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#3 in our series by G. Harvey Ralphson

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BOY SCOUTS IN AN AIRSHIP ***

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Boy Scouts in an Airship;

or, The Warning From the Sky

BY G. HARVEY RALPHSON

CHAPTER I

SPIES IN THE BOY SCOUT CAMP

Gates, the United States Secret Service man, closed the door gently and remained standing just inside the room, his head bent forward in a listening attitude. Ned Nestor and Jimmie McGraw, Boy Scouts of the Wolf Patrol, New York City, who had been standing by a window, looking out on a crowded San Francisco street, previous to the sudden appearance of the Secret Service man, turned toward the entrance with smiles on their faces.

They evidently thought that Gates was posing, as so many detectives have a silly habit of doing, and so gave little heed to the hand he lifted in warning. The boys knew little about Gates at that time, and so may be pardoned for the uncomplimentary thoughts with which they noted his theatrical conduct.

Young Nestor had been engaged by the United States government to undertake a difficult and dangerous mission to South America, and Gates had been sent on from Washington to post him as to the details of the case. The boys had waited at the San Francisco hotel three days for the arrival of the Secret Service man, and waited impatiently, as Sam Leroy, who was to be the third member of the party, was anxious for the safety of his aeroplane, the Nelson, in which the trip to "the roof of the world" was to be made.

The Nelson was lying, guarded night, and day, in a field just out of the city, on the Pacific side, and Leroy was impatiently keeping his eyes on the guards most of the time. There was a subconscious notion in the minds of all the boys that there were enemies about, and that the aeroplane would never be fully out of danger until she was well over the ocean on her way south. Gates had arrived only that morning, and now the lads were eager to be off.

A couple of hours before his appearance in the room that morning, the Secret Service agent had left the boys in the lobby below to arrange for the necessary papers and funds for the mission. Before going out, however, he had been informed of the boys' suspicions, and had made light of the idea that the aeroplane was in danger from secret enemies, pointing to the fact that no one was supposed to know anything about the proposed journey save the boys and himself as conclusive evidence that the suspicion of constant surveillance was not well founded.

Now, on his return, his cautious movements indicated that he, too,

was alarmed and on his guard. While Ned was wondering what it was that had so changed Gates' point of view, there came a quick, imperative knock on the door of the room, which was occupied by Ned and Jimmie as a sleeping apartment.

Instantly, almost before the sound of the knock died away, Gates opened the door and stepped forward. The man who stood in the corridor, facing the doorway, was tall, slender, dark of complexion, like a Spaniard or a Mexican. His black hair was long, straight, thin; his black eyes were bright, treacherous, too close together, with a little vertical wrinkle between the brows. He was dressed in a neat brown business suit of expensive material.

When the door was opened he stepped forward and glanced into the interior of the room, apparently with the purpose of entering. But when Gates moved aside to give him passageway he drew back, the set smile on his face vanishing as he bowed low and swung his slender hands out in elaborate gesture.

"Pardon!" he said. "I have made a mistake in the room."

He was about to move away when Gates gritted out a question.

"For whom were you looking?" he asked. "We may be able to direct you to your friend," he added, more courteously, his alert eyes taking in every detail of the man's face, figure and dress.

"It is nothing!" was the quick reply. "I will make inquiries at the office--which, undoubtedly, I should have done before."

In a moment he was gone, moving gracefully toward the elevator. Gates watched his elegant, well-dressed figure with a smile of quiet satisfaction. When the visitor gained the elevator, he turned and bowed at the still open doorway, and the Secret Service man recognized the grin on his face as expressive of triumph rather than apology.

"What did he want?" asked Jimmie, as Gates, closed the door.

Gates did not answer the question immediately. Instead he asked one:

"Ever see that fellow before?"

Jimmie shook his head, but Ned looked grave as he answered:

"I have seen him about the hotel--frequently. He seems to have a suite off this corridor, or the one above it."

At this moment the door was opened again and Sam Leroy bounced into the room, his eyes shining with enthusiasm, his muscles tense with the joy of youth and health. He drew back when he saw Gates, whom he had not met before, and looked questioningly at Ned.

"This is Lieutenant Gates, for whom we have been waiting," Ned said, "and this, Lieutenant, is Sam Leroy, who is to take us to South America in his aeroplane."

"I hope the machine is above reproach as to strength and speed," laughed Gates, as the two shook hands cordially, "for there is likely to be doings down there."

"The Nelson is warranted for work and wind," said Ned. "She crossed the continent in a rush and spied on us through British Columbia and on down the Columbia river, not long ago, and I can recommend her as a very desirable bird of the air."

"She's all sound now," Leroy said, "but there's no knowing how long she will be if we don't get her out of San Francisco. There was a couple of men hanging around her last night, and one of them went away with a bullet in his leg. I'm glad you're here, Lieutenant, for now we can get away--quick!"

"Did you get a good look at either of the two men you speak of?" asked Ned, his mind going back to what seemed to him to be a secret conspiracy against the Nelson.

"One of them," Leroy answered, "was tall, slender, dark; with long straight hair and eyes like a snake. I noticed, too, that he had a habit of moistening his lips with the end of his tongue, and that made me think of a snake thrusting out his tongue. I got a shot at the other fellow, but not at this one."

Gates and Ned looked at each other with nods of mutual understanding. This was a pretty good description of the man who had just stood before the door of that room. Then the lieutenant turned to Jimmie.

"You asked a moment ago," he said, "what the fellow wanted here. Now I think I can tell you. He wanted to confirm his suspicions that the four of us axe working together. He has been sleuthing about the corridors all the morning, watching me; and his mission to this room was to make sure that my business in San Francisco is with Ned--that we are working together."

"He's sure doing a lot of Sherlock Holmes stunts," Jimmie declared. "And I reckon he's next to his job, for he appears to have inspected all the points of interest, from the field where the Nelson is to the room where the plans are being made."

"Yes," Leroy said, his manner showing apprehension as well as anger, "but how the Old Scratch did he get his knowledge, of what, we are about to do? I thought no one in the West knew except us four. And what's he trying to do, anyway? What difference does it make to him if we do go to South America in an aeroplane?"

"I have a notion," Gates replied, "that he objects to your going in an airship because you will make such swift time. Let me tell you something more about this case. Then you will be able to understand why efforts may be made to prevent your going to South America, in an airship or in any other way."

"It's just the airship they've been after so far," Leroy interrupted. "They haven't troubled us--and they'd better not!"

"I imagine," said the lieutenant, gravely, "that their activities will broaden out as they get warmed up to their work. Understand? What I mean is this: You boys are risking your lives in undertaking this mission. You will be followed and spied upon from the minute you leave San Francisco, and the chances will be all against you when you reach your field of operations. Even the Government cannot protect you in your undertaking, for the Government is not supposed to know anything about this case."

"We are to do something by stealth, then, which the diplomats of the State department are too cautious to undertake?" asked Ned.

"That is it exactly," was the reply. "If the State department should take cognizance of the situation down there and make any sort of a demand, war would be certain to follow in case the demand was denied, which it would be. Therefore, the State department does not wish to make a demand. Still, the American who is in trouble must be protected. You are to go and get him out of his dungeon, or wherever he may be, and the Department of State will wink at what you do and look innocent."

"Aw, why don't they send a warship to do the job?" demanded Jimmie.

"Because," replied the lieutenant, "Uncle Sam has taken the republics of South America under his protection, and he does not care to spank them in the presence of all the nations of the earth! He wants to get this man Lyman--Horace M. Lyman, to be exact--out of the clutches of a crooked gang in Paraguay without wasting money and lives. Hence the arrangement with you boys."

"I have read something about the Lyman case," Ned observed, "but I have forgotten all the material points, I guess."

"Lyman," Gates went on, "took up his residence in Paraguay some years ago and opened negotiations with the government for a cattle concession. The lands known as the 'Chaco' district, lying between the Paraguay and Pilcomayo rivers, are said to be the best for grazing purposes in all South America. Years ago they were considered worthless swamps, but this is all changed now.

"Well, Lyman entered into negotiations with the president of this alleged republic and got his concession. There is no knowing how much he paid for it, for every new president of Paraguay--and they have new ones quite frequently down there--seems to do business on

the theory that what he doesn't get while the getting is good he never will get at all. There have been four or five new official heads of this alleged republic within a couple of years.

"The country is on the verge of revolution most of the time and as the army goes so goes the election. Jara was made prisoner last July, and one Rojas put in power. Now, in order to keep in good standing with the army, the government is obliged to have generals who are loyal to whoever is in power. These generals must be paid for their services, of course.

"It seems that Lyman fell under the displeasure of one of these powerful military chaps, probably because he refused to give up all his profits in the cattle business. Anyway, Lyman disappeared from home, quite suddenly, and his manager was notified that settlement could be made with one Senor Lopez, an army chief, said to be a relative of a former president. So Lopez was appealed to.

"Now Lopez is a slippery chap. He denied knowing anything about Lyman, but declared that unless the cattleman appeared shortly and took up his work on the cattle concession the grant would be taken from him. That is like South American justice. Lock a man up and then deprive him of his rights because he can't appear and claim them!"

"Must be a fine healthy country!" Jimmie interposed.

"It is all of that," laughed the lieutenant. "Then this manager, I think his name is Coye, appealed to the United States consul and the consul to the president. Nothing doing! Lyman, they insisted, had not been molested by the authorities. But Lyman's people in this country are kicking up an awful row, and something must be done.

"There is no doubt that the cattleman, is locked up in some of the old military prisons of the country, yet the State department can't get him out. The president offers any assistance in his power, of course! Lopez weeps when the matter is mentioned to him--weeps at the unfounded suspicions which are being cast upon him! So there you are! The only hope for Lyman lies in some such method as has been planned. If you fail, the situation will be desperate, indeed."

"Why don't Lyman buy the fellow off?" asked Jimmie.

"The purpose of Lopez in pursuing the course referred to is undoubtedly to find an excuse for robbing Lyman of the concession and selling it to another at a much greater price. So others besides the general and Lyman are concerned in this mix-up."

"You refer to a person, or corporation, waiting to buy the concession?" asked Ned, the reason for the surveillance in San Francisco coming to him like a flash.

"That is it."

"And these prospective concessionaires are looking to it that Lyman gets no aid from this country?"

"I had not looked at the matter in that way, had not thought of their venturing over here, but presume you are right."

"Look here," Leroy asked, "are you figuring it out that the people who are trying to steal or cripple the Nelson came here from Paraguay for the express purpose of watching this Lyman case and preventing his friends from assisting him?"

"You state the case in a way which gives it a good deal of importance," Gates replied, "But I believe you state it correctly. Just how the men who hope to gain the concession if Lyman loses it came to understand the attitude of our Government is more than I can imagine, but it is quite clear to me that they do understand the situation--that they are thoroughly posted as to every move that has been made by the Government and by the friends of the cattleman."

"It is a good thing to know that we are likely to be chased to South America," Ned said, "for we know exactly what to expect, and shall be on our guard."

"Chased to South America!" laughed Leroy. "They'll have to go some if they keep up with the little old Nelson! She can fly some--if you want to know!"

CHAPTER II

A FOX JOINS THE WOLVES

Nelson hung like a great gull over New Orleans one hot morning in early August. The boys who occupied seats on the light aluminum form under the sixty-foot wings glimpsed the Gulf of Mexico in the distance, while directly their feet ran the crooked streets of the French Quarter.

The departure from San Francisco had been delayed for a long time because of the non-arrival of important instructions from Washington, and because of a slight injury to the aeroplane while out on what Leroy called an "exercise run." Lieutenant Gates had remained with the boys until they started on their long flight to the mouth of the great Mississippi river, and had then returned to Washington.

I had first been the intention to proceed due from San Francisco,

then wing toward the east where the coast of Peru showed. This plan was opposed by the lieutenant, for the reason that an airship far out on the Pacific ocean, directly in the steamship route, would be likely to attract attention sailing over the southwestern states and Central America. Daring aviators now venture in all directions and at all altitudes above the solid earth, but they are still cautious about proceeding far out over the merciless waters of the oceans which rim the continent of North America.

So, yielding to the wishes of the lieutenant, the Nelson had been directed by her navigators across California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Louisiana until the great city of the South lay spread out before them. The distance covered by the airship in this flight was not far from thirty-five hundred miles, and the Nelson, leaving the coast city on Monday morning, August 7, had covered the run so as to reach New Orleans late Wednesday afternoon.

The boys might, it is true, have speeded up and made the distance in thirty-six hours, or less but they realized the necessity of taking good care of themselves, and so they had rested in quiet places both Monday and Tuesday night, landing about midnight and sleeping until long after daylight. Having provisions with them, they had not found it necessary to land except when gasoline was obtained at Santa Fe.

The machine had attracted little attention on the route, for it was painted a dull gray, and its aluminum motors gave forth little sound. It was two merits of the machine, which had been invented by young Leroy, that it could navigate in a clear sky a mile up without being observed from below, and could also run to within a short distance of the earth without making herself conspicuous by the popping of her motors. The United States authorities are now adapting these two qualities to the government airships to be used in the military service.

The boys remained in New Orleans until Thursday morning, August 10, and then, with full provision baskets and gasoline tanks, they set out across the Gulf of Mexico. They soon sighted Yucatan, which is really a province of Mexico, darted over British Honduras, and swung over the forests of Guatemala, the one country in Central America which is never bothered with revolutions.

When an ambitious person wants to wrest the reins of government from the officials in charge, they take him out and stand him up against a stone wall, with a firing squad in front. This manner of preventing revolutions is believed to be conducive to peace and also to the sanctity of human lives. Jimmie, who had been reading up on South and Central America while waiting in San Francisco, explained many points of interest as the Nelson sped on her way.

They took on more gasoline at Panama, and Ned and Jimmie were very glad to renew their acquaintance with that now model city. Those who have read the former books of this series will remember that the

Boy Scouts at one time had a commission to stand guard over the great Gatun dam.

They did not remain long in Panama, however, as they were anxious to get to the scene of their future operations. They were all anticipating great fun in exploring "the roof of the world," which extends from Colombia to Argentina, north and south, through Equator, Peru, and Bolivia, more than 2,000 miles, or as far as from New York City to Denver. In many directions from this "roof" may be seen villages, cattle, sheep, llamas, and evidences of mining.

The boys made good progress down the coast of tropical South America. They had heard much of Peru, and were surprised to see only a great strip of sand, lying like a desert, between the Pacific and the mountains. Now and then a little stream, fed by the melting snows in the Andes, comes trailing out toward the sea, but it is usually smaller at its mouth than at its source for the reason that the precious water is utilized for irrigation purposes. Wherever there is water crops grow luxuriantly.

Thus far they had not been molested in any way. Indeed, considering the speed with which they had traveled, it would have been difficult for any one to have meddled with their plans. They were therefore in excellent spirits when they landed at Lima, which is the one large city of the country.

Lima, however, is not built on the coast, Callao being the seaport of the metropolis. Lima is a modern city in every way, with, handsome streets, electric lights, and all that any modern city has in the way of amusements.

The Nelson was anchored on the morning of August 14, in a sequestered spot, and the boys, after answering many foolish questions, laid plans to look over the wonderful city. It was necessary to station a strong guard about the machine, for the natives--many of whom spoke the English language fairly well--were overly curious concerning the man-made bird.

In answer to all questions as to their plans, the lads replied that they were seeking the headwaters of the Amazon, and would soon pass over the Andes and drift down into Brazil. This was not far from the actual truth, as it really was the intention to return home by that route after their mission had been accomplished.

"But the wind is always from the east," was often urged against this plan, as explained by Jimmie, who lingered about the Nelson while the others were at the hotel.

When it was explained to the doubters that the Nelson was capable of making a hundred miles an hour against a stiff breeze, the natives seemed to doubt the veracity of the boys. The Peruvians knew little of airships, and when Jimmie exhibited to them daily newspapers showing how Germany was building a fleet of three hundred airships

to use in case of war, they still looked incredulous.

"Look here, fellers," Jimmie explained to them, later in the afternoon of the arrival, as a group of curious ones stood about the roped-in enclosure where the Nelson lay, "I guess you don't know much about the navigation of the air. It used to be risky; now it is no more so than riding on a railroad train."

"You say it well!"

The words were spoken in good English, seemingly in a boy's voice, and Jimmie peered through his audience in order to catch a glimpse of the speaker. Presently, above the heads which surrounded him, the boy saw a hand and arm extended. The palm was out, the thumb and little finger flat and crossed, the three remaining fingers held straight out. The full salute of the Boy Scouts.

"Say, you!" the lad cried out, greatly pleased at finding a Boy Scout there. "Where did you get that?"

"Scouted for it!" was the reply.

"What does it read?"

"Be prepared!"

"Where from?" was the next question.

"Fox Patrol, Chicago."

"You must be pretty foxy," Jimmie laughed, "to get away off here."

The member of the Fox Patrol now made his way through the crowd and extended a hand to Jimmie.

"You don't look as if it paid to be a Fox," laughed the latter.

The boy certainly did look like a tramp. He was a lad of about sixteen, well formed as to figure and attractive as to feature, with bright blue eyes, long, fair hair, and a complexion which would have been perfect only for the grime upon it. He blushed as Jimmie looked him over, and involuntarily turned his eyes down to his ragged clothing and broken shoes.

"Forget that!" Jimmie cried, in a moment. "I didn't mean anything by it. Where you stopping?"

The fact was that Jimmie suspected from the appearance of the lad that he was hungry as well as ragged and dirty. He certainly looked hungry. The boy hesitated before replying, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, his eyes on the ground. Then a whimsical smile came to his face and he looked Jimmie squarely in the face.

"No use of lyin' about it," he said. "I'm stoppin' down here at the Blue Sky Hotel. It's a dandy place to stop at. They never present a board bill."

Jimmie sat back on the rope which was drawn about the Nelson to keep meddlesome ones away from the machine and burst into a roar of laughter. The crowd looked on stupidly, glancing from boy to boy, and then at one another, as if wondering if these Americans always went crazy when they met in a foreign land.

"I know that Blue Sky Hotel," Jimmie said, presently, "though I've never heard it called by that name before. I had a room in one, in Central Park, New York, until a sparrow cop drove me out of it. I liked it because I didn't have to dress for dinner there," he added, whimsically.

"The feed is rather slim," observed the other.

"It's run on the European plan," grinned Jimmie. "You get your sleepins, an' no one cares whether you get your eatin's or not. What's your name?"

"Dougherty--Mike Dougherty, Clark street, south of Van Buren!"

"I guess you must be French," Jimmie grinned.

"You've guessed it. Now, what's your name, and what are you boys doin' here with this old sky-ship?"

"I'll tell you all about it when we get back to the hotel," Jimmie replied. "Do you know any of the gazabos about here? I want some one to watch the ginks who are watchin' the mutts who are watchin' the aeroplane."

Dougherty laughed at this suggestion of a treble surveillance and pointed out a lanky looking individual who was studying the machine closely from the outer side of the roped-circle.

"That's Pedro," he said. "He's all right. About all I've had to eat since I came here he's given me. He's a Peruvian Indian, and in need of money. Give him a dollar, and he'll guard your guards a month, and never leave the machine, night or day."

"Does he talk United States?"

"Oh, just a little."

Pedro talked quite a little United States, as Jimmie called it, and a bargain was soon struck with him. Then the two boys started away together. First they visited a clothing store, where Jimmie looked at the best suits in stock, and measured Dougherty cautiously with his eyes. A full outfit of under and outer clothing provided, they proceeded to the hotel, where Jimmie ushered his new-found friend

into a commodious bathroom.

"Remove some of your real estate," the boy said, "an' hop into these new clothes. They ain't very nobby, but the best I could get here."

Mike Dougherty stood looking at Jimmie for a moment as if he could not believe what he heard. It had been a long time since he had been clean and properly clothed. Then there came a suspicious moisture to his keen eyes and he turned away.

"Oh, well," he said, with a tremble in his clear young voice, "mebbe I'll be able to pay you back some day. Just now I'm--"

"Cut it out!" Jimmie replied. "You hain't got anythin' on me. I've been there meself, an' the Boy Scout that helped me out told me to pass it along. That's what I'm doin' now, and there's nothin' more to be said. When you get washed and dressed, come on to No. 4, that's the second room from this tub, on the left of the corridor, an' I'll show you the rest of the bunch."

Jimmie went away to No. 4, where Ned and Sam Leroy were waiting for him. Somehow, it seemed to Ned that Jimmie kept him waiting about half the time when they were in a strange city. The little fellow had a way of wandering off alone and forgetting all about time in his delight at the strange things he saw. When he entered No. 4 he found Ned standing near the door.

"Were you out there before?" Ned asked, pointing to the corridor, as Jimmie stepped inside.

"Just got here," was the reply. "Found a Boy Scout from the Fox Patrol, Chicago, an' brought him along with me. He's washin' some of the Peruvian scenery off his frame, now, an' will soon be along."

Then Jimmie told of his discovery of Mike Dougherty, of his leaving a treble guard around the Nelson, and of numerous other adventures in the city, which, not being in any way connected with this narrative, are not set down here.

"I'm glad you brought this boy Mike here," Ned said, at the conclusion of the story. "We need some one who knows something about Lima to keep us posted."

"About what?" asked Jimmie.

"We're spotted!" Leroy cried out, before Ned could answer the question. "The wireless is swifter than the Nelson!"

"How do you know?" demanded the little fellow. "How do you know we're spotted?"

"Oh, Ned's been doping it out," was the reply. "He'll tell you, I guess."

"You thought you'd take the cream off the sensation!" laughed Ned. "Well, that is the boy of it! All I know about it, Jimmie," he continued, "is that I've been receiving telegrams which simply mean nothing. They are from people I have never heard of, and are most mysteriously worded."

"There's one that tells you to get out of the country," suggested Leroy.

"Yes, but the others seem to infer that the man who sent them is out of his mind. The three received are from Washington, San Francisco, and New Orleans."

"What have the messages to do with our being spotted?" asked Jimmie. "I don't see any connection."

"Stupid!" cried Leroy. "Can't you see the wires were sent to locate Ned? The person who delivered them to him sure wired back that they had been delivered to Ned in person--in other words, that he has reached Lima on his journey to Paraguay."

"I see!" Jimmie said, slowly. "It's clever, eh?"

"Too clever," Ned said. "I don't like the looks of it. It means, of course, that the people who are trying to get the cattle concession away from Mr. Lyman have secret agents here. And that means that everything we do at Lima will be watched and reported."

"Reported to whom?" asked Leroy.

"Probably to this military person, Senor Lopez, who is on the job with both hands out," suggested Jimmie. "Well? What about it?"

"I think," Leroy cut in, "that we'd better be getting out of this. They can't follow us after we get up in the air."

Here a knock came on the door, and Jimmie admitted Mike and presented him to his chums. The boy looked trim and handsome in his new suit, and all took a great liking to him. While they discussed their plans another interruption took place, and then Jimmie saw Pedro at the door, beckoning excitedly to Mike Dougherty. The boy talked with the Indian for a short time, and then turned to Ned, excitement showing in his face.

"He says there's another airship here," Mike said. "Prowling over the mountains."

"They can't follow us in the air, eh?" cried Leroy. "I guess this is going some!"

CHAPTER III

BLACK BEARS ON THE AMAZON

The handsome club room of the Black Bear Patrol, in the city of New York, was situated on the top floor of the magnificent residence of Attorney Bosworth, one of the leading corporation lawyers in the country. Jack Bosworth, the lawyer's only son, was a member of the Black Bear Patrol, and the club room had been fitted up at his request.

It was in this room that Ned Nestor, Jimmie McGraw, Jack Bosworth, Harry Stevens, and Frank Shaw had planned their motor-boat trip down the Columbia river, as described in the first volume of this series. Jack, Harry and Frank had returned to New York from San Francisco when Ned had decided to accept the Secret Service mission to Paraguay, at the conclusion of the motor-boat vacation on the Columbia, leaving the two boats, the Black Bear and the Wolf, stored at Portland, Oregon.

One evening--the evening of the 1st of August, to be exact--while Ned, Sam, and Jimmie were still in San Francisco, awaiting the slow action of the State department at Washington, Jack, Frank and Harry met in the club room for the purpose of "sobbing together," as they expressed it. They had left their friends in San Francisco reluctantly because of orders from home, and now they understood that they might have gone with Ned and Jimmie if they had only explained to their parents the purpose of the mission.

"I suppose," Frank Shaw said, at the end of a long pause in the conversation, "I suppose Ned and the others are out over the Andes by this time."

"No," replied Jack. "I heard from Jimmie by wire today, and they are still in Frisco, and likely to remain there nearly a week longer."

"If the airship was only large enough!" sighed Harry.

"We might still get there in time!" Frank suggested, eagerly.

"The Nelson wouldn't carry us if we were there," Jack exclaimed, in a disgusted tone. "I wish the Black Bear had wings! Say, wouldn't that be a peach? We could run over to Paraguay and scare the life out of the boys!"

"What good would it do if she had wings?" demanded Frank. "She is in storage at Portland, Oregon."

"No," replied Harry Stevens, whose father, a noted maker of automobiles, had presented the motor-boats to his son, "I ordered

the boats sent on here the day after we left the coast. We can take a trip up the Hudson, anyway."

Jack walked thoughtfully around the room for a moment and then turned back to the others, looking moodily out of a window.

"I've got it!" he shouted, slapping Frank on the back.

"I should say you had!" remarked Frank. "What do you take for it?"

"I say I've got an idea!" Jack explained, jumping up and down and swinging his hands over his head. "A peach of an idea!"

"Does it hurt?" asked Harry.

"Oh, cut out that funny stuff!" Jack cried. "When will the two motor-boats be here?"

Harry counted on the fingers of his left hand.

"We've been home two days," he said, "and we were four days getting to Chicago. There we laid over a day, and came on here in twenty hours. We are eight days from the Pacific coast. That right?"

"It seems to be."

"Well, then, it is seven days since I ordered the Black Bear and the Wolf sent on here in a special express car. They ought to be here now."

"Then," shouted Jack, pulling Harry around the room, "we're all right--fit as a brass band at a free lunch! Whoo-pee!"

"It must be hungry," Frank exclaimed, regarding Jack with seeming terror. "Does it ever bite when it puts out these signals of distress?"

"Don't get too funny!" Jack warned.

"Then loosen up on this alleged idea!" Frank replied.

Jack rushed across the room and brought out an atlas of the world, which he dumped on the floor and opened.

"Look here, fellows!" he said, squatting over the map of South America, his chin almost on his knees.

"We're looking," grinned Frank. "What about it?"

"Here we are in New York," Jack went on. "Here they are in San Francisco. Now, they've got to sail to Paraguay, which is just about twice as far from San Francisco as is New York. Anyway, that's the way it looks on the map."

"It is all of that distance," Harry put in.

"Well," Jack continued, "as I said before, here we are in New York, with the mouth of the Amazon river about as far away as San Francisco, perhaps a little farther."

"Well?" demanded Harry.

"I begin to see the point!" Frank admitted. "But will the folks stand for it?"

"Mine will," Harry answered. "Dad didn't make the Black Bear to lie in storage. He'll stand for it, all right."

"So will mine," Frank said, then. "I'll tell him I'll send him a lot of news for his paper."

Frank's father was owner and editor of the Planet, one of the leading morning newspapers in the big city, and it was always a fiction of the boy's that he was going out in the interest of the paper when he wandered off on a trip with the Boy Scouts.

"I'm afraid you can't make that work again," laughed Jack. "Ned says that you sent only four postal cards and six letters back from Panama."

"Well, wasn't that going some?" asked Frank.

"Of course, only Ned says the postal cards carried the correspondence for the Planet, and the letters carried requests for more money!"

"Anyway," Frank insisted, "Dad will stand for it. What is it?"

"Well," Jack went on, "I'm sure my Dad will let me go. He wants me to go about all I can. Says it brightens a fellow to rub up against the rough places of the world."

"There's rough corners enough in South America," laughed Harry.

"Now, let us get down to figures," Jack continued. "We ought to be able to get to the mouth of the Amazon on a fast boat, with the Black Bear and the Wolf on board, in a week or ten days—say ten days. About that time they will be getting into Paraguay. What do you think of it?"

"Fine!" cried Harry.

"The best ever!" Frank responded. "But what then? We can't run up to Paraguay in the Black Bear."

"We can get away up in the Andes," answered Jack, with the map of

Brazil before him. "See these crooked little lines? Well, those are rivers. Just see how far we can go in a motor boat."

"But that won't bring us to the aeroplane," Frank objected.

"Yes, it will," Harry answered. "They are coming back by way of the Amazon valley, and we can't miss them. Oh, what's the use? Suppose we begin packing?"

"Well, I don't know exactly what we are to do after we get up the Amazon," Harry laughed, "but I'm game to go. There are head-hunters and cannibals up there, and we may find a little amusement."

"We're going after Ned and Jimmie," Jack explained. "This is a relief expedition! After they get to Paraguay they'll snatch that Lyman person out of the cold, damp dungeon keep he is supposed to be in and then sail off over the Amazon valley. There's where we catch up with them. Do you suppose we can find a ship going to the mouth of the Amazon early in the morning?"

"You certainly are fierce when you get started!" laughed Harry. "Well," he added, "you can't get ready any too soon to please me."

It was two days before the boys found a vessel going their way, and even then Jack insisted that his father bribed the owners to run off their course in order to set the boys and their motorboats down at the mouth of the Amazon river. The boat, however, was a fast one, equal in speed to a modern ocean liner; and in ten days from the time of starting from New York--on the 12th of August--the boys were stemming the current of the great river--more like a shoreless sea there at the mouth than a river!

"Huh!" Frank exclaimed, as they left the island of Joannes to the south, "this is no river! It is a blooming sea!"

"Pretty near three hundred miles wide at the delta, including that big island," Harry said. "It is some river, eh?"

"Four thousand miles long!" Jack contributed. "It is navigable for commercial purposes for 2,200 miles, and our boats can go up clear to the foot of the Andes."

"Boats went there in the days of Columbus," Frank said. "A companion of Columbus first discovered this great delta. The river fertilizes two million square miles of territory, and is the greatest water system in the world."

"Why," Harry observed, desiring to contribute something startling to the discussion of the river, "the current is so strong that it carries fresh water and sand five hundred miles out into the Atlantic Ocean. It is just a fresh water river in a salt water sea for five hundred miles!"

That night the boys kept the engines of the Black Bear going, one remaining on watch all through the dark hours. They had plenty of gasoline in the tank, and the tender, the Wolf, was carrying a load of fuel which Jack declared would last them until the end of the year!

It may be well to state here that the Black Bear, the Boy Scout motorboat, was a specially constructed vessel, built by Harry's father for river work. The materials were light yet strong, and the boat could easily be taken apart and put together again when occasion required. Between the cross-grained slices of tough wood of which the craft was built were plates of steel, thus rendering the boat virtually bullet proof.

The Black Bear was constructed so that it could be almost entirely thrown open to the sunshine when so desired or closed tightly against cold or rain. The roof could be rolled up in a bundle in the middle like the curtain of a modern desk. The sides were composed of oblong panels which could be inserted in grooved steel uprights when it was desired to close in the interior of the boat. The motors were very powerful.

In fact, it was just such a boat as was needed on the trip the boys had in mind. It had done excellent service on the Columbia, and nothing less could be expected of it on the Amazon. The Wolf, which was merely a tender, was watertight in construction, being shaped like a banana, and was towed by the motor-boat. Here the extra stocks of gasoline, provisions, and ammunition were packed. The interior of the Wolf was about six feet by eighteen in size, while the distance from rounded floor to convex roof was about four feet.

On both sides of the interior were gasoline tanks, which also extended under the floor, lifting the bottom of the interior space three feet. Above the tanks were spaces for provisions and ammunition. The space between the tanks and the lockers was about two feet, and here one might ride in comfort, after getting used to the rolling of the boat. There were tight glass panels of thick plate glass at the ends and the top.

Ventilators and loopholes, controlled by wires from the center, were cut in the ends and protected by sliding covers. Lying in the passageway, one might look out at either end, and shoot out, too, if occasion required. When fully loaded, the Wolf was submerged about half its height. On the top was a staff from which floated an American flag. The boys were very proud of the Wolf, and Jimmie had often declared, on the Columbia river trip, that he would some day take an exciting ride in it.

During their passage up the river the boys were often hailed from passing craft, but they took little heed, as they did not care to lose time gratifying the curiosity of those they met. Indeed, if they had stopped to talk with all who hailed them, they would have made slow progress. Up to about sixty years ago the Amazon was

closed to all save Brazilian vessels, but now it is open to the commerce of the world.

There are now vessels coming from and going to all parts of Europe and America from Amazon ports. There are lines of great steamers on the main stream, lines of smaller steamers on the big tributaries, and launches and small craft of all sizes on the affluent branches. Often the passing ships, steamers, launches, etc., almost took the form of a procession on the lower waters.

Everywhere the smaller ships were gathering the products of the great Amazon basin—rubber, coconuts, hardwoods, dyewoods, pelts, tropical fruits and other commodities. Every year over three million tons of products come down the great river. The Amazon drains a country as large as the United States east of the Mississippi. Its feeders reach the Andes, draining watersheds within a hundred miles of the Pacific ocean. It has tributaries fifteen hundred miles long.

It did not take the Black Bear very long to pass the green islands near the delta. The river there looks like an ocean. In fact, the main branch of the Amazon is from fifty miles to two hundred miles in width. Some of the tributaries are a hundred miles wide. It is from fifty to two hundred feet deep. The water is always dark colored because of the wash brought down from the uplands. For a long time it did not seem possible to the boys that they were sailing on a river instead of an ocean.

"Ned and the boys must be over Paraguay now," Jack said, one day, after they had been on the river nearly a week without accident or important incident of any kind.

"Yes," Frank replied, "they must be there by this time. Jimmie said they were to leave San Francisco on the 7th, or about that time. It would take a week or more to get to Lima, for they couldn't remain in the air long at a time, and the resting spells would set them back a little. Suppose they got to Lima on the 14th, which was last Monday, they could rest up and go prowling over that dirty little republic—which is not a republic at all, but a despotism tempered by revolution."

"I'd like to know just what course Ned has decided on," Harry said. "I don't see how he's going to get to Mr. Lyman."

"He'll find a way," Jack insisted. "He always has, and he always will."

It will be seen that the boys were tolerably accurate in their estimates of the speed of the Nelson. On the day they were discussing the possible location of the big airship, which was the 18th of August, the Nelson was in the center of as pretty a muss as Ned had ever mixed with.

The boys in the Black Bear put on all speed, traveling nights as well as days, and before long began watching the heavens, for an aeroplane. But the lads on the Nelson were not looking for a boat poking her nose toward the Andes--"a relief expedition," as Jack called it!

CHAPTER IV

A CHASE IN THE NIGHT

Following the excited announcement by Mike that an airship was prowling about over the mountains and Leroy's sudden cry of exultation at the prospect of a struggle for supremacy above the clouds, there was for a moment absolute silence in the hotel room where the boys stood. Finally Pedro entered and closed the door.

Ned walked to a window and looked out. The day was fading, and already the feet of the distant mountains were wrapped in purple twilight. The window faced the north, giving a fair view of the city and the Andes as they strung along in that direction, looking like a chain of bald heads lifting from the obscurity of a fog. The airship was not in sight from where he stood.

Pedro saw what he was looking for and stepped to his side, one hand pointing off to the east.

"Out there!" he said.

"When did you first see it?" asked Leroy, not waiting for Ned to conduct the cross-examination.

The Indian talked with Mike for a moment.

The latter did not seem to understand all that was said to him, but presently he turned to Ned.

"He says he saw it only a minute before he came here," he explained.

"He says a lot more that I can't understand. I've been here only a month, and I'm not quick at learning new speech."

"Ask him if he knows whether she landed anywhere near the city," Ned directed.

The Indian did not know. The airship was over the mountains when he first saw it, and that was all he could say about it.

"Do you think we've been followed down here?" asked Jimmie.

"Of course!" Leroy broke in. "What else would an airship be here

for just at this time? And if she wasn't sneaking about after us, what would she be hanging up there in the sky for? Why doesn't she come down to town, like we did?"

"It may be that the arrival of this airship just at this time is a coincidence," Ned said, "but it seems to me that there is something significant about it. I have felt all along that we were not yet rid of the rascals who tried to make us trouble at San Francisco."

"Some one must want the cattle concession that Lyman has pretty badly," Leroy ventured. "Well, we'll, have to run away from them, I take it!"

"Then how are we going to find out where this Lyman person is?" demanded Jimmie. "No, Sir!" he went on, rubbing his freckled nose in meditation. "We've just naturally got to bust 'em up!"

The proposition was indeed a serious one. If the airship was really there to take note of the activities of the boys on the Nelson, the situation could hardly be improved by following either line of conduct suggested by the boys.

Nothing could be gained by "running away" from the unwelcome visitor. Nothing was to be gained by following the advice to "bust 'em up." A race would only serve to draw the Nelson away from the point of action, away from the place where Lyman was held in captivity. To "bust 'em up" would be to set all the official rings of Paraguay in operation against the lads, place the Boy Scouts under the ban of the law!

"If we only knew just where to find this Lyman person," Jimmie went on, "we might swoop down an' get him an' give the lobsters a run for their money."

"Perhaps," Ned suggested, "we'd better wait for this new navigator of the air to show us where he is."

"I see him doing it!" cried Leroy.

"You bet he will!" Jimmie cut in. "He'll hang around the point of danger! He'll show us where the man is by standing guard over him! What?"

"That's my idea," Ned replied, "still, he may devote his energies to keeping track of us. One can never tell what an enemy will do."

"Well," Leroy said, "I'm going back to the Nelson. There's a chance of the lobster dropping down and trying to cripple her."

"A very good idea," Ned agreed.

Jimmie and Mike hastened away with Leroy, but Pedro remained at the request of Ned. A plan for meeting the emergency was already

forming in the active brain of the Boy Scout, and an important detail depended on information which the Indian might be able to give.

Before opening the question, however, Ned, motioning to the Indian to follow, made his way to the flat roof of the hotel building.

There he found several men, smoking, chatting, and watching the airship, now almost directly over the city. In Peru many houses are built with especial reference to providing a lounging place on the roof.

It was growing darker, and the lights of the airship shone brightly against the dimming sky. The aviator was now circling around the city, dropping lower at times, then skimming in spirals to a higher point. While Ned stood watching the machine, realizing that the fellow in charge was no novice in aviation, a gentleman whom he had noticed three times before that day observing him closely advanced and stood by his side. He was a well dressed, clean-shaven man of perhaps thirty, with an intelligent face, a bustling manner, and a suit of clothes which Jimmie would have described as "loud enough to lead a circus parade."

"Evidently an American commercial traveler," Ned thought, as the stranger stood by his side a moment without speaking, his eyes fixed on the airship.

"She goes some, eh?" the stranger observed, presently.

"The aviator seems to know his business," Ned admitted.

"You came in an aeroplane yourself, didn't you?" asked the other.

Ned answered in the affirmative.

"Thought so," the other went on. "Hadn't seen you about the city until this afternoon, and some one said you came in an airship. Where from?"

"New York," Ned replied, half amused at the impertinence of the question.

"Good old town!" the other exclaimed. "Hot old town! I like it. There's something always going on there. I'm from New York myself, but I'm selling goods for a Chicago firm--steam pumps! I've got the best steam pump in seven countries! Came here to sell to a mining company. Nothing doing. What's your name? Mine is Thomas Q. Collins."

"Nestor," Ned replied, shortly.

"And you're out for fun?"

"That's the idea." Ned did not think it necessary to enter into

details.

"Hope you get all that's coming to you! Say, will you give me a ride in that machine of yours? I went out to see it today. Looks to me like it could knock the spots off anything of the kind in the world. I don't know anything about airships, but I do know about steam pumps, and also about machinery. I know a good piece of work when I see it. That boat of yours is a peach!"

"It isn't my machine," Ned replied, "but if we remain here over tomorrow I'll see about granting your request."

The two talked for a moment longer, and then Collins left the roof. Later, Ned saw him moving through the street below in the direction of the place where the Nelson had been left. The boy hardly knew what to make of Collins. He might be a steam pump salesman, just as he had described himself, and, again, he might be a spy sent out by Lyman's enemies to discover the plans of the Boy Scouts--even to wreck the Nelson if possible. He decided to, if possible, learn something of the fellow before taking him on board the aeroplane.

After a time the strange airship fluttered away to the north and then Ned and Pedro descended to the former's room. Sitting at the north window, the two could see the lights of the aeroplane dropping downward, and they concluded that the aviator was seeking a resting place for the night.

"He's going to bed in Inca Valley," Pedro said, watching the descending bird. "It is a good place to hide the machine."

The words were spoken in pretty good Spanish, and Ned turned quickly and asked:

"You speak Spanish then?"

The question was asked in Spanish, and the Indian's face brightened.

"Yes," he said, "but I never suspected that you knew the language."

"Only a smattering of it," laughed Ned, "but, still, I think you can understand what I say to you. As I want you to do most of the talking, we may get on very well together."

"What do you want to know?" asked Pedro.

"First, I want you, after we have had our talk, to go out into the city and find out, if you can, all about that aeroplane. I want to know if it has ever been seen here before, if the aviator comes to the city after descending, if he is a stranger here--all about him, in fact."

The Indian bowed.

"Then," Ned went on, "I want you to find out whether the machine is well guarded. I also want to know what kind of a machine it is, and where it came from. If you think it advisable I want you to get into conversation with the aviator and see what kind of a chap he is."

Another bow from the Indian, whose face expressed pleasure at the prospective employment. Ned pondered for a moment, as if not quite certain of his ground, and then asked:

"How well are you acquainted with the country lying between Lima and Asuncion?"

"Oh," was the astonished reply, "but that is a long, long distance--two, three thousand miles."

"Yes, I know, but have you ever been over the Andes?"

"Oh, yes. I am a guide."

Ned pondered a moment.

"How far east and south?" he asked, then.

"To Lake Titicaca."

"That is on the boundary between Peru and Bolivia?"

"Yes."

"And you know that country--the country around the lake?"

"Very well, indeed."

"It is a long way from Asuncion?"

"It is barely a third of the way. You will see on the map."

"Well," Ned said, after a short silence, "I may as well tell you what I want. I want to be directed to a place in the mountains where I can securely hide our aeroplane. It must be a hiding place absolutely out of sight, especially from the sky. Do you understand?"

The Indian nodded, a knowing smile on his dusky face.

"You mean to hide from the other airship?" he asked.

"Yes."

"There are caverns near Lake Titicaca."

"So I understand. Caverns which defy exploration. But, you see, I

must have a hiding place from which the airship can be brought out with speed and returned in the same way."

"To dodge out and in? Yes, I comprehend."

The two dwelt over the maps and plans until; Leroy and Jimmie came romping in to report that all was quiet at the machine, and that Mike was to remain on guard until midnight, when Jimmie was to relieve him. Then Pedro went out in the city to listen to such talk of the strange airship as was floating about the streets. He was back in a couple of hours with the information that the airship had not landed in the city, and that it had never been seen there before.

"It seems to me," Ned said after the Indian ceased speaking, "that now is our time. We ought to be a long way from Lima before dawn."

"The other fellow'll see us!" Leroy objected.

"We'll have to chance that," Ned replied. "We needn't have any lights you know, and the motors make very little noise. Get your traps ready, boys!"

It was arranged that Pedro was to remain, under pay, in Lima, storing up such information as he could secure against the day of the return of the Nelson. Mike was to remain with him, of course, as there would be no room on the Nelson for him. The young man when told of the plans, objected strenuously to being left, but was finally consoled by the promise that the aeroplane would be sent back after him when opportunity offered.

It was after midnight when all the arrangements were made and the boys passed out of their rooms into the hotel lobby. At that hour they thought the driver of the other aeroplane would be likely to be sleeping. At the very door of the hotel they came upon Mr. Thomas Q. Collins! He strolled up as Ned stepped into the doorway and extended his hand. Ned took it, gave it a perfunctory grasp, and attempted to paw on.

"If you don't mind," Collins said, with a persuasive smile, "I'll walk with you if you are going out to your aeroplane. I've been to bed and find that I can't sleep."

"All right," Ned replied, thinking that he would rather have the man with him than on his way to report the departure of the Nelson. "We are just going to look the ship over--perhaps take a little spin. Come along."

"I should like very much to go with you, in case you decide to go sailing tonight," Collins said. "Perhaps you may be able to arrange it?"

"I'm afraid not tonight," Ned replied, wondering just what this new

acquaintance was up to. "However," he added, "you may as well come along and look over the ship."

Collins seemed glad of even this slight concession on the part of the boy, and walked along briskly. Presently, however, he began to fall back, talking with Jimmie, who was a few paces behind. Then, before very long, the little fellow missed Collins. He had disappeared in a dark alley. Ned worried over this when informed of the fellow's strange and contradictory conduct. The man might have gone to make report to the other aviator! This was not a pleasant reflection.

Mike was found sitting in front of the Nelson, talking with a native who was trying to learn all about an aeroplane from, a boy who knew nothing about it himself! It took only a short time to make ready for flight, then the Nelson was up and away, making little noise as she cut the air, her great planes flashing in the light of the moon.

"This is pretty poor, I guess!" Leroy exclaimed, glancing over the mighty map of sea and plain and mountain. "How fast do you want to go?"

"At full speed," Ned replied.

"I should say it would be full speed!" Jimmie said, half covering his mouth with his hand, to keep his words from being blown back down his throat. "That is," he added, "if you want to make a sneak!"

Ned turned away to the north and saw the white planes of the strange aeroplane gleaming in the moonlight. She seemed to stand still for an instant, and then sped off to the southeast. Ned sighed with apprehension, but Leroy laughed.

"Come along, you!" he cried, looking back. "If you want a race, come on, and I'll give you the run of your life!"

CHAPTER V

JIMMIE TAKES A RUN IN THE AIR

The white aeroplane flashed by, going farther to the east, and Ned laid a hand on Leroy's arm as he was about to increase speed.

"Don't hurry," he said, almost screaming the words into the boy's ear.

"I don't want him to beat me!" the driver called back.

"Let him go," Ned commanded. "Play about the scenery a little while, and then we'll go back to Lima."

"Let me catch him!" pleaded Leroy. "Just let me chase around him a couple of times. I want to see him make a sneak when he sees the Nelson in action!"

"Can you do it?" asked Ned.

"Sure I can do it. Just give me a chance. There isn't a machine in the world that can win a race against the Nelson!"

"I'm sure of that," Ned answered, "and I hope that fellow over there won't find it out right away. Let him think he can go by us like we were tied to a cloud, if he wants to. There will come a time when his confidence in his machine will cost him his job!"

Leroy saw that Ned was really in earnest in the expressed wish to deceive the aviator of the rival aeroplane, and also saw that there was good reason for doing so, so he shut off the motors and started to volplane downward.

"No," Ned said, "that's not right. Make him think we're trying to catch him. Give him the impression that we want to overhaul him, but haven't the speed."

"The Nelson will blush red with shame to be bested by a water wagon like that!" Leroy grumbled, but he did as requested.

The white aeroplane's driver appeared to take the bait. He loitered, as if waiting for the Nelson to come up, then circled away from her in great wide swaths. Once he swept around the Nelson, and Leroy almost shed tears of chagrin.

"Just see him!" the boy wailed. "He thinks I've got a dirt cart here! He is putting it all over me! I can go two miles to his one, and yet I'm taking all his guff! Let me get at him! I'll run him down!"

In a short time the stranger, apparently satisfied that he could outfly the Nelson, should he desire to do so, moved off to the south and soon disappeared in the distance.

"Now what?" asked Leroy, half angrily.

"He'll watch for us," Ned replied, "but he won't find us chasing him. Go through some of your flip-flaps and then go back toward Lima. I want to say a few words to that Mr. Thomas Q. Collins."

Half mollified at the thought of getting a little speed out of the Nelson, Leroy drove straight for the zenith. Up, up, up he went, onward toward the stars, shining no brighter for his approach, yet

luring him on. All the world below was flooded with moonlight and starlight. The mountains were dim in spots, where higher peaks dominated the light, the Pacific shone in the radiance of the night. The blue dome of heaven rounded away like a precious bowl set with diamonds.

The roofs of Lima drew closer together, apparently, and the whole town looked like a little cluttered point of land. And the mountains and the sea stretched away endlessly, and earth took on the look of a great rug woven with invisible stripes. Up, up, up, until the air became thin and the lungs staggered for breath.

Then the motors were shut off and the ocean and the mountain chains seemed to rise up to meet the aeroplane, sailing at the speed of the, fastest express. Over the water and down until even Jimmie clutched Ned's arm and gave forth an exclamation of alarm. Then a turn of a lever sent the Nelson skimming over Calleo and back toward Lima. Avoiding the vacant space where the Nelson had rested before, Leroy, under Ned's directions, landed on the dry sand some distance away.

"Of course that other chap will find us when he comes back," Ned said, when the boys stood on solid ground again, "but we'll try to make him think we're hanging around Peru just for the fun of it."

"Perhaps he won't come back," suggested Leroy. "Then I'll lose my chance of showing him what the Nelson can do."

"I have an idea that he'll be back by morning," Ned replied.

In this the boy was right, for the white aeroplane showed in a couple of hours, just about dawn, circled around the city, hovered for a moment over the Nelson, and then went off to the north again.

"It is a certainty that she is here to butt into our game!" Jimmie said, as the white planes disappeared. "She'll start when we start, an' stop when we stop, an' there won't be any getting away from her. How does she get into the air so quick after we cut loose? That's what I'd like to know."

"Some system of signals, undoubtedly," Ned answered. "Now," he continued, "we'll cuddle up in our blankets here and sleep as long as the natives will let us. Who'll keep awake?"

Each one wanted to be the one to stand guard, but the point was decided by the appearance of Mike and Pedro, who had watched the maneuvers of the Nelson, had noted her landing place, and hastened forward. Thus relieved of the care of the machine, the three boys hastened to the hotel and were soon sound asleep.

It was noon when Ned awoke, brought out of a deep slumber by an impatient knocking at his door. He was out of bed in an instant and, clad only in his pajamas, opened the door and looked out. Mr.

Thomas Q. Collins stood in the corridor with a look of alarm on his face.

"Thought I'd never get you out," he said, stepping, uninvited, into the room and taking a chair. "Thought that you ought to know what's been going on."

Ned had little confidence in Collins. The fellow's strange conduct of the night before naturally made the boy suspicious. After requesting a ride in the Nelson, or, at least, the company of the Boy Scouts to the place where the machine had been left, he had disappeared without a word of explanation.

It seemed to Ned that he had good grounds for the belief that Collins had spied around until he had learned that the aeroplane was going up, and had then communicated the information to the man on the white machine. At least, the strange aviator had shown in the air directly after the disappearance of Collins.

But it was no part of Ned's purpose to permit Collins to see that he was suspected. It was rather his idea to keep on good terms with the fellow and watch him for any evidences of treachery. He therefore greeted him cordially and asked:

"Something interesting going on in the city? We did not return until nearly dawn, and I've been asleep ever since."

"You haven't heard about the attack on our aeroplane, then?" asked Collins, looking Ned over keenly.

The boy tried not to exhibit the least emotion or excitement at the disturbing question. Leaning back in the chair he had taken, he asked:

"The curiosity of the people got the better of their courtesy, eh? I have been afraid of that. Well, I hope the Nelson was not seriously injured."

Thomas Q. Collins had the appearance of one who had expected to unwrap a great sensation and had failed. His face was a study.

"Well, no," he replied. "The fact is, when the rush was made the aeroplane shot up into the air."

"Then one of the boys must have been there," Ned said, calmly, although his heart was beating like a drum.

"The little fellow was there, the one you call Jimmie," was the reply.

"And he went into the air alone?"

"No; at the last minute a Peruvian Indian who has been hanging about

the machine ever since you came here went with him."

"Then there is no danger," Ned replied, really feeling relieved at the thought that Jimmie was not alone in the aeroplane. "The lad will bring the Nelson back in good time. Anyway, he is entitled to a little excursion, 'all by his lonely,' as he puts it."

"He can operate the machine?"

"Certainly. He can handle the Nelson easily."

Thomas Q. Collins regarded Ned steadily for a moment, his brusque, salesmanship manner all gone, and then asked:

"Where are you going from here?"

The fellow was showing his hand at last! Or was this just natural curiosity? At that moment Ned was more interested in discovering something about the attack on the Nelson than in fighting off personal and impertinent questions, so he said:

"We haven't made up our minds as to our future course. By the way, what was the cause of the attack on the aeroplane?"

"Oh," replied Collins, frowning slightly, "there were a lot of people gathered about the ropes, and one of your guards was a little coarse in protecting your property, and there was a blow struck, then the mob rushed the roped-in enclosure. I think there was no one seriously injured."

"I wonder if the other aviator is also having trouble with his machine?" asked Ned, anxious to know what Collins would say about the white aeroplane.

"I don't know about that," Collins replied. "In fact, the other fellow went off to the south soon after the departure of the Nelson."

"Chased Jimmie up, eh?"

"Well, anxious for a race, it seemed to me."

"Has the Nelson returned?" asked Ned, then.

Collins shook his head.

"If you'll excuse me, then," Ned said, presently. "I'll dress and take breakfast and go down to see what's doing."

"Your breakfast will be luncheon, I guess," laughed Collins. "I was on my way to the dining room when I thought of you. If you don't mind I'll wait for you in the lobby. These natives are not very good table companions. I'm sick for the sight of my own countrymen,

anyway, and I can't tell you how glad I am to see you here."

Collins went out and closed the door and Ned set about his toilet. He did not know what to make of the alleged steam pump salesman. At times he appeared to be perfectly frank and honest, then there would come to his eyes a look of half-concealed cunning and greed which put the boy on his guard.

However, Ned thought, the correct way to fathom the fellow's intentions would be to remain in his company as much as possible. So the boy bathed and dressed and went down to Collins in the lobby with a cheerful face.

During the meal Collins talked incessantly of the country and his prospects in South America. Ned listened, saying little, even in the short spaces of silence. He was waiting for the fellow to strike some chord which tuned with his actions of the night before. At last it came.

"I'm thinking of going over to Asuncion," he said, when the meal was nearly over. "There are mines over that way, and I may stand a chance of selling a pump. Rotten luck in Peru, and I can't afford to spend all this expense money and not sell a thing. I hear that there are a few Americans over in Paraguay," he added, tentatively, smiling over at Ned.

"I know very little about the country," Ned said, coolly, fearful that Collins would drop that line of conversation, "and I never heard that foreigners of any sort were made welcome in Paraguay. I don't think we'll go out of our way any to visit that hot little republic."

Collins looked disappointed. Ned could see that. In a moment he tried again to bring the subject out, but Ned seemed entirely indifferent.

When the two left the hotel and walked in the direction of the sand lot where the Nelson had been left, the boy was fully satisfied that Collins was in league with his enemies. For all he knew, the fellow might be the very man who was trying to get Lyman's concession away from him. This might be the man who was bribing the crooked military chief to make it impossible for the cattle man to carry out his contract.

"What time did the Nelson leave?" Ned asked, as they drew near a little group of natives standing on the sand lot.

"Not far from nine," was the reply.

"I didn't think Jimmie would be out that early," laughed Ned. "He is a little sleepy head, ordinarily."

Pushing their way into the center of the little crowd, Ned and

Collins found Leroy and Mike Dougherty engaged in a heated debate with a police officer who was threatening arrest. Ned stepped back so as not to attract the attention of the boys, and kept his eyes fixed on Collins. In a moment he saw that gentleman give an impatient gesture which seemed to urge the officer on.

Ned thought fast for a moment. He was considering whether or not he had been brought there for the purpose of getting into a row in defense of his chums and being arrested with them. He was heartily glad that the Nelson was out of the way, although he would have been better pleased had he been safe aboard of her.

"These Peruvian officers are too fresh!" Collins said, in a moment. "What do you mean by molesting these boys?" he added, in Spanish, turning to the officer.

"They are charged with assault," the latter replied.

"By whom?" asked Ned, also speaking in Spanish.

"They struck half a dozen citizens," was the indefinite reply. "We must take them to jail."

"I'll give you a bump in the eye if you come near me!" Leroy put in, as he searched the sky eagerly for some sign of the Nelson.

"That wouldn't help matters any," Ned said, speaking in English. "Go along with the officer, and I'll pay your fine."

Collins looked annoyed at this cautious advice. He came nearer to Ned and whispered:

"The courts are slow and uncertain here. It may be weeks before the boys will be restored to liberty if they are locked up. If we could get them away into the mountains until the Nelson returns that would end the whole affair."

"And so you want to get me mixed up in it, too!" thought Ned, as the officer glared at him. "You want to get me on a charge of resisting arrest! When we get out of here, Mr. Thomas Q. Collins, I'll see that you get what's coming to you!"

If Collins could have known what was passing in Ned's mind, could have understood how suspicious the boy was of him, he would not have urged the lads, in English, to cut and run. By doing so he merely confirmed Ned's unfavorable opinion of him. From that moment Ned knew him for what he was, and resolved to get him out of the way in some manner.

Leroy and Mike paid little attention to what Collins said, as a shake of the head from Ned gave them to understand what was passing in his mind. In a moment Ned stepped to the side of the policeman.

"You are all right, officer," he said. "You are only doing your duty. The boys will go with you, and I'll pay their fines."

But, as Ned discovered, it is easier to get into jail in Peru than it is to get out.

CHAPTER VI

NED IS GUILTY OF LARCENY

Night came on and no Nelson showed in the sky. Ned wandered restlessly about the rather handsome city, anxious for the aeroplane as well as for the boys who were in the city prison. Collins was always with him, at first, expressing sympathy and suggesting plans for getting the prisoners out on bail. The complainant in the case, it was claimed by the officers, was too badly injured to appear in court.

Ned grew sick of the constant talking of the fellow at last, and went to his room, saying that he was due for a little sleep. But the boy, as may well be imagined, did not sleep. Instead, he sat by his window watching the sky.

Where had Jimmie gone with the machine? This question was always in his mind. Had he met with an accident and was he lying, crushed from a long fall, in some mountain canyon? Had the pursuing aeroplane overtaken him and destroyed or captured the Nelson?

It was not like the little fellow to disappear so utterly. Even supposing he was afraid to return to Lima, he ought to understand how anxious his friends would be and signal them from the upper air. Surely, Ned reasoned, this would be safe, for the hostile machine could not approach the Nelson in speed, and, after giving a reassuring signal, the boy could disappear in the mountains again.

It was dark now in the room where Ned was, and he sat looking out at the sky in the hope of seeing the welcome lights of the aeroplane. Presently, he saw a flicker of light off to the east. It increased in size rapidly, and Ned knew that it was an airship he saw approaching at wonderful speed, but he had no means of knowing whether it was Jimmie on the Nelson or the hostile aviator.

If it was Jimmie, he thought, there would be a signal directly. He waited eagerly, but no signal showed. Presently the airship drifted off to the north, and Ned saw the glint of moonlight on white planes. It was the hostile ship, sure enough, but why had she abandoned pursuit of the Nelson?

Ned resolved to secure a closer view of the airship, but the next

question was how to avoid Collins, who was at that moment pacing to and fro in front of the hotel. The alleged salesman would be apt to accost him as soon as he appeared and insist on going with him.

He had had enough of Collins. He had no doubt that the fellow was in the conspiracy against him. It seemed reasonable that he had been warned by wire of the approach of the Boy Scouts, and had hastened to Lima to intercept them. Ned thought over the situation deliberately, and then a daring smile came to his face.

"I wonder if I can?"

He chuckled as he asked himself the question.

"I wonder if I can?"

He paced his room for a moment, and then continued.

"If he goes with me, there will be less suspicion, provided I am right in my estimate of the fellow. We may be even left alone with the aeroplane! Ah, that would be too good to come true!"

The boy watched the sky to the east from the roof as well as from his window, but there were no signs of the aeroplane which Jimmie had taken away.

"The little rascal knows what he is doing!" Ned told himself, "but I wish he would let me know, too! I reckon I'll take a chance on the plan. I'll try anything once, as the Bowery boys say."

Having settled the vexed question in his own mind, Ned went whistling down the broad stairway and came out in the lobby. Just as he had figured, Collins sat where he could keep an eye on the front entrance. When Ned appeared the fellow arose and stepped over to him.

"There is nothing new, I'm afraid," Collins said. "I've just been over to the police station, and nothing can be done tonight."

Ned thought that Collins must have made pretty good time to get over to the police station and back during the short space of time he had been out of sight, but he did not say so.

"Anything new about the aeroplane?" asked Ned. "I saw the white one come back."

"Perhaps she can give us the information we want about your ship, or, perhaps the aviator can," he added with a laugh.

"Why not go and see?" asked Ned, his heart bounding with hope and excitement as he noted how eagerly Collins took the bait. "Can we get a motor-car here? The machine must be quite a distance away."

"It does look that way," Collins replied, with a yawn, "and we may as well take a car, if we can find one. I hope you don't mind my going with you."

"Why, I wouldn't go alone!" Ned replied, speaking with perfect truth, as Collins discovered later on. "You don't know how glad I am to find you up and ready for a little adventure!"

Collins, in turn, told how pleased he was to be of service, and the two found a motor-car and started off, taking a road which ran along a level strip of land which lay between the sand and the mountains. They had proceeded a couple of miles when a motor-car appeared in sight just ahead of them, traveling toward the city.

Collins arose in his seat and waved his hand frantically.

"I believe that's Sherman!" he cried. "Sherman's here for a rival steam pump firm, but I'll be good to him, especially as there is nothing doing in the way of trade. Hey, there, Sherm!" he shouted as the two cars drew nearer. "Pull up and give an account of yourself!"

Sherman was a dark-faced, black-haired, bewhiskered fellow of perhaps forty. He was dressed in a dark business suit and wore glasses. The two men talked shop for a moment, and then Collins asked:

"Where have you been?"

"Just out for a ride," was the reply.

"You saw the airship come down?"

"Of come, but I'm not interested in airships."

"Then you haven't been out there?"

"Hardly. It doesn't interest me--this aviation craze."

"Then you don't know whether the aviator is out there or not?" continued Collins.

"Why, yes, I do know about that," Sherman replied. "I heard this driver of mine talking Spanish with a shoofer we met, and learned from the mix-up in tongues that the aviator has gone to the city, leaving a couple of natives in charge of the machine."

Ned's heart bounded so fiercely that he feared that Collins would hear its quick beats! The aviator was not there. Only two Peruvians, timid chaps at best! Mr. Thomas Q. Collins might receive his reward for his treachery sooner than he imagined, the boy thought!

"Well, so long!" Collins cried. "We'll see you in the city tonight."

The cars parted, each going its separate way, and Ned and Collins were soon within sight of the white aeroplane, which lay in a valley a short distance from the road. The spot where it lay was well irrigated, and fruits and vegetables were growing all around the rope which had been strung about the machine. The aviator had evidently paid a good price for the privilege of landing there.

A short distance away from the site of the machine was a small house, a tiny affair, with plenty of porches and a flat roof. As the two men left the car and advanced toward the machine a man left the porch and walked in their direction.

"Probably the farmer," Collins said. "We may have to pay for the privilege of looking over the machine."

Much to the amazement of the boy, the man who approached from the porch spoke to the two in English.

"What do you want?" he asked.

Ned waited for Collins to make a reply. If Collins really was in the conspiracy against Lyman, he would probably show his hand within the next few minutes. Just as Ned anticipated Collins gave the other a sly signal before he opened his mouth. Ned was not supposed to see this evidence of a common understanding, but his watchful eyes caught not only that but the answering sign of the other.

"We came up to look over the machine," Collins said.

"Well, you keep away from it," the other replied, fixing his eyes keenly on the face of the boy.

"This lad," Collins said, then, motioning toward Ned, "knows something about an aeroplane, and wants to inspect this one."

A sly wink followed the remark. It was getting rather cheap to Ned. The collusion between the two was so evident that their attempts to conceal it appeared very slazy.

"Yes," Ned put in, "I'd like to look the machine over."

"You came in that other aeroplane?" was asked.

Ned nodded, and Collins broke in:

"He's an expert, but he has no machine just at present. A member of his party took his machine away this morning," he added, with a chuckle.

"So Rowan said," the alleged farmer replied.

"Rowan?" repeated Ned. "Is that the name of the aviator who runs this machine?"

"Yes; he is a New York man. Do you know him?"

Ned replied that he had heard of him, knew him to be a splendid operator, but had never met him.

After some further talk Ned and Collins were given permission to look at the machine, which was called the Vixen. Collins expressed his thanks in elaborate language, but Ned went straight to the Vixen, which was then guarded by a Peruvian Indian. He was weary of the cheap pretense of the other.

"This is a peach of a machine," the alleged farmer explained, following Ned as he walked about the great planes. "See here! No cranking at all! You just get into the seat, which will carry two nicely, and push this button. That releases a spring which whirls the propellers until the spark is made, then off you go."

Ned admired the arrangement fully, as he was expected to do. The Nelson was fitted out in the same way, but he did not say so. Presently the Indian left the circle created by the rope and, going into the shelter of the porch, left Collins and Ned with the alleged farmer, who announced that his name was Yerkes.

Ned thought this action on the part of the Indian was in obedience to a signal from Collins, but could not be too sure of it. Then Collins and Yerkes trailed about after Ned as he wandered around the airship. The boy saw the former remove certain bits of wood which blocked the wheels of the Vixen, also he saw Yerkes, testing the gasoline gauge and looking the carburetor over carefully.

"It is all right," the boy thought. "Two hearts with but a single thought, two souls that beat as one--or the reverse anyway, they are thinking of giving me a ride in this old ice wagon! Pretty soon they'll be asking me to get up on the seat and see how easy it is. Then one of them will slip this harness about me--the harness provided for timid riders--and I'll be off in the air--a prisoner!"

Collins and Yerkes tinkered about the aeroplane for some moments, while Ned seemed to be studying the machine. The boy was anxious for the decisive moment to come.

Finally Yerkes, went back to the porch and stood there in conversation with the Indian for a number of minutes.

When he returned Collins stepped forward toward the seat.

Knowing that the time for action had come, Ned sprang into the driver's seat. Collins looked vexed at the movement, but Ned laughed down at him.

"I won't hurt your old machine," the boy said. "Get up here, so we can see how it rides."

Collins obeyed, first giving Yerkes a significant look which was not lost on the watchful boy.

The harness for the visitor's seat was a peculiar one, as Ned had noted with considerable satisfaction. There were leather cuffs for the wrists and a broad leg band which prevented the guest leaving his seat. The cuffs held the hands close together in the lap, the idea being to prevent a timid person from grasping the arm of the driver in a moment of terror.

"Move on over!" Collins called, as he stepped up, "and I'll see if I can take you out of the valley without breaking your neck. Don't say a word to Yerkes about his race with the Nelson," he added, in a whisper. "He got beaten, and doesn't like to talk about it."

Ned noticed but remained where he was, so Collins reluctantly took the other seat. As he did so Yerkes stepped forward, and the Indian stationed himself at the back of the machine, where he could give it a push down the incline which lay before it, and against which the wheels had been blocked.

As soon as Collins was fairly in the seat, Ned gave the harness a quick snap, and the click of metal told him that the cuffs had closed about Collins' wrists, that the broad strap which held him down was in position. Then he pushed the button and the spark caught. The Vixen moved down the incline.

Collins tried to lift his hands, but was unable to do so, so he lifted his voice instead! Yerkes, in the whirr of the machine, doubtless mistook the voice for that of the boy, for he paid no attention to it.

"Help! Help!" roared Collins. "Stop the machine! He's got me tied down! Stop it, you fool! Stop it!"

Yerkes and the Indian looked stolidly on with grins on their faces, and Ned stuck an elbow into Collins' ribs.

"Keep still," he said, "or I'll have to put you out of the speech habit. I've got you just where you expected to get me, and you ought not to kick about the accommodations."

"Yerkes!" yelled Collins. "Why don't you stop the machine? Catch hold of the propellers and yank them off! Put a bullet through this young fiend! Anything to stop the crazy thing. I tell you he's got me tied in!"

Then Yerkes, recognizing the voice, sprang toward the propellers. He made a brisk spring, but was too late. The blades were just

about an inch out of his reach. Foiled in this attempt, he drew a revolver and began firing foolish shots at the machine, none of which came near the mark.

In a moment the Vixen was under full speed, the ground dropped away, and the last Ned saw of Yerkes and the Indian they were performing a dance of rage on the growing vegetables below. Straight to the south the machine flew, the motors popping like mad.

The boy saw little crowds in the lighted streets below, looking and pointing up at the aeroplane, and then the city streets faded away into a dull mat, and there were only the silent peaks, the sea, and the deep, dim valleys.

Then Ned turned to his prisoner, who had by this time given over the useless struggle against the harness. Collins' eyes were fixed on the moonlit Pacific, away off to the west, and the boy's eyes followed those of his captive.

A steamer was creeping into the shallow harbor at Calleo, and the dark spot on the sand showed that a crowd was there to greet her. The Vixen was too far away for Ned to see the surf boats getting ready to take off the passengers and freight, but he knew that they were there.

It was now eleven o'clock, and the moon was well up in the sky. The ribs of the Andes lay like silver in its light. Strain his eyes as he might, there was no indication of the Nelson.

"Fine view!" Ned said, presently, giving Collins a nudge in the ribs with his elbow. "How do you like it?"

Thomas Q. Collins was near bursting with rage. He hitched about in his seat, but to no purpose.

"What does this mean?" he finally found words to say, screaming at the top of his voice, for the Vixen was now making good speed.

"I preferred to be the host rather than the guest," the boy said, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"I don't know what you mean by that," Collins replied.

"You meant to capture me tonight?" asked Ned.

"Nothing of the kind!" roared Collins.

"You got Leroy and Mike in jail, and you thought you'd burst up this relief expedition by putting me out of the way," Ned went on. "Now, we'll see who'll be put out of the way."

"What are you here for?" asked Collins.

"You know very well," replied Ned. "But it is too much exertion to talk at this speed. Wait until we land and I'll tell you all about your intentions! Understand? All about your intentions."

"Much you know about them," shrieked Collins.

Ned made no reply to this, for, away off to the southeast, he caught sight of the dipping lights of an airship which might or might not be the Nelson.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLACK BEAR IN TROUBLE

One still night on the Amazon Jack Bosworth got out a map and turned a flashlight on it. Frank and Harry stood looking over his shoulder.

"Right here," Jack said, presently, "is where we leave the main stream of the Amazon and take to the Madeira."

"How do you know that stream is the Madeira?" asked Frank. "We have passed so many large tributaries that I'm all mixed up."

"And why not try some other stream?" Harry questioned. "I've heard that the Madeira is full of falls and rapids."

"Anyway," Jack insisted, "it takes us away up into the Andes, almost to Lake Titicaca, and that's all any stream will do. As for the falls and rapids, do you expect any stream to creep down from that great plateau without jumping off occasionally?"

"All right," Frank cut in. "Go your own way to destruction! But how do you know that rippling sheet of water off there," swinging an arm to the south, "is the Madeira river? It looks like a lake to me."

"I found out while you were asleep this morning," Jack replied. "A chap came along in a launch and I asked him all about it. He said he had just come from the Andes, and advised me to turn back."

"Kind-hearted little fellow, eh?" laughed Harry.

"He wasn't very little," answered Jack. "He was six feet two, and was coming out with a finger off and a cut across a cheek bone which will last him for a spell, I guess. He cut his finger off because a poisoned arrow struck it."

"Cannibals?" asked Harry, with a laugh.

"The same," replied Jack. "Said they chased him for miles."

"We'll curb their appetites with lead," Harry observed.

"If we see them first," added Jack.

So the Black Bear was turned into the Madeira river, which is something like seven hundred miles long, and drains the wooded country where the black sheep of the land of Brazil live. Away up in the hills it is fed by the Beni river, which has its source in the mountains east of Lake Titicaca.

More than once the boys were obliged to haul their motor boat out on a rocky "bench," take it to pieces, carry it and most of the stock around rapids, and then put it together and load up again. Still, they made good time, and on the evening of the third day found themselves at the junction with the Beni river.

They were now in a wild and dangerous country. The forests swarmed with wild game, the thickets were full of serpents, and the trees were often crowded with monkeys. For two days they had seen no natives. This was suspicious as it was certain that they had penetrated to the home of the cannibal tribes so greatly dreaded by hunters and explorers.

It was on the evening of the 21st of August that Jack sent the Black Bear into a little creek, shut off the power, and turned to put up the panels. It was not very warm, but the atmosphere was sticky and heavy with the breath of the woods.

"We'll smother in there tonight," Frank said, observing the actions of the other. "Why not leave some of 'em out?"

"If you want a poisoned arrow nestling in your ribs you can sleep outside," Jack answered. "For my part, I want to wake up in this good old world in the morning."

"I don't think there's any danger yet," Frank said.

But the panels were put up and supper prepared. By this time the lads had become accustomed to preparing their own meals, as well as providing the fish from the river, and the repast was soon over. Then Jack lay back and gazed through the one glass panel of the top of the Black Bear.

It was a dark, lowering night. The wind is usually from the east in that part of Brazil. Blowing over the Atlantic it gathers up moisture to dump on the eastern slope of the Andes. The summits drain the clouds and makes Peru a dry country. It was murky now, and the clouds hung low.

"What do you see up there, Jack?" asked Frank. "Trying to study

astronomy, with not a star in sight?"

"There you are wrong," Jack replied. "There is at least one star in sight."

"With that mass of clouds drifting over the sky?" laughed Harry. "I reckon you must be seeing things not present to the senses!"

"Come and look, then," Jack invited. "Look straight up, and you'll see a star."

Frank placed himself under the glass panel and looked up.

"Well?" Jack demanded, in a tone of triumph.

"It's something," Frank exclaimed, "but I don't believe it is a star."

"It may be a reflector at the top of the Flatiron building," grinned Jack. "What is it, if it isn't a star?"

"Look yourself!" cried Frank.

The boys were all looking now. They saw the light which Jack had mistaken for a star flashing to and fro under the clouds like a firefly. It rushed earthward with amazing speed for an instant, then spiraled upward again. Once it came directly over the Black Bear, and seemed about to drop down.

Jack threw a couple of panels open, and then the whirr of motors reached their ears. Frank sprang outside and turned a flashlight upward.

"There's your star!" he shouted to Jack.

"Quick!" Harry cried. "Wigwag with that light. It is the Nelson! They may be able to see us!"

"Yell, every soul of you!" directed Frank. "Yell! She is going away!"

The boys waved their lights frantically and shouted at the top of their voices, but the light in the sky crept away to the west and soon disappeared, evidently passing above the clouds which lay like a black blanket over the Brazilian forests.

"Great heavens!" Jack sighed. "If we could only have made them hear! I'll bet they've been to Paraguay and released Lyman. Now they're going back home! Fine show we now stand of having any fun with them!"

"They went west," Harry corrected. "That isn't the way home!"

"I'd like to know just what success they have had," Jack went on. "Say," he continued, "can't we do something to attract their attention? Why not set fire to some big dry tree and let her blaze up?"

"I just can't have it this way!" Harry said. "I can't stand it to have them come so close to us and then go away without knowing we are here. We've got to bring them down in some way."

"But they've gone!" Frank declared, gravely.

"If we make a big blaze," Jack hastened to say, "the reflection on the clouds will attract their attention, and they'll come back. They won't be able to see the fire itself, of course, but they'll see the reflection, and that will bring them down to investigate. Then we'll fire our revolvers and wigwag with blazing sticks until they see who we are."

"It may not be the Nelson," Harry suggested.

"I don't believe there's any other aeroplane sailing about the roof of the world," Frank replied. "Of course it is the Nelson!"

"Perhaps the Nelson was followed," Harry went on. "I've heard of such things. The chap in that machine may be looking for Ned. Anyway," he added, "it won't do any harm to let the aviator, whoever he is, know that we are here. Come on, let's go ashore and build a big fire."

"I certainly would give a year's growth to know whether that is the Nelson," Harry said, as the boys sought the shore and began gathering dry wood, which, it may be well to add, was not easy to find, as there had been quite a shower during the day. "For all we know," he continued, "there may be another aeroplane here. If the people who are trying for the Lyman concession are as active here as they seem to have been in Paraguay, they may have half a dozen airships out after the Nelson."

Finally a quantity of wood which was fairly dry was secured, and Jack bundled it up against a dead tree which seemed to run straight up into the sky until it touched the clouds. But when the boys came to apply matches they discovered that the wood was not dry enough to be ignited in that way.

"I'll get a gallon of gasoline and pour over it," Frank explained. "Then we can run like blazes when we touch her off. What?"

The gasoline was brought, and the blaze started with a mighty concussion of the air. A portion of the highly inflammable fluid had entered a great crevice in the dead tree, with the result that there was an explosion which resounded through the forests for miles. Then the flames mounted the tree, which was soon blazing like a great torch.

"I guess that will attract their attention!" Jack said, shielding his face from the intense heat.

"Yes," Frank replied, "and I'm afraid it will attract the attention of others, too. You know we were told to sneak through this country like little mice!"

"It is too late now!" Jack said, a shadow of anxiety coming over his face. "We are in for it, I guess. What shall we do?"

Above the crackling of the flames, above the drawing and sighing of the wind, there now came a strange sound which seemed to proceed from the fire-tinted clouds above. Now and then branches of the nearby trees stirred mysteriously, and at times a wild shriek rose above the monotonous chattering.

"Monkeys!" cried Jack. "They've come out to help us bring the airship to earth. Good little beasts!"

"Don't be in too much of a hurry to give the little devils a certificate of good character!" Harry answered. "They may make trouble for us."

After a time the foolish, wrinkled faces of the monkeys were seen peering from trees. Then, above the din they made, above the crackling of the fire, constantly mounting higher, came a scream almost like that of a child.

"That's a jaguar!" Harry declared, "a South American tiger, and we'd better be getting toward the boat."

"The animals won't come near the fire," Frank said. "We may as well remain here and see the menagerie."

Directly it seemed to the excited lads that all the wild animals in South America were assembled about their signal. Harry declared that he heard the call of the red wolf, the scream of the tiger cat, the wail of the puma, the vicious snarling of the wild dog.

While the boys listened to the chorus their efforts to attract the attention of the aeroplane had produced, there came into the discord another sound--the hissing of a monster serpent. Heretofore the boys had little to do with Brazilian forms of animal life, for they had kept near the middle of the main stream of the Amazon, and also about in the center of the Madeira and the much smaller Beni, which was only a creek when compared with the other rivers.

Occasionally they had seen a monster cayman nosing against the current, and at times their progress had been retarded by turtles, but they had never before seen anything like this. Their fire had certainly brought out a combination in nature which would have been decidedly interesting if it hadn't been so threatening.

"Me for the boat!" Jack said, with a shiver, as the serpent launched his head and a third of his body from the tree and swept about in widening circles. "I never could endure snakes!"

"I'm going to take a shot at it," Frank said. "I'd like to see him take a tumble into the fire."

"Better let him alone," Harry advised.

Frank was about to fire when Jack caught his arm and held up his hand in a listening attitude.

"What is it?" Frank asked.

"Human voices!" was the quick reply.

"Inhuman voices, I should say," Harry observed, after a second of silence.

A chant unlike anything the boys had ever heard before undulated through the forest. It rose and fell with the gusts of wind, and always nearer to the fire.

"This is a new one on me!" Jack cried. "It is also another reason for getting to the boat! Come on, fellows!"

"I'm not going to run until I find out what that is," insisted Frank. "I'm going to write a newspaper story about this menagerie!"

"If you want your story published in this world," Jack cried, "you'd better get under cover, for that's the chant of the head hunters!"

"Wow!" cried Frank, and he beat both his chums to the boat.

"I guess we've started something!" Jack said, as he busied himself putting up the few panels which had been removed when they went ashore. "Now, some one push that button, and I'll get the Black Bear out of this creek. A good old scout like the Black Bear has no business associating with the wild animals on shore."

"Right you are!" shouted Harry, and the propellers began moving. Still, the boat made no progress to the rear, the reverse being on.

"What's doing?" demanded Jack. "You'd better hurry, for the head hunters are coming right along. See that big chief over there? He's got a club that would level the Singer building at a blow!"

"I can't make her back," Harry complained. "There's something the matter below her in the stream. It was all clear when we came in."

In an instant all was intense excitement on board the motor boat. There was only one way in which the savages could reach them, and

that was to block their passage out and starve them to death! Had this system been resorted to? Had the cunning savages obstructed the little stream while the lads were busy building their fire and observing their menagerie, as they called it?

These questions were in the minds of all as efforts to back the Black Bear were redoubled. Finally Jack opened a panel at the rear and looked out, a thing he should have done at first.

What he saw was a large log blocking the channel. The propellers were pounding against it, and one of them was broken.

"I guess the little brown men have got us good and plenty," he said, slowly, as he reached forward and shut off the power. "While we were playing about the blaze they plugged the river."

"They can't get in here, anyway!" Frank consoled.

"No; they'll wait for us to get good and hungry and go out!" Jack replied.

The situation was a serious one. The head hunters now appeared in the open space about the blazing tree and shook their spears and their clubs at the boat. Now and then an arrow with a poisoned tip struck the side of the Black Bear.

"They'll never leave until they get us!" Jack said, presently, "and so we may as well get a few of them. Get your guns, boys."

"Just you wait, old hard luck prophet," Frank exclaimed. "Look up through the glass panel above your head and tell me what you see."

"Well," Jack replied, "it looks like we had established communication with the Nelson at last. And also with the Greatest Show on Earth!" he added, as a mighty roar went up from the shore.

The other boys crowded the panel and looked out. The clouds above were red with the reflection of the blazing tree, yet against the mass a different light blazed out. This light moved about, from north to south and back again, as if searching out the reason for the strange happenings below.

The popping of her motors could be plainly heard, and so it was probable that those on the airship could hear the wild animal concert which was going on in the woods. Harry pushed a panel aside and fired three quick shots. The aeroplane wavered above the river a moment and then drifted away.

"They must know there's somebody down here in trouble!" said Harry. "Why don't they throw down dynamite? That would give the savages all the heads they wanted for a time, I guess."

The boys fired again and again, flashed their lights in wigwag

signals, but the aeroplane did not come nearer. Instead it whirled swiftly about in a circle for a moment and then shot out of sight beyond the clouds.

And every moment the circle of savage faces gathered closer about the Black Bear, effectively blocked in the narrow stream.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VIXEN TAKES A TUMBLE

While Ned, from the driver's seat on the aeroplane he had so cleverly taken from the enemy, watched the distant light flashing over the mountains, the bulk of an airship came into view. While the boy was cheering himself with the hope that he would soon be in touch with Jimmie, however, the light disappeared, and the dark body of the machine was no longer visible.

"There's been an accident!" Collins muttered maliciously, in Ned's ear. "That little chap can't run an aeroplane!"

"What is there over in that direction?" Ned asked, without replying to the other's suggestion of evil. "Can one land there?"

"Not in the night," was the sullen reply. "Unless you want to commit suicide and murder me in the bargain, you'd better keep in the air."

"What's over there?" repeated Ned.

"Mountains," was the surly reply.

Ned pointed to a dark stretch below.

"That must be a valley," he said. "Anyway," he went on, "I'm going down, and if we come to a point where it is jump or go down with the machine, I'll cut you loose, so you'll have the same chance for your worthless life that I do. That's more than you would do for me under the circumstances!"

Ned guided the Vixen to, as near as he could make out, the location of the other airship at the time of her disappearance and dropped down. As he swept toward the earth the peaks of the Andes rose above him.

Down, down, down he dropped, looking out keenly for trees and jagged rocks. At last he saw a level stretch of land just below. The rains had carried sand and rubble down from the mountains and filled a valley perhaps three hundred feet in diameter with the wash of the

slopes. This formed what seemed to be a pretty good landing spot, and Ned managed to bring the rubber-tired wheels of the airship down without mishap.

Then, rolling swiftly under the impetus given by the now shut-off motors, the wheels carried the bulk of the ship along for some distance and dropped. Ned felt himself falling.

Thomas Q. Collins cried out in fright, and tried to kick himself free from the harness, but the leather straps held. When the drop ended there was, a jar and a crash, and the planes lay in a confused heap in the bottom of a depression well stocked as to floor and sides with jagged rocks.

In descending, the dragging propellers had loosened some of the rocks, and they, rolling down the declivities after the machine, had fallen upon and crushed the planes. Several great boulders thumped near Ned's head, and Collins set up a great howl as a small stone landed on the back of his neck.

Although the stars were shining brightly and the moon was abroad, it was quite dark down in the hole into which the Vixen had fallen. Ned could see slanting walls on all sides, and glimpse, above, the slope of the deceiving level which had first caught the wheels, but that was about all.

Finding himself uninjured, his first move was to get out his searchlight and make an inspection of Thomas Q. Collins, who was roaring like a wounded bull.

"Are you hurt?" the boy asked.

"Hurt!" howled the captive. "My head is broken, and my arms are smashed! What do you mean by tying me up and then wrecking the machine?"

Ned searched the fellow's clothing, removed a revolver and a dagger, and then snapped off the harness which still held him to the seat. Collins stretched himself and lunged at the boy.

"Keep away!" warned Ned.

"I'll show you that no Bowery kid can double-cross me!" Collins screamed, paying no attention to the automatic in Ned's hand. "I'll show you!"

The next moment Ned would have fired, with the intention of wounding the enraged fellow, but a boulder intervened, and Collins went down, striking his head on a rock. When the boy bent over he found him to be unconscious.

Bringing the leather straps of the harness into use again, Ned bound the man's hands behind his back, so as to prevent a second attack,

and set out to look for water. He had not long to look, for a tiny spring bubbled out of the bottom of the pit and found its way toward the valley below through a crevice in the rock. In a short time Collins, under the influence of a right cold bath, sat up and addressed the boy in language which would not have been considered suitable in the presence of a lady.

"You've done it now!" the alleged steam pump salesman cried.

"You've dumped us into a pit in the heart of the Andes, and we'll starve before any one comes to our assistance. Take this strap off my wrists, or I'll have your life!"

"You're an excitable party," Ned laughed. "You want your own way! I've been wondering, while I've been giving you first aid to the indignant, what your name really is, and where you live."

"You'd better be trying to ascertain where we are," declared Collins, "and what chance we have of getting out alive."

"I think I can tell you about where we are," Ned replied. "We were in the air not far from five hours. The Vixen will run about sixty miles an hour, therefore we are not far from three hundred miles from Lima, in a southeast direction. Do you know if we are near any town?"

Collins sulked a short time and then nodded toward a great peak which rose above all the others in the distance.

"That may be Vilcanota," he said.

"Old Vilcanota seems to be a whale," Ned observed, looking up at the snow cap.

"Over 17,000 feet high," was the sullen rejoinder.

"Well," the boy went on, "if that really is Vilcanota, we are still in the land of the living. In fact, we can't be more than twenty-five miles from a town, and there is a railroad--so my maps say--over to the east. It ends at Sicuani, and there the upper branch of the Uacayli river begins. This river empties into the Amazon at the head of steamboat navigation, the maps say."

"You seem to know a lot about this part of South America," gritted Collins.

"And over to the south," Ned went on, "is Lake Titicaca, and over the mountains from that body of water is Coroico, where the Beni river starts on its long run to the Amazon, by way of the Madeira river."

"Well," snapped Collins, drawing hard at the strap which held his wrists, "you can't sit here and figure yourself out of this hole. Why don't you do something?"

"Why, I thought it might be a good plan to wait until dawn," laughed Ned. "Then I may be able to repair this machine."

"Repair nothing!" stormed Collins. "And in the meantime, I presume you think you are going to keep me tied up like a calf going to market?"

"About that way," Ned responded, whereat the captive snorted out his rage and rolled over on his face and pretended to be asleep.

In a short time dawn shone on the tops of the tallest mountains, and directly it crept slowly down into the pit where the wrecked aeroplane lay. By this time Ned had mapped out a course of action.

The aeroplane he had seen in the night had descended not far from this spot, and he had decided to climb to some convenient height and look about for it. If he could come upon the Nelson, in good sailing condition, there would be no need of repairing the Vixen, or trying to do so.

Collins had counterfeited sleep until, utterly exhausted, he had actually dropped off into slumber, so Ned had no captive to watch for the time being. Before leaving for a tour of inspection he examined the broken planes and discovered that it would be impossible for him to repair them, at least without the necessary tools and materials.

Climbing to the level bit of sand, then, he faced the east and began the ascent of a mountain spur which seemed to reach the very heavens. It was a beautiful morning, the air being sharp and clear at that height. Ned felt that he could have enjoyed the beauties of nature more fully, however, if he had something in the way of breakfast!

He climbed steadily for an hour, and then came to a narrow ledge which seemed to surround one of the lower peaks of the mountain. Passing around to the south, he heard a shout, then a fall--a bumping fall which told of a body bouncing from one rocky level to another.

He ran around the angle ahead of him and came out on a shelf-like elevation from which a green little valley, half way up the side of the mountain, might be seen. In the center of the valley, carefully blocked against sudden motion, lay the Nelson.

Ned could have danced with delight. The aeroplane appeared to be in perfect condition, but there was no one in sight. Jimmie and Pedro must be about somewhere, the boy thought, as he considered the most practical way of reaching the valley, but where were they?

He was about to call out in the hope of arousing one of the aviators to action when he saw a hand waving at him from underneath the gray

planes. A more careful inspection of the spot revealed the dirty face of little Jimmie, who was lying on his face, an automatic in each hand. Pedro was nowhere to be seen.

Ned watched the signaling hand for an instant and then, in response to what it said to him, scudded around the angle of rock by which he had reached the shelf. As he did so an arrow whizzed past his right ear and blunted against the rocky wall.

The situation was not difficult to understand. Jimmie had dropped the Nelson into the little valley and had there been attacked, either by savages or those interested in the defeat of the Boy Scout expedition to Paraguay, though how the latter could have reached that lonely spot so soon after the landing of the aeroplane was a mystery which the boy could not fathom.

Following the attack, Jimmie had hidden under the planes, and Pedro had probably taken to his heels. The situation explained, doubtless, why the boy had not returned with the airship. He had been held there by the enemies, virtually a prisoner.

After a short pause, during which Ned listened intently for some sound of pursuit, the boy moved cautiously to the shoulder of rock and looked around it to the shelf. There was no one in sight, so he pressed on, and once more came within view of the aeroplane.

Back of the planes he saw a head lifted from the lip of a gully which cut the valley like a trench. It was not the head of a savage, nor yet the head of a Peruvian mountaineer, for it was covered down to the eyebrows by a flat-topped leather automobile cap which was adorned with driving goggles! Evidently an American!

While Ned, himself unseen, watched the cap and the goggles, the wearer lifted himself and looked up over the edge of the gully. He wore a gray suit, tailor-made, from all appearances.

Back of him three ill-visaged Peruvian Indians also raised themselves to get a view of what was doing in front.

So the savages were led by an American! Instead of the automatic of civilized warfare, the enemy was resorting to the poisoned arrow of the barbarian!

An American there and in automobile costume! Where was the machine, and how in the name of all that was wonderful had it been brought to that rough country?

And why were the enemies crouching there, when their only opponent was a boy, hidden if his position may be so termed--under the planes of an airship--planes which would offer little resistance to an arrow or a bullet?

But while the boy looked and wondered a shot came from the very

shelf on which he stood, and one of the exposed Indians dropped in his tracks. Then the situation became a bit clearer.

Pedro had escaped from the valley to the shelf of rock, and was standing guard there shooting whenever the attacking party attempted to reach the aeroplane.

In a moment the automobile cap and goggles and the evil faces of the Indians disappeared from view. The attacking party had dropped back into the gully, which was some distance from the machine.

Waiting a moment, in order to make sure that no one was stirring behind the shoulder of rock, Ned called softly:

"Pedro!"

"Hello!" came the answer back.

"Where are you?" asked Ned, recognizing the voice of the Peruvian he had talked with at Lima.

"In a notch of the rock," came the answer, in Spanish.

Ned moved along the shelf, and soon came to where Pedro stood, sheltered by a jutting ledge. The journey was not accomplished without attracting the attention of the others, for an arrow whizzed past his head as he crept into the angle with Pedro.

Pedro expressed great joy at the arrival of the boy, and explained that the situation as then shown had existed since dawn. On the afternoon of the previous day Jimmie, being then about to return to Lima, had found it necessary to land in order to repair a slight break in a plane.

The driver of the pursuing Vixen, noting the temporary disablement, had circled around the valley for a short time and then returned to Lima. It was Pedro's idea that the Vixen would not return with assistance, but with enemies who would destroy the machine, leaving Jimmie and himself to find their way out of the mountains as best they could.

Jimmie, Pedro said, had been unable to fix the Nelson for flight until about daylight, and then the attacking party had appeared. Since then it had been impossible to get the machine into the air, as every motion at the airship brought a bullet or a poisoned arrow.

Just before Ned's arrival, an Indian had, by making a long journey around the cliff, gained the shelf of rock where Pedro was stationed, and been caught unawares and thrown down into the valley. It was the cry and the fall of this foe that Ned had heard.

"But," Ned said, "the Vixen must have summoned some one active in the conspiracy before returning to Lima, for the man over there came

in an automobile, and did not come very far either. He certainly did not come from Lima, which is more than three hundred miles away."

"He might have come from Sicuani," replied Pedro. "That is over to the east, and not more than twenty miles off. I have heard that there is a path by means of which a motor car can reach this place. Yes, he must have gone to Sicuani, otherwise this man of the motor car would not be here," Pedro added.

This cleared the situation not a little, and Ned was now encouraged to make an attempt to reach the Nelson, which Pedro declared to be in good condition for flight. If the others had come in an automobile, there could not be many of them. Probably not more than six in all, and two had been wounded, or killed.

Pedro insisted that, with Ned guarding him from the shelf, he could reach the machine, but the boy thought it wiser to make the desperate journey himself. Even if the Indian reached the Nelson, the two of them might not be able to get the machine into the air, as Jimmie had had little experience in running a plane.

So, after explaining to Pedro that he would be taken up later, Ned began the task of making his way down the almost perpendicular face of the cliff. Much to his surprise, there were no hostile demonstrations from the gully in which the attackers had disappeared a short time before.

Instead of shots and the whiz of arrows, the boy heard, when half way down the slope, the distant whirr of a motor car!

"There is some trick in the wind," Ned thought. "They would never run away in that manner because of the wounding of two Indians and the arrival of one boy from the outside."

It was deathly still in the valley where the aeroplane lay. Sounds from a distance came with remarkable distinctness, so the popping of the motors of the automobile were plainly heard, and the direction taken by the machine was thus made known.

Jimmie sprang up, uninjured, as Ned advanced and the two grasped hands with more than ordinary feeling. Almost the first thing Jimmie said was:

"I saw the lights of the Vixen last night, but thought the other fellows would be in charge of her. How did you manage to geeze her?"

"We stole her--and smashed her." Ned laughed, telling the remainder of the story in as few words as possible.

Presently Pedro came down from the cliff and went over to the place where the man he had thrown down the declivity had fallen. He found

him quite dead. With a solemn shake of the head he laid the body in a sheltered nook and joined the others.

It took only a brief examination of the machine to show that she was in as good condition as ever, and Ned prepared to mount and leave the valley. Then the popping of additional motors broke out on the still air, and Jimmie grinned.

"I guess you didn't smash the Vixen much," he said. "Anyway that man in the motor car seems to have repaired her broken wings. Probably had the tools to do it with him. They've got some dirty scheme on!"

"Yes," Ned replied, grimly, "or they wouldn't have left the gully. Collins will be on deck again in about a minute!"

CHAPTER IX

A TRAGEDY IN THE AIR

"Then we'd better be gettin' up in the air, so we can see what's going on," Jimmie replied. "I'd like to see where the motor car goes."

"We can satisfy our curiosity on that point without going up in the air," Ned answered. "The Vixen was left just over that cliff. There is a valley--a dent in the slope of the mountain--on each side of that elevation, and the Vixen and the motor car are in one of them and the Nelson in the other."

Jimmie started away on a run almost before Ned had finished speaking. In a few moments he was seen on the shelf, then he darted around the shoulder of rock and was lost to view. The popping of the motors continued.

Ned hesitated a moment, uncertain as to the advisability of leaving the machine in the sole care of the Indian, and then followed. When he gained the shelf on the opposite side he saw the Vixen slowly lifting in the air. The automobile stood above her, on the level yet treacherous spot where Ned had landed. In it were Thomas Q. Collins and the man he had seen in the automobile cap and goggles!

The Vixen did not look to be in good repair, just as Ned had supposed, for the newcomer had had only a short time to work over her, but for all that she was slowly leaving the narrow pit into which she had tumbled. Her motors were working, but did not appear to be doing any lifting.

Then Ned saw that a rope attached to the machine was doing the work.

The motor car, moving very slowly forward, was pulling her up the steep acclivity, her rubber-tired wheels drawing and bounding against the rocks.

"If they get her up on that level space," Jimmie predicted, "they'll get her up in the air. You can see where they've been patching the planes, and the motors are workin' all right."

"What I'm interested in, just now," Ned said, "is that automobile. I'd like to find the highway through which she entered that valley. It must be through some tunnel, for there's no path over the slopes."

"Then we'll keep out of sight an' watch," Jimmie observed. "See there!" he cried, as the wheels of the Vixen struck the level area. "She'll be in the air directly. One of the niggers is gettin' in!"

"What's that he's loading on?" asked Ned.

"Stones, as I'm a living boy!" he went on, excitedly. "Jump for the Nelson, kid, and get her into the air! You see what they are going to do?"

It was quite evident what the intentions of the others were. The Indians were loading the Vixen down with sharp-pointed stones and long wisps of dry grass; out from the nooks of the valley by Collins, who had now left the automobile.

"We've just got to get the Nelson up in the air!" Jimmie cried. "They're gettin' ready to drop stones an' blazin' grass down on her planes. We've just got to get there before the Vixen sails over her!"

Stopping no longer to observe the motor car, or watch her course out of the valley, both boys dashed around the shoulder of rock and began working their way down into the place where the Nelson lay, with Pedro, all unconscious of the approaching danger, sitting in the driver's seat and wondering if he was ever going to eat again!

The whirr of the motors in the air soon told the sweating lads that the Vixen was rising from the ground. Just how they had managed to repair her so quickly was a wonder to Ned, but he had no time to consider that side of the case then.

"Do you see her yet?" panted Jimmie, as the two paused a moment on their toilsome way downwards.

"Not yet," was the reply, and Ned almost dropped a dozen feet and caught on the point of a rock which jutted out from the wall.

"Gee!" cried Jimmie. "That was a tumble! Got a good hold, there? Then catch me!"

Before Ned could remonstrate the reckless little fellow had dropped. The impact of his body forced Ned from the crevice in which he clung, and together they rolled down a score of feet, bringing up in an angle from which a fall would have been fatal.

Ned came out of the tumble unharmed, but Jimmie lay like a rag in his arms as he straightened out and looked upward. The Vixen was rising over the cliff!

Ned drew his automatic and fired three quick shots in the air, but the aeroplane sailed on, apparently unharmed. In a moment she was directly above the Nelson, and Pedro was fleeing for his life.

Standing there helpless, with the unconscious boy in his arms, Ned saw the driver of the Vixen rain great stones down on the frail planes of the Nelson. Then a puff of smoke came from the driver's seat, and Ned saw that the wisps of straw were being ignited to finish the work begun by the rocks.

He fired volley after volley at the man who was doing the mischief, but he was so unnerved and excited that his bullets went wild. The crash of stones on the breaking planes sounded louder to him than did the explosions of his own revolver.

In a moment a blazing wisp of dry grass, or straw, dropped from the Vixen and sifted through the still air, the individual pieces of the bundle falling apart. Some of the little swirls of flame died out as the material passed downward, but others held, and dropped on the wounded planes!

Ned shouted to Pedro, ordering him to smother else incipient blaze with his coat, or anything the he could find, but the Peruvian was nowhere to be seen. Terrified at the movements of the aeroplane, he had hidden in the rocks.

Again and again the man on the Vixen lighted wisps of dry grass and hurled them down. Directly the planes were in a blaze. Ned laid Jimmie down on a narrow ledge and finished emptying his revolver, but to no purpose. He had never done such bad shooting in his life.

But Fate was abroad in the Andes that morning!

Presently the driver of the Vixen dropped his last wisp and shot upward, apparently not caring to engage in combat with the boy who had used him for a target so unsuccessfully.

As the aeroplane passed across the top of the valley, Ned saw a little tongue of flame on the under plane. The driver evidently did not understand his peril, for he mounted higher and drove straight to the north.

Ned watched the finger of flame grow as it bit into the fine fabric of the plane with something like awe in his heart. If the driver

did not see his danger instantly and hasten down, nothing could save him.

While the boy watched, almost breathlessly, Jimmie stirred and opened his eyes. He had a bad cut on his forehead, but otherwise seemed to have suffered little from his terrible fall.

"Gee!" he cried, looking up at Ned with a grin. "I guess I took a drop too much!"

Ned did not answer. He was too busy watching the tragedy which was taking place in the air. Jimmie followed the direction of his eyes and caught his breath with a gasp of horror.

"He'll burn up!" he cried.

Both planes were now on fire, and the driver knew of his peril. It seemed to Ned that the fellow's clothes were on fire, too, for he writhed and twisted about as he turned the aeroplane downward.

"He'll get his'n!" Jimmie declared.

The Vixen came down almost like a shot, leaving a trail of flame and smoke behind her. Then the end came.

The charred planes gave way and the frame dropped, carrying the driver with it. They whirled over and over in the air as they came down. The fall must have been fully five hundred feet, and Ned knew that it would be useless for him to seek the man who had worked so much mischief to the Nelson with a view of doing him any service.

Below, the Nelson was sending up sheets of flame. Pedro now ran out of his hiding place and attempted to check the fire, but his efforts availed nothing.

"It is gone, all right!" Jimmie said, with a sigh. "Now, how are we goin' to get out of here? That's what I'd like to know."

"We'll have to get out the same way the others do," Ned replied.

"They have lost their aeroplane too."

"Yes," agreed the little fellow, "but they have a motor car, and we've only our shanks' horses!"

Ned extinguished the burning woodwork on the Nelson and made a hasty estimate of the damage done.

"The motors are not injured," he reported. "If we can get something that will do for planes, we can get her out."

"Then," said Jimmie, "I reckon it's me for the highway! I'll chase that automobile into where it came from. I'll bet I'll find cloth of some kind there."

"It might be better to send Pedro," said Ned.

"All right!" the little fellow agreed. "Then you and I can sleuth about this rotten country in search of gold! They say there's gold in these hills!"

The purr of the motor car's engines now came again, and Pedro hastened up the ledge and followed down into the valley where she lay. In a moment she was out of sight, and the Peruvian was moving toward a rift in the wall of rock to the east.

But Ned, watching from above, saw that there was only one person in the car. Mr. Thomas Q. Collins had been left behind!

"That's strange!" Ned mused. "Why should he remain here? What further mischief has the fellow in mind?"

When Ned returned to the machine he found Jimmie busy polishing the scorched steel work.

"All she needs is new planes!" the lad cried.

"Jimmie," Ned asked, "when you came here yesterday, did the Vixen follow you closely, or did she stand off and on, as seamen say, and take note of your course indifferently? What I want to know is this: Did the driver seem anyway excited when you speeded over this way?"

"He followed tight to my heels," replied the little fellow. "Then, when he saw me land, he whirled about and went away."

An idea which seemed almost too good to be true was slowly forming in Ned's brain. Why had the Vixen always followed the Nelson? Why had she spied upon her without in any way interfering?

Again, why had Thomas Q. Collins been left there in the wilderness? Surely there were no accommodations in sight in those valleys--nothing to subsist on, no shelter from the weather.

He might, it is true, have remained out of a spirit of revenge, hoping to punish Ned for his treatment of him, but this explanation did not appeal to the boy. With the Nelson hopelessly out of repair, he could well afford to leave the lads to their fate, as the chances that they would be able to get out alive--being strangers to that country and, supposedly, to mountain work--were about one to ten.

And so, Ned reasoned, there must be some other incentive for the action taken by Collins. He had a subconscious impression that he knew what that incentive was, but hardly dared to whisper it to himself.

The boy's reverie was interrupted by Jimmie, who had been running back and forth in the valley in quest of wild berries, or something which would serve as food.

"I could eat a whale!" the little fellow shouted.

"Catch a hare and cook him," Ned suggested.

"The hares here are not exactly like our rabbits, but they are good to eat. If you go over into the little jungle below, at the end of this bowl, you might find one."

Ned, still wondering if what he hoped might be true, turned to the cliff which separated the two valleys and began a careful inspection of the rock formation. Away around to the east, under the shelf which ran like a terrace around the elevation, he came upon what he was looking for.

The shelf extended outward from the face of the rock, and under it, setting back into the cliff perhaps a dozen feet, was a cavern which looked out on the valley where the Nelson lay, but from which the machine itself was not in sight.

The floor of the cavern showed traces of human habitation. It had undoubtedly been occupied as a shelter from storms by mountaineers for centuries.

But the evidences of occupation which Ned saw were not those showing distant use. There was a tiny fire burning in a crevice which served as a chimney, carrying the smoke far up into the sky before discharging it.

Scattered about the fire were tin cans, some empty, some containing food of various kinds. Thrown over a heap of broken boxes in a corner was a coat--a tailor-made coat of fine material.

On a little ledge at the rear were a safety razor, a small mirror, and a shaving mug. Ned picked up the coat and thrust a hand into an inside pocket. That, he thought, would be an easy way to ascertain the identity of the owner.

In a moment he drew forth a folded paper, covered with figures in pencil. The figures were in columns, as if the maker had been setting down items of expense and adding them up. The total was in the millions. The calculations of a cattleman, covering shipments and receipts!

Ned continued his search of the coat and presently came upon a packet of letters, all enclosed in envelopes and neatly ticketed on the back. They were enclosed in a rubber band, and showed careful handling.

And the envelopes, every one of them, were addressed to Dr. Horace

M. Lyman, Asuncion, Paraguay!

CHAPTER X

DINNER IS SERVED

Ned stepped to the mouth of the cavern and looked out. Jimmie was making his way back to the machine, empty handed and evidently dejected. Ned gave a sharp whistle and beckoned to the lad when he looked up.

He did not care to make any unnecessary noise there, for he believed that Collins was not far away.

He was now half convinced that Lyman had been secreted in that vicinity after being abducted from Paraguay; that he had been closely guarded and comfortably provided for, the idea being to keep him out of Paraguay until his concession reverted to the government.

It was his notion, too, that Lyman had inhabited this cavern until the appearance of the Nelson, when he had been removed by his attendants and placed in custody in some other natural hiding place.

Whether he was still in that locality the boy could not say, but of one thing he was certain. That was that Lyman had not been taken away in the motor car.

And so the quest had been shifted! There would now be no need of proceeding to Asuncion. Probably to prevent getting mixed up in the crooked game, the plotters in Paraguay had ordered those interested in the disappearance of Lyman to get him out of the alleged republic.

This would account for his being in the mountains of Peru. It might also account for the presence in Lima of the Vixen and Mr. Thomas Q. Collins.

The telegrams without meaning which Ned had received on his arrival at Lima pointed out the fact that the conspirators knew that the Nelson was heading for that city as a base of operations. Ned's receipting for the telegrams was proof positive that he had arrived.

"A very pretty plot!" Ned thought, as he waited for Jimmie to make his way up the face of the cliff to the mouth of the cavern.

"Gee!" the little fellow cried, as his head showed above the level of the floor of the hiding place. "I never was so hungry in me blameless life!"

Ned backed up so as to conceal the tinned food.

"What will you give for a couple of tins of pork and beans?" he asked, with a provoking smile.

"I'll sign a check for any amount!" grinned the boy.

Ned stepped aside, disclosing the food, and handed Jimmie a small hatchet which he had found under the rubbish.

"Go to it!" he said.

Jimmie almost dropped with amazement. It was like getting water out of the desert. Like finding milk in the heart of a rock. Like uncovering snowballs from a bed of hot coals! American tinned goods in the mountains of Peru!

The boy examined the cans attentively. They were all correct on the outside. Then he cut one open with the hatchet and brought out a spoonful of beans on the corner of the implement.

"Wow!" he cried, in a moment. "They're all right! Come on an' fill up!"

Both boys fell to, and the supply of tinned food was considerably diminished before they had finished their breakfast. Then, fearful that the owners of the food might seek to remove it before another meal time came, they carried a considerable portion of the cans away and hid them in a small cache near the Nelson.

"We won't starve for a few days," Jimmie said, when this work had been finished.

"Now, tell me what it all means. I wanted to ask you before, but, somehow, I couldn't keep my mouth empty long enough to talk. What about it?"

"I think," Ned replied, "that we have blundered on the country residence of Mr. Horace M. Lyman!"

"What does he come up here for?" asked the little fellow. "Ain't he got no sense?"

"The decision wasn't up to him, I take it," laughed Ned. "The schemers in that crooked little country wanted to get him out of the way, so they wouldn't be getting into a quarrel with the little old U. S. A."

"I don't see him anywhere around," the other said.

"He doesn't seem to be on exhibition, and that's a fact," Ned replied.

"Perhaps," Jimmie grinned, "we'd better look up this Thomas Q. Collins! I guess, he could lead us to him."

"No doubt of that," Ned admitted.

Having securely hidden the tinned food, the boys still lingered in the vicinity of the Nelson. The machine lay shining in the sunlight, seeming to look reproachfully up at the boys, accusing them of getting her into a very bad predicament.

"Good old girl!" Jimmie cried, stroking the motors. "We'll get you out of this mix-up, all right!"

"If we do," Ned replied, studying the ground about the machine, "we'll have to get cover somewhere and watch her night and day." He pointed to footprints close up to the motors as he spoke, and Jimmie began measuring the impressions in the soft earth.

"They've been here since we landed, all right," the boy exclaimed, in a minute. "We never left these tracks. They're big enough for an elephant to make!"

"They were made by muckers," Ned continued. "You know the kind of shoes the men who work in mines wear? Big ones, looking more like a mud scow than a shoe. They have turned some of the copper workers loose on us, little man."

"Gee! How long will it take Pedro to get back?"

"Probably three days, if he has no bad luck--if they let him come back at all," Ned answered.

"You can take it from me that they won't let him come back at all if they have anything to say about it!" the lad muttered. "I reckon I'll have to go an' find him."

"I think it will take both of us to prevent the Nelson being broken up," was Ned's reply. "We shall, as I have already said, have to guard it night and day. And, besides, we've got to keep out of the way of bullets and poisoned arrows."

"This is a cute little excursion, when you look at it up one side and down the other," Jimmie grunted. "We've left Leroy in trouble at Lima, and we've got the Nelson all banged up. Perhaps they'll hang Leroy before we get back!"

"Cheer up!" laughed Ned. "The worst is yet to come!"

"And here it comes!" cried the little fellow, as a handkerchief which might once have been white fluttered above a boulder not far away, held aloft and waved frantically back and forth by a hand which could only faintly be seen.

"Come on out!" Ned shouted.

A figure lifted from behind the rock and stood straight up, waving a dilapidated slouch hat, now, instead of a handkerchief. The fellow wore a suit of clothes which was much too small for him, so that his wrists and ankles protruded a good six inches. The clothes were dirty and ragged too, and the man's face looked as if it had been a long time since it had been brought into contact with water.

At a motion from Ned he advanced toward the machine. Ned thought he had never seen a sadder face on a human being.

"Looks like Calamity!" Jimmie muttered

"Have you boys got anything to eat?" asked the stranger, rubbing his palms over the waist band of his ill-fitting trousers.

"You look like you needed something to eat!" Jimmie put in. "How long you been sleuthin' at us from that rock?"

"Not long," was the reply, in a slow, sober tone. "Just a minute. I fell down a mountain not so very long ago."

"Then," said Jimmie, pointing to the wound on his head, "you haven't got anything on me. I'm quite a hand at fallin' down precipices, myself!"

"You didn't say if you had anything to eat," insisted the stranger. "I'm so hungry that I could eat a fried griddle."

"Well," replied Ned, "we're just out of fried griddles, but we've got a tin of beans we might give you."

"Slave for life if you do!" drawled the other. "I've been wandering in the mountains for more than a week, and am so empty that it will require several tins to fill me up, but if one is the limit, why--"

Jimmie uncovered the cache and brought out a can of beans, which he opened with the hatchet and presented to the other, with a grave bow.

"Dinner is served, me lud!" he said.

The stranger did not wait for formalities. He had no knife, fork, or spoon, but he managed to remove the beans from the can and convey them to his mouth without the aid of such artificial aids to the hungry. He sighed when the can was empty, and wiped his hands on the grass at his feet.

"How did you get in here?" asked Ned, then, curious to know how any one could have the nerve to face a mountain journey in the condition this man was in.

"I came after the mother lode," was the reply.

"Have you got it in your pocket?" asked the little fellow.

"I didn't say I found it," was the grave reply. "I said I came in here looking for it. There was a party left Sicuani, over to the east, two weeks ago, and I trailed in behind. You see, I had a fool idea that these people were on the track of a big gold find, and so just naturally sneaked along. They had an automobile. I walked. They had plenty of provisions. I had no one to grub-stake me. They feasted while I starved, but the way is rough and slow, especially when tires break, and I managed to keep up with them until two days ago. Then they got away from me."

"Did you find gold?" asked Ned.

The stranger shook his head.

"Nothing doing!" he said. "I've been grubstaked all over Australia, and up the Yukon, and over Death Valley, but I have never found a spot where there's so little gold as there is in these hills."

"So, you are an American tourist?" asked Ned.

"I am," was the grave reply. "I stowed away on a ship bound for Asuncion and got a job shoveling coal to pay for the rottenest grub I ever ate. When we got up the river to Asuncion I hired out to a man to herd cattle. That was worse, only the air was not so confining."

"So you left and went to Sicuani?" asked Ned.

"Exactly, after many days. I liked the cattle business all right, but I had to move on. Horace M. Lyman is a good chap to--"

"Wait!" Ned said. "It was Horace M. Lyman you worked for, eh?"

"Sure. He's an American, and a fine fellow."

"Well," Jimmie cut in, "you're likely to see him if you stick around here. They geezled him, so another gazabo could get his concession."

"And marooned him off here? Is that it?" asked the stranger.

"Well, there's a pair of us, then, that don't find anything nourishing in the scenery. Where is he?"

"We haven't found him yet," Ned answered, "but we're on the trail. If you had one more can of beans, do you think you could help us hunt him up?"

"Certainly. Of course. I'll do that without the beans, but--"

"I see," Ned answered. "You haven't the strength, just now, to do much looking. All right, we'll fat you up, and then--"

Ned did not complete the sentence, for a long, wavering call came from the west, and the stranger started off in that direction without a word of explanation. Ned wondered for a moment whether this fellow wasn't another hypocrite of the Collins stripe.

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed. "Suppose you tell us something about that call?"

"I'm agreeable," replied the other. "Don't you know what that coo-coo-ee-ee is? Then you've never lived in the cattle country. That is a cowboy salute, pard, and my private opinion is that Horace M. Lyman is the party that uttered it."

"Then he's not far away," Jimmie said.

"Suppose I answer him?" asked the stranger.

"Go on an' do it," the little fellow advised, and Ned nodded.

The cod-coo-ee-ee which the ex-cowboy emitted rang through the valley and came back in weird echoes from the crags around.

"Now he knows there's some one here looking after him," the stranger explained. "He knows that Old Mose Jackson is right on the job. What might your name be, pard?" he added, turning to Ned.

"Nestor," was the reply.

"Ned Nestor, of course!" Jackson exclaimed. "I read about you being in Mexico, and in the Canal Zone. Strange I should bump into you away off here! And I'll bet this is Jimmie? What?"

"The same!" the little fellow replied. "Ned can't lose me!"

Hardly had the words left the boy's mouth when a bullet came zipping through the air. It struck a metal section of the Nelson and flattened out.

"Before now," Jackson said, coolly, "when I've found myself on the open plain with redskins popping away at me I've dug a hole in the ground and stowed myself away in it. What do you think of the notion, pard?"

"It looks good to me!" Jimmie cried. "But," he went on, "We've got nothing to dig with, so we'll just have to move back to that gully, an' take the grub with us."

The change was soon made, the Nelson being run back to the edge of the trench-like depression, and then the three awaited the next move on the part of the enemy.

Presently a shout was heard, and then the flashily-dressed figure of Mr. Thomas Q. Collins appeared on the shelf of rock.

"Don't shoot!" he cried, swinging both hands aloft. "I want to come down and talk with you."

"There's some trick in that!" Jimmie said.

CHAPTER XI

A STICK OF DYNAMITE

"If we could only get out of this cul-de-sac," Jack said, as the savages gathered closer about the Black Bear, "and make the Beni river, we could leave them behind like they were painted on the trees."

"There ought to be some way," Frank mused.

Harry, who had been rummaging in a trunk of clothing and tools which stood under the bridge which half concealed the motors, now came forward with a package in his hand.

"What is it?" asked Jack.

"Dynamite!" was the cool reply.

"That ought to induce them to go on about their business--if properly administered," Jack said. "I didn't know we had any on board."

"I didn't know what we might come across up here," Harry replied.

"Shall we light a fuse and give one of these persuaders a toss over into that mess?"

"It would amount to wholesale murder," Frank replied.

Harry's face hardened as he held up a hand for silence. The howling on the banks of the little stream was now almost deafening, and every second there came the thunk of arrows against the boat.

"You see what they would do to us," he said.

"Yes, I know," Jack said, "but we are supposed to be civilized! It would be a wicked thing to do, to murder fifty or a hundred of those savages. Suppose we toss a stick where it will do little damage and still attract their attention from the boat? Then we might get that

log out of the way."

"We'll see what show we have for getting it out of the way-the log, I mean," Jack replied.

He cautiously opened one of the lower panels at the rear and looked out. The log which blocked the narrow channel was afloat, for it was the trunk of a dry tree, and the water was deep. What held it in place was the end which lay on the shore. It had been rolled in at a point where the bank was low, and at least two-thirds of it lay on the ground.

"I'd like to know how they got it in there!" Jack said. "It looks too big for a hundred men to handle."

"Anyway, there it is," Frank replied, "and there the propellers are--one of them broken. Can we make speed with that busted wing?"

"We've got to," Harry said. "Just hear the devils! They will rush the boat in about a minute!"

The cries coming from the forest were now blood-curdling in their ferocity. The cannibals were evidently working themselves into a pitch of excitement which would give them courage to charge the Black Bear.

Now and then the frightened howl of some wild beast was heard in the distance, adding not a little to the excitement of the scene. The tree which had been set on fire to attract the attention of the airship still blazed, sending a twist of flame far up into the sky.

In the glare of the fire the savages looked like fiends ready for any act of devilry. Now and then three figures larger than the rest stood together as if in conference, and then the shouts grew louder, and the line about the boat closer drawn.

"I've got a notion that we can make pretty good speed with that broken wing," Jack mused. "Anyway, we can drift down stream if we can't steam up stream, and that will take us out of this mess."

"Then let's blow that log up with dynamite," suggested Frank.

"Yes," said Jack, "and finish the propellers!"

"Blow up the shore end," continued Frank. "Who can pitch it so that it will knock that blooming dry wood into the stream?"

"I'm willing to try," Harry said. "I used to pitch a tricky ball! I'll get a fuse ready, open a panel, and give it a throw. While I have the panel open, though, you fellows open up a loophole in front and do some shooting out of it to attract attention. I don't want any poisoned arrows biting me."

This was agreed to, and Harry arranged a fuse and prepared to throw it. When Jack opened a panel in front and sent a volley of bullets ashore, the boy pushed open a panel in the rear and, waiting until the attention of the savages was attracted to the front of the boat, tossed out the dynamite.

It hurled through the air, flashing in the red light of the fire, and landed at the very end of the fallen tree, rolling into the angle between the wood and the earth. A fine throw!

Harry yelled to Jack to close his panel, and all three boys stood on the tips of their toes, fingers in ears. In a moment the explosion came.

The Black Bear rocked violently, so that it was with difficulty the boys kept their footing. Wild cries of distress and fright came from the forest, and, in a few seconds, the crash of falling trees. The dynamite had done its work well, at least, so far as noise was concerned. They could not yet see what effect the explosion had had on the tree.

Had it loosened the obstructing log so that the boat could pass out into the Beni river? Had the concussion damaged the propellers so that the trip up the valley of the Amazon would have to be abandoned?

These questions were in the minds of all three boys as Jack cautiously opened a rear panel and looked out. The first thing he saw was the log, splintered and broken into half a dozen pieces, floating down stream.

The explosion had whirled the great trunk high up in the air and brought it down, broken, in the channel of the stream. There seemed nothing to do now but to set the motors at work and run out of the dangerous position.

But the motors refused to work. Something more than showed on the surface was the matter with them. Harry looked out at the rear and saw a great red patch of earth without a single human being in sight. The fire was still burning brightly, but there were no savages dancing about in its fierce light.

At the sound of the explosion the head hunters had taken to their heels. At first view, no one seemed to have been injured by the dynamite, but, on giving the scene a closer inspection, the boy saw three bodies lying near where the log had been. They might be dead or only stunned; the lad had no means of knowing.

While Harry watched for some sign of life, the roar of a wild animal came from the forest, and he knew that a tiger cat was approaching. The humans--if the man-eating savages may be so termed--were still running, it appeared, while the wild beasts of prey were returning to the scene of the explosion.

"Come," Harry cried, "we must get out of this now if we can get the propellers to working. There is no one in sight, only three men lying near where the log lay, and there are man-eating animals coming, so I'd rather not see what takes place next."

Jack threw open another panel and stepped out. The roar in the forest was growing again, but no savage was in sight. He moved to the back of the boat and bent down to look at the propellers.

"I can't see from here!" he shouted, in a moment. "Look out for me, you fellows!"

Like a shot he was in the river, diving under the stem of the Black Bear. Harry and Frank, knowing the rivers of that district to be swarming with caymen, grouped at the rear and watched with anxious eyes for the reappearance of their chum.

In a few seconds Jack's face appeared above the surface of the water. He seized a rope passed to him and climbed on board, shaking the water from his clothing like a great dog.

"It is all right," he said, as soon as he could get his breath. "There was a piece of the log wedged in back of the paddles and I got it out. Get a pole and push. She's in the mud, I guess."

The pole was used before the motors were turned on again, and the Black Bear was soon out of the little creek, sailing slowly down the Beni. However, the boat did not behave well, and it was decided to tie up for a day and go over her carefully. The propellers needed fixing, and there might be some other injury which had not been discovered.

Not caring to strain the weakened propellers, they permitted the boat to drift down stream.

When a mile away the illumination of the fire which had been so injudiciously set could still be seen distinctly, and when the boys listened they could hear the cries of the savages and the fierce howls of the wild beasts.

During the day the boys had passed a level plateau on the east bank of the river, and it was decided to float down to that, as they could beach the Black Bear there and work without danger of being attacked from the shelter of a forest.

They gained the spot about midnight and anchored some distance out, resolved to take no chances on the shore that night. The stream was quite wide, and they opened the top panels so as to get what fresh air they could.

Jack was the first one to see the airship hovering over them.

"Look!" he cried. "Look! Look! We've just got to attract their attention in some way! See! They are going away again! Confound the luck!"

The airship seemed about to dip down, then it floated off to the west and whirled to the south.

"They're signaling!" Harry cried.

This seemed to be true, for there were lights moving about in the air in queer combinations.

"Get a glass!" shouted Jack, in great excitement. "We'll soon see about this!"

But the airship seemed interested in the spot where the fire was burning, and did not remain overhead long enough for the boys to get a good view of her. At last she disappeared entirely.

Although anchored out in the stream, which was at least two hundred feet wide at that point, the lads kept a close watch of the shores that night. Once, just before dawn, they caught the sound of paddles, but the canoe which appeared on the west soon sneaked away.

The hubbub on shore kept up all night long. The beasts took up the chorus when the savage tribesmen retreated.

"Beautiful country this!" Jack said, as the sun rose over the great valley. "I think I'll like to live here always--not!"

"Yes," grunted Frank, whose eyes were heavy with the long watch, "even on the Great White Way, the enthusiasm quiets down after three o'clock."

"It is all in the game!" grinned Harry. "We came out here for excitement, and you mustn't complain when you get it."

After breakfast, which was keenly enjoyed, the Black Bear was beached on the east banks and the injury to the propellers examined. Some of the blades were broken while others were strained.

"Well," Harry said, as he scratched his head in deliberation, "we've got extra blades, and we've got the tools, and I don't know as we're in a hurry anyway. We've got all the time there is!"

"Not if we catch the Nelson before it gets out of the country," Jack objected. "This is the 22d of August, and the Nelson must have sighted Lima about the 14th, so you see we've got to do some sailing if we get to the headwaters of the Beni before the boys get back home."

If they had only known, the lads might not have been so anxious to get on, for the boys with the Nelson were having troubles of their

own about that time. Besides, there were difficulties ahead much greater than those entailed by the breaking of the blades of the propellers.

They worked all day at repairing the injuries, and at night were ready to proceed. It was dark again, and there seemed to be a great commotion on shore.

"For one," Frank observed, "I don't like the idea of going on up an unknown river in the night. There are rapids, and there may be obstructions. And then we may follow off some tributary which will land us in some swamp after an all night ride."

"I'm not anxious to go on tonight," Harry contributed, "for I'd like to see what that mess on shore will amount to. There's something besides the appearance of the Black Bear exciting those fuzzy little natives, and we may miss something if we run away. I wouldn't like to do that."

So it was decided to remain where they were until morning. The panels were put up, leaving only the openings for ventilation, and the Wolf was brought close alongside.

Frank got the first watch in the drawing of sticks, and stationed himself at the prow, where he could look out on the river. Jack and Harry were soon asleep.

About midnight a great clamor arose on the west bank. In a moment it was echoed from the opposite shore. There was a beating of drums--the foolish drums which the natives made so crudely--and long chants, rising in the darkness like the monotonous melodies the boys had heard in the cotton fields of the South.

Frank shook Jack and Harry out of their bunks, much to the disgust of the two sleepy-heads. They did not need to ask questions as to the reason for this, for the chant was coming nearer, and the drums were beating like mad.

"They're arranging an attack!" Jack said, turning a searchlight out of the front loophole. "I can see half a dozen canoes hanging off and on at a bend above. I guess we made a mistake in stopping here."

"Perhaps we'd better drop down the river," Harry suggested. "I don't want those heathens swarming over the Black Bear."

Jack went to the stern and looked out on the swirling river from that point.

"If we do," he said, in a moment, "we'll bunt into a fleet of war canoes. We've got to put on all speed and drive ahead."

"Why not drop back?" asked Harry.

"Because," was the reply, "we can go up stream about as fast as we can go down stream, and the canoes can't. We'll shut everything tight but the loopholes and go through them like a shot through paper. If they board us we'll have to open up and drop them into the river with our automatics."

"Put the big light out in front then," Harry said, "and stand there and tell me which way to steer, and let her go!"

The next moment the Black Bear, closely followed by the Wolf, was nearing the canoes, now drawn up in line of battle in front.

CHAPTER XII

A BRIBE OF HALF A MILLION

"What do you want to talk about?" asked Ned, as Thomas Q. Collins advanced a step, both hands still high above his head, as an indication that he was unarmed.

"I want to reach an understanding with you," was the reply.

"About what?"

"About--well, about your errand here."

"Oh! Well, what about it?"

Collins hesitated a moment and then asked:

"Why can't I come to you and sit down? I'm not armed. This is not an easy or a dignified position for me to hold."

"You say you are not armed," Ned replied. "Will you say as much for the savages who are with you in this dirty game?"

"There are no savages here with me," Collins protested. "Your Indian killed one by throwing him from the ledge, one was killed when the Vixen burned and dropped, and one was shot by one of your boys. The other went away with the motor car. You must have seen them riding away?"

"There were five people with him when he first came out here in the car," Jackson said, under his breath. "Ask him where the other white man now is."

"Did you see the other white man?" asked Ned of Jackson.

"Not distinctly."

"Would you have recognized him if it had been Lyman?"

"I might. I can't say. I wasn't very near to them. They kept me scouting over the hills to keep them in sight."

"Well," Collins called out, impatiently, "are you going to let me come in for a talk? If not, I'll go back and bring some shooters out here."

Without answering that special question, veiled, as it was, with a threat, Ned asked the one proposed by Jackson.

"Where is the white man who was with you when you first came here in the car?"

"I did not come in a motor car," was the reply. "I came in the Vixen."

"That's a lie!" Jackson whispered. "The Vixen, if that is what they call their airship, never showed up until a few days ago. I tried to signal to the driver; or, rather, I did signal to him, but he ignored me. This man Collins came in with the car more than two weeks ago, and went out in it, too, and the other white man remained. The next time he came, he was in the Vixen."

"Who is that fellow who is filling you with prejudice against me?" demanded Collins, presently. "It looks like a man wanted for stealing cattle from the Lyman ranch."

"Why didn't you communicate with him, if you were so hungry?" asked Ned of Jackson, suspiciously. "You say he has been here at least twice."

Jackson frowned and looked away. Then his forehead flushed and he said:

"I guess there's no use lying about it. I was accused of running cattle off the Lyman range. That is the man who accused me. I never did. He knows that. Now you know why I didn't approach him and ask for food."

"Well," insisted the boy, "why didn't you browse around and find the white man he left here? That is what he came in here for, isn't it--to hide some one he wanted out of the way?"

"I thought he came to look for gold," was the reply. "Now, about the other question. I did try to find the man he left here. I wanted to eat with him! I knew there was some one in the hills, but I never found him. It beats the Old Scratch where he is!"

"Come, come!" Collins cried, impatiently, "you can do your visiting

after we have our talk. Shall I come to you, or will you come to me?"

"Don't you go out there!" Jimmie warned. "He's got some one hidden. You'll be shot if you do. Tell him to come here."

"Keep your hands up and come here," Ned ordered, thinking this good advice.

He had already experienced the treachery of the fellow, and did not care to take any chances. Collins came along sullenly, stood stock still, while Jimmie searched him, and then sat down on the framework of the Nelson.

"That aeroplane would look handsomer," Ned said, grimly, "if your men had not set it on fire."

"That was war!" Collins replied. "It is war still, unless we can come to some kind of agreement."

"I haven't much faith in your word," Ned replied. "You played a dirty game on me at Lima, you know."

"The chances of war!" Collins replied. "Now," he went on, "we can come to terms without any reference to the International Peace Congress, if we want to. I'll admit that if things were a little different I wouldn't be asking for terms, but that is neither here nor there. I want your assistance."

"On the level?" demanded Jimmie.

Jackson grinned scornfully, and Collins glared at both.

"The man we brought out here--merely as a matter of business--has disappeared," Collins went on. "We left him in the little cavern where you found his coat and the food. He's got away."

"You refer to Lyman?"

"Of course."

"You were keeping him a prisoner until his concession should lapse?"

"That's only business."

"When does it lapse, in case he does not appear and make payment?"

"On the 31st of August."

"And this is the 18th?"

"I think so. I'm pretty well mixed as to time, as well as everything else."

"Then he has only fourteen days in which to get back to Asuncion and make a large payment?"

"That is just it."

"And he is lost?"

"Yes."

"When did you see him last?"

"You remember how I came to be here? You brought me, trussed up like a hen in that aeroplane harness. Well, when the Vixen went into that pit and you went away to look over the scenery, I knew that the motor car would be along soon, so I didn't try to get away. I knew what would happen if I did. You'd shoot! Just as soon as the car came and I was released--the car brought in food for Lyman-- I sent a man over to the cave to find Lyman. He wasn't there. Understand? He wasn't there."

"But there were live embers in the cave when I got there," Ned said.

"I know. That was built by one of my men, who wanted to make coffee, but didn't. The food you stole was brought in by the car as I said before. You found Lyman's coat, didn't you?"

"Yes, and a packet of letters."

"I knew what you were in Lima for from the first. I knew of your mission before you left San Francisco. So I did not lie to you when you asked if the man who was brought in, something over two weeks ago, in a motor car was Lyman. I knew that you knew. You see, we had to get him out of Paraguay when it was learned that the United States had placed the Lyman affair in the hands of the Secret Service."

"Go on," Ned said. "You are getting pretty close to the point now."

"I thought at first," Collins went on, "that you had blundered into this district just by blind luck. Now I know better. I gave myself away by my fool antics at Lima. Then the Vixen showing up and chasing the Nelson around increased your suspicions. Oh, I know how it happened. You fooled us all. We led you right to the spot where Lyman was hidden by our attempts to mislead you. More fools we!"

"You have stated the case correctly," Ned said. "If you had kept away from me at Lima, and the Vixen had kept out of sight, I should have gone straight on to Asuncion, and should have been wasting my time there this minute."

"Yes, that's the truth! Well, now I've been perfectly frank with you, and I want you to be equally honest with me. Do you know where

Lyman is?"

"I do not."

"You haven't seen him?"

"Never saw him."

"If you find him, what do you propose doing?"

"I shall take him back to Asuncion and see that he gets justice."

"Acting as a Secret Service man of the United States?"

"No, as an individual."

"But you are in the employ of the government?"

"Yes, but I'm not authorized to mix the two countries up in a war."

"Yes, I know, but your government will back you in whatever you do. That is the point with me. If you report no cause for interference down in Paraguay, there will be no danger of our getting into trouble. Your government wouldn't make a demand for Lyman's release, although it was understood he was kept in duress by a high official of the republic. Still, it sends you out to act unofficially. Now, this being the case, you are the person I want to talk with."

"Well?"

"I want you to help find Lyman, and then I want you to help me come to terms with him--we can't fight the United States!"

"In other words, you want me to betray my trust and help you rob him?"

"No. There are two sides to everything--where there are not three, or more. So there are two sides to this cattle concession business. I think that Lyman will be glad to settle if we find him--if he does not know that the United States has Secret Service men on the ground!"

"So you really do want to buy my silence?"

"I want to make sure that you will not attempt to defeat our plans."

"Nothing doing," Ned replied.

"Wait!" Collins continued. "You haven't heard me out. We'll see that Lyman gets all his money out of the deal, with something besides, and also that you get a quarter of a million dollars for saying nothing."

"Nothing doing!" Ned repeated.

Collins actually gasped with amazement. He had offered bribes before, but had never started out with so large a sum. And he had never been denied!

"Understand the proposition," Collins said, presently, as soon as he could catch his breath, "it is not you we want. We don't care a continental cuss for you. What we want is for you to keep quiet after we find Lyman. It is the Secret Service of the United States we are afraid of. I'll make it half a million."

"It must be a rich concession," Ned said.

"It is, and Lyman got it for a song, for no one ever supposed that swamp would make good grazing ground."

"I guess Mr. Lyman will earn all he gets out of it," Ned laughed.

"He will never get anything out of it, unless he comes to terms with me," Collins said, impatiently. "We'll find some way to keep him out of Asuncion until after the 31st. It is a long way from here to Paraguay!"

"All the more reason why we should get busy looking for him," Ned said.

"And when we find him?" asked Collins, tentatively.

"I shall take him back to Asuncion."

"Then you'd better not find him," threatened Collins. "If you're going to oppose me, I'll leave it to you to look him up. I'll go back to Asuncion and bring men out here who will see that you never leave the mountains."

"Gee! That's a cheerful proposition!" grinned Jimmie.

Collins, disgusted at his failure to either bribe or frighten the boys, started away, but Jackson laid a heavy hand on his shoulder and swung him around.

"Wait a minute!" he said.

"What do you mean?" demanded Collins.

"You're not going to Asuncion after help," Jackson said. "I have a little score to settle with you myself! You're the man who accused me of running off cattle. Well, you're going to remain right here with me until I go out with you and give you a chance to make that right."

Collins glanced at Ned.

"Is this by your order?" he asked.

Ned shook his head.

"I have no present quarrel with you," he said.

Collins started away again, but Jackson thrust him back, not any too gently.

"If you make a touse," he said, "I'll tie you up. Now," he added, as Collins, almost foaming with rage, threw himself on the ground, "I want you to tell me where you left that tent."

Both Ned and Jimmie sprang to their feet at the mention of the word.

"A tent! Here!"

Collins snarled out some impertinent reply, and Ned asked:

"Did they bring in a tent?"

"You bet they did!" Jackson answered. "This fine-haired duck with the circus parade clothes wasn't going to sleep in no cavern. He was going to have a nice, soft, cool bed under a tent while he was waiting for the Lyman concession to lapse. He was reared a pet--he was!"

The ex-cowboy was so enraged at Collins for the insinuations he had cast upon him that he pushed up to where he lay and would have assaulted him if Ned had not interposed.

"Let him alone," the boy said. "We'll leave the law to make payment in his case. Are you going to tell us where the tent is, Collins?" he added, turning to the angry captive.

"I guess you can get along without the tent," Collins said. "You won't have to remain here long. I've got men coming in. They may be here at any moment. Officers of the Republic of Paraguay!"

"I shall be glad to meet them!" Ned laughed. "If you'll tell me where the tent is I'll be able to entertain them properly."

"Aw, I can find the tent if it is around here anywhere!" Jimmie broke in.

"What do you want of it?" demanded Collins

"A little tent cloth," Ned smiled, "would make a serviceable machine of the Nelson. We could make new planes in no time. What do you think of the idea?"

"I'm not going to have the tent cut up," shouted Collins.

"I guess yes," Jimmie said, provokingly. "You burned our planes, and you've got to supply material for new ones."

The little fellow darted away as he spoke, working his way over the ledges which separated the two dents on the mountain sides. In a short time Ned heard him calling and saw him looking down from the shelf above the cavern.

"Come on up," the lad cried. "I can see the tent over in the other valley, and there's another automobile coming. What do you think of that? This must be a regular station on the underground railroad between Asuncion and Lymanville!"

Ned lost no time in gaining the ledge. The white body of the tent was in plain sight, just where the men had dropped it out of the machine. The two boys hastened into the depression, seized the canvas in their arms, and started back toward the Nelson. On the shelf again, Ned asked:

"Where did you see a motor car?"

"Over east," was the reply. "There's a tunnel under the range off that way. I take it that a river ran there once, draining this valley."

Presently the machine appeared in the valley from which the Vixen had slipped off into the pit. There were four men in the two seats. One was the Indian in goggles who had driven the car away, the others were white men. The car could not have gone far, so these men must have been picked up just outside.

The boys carried the canvas down to the Nelson and began the work of making new planes, keeping close watch, but leaving the newcomers to do the calling if there was any to be done. There was plenty of canvas and the tools necessary for the work were found in the Nelson's tool chest. Collins watched the doings angrily.

"These men," he finally said, "are officers. Two from Paraguay and one from Peru. They have warrants for your arrest."

He started to his feet as if to join the others as he spoke, but Jackson saw that he did not get very far.

"Tell your friends," Jackson said, "that we're too busy to be bothered now. We'll soon have this aeroplane fixed, and then we'll give an imitation of men sailing out of this mess. Lyman knows a friend is here, for he heard my cowboy call. He will soon come out of his hole, and we'll take him back to Asuncion--just to prevent international complications!" he added with a grin.

The work of preparing the new planes progressed swiftly, but before

it was completed the men who had arrived in the automobile appeared on the ledge and called down to those below.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NELSON IN THE SKY

"Well," Ned called back, as the new arrivals shouted down from the ledge, "what do you want?"

"We want to talk with you."

"Cripes," Jimmie grinned, "we're in good demand today. The stock of Boy Scouts must be gettin' shy!"

"Go on and talk, then," Ned answered, well satisfied as to what the fellows wanted.

"Shall we come down there?"

"You stay away!" Jimmie replied. "We're a little particular about our company!"

"Is that little runt speaking for you?" demanded the man on the ledge. "If he is, we'll do something besides talk."

"For the present he is," Ned replied. "What can I do for you?"

"You can surrender yourself. We have warrants for your arrest."

"Couldn't think of it!" was the cool reply. "We prefer to remain at liberty."

"I told you!" Collins grunted, rising from his reclining position and moving toward the ledge. "I told you that you'd get into trouble. You'll sweat for this!"

Jackson caught him by the shoulder and whirled him back.

"You stay here!" the ex-cowboy gritted. "The less trouble you make the better treatment you will receive."

"What are you doing to Collins?" asked the newcomer. "Tell him to come up here."

"I'm being held a prisoner!" Collins shouted. "Train your guns on these kids and drive them off. And find Lyman. He left the cavern, but he's somewhere about, for he answered a cowboy call not long ago."

"We already have Lyman!" was the answer. "He thought we were the friends who had called him and joined us. We'll take care of him, all right."

"That's fine business--not!" grunted Jimmie.

Ned was not a little disappointed by the announcement. With Lyman in the hands of his enemies, it might be impossible to get him back to Asuncion in time to save his concession.

And here was another difficulty, one which might bring on a war between the United States and Paraguay. Ned, as an official of the United States Secret Service, now knew that those high in authority in the government of Paraguay were involved in the attempt to defraud Lyman of his rights. This had been only suspected before.

So long as only private interests were interfering with the treaty rights, so long as the government of the unruly republic was not mixed up in the attempt to cheat an American citizen out of his property, the government at Washington might well restrain its hand. But when the government of Paraguay itself, as Ned now believed, was involved in the crooked game, that was an entirely different matter.

Ned believed that a full disclosure of the facts in the case would send warships to Asuncion. He believed that an international complication might breed open war unless he succeeded in getting Lyman away without open conflict with the authorities of the little republic. But how?

Well, the State Department at Washington had trusted him, and he would do his best. The thing to do at that time, it appeared to him, was to await the action of the newcomers. They might be officers of Paraguay, with authority to make arrests in Peru, and they might be only four-flushers. He must temporize until he found out what they proposed to do in the matter.

And, then, he reasoned, if they had Lyman, he had Collins! That was not so bad! Perhaps an exchange of prisoners might be made! This did not seem very likely, but still there was hope. Collins, for all he knew, might be the man who expected to profit by the robbery of the American cattleman.

"So Mr. Lyman is there with you?" Ned called back. "Send him over here. I want to talk with him."

A harsh laugh was the only answer to this.

"You may as well come to terms with me," Collins exclaimed. "You have no chance of winning now. I like your nerve, but you're butting into too strong a game for a lad of your years."

"I shall have to take chances," Ned replied. "What will those men

do with Lyman?"

"I don't know!"

"I know!" Jimmie cried. "They'll kill him!"

"I don't think they'll do that," Collins remarked, with a wicked sneer, "but it would clear the atmosphere if he should fall down a mountain!"

"If he does," Ned declared, flushing with anger at the brutality of the remark, "you will also take a tumble. If he is injured in any way, you'll answer to me for it."

"You wait!" warned Collins. "I've handled cases like this before. I can give you cards and spades and beat you out. You'll be getting hungry before long."

"And the Nelson will be ready for flight before long," Ned replied.

During all this conversation Jackson and Jimmie had kept steadily at work sewing the new, strong canvas taken from the tent on the frame of the planes. They could not make a very neat job of it, but they did their work well. Ned had hope of getting out of the valley that very night. Presently the men on the ledge withdrew for a time, and Ned began a closer examination of the Nelson. To his disgust he discovered that the gasoline was very low in the great tanks. Built for long flights, the Nelson's tanks were very large, fitted to carry a supply which would last a couple of days. Ned did not quite understand why the supply should be short after a run of only three or four hundred miles.

"I've got an idea!" Jimmie said, catching the worried look on Ned's face.

"I'm afraid it will take something more than an idea to get the Nelson back to Lima," Ned replied in a low tone, for he did not care to have Collins informed of this new difficulty.

Collins, however, had been watching the movements of the boys closely, and at once surmised what the trouble was. He laughed insultingly as he pointed to the great tanks.

"Empty?" he snarled. "I knew it. Now will you be good!"

"Shut up!" raged Jackson, who was only too anxious to get a pretext for attacking Collins. "We've heard enough from you!"

"Tie him up!" ordered Ned. "He's likely to make a run for it, and then we should have to shoot him. Tie him up good and tight."

"You'll be sorry if you do!" threatened the captive.

Notwithstanding this threat, the fellow was bound hand and foot. During the process of the work, which was performed none too gently by Jackson, Collins called out to his friends in the other valley, but there was no response. They were probably too busy with their plotting against the boys to hear the shouts.

This business completed, Jimmie beckoned Ned aside.

"Here's my idea," he said. "The Vixen's tanks didn't blow up when she burned and dropped. When it comes night I can go and get the gasoline. The tanks were full, were they not?"

"Yes, chock full. The driver seemed to have fitted her out for a long run. But we may be able to get the stuff before dark. The Vixen did not land in the valley where they are, but in a canyon over to the west. Suppose you go over there and see what the chances are?"

"All right!" replied the boy. "And if the tanks of the Vixen are not full, we'll steal the fuel out of that automobile when it gets dark!"

"That's a good idea, too!" laughed Ned.

Jimmie hastened away, keeping in the gully as long as possible and dodging around friendly cliffs when it came to climbing over the ridge which shut in the valley on the west. The gully cut across the valley, east and west, and was very deep at the east end.

After the disappearance of the boy, Ned removed Collins to the deep end of the cut and placed Jackson there as a guard. He did not want the captive to know what was going on, as a shout to his friends, if they again visited the ledge, might put them in possession of the facts regarding the empty tanks of the Nelson. Then it would be an easy matter for them to prevent the getting of the gasoline from the wrecked Vixen.

Then Ned, hearing no more from the alleged officers, went to work on the planes, and succeeded in getting a long strip sewed in before Jimmie returned with his report.

"The tanks are almost full," the lad said, "and all we've got to do is to unscrew a couple of burrs and lug them right over here. We can't do that until, after dark, for they would shoot at us. Where's Collins?"

Ned pointed to the gully.

"Well," the boy continued, "when I got up on that ridge, I could see the men over in the other valley. They are getting reinforcements from somewhere. Anyway, I saw half a dozen Indians standing around. They've got a fire and are cooking dinner. Then I saw one of the white men pointing, and I'll tell you right now what they're going

to do! They're going to station men around this little old crater and keep us in here until we starve, unless we give in."

"They forget that there's an air route," laughed Ned.

"Suppose we get up there on the Nelson!" exclaimed the boy. "And suppose they shoot us off! That wouldn't be funny, would it?"

"We've got to go in the night, then," Ned said. "But before we go I want to have a talk with those fellows."

"Then you'll get a word with Lyman, if you can?"

"That wasn't a bluff, then? They have captured him again?"

"Oh, yes, they've got him with them, all right. Anyway, there's four white men, and only three came in the car. Guess it's Lyman, sure enough!"

"What is he doing?"

"Just walking about. They haven't got him tied up, at least the man I took for Lyman isn't. He looks mad enough to bite nails, though!"

"That is a wonder," Ned said. "It may be that they are trying to make terms with him."

"Of course!" replied the boy.

Along in the afternoon one of the alleged officers appeared on the ledge again. He appeared to be somewhat excited, and Ned suspected that something had gone wrong with the other party. However, he remained quiet, waiting for the other to make his errand known. After a short silence the fellow asked:

"What has become of Collins?"

"He is still here," Ned answered.

"Held against his will?"

"Well, he is still doing some kicking."

"You'll be sorry if you don't let him go."

"How will you trade prisoners?" asked Ned. "Send Lyman down here and we'll send Collins up to you."

"Oh, Lyman doesn't want to leave us," was the reply. "We've arranged a settlement with him."

Ned did not believe this. He knew that the Lyman concession was a valuable one, and that the cattleman would put up a long fight

before sacrificing it.

"Send him down here then," Ned answered. "If he is voluntarily staying with you, he can return if he wants to. Send him down!"

"He is afraid you'll try some trick on him," was the reply.

The whole afternoon passed in just such conversation as this--talk which brought no results worth mentioning. Ned did not believe that Lyman was remaining with the newcomers voluntarily. He did not believe that Lyman was suspicious of him.

The men in the other valley frequently visited the ledge and talked with Ned, but the boy saw that they were quietly making arrangements to surround him. Now and then the figure of an Indian appeared on the elevations about the valley, which was the crater of an extinct volcano.

A little study showed Ned that in some long forgotten time the two valleys had formed a great crater, and that this had been cut in two by the elevation of a mass in the center. High up above this dead crater, on the north, stretched the bulk of the mountain, the eruption having taken place on its south slope.

But while Ned talked with the visitors, argued with them, threatened, he kept at work on the planes, and at nightfall had them completed. The canvas had been put on double and sewed on very strongly, so the boy believed that it was as good a machine as ever that he contemplated getting out that night.

"But," argued Jimmie, when the plans were laid, "we can't all go in the Nelson. How are you going to carry Lyman, Jackson and me?"

Jimmie thought for a moment and then added: "But we haven't got Lyman yet. We'll have to come back after him, I take it, after we land Jackson outside."

"But I'm going to get him," Ned replied, "if this machine works all right. I'm going to leave you and Jackson here. What about that?"

"If you can grab Lyman," Jimmie grinned in disbelief, "I'll be willing to stay here as long as the grub lasts!"

"I'm going to get him," Ned replied. "I don't know how, but I've just got to get him back to Asuncion before the 31st."

"And what about Collins?"

"We'll have to let him go. When I get out, let him go, and then you two will have to hide away until I can come back after you."

"All right," replied Jimmie, with a sigh. "Only hurry back! I don't want to starve to death here."

After dark Ned, Jackson and Jimmie lugged the tanks of the wrecked Vixen over to the valley and dumped the gasoline into the Nelson's tanks. Even this accession did not quite fill the latter.

"Wish we could get to the motor car," Jimmie suggested.

"Now," Ned said, "I want you two to kick up an awful rumpus here, directly. Shoot and do all the yelling possible. Let Collins loose and chase him! He deserves it! Then, when the fellows over there run up on the ledge to see what is doing, I'll swoop down in the aeroplane and pick up Lyman--that is, if he is willing to come with me. If he isn't, I can't get him, that's all."

"Then, when we get up in the air, we take to our heels?"

"Exactly. If you don't these fellows will make trouble for you. Hide, but keep making to the east. When I come back after you I'll come in from that way."

"How long will it be?" asked the lad, who did not quite like the notion of being left there with Jackson.

"I can't say," was the reply. "I may leave Lyman in the nearest town, or he may want to go to Asuncion. I may be back by daylight, and I may be gone two days. I hope to be back by daylight."

"All right," Jimmie grunted. "We'll keep off to the east, and when you return you can pick us up before they know what's going on. Here's hoping you get Lyman!"

"I'll get him!" Ned replied, shutting his teeth hard together.

So, all arrangements made, Jimmie crept up on the ledge, about nine o'clock, and looked over into the twin valley.

There was a campfire burning, and Lyman, or the man the boy took for the cattleman, sat close beside it. The others were walking about. Now and then an Indian stepped inside the circle of light cast by the fire, consulted with the others for a moment, and disappeared again.

It was certain that the alleged officers were preparing to advance on the boys, bent on putting the Nelson out of commission for good. The planes had not been repaired any too quickly. When Jimmie reported Ned stepped into the machine.

"When I get within sight of those in that valley," he said, "make all the noise you can. If you can cause them to think you're killing Collins, all the better. Make him yell! I'll go straight up and drop down by that fire before they get over their excitement."

A few strong shoves, a dozen revolutions of the rubber-tired wheels, and the Nelson left the ground, as strong and capable as ever. The motors made little noise, and no signs of discovery came from the other side until the machine was high up. Then a few ineffectual shots were fired at her.

Jimmie and Jackson began their part of the performance promptly by shooting and yelling. They loosened Collins, much to that gentleman's delight, and started him off in the dim light on a run. As Jackson took great delight in landing his bullets close to Collins' feet, the alleged salesman ran for dear life toward the ledge, screaming and calling for help at every jump.

This was exactly what the others wanted, and in a short time they saw a huddle of dark figures on the ledge. In the excitement the firing on the Nelson had ceased.

Jackson and Jimmie were not long in getting out of the valley after that. They whirled around the elevation between the two valleys, sometimes feeling their way in the darkness, climbed over a ledge, and made for the black entrance to the tunnel through which Jackson had entered.

When they were at the mouth of the tunnel they turned and looked back. The Nelson was lifting from the valley where the fire had been seen, whirling up, up into the night sky. They could not determine from where they stood whether there were two or one on the big aeroplane. They had no means of knowing whether Ned had succeeded or failed.

The two watched the dim bulk of the aeroplane as it winged over their heads. Now and then, after it was too late to do her any harm, a few vengeful shots were fired at her. The fact that Ned kept going convinced them that he had picked up Lyman and was on the way out with him.

After the aeroplane had disappeared from sight Jackson and Jimmie hurried on through the dark tunnel, which, as has been said, was merely the dry channel of a stream which had cut its way out of the valley years before. Jimmie proposed that they remain there all night, but Jackson objected to this.

Their pursuers knew that he knew of the tunnel, he explained, in support of his objection, as they were aware that he had entered the valley by that route, so they would naturally look there for them.

This was convincing, of course, and the two hastened on their way, lighted by the little searchlight. For a long time there were no indications of pursuit, then a popping roar came beating down the passage.

"That's the automobile!" Jimmie cried. "Sounds like an express train, eh?"

"It certainly does," Jackson replied, "and it is up to us to get out of the way, somewhere. They won't take extra pains to catch us alive."

CHAPTER XIV

ARRESTED FOR SMUGGLING

The Nelson swept out of the air like a bird and landed so close to the fire that Ned felt the warmth of it on his face. The wheels cut the earth at first, under the force of the quick descent, then stopped.

The firelight shone on the white planes, bringing them out strongly against the darkness, and Ned knew that he could not remain there a minute without being discovered by the alleged officers of the little republic he was just then warring against. When he landed the men were out of sight around the ledge, but they of course saw the aeroplane and came running back.

Lyman, or a man Ned believed to be the cattleman whose financial operations had stirred up an international row, stood moodily by the fire when the Nelson dropped down, almost on top of his head. He sprang away, rubbed his eyes as if trying to awake himself from a bad dream, and then stood stock still, watching.

"Lyman?" Ned called.

There was no reply, and Ned spoke the name again.

"Yes, Lyman," the man by the fire answered, then. "What new wrinkle is this?" he added, stepping a little closer to the machine.

"If you're Lyman," Ned replied, hastily, "you can't get in here any too quickly. Those fellows will be here directly, with Thomas Q. Collins in the lead, if my boys do their duty. There will be little chance for either of us then. Jump in!"

"But I've never been on one of those things, and I'm afraid," Lyman said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I'm afraid I'd fall out."

A shot came from the ledge, and Ned reached for the button which would start the motors going.

"You've only a minute to decide," he said. "I've come a long way to find you. If you reject this chance you won't get another."

"Well," Lyman cried, stepping up to the seat, very shaky as to

nerves and pale as death, "I may as well die from a fall as from a bullet or a knife. If Collins is coming back with the officers, I'll have to do something."

The instant he was in his seat, Ned threw the leather straps about his legs and wrists and buckled them tight. Lyman shivered with fright.

"I thought so!" he cried, mistaking Ned's motives. "This is only another trick!"

The wheels bumped for an instant over the inequalities of the surface, the machine rocked lightly, then the planes lifted into the air, the propellers running like mad. A few ineffectual shots came from the men who were running down from the ledge. Ned saw Jimmie and Jackson chasing Collins out of the valley, heard their shots, and then, in a few moments, saw them at the mouth of the tunnel.

In five minutes more the Nelson was out of all danger, purring through the darkness like a contented cat. Lyman sat moodily in his harness, saying not a word, but fully convinced that this was only another trick of his enemies. Directly the boy slowed the motors down so as to make conversation possible.

"Well," he said, turning on one of the electric bulbs so as to see the face of his passenger, "what do you think of the Nelson? Peach, isn't she?"

"Where are you taking me?" was the only reply to the question.

"That is for you to say. We are not very far from Sicuani, Peru, and from there you can secure transportation back to Asuncion--if you think it safe to go there, under the circumstances. About a hundred miles to the north is Cuzco. You can go there and prepare for your visit to Asuncion if you care to. Then, over here in Bolivia, is Sucre. It might be well for you to go there. Anyway, it is up to you."

"Who is doing this?" asked Lyman, suspiciously.

"I can't see as that makes any difference to you," Ned replied.

"I was in the hope," Lyman went on, "when you came down upon me so unexpectedly, that my friends had found me. You speak English like a New York man," he went on. "Perhaps you live over there?"

"Yes," was the reply. "I live in New York, when I am home."

"Nice little old rotten government we've got!" almost shouted Lyman.

"The people at Washington let any crooked little republic do anything it has a mind to do to a citizen of the United States. They're too busy getting themselves into office and keeping in to pay any attention to their duties. England wouldn't stand for a

minute the tricks that have been played on me, not by business rivals, but by the government of Paraguay! England protects her citizens, wherever they are!"

"Well," Ned replied, with a laugh, "you may be right about England, but you are wrong about Uncle Sam. He looks after his own, too; if he didn't I wouldn't be here now. You wouldn't be on earth!"

"Do you mean to say--"

Lyman hesitated, and Ned went on and told him as much of the history of the expedition as he thought it necessary for the cattleman to know.

"And now," he concluded, "Where do you want to go?"

"I want you to go with me, wherever I go," was the reply. "And I think we'd better go straight to Asuncion."

"Do you think that a safe plan?"

"Oh, yes; they won't dare abduct me again."

"Then," Ned added, "we may as well get on the way. Asuncion is somewhere about twelve hundred miles from here, and we've got to make it by daylight."

"What's that?" asked Lyman, hardly believing he had heard aright. "You would better say in two days."

"The Nelson can make it in eight hours," Ned replied, "if we don't drop into any holes in the air or adverse currents."

"Holes in the air!" repeated Lyman.

"Sure," answered Ned. "The atmosphere surrounding the earth is just like the water in the large reservoirs--there are deep places and shallow places, holes you can drop in, and currents like the Gulf Stream current, the Japanese current, which warms the northern states and British Columbia, and the Arctic Humboldt current, which sends a cold stream down the Pacific coast of South America. If we have no difficulties with these rivers of the air, and the wind does not come up too strong, we can make Asuncion by six o'clock in the morning. It is about ten now."

"What sort of an airship have you here?" demanded Lyman, amazed at the thought of running at the rate of two hundred miles an hour or a hundred and fifty, at least.

"She was built for speed and endurance," was the reply. "Now cover your face with this mask, unless you want to have your breath blown out of the back of your head, and we'll get under way."

That was a night ride which neither of the participants ever forgot. The first part of the night was dark. Then a moon shone down from a cloudless sky, showing all the beauties of that magnificent country.

The mountains, the forests, the headwaters of the rivers which help to make the Amazon, were under their feet. Now and then they swept over a point of light which denoted the presence of a small town. Occasionally the cry of frightened wild beasts--the vicious mountain lion, the savage tiger cat, the prowling puma--came up to their ears.

After a short run to the southeast, Ned wheeled about and struck straight off to the east. The wind was growing stronger, and the Nelson was not making as good time as the boy desired.

There was a fierce current about the top of Mt. Sorata, which is something over 21,000 feet in height, and again Ned swung off to the north. Dropping down, then, he swept into the valley of the Beni river, which joins the Madeira river, some distance beyond the Bolivian border.

He knew that at the eastern rim of Bolivia there was a series of high mountain ranges which would protect him from the drifts blowing over from the Atlantic--Serre Geral, Serre Paxecis, Serre Aguapehy--and he reasoned that he could make better speed under the lee of these elevations. So he swept down the valley of the Beni until it joined with the Madeira, crossed a line of hills, and made for the Serre Geral range, something under a hundred miles away.

As the Nelson cleared the valley, however, Lyman gave Ned a punch in the ribs with an elbow and nodded toward the ground. His wrists were fast in the harness so he could not use his hands. Ned looked down and instantly dropped the Nelson a few hundred feet.

Some distance down the Madeira, in the center of the stream, were the lights of a boat which seemed to be anchored there. Ned swept closer and tried his best to make out the outlines of the craft, but he could not do it without descending close to the river, and this he did not care to do.

"It looks like the Black Bear," he thought, as he shot up into the air again, "but of course it can't be. Those Boy Scouts are not fools enough to bring her up into this country."

So he came to the protection of the mountains and proceeded south toward Asuncion at a speed which caused Lyman to gasp for breath. Of course he was ignorant of the fact that Frank, Jack, and Harry had started out, during his absence, to explore the headwaters of the Amazon, hoping to come upon the Nelson before returning.

As for the lads on the Black Bear, they did not even know that the Nelson was so close to them that night. It was three nights later that they first saw the aeroplane drifting above them. Asuncion

does not at all compare in beauty or in thrift with the other capital cities of South America. The government of the republic is so unstable that business men are loath to make heavy investments there.

For one thing the town is poorly lighted, and when Ned came, in view of the place at five O'clock the few street lamps were already out. People were abroad at that early hour, however, and small crowds soon gathered on the street corners to watch the great airship approach.

What Ned could not see was the intense excitement around the government offices. In ten minutes from the time the airship showed above the city, messengers were out in the streets and officials of the lower rank were headed for their offices. In a few minutes this alarm was communicated to police headquarters and to the military station where the governor's guard was stationed.

If the boy had been able to understand the situation below, if he had known that Asuncion had been communicated with from Lima and also from Sicuani, he would have given the city a wide berth. He saw the gathering of crowds below, of course, but naturally attributed this to curiosity. He had no doubt that the Nelson was the first airship ever seen at Asuncion.

"Where are you going to take me?" asked Lyman, as the machine slowed down and he found himself able to speak.

"To the American consul," was the reply.

Lyman sighed and shook his head.

"I'm afraid he will take little interest in me," he said.

"Doubtless," Ned replied, "he has received instructions from Washington. Anyway, I fail to see how they can molest you now, even if they have the inclination to do so. You just go about your business as usual, and leave this abduction matter to the future. You can gain nothing now by stirring that up. Report to the consul and go on about your business as if nothing had happened."

"That is the only thing there is to do," Lyman responded, with a sigh. "Still, I'm suspicious of those chaps. They'll have some trick ready."

Before long Ned found a level spot not far from the capitol building where he could, drop the Nelson. When he headed for that locality he was followed through the streets below by a shouting, howling mob.

"I can't understand this," he thought, and Lyman was still more suspicious.

At last the Nelson was brought to the surface of the earth and Ned and Lyman stepped out, very willing to stretch their legs after such a long ride. They had been in the air about twice the time set for endurance by noted aviators.

They did not get much of a chance to stretch their legs, however, for they bumped into a squad of soldiers on stepping out of their seats.

"You are under arrest!" a gaily-dressed officer said, flashing his sword out of its scabbard.

"What for?" demanded Ned, speaking in Spanish.

"Smuggling!" was the reply.

Ned laughed heartily. Arrested for smuggling!

"Search us, and search the machine, then," he replied, "and let us go on about our business. We have no time to lose."

"In time! In time!" was the drawling reply. "Such things are not done so quickly here! In three-four days--in a week--in three, four weeks, perhaps. In the meantime you go to the jail."

Ned thought of the swiftly-slipping days, of the peril Jimmie and Jackson were in, of Leroy in prison at Lima, and was about ready to fight. The officer refused to take him to the president, or to the American consul. In a quarter of an hour he was in a cell, alone, wondering what had been done with Lyman, and also wondering what would become of the Nelson.

He knew that the charge of smuggling, of bringing goods into the republic by means of an airship, would be held against him as long as it pleased his accusers to keep him in prison. That would be until the concession expired and, possibly, until the Nelson lay a total wreck in the streets.

He saw no one who could give him any information as to what was going on in the outside until the morning of the 21st, after he had been incarcerated forty-eight hours. Then a turnkey unlocked his door and motioned him out.

"For trial?" Ned asked, hopefully.

"It is the wish of the president," was the reply.

"But what, why, when--"

"You have yet to see," was the impertinent reply. "You have yet to see if you can do these things to our countree!"

And so, mystified and, if the truth must be told, not a little

discouraged, Ned was led through the prison corridors, his mind filled with thoughts of Leroy, Jimmie, the Nelson, and, strangely enough, the Black Bear!

CHAPTER XV

THE WARNING FROM THE SKY

There was a shock when the prow of the Black Bear struck a canoe which lay full in its path. The momentum was retarded for only a second. Then the motor boat was beyond the line of war canoes with their screaming, gesticulating occupants.

Looking out of the rear ventilator, Frank saw a smashed canoe running down with the current, with a dozen or more natives clinging to it. But there was still a large number of canoes up the river, and the Black Bear was struck more than once by forceless bullets and poisoned arrows as she sped past them.

Armed with modern rifles, the Indians would have made short work of the occupants of the Black Bear, but the muskets they used were old and mostly out of condition. The arrows were far more deadly, although they stood less chance of penetrating the tough panels.

"Now," Harry said, as they passed a racing fleet of Indian boats, "we can open up a little and get a breath of fresh air! I'm just about suffocated!"

"Not just yet," Jack, who was at the front, said, "for there's a mess of the black scamps just ahead. They are on the bank, both banks, and seem to be waiting for something to happen. I wonder what it can be?"

"Some trap, I suppose," Harry gritted. "Well, all we can do is to run on through them, if they come out in boats, and get out of their reach. We ought to be able to be out of this blasted country in a couple of hours."

"That's all right," Jack replied, "but you just listen a moment."

But the racing motors shut out all individual sounds, and Harry shut them down for a minute. Seeing this, Jack dropped an anchor at the prow, and the boat lay pulling at the cable in the current.

"What did you do that for?" asked Frank, addressing both boys from the stem.

"Listen!" commanded Jack.

"Look!" ordered Harry.

What Frank heard was the heavy, continuous roar of a waterfall. What he saw, as he crowded up under the plate glass panel in the top, were the lights of an airship!

"I tell you," Harry cried, excitedly, "that that's the Nelson. You can't fool me about that."

"Why doesn't she come down, then?" demanded Jack.

"Because she doesn't know that this is the Black Bear. That is an easy one! If she did she'd be here in a second."

The boys studied the lights a moment and then turned their attention to the Indians, who were now making a great clamor. In a short time it was easy to see what they were up to.

Above roared the falls and the rapids. At this point in the Beni river there is a swift drop from the mountain plateau above. It will be remembered that the Beni reaches away up into the Illimani mountains, with its springs not far distant from the summit of the Andes.

Where the boys were the Paredon and the Paderneira, falls and the Araras and the Misericordia rapids made the navigation of the river, even in the protected Black Bear, impossible for many miles. The Indians seemed to understand this, for they had gathered at the foot of the falls, possibly expecting to see the craft attempt the ascent.

Jack watched them from the prow for a time and then asked:

"What's that they are throwing into the river?"

"Logs!" replied Harry, looking out over Jack's shoulder, "and brush!"

"Well, of all the--"

The sentence was not finished. Frank, at the stern, gave a yell and fired out of the loophole. "Come here!" he shouted, then, "if you want to see what the devils are doing. This takes the cake!"

A glance showed the others what the plot against them was. Harry went to his locker for his revolver and Jack drew his from a pocket.

"I guess it is a fight now!" Frank said. "You see what they are doing?"

"Of course. Anybody can see that."

Jack reached out of the opening and fired a perfect volley down stream. Frank crowded against him to look out.

"Never touched them!" he cried.

"No," Jack went on, "they're forming a bridge with their canoes and running logs and brush down against it. They've got an obstruction already that the Black Bear never can get through."

"What's the matter with dynamite?" asked Harry.

"Oh, we can use dynamite as long as we have it," was the reply, "but there will be Indians on guard there long after we are out of the stuff."

"I guess that's right!" with a sober drawing of the lips.

"I'll tell you what we've got to do," Harry said, presently. "We've got to put on full power and try to run up the rapids."

"Why, there is noise enough for a ten-foot fall," Frank replied.

"We've got to risk it," Jack went on.

"Now, you just wait," Frank cut in. "I don't think you've got this thing sized up right at all. Harry," he continued, "who does this boat belong to?"

"To the Black Bear Patrol," was the reply. "You know that well enough."

"Then we can do what we please with it, so long as we make it right with the other members of the Patrol?"

"Why, of course."

Jack looked at his chums with a grin.

"What are you figuring on?" he asked. "One would think you were planning to blow the Black Bear into smithereens."

"That's about it," Frank replied.

"And go to kingdom come with her?" laughed Jack. "Not any of that for me. I'm headed, eventually, for little old N.Y."

"I'm tired of fooling with these cannibals," Frank explained. "We haven't molested them, and yet they are after our scalps. They'll get them, too, if something isn't done--and done right away, at that."

"I'm with you!" Jack exclaimed. "I'm willing to try anything once. Only let me in on the secret!" he added, chuckling.

"You had it right," Frank said. "What I propose is to blow the Black Bear into smithereens, and about a thousand of those bloodthirsty natives with it. The world will be all the better for their being out of it. They are worse than the savage beasts in the forests."

"But what is to become of us?" asked Harry.

Frank pointed to the Wolf, tugging at the cable which held her nose to the stem of the Black Bear.

"We'll be safe in there when the explosion takes place," he said.

Jack clapped the speaker on the shoulder.

"You're all right!" he cried.

Harry looked mystified for a moment, and then said, speaking loudly in order that his voice might be heard above the shouts of the savages and the beating of arrows against the panels of the boat:

"It looks as if we'd have to do it. I hate to leave the Black Bear in such a mess away off here in South America, but I don't see how we are to get her out. The Wolf will carry us all right, I suppose?" he said, tentatively.

"Sure thing!" Frank replied. "I've been thinking it all out. We'll do it this way: When we get ready we'll put on full speed ahead on the motors, with the prow turned against that obstruction below. Then we'll hop into the Wolf and shut everything down tight. The Black Bear will weaken the jam below, and the sharp nose of the Wolf will poke through the rest of the logs and canoes. And there you are!"

"Free of the natives, and bobbing down the river in safety!" cried Jack. "That looks good to me!"

"But about the dynamite?" asked Harry.

"Well," Frank replied, "we've got to use the Black Bear for a battering ram anyway, and she'll be all smashed up, so we may as well go the whole hog with her. We'll put a lot of dynamite down under the motors and fix a cap so it will blow up when the concussion comes. By that time the natives will be swarming around her, and they'll get what's coming to them."

"And where will we be when the explosion is rocking this half of the world?" demanded Harry. "Up in the air?"

"We'll be a cuddled up in the Wolf, between the lockers, with plenty of grub and ammunition, sailing down the river in a bullet-proof vessel. This move will burst up our meeting with the Nelson, of

course, but there is no other way. They'll get us if we remain here."

While this talk had been going on, the cannibals had drawn nearer to the Black Bear, pressing forward from both banks in canoes and pounding at the panels with their arrows. It seemed only a question of time when they would board the craft and force the panels. Their shouts of victory were shrill and exasperating.

"You see how it is," Frank said, "the Black Bear can never be pushed up over the falls, and we can never get her past the obstructions below, even by the use of dynamite. If we could blow those logs out of the way, the Indians would board us instantly. We could give them only a charge or two of dynamite and a few shots before they would be inside. Now we can drift down the river in the Wolf without fear of entertaining man-eaters on board. They may get on top of the boat, but they can never get inside."

"And so we'll have to give up our trip!" wailed Harry. "We'll have to drift down stream in that hot hole and take a steamer at the nearest river town!"

"It strikes me," Frank observed, "that it is a mighty good thing we've got that hot hole to drift down stream in. If the Black Bear had only been constructed on the principle of the Wolf, we'd be in a position to give these heathens the laugh. Well, let us pull the Wolf up and throw out stuff enough to give us room. Then we'll get out the dynamite."

The boys drew the Wolf up by the cable as Frank tried to elude the watchful eyes of the savages long enough to open the hatch on top and climb inside, but a dozen arrows whizzed by his head when he looked out.

"Can't do it!" he said.

"Never in the world!" Jack assented.

"Another good scheme gone wrong!" Harry ejaculated. "What next?"

"Dynamite," almost shouted Jack. "We'll give them dynamite as long as it lasts, and then ram the logs below."

"We may kill, a couple of hundred," Frank said, "but it seems to me that there will be about ten thousand left."

The boys were indeed in a tight box. With their automatics and their dynamite they might keep the natives at bay for a time, but in the end they would be obliged to surrender or starve to death.

"Well," Jack said, grimly, "let's get out the dynamite. I want to see some of these devils blown up!"

Just then an arrow struck the plate glass panel at the top of the Black Bear's deck covering and Jack looked up. He gazed a moment in wonder and then let out a shout that rose above the yelling of the savages and the pounding of arrows against the panels of the Black Bear.

"Glory be!" he shouted.

Frank and Harry crowded to his side and looked up.

"It is the Nelson!" Harry exclaimed.

"You bet it is!" Frank admitted.

"Good old Ned!" Jack roared.

The aeroplane was only a few yards above the Black Bear. Already the natives were slinking away in their canoes. Those on the banks were slowly withdrawing into the shelter of the forests.

"They're running away!" Jack cried. "Now we'll have some fun with good old Ned Nestor!"

For a moment it looked as if the statement was correct; as if the natives, alarmed at the sight of the aeroplane would disappear from sight without a fight. But this supposition was soon disproved.

As the Nelson came nearer, a dozen bullets from the forests struck her planes. The boys, in the boat raised the panel and shouted to the aviator to look out for poisoned arrows.

Then the aeroplane shot up again. They could see that there was only one person on the machine, and that he was busy arranging something which looked like a stick of dynamite which he held in his hands.

In a moment something grim and sinister whirled and hissed through the air, and then there came a terrific explosion in the forest to the right. Trees were leveled, and a great hole showed in the bank. In an instant, following close on the roar of the dynamite, there came a chorus of cries from savage throats--cries of fear, of terror, of rage--and then silence.

For a moment it seemed as if the forests held no forms of animal life, then the sharp call of the tiger-cat, the wail of the puma, the chattering of the monkeys, came to the ears of the listening boys.

"I guess this coming act will consist of a feed for the wild beasts!" Jack said.

For a long time there was no sound of savage life in the forests, save that from the throats of beasts of prey, scenting blood and

slowly drawing closer to the river's banks. The boys on the Black Bear looked into each other's faces and wondered.

"They didn't act that way when we exploded dynamite!" Jack said.

"No. They came right back at us!" Frank replied.

"I take it that they think there's something supernatural in this dropping of dynamite from the sky," Harry observed. "Anyway, they seem to have taken themselves off, and we'll open up and signal to the Nelson! Say, won't it be fine to see good old Ned Nestor again? I wonder how he knew we were here?"

"And I wonder where Jimmie and Leroy are?" Harry reflected. "There is only one person on the machine, and that must be Ned."

Jack was about to throw open the top panels when he caught sight of the aeroplane again, nearer to the water than before.

"What's Ned doing?" he asked, pointing upward.

"Talking!" exclaimed Frank.

"Wigwagging!" Harry broke out. "Now, let us see what he says."

Slowly to the right and left, up and down, an electric bulb flashed in the sky. Harry counted.

"That's C," he said, "and that's 'a,' and that's 'u,' and that's 't,' and now 'i,' and 'o,' and 'n.' 'Caution!' That means that we've got to stand pat for a time yet."

"It also means," Jack said, "that we've made no mistake about that being the Nelson, with a Boy Scout on board. Those wigwag signals show the supposition to be true."

"Well," Harry puzzled, "he wouldn't be sending us a warning from the sky if there wasn't some danger we were not aware of. There is something going on that we are not wise to."

There was a short silence on board and then Frank remarked:

"We must be nearer the falls than we thought, for the water seems to be a ripple about us. Rear it! I'm going to look out and see it looks like."

In a moment he was jamming the panel shut and springing the slides over the loopholes and the ventilators.

Jack sprang to the prow, not knowing what danger threatened, but obeying the sudden gestures of his chum to close every opening. Before he sprung the steel panel over the ventilator he glanced out on the river.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "Get your guns, boys!"

The whole surface of the stream, as far as the boy's eyes reached, seemed covered with savage heads, floating, drifting, down upon the Black Bear.

CHAPTER XVI

RED FIRE FROM THE SKY

Under the light of the moon the rushing river seemed full of leering, cruel eyes. The bodies of the swimming savages were not visible--only the upturned faces and the threatening eyes, with now and then a hand or the point of a glistening shoulder. There appeared to be thousands of the cannibals; their mass reaching from shore to shore.

Then, while the boys looked, expecting every instant to hear the sound of feet outside the panels, a rocket shot out from the Nelson and a score of parti-colored balls curved and hissed toward the earth.

"Gee!" Jack cried. "He's giving them a fourth-of-July celebration!"

"Hope it scares them off," said Harry.

Looking through the heavy glass panel at the top, they saw a rain of red fire drop down on the swirling river. For a moment the whole upper air, then river and forest, was painted a bloody red by the burning powder.

Cries came from the river, and the mass of floating heads parted and swung swiftly toward the shores; then silence. The aeroplane circled about cautiously and then dropped down lower. Jack opened the panel.

"Hello the boat!" cried a voice from the aviator's seat.

"Hello, Ned!" all three boys called back.

"How do you know it's Ned?" was asked.

"We saw that beautiful face of yours in the red fire," replied Jack.

"How are we going to get out of here? They've blockaded the river below, and the falls are above."

"I presume I have dynamite enough to blow up that improvised dam," replied Ned. "Why didn't you do it?"

Before Jack could explain the situation, the Nelson drifted past, and he knew that his voice would not carry to her.

"I'm going to open up now," Harry said, as the Nelson drifted out of range of the glass pane. "I'm pretty near choked in here."

"Nice time we would have had in the Wolf," laughed Jack.

"Anyway," urged Harry, "we should have been in her in a minute if the Nelson hadn't shown up. Say, won't they give us the laugh in New York? Came away off out here alone, and then had to be rescued by Ned!"

Very cautiously the panels giving on the stern were opened. There were no savages in view. The banks of the stream seemed as quiet and harmless as a thicket in Central Park.

"I guess the rocket and the red fire got them!" grinned Frank.

"Yes, but they won't stay scared forever!" Harry put in. "We'd better be getting out of this before they come back to their senses."

"They never had any senses!" claimed Jack.

Looking out from the interior, now guarded only by the panels at the front and sides, the boys saw Ned drop half a dozen sticks of dynamite on the logs and brush which had been floated down on top of a number of canoes. In some places the logs had pushed up until they were high above the surface of the water.

The pressure of the current was continually making the obstruction more compact. The canoes seemed to have been bound firmly together and stretched from shore to shore. At least the moorings were strong, for the logs were heavy and the current pulled heavily at them.

The explosions made great havoc with the barricade, and presently the line was broken and the whole mass swung shoreward or drifted down stream.

Then Ned called out:

"Now drop down stream and I will join you."

"Better look out where you land!" Harry called back.

"I hope I won't get into any such scrape as you did," Ned replied.

"Oh, you're not out of it yet!" laughed Frank. "These woods are full of man-eaters. Look out where you go, and we'll find a place for you to come down."

The anchor of the Black Bear was lifted and the power turned on. In a minute she was going down stream at a thirty-mile gait.

Directly they passed the wrecked barricade, rolling and tumbling in the waters, the canoes either broken or half full of water. The Nelson still led the way down the stream.

"I guess he's never going to stop."

"Wonder if he's going back to New York?"

"Perhaps he's lost control!"

The boys looked and wondered as the aeroplane drifted on to the north and east. They were miles from the scene of the battle now, but the airship went on.

Presently they saw the purpose of the aviator in making this long run. A little nest of houses flashed out on the river bank, with here and there a light showing, and here the onward course of the Nelson became a circling descent.

In the east there was a faint line of dawn in the sky when the Black Bear was pushed up to a primitive wharf. The aeroplane was still circling in the air.

"He wants us to pick out a spot for him to land on," Jack said.

"There's one over by that hill," he added.

When Ned saw the three boys gather at the spot indicated and motion to him to come down he lost no time in doing so. When he stepped out of his seat all three lads were upon him. One would have thought they were determined to tear him in pieces the way they seized his hands, his legs, and pulled at his neck.

"You old fraud!"

"How did you know?"

"You're a nice old chaperon!"

For a moment Ned could not say a word, then he pushed the boys away and sat down on the ground.

"You're a nice bunch!" he said.

"Sure!" said Jack.

"The people back there thought so much of us that they wanted us to remain to dinner!" grinned Harry.

"There ain't no better people!" Frank insisted.

"How did you happen to get out here?" demanded Ned. "Why, you fellows ought to have a chaperon. Those cannibals would have had a good dinner today if the Nelson hadn't come that way."

"Now, don't crow over us!" pleaded Frank. "We know all about it. You've gotten us out of many a scrape, but this is the large event. We take off our hats to you. Now, where's Jimmie and Leroy?"

"I don't know," answered Ned, gravely.

"I guess you are the one who needs a--"

"I guess you are right," Ned replied. "I've been up against the pricks good and plenty since I left you. If I get to New York alive, I'm going to stay there for good."

"Where did you leave Leroy?" asked Frank.

"In jail!"

"Wow!" cried all three boys.

"And Jimmie? I don't see how you happened to lose him."

"Jimmie is lost in the Peruvian mountains," Ned said.

"Well, why don't we go and get him?" asked Harry.

"Yes," laughed Frank. "We might ride in the Black Bear over the storm-tossed summits of the Andes!"

"At least," Ned said, "you boys can help me a lot. I have my hands full. We can all ride the Nelson, I take it. She was built to carry three average-weight men, you know, and I think she ought to manage three boys and one man!"

"Oh, you man!" laughed Jack, poking Ned in the side. "You man who has to come to the three boys for help!"

"Tell us about it," Frank said.

"The quicker we start in on the search for Jimmie the quicker he will be found," Harry insisted.

It was not much of a town where the Nelson had landed. There were a few native houses and a great warehouse, at one end of which was a small office. Such river products as came from up stream were packed there to await transportation down to the Amazon.

By the time the sun was up a score or more natives and a couple of British traders were gathered about the aeroplane and the Black Bear. One of the traders, Mr. Hamlin, invited the boys to his home

for breakfast, and left some of his employees on guard at the Nelson and the Black Bear.

During the breakfast Ned recounted his adventures, to which the host listened with the closest attention. Frank then told of the cruise of the Black Bear, adding that they had hoped to reach the very last yard of water flowing down the Andes slope to the east.

"It is wonderful what American Boy Scouts will accomplish!" Mr. Hamlin said, when the tales had been told. "A few years ago no boy of your age would have undertaken such a duty as sent you to Paraguay," he added, addressing Ned, "and no boys would have dared to navigate the Beni river," he continued, smiling at the three bright faces on the other side of the table.

"The Boy Scout training makes for courage and resourcefulness," Ned said. "We have not been caught in many traps. In fact, I think we are now up against the very worst situation we have ever encountered."

"But you haven't yet told us how you got out of jail at Asuncion, only that you got in on a smuggling charge and were released. Who brought about the release?"

"The president of the Republic," was the reply. "He learned of the matter and ordered me brought before him. Well, I had been searched, and the Nelson had been searched, and nothing found, so I was let go. The president also ordered the Nelson returned to me. It had been appropriated by an official who had declared it forfeited. Not a bad chap that president, still, I think he saw Uncle Sam in the background!"

"And about this man Lyman?"

"I was told that he had gone back to his concession. I went out there in the airship, but failed to find him. After we find Jimmie and get Leroy out of the jail at Lima I'm going to find Lyman once more."

"This," Jack said, "is the 23d of August. Now, we saw you last night, the 22d, and the night before, the 21st. Why didn't you come down then?"

"Because I was not certain that it was the Black Bear, and because I wanted to investigate the place where I last saw Jimmie and the man Jackson. I was over the boat longer ago than the night of the 21st, but you did not know it, I guess."

"Well, you came at the right time, when you did come," Jack said. "I only wish you hadn't found us in such a pickle!"

"It doesn't seem to me," Mr. Hamlin suggested, "that the Nelson ought to carry four. You may have to go pretty fast. Now, one of

you can remain with me, in welcome, and look after the Black Bear. I have plenty of gasoline, and we can amuse ourselves with trips on the river. Later, you can come back after the boat."

"I think I'd better stay," Harry Stevens said. "I'm not stuck on long rides in the air. Besides, you can do just as well without me. How far is it to the place where you left Jimmie and this man Jackson?"

Ned took out his pocket map and bent over it.

"Here we are," he said, presently, "in the valley of the Madeira, with a range of mountains on each side. Below are the rapids and the falls. You must have had a sweet time traveling up from Fort San Antonio. You passed about three hundred miles of swift rapids and falls. How many times did you have to take the Black Bear to pieces?"

"Not once there," was the reply. "We managed to steam up. But, say, we had a lovely time getting up over one waterfall!"

"Well," Ned went on, "here we are at the big bend of the upper Madeira. We are not far from a thousand miles from the place where I found Lyman. We can get there by nightfall."

"Not for me," Jack said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "We should have to ride continuously to make it in that time, and I don't like to remain in the air that long. We ought to have five rests of an hour each, and get there in the morning."

"Yes," Ned replied, "I'm getting tired of long rides myself. We'll go slower."

After breakfast the boys went to the Black Bear and looked her over. The propeller which had been broken could easily be repaired, they found, so they left that matter to Harry, replenished the tanks of the Nelson with gasoline, and prepared for the long journey back to the mountains of Peru.

"When are you coming back?" asked Harry, as the three mounted the machine.

"In three days," replied Ned. "And we'll bring Jimmie with us."

"If they haven't fed him to the mountain lions before now!" Harry said, with a strange premonition of evil in his heart.

And the Nelson was up and away, and Harry set to work cleaning up the motor boat, hoping to forget in toil how lonely and apprehensive he was.

CHAPTER XVII

USING BOY SCOUTS FOR BAIT!

Alarmed by the swift approach of the motor car in the tunnel, Jimmie and Jackson took to their heels and made swift progress toward the east entrance, throwing the searchlight about and keeping their eyes out for some hiding place as they ran.

Before long it became evident that they could not long maintain the pace they had taken. The motor car was gaining on them rapidly, as they knew by the steady approach of the clamor which the engines were making.

"Gee!" cried Jimmie, at last. "No use! I've got to drop in somewhere!"

Jackson was as ready to stop running as was Jimmie, so they drew up against the wall and Jimmie shut off the light from his electric candle.

"Do you think they saw that light?" asked Jimmie, pushing close to the rock wall. "I hope not."

"Probably not, as there was always an angle between us," was the whispered reply, "but their light is coming around that angle now. Stand close!"

It was of little use to stand close.

Under the great lamps every crack and crevice of the tunnel walls was in plain sight to the occupants of the car. The two fugitives might as well have attempted concealment under the limelight in the center of the stage of a Broadway theatre!

Jimmie's hand was on his automatic as the car halted in front of him. Jackson saw what was in the boy's mind and laid a hand on his arm.

"None of that!" he said.

"Well, I'm not goin' to be--"

Jackson forced the revolver out of the boy's hand as he brought it out of his pocket.

"They've got us," he whispered, "and will be only too glad of an excuse to shoot us down in cold blood."

"Well!"

This from Thomas Q. Collins, who sat in the front seat, looking at the two as if he could bite them in pieces!

Jimmie looked sullenly toward his automatic, in Jackson's hand, and said not a word. Jackson stepped forward.

"You've got us!" he said.

"You bet we have!" gloated Collins. "Where did that Nestor boy go with the man he picked up by the fire?"

"Did he get him?" asked Jimmie.

"Yes, he got him, worse luck!" was the reply. "Where did he go with him?"

"Don't know," replied Jimmie.

"I'll find a way to make you know!" gritted Collins. "Do you fellows know what it is to be hungry?"

"Honest," Jackson cut in, "we don't know where Nestor went with Lyman. When he left us, he was not certain that he could get him. Thought Lyman might not want to go away with a stranger on such short notice."

"Oh, what's the use?" demanded one of the others. "The fellow has gone back to Asuncion. That's easy to figure out. Who set you boys at work on this case?" he added, in a moment, at a whisper from his seat-mate.

"Ned set me at work," Jimmie answered.

"Yes, but who set him at work?"

"I'll tell you," Jackson said, with a smile of satisfaction on his face, "the United States government set Ned at work. You'd better watch out how you butt up against the Secret Service men."

"That's just what I told you!" sneered Collins. "You wouldn't believe me. Now what do you think?"

The speaker left his seat in the machine and walked over to where Jackson was standing, the revolver still in his hand.

"Give me that gun!" he demanded.

Jackson passed it over without a word of protest.

"Now your own gun," Collins demanded, extending his hand.

"I have no gun," was the reply. "You know that very well."

"I thought you might have stolen one since leaving the cow country," snarled the other. "There is no knowing what kind of property you light-fingered gentlemen will acquire."

"You're a liar, Collins," Jackson said, coolly. "You know I never ran off the cattle which were missed. I believe you stole them!"

Collins advanced angrily toward the speaker, but one of his company drew him back.

"Cut it out!" he said. "There will be plenty of time later on."

"What are you going to do with us?" asked Jimmie.

"You'll see!" Collins replied. "I wonder how you would like a game of chase-the-bullet? Similar to the one you gave me not long ago?"

"Like it fine," Jimmie grinned, "if it didn't do me no more harm than it did you. Never touched you!"

"It may be different in your case," Collins threatened.

After consulting together in whispers for some moments, the men loaded Jimmie and Jackson into the crowded motor car and put on the reverse movement. In half an hour, the progress being slow, they came to the valley where the campfire was still burning. Here they all alighted.

Half a dozen Peruvian Indians of vicious appearance now came forward, and Collins gave them instructions in an undertone, after which the two captives were led away to the cavern in which Lyman had been sheltered up to the time of the arrival of the Nelson. One of the Indians remained outside while the others hastened away.

"Well," Jimmie said, as he looked gloomily at the discouraged Jackson, "what do you think of this? I'd like to push the face of that Collins person in so it would mix with the back curtain."

"We're in for it!" moaned Jackson.

"Aw, what can they do to us?" demanded the little fellow.

"They can keep us here until we die of starvation," replied Jackson. "I've had a turn with starvation, and know what it's like."

Jimmie reached under his coat and brought out a can of beans.

"Here," he said, "get busy on this."

"They took mine away when they searched me for a gun," said Jackson.

"Buck up!" advised Jimmie. "We've got to figure out some way to give them the slip. What?"

"Yes, I suppose so!"

Jackson had counted on getting back to civilization without further difficulties, on the arrival of the Nelson, and now he was completely discouraged. Jimmie sat on the floor of the cavern and eyed him quizzically.

"Ned will come back after us," the little one said, presently. "You put your bloomin' trust in Ned, an' you'll come a four-time winner out of the box. I know. I've been out with him before."

"But how will he ever find us here?" asked Jackson.

"How did he ever find Lyman?" demanded the boy. "You hush your kickin' an' leave it all to Ned. Guess he knows enough to get us out of this sink of iniquity! That boy eats 'em alive!"

"I can't see why they should keep us here," Jackson remarked, presently, prying off the top of the can of beans with his pocket knife. "Why don't they go back to Asuncion and look after that cattle concession?"

"Because they've got some one there to look out for it for them," replied the boy. "They're waitin' here for Ned to come back an' get us, if anybody should ask you," he went on, his cheerful smile not at all matching the serious import of his words. "This Collins person has cards up his sleeve, an' he wants to get hold of Ned. He's set his trap with us for bait."

"You're a cheerful little cuss!" grinned Jackson, beginning to see the dangerous side of the situation. "And what are we going to do when Ned comes back? Let them soak him?"

"Not so you could notice it," was the reply. "When Ned comes back we'll be out at the other end of that tunnel, an' he'll swoop do in in the Nelson an' pick us up, an' we'll be back in little old N. Y. before you can say scat."

"But how can we--"

The entrance to the cavern was darkened for a moment and then the flashily-dressed form of Collins made its appearance.

"What's that about getting back to little old N. Y.?" he asked.

"When do you start for Manhattan Island?"

"You heard, then?" asked Jackson.

"Of course."

"Well?"

"Well, we'll see that you don't get away until this Ned comes back after you. We need him in our business."

"He'll land Lyman at Asuncion before you see him again," Jimmie said.

"Not a doubt of it," was the sullen reply, "but don't you ever think we haven't got people there who will look out for our interests. Lyman won't be at liberty long, and your Ned will come back here to get what's coming to him."

"Is that so?" exclaimed the boy, putting on a bold front, but inwardly fearful that the situation was a tragic one.

Leaving the captives with this cheering (?) information, Collins went back to his companions, leaving the Indian still on guard. For a time the Indian stood stolidly in front of the cave, then, looking carefully about to see that he was not observed by his employers, he faced the opening and uttered one English word:

"Prepared."

Jackson opened his eyes in amazement, but Jimmie saw an extended hand and sprang forward. The Indian's right hand was extended toward the boy, palm up, the thumb and little finger meeting across the palm and crossed, the remaining fingers straight out.

"You mean, 'Be prepared'?" Jimmie asked.

"Be prepared," repeated the other, like one rehearsing a lesson.

"Gee!" laughed the boy. "Here's a Boy Scout lingerin' in little old Peru! Now wouldn't that stop a clock?"

"You just wait a minute," Jackson said, hopefully. "I think I can talk with this chap a little in Spanish."

Then followed a great picking of words to match gestures, and gestures to explain words, during which the full salute of the Boy Scouts of America was often repeated by the Indian. Then Jackson said:

"He says that there were Boy Scouts down here six months ago, and that he guided them through the mountain passes to the headwaters of the Beni river. From there they went through to the valley of the Amazon in a boat--a steam launch."

Jimmie reached under his waistcoat collar and produced his Wolf badge, pointing to it with his finger inquiringly. The Indian shook his head.

"Not Wolves," the boy said, in a moment. "Let's see if they were Black Bears."

When a Black Bear badge which belonged to Jack Bosworth was shown the Indian still shook his head. Then he pointed to the sky and whirled his hand around significantly, finishing with a waving, flying motion.

"I see!" cried Jimmie. "They were Eagles!"

"This ought to help some," Jackson observed, his face growing more cheerful.

"Of course it will," replied the boy. "Ask him if he wants to get out of this blasted country and go to New York. We'll take him if he'll get us out on the east slope before Ned gets back."

Jackson talked with the Indian again, but did not seem to be able to come to terms with him.

"He doesn't want to commit himself," the ex-cattleman said. "We'll have to wait until he thinks it over."

The Indian seemed moody and sullen for the next few hours. When dawn came and the little fire which had blazed in the cavern all night went out, he was called away and another native placed on guard.

"That settles it," Jimmie said. "We lose!"

"I'm the losenest feller you ever seen," said Jackson. "I never won a bet in my life. You're unlucky to get dumped in a mess with me."

About the time Ned and Lyman landed in Asuncion the boys in the cavern began looking for his return. They were not permitted to leave the cavern, but they watched the eastern sky intently every minute.

They watched the sky, too, during the long days when Ned was in prison at Asuncion. Late on the afternoon of the 21st, as the reader knows, Ned searched the eastern slope for them but they did not see him. On the morning of the 23d they were taken from the cave and placed in full sight on the eastern slope, where they would be sure to be seen from the sky. They did not know what to make of this at first, but directly, when they saw Indians, heavily armed, stationed in hiding places all about them, they understood.

Jimmie had expressed the situation exactly. The cowards were baiting their trap for Ned with his friends.

Unless some means of warning him could be found, Ned would drop down to his death if he landed to rescue the ones he had left behind.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF A LONG CHASE

On the 23d of August the Nelson, with Ned, Jack, and Frank on board, was sweeping over the mountains and valleys of Bolivia and Peru toward the twin valleys in which Jimmie and Jackson had been left. Plenty of provisions and gasoline had been taken on at the Hamlin storehouse, and the lads were well equipped for a week's cruise in the air.

They did not urge the aeroplane to its fullest speed, nor did they remain in the air longer than a couple of hours at a time. It had been decided to strike the eastern slope of the range just before dawn, so the Nelson was allowed to loiter on the way. Jack afterwards declared that Ned slept half the time!

Had the first decision, to run to the twin valleys as swiftly as possible, been held to, the two prisoners, guarded on that eastern slope, would have seen the Nelson coming toward their relief.

At the same time, on landing, Ned and his companions would have been confronted with armed Indians demanding immediate surrender. This would not have been according to the notions of the boys on the aeroplane, as they had figured that Jimmie and Jackson would be able to keep out of the hands of the Collins gang.

The 23d dawned slowly, with the Nelson loitering over the great brown and green map of South America and the boys tiring their eyes looking for the glistening planes of the aeroplane. The captives were provided with food, but it was decidedly cold on the mountainside when night came.

All that day and all that night the guards lay in wait in sequestered places, waiting for the Nelson. Although his only hope of immediate rescue lay in the arrival of the Nelson, Jimmie wished every minute of the time that Ned would in some manner be warned away from that dangerous locality.

Just before dawn of the 24th Jimmie, who had fallen into a light slumber, felt Jackson pulling at his arm.

"Wake up!" the man whispered. "There is a light in the sky!"

Jimmie was on his feet in an instant. Away off over a parallel ridge to the east, a ridge not so high as the one on which they stood, and which formed only a slight elevation in the general slope, a single light twinkled and swung up and down in the half light between night and morning. "That's the Nelson, all right!" Jimmie declared. "Ned is coming! Good old Ned! Now, what can we do to keep him from being murdered?" the boy added, tearfully.

"I give it up!" replied Jackson. "All we can do is to give them some signals and tell them to keep away."

Jimmie sprang out to one of the guards, who already stood erect, watching the light with his gun in his hand. The guard looked curiously at Jimmie as he advanced, his hands clasping his shoulders, his body shivering as from extreme cold. The Indian was cold, too, so it did not take him long to make out the boy's meaning.

Jimmie next pointed to sticks lying about, and to bunches of dry grass which stood in some of the crevices of the rocks. The guard nodded consent for a fire and Jimmie raced about like mad collecting principally dry grass.

Jackson ran to help him, piling his gatherings all on one heap.

"Make three piles!" Jimmie cried. "I want three fires! Three bright fires! Make three heaps!"

The three heaps grew fast. They were not arranged in a row on a level, but mounted one above another on the slope. Jimmie's idea was to so place the fires one above the other, some thing like notches cut in a tree trunk.

The reason for this is apparent. Three fires in a line facing the point signaled to signal "Good News." Three notches cut in a tree trunk, one above another, mean "Important Warning!" Now the question was, would Ned understand that the fires represented warning notches, one above the other, and keep away until some safe plan for landing could be arranged?

If he accepted the signal as "Good News" signs, he would drop down to death. If he read them as Jimmie intended he should, he would sail away and wait for a more favorable opportunity.

When the three fires were going the Indian guards gathered about in order to warm themselves. Jimmie and Jackson hovered near them, too, but they never shifted their eyes from the light in the sky.

The Nelson hovered over the elevation to the east for a second, and then, much to the amazement of the lad, whirled about and shot downward, out of sight. The guards watched the light as long as it showed and then turned to the fires again.

Daylight came swiftly, and a finger of sunlight lay on the crest of the mountains when the machine was in the air again. It was, perhaps, three miles away, across deep and dangerous canyons which it would require hours of the hardest kind of traveling to cross on foot.

Sailing low, almost touching minor elevations at times, the great

airship came on, straight to the spot where the boys stood--where the Indians awaited them with guns in their hands!

In a moment Jimmie saw why this course was being taken. Unless the rascals in the twin valleys had seen the light when it first appeared they would not see it at all, for the bulk of the mountain shut off their view of the rough country over which Ned was traveling.

Ned did not seem to mind the fire signals. Perhaps, Jimmie thought, he had recognized the warning as a "Good News" signal. In that case the boy thought, the end of everything, for them, would come right there!

Moving slowly and softly, with little noise of motor or propeller, the Nelson approached the spot, circled about, and dropped in a little depression just below the place where Jimmie was standing. Then the strangest thing happened!

The boy had expected to hear rifle shots, to see his friends attacked, perhaps murdered before his eyes. But the first one to spring from the machine was the Indian who had given the Boy Scout salute some days before!

The Indians on guard saluted him gravely and stood eyeing the aeroplane critically. No hostile move was made. It was the strangest thing! Where had Ned taken the Indian up, and why had the latter volunteered to render this assistance?

It was no use to wonder, so Jimmie and Jackson sprang toward the machine, grasped Ned by the hand, and swung into seats. The Indian who had piloted the Nelson to the place and prevented an attack by the guards, stood with his arms folded across his broad breast. For a moment Ned grasped his hand. The others followed, with what emotion may well be understood, and the Nelson was away, purring through the sweet air of the morning as if there were no perils at all in life!

Later revelations showed that the Indian, wishing to protect the Boy Scouts, had made his way to the elevation where the Nelson had first dropped down, signaled to Ned, and informed him of the plans of the Collins people. Frank and Jack had been left farther down the slope, as it was feared that the Nelson would not be able to get away with so much weight to carry. It is almost needless to say that the Indian was rewarded for his loyalty to the Boy Scouts, and that he carried back with him enough money to make each of the guards a substantial present.

When the Nelson first rose above the rim of the twin valleys shrill cries came from the direction of the cavern, and half a dozen shots were fired. But all to no purpose. The last the boys saw of Collins and his adherents they were shouting angrily at the Indians, who were rapidly disappearing from sight over the west wall.

After a time the aeroplane dropped down again, and Jimmie's eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw Jack and Frank sitting complacently on a rock watching him with grins on their faces. The greeting of the three boys may well be imagined.

"You're a nice bunch!" Jimmie cried, after many handshakes and much pulling about. "We left you on the way to little old N.Y. Where you been?"

"We just took a run in the Black Bear!" was the reply.

"The Black Bear!" repeated the little fellow actually rubbing his eyes to see if he was awake. "Where is the Black Bear?"

"Down in the Madeira river," laughed Ned, "and there's no knowing where she would have been by this time only for the--"

"Cut it out, Ned!" broke in Jack. "Let us break it to him gently. He'll have fun enough with us without getting it all in a bunch!"

Jackson was introduced to the two boys, and then a council of war was held. It was finally decided that Jackson should be taken to Sicuani in the Nelson and left there, with money enough to make his way out. Pedro was found at Sicuani and richly rewarded. He did not return to Lima.

Then Ned was to return for the boys and proceed straight to Asuncion, where the search for the missing cattleman was to be renewed. This programme was carried out. Later the boys met Jackson in New York and royally entertained him at the Black Bear club room and saw that he secured a fine position.

When the Nelson reached Asuncion Ned proceeded directly to the office of the president, taking the boys with him. There the story of the trip was told, and Frank and Jack saw to it that Ned's official position was made known to the head of the republic.

"And so this Mr. Thomas Q. Collins is the man at the bottom of the trouble?" asked the official. "Well, he will be taken care of if he returns here. And this military chief? He shall be sent out of the country!"

It transpired later on that the president had been deceived in the two men, and that Collins had secured the assistance of the general by false statements and by offers of large sums of money in case the cattle concession was taken from Lyman. A good many officials were found to be mixed up in the conspiracy, and there were numerous vacancies in the government service.

"And now," the president said, after the whole truth was known, "the next thing to do is to find Lyman and restore him to his rights."

"It seems to me," Ned suggested, "that this general ought to be able to produce him in Asuncion in a few hours' time."

"It may be so," admitted the official. "At least, we'll see what can be done in that direction."

Lyman was safe in his home in one day. When the general learned that it was the wish of the president that the cattleman should be brought forth, the thing was as good as accomplished.

"It seems to me," Ned said to the boys, that night, "that this thing has been settled without much help from me. All the president needed was to be set right."

"What he needed," laughed Jack, "was the proof that Collins had abducted Lyman, and that he was prepared to prevent his return to Asuncion until his concession had expired. Perhaps you can tell me how all this proof could have been obtained if you had not undertaken the job offered you by the Secret Service men at San Francisco?"

"Of course he can't," Jimmie put in. "Lyman man would have died there in the mountains and Collins would have taken over his property. The president might have been in with the deal at first, but he certainly wasn't willing to stand for such coarse work."

"And when Lyman didn't show up, his heirs would have demanded the property, and then there would have been an international quarrel--perhaps work for gunboats," Frank added. "I think the case was settled just right, and in the right way."

"And what does this Lyman person say?" asked Jimmie.

"Not a thing!" cried Jack. "He just offers Ned all the money there is in the world in the shape of a reward. I should have taken it!"

"I know better," Ned commented. "We don't need his money, any more than we need the half million or so Collins offered us."

"Wonder what Collins will do now?" asked Frank.

"He'll duck!" replied Jimmie.

The little fellow was right. Thomas Q. Collins was heard of no more, either in Paraguay or Peru. When Ned, leaving the others at Asuncion, speeded over to Lima he found Leroy and Mike lounging about the hotel, waiting anxiously for news from their chums. They had been released on the day following Collins' departure, there being no one to press the charge of assault and battery against them.

Now there was work cut out for the Nelson. She carried Ned, Mike and Leroy over to Asuncion and then made two long trips to the

little town on the Madeira where the Black Bear lay.

The meeting between the boys and Harry was an enthusiastic one, and the latter pointed with a good deal of pride to the motor boat, good as new and as bright and clean as a new gold piece.

After a few days spent exploring the country up the Beni, the boys started home, their errand satisfactorily accomplished. Jimmie decided to go with Jack, Frank, Harry and Mike in the motor boat, leaving the Nelson to Ned and Leroy.

"One thing I'd like to do," Jimmie said, as the Black Bear lay waiting for the boys, "and that is to go up into that cannibal country and have some fun with the fellows who captured the Black Bear and made the occupants of it look like thirty cents in postage stamps!"

"They never did capture the Black Bear!" yelled Frank. "They tried to, and got dynamited for their pains. That's what they got."

"And of course," tormented the little fellow, "you wished the Nelson had stayed away, and left you all the glory--not!"

"Well," Jack interposed, "we didn't get tied up in a mountain cave by a lot of cheap skates. We never got where we had to let an Indian get us out of a mess."

"Rats!" shouted Jimmie. "Ned would have recognized our fire signals and remained away! We could have gotten off without the Indian."

"You say it well!" laughed Frank. "I think that fire signal was punk!"

And so the lads roasted each other all the way down the Amazon, with the Nelson sailing above them, dropping down at night and, perhaps, changing passengers each day.

"I wish I had the frame of the Vixen," Leroy said, one day. "I could make a fine aeroplane out of it. Shame to have an airship smashed like that!"

Ned pointed to the planes of the Nelson.

"You've got quite a job making this little lady look like new," he said. "Those tent canvas planes look rather cheap."

"I'll have the new planes in place in a week after we get back to New York," said the other.

"And send the repair bill to the government," advised Ned. "It will be paid without a cross word."

At the mouth of the Amazon the Black Bear was taken apart and packed

aboard a fast steamer bound for New York. The five boys accompanied her, of course, while Ned and Leroy completed the trip home in the Nelson. When the four reached the Black Bear club room they found Ned there with a mass of letters and telegrams before him.

"Look here, lads," he said, "we've got more trouble on hand. You know about the revolution in China, and all that? Well, there's a lot of gold which belongs to the republic been dumped in the sea, and I've got to go and help get it out!"

"Let 'em get their own gold," Jimmie said.

"But in this case, it is claimed that there was fraud in the shipment of gold, also, that the vessel carrying it was rammed for the purpose of concealing the fraud. Anyway, Uncle Sam wants me to look it up."

"What's he got to do with it?" asked Frank.

"Something connected with the sub-treasury," laughed Ned. "That is all I can say to you about it."

"And how you goin' to get it?" demanded Jimmie.

"By working with a submarine," was the reply.

"Down in the bottom of the sea!" sang Frank.

"Well," Ned said, presently, "figure the thing out for yourselves. Find out if you can get permission to go, and all that. The government will provide the submarine and all the supplies, of course, and land us near the spot we are to search."

But the story of the search for the gold is quite another tale. It will be found in the third volume of this series, entitled:

"Boy Scouts in a Submarine; or, Searching an Ocean Floor."

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