

ROY ROCKWOOD

DAVE DASHAWAY
AROUND THE WORLD:
OR, A YOUNG YANKEE
AVIATOR AMONG MANY
NATIONS

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CHAPTER I THE COMET

"I wish Dave Dashaway would hurry up here," said Hiram Dobbs, who was for the time being in charge of the biplane, the *Comet*.

"What's your great anxiety, Hiram?" questioned Elmer Brackett, reclining comfortably in one of the spacious seats behind the pilot post of the machine.

"Do you know that fellow with the long frock coat over yonder – the one who looks like some cheap sharp lawyer? There," added Hiram, pointing at a group near a hangar, "he's talking now with that fat, porpoise-looking man with gold braid on his cap and a badge on his coat."

"I see them," nodded young Brackett. "Never saw either before that I can remember. What of them?"

"Just this," replied the young airman, quite seriously. "That lawyer fellow has been rustling around like a hen on a hot griddle for the last ten minutes. He seemed to be waiting for someone. Then I saw that man with the light fuzzy hat, and a moustache and glasses, come in a great hurry up to him, and direct his attention to the airship here. Just now the same fellow pointed it out to that constable – policeman – or whatever he is."

"I declare!" exclaimed Elmer, with a start, sitting up and taking notice. "Why, I know the man with the fuzzy hat."

"You do?"

"I am sure of it, Hiram. He is disguised, but I certainly recognize him. That fellow is my enemy," and the speaker shifted around in his seat, greatly disturbed. "Do you remember that fellow Vernon?"

"I should say so, and I suspected it to be just that individual all along," explained Hiram. "He's made all of us trouble enough not to be forgotten."

"I wish Dave would come," said Elmer, anxiously. "It would be a terrible thing if, after all my hopes and preparations, something should come up to prevent my going with you on the great airship trip around the world."

Elmer Brackett spoke very earnestly. He might well do so. When he referred to an exploit that sounded like the scheme of some visionary, his words had a tangible and sensible business basis.

His companion was pretty nearly a professional airman, and Elmer himself knew a great deal about aircraft. His father was practically the owner of the Interstate Aero Company. The person they were now awaiting, Dave Dashaway, was a youth who had won fame and fortune in the aviation field.

Young as Dave was, this expert had pretty nearly reached the top as a professional airman. Those who have been introduced to him in the first book of the present series, named "Dave Dashaway, the Young Aviator," will recall with interest his first struggles to earn recognition and a living in a line to which he was naturally adapted. Dave Dashaway's father had been a scientific balloonist, and when Dave met the old aviator, Robert King, he found a man who was glad to help him on in his ambition to succeed as a sky sailor.

Dave steadily and earnestly studied aeronautics as if he was learning a trade. In the second volume of this series, entitled "Dave Dashaway and His Hydroplane," the energetic young airman won marked distinction at an aero meet by his monoplane and hydroplane work. His ability won the

attention of a friend and former professional associate of his father, and the latter agreed to finance the most stupendous aerial proposition ever attempted.

The result has been told in the preceding volume of this series called, “Dave Dashaway and His Giant Airship.” The remarkable adventures of Dave and his friends while sailing the mammoth airship, the *Albatross*, across the Atlantic Ocean have there been narrated. After the giant airship had started on its extraordinary trip, a stowaway had been discovered – Elmer Brackett.

It seemed that the lad had gotten into bad company. His father was rich and he had plenty of money, which he spent very foolishly. He had formed the acquaintance of a clever schemer named Vernon. This man had so enmeshed Elmer in his toils, that he made the boy believe that he could send him to prison, and ruin his father’s business. All this was untrue, but in sheer desperation, believing he had wrecked all his chances in life, the frightened lad had secretly stolen aboard of the *Albatross*. In a very heroic way he had saved the crew of the giant airship from capture by some mountain outlaws in North Carolina, where the *Albatross* had descended for repairs. This had made him a welcome comrade to Dave and Hiram. When the former returned to the United States, victor in the great race across the Atlantic and the possessor of a small fortune in prize money, his first task was to hunt up the schemer, Vernon. Dave gave the rascal to understand that if he annoyed Elmer any further, he would find himself in serious trouble.

For all that Dave Dashaway and the powerful friends he had made did, however, Vernon was slow to abandon his hope of fleecing his victim out of more money. He tried to blackmail Mr. Brackett, and even brought a suit against the wealthy manufacturer on some notes he had induced the son to sign under false pretences. To get rid of him, Mr. Brackett had finally given Vernon a sum of money to cease his annoying persecutions. Then Vernon had disappeared, and Dave had supposed that he was “off the map” for good.

Elmer had acted like a new being since coming under the healthy influence of the brisk, high-minded young airman, Dave Dashaway, and his ardent assistant, Hiram Dobbs. For the first time in his life, the zest of adventure and the ambition to make something of himself had acted like a spur on the young fellow.

For over a month our hero, Dave, and his two loyal comrades had led an existence of delight. The young airman had become greatly interested in an exploit in which he had been invited to take part. The National Aero Association had arranged for a wonderful novelty and a test in the aviation field. This was nothing less than an aeroplane race around the world.

The route had been marked out, the prizes announced and the rules of the contest adopted. Nearly half a score of contestants had registered. In the official list there had been published a line or two that the adventurous Hiram read proudly a dozen times a day: “Entrant VI – the biplane *Comet*, pilot Dave Dashaway.”

An aero meet was now in progress near the city of Washington, which was to be the starting point of the great race. Dave and his young assistants had fairly lived at the plant of the Interstate Aero Company. Every facility of the great factory had been placed at the command of Dave. The result had been the construction of the *Comet*, probably the most perfect and splendid aircraft ever built.

There was a permanent aero practice field near the factory, and on the afternoon when our story opens the *Comet* was ready to make its daily trial flight. With the morrow, entirely equipped and its crew aboard, the model biplane was to sail across the country for Washington, to be on hand for the start of the race around the world a few days following.

Other sky craft were in practice or motion about the field. Hiram and Elmer had gotten their machine in order for a non-stop flight of one hundred miles. They were waiting for the arrival of Dave, when Hiram made the discovery that upon the very eve of their grand and stimulating star exploit, an old enemy had suddenly appeared upon the scene.

Hiram Dobbs bent a keen, suspicious glance at the three men whom he had pointed out to his comrade. A worried look came into Elmer’s face as he, too, watched them.

“Yes,” said the latter in an uneasy tone, but convincingly, “one of those men is Vernon.”

“And the others are a lawyer and an officer of the law,” added Hiram. “There’s something afoot, Elmer. I guess what it is and – I’ll fool them.”

“The constable is coming this way!” exclaimed Elmer, apprehensively.

“He won’t get here quick enough,” declared Hiram. “I see through their tricks – Vernon is bent on having you arrested on some flimsy charge. The scoundrel counts on the belief that your father will pay him more money rather than see the *Comet* delayed for the race. We’ll disappoint him.”

The speaker shot out his hand to the wheel. His foot was ready to depress the self-starter button.

“All clear?” he called to the field man who stood close by, and the latter nodded and waved his hand.

“The constable is running towards us,” said Elmer rapidly.

Chug! chug! The *Comet* rose from the ground. Elmer Brackett uttered a great sigh of relief. Hiram chuckled softly to himself.

“Hold on! I’ve got a warrant! In the name of the law – ugh!”

The *Comet* gave a great sway. Its pilot dared not relax attention to his duties, but he shot a swift glance at the source of the outcry.

“The mischief!” uttered Hiram, in surprise and concern.

The big bulky constable was clinging to the machine body, his feet dangling, his face white and scared-looking, swaying helplessly except for his frantic hand-hold fifty feet above the ground!

CHAPTER II

AN INVOLUNTARY PASSENGER

Dave Dashaway's assistant knew his business too well to attempt any rash or reckless change in the course of the biplane. At a glance Hiram had taken in the situation. In a flash he gave the right order.

"Help him – pull him in," he directed.

"Yes, he'll smash the wing and we'll all go down in a heap if he hangs on there," declared Elmer, quickly.

"Let me off! Let me off!" puffed and panted the constable. "Help! I'll drop! Murder! I'm a goner!"

"Easy, officer!" cried out Hiram, in his clear, ringing tones. "Don't get rattled or you'll be gone, indeed."

Elmer had grasped the arm of the clinging man. He had strapped himself into his seat, and this position assisted in giving him a tugging strength that counted for something. The white, scared face of the constable came nearer and nearer to him. Through great efforts the trespasser was hauled up over his center of balance, and he tumbled into the vacant seat all in a heap.

"Let down this balloon! I've got a warrant," began the constable, breathlessly – "oogh!"

A whirl of the biplane sent the man banging against the side of the seat till his teeth rattled.

"Strap him in," called out Hiram, "if he don't want to get a spill."

"Oh, my! Stop! Please stop! Let me out!"

Meantime Elmer had snapped the belt in place. It was well that he had acted speedily. The *Comet* made a switch just there which caused the involuntary passenger to tremble with terror, yell outright, and crouch back in his seat.

Hiram directed a smooth volplane and made an even spurt of speed on a set level. This gave the intruder a chance to steady his nerves and regain his breath. He was still, however, big-eyed and chattering. The young pilot dared not direct attention from his task of running the machine, but he managed to turn his face sideways so as to give Elmer a significant glance. The latter half smiled as he understood what was on the programme.

"Now, see here, officer," spoke Hiram, past his shoulder, "I can't give you any further attention than to tell you what to do. If the machine tips – "

"Is there danger?" gasped the overcome constable. "Say, please go down! Easy, you know! P-please-p – please!"

"You had better show some sense," retorted Hiram, with pretended sternness. "There is always danger of a spill. Don't help it any."

"N-no, I won't," chattered the officer. "I – I'll do just what you tell me."

"Then sit still and keep still. Elmer, get him into that airman armor. He's pretty bulky, and if we take a flop – "

"Br-rr-r!" shivered the unfortunate passenger. "Oh, don't talk about it!"

"Get the aerodrome safety helmet on him," pursued Hiram. "It will save his head if he tumbles."

"Say, I don't want to! You've got to stop! I'm an officer of the law and I order you to lower this balloon."

"You want to drop, do you?" called back Hiram, "All right, if you say so, only – "

"No! no! no!" fairly bellowed the constable, as the pilot described a manœuvre pretty near to accomplishing a "shoot-the-chutes" dive in aviation. "You know best. I'll do as you say."

He allowed Elmer to fasten on the helmet as the machine steadied. It made his big shock-haired head look bigger than ever.

“Now then, the felt safety buffers,” directed Hiram, and his willing accomplice bundled the passenger in between two thick pads covering chest and shoulders like a wad of pillows.

“He’d better have the earflaps and respirators if you’re going up into the rarefied air,” suggested Elmer, solicitously.

“Don’t go! Say, I’m not well! This air is good enough for me,” remonstrated the constable.

“Now for the non-concussion girdle,” ordered the merciless pilot.

Elmer was almost bursting with suppressed merriment. He was so sure that Hiram knew his business and that no real danger was imminent in that calm air with a perfect head breeze, that he enjoyed the occasion immensely.

By this time their frantic fellow passenger resembled a diver, swathed as he was in thick leather safety devices crowned with steel. Muffled up and helpless, he squirmed, groaned and closed his eyes with a sickening shudder every time he glanced over the edge of the machine. The unusual sight of the earth fading away, the swift passage of the landscape, fairly chilled him.

For five or ten minutes the passenger was content to remain mute, trying to realize and become accustomed to his unexpected condition. The machine had a duplicate control system. That is, the rudder wires ran to the right hand second seat as well as to that of the pilot. This made it possible for Hiram to confine his attention exclusively to spark and throttle control, while his assistant could cooperate as to the steering gear whenever the tail trailed heavily. Elmer, too, could cooperate in the aileron and elevator control, and the flight settled down to a smooth, perfect rush through the atmosphere.

“Ahem,” ventured their passenger as he regained his scattered wits. He spoke in a vague, uncertain tone. “I told you that I had a warrant and I want to explain – whew!”

Hiram Dobbs was bound to shut off the passenger from any official complication of matters. His eye had been fixed to a row of hills ten miles distant. He had marked out his course and he had a definite destination in view. Just now he stirred up the officer considerably with a new joggling twist of the machine, just as he had planned to do. The fright of the constable was renewed. He forgot what he had started to say.

“What’s the programme?” whispered Elmer, bending over close to the ear of the pilot.

“I want to get you to a point of safety before that fellow has a chance to read that warrant of his,” was the low-toned reply.

“I see; but how are you going to work it?” questioned Elmer, in some perplexity.

“Leave that to me,” returned Hiram, in a confident way.

“Yes, I’m going to.”

“I want to get beyond the ridge ahead – in fact, as far away from our starting point as I can.”

“I want to explain,” here again broke in their passenger. “I’ve got a document here – ”

There he stopped. Hiram had to laugh and Elmer chuckled. The constable made several ineffectual efforts to reach a pocket in his coat. The muffling devices he wore prevented him. He was like a man encased in a suit of armor.

“Never mind the document,” said Hiram. “Just tell us what it’s about.”

“It’s a warrant, and it charges this young man with trespassing on the property of a farmer with an airship. The complainant has a legal right, *ipse dixit*, to claim malicious intent, which makes it a criminal offense.”

“I thought so. Pretty flimsy,” remarked Hiram. “They’ve raked up some trifle to give that miserable Vernon an excuse to keep you in court for a week or more. All right officer,” he added, “read your warrant.”

“How can I read it when I can’t get my hands with these pesky things on them anywhere near my pocket?” demanded the constable, wrathily.

“Very well, then don’t say I obstructed the law by refusing you your rights.”

“When you land I’ll read the warrant,” explained the constable. “This boy has got to come with me. It’s defiance of law to refuse.”

“We will land very soon now,” promised Hiram. “Whisper, Elmer.”

The skillful pilot worked the exhaust purposely to cover a quick undertoned interview with his friend. There was a perfect understanding between them by the time the colloquy was concluded.

“All right,” said Elmer simply, and with a satisfied expression on his face, as he sank back in his seat.

The young air pilot skirted a great grove of trees and flew the *Comet* high above a range of hills beyond. Then, near a little town with a railroad depot showing in its midst, he prepared to descend.

Hiram made a thrilling dive that nearly sent the constable into hysterics. The *Comet* reached the ground and settled down upon it as safely and gracefully as a bird sinking to its nest.

“Jump out,” he said simply, to Elmer.

The latter unbuckled the seat belt promptly and leaped to the ground beside the machine.

“Hold on! Stop!” shouted the constable.

Elmer showed no disposition to run away. He only walked briskly up and down, stamping his feet and exercising his arms.

“That boy is under arrest,” continued the officer, struggling with his burden of wraps.

“Not quite yet, officer, I fancy,” retorted Hiram.

“Well, he will be soon as I get out and read my warrant. I order you to help me, young man. If you refuse, I shall complain of your aiding and abetting a criminal to escape.”

“Bah!” cried Hiram, “you know as well as I do that he is no criminal. Here,” and he assisted his passenger in getting rid of the hampering devices. “I’ll help you.”

With a great snort of relief the bulky officer stepped to the ground. His first act was to shake his cramped limbs. Then he fished in his pockets for the warrant.

“In the name of the law,” he began with assumed dignity, producing a folded document.

“Hold on,” challenged Hiram, “what are you up to?”

“I’m going to arrest one Elmer Brackett.”

“I think not,” retorted Hiram, coolly. “It seems you’ve forgotten something rather important, Mr. Officer.”

“What’s that?” snorted the constable.

“We have landed just over the state line and your warrant is no good in this locality.”

CHAPTER III ON THE WING

The constable stared at Hiram. He glanced at Elmer with half a scowl. Then he rubbed his head as if seeking for new ideas. Finally a sort of sickly grin overspread his flabby face.

"You'd make a good lawyer," he observed. "Over the state line I am, sure enough, with no warrant served. Well, I'm not so sorry as you may think."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," declared Hiram. "You'll be glad, too, when you come to know that the man behind the gun in this case is an unmitigated rascal."

"I didn't know anything about that, I simply followed orders," said the official, in a slightly apologetic tone.

"Well, good-bye, officer, I suppose I can go?" broke in Elmer.

"I shan't hinder you. Only keep out of my territory."

Elmer exchanged a look of mutual understanding with Hiram, and walked slowly away. He soon disappeared beyond a little thicket, heading in the direction of the town and the railroad station.

"Well, officer?" spoke up Hiram, moving about the biplane to see that everything was in order.

"Well, lad," returned the constable, "I suppose it's in order for me to get back home after this fool's errand."

"I'll be glad to take you back with me," said Hiram.

"Humph!" and the constable shrugged his shoulders in a dubious way. "I'm safe on the ground once more, thank goodness; and I reckon I'll stay here."

"Oh, come ahead in the machine," invited the young pilot. "No capers, officer, honestly. I had to do some gliding to make you forget business till my friend was over the safety line, but I'll take you home steady as a Pullman, I promise you."

"No diver's suit, though, mind you."

"That isn't necessary," laughed Hiram. "Just strap yourself in and I'll give you a nice ride."

By the time they got back to the aero grounds the constable was as friendly as could be. He shook hands good-bye with Hiram, and winked at him and chuckled to himself as he walked over to where the lawyer-like man and the disguised Vernon stood waiting for him. They evidently had seen the *Comet* returning and had hastened to the grounds to hear the news.

Hiram lingered, watching the group until they disappeared. Dave Dashaway came out of the hangar as the assistants ran the biplane towards it.

Bright as a dollar, looking every inch the active, ambitious fellow his friends called him, the young airman regarded his assistant inquiringly and expectantly.

"You didn't wait for me," observed Dave.

"No, I was in a hurry," laughed Hiram. "I suppose you know what was doing?"

"I've heard something about a warrant for Elmer. I've guessed out the plot. Mr. Brackett was here, quite worried."

"He needn't be," declared Hiram, reassuringly. "There he is now. It's all right, Mr. Brackett," added Hiram, advancing to meet the wealthy manufacturer. "They didn't get Elmer, and, what's more, they won't get him very soon."

Dave Dashaway led the way into the little portable house adjoining the *Comet* hangar where the boys slept nights. All sat down on camp stools.

"I hope this new trouble is not going to disturb your plans," spoke Mr. Brackett.

"Not a bit of it," replied Hiram. "Elmer is safely out of the way, and everything is arranged to keep that miscreant, Vernon, from annoying him."

Hiram recounted all that had transpired. The cloud of uneasiness passed from the brow of the president of the Interstate Aero Company. He smiled approvingly at the keen-witted narrator.

“Elmer will take a train and go right on to an arranged rendezvous,” explained Hiram. “He will be on hand for the start, Mr. Brackett.”

“I shall start for Washington,” announced the manufacturer. “I want to see the *Comet* begin the big race in which I feel Dashaway and his friends will win new laurels.”

“Thank you for your confidence in us,” said the young airman. “I expect to deserve it. There’s a reason – you have given us a biplane that is a marvel.”

“Yes,” declared Hiram, enthusiastically, “there will be nothing in the field that can even begin to compare with the *Comet*.”

Our hero and his assistant spent some time going over the splendid piece of mechanism, after Mr. Brackett had gone away. The highest skill had been employed in the construction of the *Comet*. From barograph to breeches buoy it was as nearly perfect and thoroughly equipped as money and intelligence could make it.

The biplane was of original design. It had a tube mechanism and universal bearing that were entirely new in the aviation field. The arrangements for gasoline, oil and water had been the main consideration. The capacity for carrying extra weight the second. The coverings were rubberized fabric, the machine had the very newest shock absorbers, and the double-control system admitted of a manipulation that not only divided the operation work, but added to the safety of navigation.

As to the superb balancing and self-righting powers of the *Comet*, the boys had demonstrated these merits only the day previous. With a ripping crash the machine had entered the perimeter of a corkscrew glide. Dave found the tilt so steep there seemed no chance to come out of the spiral. Hiram, in the second seat, by a deft, quick operation of the rudder control, changed the equilibrium. Dave did the rest, and the *Comet* passed a hair-breadth ground swoop clean as an acrobat.

On account of the long flights necessary, probable landings in desert spots far from civilization, and the menace of supplies giving out, the *Comet* had been constructed of a weight, breadth and length that would admit of the utilization of a so-called ballast pit. This was located directly behind the seats. It was compactly filled at the present time, all ready for the start scheduled for a few days later. With every article cared for, and after a close calculation of the effect of dislodgment and replacement, the young aviator in command of the machine felt that he had mastered most of the details of the prospective trip around the world.

Before Mr. Brackett had left them, he had made arrangements to join them at the aero meet at Sylvan Park, near Washington. There were some final details of the journey to arrange for after they reached the aviation field. So far as their present situation was concerned, however, the *Comet* was all ready for the flight.

The sky was clear, the stars shone brightly and there was a gentle breeze entirely favorable to them, as, about ten o’clock the *Comet* was quietly rolled out of the hangar. The young airman purposely evaded any publicity as to their start on account of Elmer and his enemies. The two assistants waved them a hearty adieu, but stirred up no commotion. Within five minutes the splendid piece of mechanism was speeding on its way for a point fifty miles distant.

“At Fordham, you said,” remarked Dave, as they settled down to an even course of progress.

“Yes, just beyond the town. We all know the town, it’s right in our course – and I thought that the best place to have Elmer wait for us.”

The *Comet* passed over half a dozen quaint little villages. Then it followed the railroad tracks, the signal lights operating as guides. They knew Fordham, because they had made several trial spurts to and from the place. They passed its rows of street lights, slowed down, and the *Comet* reached *terra firma* inside of the town baseball grounds.

“Hello!” at once hailed them, and Elmer came forward from a seat on the bleachers, where he had been resting. “Everything all right?”

“As a trivet,” pronounced Hiram. “Been a slow wait; eh?”

“Oh, I snoozed a little,” replied Elmer; “lunched some, and had a hard time explaining my being here to a suspicious old watchman who looks after the grounds.”

“Get aboard,” directed Dave, and Elmer sank into the seat with a contented sigh.

“It’s business now, I suppose,” he remarked. “Say, fellows, it’s a big thing we hope to do; isn’t it?”

“Yes,” assented the sprightly Hiram; “and I reckon we’ll have seen some startling sights before we come this way again.”

CHAPTER IV

A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

Dave Dashaway stood at the entrance to the hangar of the *Comet* at Sylvan Park. The machine had done nobly on the trial field near the Capitol city. Now it was housed among the group of competitors in the great race. The pick of the world's best airmen was represented at this international meet, and the scene was one of activity and interest.

The airship boys were comfortably housed in the living tent just beyond the hangar. At first upon arriving it had been decided to have Elmer stay away from the field until the final start was made. This procedure was actuated by the fear that the troublesome Vernon might put in an appearance and continue to annoy and hamper the young airman. The next morning, however, Mr. Brackett arrived.

"I am here for two reasons," he had announced. "First, I wish to see our last word in biplanes, the *Comet*, sail off on the race I know you are going to win. Next, I want to be on hand if that troublesome Vernon tries any more of his tricks."

"I hardly think he will attempt to follow us this far," was the expressed opinion of our hero. "It would cost him some money, and it would be somewhat dangerous for him to work any trumped-up charge with so many of our airmen friends around to defeat his plans."

"There is still more than that," remarked the airship manufacturer, in a confident way.

"What do you mean, father?" inquired his son.

"Just this," answered Mr. Brackett, "as I left home my lawyer, who was looking up Vernon, put in my possession some documents that will enable me to baffle this wretch at every turn. I only hope he will appear. It will be to receive a final quietus, believe me."

The big event was now only three days distant. The *Comet* was in perfect shape for its long flight. The boys had used prevision and judgment in all their preparations; and had not really much to do. Dave, however, was kept pretty busy with a constant stream of visitors. Professional and otherwise, those who had seen descriptions of their splendid machine in the public prints were eager to view that work of mechanical perfection. A group of them were now gathered inside the shelter building. Experts were examining and admiring the *Comet*.

It pleased Mr. Brackett to exhibit this last masterpiece from the Interstate Aero Company's factory. As a strictly passenger carrying biplane it had never been equalled. Mr. Brackett showed all its improvements, from the new chain drive apparatus to the high pitch revolution screws. The original model of the *Comet* had represented a machine weighing over one thousand five hundred pounds with a spread of thirty-eight by sixty-three and one-half feet, pitch speed five thousand six hundred feet, average flight record fifty miles. The old style rear propeller drive had been supplanted by tractor screws. The tubing truss underneath the center section and skid bracing also in the rib or plane section was a new feature. A divergence from the popular headless screw traction design was the use of the Curwell type of outriggers. This did away with an attachment at the end of a monoplane type of fuselage.

It was almost dusk when the visitors began to depart. Dave was giving orders to two of the hangar men to lock up the machine for the night, when an automobile drew rapidly up to the spot. As the young aviator glanced casually at the machine, he saw that besides the chauffeur it contained a veiled, girlish form.

The chauffeur stopped the machine directly before the living tent. He leaped from the auto and approached Mr. Brackett, who was standing near by.

"Can you direct me to the *Comet* hangar?" he inquired, touching his cap politely.

"This is the place," explained the manufacturer.

"And Mr. Dave Dashaway – do you know where I can find him?"

The young airman overheard this conversation. He stepped forward at once with the words: "I am Dave Dashaway. What can I do for you?"

The chauffeur moved aside with a movement of his head towards the automobile. Its occupant leaned slightly forward, and extended a daintily gloved hand. As Dave advanced and lifted his cap she spoke to him in a low, tremulous tone.

"I wish to speak to you for a few moments, Mr. Dashaway," she said. "In private," she added, with a glance at the several persons in view.

"Certainly," responded Dave readily, but in some wonderment. "There is our office, miss. May I assist you?"

The little lady uttered a fluttering sigh as our hero helped her from the machine and led the way to the living tent. Hiram had just lighted a lamp. Both he and Elmer regarded their friend's companion in some surprise. They were too well bred, however, to stare at the newcomer, who seemed timid and uncertain. The boys moved quietly from the tent, Dave set a stool for his visitor and seated himself at a little distance, awaiting her pleasure.

"You must not think it strange that I have come to you, Mr. Dashaway," she said. "I – that is, I was directed to you by a very close friend, who knows you well."

"Ah, indeed?" spoke the young airman.

"Yes, I bring you a letter from a friend of my dear father, who is as well a close friend of your own – Mr. Robert King."

"I am pleased and interested at once, Miss," said Dave, trying to set the young lady at her ease under such strange surroundings. "Mr. King is, indeed, a close friend, and his friends are very welcome."

"You are most kind," said the visitor, nervously searching for the letter in question, and in her confusion lifting her veil. From her face Dave saw that she was about his own age. There was an anxious look in her eyes. She finally found the letter, and handed it to the young airman with the explanation:

"We went to Mr. King where he is sick at his home in New York City."

"Yes, I know," said Dave. "He wrote me only last week."

"I am Edna Deane," proceeded the young lady. "My father is himself something of an invalid and could not come with me to-day. We went to Mr. King to ask his help in a case where he only, or somebody like him, could be of any assistance."

"You mean in the aviation way?" inquired Dave, getting interested.

"Yes, Mr. Dashaway," replied the young girl. "I want my father to explain to you about it. He has written our address on the envelope – Hampton Flats. He wishes to have you make an appointment to meet him, if you will be so kind."

"I certainly shall be glad to be of service to any friends of the gentleman who taught me all I know about sky sailing," began Dave, and then he added very heartily: "Surely I will come, Miss Deane. To-morrow morning, if you wish. Shall we say at ten o'clock? I have some few things to attend to that will take up my time until then."

"My father will be very glad," murmured the girl, gratefully.

A glance at the letter from the veteran aviator, Mr. King, had at once influenced Dave. The old airman wrote briefly, but to the point. He stated, that were he in shape to do so, he would at once assist Mr. Deane. He asked his former assistant to act in his place, could he at all arrange to do so. Mr. King hinted that there was an opportunity for a great humane act. He said he was sure that when Dave knew its details, his generous heart would respond to an unusual appeal for help in a strangely pathetic case.

Meantime Hiram and Elmer had strolled to a distance. They passed Mr. Brackett, who was seeing to it that the hangar men safely housed his pet biplane for the night. Hiram looked curiously at his companion.

“Well,” he observed, “sort of mysterious, Elmer; eh?”

“You mean that young lady?”

“I do. Automobile – mysterious veiled visitor,” said Hiram with a smile.

“Maybe it’s another of those venturesome college girls wanting to make a flight for the name of it. Dave will tell us when he sees us. No nonsense about him. He’s too busy for romance.”

“That’s so. There she goes, Elmer,” announced Hiram.

The boys made out Dave, cap in hand, walking beside the automobile as it started up slowly, and conversing with its occupant. Then, curious and eager to learn the merits of the interesting episode, they proceeded towards the living tent, approaching it by a roundabout route so as not to look as if they were “snooping around,” as Hiram put it.

Just as they neared it, Elmer grasped the arm of his companion, bringing him to a halt with a startling: “S – st!”

“What is it?” demanded Hiram, staring ahead in the direction in which the glance of his companion was fixed.

“Look for yourself,” whispered back Elmer, pointing to a crouching figure just behind the tent. “See – a man, a lurker, a spy! Who do you suppose he is; and what is he up to?”

CHAPTER V

SOMETHING WRONG

The boys stood perfectly still. The crouching man had not heard them coming nor did he see them now. He half rested on one elbow and one knee, close up to the end of the tent. It looked as if he had been posted there for some time, as if peering into the tent through some break in the canvas and listening to what had been spoken inside.

Just now he was guardedly looking past the corner of the tent and following Dave and the automobile with his eyes. It was fast getting dark, but the glint of the headlight of the auto as it turned towards the entrance to the grounds swept over him, and Elmer gave a great start.

"Why," he spoke suddenly, "Hiram, it's that man – Vernon!"

"You don't say so," returned Hiram. "Are you sure of it?"

"Yes, I am," declared Elmer, in a disturbed way. "He is after me again, and may make all kinds of new trouble for us."

"He won't," asserted Hiram, with a quick snap of his lips, and the old farmer-boy fight and determination in his face. "Get ready to help me."

"What are you going to do?" inquired Elmer, as his companion began to roll up his coat cuffs.

"I'm going to nail that fellow, good and sure," pronounced Hiram. "Maybe your father would like to see him. Now then!"

Hiram made a spring. He landed on the shoulders of the crouching figure, Elmer close at his heels. The unsuspecting spy went flat, the nimble Hiram astride of him.

"What are you up to, and who are you?" demanded Hiram. "You needn't tell," he added swiftly, as his prisoner squirmed about and his face came into view. "You're that mean rascal Vernon, and we're going to know what you are plotting this time before we let you go. Grab him, Elmer."

Each seized an arm of the squirming captive. Hiram arose to his feet without letting Vernon go, although the latter struggled fiercely. He managed to break the grasp of Elmer, but Hiram held on to him – would have held on to him if he had dragged him all over the field.

"What's this?" cried Mr. Brackett, attracted to the spot by the noise of the struggle. Then he recognized Vernon. "Ah, it's you is it?" he said, bending his brows at the prisoner. "I have something to say to you," and he seized the man by his coat collar and assisted Hiram in dragging him around to the front of the tent.

"Oh, you have?" sneered Vernon, ceasing to struggle as he found his efforts in that direction vain. "Well, you want to say it quick and short."

"What are you doing around here?" demanded the aeroplane manufacturer, sternly.

"What do you suppose?" retorted the schemer boldly, thinking brag and bluster only would serve him now. "I'm in the market with information, and you had better buy it."

"You sit there," ordered Mr. Brackett, forcing the miscreant upon a stool with the gesture of disgust. Then he motioned to Hiram and Elmer to guard the doorway and sat down facing the captive. "You have gone to the last length, my man, in persecuting my son. There is not a vestige of accusation against him that you can press legally."

"Oh, I think I can make you a little uneasy," boasted the conscienceless one.

"We shall see. It is only a few days since my lawyer reported to me the facts of an investigation into your career. I have a few questions to ask you. After that, I fancy you will be glad to get away from us and stay away in the future."

"Oh, is that so?" said Vernon, coldly.

"My lawyer has placed certain documents and information in my hands," continued Mr. Brackett. "One of them," and he reached into his pocket and produced a photograph, "is a picture

of a man who served a prison term. Do you recognize it?” and the speaker held up the photograph full in the lamp light.

Vernon changed color. He quaked and wriggled about, but he was silent, for it was his own portrait, in prison garb.

“How far the word of a convict will go against that of my son, whom you duped into signing notes he could not pay, and which I will never pay, for no consideration was involved, I do not know,” proceeded the aeroplane manufacturer. “I do know, however, that you dare not make another move. This document,” and he showed a folded paper, “describes you as the man who is wanted in Boston for forfeiting a bail bond. I have only to send word to the authorities there of your whereabouts to have you shut up for some time to come. Now go. If I so much as hear of your hanging around this vicinity, I will telegraph to the people who are searching for you.”

Mr. Brackett pointed to the doorway. Vernon arose and like a whipped cur slunk through it. An expression of relief crossed Elmer Brackett’s face.

“I only hope we are rid of him for good,” he said, fervently.

“There seems to be no doubt of that,” declared Hiram, with a satisfied smile. “Say, though, I wonder why he was sneaking around the hangar here?”

“To pick up what information he could about our plans, to disturb them if he could, I suppose,” said Elmer.

Just then Dave appeared. His friends noticed that he was somewhat thoughtful. No one alluded to the visit of the girl whom the young aviator had just escorted to the automobile. Dave did not seem to have any explanations to make. The others told him about the discovery of Vernon and his summary disappearance. Then the incident was dismissed from their minds as they all went over to the restaurant at the other end of the big aviation grounds for supper.

Dave told his young assistants that he had an engagement in the city the next morning. There were some little purchases to make for the *Comet*, and he took Hiram along with him.

“I am going to call upon the friends of the young lady you saw last evening, Hiram,” he confided to his friend. “They live at the Hampton Flats,” and he gave Hiram the location. “If you like, after you get through with your shopping you can call there for me. Then we can go back to the park together.”

“All right,” assented Hiram, “I shan’t be busy for more than an hour.”

It was about eleven o’clock when Hiram started for the Hampton Flats. He finally turned into the street where the building was located. As he neared it, a man came hurriedly down its steps, passed down the street, and disappeared from view around the corner.

“Well, I’ll be bumped!” exclaimed Hiram, forcibly.

He came to a dead stop, irresolute as to the course he ought to pursue. Hiram had recognized the man as Vernon. He wondered how the rascal came to be in the building where his airman friend was.

“Why, he’s nagging Dave, that’s sure,” declared Hiram. “But why? It won’t do any good to run after him. I must tell Dave about it, though, and – there he is now.”

The young aviator appeared at just that moment. He looked up and down the street and then advanced towards Hiram as he made him out. The latter fancied he had never seen Dave look so grave and thoughtful, but our hero roused up into instant interest as Hiram said:

“I saw Vernon come out of that building just before you did.”

“What’s that!” challenged Dave. “Out of that building?”

“Yes, he did, Dave. Now what do you suppose he was doing there?”

The young airman did not reply. He walked along in silence. Hiram saw that he was a good deal stirred up, but all Dave said about the incident was:

“I’m glad you discovered this, Hiram, and told me about it. We want to look out for that fellow.”

All that day, Hiram noticed that the pilot of the *Comet* seemed to be preoccupied. The hum and bustle of the approaching event, however, took up the attention of all hands. They had a busy day of

it, and Hiram was so tired out by nightfall that he had well-nigh forgotten all about the unexplained incident of the earlier hours of the day.

Just after daylight the next morning Elmer stirred on his sleeping cot and drowsily cried out:

“What’s up? I thought I heard some one call for Dave.”

“You did,” replied Hiram, jumping from under the bedclothes. “I just roused up to see one of the hangar men scurrying out of here, and Dave, half dressed, rushing after him. Hurry up, get your clothes on.”

“What for?” inquired Elmer, sitting up in his cot and rubbing his eyes sleepily.

“Because I caught a remark the hangar man made.”

“What was it?”

““Something wrong with the *Comet!*””

CHAPTER VI

THE STOLEN BIPLANE

The alarming words spoken by Hiram were sufficient to at once bring Elmer out of bed and onto his feet. Speedy as Elmer was, however, Hiram was outside, shoeless and hatless, almost before his drowsy companion had drawn on his sweater.

“What’s the trouble?” panted Elmer, trailing after his companion a minute later.

His eyes grew big with wonder and suspense as he noticed Dave and the hangar man running around to the rear of the portable biplane shelter. In front he saw Hiram posed like a statue and staring hard.

“The *Comet* is gone!” announced Hiram. “Look there – gone!”

He spoke in a tone of voice as if the whole world was slipping away from them. Elmer, gaining his side, saw that the hangar was empty.

“Oh, say!” he gasped, “you don’t mean to say – ”

“Stolen? Yes! That is sure,” came in Dave’s tones, and the young aviator hurried around to the spot.

“You see, whoever took it drew the steel frames and canvas out of the whole back,” the hangar man was explaining. “The wheel marks yonder run about twenty feet. Whoever did it knew his business. There was no wasted fooling around – up and away was the programme.”

Dave stood silent, thinking hard. Elmer came up to him, worried and anxious. By this time Hiram had got full steam of excitement on.

“See here, Dave,” he cried, “what is this – a trick, or something serious?”

“It’s pretty serious,” answered the young airman. “Whoever ran away with the *Comet* had a bad motive in view – I feel certain of that.”

“You mean, to keep us from making the start in the race?” inquired Elmer, anxiously.

“Just that,” assented Dave, positively. “No ordinary thief would steal the biplane, for he couldn’t sell it. Professionals do not meddle with other people’s machines. I’ve got a lot of suspicions about this mysterious piece of business, but there’s no time to lose in theorizing.”

“No, we must get on the track of the *Comet* right away,” declared Hiram, adding, “but how?”

Dave gave a few rapid, undertoned directions to the hangar man. Then he hurried back to the living tent, followed by his friends, and all completed dressing. Then, Dave piloting the way, they made a brisk run for the office building of the club in control of the meet.

The young airman was lucky in running across the manager, a man who knew his business thoroughly. Inside of an hour, with his perfect knowledge of details, he had telegraphed every aviator and practice station in the East to be on the watch for the stolen machine. Dave was leaving the office building when they met Mr. Brackett.

“Oh, father!” exclaimed his son, in distress, “the *Comet* has been stolen!”

The aeroplane manufacturer was stunned by the announcement. Dave motioned him instantly to one side. Hiram’s heart took hope as he noted the business-like look on Dave’s face.

“He’s got some plan worked out already,” announced Hiram to Elmer. “Dave isn’t telling us all he has guessed out.”

Whatever information the young airman was imparting to Mr. Brackett, the latter seemed greatly interested, and his troubled face cleared somewhat as Dave proceeded. Soon the manufacturer hurried away. Dave consulted his watch and came briskly up to his young fellow aviators.

“There’s just time to get our breakfast,” he announced.

The boys had about completed the meal, when an automobile drove up in front of the restaurant and the aeroplane manufacturer got out. Dave hurried to his side. There was a brief consultation, and our hero beckoned to his friends.

"You had better come with me, Hiram," said the young aviator; "I shall need you. If you will keep track of things around the hangar, Elmer, it will help out."

Dave waved his hand to the manufacturer and his son, and told Hiram to jump into the seat beside him. They made a quick spin for the office of the manager. The young airman came out with several telegrams in his hand. He read these over carefully while his companion was cranking the machine. Then he thrust them into his pocket and took charge of the wheel.

"Say," began Hiram, as they left the aero grounds and started down a lonely country road; "tell me are you going on a hunt for the *Comet*?"

"Yes," replied the young airman. "I don't know that there is much chance of running down the people who stole the biplane, but they can't sail far without being reported."

"What is their object in stealing it, anyhow?" asked Hiram.

"If you want my honest opinion, I think they are trying to keep us out of the race," replied Dave.

"Oh!" exclaimed his companion, "then you think it's professionals who are at the bottom of this mischief?"

"It was certainly an expert airman who piloted the *Comet* away so snugly," declared Dave. "I believe, though, that he was hired by others."

"Why, Dave, what do you mean?" inquired the puzzled Hiram.

"I can't explain everything to you just now," replied Dave. "I am not trying to throw any air of mystery about this strange disappearance of the *Comet*, but you remember telling me about seeing that schemer, Vernon, come out of the Hampton Flats in the city?"

"Why, yes," assented Hiram, with a start of enlightenment.

"Well, I have reason to believe that he is mixed up with this affair."

"You don't say so! Bound to bother the Bracketts to the last limit, is he?"

"No, I believe his motives lead in an entirely different direction this time," replied Dave, but he would say no more on the topic just then. He resumed: "Of course, we must find the *Comet* by this time to-morrow, or start in the race with another machine."

"Oh, then we'll go anyway?" asked Hiram, brightening up. "Say, that's great!" and he uttered an immense sigh of relief.

"Mr. Brackett has telegraphed for the *Zephyr*, which is at Baltimore," explained Dave. "It will be on the grounds before night."

"Have you any clue as to what has become of the *Comet*?" asked Hiram.

"I have a very strong theory," replied the young aviator. "Whoever made away with the *Comet* did not venture to fly north – too many machines were on their way to the meet, and they would be seen. The manager wired in every direction. An unknown airship was sighted twice, early this morning, both times about fifty miles from Washington, going southwest and making for the mountain districts."

"What do you guess from that, Dave?" inquired Hiram, eagerly.

"I think they are trying to hide or lose the *Comet* until it is too late to start in the race. Of course, hopeless as it may seem, we must try and recover the machine."

"Yes, the *Zephyr* cannot begin to compare with our special machine," said Hiram.

"Besides that," added Dave, "I hope to find out who ran away with the biplane. If Vernon is indeed back of it, that discovery would throw a good deal of light on a certain subject in which I am greatly interested at the present time."

Hiram was prudently silent. He wondered to himself, however, if the subject at which his companion hinted had anything to do with the young lady in the automobile and Dave's visit to the Hampton Flats.

It was about eleven o'clock when the young airman stopped at a town named Wayne. He made a second stop at a little settlement ten miles beyond. The automobile had now gotten well in among the hills, and the scenery had grown wilder and wilder.

"Some airship passed over here just before daylight this morning," Dave finally reported to Hiram.

"Do you know the direction it went in?" asked the latter.

"Yes. We will keep on and make Tarryford. If we get no information there, I guess we will have to give up the hunt."

It was shortly after noon when they passed an old farmhouse. As they whizzed by, Hiram remarked some sheds in ruins, and smoking yet as if recently consumed by fire. He called the attention of his comrade to the fact. They sped on. Less than half a mile accomplished, they saw ahead a steep, high hill. By the side of the road, seated on a level rock, was a man holding a rifle between his knees.

Something about the grim, watchful manner of the farmer attracted the curious attention of both of the boys. Dave brought the machine to a halt at the side of the road.

"Say, my man," he called out, pleasantly, "have you seen or heard of an airship anywhere around here this morning?"

It was quite startling the way the farmer came to his feet. His eyes flashed and he handled his weapon in a menacing way.

"Have I?" he cried, fiercely. "I reckon so, and I'm ready to riddle the troublesome old contraption the minute she shows herself again!"

CHAPTER VII

FOUND

“We’re going to find out something sure,” declared Hiram. “Say, Dave, that man knows something about our machine.”

The young airman leaped from the auto and approached the farmer. The latter stood viewing the newcomers in a surly, suspicious way.

“You say you have seen an airship,” observed Dave. “Where? when?”

The farmer eyed our hero and his companion shrewdly.

“What do you want to know for?” he questioned.

“Well,” answered Dave, bluntly, “someone stole a biplane from the aero field, near Washington, last night, and we are looking for it.”

“Oh, you are?” muttered the man. “Belongs to you, maybe?”

“To a company which we represent.”

“Responsible for damages?” insinuated the farmer, with a shrewd glint in his calculating eyes.

“Is there some damage to account for?” inquired Dave.

“I reckon,” pronounced the man seriously. “Did you happen to notice the last farm down the road?”

“We saw it, mister,” nodded Hiram, impatient to hurry up the man with his disclosures.

“I suppose you saw them smoking ruins. There was a shed, a pigsty and a stack of hay. I don’t reckon fifty dollars would replace them.”

“What has an airship to do with them?” inquired Hiram.

“Everything. See here, just at daylight this morning I came to the back door. I heard a whir and a ping overhead, and I saw an airship going lickety-switch. Just as it passed over the house, someone in it must have thrown a lighted cigar overboard. I didn’t see it fall, but after I had gone into the house and finished dressing and came out again, I saw the airship dropping into the basin on top of Pike Hill up yonder. Then I smelled smoke. I ran around towards the sheds. The stack was blazing. I know it was a cigar that started it, for I found one on the ground where the fire started, and we smoke nothing but corncob pipes around these diggings.”

“And you say the airship landed on top of Pike Hill, as you call it?” inquired Dave. “How do you know that?”

“Say, get up on this rock with me. That’s it. Now then, take a squint past the spur of rock way up near the crest of the hill. See it?”

“Hello!” instantly exclaimed Hiram, in a state of great excitement.

“Why, sure as you live it’s the end of a wing,” declared Dave. “Have you seen anything of the persons running it, mister?”

“No, I haven’t. The way I figure it out is that they ran out of steam. Maybe they thought no one saw them when they flew over the farm. Maybe they’re hiding. Maybe, when they saw me start on guard down here with my rifle, after we’d tried to put the fire out, they were afraid to budge.”

“It is very likely they alighted on account of the lack of gasoline,” Dave said to Hiram. “We didn’t leave much in the tanks last night.”

“That’s so,” assented Hiram. “What are you going to do?”

The young aviator reflected for a moment. Then he turned to the man again.

“See here, mister,” he said, “I must find out the condition of that biplane up there. It may not be ours. If it is, I promise you one thing.”

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