got to Logansville, and told him what I wanted. He offered to show me the way out here, and here I am. Let's have a look at the camera, to see if it's in good shape. Are you going to have a try for the smugglers to-night?"

"I think so," answered Tom. "As for the camera, really I've been so busy I haven't had time to look at it since we started. I guess it's all right. I don't know what made me bring it along, as I didn't expect to use it."

"But with your great searchlight it will be just the thing," suggested Ned.

"Yes, I think so," added Mr. Whitford, who had been told about the wizard instrument.

"Bless my detective badge!" cried Mr. Damon. "It may be just the thing, Tom. You can offer moving pictures of the smugglers in court, for evidence."

"Of course!" added Mr. Period. "Now, Tom, don't disappoint me."

"Well, I suppose I'll have to get the camera out, and set it up," conceded Tom with a laugh. "As you say, Mr. Damon, the pictures MAY come in valuable. Come, Ned, you get out the camera, and set it up, while Koku and I see to getting the ship in shape for a flight. You'll come along, Mr. Period?"

"I don't know. I was thinking of going back. I'm losing about a hundred dollars a minute by being away from my business."

"You'll have to go back alone," said Mr. Whitford, "as I have to be with Tom, in case of a capture."

"Ride back alone, through these woods? Never! The smugglers might catch me, and I'm too valuable a man to go that way! I'll take a chance in the airship."

Ned busied himself over the wizard camera, which had been stored away, and Mr. Period went with the young bank clerk to look after the apparatus. Meanwhile Tom and Koku saw to it that the Falcon was ready for a quick flight, Mr. Damon and Mr. Whitford lending whatever aid was necessary. The horses, which the agent and Mr. Period had ridden, were tethered in the clearing where they could get food and water.

"Did the smugglers rush anything over last night?" asked Tom.

"No, we evidently had them frightened. But I shouldn't be surprised but what they made the attempt to-night. We'll go back toward the St. Regis Indian reservation, where they were getting ready to unload that steamer, and hover around the border there. Something is sure to happen, sooner or later."

"I guess that's as good a plan as any," agreed Tom, and in a little while they started.

All that night they hovered over the border, sailing back and forth, flashing the great light at intervals to pick up the white wings of a smuggling airship. But they saw nothing.

Mr. Period was in despair, as he fully counted on a capture being made while he was present, so that he might

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see the moving pictures made. But it was not to be.

The wizard camera was all in readiness, but there was no need to start the automatic machinery. For, search as Tom and his friends did for a trace of the smugglers, they could see nothing. They put on full speed, and even went as far as the limits of the Indian reservation, but to no purpose. They heard no throbbing motor, no whizz of great propellers, and saw no white, canvas wings against the dark background of the sky, as Tom's craft made her way noiselessly along.

"I guess we've frightened them away," said Mr. Whitford dubiously, as it came near morning, and nothing suspicious had been seen or heard. "They're holding back their goods, Tom until they think they can take us unawares. Then they'll rush a big shipment over."

"Then's the time we must catch them," declared the young inventor. "We may as well go back now."

"And not a picture!" exclaimed Mr. Period tragically. "Well, be sure to get good ones when you do make a capture, Tom."

"I will," promised the young inventor. Then, with a last sweep along the border he turned the nose of his craft toward Logansville. He had almost reached the place, and was flying rather low over the country roads, when Ned called:

"Hark! I hear something!"

The unmistakable noise of a gasoline motor in operation could be distinguished.

"There they are!" cried Mr. Period.

"Bless my honeysuckle vine!" gasped Mr. Damon.

"The light, Ned, the light!" cried Tom.

His chum flashed the powerful beam all around the horizon, and toward the sky, but nothing was visible.

"Try down below," suggested Mr. Whitford.

Ned sent the beams earthward. And there, in the glare, they saw a youth speeding along on a motor-cycle. In an instant Tom grabbed up the binoculars and focussed them on the rider.

"It's Andy Foger!" he cried.

CHAPTER XXIII. NED IS MISSING

There was a period of silence, following Tom's startling announcement. There were several plate glass windows in the floor of the airship, and through these they all gazed at the youth on the motor-cycle. Only Tom, however, by the aid of the glasses, was able to make out his features.

"Bless my spark plug! Andy Foger!" cried Mr. Damon. "Are you going to try to catch him?"

"Get him and break chug-chug machine!" suggested Koku.

"What do you suppose he's up to, Tom?" asked Ned.

"Andy Foger speeding along at this hour of the morning," remarked Mr. Whitford. "There must be something in the wind."

"Get a moving picture of him," urged Mr. Period. "I might be able to use that."

"I hardly think it would be worth while," decided Tom. "You see Andy hasn't done anything criminal, as far as we know. Of course I think he is capable of it, but that's a different thing. He may be out only on a pleasure jaunt, and he could stop us from showing the pictures, if we took them."

"That's so," agreed Mr. Period. "Don't run any risks of a lawsuit. It takes up too much of my time. Never mind the pictures."

"Just capture him, Tom, and see what he is doing," suggested Mr. Damon. "Bless my chewing gum! But he must be up to something."

"Well, he's aware of the fact that we're watching him, at all events!" exclaimed Mr. Whitford, for, at that moment, Andy, having seen the glare of the light, glanced up. They could see him looking at him, and, a second later, the Shopton bully steered his machine down a side road where the overhanging trees were so thick that he could not be made out, even by the powerful gleams of the great searchlight.

"He's gone!" gasped Ned.

"Afraid I guess," added Mr. Damon. "That shows he was up to something wrong. Well, what are we going to do?"

"Nothing, that I can see," spoke Mr. Whitford. "We can only go back to our camping place, and make another try. This Andy Foger may, or may not, be in with the smugglers. That's something we have yet to prove. However, we can't do anything now."

In vain did Ned try to get the bully within range of the light. They could hear the sounds of the motor cycle growing more and more faint, and then, as it was rapidly getting light, and as they did not want to be seen dropping into their camping place, they made all haste toward it, before dawn should break.

"Well, I can't spend any more time here," declared Mr. Period, when a hasty breakfast had been served.

"Will you ride back with me?" asked Mr. Whitford of the moving picture man.

"Will I? Well, I guess I will! You can't lose me! I'm not going to be captured by those smugglers. I'd be a valuable man for them to have as a hostage. They'd probably ask a million dollars ransom for me," and Mr. Period carefully straightened his brilliant red necktie.

Soon he and Mr. Whitford were riding back to town, taking a roundabout way, as the agent always did, to throw any possible spies off the track.

Everyone, even including the giant Koku was tired enough to take a sleep after dinner. It was about three o'clock when Ned awoke, and he found Tom already up, and at the wireless instrument, which was clicking and buzzing.

"Message coming?" asked the young bank clerk.

Tom nodded, and clasped the receiver over his ear. A moment later he began jotting down a message.

"Mr. Whitford says he has a tip that something is going to take place to-night," read the young inventor a few minutes later. "The smugglers have accumulated a big store of goods, and they are anxious to get them over the border. There are silks, laces, diamonds, and other things on which there is a high duty, or tax for bringing into the United States. He will be here early, and we must be ready for a start at once."

"All right. I guess we are ready now. Say, I'm going over to that little brook, and see if I can catch a few trout for supper."

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"All right. Good idea. Don't be gone too long."

"I won't. Say, where is my coat, anyhow? I never can seem to keep track of that, or my cap either."

"Never mind. Wear mine, and you won't be delayed looking for them," so Ned donned Tom's garment and headpiece, and set out.

Three hours passed, and Mr. Damon prepared to get supper.

"I wonder why Ned doesn't come back with the fish?" he said. "It's time, if we're going to cook them to-night."

"That's right, he ought to be here," agreed Tom. "Koku take a walk over to the trout brook, and tell Mr. Ned to come here, whether he has any fish or not."

"Sure, me go, Mr. Tom!"

Koku was gone perhaps five minutes, and when he came back he was much excited.

"Mr. Ned he no there!" the giant cried. "But fish pole all broken, and ground all full of holes. Look like fight."

Tom started for the place where he knew Ned usually went to fish. Koku and Mr. Damon followed. On reaching it our hero saw indeed that the ground was "full of holes," as the giant described the indentations made by the heels of boots and shoes.

"There's been a fight here!" cried Tom.

"Yes, and Ned is missing," added Mr. Damon.

CHAPTER XXIV. THE NIGHT RACE

The three looked at each other. For a moment they could not understand, and then, as they stood there, the meaning came to them.

"The smugglers!" whispered Tom.

"Of course!" agreed Mr. Damon. "And they must have taken him for you, Tom, for he had on your coat and cap. What can they have done with him?"

"Taken him away, that's evident," spoke Tom. "Let's look around, and see if we can find him."

They looked, but to no purpose. Ned had disappeared. There were the signs of a struggle, the fish rod was broken in several places, as if Ned had used it as a club, and the ground was torn up.

"Bless my tin whistle!" cried Mr. Damon. "What shall we do?"

For a moment no one knew what to say, then, as they looked at each other in silence, a voice called:

"I say! What's up? What's the matter? Where are you all? Hey, Tom Swift!"

"It's Mr. Whitford!" cried Tom. "He's just in time." Then he called in louder tones:

"Here we are! In the woods by the trout brook! Come on over! Ned is gone!"

There was a commotion in the bushes, the trampling of a horse, and a moment later the government agent had joined the others.

"What's this?" he cried. "Ned gone? What do you mean?"

"He's missing. The smugglers have him, I'm afraid," explained Tom, and then he gave the details.

"It certainly looks so," agreed Mr. Whitford. "His wearing of your coat and cap fooled them. They must have spied out this camping place, and they were in hiding. When they saw Ned coming to fish they took him for you. Having failed in their attempt to damage the airship, they decided to get her captain. Probably they thought that if they did the Falcon could not be run, and they would be safe. But they got the wrong man."

"Then we must get Ned back at once!" cried Tom. "Come on, we'll start right away! Where do you think we can nab them, Mr. Whitford?"

"Wait a minute," suggested the government agent. He seemed in deep thought, and paced up and down. It was clear that a great question was confronting him.

"Well!" exclaimed Tom impatiently, "if we're going to get Ned we must start at once."

"Perhaps it would be best not to try to rescue Ned at once," said the custom house man after a pause.

"What!" cried Tom. "Not rescue Ned, my best chum?"

"Not at once," repeated Mr. Whitford. "Look here, Tom. I know it seems a hard thing to say, but perhaps if we proceed on our original plan, to hover over the border, and get on the trail of the smugglers, chasing them to where they land the goods in the United States, it will be best."

"And not rescue Ned?"

"We can best rescue him by catching the smugglers."

"Then you think—"

"That they have him with them—on board one of their airships very likely. If we get THEM we'll have NED."

"Then we'll get 'em!" cried Tom with energy. "Come on back to the Falcon. We'll get ready for a big flight!"

"Yes, I think they'll make a desperate effort to—night," went on the agent. "They have a lot of goods ready to rush over the border, and the fact that they tried to capture you, shows that they are ready to pull off a big trick. I think if we can catch them to—night, it will put an end to their operations, and, at the same time, bring Ned back to us."

"Where do you think they will start to cross the line?" asked Tom.

"Near the place where we saw the man waving the flags. I have information to the effect that they have a store of valuable goods there. They imagine that they have the master of the airship, and the owner of the great searchlight in their power, and that they can not be molested, so they will be bold."

"But they'll soon find out that Ned isn't Tom," said Mr. Damon.

"No they won't! Not if it depends on Ned!" cried Tom. "Ned is game. He'll soon get wise to the fact that they have taken him for me, and he'll carry on the deception. None of the smugglers know me intimately."

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"Unless Andy Foger should be with them," suggested Mr. Damon.

"Oh, Ned can fool Andy any day. Come on, Mr. Whitford. We'll get the smugglers to-night, spoil their game, and rescue Ned. Somehow, I feel that we're going to succeed."

"Bless my tin dishpan!" cried Mr. Damon. "I hope we do."

Slowly, and with no very cheerful hearts, they filed away from the scene of Ned's capture. In spite of the fact that they did not think he would be harshly treated, they worried about him, Tom especially.

A hasty supper was eaten, and then, Tom, having seen that everything aboard the ship was in good order, sent her aloft on what he hoped would be the last chase after the smugglers. He decided to have Mr. Damon steer the craft, as this was comparatively easy, once she was started on her course, while the young inventor would manage the searchlight, and start the automatic wizard camera, in case there was anything to photograph.

Up and up went the Falcon, and soon she was making her way toward the St. Regis Indian reservation, near which it was expected the smugglers would start. Tom put out every light, as he wanted to remain in darkness, until he could see a moving glow in the sky that would tell him of a rival airship on the wing.

It did not take them long to reach the desired spot, and they hovered in the air over it, every one with tense nerves, waiting for what would happen next.

Tom did not want to show his searchlight just yet, as he feared the gleam of it might stop the operations of the smugglers. So he waited in dark-ness, approaching close to the earth in his noiseless ship several times, and endeavoring to see something through the powerful night glasses.

Suddenly, from below them, came a subdued throb and hum of a motor.

"There they are!" exclaimed Mr. Damon.

"I think so," agreed Tom. He looked below. He saw two flickering lights, rather far apart. Mr. Whitford observed them at the same moment.

"There are TWO of them!" exclaimed the agent, "TWO airships, Tom!"

"So I see. Koku, get out my electric rifle. We can't chase two, if they separate, so I may have to stop one. It's best to be prepared. I'm going to follow them in the dark, until they get over the border, and then I'll turn on the light and the camera. Then it will be a race to the finish."

The twin lights came nearer. Tom stood with his mouth to the signal tube that communicated with Mr. Damon in the pilot house. From a side window he watched the smugglers' airships. They shot upward and then came on straight ahead, to pass to one side of him. Now they were past. Tom started the wizard camera.

"Half speed ahead!" the young inventor signalled, and the Falcon shot forward. The night race was on.

CHAPTER XXV. THE CAPTURE—CONCLUSION

"Do you think they know we are here, Tom?" asked Mr. Whitford, as he stood at the side of the young inventor in the motor room.

"I don't believe so, as yet. They can't hear us, and, unless they have pretty powerful glasses, they can't pick us up. We can soon tell however, if they are aware that we are following them."

"Have you made any plan about capturing them?"

"No, I'm going to wait and see what turns up. I can't certainly chase two of them, if they separate, and that's why I'm going to cripple one if I have to."

"But won't that be dangerous? I don't want to see any of them killed, or even hurt, though they are smugglers."

"And I don't want to hurt them, either. If worst comes to worst I'm going to put a few holes in the wing planes of the smaller craft. That will cause her to lose headway, and she can't keep up. They'll have to volplane to earth, but, if they know anything at all about airships, they can do that easily, and not get a bit hurt. That will put them out of the race, and I can keep on after the big ship. I fancy that carries the more valuable cargo."

"I presume so. Well, don't bring the one to earth until you get over Uncle Sam's territory, and then maybe there will be a chance to capture them, and the goods too."

"I will," promised Tom. They were still over Canadian territory, but were rapidly approaching the border.

"I think I will send a wireless to my men in Logansville, to start out and try to pick up the crippled airship after you disable her," decided Mr. Whitford, and as Tom agreed that this was a good plan, the wireless was soon cracking away, the government agent being an adept in its use.

"I've told them we'd give another signal to tell them, as nearly as possible where we made them take to earth," he said to Tom, and the young inventor nodded in agreement.

"Ned in them ship?" asked Koku, as he came back from the pilot house to report that Mr. Damon was all right, and needed no help.

"Yes, I think Ned is in one of them," said Tom. "The big one most likely. Poor Ned a prisoner! Well, I'll soon have him away from them—if nothing happens," and Tom looked about the motor room, to make sure that every piece of apparatus was working perfectly.

The two airships of the smugglers were hanging close together, and it was evident that the larger one had to make her pace slow, so as not to get ahead of the small craft. Tom followed on relentlessly, not using half his speed, but creeping on silently in the darkness.

"We're over the United States now," said Mr. Whitford, after a glance earthward through the binoculars. "Let 'em get a little farther over the line before you pop 'em with your electric rifle, Tom."

Our hero nodded, and looked out of a side window to note the progress of the smugglers. For several miles the chase was thus kept up, and then, suddenly the smaller craft was seen to swerve to one side.

"They are separating!" cried Mr. Whitford, at the same time Mr. Damon called through the tube from the pilot house:

"Which one shall I follow, Tom?"

"The big one," the youth answered. "I'll take care of the other!" With a quick motion he flashed the current into the great searchlight, and, calling to Mr. Whitford to hold it so that the beams played on the small aeroplane, Tom leveled his wonderful electric rifle at the big stretch of canvas. He pressed the lever, a streak of blue flame shot out through an opened port, and, an instant later, the small craft of the smugglers was seen to stagger about, dipping to one side.

"There they come!" cried Mr. Whitford. "They're done for!"

"One shot more," said Tom grimly. "It won't hurt 'em!"

Again the deadly electric rifle sent out its wireless charge, and the airship slowly fluttered toward the earth.

"They're volplaning down!" cried Tom. "That's the end of them. Now to catch the other!"

"Take the lantern!" cried Mr. Whitford. "I'm going to send a wireless to my men to get after this disabled craft."

Tom swung the beam of the searchlight forward and a moment later had picked up the big aeroplane. It was

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some distance in advance, and going like the wind. He heard the automatic camera clicking away.

"They speeded her up as soon as they saw what was on!" cried Tom. "But we haven't begun to go yet!"

He signalled to Mr. Damon, who pulled over the accelerating lever and instantly the Falcon responded. Now indeed the race was on in earnest. The smugglers must have understood this, for they tried all their tactics to throw the pursuing airship off the track. They dodged and twisted, now going up, and now going down, and even trying to turn back, but Tom headed them off. Ever the great beam of light shone relentlessly on them, like some avenging eye. They could not escape.

"Are we gaining?" cried Mr. Whitford.

"A little, and slowly," answered Tom. "They have a bigger load on than when we chased them before, but still they have a speed almost equal to ours. They must have a magnificent motor."

Faster and faster sped on the Falcon. The other craft kept ahead of her, however, though Tom could see that, inch by inch, he was overhauling her.

"Where do they seem to be heading for?" asked the government agent.

"Shopton, as near as I can make out," replied the youth. "They probably want to get there ahead of us, and hide the goods. I must prevent that. Mr. Damon is steering better than he ever did before."

Tom shifted the light to keep track of the smugglers, who had dipped downward on a steep slant. Then they shot upward, but the Falcon was after them.

The hours of the night passed. The chase was kept up. Try as the smugglers did, they could not shake Tom off. Nearer and nearer he crept. There was the gray dawn of morning in the sky, and Tom knew, from the great speed they had traveled that they must be near Shopton.

"They're slowing up. Tom!" suddenly cried Mr. Whitford who was watching them through an open port.

"Yes, I guess they must have heated some of their bearings. Well, here's where I capture them, if it's ever to be. Koku, let down the grappling anchor."

"Are you really going to capture them, Tom?" asked the custom officer.

"I'm going to try," was the answer, as Koku came back to say that the anchor was dragging over the stern by a long rope.

"You work the light, Mr. Whitford," cried Tom. "I'm going to relieve Mr. Damon in the pilot house. He can help you here. It will be all over in another minute."

In the pilot house Tom grasped the steering levers. Then in a final burst of speed he sent his craft above, and past that of the smugglers.

Suddenly he felt a shock. It was the grappling anchor catching in the rail of the other air craft. A shout of dismay arose from the smugglers.

"You've got 'em! You've got 'em, Tom!" yelled Mr. Whitford.

"Bless my hasty pudding! So he has!" gasped Mr. Damon.

Changing the course of his craft Tom sent the Falcon toward the earth, pulling the other aeroplane with him. Down and down he went, and the frantic efforts of the smugglers to release themselves were useless. They were pulled along by the powerful airship of our hero.

A few minutes later Tom picked out a good landing place in the dim light of the breaking dawn, and went to earth. Jamming on the brakes he leaped from the pilot house to the stern of his own craft, catching up his electric rifle. The other airship, caught by the grappling anchor at the end of a long rope, was just settling down, those in her having the good sense to shut off their power, and volplane when they found that they could not escape.

As the smugglers' craft touched the earth, several figures leaped from her, and started to run away.

"Hold on!" cried Tom. "I've got you all covered with the electric rifle! Don't move! Koku, you, and Mr. Whitford and Mr. Damon take care of them. Tie 'em up."

"Bless my hat band!" cried the eccentric man. "What a great capture! Where are we?"

"Not far from Shopton," answered Tom. "But look after the prisoners."

There was a cry of astonishment from Mr. Whitford as he reached the sullen occupants of the smugglers' craft.

"Here are the Fogers—father and son!" the agent called to Tom. "They were in it after all. Great Scott! What a surprise. And here are a lot of men whom I've been after for some time! Oh, Tom Swift, this IS a capture."

"What right have you to use these high-handed methods on us?" demanded Mr. Foger pompously.

"Yes, dad make 'em let us go; we haven't done anything!" snarled Andy.

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"I guess you won't go yet a while," said the agent. "I'll have a look inside this craft. Keep 'em covered, Tom."

"I will. I guess Andy knows what this rifle can do. See if Ned is a prisoner."

There was a few moments of waiting during which Koku and Mr. Damon securely bound the prisoners. Then Mr. Whitford reappeared. He was accompanied by some one.

"Hello, Tom!" called the latter. "I'm all right. Much obliged for the rescue."

"Are you all right, Ned?" asked Tom, of his chum.

"Yes, except that they kept me gagged. The men who captured me took me for you, and, after the Fogers found out the mistake, they decided to keep me anyhow. Say, you've made a great haul."

And so it proved, for in the airship was a quantity of valuable silks and laces, while on the persons of the smugglers, including Mr. Foger, were several packets of diamonds. These were taken possession of by Mr. Whitford, who also confiscated the bales and packages.

Ned was soon aboard the Falcon, while the prisoners, securely tied were laid in the cabin of their own craft with Koku to stand guard over them. Mr. Damon went to Shopton, which was the nearest town, for police aid, and soon the smugglers were safe in jail, though Mr. Foger protested vigorously against going.

Ned explained how he had been pounced upon by two men when he was fishing, and told how without a chance to warn his friends, he had been gagged and bound and taken to the headquarters of the smugglers in Canada, just over the border. They went by carriages. Then the Fogers, who, it seemed, were hand in glove with the law violators, saw him, and identified him. The smugglers had thought they were capturing Tom.

"It was your coat and hat that did it, Tom," explained Ned. "I fought against being taken away, but when I happened to think if they took me for you it might be a trick against them. And it was. The Fogers didn't discover the mistake until just before we started."

"They planned for a big shipment of goods last night and used two airships. I don't know what became of the other."

"We've got her, and the men, too," interposed Mr. Whitford, as this conversation was taking place several hours later in the Swift home. "I just had a wire from my deputy. They got right after the damaged airship, and reached her just as the men were hiding the goods, and preparing to dismantle the craft. We have them all, thanks to you, Tom!"

"And to think that the Fogers were in it all the while!" remarked Tom. "They certainly fooled us."

"I'm not done with them yet," said Mr. Whitford. "I'm going to have another look at their house, and the gardener's home."

"The Fogers were in dire straits, that's why they went in with the smugglers," explained Ned. "Though they gagged me, they didn't stop up my ears, and when they hid me in a little room on the airship, I could hear them talking together. It seems that the smugglers put up the money to buy the airships, and just happened to stumble on Andy to run the machinery for them. His father helped, too. They shared in the proceeds, and they must have made considerable, for the smuggling has been going on for some time."

"Well, they'll lose all they made," declared the agent. Later he, Tom and Ned made another inspection of the Foger premises. Down in the cellar of the gardener's house they found, behind a cunningly concealed door, a tunnel leading into the old mansion. Later it was learned that the smugglers had been in the habit of bringing goods across the border in airships, landing them in a lonely stretch of woods outside of Shopton, and later bringing them by wagon to the mansion.

Inside there, in some secret rooms that had been constructed off of the main apartments, the goods would be unpacked, put in different boxes, carried through the tunnel to the gardener's house, and thence shipped as "old furniture" to various unscrupulous agents who disposed of them.

The hiring of Mr. Dillon had been only a blind. Later the smugglers, in the guise of carpenters, made the desired changes. So cunningly had the opening of the tunnel in the cellar of the gardener's house been concealed, that it was only discovered after a most careful search.

There is little more to tell. With the capture of the two airships, an end was put to the smuggling operations, especially since nearly all the gang was captured. A few, those who brought the goods up the St. Lawrence, from the ocean steamers, managed to escape, but they had to go into hiding.

The goods captured proved very valuable, and partly made up to Uncle Sam's treasury the losses sustained. Tom was offered a big reward, but would not take it, accepting only money for his expenses, and requesting that

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the reward be divided among the agents of Mr. Whitford's staff, who needed it more than Tom did.

There was no difficulty about convicting the prisoners, including the Fogers, for Tom's wizard camera had taken pictures of the chase and capture, and the men were easily identified. Mr. Period was quite delighted with the roll of films that Tom gave him. Some of the smugglers were sent to prison for long terms, and others, including Andy and his father, had to pay heavy fines.

"Well, Tom Swift, I can't thank you enough," said Mr. Whitford, one day as he called to pay the young inventor a visit. "I'm ordered to the Pacific coast and I may have to send for you with your airship, and great searchlight."

"I don't believe I'll come," laughed the lad. "I'm going to take a long rest and settle down."

"He's going to get married!" exclaimed Ned, taking care to get behind a chair.

"If Mr. Tom marry, he keep Koku for servant?" asked the giant anxiously.

"Oh, I'm not going to get married, just yet, Koku!" exclaimed Tom, who was blushing furiously. "I'm going to invent something new."

"Bless my fountain pen!" cried Mr. Damon.

"Oh, Tom, it seems good to have you home again," said aged Mr. Swift softly.

"Dat's what it do!" added Eradicate. "Boomerang hab been monstrous lonely sence yo'—all been gone, Massa Tom."

"Well, I'm going to stay home—for a while," said Tom. And thus, surrounded as he is by his friends and relatives, we will take leave of Tom Swift.

THE END