

Foster James H.

Secrets of the Andes



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«Public Domain»

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CHAPTER I

Stranded

“**LOOK!** The bridge is out! Stop the car – quick!” Bob Holton’s voice was unsteady as he gazed ahead at the place of danger.

Acting on the instant, Joe Lewis pushed the brake pedal to the floor and waited breathlessly, his mind filled with thoughts of tragedy.

The wheels of the small automobile locked, but the momentum carried the car on at a sickening pace. Despite the fact that the tires were new, they slipped over the road easily.

An instant later the youths saw that the distance between themselves and the washout was not great enough. In but a few seconds they would be plunging down the embankment into the swollen river.

There was not a moment to lose. Opening the doors as rapidly as possible, the chums jumped from the car and rolled over on the ground, their faces wet with perspiration.

And they were none too soon. The car sped on, reached the edge of the river bank, and then plunged out of sight.

There was a loud splash as it struck the water, and then all was quiet. The sun continued on its downward path, the faint wind played through the trees. Nothing but two lone boys were left to tell of the misfortune.

“Well,” sighed Joe, at last breaking the silence, “we sure had a tough break, didn’t we?”

“Lucky to get off with our lives, though,” Bob reminded him. “That was about the closest shave I’ve ever had. Wonder why the highway commission didn’t put out a sign?”

“Probably didn’t know the bridge was out. Not many cars go over this road, and it would not be exceptional for this to go unnoticed for quite a while.”

“We’ll sure make a report of it,” said Bob, getting to his feet and brushing off his mud-stained trousers.

Joe laughed unwillingly.

“That’ll be like locking the barn after the horse has been stolen,” he grunted. “Come on,” he went on, “let’s go over to the river bank and see if we can catch a glimpse of the coupé.”

The youths walked over and stared into the swiftly moving water. It had rained in torrents two days before, and the river was now almost a rapids.

“Car’s nowhere in sight,” said Joe Lewis gloomily. “But” – his face lighting suddenly – “it’s insured. So I guess there’s no use worrying.”

“Maybe not about the automobile. But how are we going to get back to Washington?”

“We’ll have to hike to the main highway, I guess,” Joe answered. “It’s about five miles away, too.”

The youths were returning to their homes in Washington, D. C., after having spent a delightful week-end in Virginia. Their accident came upon them in a rather out-of-the-way spot, a great number of miles from the city of their destination.

“If it hadn’t been for that hill,” remarked Joe, as he and his friend walked back up the road, “we would have seen this place in time to stop the car.”

“The hill is here, though,” returned Bob with a grim smile. “So that’s that.”

The boys paused a moment at the spot where they had jumped from the doomed automobile. With one last look at the washout, they turned and began climbing the grade.

“Five miles is a good distance to walk,” grunted Joe, “especially when we want to get home before long.”

“That last you said made the first all right,” laughed Bob Holton, “because on the Sahara and in Brazil we often hiked, not five miles, but several times that far without stopping.”

The friends were refreshed after the idle weekend trip and worked their legs like pistons. Despite their serious predicament, they observed the wonders of autumn with the eye of a nature lover.

Leaves of yellow and brown were lying about the ground in profusion, while others on the trees were almost ready to fall. There was a cool afternoon breeze that gave evidence of winter being not far off.

“Think there’s a chance of getting a ride with somebody?” asked Joe, as the youths followed the curving road.

Bob shook his head.

“Fellows in this part of the country are pretty careful about picking up strangers,” he returned. “Too many stick-ups and robberies. Still we might see some soft-hearted person who would not be afraid to take a chance with us.”

“The question is, though,” began Joe, “will we get in with somebody before night? It’s three o’clock now, and we may have to do a great deal of thumbing before anybody will stop and let us in.”

The road wound through a rather isolated section, with only an occasional farmhouse looming up from behind the trees. It was indeed a poor place to be stranded.

The sun was well down to the horizon when the youths finally reached the through highway. Although they had done their best, they had found it difficult to avoid the many large mud puddles that often reached nearly across the road.

“Now to get down to business,” said Bob, gazing far down the highway. “We’ll surely find a car before long that will pick us up.”

“Here comes one now,” observed Joe. “It’ll be here before long. Come on, let’s get out farther.”

The boys waited for the automobile to come nearer. Then they signaled the driver. But the latter appeared to pay no attention to the young men. A moment later the car whizzed on up the road.

Bob and Joe looked at each other. Their faces clearly showed that they expected the worst.

“Could hardly blame him, though,” remarked Bob. “So many innocent-faced crooks walk the highways that it’s unsafe to pick up anyone.”

“But you know the old proverb,” grinned the other youth. “‘If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.’ According to that, we – Look! Here comes another car. Maybe we’ll have better luck this time.”

Again the chums signaled, and were delighted to see that the car was coming to a stop. At a motion from the driver, who was the only occupant, they climbed inside.

“How far ye goin’?” the stranger asked. He was a short, fat man who looked capable of great mirth.

“To Washington,” replied Bob. “We had an accident with our car not far from here.”

“Accident, hey? Not hurt, I hope?”

“No. We were able to jump out in time. You see, we came unexpectedly on a spot where the bridge was washed away. Caused by the recent rain, no doubt.”

“Oh. Tough luck, wasn’t it? And the machine – was it insured?”

“Luckily it was,” replied Joe with a chuckle. “Though we may have trouble in proving it.”

“Fight it to the finish!” said the man, shifting his cud of tobacco to the other side of his mouth. “If you have to, take it to court.”

“I hardly think that will be necessary,” Joe said with a smile. “The insurance company bears a good name.”

“Wonder if this guy’s Scotch?” mused Bob to himself. Only recently the youth had read a good joke about a man of that nationality.

For the next half-hour the three carried on a varied conversation. It was at last broken as they neared a small town.

They had almost entered the city limits when a slowly moving freight train halted them. Reluctantly they settled back and waited.

“This will mean a big loss of time,” remarked Joe, as he gazed far down the track at the seemingly endless string of cars. “I’m anxious to – ”

“Listen!” commanded Bob, leaning forward wonderingly. “Did you hear anything? There it is again.”

“It’s a muffled cry for help, coming from one of those freight cars.” Joe had opened the door of the sedan.

With a parting word for the driver, the youths left the automobile and ran down the track, straining their ears for a repetition of the cry.

“There it is again!” declared Joe. “Sounds like a young boy. In that third freight car up there.”

Summoning all their strength, the youths ran on until they were opposite the box car. It was easy to keep abreast with the train, moving as slowly as it was.

The door was pushed back about three feet, leaving barely enough room for the youths to clamber up into the car. Their efforts were not in vain, however, and soon they found themselves inside.

“Where are you?” called Joe, glancing about at the scores of boxes and barrels.

“Here!” a faint reply came from a far corner.

At once the youths turned in that direction, searching for a passageway between the many objects that filled the car. At last they were within a few feet of the corner. But it was not possible to penetrate farther, for a large pile of heavy crates barred the way.

“Let’s get these to one side,” said Bob, and for the next few minutes the young men worked furiously.

Finally they made an opening sufficient for them to pass through.

“Now we’ll see who’s here,” muttered Joe Lewis.

The youths worked their way through the passage, their eyes trying to pierce the darkness. Suddenly they drew back with a cry of surprise.

CHAPTER II

The Aimless Wanderer

EMERGING from behind a pile of boxes was a small boy, his face black with dirt that looked the product of weeks. The clothes he wore were soiled and torn, and his shoes barely clung to his feet.

“Thanks!” was all he said, as he glanced up shyly at Bob and Joe.

For several seconds the young men stared wonderingly at this forlorn being, as if trying to account for his presence. Finally Bob broke the silence.

“What’s it all about?” he asked. “What are you doing *here*?”

The boy hesitated a moment, looked up at Bob and Joe, and then, satisfied that he could confide in them, spoke.

“I – I was caught behind that stuff,” he stammered. “I hid under a pile of bags when they loaded the car so they wouldn’t find me.”

“But why were you in the car?” demanded Joe. “Where are you going?”

The boy waited a moment before replying.

“I don’t know,” he confessed, dropping his head.

There was something about this youngster’s frankness that moved the youths to pity.

“Come,” urged Bob, laying his hand on the boy’s shoulder, “tell us about it. Why did you run away from home?”

“I didn’t want to go to school, that’s why. Ain’t that reason enough?”

“H’m. Don’t like school, huh? Where do you live?”

“Chicago.”

There were exclamations of surprise from Bob and Joe.

While they gaze at the young lad in wonder, it might be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the first two books of *The Exploration Series*, to tell something about the two youths, and what had been their adventures up to the present time.

Bob Holton, who was generally the leader of the two, was a large, powerful boy of nineteen. His complexion was originally light, but an adventurous life in hot lands had made him bronzed. Wherever he went, he was a prime favorite of all.

Joe Lewis was Bob’s closest friend, the two being almost inseparable. Joe was of medium build and possessed many desirable characteristics. But in a crisis he was never as cool as the other youth.

Fortune favored the boys. Their fathers, Howard Holton and Benjamin Lewis, were noted naturalists, who often wandered to far corners of the globe in search of wild animals for a large Washington museum. The two families thus lived in Washington, their homes being but a few rods apart.

Shortly after Bob and Joe had graduated from high school, they were given an opportunity of accompanying their fathers to little-known Brazil. Here with wild animals and treacherous savages they had many thrilling adventures, which are related in the first volume of this series, *Lost in the Wilds of Brazil*. The boys proved themselves worthy of being called explorers, and the following spring were given another chance to penetrate the unknown.

On the Sahara Desert they encountered more perils and hardships. How, among other things, they endured a terrible sand storm, went for days without water, and finally fought hostile Arabs for freedom, is related in the volume entitled *Captured by the Arabs*.

At the time this story opens, the youths would have been in college had it not been for another proposed scientific trip. The naturalists had finally decided to explore the Andes Mountains in South America, and Bob and Joe were given the permission to accompany the men. The boys had argued

stiffly that such an adventure would benefit them as much as a half-year at college, to which their fathers had finally agreed. Now less than two weeks remained before the expedition would depart.

As we return to Bob and Joe, who stood staring in amazement at the small lad who said his home was in Chicago, we see that Bob is speaking.

“And you came all this distance?” he asked. “How old are you?”

“Twelve.”

“Aren’t you sorry you ran away from home?” queried Joe.

“I ain’t sorry, but I’m goin’ back. That’s where I’m headin’ now.”

“Why did you change your mind?” Bob asked.

“Even school’s better’n goin’ without anything to eat,” the boy said.

For some time Bob and Joe sat staring at the floor. Everything was clear to them now. They were impressed by this little fellow’s resourcefulness in finding his way freely about.

Suddenly Joe glanced up. He had almost forgotten that he was on a moving freight train. The cold sweat burst out on his forehead as he saw that they were now traveling rapidly.

“No chance of getting off now, Bob. I guess we’re in for it. Where does this train go?” he asked the boy.

“Chicago,” was the response. “That’s where this car is headed for. I made sure before I got in it.”

Bob grunted.

“We’re booked for a ride, I guess,” he said. “Still there may be a chance of getting off at some town not far from here.”

“That’s what we’ll hope for,” the other youth said, nodding. He turned to the lad. “Can you find your way home after you reach Chicago?”

“Sure. This ain’t the first time I’ve run away. Gettin’ back ain’t what worries me.”

“What does?” inquired Joe.

“My old man. He’ll be mad enough to bite nails. Bet he’s got the razor strop hangin’ up now waitin’ for me.”

Bob and Joe smiled. The personality of this waif touched them.

“Bob Holton is my name, and this is my friend, Joe Lewis.”

A small hand was extended.

“I’m Spike Weaver, the son of a horse thief.”

The youths burst out in laughter.

“A horse thief?”

“Yes,” the boy said. “That’s what the old man used to be. I’m not onto him now, I been away from home so much.”

Another outburst of laughter followed. The youths were beginning to take a liking to this small wanderer.

One thing stood out in the young men’s minds: the family to which this boy belonged was evidently of a very low type morally. Little wonder that young Spike had turned out to be a worthless ne’er-do-well. There was apparently little hope for his future.

“Why don’t you go to school and try to make something out of yourself?” asked Bob. “Wouldn’t you like to be a big business man, or doctor, or merchant, or *naturalist*?”

“What’s that?” the lad asked.

“A naturalist is a scientist who travels to little-known places to collect wild animals for a museum or college,” explained Bob.

There was a glint of interest in young Spike’s eyes. He had absorbed this definition eagerly.

“Does he shoot with a big rifle, and camp out?” Spike demanded.

“That’s exactly what he does,” Bob replied. “And he usually has plenty of adventures, too.”

“Boy! That sounds swell! Wonder what it feels like to fire one of them guns.”

“Feels all right after you get used to it,” Joe said.

“How do you know?” Spike asked, as though he felt that Joe was talking of something that he knew nothing about.

“My friend has fired them,” explained Bob. “And so have I.”

At once the lad was all excitement.

“You’ve really hunted wild animals? Tell me about it.”

During the next hour Bob and Joe related some of their experiences in Brazil and North Africa, while their newly made young friend listened breathlessly. By the expressions on his face they knew that he was absorbing every word with interest. When they had finished, his admiration for them was beyond expression.

“Gee! You two are real naturalists,” he said.

“Not yet,” corrected Bob, “though we hope to be some day. To be a naturalist you must go through college and get your lessons every day. But it isn’t hard if you want to like it.”

For a time young Spike seemed lost in thought. Finally he roused himself and turned to his friends.

“I’m goin’ home and go to school, so I can be a naturalist,” he said conclusively. “And then maybe I can have a lot of fun huntin’ and campin’, like you fellows do. I always did want to do that.”

Bob and Joe glanced at each other. Did this lad’s decision mean anything, or was it merely a childish notion? At least they had induced him to attend school temporarily.

Joe started to speak, but Spike silenced him.

“Look!” he cried. “We’re comin’ to a stop. This must be a town.”

The boy was right. The train was gradually slowing up at a spot where the track had branched into several switches. At last it came to a full stop.

“Now’s our chance to get off,” declared Joe. “We – ”

“Keep still,” hissed Bob. “Somebody’s coming down the track. It may be a railroad policeman, or ‘bull,’ as the hoboes call them.”

“Let’s hide behind these boxes,” suggested Joe. “He may be coming in here.”

Quickly, yet quietly, the three concealed themselves in a corner of the box car. Then they waited.

The sound of someone walking grew louder, and the next moment a man stopped at the side of the box car. There was the sound of a door rolling forward, and then the click of a chain. Less than a minute later he was on his way up the tracks.

Hastily the hideaways slipped out from behind the boxes and into the center of the car.

Bob uttered an exclamation of dismay.

“That fellow locked the door!” he cried. “We’re trapped!”

CHAPTER III

Helplessly Trapped

SPIKE uttered a cry of fright, while Joe dashed forward to make sure that his friend was right. As Bob had said, the railroad man had fastened the door securely. There was an opening of about eight inches, across which was a heavy chain that terminated at a large lock. In order to cut the chain, a file would be necessary.

Of the three prisoners, Spike was the first to resume his natural attitude. Perhaps this was due to his wide experience in riding freight trains. At any rate he seemed to forget his plight and resign himself over to any fate.

“Tough luck!” the lad said. “Guess you guys will have to ride with me to Chicago. May be several days before we can get anything to eat, too.”

“That’s the worst part about it,” lamented Bob. “It may be days, or even weeks, before we’ll reach our destination.”

Bob and Joe were inclined to be downhearted, but their young friend was cheerful.

“Don’t you worry,” he consoled them. “I’ve been in tight fixes like this many a time, and I’ve always got out all right. One time I went out West and got locked in just like we are now.”

Young Spike sounded like an experienced vagabond, and the youths could not help laughing.

“How did you get out?” asked Joe, after the laugh had subsided.

“It was easy. When we stopped at a town I just waited for some hobo to come along. Somehow he got ahold of a file and had me out in a jiffy. Hoboes are good to do anything like that for you.”

“Let’s hope history will repeat itself,” muttered Bob, who, along with Joe, did not like the prospects of a trip to Chicago.

Less than ten minutes later there was a slight jar, and the train started moving. Although pulled by a large engine, there was little chance of high speed, for a line of cars over a half-mile long stretched far down the track.

Bob, Joe, and Spike crowded before the crack to catch a glimpse of the town at which they had stopped. But aside from a number of freight cars and old buildings, there was little to be seen.

“Suppose we arrange boxes in front of what little opening there is,” suggested Joe. “We may as well amuse ourselves by looking out.”

“That reminds me,” burst out Spike. “I want to see if anything in this car has stuff to eat in it.”

He at once began a search of the many boxes, bales, and crates that were packed in each end of the car. Suddenly he gave a cry of delight.

“Here’s apples!” he cried excitedly. “Gee whiz! Who says we don’t eat?”

But the fruit was in tightly nailed crates, which could not be easily opened.

“Come here, fellows!” shouted Spike. “Give me a hand! You don’t expect *me* to open ’em when there’s big guys like you around, do you?”

“Wait a minute!” commanded Bob. “Whose apples are they?”

“Whose are they? I don’t know. Why?”

“Do you think it’s right to get in a box car and eat up somebody’s apples?”

“Ah, gee whiz! You ain’t gonna back out of a chance like this, are you? Come on. Be a sport.”

Bob stoutly refused.

“We’re not going to open any boxes or crates around here, and you’re not either! Get that and get it straight! Of course if we have to, to keep from starving, we will. But not now.”

Against this stout protest there was no use persisting, and Spike finally walked sullenly back to his seat before the slightly open door.

“You guys sure are the berries,” he said with an ironic smile. “You’ll never get anywhere that way.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” Joe corrected him. “We will and you won’t, unless you get such notions out of your head.”

“Ah, blooey!”

A half-hour of silence followed, during which time the three gazed absently out, watching the farms, the forests, the rivers and creeks slip by. They were beginning to enter the Appalachian Mountains, and more of natural beauty promised to be visible.

But Bob and Joe did not care to observe the beauties of nature just then. Their thoughts were dwelling on the probabilities of the future. What lay in store for them? Would they be able to get home in time to accompany their fathers to the Andes Mountains, or would fate rule that they remain for an indefinite period in this box car? If the truth were known, the youths were not a little worried.

Darkness was beginning to enshroud the travelers, and the necessity of making improvised beds moved them to action. There was a large pile of burlap sacks in a far corner of the car. These they arranged a short distance from the partly open door.

“I don’t think these bags are inhabited,” smiled Joe. “They look almost brand-new. At any rate we’ll take a chance with them.”

“We’ll have to,” agreed Bob, who realized the necessity of a rest after such an arduous day.

However, the travelers spent an hour or so longer gazing out at the dim outlines of the mountains. Although Bob and Joe were tired, they had an uneasy feeling about resigning themselves over to sleep. Something unexpected might happen during the night.

Finally Bob arose and walked over to his bunk.

“Suppose we turn in,” he suggested. “We may need plenty of energy tomorrow. It’s possible for almost anything to happen, you know.”

Joe nodded and took his place beside his friend, but Spike announced that he would remain up awhile longer.

Almost at once the youths fell asleep. But from their experiences in dangerous lands they had learned to keep one eye open as a precaution.

This proved to be unnecessary, however, and they awoke the next morning greatly refreshed.

“We’re on the other side of the mountains,” observed Joe, as he stretched and glanced out of the crack.

“Now maybe we can make better time,” Bob said, moving over to the door.

The three travelers were forced to begin the day without breakfast. Spike insisted that they open the crates of apples, but Bob firmly refused.

“We may find some way out today,” the youth consoled him. “If we have to, we can eat a few of those apples tonight.”

All morning the train continued on its journey, passing small towns and villages. Along toward noon it stopped at Charleston, West Virginia, where after an hour of switching it was left on a side track.

Suddenly Joe, who was standing by the crack, caught sight of a trainman not far away. The man’s face was rather pleasant, with no trace of gruffness.

“There’s a chance,” Joe said. “Let’s ask him to help us out.”

“No, don’t,” pleaded Spike, pulling Joe back.

“Why not?”

“Cause if he gets you out he won’t let me keep in this car to Chicago.”

“But what about Bob and me? We don’t want to ride all that distance.”

“No. Go ahead and call him,” directed Bob, who was moving up to the door. “Spike can find another car that’s going to Chicago. We want to get home.”

Disregarding the lad's protest, Joe shouted and motioned for the man to come to the box car. There was a look of surprise on the fellow's face as he moved over to where the three were trapped.

"What's it all about?" he demanded. "You guys trying to steal a ride, huh? Come on out of there and pick a car that ain't got anything in it."

"We can't get out," explained Joe. "Locked in, I guess. That's what we wanted of you. See if you can get the door open."

"Oh! So they penned you up, huh? Yeah. I see that locked chain now. Sorry, but I'm afraid I can't do anything for you."

"But – but we've got to get out," Joe said persistently. "We haven't had anything to eat for quite a while."

The man hesitated a moment.

"Got any money?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Let's see it."

Joe held up a half-dollar.

"O.K. There's a grocery a block from here. Want me to get you something?"

Delighted at such a chance, Joe instructed the trainman to purchase several articles of food that would be sufficient to last for several days. It was with a feeling of high hope that the youths watched the man walk in the direction of the store.

In less than fifteen minutes he was back and handed Joe a sack of groceries in return for money. In recognition for his service, the youth tipped him generously.

"Now for a delicious meal," said Bob, smacking his lips. "And will we eat!"

The boys *did* eat, and felt much better for it. When they had scraped up the last crumb, they stretched out on the burlap sacks.

The remainder of the day passed without incident. Darkness was just setting in when, with a slight jerk, the train started moving.

Even though they had expected an undisturbed sleep, Bob and Joe were delighted that they were again on their way. Every mile left behind would mean that they were nearer Chicago, which was perhaps the only city at which they could hope to escape from their prison.

"Let's hope we make good time now," breathed Bob, as he and his friends turned in, to get what sleep a rumbling train would allow them.

All through the night the freight rattled on, this time much faster than before. Although several stops were made, the train made unusually good time, pulling into Cincinnati late the next morning.

"Here's where we'll have to wait," said Joe. "They might keep us switched here for several days."

Almost at once their box car was sidetracked, and was not moved until late the next day. About four o'clock another engine was attached, a much shorter train being formed. Then slowly it pulled off the switch and found a through track.

Bob and Joe could hardly believe their eyes. Were they to leave Cincinnati so soon?

An hour later this question was answered. The boys found themselves speeding along to Chicago, after having remained on the switch less than twenty-four hours.

"I suppose we'll stop at every town and small city in Indiana," said Bob gloomily. "Even though this is a fast freight, a delay will be almost inevitable."

The youth was right. It was nearly three days later when the train entered the city limits of Chicago. Gary and other cities of the Calumet district had been left behind.

After what seemed like hours of constant travel in the metropolis, the freight stopped at a busy switch yard, where scores of trains were moving in all directions.

Suddenly Bob cried out in delight as he caught sight of a man walking up the track. The youth recognized this fellow as the one who had snapped the lock on the box-car door, making the young men and Spike prisoners on the train.

Bob at once called the man, who, upon hearing, turned about in surprise.

“Why – what – what are you doing in that car?” he demanded angrily, as he caught sight of the youth.

“We want to get out!” Bob’s voice was cool and determined.

“But how did you get in there? I thought I locked that door. I – ”

“Let us out and we’ll tell you all about it,” Bob pleaded.

The man pulled a bunch of keys out of his pocket and immediately unlocked the door. Bob hurriedly rolled it open and jumped out, followed by Joe and young Spike.

It was good to feel their feet on the ground again. Bob and Joe could have cried out in joy. But there was little time to do this, for the trainman demanded an explanation of their presence.

Briefly Bob narrated the circumstances that led to their boarding the train, shielding Spike as much as possible. When he had finished, the man viewed the young lad critically.

“I think I’ll turn you over to the yard master,” he said to Spike, “and see that you get what’s coming to you.”

He roughly caught hold of the boy’s arm and pulled him forward.

“Wait a minute,” begged Joe. “Spike didn’t do any harm. He’s promised to quit running around and go home and go to school.”

“Well, he ain’t gonna get no sympathy from me. I got no use for a kid that rides freights.”

He gave the boy another pull, this time so violent that the latter slipped and fell, bruising his face on the cinders.

Bob grew furiously angry. He stepped boldly up to the trainman.

“Let the boy alone!” he demanded, his eyes seeming to penetrate the man.

CHAPTER IV

The Surly Trainman

BEFORE the blaze in Bob's eyes the man shrank back, hesitated a moment, and then turned in the direction of the freight station.

"All right," he snarled. "But don't let me catch the kid around here again, or you either."

He walked up the track to the end of the train, then disappeared behind the engine.

"Gee, that was swell of you," said Spike to Bob. "You sure had that guy scared."

"He was glad enough to get out of it," laughed Joe. "Old Bob wouldn't have left a grease spot of him."

"But now," began Bob, anxious to turn this tribute aside, "let's figure out what to do. I suppose the only thing –"

"I want to get home," Spike interrupted. "I may have something comin' to me, but the sooner I get it over, the better."

"Where do you live?" Joe asked.

"Only about a half-mile from here."

Joe got a piece of paper and pencil out of his pocket. He tore off one corner and wrote down the address of himself and his friend. This he gave to Spike.

"Here," he said. "Write us a letter some time. Now where do you live?"

Spike told him, and then, with a warm good-bye, he left the youths and hurried down the track.

Bob and Joe watched the lad until he disappeared from view. Even after they lost sight of him, they stood gazing in that direction until a locomotive whistle roused them.

"He's a good kid, all right," smiled Bob. "Might be an aimless wanderer, but he has a lot in him."

"Got a keen sense of humor, too," said Joe, and then added: "I wonder if he'll really go to school and make something out of himself, as he said he would?"

"Hard telling. A lot can happen to change his mind, you know."

For several minutes Bob and Joe watched the busy scene about the tracks. Finally a factory whistle from afar prompted Joe to glance at his watch.

"Nearly two o'clock," he announced. "Come on. Let's hurry down to the freight station and see if we can send a telegram to our folks. If we hadn't lost the car in that river, we would have been home several days ago."

The youths moved down to the building and went inside. After making several inquiries they finally found the main office, where they were permitted to send a telegram. Then they left the building and walked in the direction of the street.

"Good old Chicago," smiled Joe. "It's only been a couple of months since we were here."

Bob stopped suddenly.

"That reminds me," he started. "We came here with our dads to see a Mr. Wallace, who's with the Museum of Natural History, didn't we? And this Mr. Wallace is planning on going with our dads' expedition to the Andes Mountains, isn't he? Do you suppose he's left for Washington yet?"

Joe's face lightened.

"I see what you mean," he said. "We can go and see him, and incidentally we can borrow enough money to get home on. Suppose we go to the museum now."

The boys were familiar with Chicago and had no difficulty in taking a street car. After a half-hour's ride they got off within a few squares of the museum. A ten-minute walk brought them to the main entrance.

At the office they made inquiries about Mr. Wallace and finally found him in a laboratory on the second floor. He smiled broadly as he recognized Bob and Joe.

“Well, this is an unexpected pleasure,” he said, extending his hand. “What, may I ask, are you fellows doing in Chicago? Why aren’t you getting ready for that Andes expedition?”

“It isn’t our fault that we’re here,” laughed Bob, and then proceeded to tell of the events that led to their presence. “Since we finally landed here, we thought we’d come to the museum and see if you had left for Washington yet,” he concluded.

“A strange chain of circumstances,” the scientist breathed. “Not many could go through all that in the course of a few days. No doubt it was your first experience as hoboes, was it not?”

“First and last,” returned Joe. “We’ve had all we want of it. But now,” he went on, “when are you going to Washington? The expedition leaves in little more than a week.”

“I had planned to go day after tomorrow,” Mr. Wallace said. “I think everything will be in readiness by that time. I’d like to spend at least three days in Washington talking with your fathers and others of the expedition before sailing. Of course you fellows are familiar with the details of the expedition, are you not?”

“Quite the contrary,” returned Bob. “You see, when the matter was first mentioned, about a month ago, there was not much known about it. Our dads declined to say much, because they were not absolutely sure they were going. Joe and I, though, had a sort of feeling that they *were* going, and finally got permission to stay out of college at least a half-year.”

“So you could go with the expedition?” interrupted the scientist.

Bob nodded.

“We figured we’d get as much good out of such a trip as we could get in a university,” he explained. “Then, too, there’s a chance of making money by taking motion pictures, as we did on our other expeditions.”

“I think you did wisely,” Mr. Wallace said. “It usually isn’t good for a fellow to get out of college too young. When an extraordinary chance like this turns up, it’s best to take it.”

He motioned for the boys to follow him into his office, where several chairs were arranged about the desk. A large bookcase occupied a whole end of the room, while opposite it was a case of instruments and preservatives.

“Sit down,” he directed them, “and we’ll talk over this Peruvian expedition.”

Bob and Joe did as directed, glad of the chance to rest their tired limbs.

Mr. Wallace procured an atlas, opened it to a map of Peru, and drew an imaginary line in the lower right-hand corner.

“Here’s Cuzco,” he pointed out. “We’ll probably make it or some other near-by city our base. From there we’ll go into the Andes Mountains on our varied scientific quests.”

“But what – what is the main purpose of the expedition?” inquired Joe. “Of course, you and Mr. Holton and Dad are naturalists, who want to get specimens of animal life. But that isn’t the chief aim of the expedition, is it?”

“No. It is being sent out by the division of ethnology at the museum in Washington. The scientists in that field have in mind mainly to study the ruins of the vanished Inca civilization. Those Indians, you know, that built so many marvelous works of architecture. That’s about as much as I know about them, though,” he laughed. “My line runs straight through the field of natural history and zoölogy, and incidentally anatomy, histology, taxonomy, embryology, ecology – ”

“That’s enough!” interrupted Bob, smiling sheepishly. “You don’t expect Joe and me to be acquainted with all those subjects, do you? We’re pretty good shots, but as scientists we’re as yet a complete flop.”

A general laugh ensued, after which the naturalist again pointed to the map.

“We are to explore the region northwest of Lake Titicaca,” he continued. “I understand there are some very high peaks in this range, all the way from ten to twenty thousand feet in altitude.”

“These Incas,” started Joe, “when did they live? It hasn’t been so very long ago, has it?”

“Not as time is usually thought of. The sixteenth century witnessed their downfall. This was at the time of the Spanish South American explorations, you know.”

“Those Spaniards sure saw something unusual and unexpected,” remarked Bob. “This mountainous region was chock-full of architectural wonders, all built by the Incas.”

“Something tells me we’ll see sights, all right,” said Joe. “It will be good to get away from home again – into the unknown, I mean. And that reminds me. Would it be possible for you to lend us enough money to get back to Washington?”

“Why – of course. How much do you need?”

“Fifty dollars will pull us through. Perhaps we can get along on less than that,” was the answer from Bob.

“All right. I’ll see that you get it. But wait! I expect to go day after tomorrow with a friend, who is driving East on business. There will be plenty of room for two more. You fellows don’t have to get home at once, do you?”

“No, we don’t have to,” returned Joe. “We – ”

“Suppose you be my guests until then. I’ll be only too glad to have you. In the meantime we can be discussing the coming expedition.”

“We’d sort of hate to do that,” Bob said. “It will mean a lot of trouble to you.”

“Forget it! I’ll be only too glad to have you.”

“Well, all right, if you – ” Joe began.

“We’ll call it settled,” Mr. Wallace said. “And now, since my day is practically over, we may as well go to the house. That is, if you’re ready.”

“We’re ready any time,” Bob told him.

The three went outside, to a place where the naturalist’s automobile was parked. All got inside and drove through the city till they came to a beautiful suburb.

“Here’s my place,” said Mr. Wallace, pointing to a large house of rather costly design.

Inside, the youths were introduced to Mrs. Wallace, who made them feel perfectly at home.

“I hate to see Mr. Wallace leave on an expedition,” she said, “but I can appreciate his interest in science. In fact, I have often wished I could accompany him. Be a sort of Mrs. Martin Johnson, you know.”

“I wish our mothers were like that,” laughed Bob. “If they were, perhaps Joe and I wouldn’t have so much difficulty in getting their consent to go with our dads.”

A bountiful dinner was soon served, Bob and Joe eating heartily.

“And now I have a surprise for you,” Mr. Wallace said, when the meal was over. “It is something I know we all will enjoy, especially in view of what is to come.”

The young men looked inquiring.

CHAPTER V

As Guests of the Naturalist

“**WHAT** is the surprise?” inquired Joe Lewis anxiously.

“This: I made arrangements for a movie to be shown – purely for our own benefit,” the naturalist explained. “It deals with Peru and the Andes.”

“The region we’re going to explore!” cried Joe, delighted beyond words. “Why, that will be wonderful!”

“I’ve never seen it,” Mr. Wallace said. “But the chances are it will be good. Perhaps we had better go before long. It is to be shown at eight o’clock, and we haven’t a great deal of time to get down there.”

“Where?” inquired Bob.

“To the museum – in the auditorium,” was the response.

Mrs. Wallace asked that she be permitted to go also, and the others consented at once. The wonderful civilization of the ancient Inca Indians she knew not a little about.

At the museum they found several score people waiting for the movie to be shown. There was a friendly gathering for a half-hour or so, at which Mr. Wallace introduced a number of scientist friends from the museum and Chicago universities.

Then the lights were switched off and the movie was projected. It proved everything and more that Bob and Joe had expected, showing the fascinating country of Peru.

The shy Indians with their flat “pancake” hats, the curious llamas and alpacas, the magnificent heights of the mighty Andes, the many old ruins of the Incas – all these and more were depicted on the screen.

It was very inspiring, especially to the boys and Mr. Wallace, who were delighted that before long they would be able actually to visit those wonderful places.

During the drive home the naturalist’s conversation was directed chiefly about this inspiring country, his excitement being almost like that of a small boy. But if the naturalist was impressed, the youths were still more. They longed for the great day to come when they would leave for the wonderland of Peru.

It was so late when they arrived at the Wallace residence that the youths and their hosts decided to retire at once.

“I’m not going to the museum today,” announced the naturalist the next morning at breakfast. “There is so much that has to be done in the way of preparing for the coming expedition that I won’t have time for anything else.”

“If there’s anything Joe and I can do for you, we’ll be glad to do it,” said Bob. “Our preparations won’t begin until we get back to Washington.”

The young men proved to be of valuable service to the scientist. Their previous experience in preparing for exploration ventures enabled them to offer valuable suggestions to Mr. Wallace, even though the latter had made numerous trips for the good of science.

The vast resources of the great metropolis enabled them to find anything that the naturalist needed in the way of outdoor equipment. All that day and half of the next were spent in the business district.

“Now if you fellows like sport, as I do, what do you say about a little target practice?” Mr. Wallace asked them, after the noon lunch.

“What do we say?” Joe was overjoyed. “Lead us to it!”

In the extreme rear of the lawn was a large rifle range. Here, with the guns that Mr. Wallace generously furnished, they took turns exercising their skill at the trigger. Bob easily placed himself above the others by striking the very heart of the bull's-eye.

"I thought I was a fair shot," smiled the scientist. "But you have me beat by a mile."

"Just happened that I hit it, I guess," Bob said modestly.

But when he again was able to send a bullet almost directly over the first one, the others knew that it did not just happen.

"Wonderful to be such a shot," remarked Mr. Wallace. "I suppose it has been the secret of your emerging unharmed from the unknown, hasn't it?" he said laughing.

"Trying to kid me, are you?" smiled Bob. "Joe and I may be green, but another expedition or two will make us full-fledged explorers. At least we hope so."

Mr. Wallace grinned.

"That's what we all think," he said. "But the fact is, we never do get to be what you call full-fledged explorers. I've been on a good many expeditions, but I don't know much even now. To me it's interesting that I got my start in scout work. The Boy Scout organization is one of the greatest on the globe."

"So did we, to a certain extent," said Bob. "Although the fact that our dads are explorers perhaps accounted for a still earlier interest."

The youths and the naturalist spent the better part of the afternoon on the rifle range. Then they went to the house, where in Mr. Wallace's extensive library they read still more about Peru and the Andes.

That evening they spent quietly, for the next day they were to start on the trip to Washington. The naturalist's friend, with whom they were to drive to the East, was to come after them early the next morning.

And early it was. Too early for the youths and Mr. Wallace, who had barely finished breakfast. But they were packed and ready, and so lost no time in getting their belongings together.

The friend, whose name was Wilson, was a newspaper man, often traveling East in the interest of his profession. He was good-natured and talkative, at once taking a liking to Bob and Joe.

When everything was in readiness, Bob and Joe and the men took their places in Mr. Wilson's automobile and, with a warm farewell to Mrs. Wallace, started down the driveway.

Soon the youths would be home – and on their way to the mysterious Andes!

CHAPTER VI

The Big Surprise

AS the automobile sped toward the thoroughfare, Bob and Joe settled back for the long ride. Now that they were at last heading for Washington, the boys were becoming impatient, although they had enjoyed the last few days immensely.

Until after they had left Chicago, Mr. Wilson was rather quiet, bending his efforts solely on managing the car. But when the metropolis had disappeared from view, he inquired about his friends' expedition into the Andes Mountains.

"Perhaps I'm not much of an adventurer, but somehow I wouldn't care for that sort of a life," he laughed, after Mr. Wallace had related the outlines of the expedition. "I wouldn't mind taking a trip to that place – put up at a hotel, or the like. But when it comes to straying off the traveled road, well –" He stopped meaningly.

Bob laughed.

"It's a good thing people aren't all alike," he said. "If they were, either the wilds or the civilized places would be filled to capacity."

Although the youths were anxious to reach their destination, they found the drive East interesting, even though they had made it before. Their attention was so held by the many interesting sights that, almost before knowing it, they found themselves in Pittsburgh, after having eaten a lunch several hours before. In the business district they engaged rooms in a small but comfortable hotel.

If Mr. Wilson and the naturalist were tired, the youths were not. They insisted on taking a look at Pittsburgh, which they had not seen for many months. An hour or two of looking around and they would return to the hotel, remarked Bob.

During that time the young men found much to hold their interest. The great fiery blast furnaces, the towering skyscrapers, the crowds of pleasure seekers, and the lights of river boats all kept them gay with amusement.

At last, when they finally made themselves return to the hotel, they found that their friends had gone. Evidently the lure of a great city was too much for them.

"And Mr. Wilson said he was dead tired," said Joe with a smile.

"They're no different from us," said Bob. "Want to keep on the go, I guess."

Mr. Wallace and his friend did not return until late, much to the amusement of the youths. Both men wore a sheepish look as they caught sight of Bob and Joe.

"Sorry, but we just had to get out," grinned the newspaper man, walking drowsily through the lobby. "Couldn't stand it to stay inside."

"Perhaps you'll pay the penalty of oversleeping," laughed Joe, "and we won't get started until late."

Joe proved wrong, however, for early the next morning they were up making ready to resume the journey. From Pittsburgh the traveling promised to be slower, owing to the increased traffic and mountainous country. But Mr. Wilson was determined to make good time, and did, reaching York, Pennsylvania, at one o'clock.

Here the youths and the naturalist were to take their leave, while the newspaper man would continue to New York City. Had he not been in a great hurry he would have insisted on driving them on to Washington. As it was, his business prevented his doing so.

With a hearty farewell, the boys and Mr. Wallace left his car and made their way to a railroad station, where they boarded a train for the nation's capital.

An hour and a half of traveling brought them to Baltimore, and now the youths began to feel that they were in home territory. In this city a delay was inevitable, but at last the train resumed its journey to Washington, which it reached in due time.

Since Mr. Wallace and the boys had not known exactly when they would arrive, they had not expected anyone to meet them at the station. But much to their surprise they found that Mr. Holton and Mr. Lewis were waiting for them when they went down from the tracks.

“Boys!” cried Mr. Holton excitedly. “And there’s Wallace, too. How are you, old man?”

There followed a wild shaking of hands, patting of backs, and general welcome, in which Mr. Wallace took as large a part as the others.

“How did you know we would come on that train?” inquired Bob wonderingly. “Mr. Wallace didn’t tell you, did he?”

“Not exactly,” Mr. Lewis returned, picking up a suitcase. “But he said you would probably get near Washington today, and that York, Pennsylvania, would be your junction point. So Howard” – referring to Mr. Holton – “and I called up the station to find out when the train would get in. We were here this morning, when the early one arrived.”

The newcomers were led to Mr. Holton’s car, which was parked a short distance away. Glad of the chance to relax, the youths and Mr. Wallace threw themselves tiredly into the seats.

As mentioned previously, the respective homes of Bob and Joe were located next door to each other, almost at the edge of the city. They were not of costly design, but were comparatively new and pleasing.

Mr. Holton had barely brought the car to the curb when the boys’ mothers, along with Bob’s small brother and Joe’s sister, came out to meet them. There followed another greeting, if anything warmer than the first. Mr. Wallace, upon being introduced, received a hearty welcome. It might be added that he was to remain with either the Holtons or the Lewises until the expedition would depart for South America.

“Now tell us what happened,” urged Mrs. Lewis, Joe’s mother, when everyone had assembled in the living room of the Holton home.

Briefly Bob related the adventures of himself and his friend, from the time they lost the car in the river to the present. He told of coming to the washed-out bridge, of the forced abandoning of Joe’s coupé, and of boarding the freight train where Spike Weaver was trapped. The forced ride to Chicago, the calling on Mr. Wallace, and the eventful days that followed were described fully, while the others listened breathlessly.

“Quite an experience,” commented Mr. Holton, when his son had finished. “Not many could have gone through it all.”

The friendly gathering lasted until late that afternoon. As there was no use making further preparations for the coming expedition, all but Bob and Joe took it easy. The youths, however, thought it best to notify the insurance company about losing Joe’s car.

At request, the company agreed to send out an investigator without delay. He arrived as soon as was promised and asked that Bob and Joe accompany him to the spot where the car plunged into the river.

When they arrived at the familiar spot, Bob and Joe were not surprised to see that workmen were repairing the washed-out bridge. The men were aware that a car was at the river bottom.

“I’ll take a few notes,” said the insurance man. “Then we’ll go back. And let me assure you that this matter will be looked after promptly.”

Back at their homes, Bob and Joe were surprised to see a tall young man of perhaps twenty-five conversing with the three naturalists in the Holton library.

Mr. Lewis looked up suddenly as he caught sight of his son and Bob.

“We’ve a surprise for you,” he said smiling. “Part of the Andes expedition is going by airplane.”

CHAPTER VII

Off for the Andes

THE surprise of Bob and Joe was almost inconceivable. They stood staring for several seconds before either seemed to grasp the full significance of the naturalist's words.

"Airplane? Going by airplane?" gasped Joe. "How come?"

His father laughed.

"We expected to see you fellows startled," Mr. Lewis said. "But that you would show such unusual astonishment we did not in the least anticipate." He turned to the stranger. "This," he went on, addressing the youth, "is Mr. Karl Sutman, who is going to take several members of the expedition in his airplane, or rather monoplane. Karl, I want you to meet Bob Holton and Joe Lewis, the young men we were just talking about."

"Glad to know you, fellows," the aviator greeted, extending a hand.

"Pleased to meet you, Mister –" Bob began, but was interrupted.

"*Karl*, if you don't mind," the tall man laughed. "I don't care for that 'mister' stuff. First name fits me good enough."

"Good enough for us, too," said Joe with a smile. "Call us Bob and Joe."

These informalities tended to bring about a feeling of friendliness which was noticeable in the conversation that followed.

"Will you please explain how it all came about?" asked Bob. "This airplane stuff almost took Joe and me off our feet."

"Off your feet you'll be in a few days," chuckled the aviator. "That is if you ginks are picked out to go with me in the plane."

"If there's any air traveling, we want to be in on it," Bob assured him. "But –" he hesitated a moment – "how did it all come about?"

"I'll tell you," Mr. Lewis said. "Karl's dad and I are very good friends – have been for many years. Now when Karl learned of this coming expedition, he at once looked me up and offered to take part of us in his monoplane. All that he'll charge will be for the gas and oil, and he'll pay a share of that. The fact that he is a licensed transport pilot makes the whole thing a pretty safe venture."

"And I've had six hundred hours of flying – without a single mishap," Karl added proudly. "The monoplane I own is one of the fastest and most efficient machines there are. It'll do a hundred and fifty miles an hour with no trouble at all."

"Sounds well enough," smiled Joe. "Tell us some more."

During the next few minutes the young aviator explained in detail the plans made for the trip. His machine, he said, could carry four passengers and the pilot, and there was a possibility of adding one more. Just who those passengers were to be, the others could decide. The course they would follow he had mapped out carefully, taking into consideration the possibility of having to land at any time. Norfolk, Virginia, would be the last large American city they would see. From there they would proceed south over the Bahama Islands and Cuba, and then on to the north coast of South America. At Bogotá, Colombia, a stop would probably be made for fuel. They would then continue along the coast mountains (Andes) over Colombia, Ecuador, and into Peru. At Mollendo, a small but important coast town, the air travelers would wait to join the other members of the expedition, who would arrive several days later by steamship.

When Karl had finished, the youths were overflowing with enthusiasm. Their imaginations had been captivated by the prospects of a unique air trip into the Andes. That they could accompany Karl they sincerely hoped.

“Of course,” began Joe, addressing his father, “Bob and I will be among the passengers, will we not?”

Mr. Lewis looked grave. He did not have any too much faith in aviation.

“We’ll see,” he replied. “Your mothers will have to give their consent, you know. It may prove difficult to get that.”

“I think we can bring them around,” Bob said, with an optimism that he was far from feeling, “especially if you and Dad decide to go. And you will, won’t you?”

“Impossible for me to do so,” returned Mr. Lewis. “I’ve already made reservations on a steamship. As for Mr. Holton, he may make arrangements to go.”

“But right now,” started Karl, rising, “how would you fellows” – referring to Bob and Joe – “like to come with me out to the airport? I want to show you the ’plane.”

“Lead us there!” cried Joe at once. “We want to take in everything.”

The youths’ fathers had been to the airport the previous day, and so did not care to go again. The boys and Mr. Wallace, however, desired to see the monoplane, especially since there was a chance of their becoming passengers.

It was nearly noon, but the four decided to leave at once. They could get a lunch somewhere else, perhaps at the airport.

“Besides, we’re not hungry,” explained Joe, when the others asked that they leave an hour later. “Excitement and activity make us forget all about eating.”

At the airport the youths and Mr. Wallace were taken to a corner of the field, just off the cement runway. There, before their eyes, was a large white monoplane, shining brightly with a coat of fresh paint.

“Ain’t it a dandy?” Karl was beaming all over with pride. “Just been completely inspected. It’s just r’arin’ to go!”

They walked up to the machine to examine it at close quarters.

“Sure a peach for looks,” commented Joe. “Got an air-cooled motor, too. How about getting inside?”

“Go ahead. You’ll find it as accommodating as a street car.”

“It’s all of that,” agreed Bob a moment later, when he had opened the door and stepped into the cabin. “Those comfortable deep seats appeal to me.”

“Seats aren’t as important in an airplane as in a bus,” laughed Karl. “No bumps in the air.”

On either side of the cabin were two chairs, placed several feet apart. In the middle of the floor was a small folding table, which the boys guessed had been placed there by Karl as a convenience to members of the expedition. A wide glass window separated the pilot’s cockpit from the passenger section, and the two were connected by a telephone apparatus. Three large windows were in each wall, which was slightly curving near the ceiling. At the rear was a large compartment for food, maps, and other equipment.

“Now that you’ve looked it over, how would you like to go up for a short ride?” the aviator asked, as the others examined the ship minutely.

“Like nothing better!” came from Bob. “Can we go now?”

“Yeah. Everybody hop in. Be sure that door’s tight.”

Delighted at such an opportunity, the youths and Mr. Wallace took places in the cabin, while Karl climbed into the cockpit.

A few seconds later there came the roar of the motor, and then the passengers felt themselves moving.

The ’plane rolled over the cement runway for several hundred feet, then gradually left the ground and began climbing steadily.

“We’re in the air!” cried Joe excitedly. He and his friend had never been in a monoplane before. “Doesn’t feel unusual, does it?”

“I wouldn’t know it if I didn’t see the ground dropping away from us,” Bob said. “We’ll probably appreciate the absence from jolts and jars.”

This easy conversation was made possible by the heavy insulation between the pilot’s and passengers’ quarters. As a result, the roar of the engine was silenced to a remarkable degree.

When just above the airdrome, they heard Karl’s voice through the telephone.

“How does it feel?” the aviator asked. “Think you’d like flying?”

“Sure,” came from Joe, speaking through the transmitter. “It’s a hundred per cent better than land traveling.”

The experience was not novel to Mr. Wallace, who had once crossed the continent in a huge tri-motor monoplane. But nevertheless he appeared to be enjoying it as much as the young men.

An altitude of perhaps a thousand feet was reached, and then the ’plane shot ahead toward the business district of Washington.

They had been in the air perhaps five minutes when Karl’s voice was again heard through the telephone.

“See anything familiar below?”

“By George!” exclaimed Bob wonderingly. “We’re right above our houses. Suppose anybody sees us?”

“Guess not,” his chum said. “They’re not out, anyway.”

A much higher altitude was reached, and their direction of travel was changed.

From that height, the passengers could easily make out the business district, including the United States Capitol, the White House, and other government buildings. In addition, they could see several score miles in every direction.

“Isn’t that Baltimore over there?” queried Joe, his keen eyes scanning the landscape.

“It is at that,” observed Mr. Wallace. “The atmosphere isn’t any too clear, though, and we can’t make it out very plainly.”

“We’re a great distance away, too,” remarked Bob. “Wonderful when you think about it, isn’t it?”

They circled around for a few minutes and then headed back to the airport, as the aviator did not care to use too much gas.

When again on the ground, Bob and Joe were more anxious than ever to be among those of the expedition who would travel by air. Their eagerness was increasing with every minute.

“You’ve got to let us go!” said Bob to his father, when he and his friends had returned home. “Why, just see what we’ll be missing if we don’t.”

“You may be missing death,” Mr. Holton returned grimly. “But then,” he went on, raising his voice, “the chances are that nothing will happen. Any more, airplane accidents are rare. I’ve almost decided to go myself. It will be a chance of a lifetime.”

“Then – then you mean we can go?”

“I haven’t exactly said so,” the naturalist answered. “There is your mother, don’t forget.”

“Perhaps she won’t consider it so wonderful,” suggested Mr. Wallace, who had been induced to spend the few days before leaving with the Holtons.

Bob’s mother did not at all like the idea when it was put before her later. But she did not protest so violently when she saw that her husband was actually bent on going. After all, his judgment had seldom failed him, and most likely would not now. Then, too, she was somewhat of an air enthusiast herself, having great faith in the development of aviation. And what Mr. Holton did she usually considered fit for Bob.

Joe had more difficulty in securing the consent of his parents, for they were doubtful as to the outcome of such a venture. Mr. Lewis, however, was well acquainted with Karl Sutman, and knew him to be an excellent airplane pilot, besides being a resourceful, well-thought-of citizen. In the end, Joe’s parents consented to the youth’s going, especially when they learned that Mr. Holton and Bob

intended to go. Mr. Lewis, however, had already booked passage on a steamship, and could not cancel his arrangement, much as he would have liked to.

The two chums were delighted beyond words.

“It’ll seem strange without your father with us, though,” said Bob. “We all went together on our other trips, and – ”

“He’ll meet us in Mollendo,” Joe reminded him, and then added: “Wonder if Mr. Wallace will go in the ’plane?”

That person desired very much to do so, but hesitated to let Mr. Lewis make the ocean trip alone. Joe’s father, though, declared he would not be without companions, for he was acquainted with several members of other divisions of the expedition. A Mr. Thomas L. Wells, of the division of ethnology, was a very close friend of the naturalist.

“So, although I would like for you to come with me on the boat, I want you to go in the airplane,” Joe’s father said to Mr. Wallace, “because I know you are bent on doing so, and it is a wonderful opportunity.”

The result was that Mr. Wallace made preparations to go by air, much to the delight of Bob and Joe. Since their first meeting with the naturalist several months before, the youths had taken a great liking to him.

Making ready for the airplane trip was a novel experience to Bob and Joe. They found there was much to be purchased in the way of suits, caps, goggles, and other provisions. Aviator’s togs, the young men knew, would not be strictly necessary, as it was a monoplane with a closed cabin. But they thought it best to get them, since they could also be used for general outdoor clothes.

“Here’s something the express man left you, boys,” Mr. Holton called, when the chums returned from a shopping trip downtown.

Eagerly Bob and Joe opened the large box. A minute later, when they saw its contents, they uttered exclamations of joy.

“The moving-picture camera and film, from the Neuman Motion Picture Corporation!” cried Bob happily. “It got here just in time, didn’t it? We’ll be leaving day after tomorrow.”

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