

GEORGE A. WARREN

THE BANNER BOY SCOUTS
IN THE AIR

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George A. Warren

The Banner Boy

Scouts in the Air

CHAPTER I

At the Airport

Paul and Jack were dashing along on their bicycles through Main Street. It was a clear, beautiful summer day. School was over and they grasped the first opportunity to run over to the airport about a mile outside of Stanhope and which had only recently been completed.

The two boys wore their Scout uniforms and they pedalled along swiftly. Several townspeople paused to watch them pass by and wondered what might be the cause of their haste. Paul stuck his left hand out and they turned right into Oliver Street, thus taking a short cut to the highway and then to the aerodrome. When they arrived at their objective, they dismounted and stood around, taking everything in with their eyes.

The flying field was about a mile long and half a mile wide and entirely cleared of trees, bushes or anything that might be an

obstruction. To one side were a group of sheds and a building, evidently the office. At about the middle of the field there was a solitary monoplane.

Jack gasped. Finally he remarked, "Gee, isn't this grand?"

Paul nodded. He was as much overcome with the wonder of it as his chum. "Boy!" he exclaimed, "it sure is."

Jack said, "Let's walk over to the buildings."

His chum nodded. "Sure, let's go."

Pushing their bicycles along side of them, they walked across the field. They could barely contain themselves with wonder, joy and astonishment, which was the cause of their lack of speech. For the past weeks they had been so excited by the news of the flying field being completed that they found it difficult to control themselves enough to go on with their school work. And it wasn't only Jack and Paul, but all their chums had suddenly become interested in aeronautics. They began to boast of their ambition to become pilots, fly all over the world and enjoy all sorts of adventurous experiences. At times, instead of studying their biology lessons or French, they would be reading thrilling air stories or books on flying.

As the two boys approached the office building, a man emerged and waved to them. They waved back. Paul whispered, "I'll bet it's Major McCarthy, the manager."

Paul was right. The Major was a tall, stocky man of about forty and almost bald. He smiled to them and said, "Hello fellows. I'm Major McCarthy. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Jack said, "We came over to look around, if you have no objections, Major."

The Major smiled warmly. "Oh, none whatsoever. You're welcome."

Paul said, "My name is Paul—Paul Morrison."

"And your dad is Dr. Morrison?"

"That's right. How did you know?"

"Well, there's only one Dr. Morrison in Stanhope. Glad to meet you, Paul."

The two shook hands. Jack said, "I'm Jack Stormways."

"Glad to know you," the major said and they shook hands.

For a few seconds there ensued an embarrassed silence. Neither Jack nor Paul could think of anything to say and Major McCarthy was waiting for them to ask questions. Finally the major said, "Suppose you boys lean your bicycles against the wall and I'll show you around. There isn't much doing now and I have some time on my hands."

Paul cried, "I think that's swell of you."

And Jack added, "Thanks a lot."

The boys quickly leaned their wheels against the wall and then joined the major, one on either side of him. The major said, "I might as well begin by telling you something about the field. You'll notice that the field is cleared of all obstructions. That's absolutely necessary to make sure there is nothing to cause an accident in taking off or landing. The field is about a mile long. That's to provide plenty of room for taking off or landing."

Jack interrupted. "How much of a run does it take to land or take off?"

Paul nodded, implying that he too was interested in the question. Major McCarthy answered, "It all depends. A light ship can take off in about a hundred yards or less. A big ship heavily loaded may take a quarter or half a mile or even more to take off. In landing, the ground speed depends a lot upon the velocity of the wind. The stronger the wind, the less space required in which to land."

They were walking towards the sheds. Pointing, Paul asked, "What's that?"

The major looked in the direction the boy was pointing. "That's a wind indicator," he said. "That shows which way the wind is blowing."

"And what's the purpose of that?" Paul asked.

"To tell which way to land. You always land directly into the wind."

They were heading toward the monoplane. The boys were thrilled. They had seen planes in the movies and in the daily newspapers, but they had never seen a *real* plane. As soon as they neared the ship, the first reaction of the boys was to pat it, caress it as if it were a live thing. The major smiled casually and understood how they felt. He said, "Suppose the two of you get into the observer's seat while I get into the pilot's place and I'll explain a few things to you about a plane."

The boys gasped for breath, they were so shocked by the

invitation. "Do you think it's all right?" Paul asked bewildered.

"Of course," the major answered, "otherwise I wouldn't ask you."

Quickly, lest he reconsider his invitation, the boys scrambled into the observer's seat. Major McCarthy climbed into the pilot's seat. They leaned over the major's shoulders and stared at a bewildering and numerous collection of gadgets on the dashboard. The major said, "First I had better explain to you the meaning of these gadgets." Pointing to a dial, he explained, "This is the revolution counter. The engine in this plane is designed to give about two thousand revolutions per minute. For all practical purposes, about 1700 or 1800 revolutions are sufficient. Here, on the right, is the throttle lever. And here are the gasoline and oil gauges. This is the 'doper' which pumps a spray of gasoline into the engine to help in starting it up. These are the gasoline taps connecting the two tanks and each of the tanks with the feed pipes leading to the carburetors. And this is the ignition control. You keep it advanced when running but retarded when starting up. This is the water temperature indicator. You always keep the water pretty hot." He paused, then he asked, "Do you have any questions?"

The boys shook their heads, bewildered by it all. "If there are no questions," Major McCarthy said, "then I'll continue."

"This is the control lever, or the 'joystick' as it is commonly called." And he grasped the handle of a short straight stick that protruded upwards between his legs from the floor of the cockpit.

“The stick is attached to a universal joint, and it controls both the longitudinal movements as well as the lateral movements by means of wires attached to the elevator and the ailerons. If you want to go up, all you do is pull the stick back; if you want to go down, you push the stick forward. Now notice where my feet are—on the rudder bar. If I want to turn to the left, I push my left foot forward; if I want to turn to the right, I push the right foot forward. Simple, isn’t it?” And he looked up to see the astonishment on the boys’ faces. He continued with his interesting lecture. “Now when I want to turn, I must push the joystick over simultaneously and in the same direction as the rudder. This is called ‘banking’ on one side. The object of banking on a turn is to offer the under-surface of the wings as a plane of resistance to the air. Not banking the plane over retards the forward speed. If you don’t bank enough you may get into a ‘flat turn’. Now a ‘flat turn’ is bad because you may thus stall the motor and take a nose dive and unless you keep your head clear and straighten out again, you’ll most likely crash. Do you understand what I’m talking about?”

Both boys nodded; actually it was all a puzzle to them. Paul remarked, “Gosh, Major, it must be wonderful to be a pilot.”

“It isn’t such a bad job.”

“Do you think we could learn to fly?” inquired Jack.

“Of course. Anybody could.”

“Could you teach us?” Jack was anxious.

“Certainly. But I imagine you’d first have to get permission

from your parents. I don't suppose either one of you is eighteen or over."

The boys shook their heads dejectedly. "I'm only seventeen and a half," Jack said.

"I'm going to be eighteen the fifteenth of next month"—that from Paul.

Major McCarthy looked up. Somebody over at the hangar was calling to him and motioning for him to come over. "Well, I have to go now. Let's get out of the plane." Walking back toward the hangers, the major said, "Come around again one of these days and if I have time I'll take you up."

"Gee, wouldn't that be swell," Paul cried. "You really mean it?"

"Of course."

Jack was eager. "How about tomorrow?" he asked.

Major McCarthy nodded. "Okey" he said, "but I must ask you boys to obtain permission of your parents. Otherwise I won't do it."

"That's a bargain," said Paul. "If my dad or mother object I'll tell you the truth."

"Same here," chimed in his chum.

"All right then, I'll see you boys tomorrow."

Waving their hands to the Major, they took their bicycles and walked off the field.

CHAPTER II

The Meeting

Peddling back to town, their minds were in the clouds. Each one was thinking how wonderful it would be to learn to fly, to be a pilot and fly all over the country, perhaps all over the world. And when they thought of the adventure that was in store for them, their hearts swelled with joy and their pulses missed a couple of beats. Paul, who was riding behind, pulled up alongside of his chum, and asked, "Do you think we ought to tell the boys about it?"

"You mean about our coming over here?" Jack queried.

"Yes."

"Why not? They would certainly be very much interested and there's no reason why we can't tell them."

Paul mused for a moment. Then he said, "But if we tell them that the Major promised to take us up tomorrow, then the whole gang will come out here and want to be taken up. Then perhaps he won't take any one of us up."

"I never thought of that," Jack said. "But then I suppose—" He didn't finish his sentence because he didn't know what to say. He didn't want to hold anything back from the boys, yet he

thought it was rather selfish on his part not to let them in on it. The same thoughts were going through Paul's head. They were both fine chaps and ready to share with their friends not only their thoughts, adventures but even their most personal things. But the idea of going up in the air, of actually flying in a real airplane, stunned them. And they naturally hated to be deprived of their forthcoming joyous adventure. Finally, Jack said, "I don't know, but I think we ought to tell them."

Paul's face lit up. "That's just what I was thinking," he told his chum.

That off their chests, they wheeled into town briskly. On Main Street, they caught sight of Arline Blair. They jumped off their bikes as they pulled up alongside of her. "Hello, Arline," both boys cried out.

She was about a year younger than the boys and one of the prettiest girls in town. "Hello," she said. "Where are you boys coming from? You're so flushed and look so happy, I wonder what you fellows were up to."

"We were over to the airport," Paul told her.

"Really?" She opened her eyes wide with astonishment.

Jack blurted out, "Sure. And we're going to learn how to fly and be pilots."

"Both of us," added Paul.

Arline pursed her lips. "Isn't it glorious just to think of it!" she remarked.

The boys stuck their chests out. "It certainly is," both agreed.

Paul asked, "Which way are you going, Arline?"

"Home."

"Take you there on my handle bars."

Jack interrupted, "Perhaps Miss Blair would prefer to ride on my handle bars."

Arline shook her head. "No. It isn't very nice for a young lady to ride on handle bars," she remarked coolly.

"But you used to do it and like it too," insisted Paul.

"Yes, that's right," echoed Jack, "you used to ask me to give you rides."

Miss Blair raised her chin several inches. "My childhood days are over, gentlemen. Good day Mr. Morrison, and you, Mr. Stormways." And with that continued her walk down the street, every inch of her a queen.

Jack and Paul looked at each other puzzled, speechless. Paul shrugged his shoulders and put his hand out. Seriously and affectionately they shook hands, jumped on their bikes and were off again.

When the two boys arrived at the meeting place, they found their chums, members of their Patrol, waiting for them. All were dressed in Scout uniforms. The Carberry twins—Wallace and William—were there; so were Bluff Shipley, Bobolink (Robert Oliver Link), Nuthin' (Albert Cypher), and Ken Armstrong. Just as soon as Paul and Jack came in sight, the boys set up a howl. "Hey, where have you guys been?"

"We've been waiting an hour for you fellows."

“What’s the idea of keeping us waiting like this?”

“You fellows must be up to some mischief.”

Paul and Jack looked at each other and smiled. Paul held up his hand and the boys quieted down considerably. “Would you care to know where we’ve been?”

“Of course.”

“Certainly.”

“Come on, Paul, tell us.”

“Hey, Jack, don’t hold back on us.”

Jack, to tantalize his friends, turned to Paul and asked, “Do you think we ought to tell them?”

“Hey, how do you get that way?”

Wallace began jumping up and down. “You better tell us,” he cried, “or we’ll roast you.”

“Roast them, that’s it,” echoed Bobolink.

Paul held up his hand and the boys quieted down. “We’ve been over to the airport,” he announced.

Bedlam broke loose, the boys were so thrilled and excited. So many questions were hurled at the two boys that they stuck their fingers into their ears and turned away. When the boys finally quieted down again, Paul said, “If you promise to keep order, we’ll tell you about it.”

Bluff stuttered, “Sure, we p-p-promise. Don’t we, b-boys?”

They all nodded and agreed. Between Paul and Jack it was decided that Paul should be the one to narrate the events of their adventurous afternoon. As he told the story, the boys gasped

with amazement. And when he told them about the major's promise to take them up into the air on the morrow, the boys were dumbfounded. Finally, the first one to regain his speech, William, exclaimed, "Gee, what luck!"

Bluff muttered mournfully, "Luck! There is no word for it. These two have all the luck in the world."

Wallace, the sober and serious one of the twins arose. "Scouts," he began in a dignified tone, "in view of the fact that we are all interested in aeronautics, I propose—" he hesitated and looked around to see all eyes on him. "I propose," he continued, "that we consider ways and means to learn everything there is about flying and about airplanes."

Nuthin' cried, "That's a mighty fine suggestion, but how are we going to do it?"

Paul suggested, "We might talk it over with Major McCarthy, he's the manager of the airport and he ought to know."

Bobolink cried, "Sure he knows and he'll tell us too. I want to be a pilot."

"S-s-same here," stuttered Bluff.

"In that case," spoke up Jack, "I guess we better postpone any further discussion until Paul and I will see Major McCarthy tomorrow. We'll speak to him and then report back."

"That's swell."

"Okey."

"That's the right idea."

Paul asked, "Is everybody agreed?" All the boys nodded.

“Then the meeting is adjourned until tomorrow,” he concluded.

CHAPTER III

Bobolink is a Hero

Jack and Paul mounted their bicycles and peddled along very leisurely. The other six, in formation, marched on the side walk. Suddenly a shriek pierced the air. Bobolink was the first to notice. Dropping out of line, he began to run at full speed. The others, although they were not sure what it was all about, nevertheless also joined in the run. A blue sedan was speeding down the street and bearing down on a little boy of about three who, unconcerned of traffic or any danger, was crossing the street. Half way across he paused and stared for several seconds at the cobblestones, then he continued walking to the other side, thus getting into the path of the oncoming, speeding automobile. Several women screamed. The mother, about ten yards away, fainted.

Bobolink ran until his breath was gone. It was the fastest hundred yard run a human could do. The speeding car was barely a yard away when Bobolink reached the spot. With his outstretched arms he gave the child a shove that sent him sprawling. The next moment he saw a galaxy of stars, a piercing pain made him cry out and then darkness, unconsciousness. The

automobile had side-swiped him and scraped his right side.

A great number of people immediately collected and surrounded the two victims. The child, except for being shocked and very slightly bruised, was unhurt. Bobolink, however, lay stretched out, appearing more dead than alive.

Paul and Jack, on their bicycles, saw the incident. Immediately they wheeled around and peddled vigorously after the speeding car. Ordinarily, the chase would have been a futile and useless gesture. But the boys knew that about 500 yards away was a very sharp left turn, and at the speed the driver was going, he was sure either to crash or turn over. And sure enough, the driver, ignorant of the sharp turn ahead, did not slow up until it was too late. Frantically he swung the wheel, so he would not crash into the wall that loomed up in front of him. The side of the car bounced against the concrete wall and turned over into the ditch. Just as the boys came up and jumped off their wheels, the driver had extricated himself. He was a tall, husky, evil looking young man. Dazed, he stood wavering on his legs and shaking himself trying to shake off his dizziness. Without hesitation, the boys jumped on him. He offered no resistance. He lay stunned. Paul said, "Guess he's out all right."

They looked down at the unconscious form sprawling on the ground. The man's face was a mass of blood and his hand was twisted as though broken at the wrist. Paul said, "I'll stay here and watch him. You ride back and get the police and have an ambulance come."

Jack nodded. "But suppose he comes to, do you think you could hold him?"

Paul looked down at the victim. "Even if he comes to," he said, "he'd be too weak to run or put up any fight."

"All right, then," Jack said, "I'm going."

But just as he was about to mount his bike, he saw an ambulance come speeding toward them. Evidently someone in the house a short distance away had seen the accident and immediately reported it by telephone.

The ambulance stopped. An interne jumped out and with him a policeman. The doctor examined the man, then had him put on a stretcher and into the ambulance. The policeman examined the wrecked car, took the license number, removed a valise, and then questioned Paul and Jack who told him all they knew. They asked him about Bobolink but he knew nothing of what happened to the boy.

The ambulance turned around and went back to town. With heavy hearts and wondering whether their friend was alive or dead, the two boys mounted their bikes and wheeled back to town. Jack sidled up to his chum. "What are we going to do now, Paul?" he asked.

"I guess we better try to find out how Bobolink is," he answered.

"He was a swell guy," muttered Jack.

"He certainly was," echoed Paul.

"Do you think he was killed or just hurt?"

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know," he answered. "We better wait and see."

They peddled along slowly and mournfully. At last they came to Bobolink's home and found all the other boys idling dolefully on the porch.

Paul approached the twins and asked, "How is he?"

Wallace shook his head and turned away. William whispered hoarsely, "Don't know yet."

About ten minutes later Dr. Morrison emerged from the house. Noticing the boys congregated on the porch, with their faces drawn and appearing quite sombre, he looked puzzled, then suddenly smiled. They rushed up and surrounded him. Paul asked, "How is he, Dad?"

"He's fine," Dr. Morrison replied. "Nothing to worry about. He'll be back with you and running around as though nothing had happened, in three days."

Bluff for once didn't stutter and cried, "Hooray! Hooray for Bobolink!"

The other boys joined and they cheered the hero. When they quieted down, Paul asked his father, "May we go in to see him?"

The doctor nodded. "Yes, of course. That is, if it's all right with Mrs. Link."

So Jack was delegated to go in and ask Mrs. Link for permission to see Bobolink, which was granted. So they entered in a body to cheer up the invalid and hero.

CHAPTER IV

Flying

That evening Paul and Jack approached their parents for permission to be taken up in an airplane. Paul encountered little difficulty, much to his surprise. Of course, he was cautioned several times to be careful and he reiterated all the arguments he could muster about how safe flying had become and that there was no danger involved at all. Jack, on the other hand, found his mother set against any such thing. His father was reasonable and consented, but only on condition that his mother did not object. But she did, very strenuously! Jack argued his case as well as the best lawyers until his mother would no longer answer him but merely shake her head. Finally he told her that if Paul's mother didn't object he didn't see why she should. So she called up Mrs. Morrison and then reluctantly gave her consent. Jack jumped high in the air and whooped for joy.

That night both boys found it difficult to fall asleep thinking of the adventure that was in store for them. And when they finally did fall asleep they dreamed of all sorts of things. Jack dreamed that he was a pilot flying across the country. Paul dreamed that he and his chum were flying across the jungles of South America

and that they crashed and became lost in the jungles. And just as a wild animal which he couldn't recognize was about to jump at him, he woke up and tumbled out of bed.

At about noon, Jack met Paul at the latter's home and, mounting their bicycles, they were off to the airport. They were so thrilled that they couldn't talk. So they peddled along briskly and when they arrived at their destination they found the Carberry twins and Nuthin' already there and waiting for them. As Paul and Jack came in sight, the three boys set up a yell. Major McCarthy came out of the office building and waved to them. "Hello, there," he said. "Are you ready to go up?"

Paul cried, "Sure. And we can hardly wait."

Jack said, "And our parents gave us permission, too."

The major smiled cheerfully. "I don't see any reason for them to object," he said, "but then some parents object thinking that it's dangerous when it isn't at all."

The boys agreed with him. Nuthin' cried, "You fellows don't know how lucky you are. I'd give a right arm to be in your place."

William offered higher stakes. He said, "I'd give a right arm and a right leg to change places with either of you two."

Major McCarthy grinned. "Maybe I'll take you boys up on that," he said. "I can always use a couple of right arms."

William jumped high in the air and whooped. "Say, do you mean that?" he demanded.

"I'm not saying a thing," the major replied. "We'll just wait and see."

He went into the office and returned a few minutes later. "Already to go up?" he asked. They answered eagerly that they were and he said, "Then let's go."

The two boys fell in alongside of him with the three others trailing behind. At the hangar, one of the mechanics helped the major wheel out the plane. Then the mechanic hunted up a couple of jackets and goggles for the boys. When everything was ready, the major said, "All right, boys, climb into the observer's seat. If you make yourselves small enough, there will be plenty of room for both of you."

They climbed in. The other three boys were told to retreat about a hundred yards away. Finally the major got into the cockpit. Turning to the boys, he asked them, "Everything all right? Not frightened?"

They shook their heads and assured him that they felt perfectly at ease. The mechanic grasped hold of the propeller. "Ready! Switch off! Suck in!" he shouted.

"Switch off! Suck in!" answered the pilot.

The boys leaned over to watch what the pilot was doing. As the mechanic turned the propeller over about half a dozen times, the pilot, with a few strokes of the doping pump, sprayed gasoline vapor into the cylinders. "Contact!" cried the mechanic.

"Contact!" replied the major. He pressed down the switches and quickly turned the handle of the starting magneto. Brrr ... brrrr ... went the engine. The mechanic sprang away. The mechanic made as though to bound forward but was checked by

the wooden chocks, placed in front of the under-carriage wheels.

Just as he was ready, he turned back and asked, "Are you ready boys?"

"Yes, sir," they replied.

"Very well, then, we're off."

The three boys at the sheds cheered lustily as the machine began to move and Paul and Jack waved to them. And before they realized it the machine was about six feet off the ground which seemed to be falling away beneath them. The plane kept climbing steadily upwards. The boys leaned forward. They saw that the air-speed indicator registered a little over a hundred miles an hour, and they wondered because they couldn't feel the machine traveling at such a rate of speed. As they continued to climb, the boys looked over the side at the scene below them. The earth now appeared like a great colored map, with fields showing up in different shades of green and brown. The airport which they had only shortly left, was a little to the left of them. Sheds and houses and barns appeared as very small rectangular blocks. As they climbed still higher, things took on yet smaller proportions. Major McCarthy spoke to them through the telephone. "Well, how do you like it?" he asked.

Paul answered for both of them. "Marvelous!" he cried.

The pilot banked the machine and it steeped over on one side so sharply that the boys instinctively clutched for support. McCarthy's voice came over the telephone "Don't be alarmed," he said, "there's no danger and you can't fall out." He straightened

out the machine. Again they heard his voice. "Feel a little giddy?" he asked. "If you do," he cried, "look down upon some fixed object on the ground and you'll feel all right."

Both boys complied with his instructions and they soon got over their giddiness. The pilot kept the machine sailing at an even keel. Soon they were flying over a small town and they saw what appeared to them as ants scurrying along. They knew that the ants were really men and women and they marveled how small they appeared. As a matter of fact, everything looked like toys from that distance and flying above a railroad, the track seemed to be two thin lines drawn with a pencil. Major McCarthy's voice came over the telephone. "How would you boys like some stunts?" he asked.

The boys grinned at each other. Paul answered for both of them. "Very much," he said.

"All right," he said, "we'll have to be satisfied with only one today. Just to see how you fellows take it. First we'll bank and turn around. Ready!"

But before they could answer the pilot already had the machine keeled over on one side. On an even keel again, the major asked them, "How about your safety belts." They adjusted their safety belts and told him so. "Very well," he said, "here goes." And so saying, he opened the throttle and the plane bounded forward. In a few seconds the nose sprang upward. As it rose the forward speed decreased, yet the engine continued to run at the maximum revolutions. The machine was not pointing

vertically upwards. For a moment the plane appeared to hang on the revolving propeller and it felt as though the machine must inevitably drop tail foremost. But right away the nose fell over to one side and dropped and the tail shot up and the machine was shooting sharply downward. For some distance they continued to dive, then the pilot shut off the throttle and pulled back the elevator lever and brought the plane again on an even keel. However, they were now flying in the opposite direction. McCarthy asked, "How was it?"

The boys were thrilled. "Fine!" cried Paul.

"Were you afraid?"

"No, not in the least."

"Well, that was an easy one, but the next time we'll try a harder one."

Jack couldn't contain himself, so he cried, "How about now?"

Major McCarthy shook his head. "Enough for today," he told them.

They were now flying over the airport and a minute later they landed. The three waiting boys sent up a couple of greeting cheers and ran over to meet the grinning two who were tumbling out of the plane. "How was it?" demanded Nuthin'.

William was impatient. "Tell us about it, quick," he cried.

Paul nudged his chum in the ribs and asked, "Do you think we ought to tell them?"

Jack smiled and wiggled his head. "I don't know," he said. "I think we ought to consider it."

William was impatient. "Hey, come on," he cried. "No stalling now."

The major joined the group and the two boys thanked him. He said, "It's quite all right, boys, I'm only too glad to do it. And by the way, I heard all about what happened yesterday. You tell that fellow, what's his name—"

"Bobolink," cried Nuthin'.

"Bobolink," repeated the major. "He's a friend of yours, isn't he?"

Wallace interjected, "He certainly is. He is a grand fellow, too."

"I'm glad to hear it," said the major. "So you tell him that just as soon as he's recovered, to come over here and I'll take him up for a ride."

"Yea!" cried Nuthin', "hooray for Major McCarthy!"

They gave the major three cheers. But William wanted to know something else. "How about us?"

"Well," he said, "I'll think it over." They were now at the door of the office building. Entering, he turned around and said, "Don't go away, now. I'll be out right away."

The boys squatted on the ground, with Paul and Jack in the center and the two boys were obliged to tell every detail of their experience. It took about fifteen to twenty minutes to narrate the story and when finally it was told, the boys sat back, speechless and lost in thought. William said, "Gee, I hope the major gives me a ride. I'd do anything."

Wallace said, "Getting a ride is all very well, but what I really am interested in is to learn how to fly. I wonder if it's hard to learn."

"No, I don't think so," replied Paul. "Major McCarthy told us yesterday that it was easy to learn."

Jack said, "I was watching him all the time and it looks very simple. But we could ask him."

"Yes, we could do that," remarked Wallace, "but what we want to know is whether he would teach us."

William spoke up, saying, "All of us."

"Of course, all of us," agreed Paul.

Just then the major came out and they called him over. He seated himself on the ground beside them. Paul asked, "Do you think you could teach us how to fly?"

"Of course," he said. "I've taught a lot of people how to fly."

"Is it difficult to learn?" demanded Wallace.

"Why, no. On the contrary, it's very simple."

Again Wallace asked a question. "If you could teach us to fly, would we—would we—" he hesitated. Finally he said, "Would it cost a lot of money?"

McCarthy thought for a moment. "Well," he said, "I don't think so. As a matter of fact, I'd love to teach you young fellows and I'm sure we could come to some arrangement."

"That's mighty nice of you," Paul said, voicing the sentiment of the other boys.

"I think what you ought to do," said McCarthy, "is to consider

yourself a single group and I'll teach you as a group. Of course I couldn't take you up all together, but whatever ground-work there is to be done, I could instruct you as a group."

"That's just what we were thinking, sir," said Jack.

"In that case, everything is settled, except that I must insist that you bring written permission from your parents. Is that agreeable?"

The boys were so surprised and shocked by the willingness of McCarthy to instruct them that they were left almost speechless. William was the first one to recover. "You mean to say that you're actually willing to teach us to fly?" he asked skeptically.

The major smiled and nodded. "That's just what I said, didn't I?"

"Yes, but you said it so casually and carelessly that we didn't grasp it at once," said Nuthin'. "Say it again, please, sir," he pleaded.

Major McCarthy reiterated his offer and the boys let out wild yells of joy.

CHAPTER V

The Reward

The major got up and the boys also jumped to their feet. "Well, who wants to go up now?" he asked.

"I do!" cried William lustily.

"Me too," insisted Wallace.

"What about me?"—that from Nuthin'.

The three boys milled around the major. Paul and Jack, smiling, retreated to the background. They had had their ride and it was somebody else's turn now. "I'll tell you what," the major said, "the three of you choose and I'll take the two winners up now. And when I come down I'll take up the loser."

It was a good suggestion and fair enough. And as luck would have it, William who was the most persistent and eager, lost and his twin brother Wallace and Nuthin' went up. From the ground, they watched the plane in the air. McCarthy kept them in the air for a much shorter time than Paul and Jack and performed no stunts. When they landed, the two boys, thrilled and excited, climbed out of the machine. The pilot smiled cheerfully and cried, "Well, who's next?"

William shouted, "I am!" And quickly and eagerly tumbled

into the observer's seat. This time the other boys thought that William was the lucky chap, since he was going to fly all by himself. Jack immediately spoke up. "Major McCarthy," he said, "would it be all right with you if the four of us chose to see which one of us could go up with you a second time?"

He nodded. "Sure," he said. "That's fair enough, I guess."

Paul was the lucky one and he went up in the air for a second time. When McCarthy landed, the boys thanked him heartily. When they returned to Stanhope they all went to Bobolink's house because he was still unable to leave his bed and they had decided to hold the meeting that afternoon in his room. When they got there, they found Bluff and Ken already present and they could hardly contain their excitement. William, impatient as well as impulsive, broke into the room, shouting, "Hey, fellows, we flew in a real airplane."

The boys in the room were also highly excited and Bluff, who was eager to explain, stuttered so because of the exciting news, that he couldn't talk. He cried, "A-a-a-and y-y-you n-n-n-know what—"

He was interrupted, however, by Ken, who called out, "Wait, Bluff, don't tell them until we hear what they have to say."

Paul demanded, "What is it you've got to tell us?"

Bobolink, propped up in bed, declared, "Oh, nothing, nothing much."

But their eyes glittered so with excitement and their faces were so flushed that the new-comers could tell at a glance that there

was something up.

“Say, you fellows are holding something from us; come on, tell us,” William demanded.

Ken, who was always able to keep a straight face, no matter what happened, remarked very coolly and casually, “Nothing, really. You tell us first what happened at the airport. Did you all get a ride?”

The boys grinned. “We most certainly did,” announced William.

“Each and everyone of us,” added Jack.

Paul said modestly, blushing to admit the truth, “I went up twice.”

Bluff made believe he was fainting. “Is that b-boy l-l-lucky!” he exclaimed, “H-h-how come y-y-you w-were thus h-h-honored?” he wanted to know.

Paul explained. Wallace interrupted to say, “And what’s more, Major McCarthy told us to tell you, Bobolink, that just as soon as you’re recuperated, he’s going to take you up, too.”

The boys swarmed about Bobolink’s bed and the boy had to turn his head from one side to the other to listen to what each fellow said. He replied, “I’m glad and I appreciate the major’s offer but I wish you boys would stop jumping around like frogs and get chairs and sit down.” He was interrupted by William and Jack who began to speak at once but he stopped them and added, “Don’t all talk at the same time.”

Wallace got ahead of all the others this time and announced,

“Major McCarthy also told us that he is going to teach us all how to fly.”

Bluff and Ken who heard the news for the first time, jumped high in the air and shouted, “Wow!!”

Paul called the boys to order and admonished them not to make so much noise because that would be a very poor manner in which to reciprocate Mrs. Link’s kindness in permitting them to meet in Bobolink’s room. All the boys nodded and agreed to refrain from making any further noise. They brought in chairs, placed them around the bed and sat down very orderly to discuss the business at hand, which was, Major McCarthy’s offer to teach them how to fly. For the moment they forgot everything else and thought only of their ambition to learn how to fly and be pilots. Bluff, however, soon remembered that there was some exciting news to tell which had been temporarily forgotten. At the first opportunity, therefore, he interrupted and said, “W-w-wait a minute, f-f-fellows, we h-h-have f-f-forg-g-gotten s-s-something.”

Given the cue, they all suddenly remembered. William jumped out of his seat and cried, “That’s right, you were supposed to tell us something. So come across, don’t hold back, tell us,” he demanded.

Bluff waved his arms and wanted to tell but Ken restrained him and said, “No, it’s Bobolink’s news; let him tell it.”

All eyes turned on Bobolink. A modest and unassuming person, he hesitated. Ken urged him on, saying, “Don’t be

bashful, tell them.”

Blushing, he said, “It’s really Paul and Jack who deserve all the credit for catching that crook and they should really get all of the reward.”

“Reward! What reward?”

“What crook?”

They all spoke simultaneously, without listening to each other. Paul held up his hand and motioned for everybody to be quiet. He said, “Let’s first hear what it’s all about. All right, Bobolink, tell us what you’re talking about.”

Bobolink said, “Well, the story is all very simple. You remember yesterday how that speeder nearly ran over the Smither’s kid?”

They all nodded. Wallace said, “Of course we do, and if it weren’t for you, the kid would be dead.”

“It wasn’t much, really,” said Bobolink. “But what happened afterwards is what’s really important. Jack and Paul went after the fellow and caught him and then the police arrested him.”

William was impatient. “So what about it?” he demanded.

“Well,” continued Bobolink, “a short while ago Chief of Police Bates called up and said that there was a two thousand dollar reward for the arrest of that fellow and that very likely the money will be awarded to be shared by Paul, Jack and me. But it’s Jack and Paul who should really get all of it.”

The last sentence was not heard because of the commotion that followed. The boys jumped high in the air, shouted,

screamed, cheered Paul, Jack and Bobolink. They were beside themselves with joy. When at last they quieted down, Jack asked, “But who’s the culprit, Bobolink? What crime did he commit and who’s giving the reward?”

Bobolink answered, “Chief Bates explained to mother that the culprit is a well known counterfeiter and the government is giving the reward. He said that in a day or two a government agent will come to town to determine who really deserves the reward. But my mother told me that he assured her that the three of us are going to get the reward.”

CHAPTER VI

What To Do With The Money?

The boys were in such a turmoil of excitement that they barely noticed Jack and Paul draw aside and whisper together. It took them only a few seconds to agree to a mutual proposal. Paul walked over to Bobolink and whispered something in his ear. Paul then called the boys to order, told them to sit down, then said, "Fellows, we have some serious thinking to do. We must determine the best manner in which to dispose of the \$2,000 reward."

Ken objected. "What do you mean 'we'?" he demanded. "The money belongs to you, Jack and Bobolink and it's up to you to do as you please with it."

Jack and Bobolink shook their heads in disagreement with the statement. William, however, remarked, "I think Ken is right."

Bluff nodded in agreement while Wallace was noncommittal. Paul said, "The money belongs to all of us, the members of this Patrol. Furthermore, if there is any argument about it, Jack, Bobolink and I are agreed that we want the money to be shared by the eight of us. Now let's discuss, orderly and intelligently, what we should do with the money."

All the boys were silent, not knowing what to say or how to deal with the situation. Wallace, however, the sober and serious fellow of the group, remarked, "I'm sure all the boys agree with me when I say that we appreciate very much the gesture of Paul, Jack and Bobolink. Furthermore, it is my opinion that none of us should hesitate to accept their offer. Ever since I can remember, since the time we were kids, we have always lived together, played together, gone to school together and shared each other's property. If a fellow had a dime, he bought candy and shared it with all of us. I cannot remember a single instance when a fellow refused to share anything he possessed with the rest of us. You'll remember that when we first became Scouts, we pooled our money to buy uniforms for *all* of us. We've been doing that ever since and therefore I—"

That was quite a long speech and the boys would not permit him to continue. They applauded him to show their whole-hearted agreement. Even Ken now agreed and said, "I think we owe a vote of thanks to Wallace for explaining it to us and making it so clear that we cannot help but agree with him."

Some of the boys nodded. William jumped up to offer a suggestion. He said, "All right, we all agree by now that the money is the property of all of us. Now what are we going to do with it? I propose that we use it to learn how to fly and—"

"R-r-righto!" exclaimed Bluff.

"I think that is a good idea and it suits me perfectly," said Jack.

"Same here." cried Nuthin'.

The others nodded their approval.

William held up his hand and called for order. "I'm not finished yet," he cried.

"What else?" someone asked.

"Hear, hear!" somebody else shouted.

William continued. "What I want to add is this," he declared, "That we have enough money not only for all of us to learn how to fly but maybe to buy a plane, too."

"Wow! Wouldn't that be swell!"

"Perfect is the word!"

"Gee, a plane of our own!"

Paul made himself heard. He said, "We'll have to wait and discuss it with Major McCarthy."

"That's right, we'll do that."

"He's just the man."

"I'm sure he'll be glad to advise us."

Wallace rose to address the boys. He said, "We've been so excited that we've completely forgotten how to think straight." The boys were seized by a feeling of discomfort. "I know that I too got lost in the excitement," he added, "and only a moment ago it occurred to me that we weren't quite fair to our parents. We should by all means consult them and find out whether they object to what we propose to do with the money."

The boys became sombre and thoughtful. Someone said, "But after all, the money is ours and we ought to be able to do with it as we please."

William added, "And suppose they won't let us use the money to learn how to fly, what'll we do?"

Paul said, "I don't think we should feel disheartened by the thought that perhaps our parents will object to the manner in which we propose to use the money. I'm sure that our fathers and mothers are considerate of our welfare and will most likely permit us to dispose of the money according to our desires. Whatever we do, however, we should by all means take our parents into our confidence and ask for their advice."

Jack supported his chum. He announced, "I agree wholeheartedly with Paul and I hope you all do likewise."

Bobolink raised his hand. "I do," he declared.

"S-s-same here," Bluff cried.

"And me too," said Wallace.

The others also agreed. It was then decided that Wallace, Paul and Jack approach Dr. Morrison and speak to him about it. The meeting was then adjourned.

On the street, the boys were acclaimed everywhere. It seemed that the news had spread all over town very quickly. Walking through the streets, many townspeople stopped the boys to congratulate them, shake hands and slap them on the back. By the time they arrived at Dr. Morrison's office, they were worn out. Dr. Morrison greeted them, then asked, "Well boys, what can I do for you?"

Jack distorted his facial features and muttered, "Something for a backache, Doctor, I'm all sore."

The doctor laughed good naturedly. Paul held up his right hand. "Dad," he said, "my fingers are swollen, can you do something?"

Wallace interjected, saying, "And I, the innocent party, have to suffer also."

The doctor smiled, then remarked, "I guess it's because you fellows deserve it."

They settled down to a serious talk and told Dr. Morrison everything that had transpired. He listened respectfully and carefully noted all their remarks. When they were finished, he agreed with them and then suggested that each boy explain the entire matter to his father and mother and then invite them to a meeting at Dr. Morrison's home the following evening. He offered to speak over the telephone with all the parents and personally urge them to come to the meeting. The boys thought it was a very good plan and agreed to go and tell it to the other boys.

The following evening all the parents assembled at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Morrison. The boys were somewhat nervous and fidgety. They met again in Bobolink's room and worried together. What if their parents vetoed their plan or decided that the money should be disposed of in some other manner? What if their fathers and mothers decided this, that, or something else? They were truly worried.

In the meanwhile the parents assembled. Paul had been told to stay with Jack for the night. Dr. Morrison called the meeting to order and suggested that they elect a chairman. He himself was

nominated and elected unanimously. It didn't take long after that for the meeting to warm up and for everyone present to enter the discussion and passionately plead his or her arguments. Soon the parents became separated into two factions, one led by Dr. Morrison and the other by Mr. Armstrong. It was Dr. Morrison's idea that although the parents should by all means keep a guiding hand over the boys and advise them accordingly, yet the plan of the boys to use the money for flying instructions, should be respected. Mr. Armstrong argued that he was not anxious to disappoint the boys and that learning to be a pilot was all right as far as he was concerned, but he thought that the money should be used for more worthy purposes. For instance, the money might be used to send some poor but deserving boy through college, or it might be used to build a club house for the boys.

Mr. Carberry, who supported Dr. Morrison, argued that the suggestion of a club house was a poor one, because the boys always had a place at their disposal to meet; that such a state of affairs was preferable to a club house where they would withdraw and do things the parents would be ignorant of. And as for using the money to send some poor but able boy to college, it was a most commendable suggestion but the money after all belonged to the boys and they should be permitted to use it for their own ends.

Mr. Link, who supported Mr. Armstrong, argued that it was all right to let the boys have their way but that when they were on the verge of doing something wrong, such as mis-using a large

sum of money, it was up to the parents to advise them and see that they acted differently;

And thus arguments flew back and forth. Finally Mr. Shipley suggested that a vote be taken to see how matters stood. A show of hands revealed that one faction won by a vote of ten to six. There was some applause and then Dr. Morrison told them all to relax, that although they had argued one against another, it was all on good faith and friendliness. Several minutes later Mrs. Morrison served tea.

Although the boys were in bed and supposedly asleep when their parents returned home at about eleven, yet they were all very much awake. They couldn't question their parents that night, however, as to the results of the meeting. They were obliged to spend a wakeful night and wait until morning to learn the results.

At precisely eight o'clock the next morning, Wallace and William came downstairs for breakfast. Wallace affected a reserved, calm attitude while William was openly impatient and eager to know the results. In the dining room, Mr. Carberry was already at the table. He greeted the boys with a cheerful good morning. Just then, Mrs. Carberry came in from the kitchen. The twins kissed their mother. Wallace sat down at the table. William glanced from one parent to another. "Well?" he queried.

The parents smiled and the boys knew that everything was all right. William shouted, "Wow!" He threw his arms around his mother and hugged her. Both boys then pressed their father's hand affectionately and insisted for the details of the conference.

Similar scenes were enacted at the homes of all the boys. Jack and Paul had decided, before they came down for breakfast, that they would attempt a carefree, noncommittal attitude and would not inquire but wait until they were told the news. Both boys sat down glumly at the table and played with their food, insisting that they were not hungry. But their appetites were quickly revived when Mr. Stormways told them the story of the meeting.

Bobolink, just as soon as his mother entered his room bringing him his breakfast, inquired anxiously, "What was decided last night, mother?"

She smiled carelessly and answered, "Well, I really don't approve of the decision and I argued against it, but—"

Bobolink's face fell and he expected the worst. But when she told him the truth, that the majority of parents had voted to permit the boys to use the money as they planned, he became so excited that he almost overturned his breakfast tray.

At the Shipley home, the moment he woke up, Bluff donned a bathrobe and raced downstairs to ask his mother for the news. Nuthin' was told the news at the breakfast table and Ken's father also told his son the good news at breakfast.

About nine o'clock all the boys left together for the airport to confer with Major McCarthy.

CHAPTER VII

Mystery

At the airport the boys had to wait a while until Major McCarthy showed up. When they told him their plans, he approved heartily and assured them that he would try his best to get them a good second hand airplane for the money available. Then he also informed them that he was leaving that same afternoon for New York and expected to be away about a week. The boys would therefore have to wait, until he returned, for their flying instructions.

On their way back to town the boys decided that in the meanwhile they could go camping for a week. Someone mentioned that Bobolink would be unable to come along and that therefore they should postpone their camping trip. Paul then called their attention to the fact that for the next month or so they would be occupied at the airport; in three weeks they had an agreement to play a baseball game against the Ted Slavin team and then a swimming match against the same group. "Sure," he said, "we won't have another opportunity to go camping until just before school opens and we plan to do that anyhow."

Jack suggested, "Let's put it up to Bobolink and then do

whatever he decides.”

They all agreed to the proposal. Bobolink, when he heard of it, urged them to go. And they decided to leave early the following morning.

The air was fresh and clear. The dew was still on the ground. The sun shone brightly. Stanhope was only now awakening out of its slumber and an occasional car or truck that passed seemed to be committing sacrilege against the peace and quiet that hung like a mantle over the town.

Main and Chestnut Streets was the meeting point upon which they had agreed. Paul, Jack and Ken arrived almost simultaneously. They greeted each other with a smile. They inhaled deeply the fresh, invigorating air that set their blood dashing through their veins. William and Wallace arrived next and a minute later followed Nuthin'. They conversed in whispers lest they disturb the hushed, still air that hung everywhere about them. They were aglow with the joy of life. They huddled together, bubbling over with excitement and anticipation.

Bluff, gasping for breath, came running up. All there, Paul, the leader, gave the order to fall in line. Then he called out, “Forward, march!”

They were on their way. They walked in double file; each boy was dressed in his Scout uniform, with a knapsack on his back. As far as the end of the town they marched in formation. Turning into the road leading to Black Mountain, Paul gave the order to break formation. They divided into groups of twos and threes

and walked along briskly. Soon they broke into song and during the next hour they sang every song they ever knew.

At about eight-thirty they decided to stop for breakfast. They picked a small clearing about a mile and a half up the slope of the mountain. Under the direction of Paul, enough wood was soon collected to build a fire and Ken, the official chef, set to work. It didn't take long to prepare the meal and soon they all sat around in a circle and ate heartily, with gusto. After putting out the fire and cleaning up their dishes, they decided to rest there for about half an hour. The boys stretched out on the ground and stared up at the sky. Paul remarked casually, "This is the life, eh fellows?"

Bluff agreed, saying, "N-n-nothing I-I-like it."

William interrupted, calling out, "Is that so! Just wait until we learn how to fly and have our own ship, then we'll be able to camp anywhere within a radius of a thousand miles."

Jack wanted to know, "What's the matter with camping on Black Mountain?"

"Nothing at all," answered William. "But just think of it: being able to fly, being able to pilot your own airplane and going anywhere your heart desires; and think of it, you pick out your camping ground as you fly along and looking down from a height of 5000 feet, that tree over there would look like a tiny household plant."

Paul said, "Yes, there is something staggering about it, a feeling of tremendous power when you're up in the air." He sat up and yawned. "However," he added, "what we have to decide

right now is where are we going to camp?"

Ken spoke up, "Let's return to where we camped last year; it's as good a spot as you can find anywhere on the mountain."

Bluff agreed, saying, "That s-suits me."

Wallace suggested, "Why not go somewhere else this year? I know a swell spot about three miles south east."

Jack asked, "How about it, Paul, you want to try this new camping site Wallace suggests?"

Paul nodded. "It's all right with me," he said.

The boys resumed their hike. It took them about four hours of steady walking with a few short rest periods to reach their goal. The clearing was off the beaten track. A hundred feet away was a precipice overhanging the tops of many trees about a hundred feet below. There was a stream of fresh, cool water just behind the clearing.

Tired, footsore, ravenously hungry, they immediately set to and prepared a sumptuous meal of chops and potatoes prepared over an open fire. Later they pitched their tents and settled themselves for a week's stay. That night, at the camp fire, the boys huddled close around the flaming logs of wood. Jack and Wallace were sitting together, about a yard or so away from the rest of the group. Jack asked his companion, "How did you happen to know of this place?"

Wallace hesitated. Finally he said, "Well, there's a story behind it, some sort of mystery I never could make head or tail of."

Jack perked up his ears. “What do you mean?” he inquired in a low tone of voice. “You never told us anything about it.”

The other boys were singing, and the echoes resounded far out across the mountain. The two whispered to each other. Wallace answered, “No, I didn’t, but that’s only because the story doesn’t seem to have any meaning and I didn’t want the fellows to think I was trying to put over a tall one on them.”

Jack became interested. Eagerly he asked, “Do you mind telling me the story?”

Wallace shook his head. “No, I don’t, but I warn you—there’s no sense to it all.”

“Well, let’s hear it anyhow,” said Jack urging his companion on.

Wallace twisted and turned and finally found a comfortable sitting position. He began his story by saying, “This camping ground is about three miles south east of the camping ground we usually go to. If you were particularly attentive, you would have noticed as we came here that this place is off the usual course followed by campers, is a little difficult to find and yet it appears to have been used frequently.”

Jack nodded, glanced at the fire and his companions, permitted his eyes to wander about the general extremities of the camp, then turned to his story teller and said, “Yes, but how did you come upon this camp site? Tell me that.”

Wallace betrayed a bit of uneasiness. He said, “I’m coming to that. Last year, camping up there”—he motioned with his hand

—“I decided one morning to take a walk through the woods. There was no path, so I had to fight my way through bushes, shrubbery and all sorts of entanglements, until I came to a spot where the bushes were beaten down, a couple of low branches were broken off—there was every indication that on that spot a struggle had taken place between two or more people. I examined the ground very carefully for torn pieces of clothing and such things, and walking straight ahead I came upon the stream. Following the stream, I came upon this camp site.”

Jack mumbled, “Hm! Nothing mysterious about that.”

Wallace demanded, “What do you mean?”

Jack answered, “What I mean is, that there is no evidence of any mystery or anything. The whole thing seems to fall flat.”

“I told you that before,” said Wallace. “But you haven’t heard all of it. I have told you only the beginning.”

Jack felt foolish for having spoken out of turn instead of listening to the rest of the story. He squirmed in his seat and said, “I’m terribly sorry for interrupting. Go on.”

Wallace had by now become enthusiastic and he leaned closer to his companion. But just then, William called out, “Hey, you two, no secrets. Come on over and join us.”

A few of the other fellows cried, “Yes, come on, join us!”

“If it’s a story you’re telling him, Wallace, tell it to all of us.”

“Don’t be snobs. Join us.”

Jack waved to them and replied, “He’s telling me a ghost story without a ghost and no story to it.”

The boys laughed. The two drew closer together and Wallace continued. "Listen closely," he said, "can you hear the gurgling sound of the stream?"

Jack listened closely and to his astonishment he couldn't hear the sound of running water. Yet he was sure that the stream was less than ten feet away from where he sat. He looked in the direction of the stream but he didn't see it. He turned quickly to his companion and whispered, "I don't see it. Isn't it supposed to be right there?"

Wallace grinned. "Correct," he remarked. "But that's another thing, one yard away from the stream and you don't see it any more. Notice how cleverly, yet how naturally it is hidden."

Jack nodded and looked around in amazement. He crept up on his knees, then stood up and still he couldn't see the stream. He wanted to walk over there and assure himself that the stream was there but he was afraid of arousing suspicion. He sat down again and Wallace continued. "One more link in the chain," he said. "About half a mile down this side of the mountain, there is a cave—a natural cave. I came upon it accidentally."

"Did you go inside?" queried Jack eagerly.

"I only took a peek inside. Then I heard a noise or at least I thought I heard a noise and I jumped away, thinking that I would hide behind some shrubbery or something. But I never saw it again because I couldn't find it."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. I looked for it, I retraced my steps as

carefully as I knew how, but no cave.”

Both boys remained silent for a while. Jack seemed to be lost in thought. Finally he asked, “Is that the whole story?”

Wallace nodded. “Yes.”

Jack shook his head. “Doesn’t seem to make sense.”

“That’s what I told you before,” insisted his companion.

CHAPTER VIII

The Mystery Becomes Complicated

Jack and Wallace joined the other boys in their singing. Later there circulated around the camp fire a series of humorous anecdotes followed by tall stories, each boy trying to improve upon the previous tale. Nuthin' was doing his best to hold the attention of his listeners (and he was succeeding fairly well) with a ghost story which he had read in a magazine, but was relating as a personal incident. Suddenly Paul, possessing the sharpest ear among the group, wheeled around and listened carefully. The noise that he thought he heard stopped. Dropping on his stomach, he put his ear to the ground. A couple of minutes later, they could all hear various small noises, that sounded like the breaking of twigs or rolling stones set loose. Somebody was coming. Silent, awaiting the arrival of whoever it was, they sat hushed around the fire and stared expectantly at the probable spot where he would emerge. Tense, eager, every moment was an hour and the five or six minutes they waited seemed like an age. Finally a short, husky man, with a brutal face, emerged out of the woods and stepped into the light. He glanced from one boy to another. His facial features were distorted by his smile. At last he spoke. "Hello,

fellows,” he said, his voice a bit raucous and loud. “Did I scare you?”

Paul stood up. “Why, no,” he answered calmly, “not at all. Won’t you join us?”

The man laughed with a gurgle in his throat. “Sure,” he answered, “but only for a couple of minutes. I have a shack a couple of miles yonder,” and he pointed in the general westerly direction. He joined the circle of boys around the fire. “What are you fellows doing here?” he asked.

Paul answered for all of them. “We’re seven Boy Scouts,” he said, “and we’re camping here for a week.”

“A week!” he exclaimed. He mused and stroked his chin. “Where are you boys from?” he inquired further.

“Stanhope,” he was told.

“Stanhope! I go down there about once every two weeks for supplies. But why do you boys camp here? I can tell you of a far better place to camp.”

“Where?” one of the boys asked him.

“About three miles northwest of here,” he answered.

They all guessed at once that he was referring to their old camping site. A couple of the boys were on the verge of telling him that they knew all about the place. But Jack spoke up first and asked, “What sort of a place is it?”

“Oh, it’s a very good camp site,” he answered. “There is a large clearing where you can play ball or any other game, and a large stream where you can go fishing and swimming.” he paused,

glanced from one boy to another, then added, "Oh, it's a far better camping site than this."

"Where did you say this place was, sir?" asked Paul, affecting ignorance.

"Almost directly northwest of here," the man replied with what seemed undue eagerness. "You can't miss it."

All the boys nodded in unison, as though they understood perfectly the directions he was giving them. In silence they wondered why the man was so anxious to have them move from their present camping ground. He tried hard not to betray his eagerness and anxiety, but he was a very poor actor. Jack inquired, "Is there anything wrong with this camping ground?"

The man scratched his head. "Well," he answered, "not very much but it isn't anywhere near as good as the one I'm telling you about. You really ought to go over there and see it."

Wallace spoke up, saying, "I'm sure the gentleman has the best of intentions and if he says that the camping ground he's telling us about is superior to this one, it must be so. In that case, it would be a shame not to take advantage of the information. The first thing tomorrow morning I'm going over there and take a look. If it is all the gentleman says it is, we're going to move."

The man grinned, the curl of his lips betraying, his deep self-satisfaction. "That boy is a smart one," he cried. "He's got the right idea." He jumped to his feet. "Well, I'll be going," he announced. "So long, fellows."

"So long."

He went in the direction he came from. The boys held their breath and silently waited for fully five minutes, until the man's footsteps could no longer be heard. Ken exploded. "Can you imagine that?" he cried. "He said he was going the other way and he walked back in the direction he came from."

Paul held up his hand and motioned for order. "Hush, fellows," he said. "We can discuss this quietly. Trees and bushes have ears, you know."

They huddled closely together and whispered among themselves. Nuthin' voiced the thought that disturbed them all. "I wonder why he objects to our camping here?" he asked.

William answered, "That's something we all would like to know."

Bluff stuttered, "S-s-something m-must be up."

With a wave of his hand, William dismissed Bluff's remark. "Anybody can guess that," he said. "But what is it about, that's what we want to know." He turned to the other boys. "I'm stumped, I admit it," he told them. "Can anybody guess?"

By the blank look on their faces he could tell that all his companions were just as much in the dark as he was. Jack whispered to Wallace, "You think this has something to do with the story you told me?"

Wallace shrugged his shoulders. "I'm at a loss. I can't imagine."

Paul addressed them. "Fellows," he said. "There is something up, that we can all tell. There must be a reason why he wants us

to move camp. But what the reason is and what it's all about, we can't find out tonight. There's nothing we can do tonight anymore except go to sleep. In the morning we will consider the whole thing and see what we can do."

The boys were nonplussed, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with Paul. They were loathe, however, to turn in just then. The incident had the effect of keeping them wide awake and of arousing in them the curiosity to know what it was all about. But it was evident that there was nothing they could do that evening. So in spite of their inclinations they all decided to go to sleep. But just then Bluff spoke up and inspired a new argument. "D-d-don't you think that w-w-we ought t-t-take turns k-k-keeping guard?" he asked.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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