

Goldfrap John Henry

The Boy Scouts at the Panama-Pacific Exposition



John Goldfrap

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Charles L. Wrenn

The Boy Scouts at the Panama-Pacific Exposition

CHAPTER I

TWO SCOUTS ON A MOTORBOAT

“Seems to me, Rob, I ought to know that old tub of a motorboat we’re overhauling.”

“Why, yes, Andy, it’s Captain Jerry Martin’s *Sea Gull*. Time was when she had a reputation for speed, but her engine is a back number now.”

“Huh! that must have been away in Noah’s time, I reckon, Rob. Why, we could make circles around her, if we chose to drive our little *Tramp* to the limit.”

“As we happen to be in no hurry to-day, there’s no use making the old skipper feel that his boat is down and out. With vacation opening up before us, I’ve been trying to settle on some scheme for the scouts of the Eagle Patrol to have a rousing good time this summer.”

“Well, I know where I’d be if I had the cold cash to pay my expenses; and, Rob, chances are you feel the same way about it.”

“Now, I suppose you’re thinking of Tubby Hopkins’ great good luck in having his uncle, Dr. Mark Matthews, the famous globe-trotter, carry him off three days ago for an extended trip to the big show out in California?”

“Just what was on my mind, Rob. I don’t believe I ever wished so much for anything as a chance to hike away out to the Pacific. Nothing comes my way any more, seems like. Some of us scouts were lucky enough to have our turn down in Mexico that time Tubby’s uncle was taken sick, and couldn’t get there to meet his old friend, General Villa, so as to dispose of the cattle on his ranch before they were stolen by the raiding Mexican rival armies. How the rest of the boys envied us that glorious trip, Rob!”

“I admit it was a rare streak of good fortune to have things come our way as they did,” the boy named Rob remarked, as he gave a slight turn to the wheel of the bustling little motorboat, aboard which he and Andy were the sole passengers. “We ran up against quite an interesting bunch of experiences, you remember, Andy, that none of us will ever be apt to forget.”

“As if that wasn’t enough fun for Tubby and Merritt and you,” continued the boy called Andy at the wheelsman, “it came about that you all got a chance to go across the water to England and Belgium late last summer on an important mission for Merritt’s family, and saw a heap of what was going on in the fighting zone where the Germans are up against the armies of France, Belgium and Great Britain.”¹

“We’ve shaken hands with ourselves dozens of times since, I give you my word, Andy, on account of that fine streak of luck. Yes, we did encounter a whole lot of remarkable adventures over there, and saw sights we’ll never forget. Some of them I wish I could put out of my mind, because they were mighty unpleasant. But that page is turned down, Andy; and now the next thing to consider is what we are going to do this summer to make the time pass happily.”

“Oh! I suppose I shouldn’t complain,” Andy Bowles continued, trying to smile away the discontented frown that had settled across his forehead. “Here, in this good old Long Island town of Hampton, there are lots of ways a pack of lively up-to-date Boy Scouts can have good times during

¹ See “The Boy Scouts on Belgian Battlefields,” also “The Boy Scouts with the Allies in France.”

vacation. With the big bay at our doors, and a bully little motorboat like this to go fishing or cruising in, there's no reason for us not to be hustling most of our spare time."

"Yes," Rob Blake went on to add, wishing to soothe the ruffled spirit of his comrade, "and you know what glorious camping trips we can have with a lot of the boys, just as we used to in other summers. There is the full Eagle Patrol, except our fat chum, Tubby, who's gone to see the sights of the Panama-Pacific Exposition, and Merritt Crawford, who expects to be away for a month and more with his folks."

"Besides," continued Andy Bowles, as though the fact gave him more or less solid satisfaction, "all the other patrols are full – eight each in the Hawk, the Black Fox and the Badger, with a new one forming in the bargain. Boy Scout activities are at flood-tide around Hampton these days."

"One reason for that, I take it," mused the skipper of the little *Tramp*, "is the fact that through our activities in the past we have managed to keep our troop in the public eye, more or less. People know what the Eagles have done, and on the whole they favor their boys joining the newer patrols. There's been a big change in the young fellows of Hampton, I'm told, since this Boy Scout movement first came to town."

When the young leader of the Eagle Patrol made this modest assertion, he certainly hit the truth squarely on the head. During the last two years the members of the Eagle Patrol had made a name for themselves in Boy Scout annals – as the new reader will find out for himself if he cares to read the earlier books of this fascinating series.

Among other things they had, through a happy chance, become associated with certain scientific gentlemen connected with the United States Government, who were experimenting with a new and secret model for a big airship patterned somewhat after the famous Zeppelins of the Germans.

On another occasion they had been enabled to assist in saving the design of a wonderful submarine, also intended for the use of the Government, and the secret of which it appeared was coveted by emissaries of a nation supposed to be hostile to the United States, and desirous of learning all about such an important discovery that was apt to play an important part in future ocean warfare.

Some of the scouts later on were given a chance to pay a visit to the wonderful canal that was then being dug across the Isthmus – at Panama; and the record of how they made themselves exceedingly useful while down there will always be a bright page in the history of the Hampton Troop.

Mention has already been made by Andy Bowles, the bugler of the troop, of the trip to Mexico, with its attendant adventures; and also of the foreign tour undertaken by several of the Eagles on the previous summer, just when hostilities had broken out between the nations of Europe; and Belgium, where they were compelled to visit, was torn from end to end with the mad struggles of warring factions.

Yes, surely the Eagles could rest upon their laurels from this time on, and history would accord them the laurel wreath as the most enterprising patrol known to the Boy Scouts of America.

Still, what boy is ever satisfied with what has happened in the past? The present and the near future is what engages his attention and excites his interest. Even sensible Rob Blake secretly sighed when he contemplated having to put in the whole summer around the home town while Tubby Hopkins was having such a glorious time out there on the Coast; and his other chum, Merritt Crawford, was up in Canada with his folks at a camp.

It was a beautiful and warm day in the early summer. The sun shone from an unclouded sky, but there was enough sea breeze to fan their heated brows, and to make them think that there could be few things equal to being in a speedy little motorboat, spinning over the surface of that lovely land-locked bay, with the ocean booming on the outer edge of the sandy strip to the south.

They could have quite an extended view from far out in the bay, with the houses scattered along the shore, and the white sails of pleasure craft or fishing and clamming boats dotting the water far and near.

Just ahead of them the old launch that had seen better days was churning up the water with its noisy propeller, though not making remarkable headway at that. As the two scouts gradually drew up on the *Sea Gull*, they made out that besides the ancient skipper there was just one passenger aboard.

“Why,” said Andy Bowles presently, as this person chanced to turn his face toward them by accident, “that must be the old gent I saw drop off the nine-thirty train from New York this morning when I was heading for your house. Yes, and now I think of it, I heard him ask Dan Trotter at the station where Judge Collins lived, and how he could get to his house at the Point.”

“Some friend of the Judge, then,” suggested Rob; “and I guess he has a host of them here and abroad; for he’s wealthy, and interested in all sorts of scientific matters. They say that at his city house in the winter he entertains, at times, all the big guns from the different colleges of the world.”

“Which reminds me, Rob. There was an odd twang in this old fellow’s manner of speech that made me think of Sandy Ferguson, the Scotchman who has the bagpipes, you remember, and always insists in marching in all the parades in Hampton.”

“Then, perhaps, he’s some famous Scotch professor,” observed the skipper of the *Tramp*, “who wants to see the judge so much that he’s chased away out here to his summer home on invitation.”

“He has a red face, wears big glasses, and is scrawny enough for a Scotchman, anyway,” chuckled Andy, “but do you know I always like to listen to one of the Highland folks talk. It was the ‘burr’ in his speech that made me stop and listen as far as I did. He’s got it down pat, Rob.”

“Don’t say anything more now, Andy; we’re drawing up pretty close, and he might not like it if he thought we were talking about him. That old motor does make lots of noise, but sometimes it misses, and then there’s a lapse, you know.”

“But they’re heading straight for the Point where the Collins Castle is located, you notice, Rob, so I guess Cap. Jerry is ferrying him across. I only hope the old tub doesn’t take a notion to founder before it gets to the dock a mile away from here.”

“Oh! it’s stood lots of pounding, and only has to be bailed out frequently on account of leaking like a sieve,” Rob said in a low tone. “Jerry has all that down to a fine point, and just once in so often he gets busy and lowers the bilge water with the pump he keeps rigged handy.”

“Excuse me from running around in such a trap,” muttered Andy, who was rather inclined to be “fussy” with regard to everything he handled, and tried to have his possessions kept up to top-notch condition – what he himself called “apple-pie shape.”

“The professor is like most Englishmen, for he loves his pipe,” remarked Rob, as he watched the passenger aboard the old launch filling his little black pipe with tobacco taken from a rubber pouch. “I hope, when he strikes that match, and then throws it away after lighting up, he knows enough about motorboats to see that it goes overboard, and not into the bottom of the craft. Sometimes a leak will spread a film of gasoline over the bilge water, and there’s always more or less danger of an explosion.”

“Yes,” added Andy seriously, “there have been a number on the bay the last three seasons, and two people that I can remember were so badly burned that they died after being rescued.”

Both of the boys watched with more or less interest, and possibly with suspended breath, while the red-faced passenger in Captain Jerry’s old launch puffed several times at his pipe, then tossed the match aside.

“Oh! it didn’t go overboard, for a fact, Rob!” gasped Andy; but there was no time to say another word, for suddenly they saw a flash of flame spring up aboard the old *Sea Gull*, and in an instant it seemed as though the launch was aflame from stem to stern!

CHAPTER II

PROMPT WORK, AND A RESCUE

Fortunately Rob Blake had wonderful presence of mind in a sudden emergency. Some boys would have been so badly shocked by what was happening near at hand, that for the time being, they must have been unable to make any move toward rendering first aid to the afflicted.

No sooner did the leader of the Eagle Patrol see that terrible outburst of fire than he started his little motor on at full speed, heading straight toward the imperiled launch.

“Quick! get hold of that fire extinguisher we carry!” he called out to his companion, who was staring, with open mouth and awe-filled eyes, at the scene of commotion close by.

“But, Rob, will the fluid put out a gasoline fire?” exclaimed Andy, though at the same time hastening to throw back the lid of a locker and snatch out the brass tube which had been lying there for just such a time of sudden need.

“Yes, that’s one of its best uses,” Rob told him hastily. “It seems to form a coating over everything it touches that the fire can’t break through. It kills fire. That’s where it gets its name. Be ready now to make use of it when we come up as close as I dare go.”

“Both of the men are overboard, Rob!” announced Andy excitedly, “and hanging on to the side of the boat. Wow! but isn’t she blazing, though? I can begin to feel the fierce heat even here!”

“Ready to get busy now!” cried the skipper, as he manipulated his engine in such a way as to reverse the propeller, and bring the *Tramp* to a stop close to the blazing launch.

Andy was no coward, and could keep a pretty level head when it came down to doing things; though often he had to be told what to attempt by someone more masterful than himself. As soon as Rob shouted to him to start operations, he worked the fire extinguisher with might and main, and was considerably astonished to discover that just as Rob had said, wherever the magical fluid struck, it seemed to dishearten the conflagration, for the flames immediately died out.

“Whoop! it’s doing the whole business, that’s right, Rob!” cried the pleased amateur fire-fighter, as he continued to make judicious use of his apparatus. “Why, I tell you nothing can hold out, Rob, against this dandy contraption. Look at it do the work, will you? Oh! it’s sure worth its weight in gold when you need something to save your boat with.”

Indeed, to judge from the magical way in which the threatening fire was extinguished aboard the old launch, Rob Blake had certainly made no mistake when he purchased that little fire-fighting contrivance, even though it did cost him close on ten dollars.

Rob, seeing that all danger of the fire communicating to the *Tramp* was now past, slowly started toward the other boat. His intention was to rescue the two elderly men who were in the water. To tell the truth, Rob was very much afraid the passenger may have been seriously burned, and that in his panic he might release his frenzied grip on the gunwale of the boat.

It turned out otherwise, however, for Scotch grit held good, and Rob soon had the satisfaction of helping both men aboard the *Tramp*.

They had received a number of burns, and presented rather a peculiar appearance, since their eyebrows and beards had been badly singed.

“Fire’s all out, Rob!” announced Andy, at this juncture.

“Then fix it so that we can tow the *Sea Gull* behind us,” the other told him, “and we’ll change our course for the Collins Point yonder.”

“It is verra kind of ye to go to all that trouble,” remarked the elderly man, looking the young skipper of the rescuing boat over from head to toe, “and I wull not be the one to forget the favor, I assure you, my fine laddie.”

“I hope you are not seriously burned, sir?” remarked Rob, who saw that there were signs of the other’s clothes having been afire before he tumbled overboard, possibly urged to this last resort through the energetic efforts of old Captain Jerry Martin.

“I sincerely hope not myself,” replied the other, as he felt of his body, and then put up a hand to his blackened face. “I believe I’ve been well singed, and that until I grow a new crop of eyebrows I will look like a scorched rat; which is verra unfortunate, since I am on a most important errand over in your country. But, indeed, I should be ashamed to complain, for it might have been a deal worse.”

“And how about you, Captain Jerry?” asked Rob, turning to the subdued looking old skipper of the disabled motorboat, who had once been an oysterman, though of late years rheumatism had compelled him to seek another less strenuous means for making a living on the famous bay.

“Nawthin’ to count much, Rob,” grunted Captain Jerry, “but I’m afraid I’ll jest hev to git a new engine aboard the *Sea Gull* arter this accident. I knowed she leaked a mite in the connectin’ feed pipe, but I never thought anybody would throw a lighted match down *thar!* I’m glad to be alive still; and I hopes as how the duckin’ ain’t agoin’ to fotch on my rheumatiz agin.”

“As I’m altogether to blame for the accident, Captain,” said the passenger, “I shall insist on doing my part toward helping you put in that new motor. The chances are I will be marooned at my friend’s place now for weeks, until I’m presentable; though what’s to be done about getting that valuable shipment out to our exhibit I am unable to say. Perhaps Judge Collins may be able to help me decide. It’s a verra odd time to introduce myself, laddies, but I want to know more of ye, and so permit me to say I am Professor Andrew McEwen, from Edinburgh University, Scotland.”

“My name is Robert Blake, and my father is connected with the bank at Hampton. My chum here is of the same name as yourself, professor, Andrew; but his last name is Bowles. I think his family came originally from Scotland. We are Boy Scouts, and out for a little cruise just to pass the time away.”

“Which was a lucky thing for myself, I am sure,” remarked the elderly gentleman, as he squeezed a hand of each of the young fellows. “And if you will land me at Judge Collins’ dock, you will increase the obligations under which you have placed me.”

“We are heading straight that way, sir,” Rob told him.

Somehow he liked the stranger from the start. He had shrewd, gray eyes that had been wont, no doubt, to twinkle under bushy eyebrows; but with these now missing his thin face had an almost comical appearance. Still, there was a kindly expression to be detected there, as well as the keen look of a savant. And from the way in which Professor McEwen from time to time watched Rob, it was evident that he had also conceived a great fancy to the fine, manly looking boy who seemed to be able to master a crisis so ably.

Presently they drew in at the dock, where Judge Collins was awaiting them. From the fact that the gentleman gripped a pair of marine glasses in his hand, and had an anxious look on his face, Rob jumped to the conclusion that he must have been on the lookout for the coming of the celebrated scientist from abroad, and might have witnessed the details of the accident and the rescue.

“I dinna doobt but that ye will have some difficulty in recognizing me, Judge Collins,” called out the Professor, falling back more than ever into his Scotch dialect in his mingled amusement and chagrin. “My ain brother wouldna know me with this blackamoor face, *sans* eyebrows, *sans* beard, and fortunate to have saved my eyesight. I am a fearsome sicht, and feel unco’-unpleasant in the bargain. But thanks to these braw laddies we were saved from a watery grave, for which baith feel thankful.”

“You must come up to the house at once and wash up,” said the judge feelingly. “Then I shall ease any suffering with some magical pain extractor that I chance to have and can recommend. No, please stay with me a little while, boys, unless you are in a great hurry. I want to hear your side of the story as well. And Captain Jerry, what can I do to make you comfortable? An old sailing mate of yours is in the boathouse at work, and if you will join him shortly I will send something comforting out to you.”

Rob looked at Andy, who nodded his approval of this idea. Andy had never before met with a chance to see the inside of the judge's house on the Point, which, being built of stone, and boasting a few turrets, had come to be called the "Castle" by most of the baymen. Such a golden opportunity might not come along again; and, besides, they certainly were in no hurry, so they could oblige the judge without putting themselves out at all.

Shortly afterward they found themselves in the library. Rob had been here before and even spent some hours examining the myriads of curious things among the collections which Judge Collins kept at his country house, where he spent more than half the year entertaining visitors.

Here the judge made an examination of the burns of the little Scotch scientist. It was found that beyond a few painful red marks, and the loss of the hair that had once been on his face, Professor McEwen was all right.

He seemed to take his mutilation greatly to heart.

"It would ha'e been peetifu' eno' at any time to be transformed into such a scarecrow as this; but think of me on the way out to join some of my fellow workers in the avenues of science, and taking with me the balance of our delayed valuable exhibit. Aweel, aweel, the best laid plans o' mice an' men gang aft alee. I shall ha'e to hide my diminished head until Nature restores my looks. Ya maun rest assured I shall not let my friends see me in this way; they wouldna doobt but that it was the Missing Link come to light."

"I shall be delighted," said the judge impulsively, "to have you stay with me as long as you can spare the time, Professor. It will gladden my heart more than I can tell you, for the profit is bound to be all on my side."

"But whatever am I to do aboot getting that exhibit out to our concession at the Exposition, now that I shall be utterly unable to attend to it myself? I wish I could solve that problem; my own discomfort I wouldna consider so much. In fact, I have undertaken this trip under protest. I care not a rap or a bawbee as to whether I see the Exhibition or not, if only I could make positive that my errand had been successfully carried out."

"Surely you can send what you are taking there by express, and it will arrive safely?" suggested the judge.

"But I gave my solemn word," expostulated the Scotch professor, who seemed to possess all of the stubborn qualities with which those of his land are said to be afflicted, "not to let the valuable packet go out of my possession for a minute, unless I gave it in charge of an equally responsible messenger. Money would be no object, judge, I assure you, if only you could find me a gude mon; nane ither would I trust."

The judge seemed to be pondering. When Andy caught him looking in a serious fashion in the direction of himself and comrade, somehow he felt a queer thrill pass through his system, though he did not exactly know why it should be so.

Then he saw a smile begin to creep over the face of Judge Collins, as he nodded his head slowly. Whatever had flashed into his mind, it seemed to afford him considerable satisfaction.

"Professor McEwen," he said slowly, but earnestly, "if you are looking for some trustworthy persons to whom you can delegate your mission, and do not mind what expense there may be attached to carrying it out, I believe I can suggest a couple of dependable young chaps who might fill the bill; they are the wide-awake Boy Scouts who were concerned in your rescue this very morning. How would you like to talk over that business with Rob Blake and Andy Bowles, here, Professor?"

CHAPTER III

WHEN LUCK CAME THEIR WAY

Andy fairly held his breath in suspense when Judge Collins made that astonishing suggestion to the little Scotch professor. He had always known that the judge was a firm believer in the uplift of the Boy Scout movement, for he had never failed to assist the Hampton Troop by every means possible. That he would go so far as to recommend two of the scouts to his friend as responsible enough parties to be entrusted with such an errand filled Andy with both amazement and delight.

Professor McEwen's eyes twinkled as he surveyed first the boys and then their earnest sponsor.

"I ha'e no doobt but that they are responsible and trustworthy, just as ye say, Judge Collins," he proceeded to remark presently, with lines of perplexity visible across his forehead, "and if it were but an ordinary errand I wouldna hesitate a single instant aboot entrusting it to them. But I ha'e to consider well before makin' up me mind. The property belongs to ithers than mesil', ye ken; and it is of a scientific value beyond compare. In fact, it could not well be replaced if lost in transit; money wouldna be any consideration in exchange, which is why I wouldna wish to send it by express."

"Be kind enough to listen while I relate a few facts concerning this same Rob Blake, and a couple of his friends," said the judge, smiling, and shaking his head at Rob when he thought the latter looked as though about to protest.

"I should be unco' pleased to hear all you can tell me," declared the scientist, "for I must confess that from the verra beginning these braw lads ha'e made a most favorable impression with me."

And so Rob had to sit there, squirming rather uneasily, while the judge told of the perilous trip he and several chums had made to the troubled republic of Mexico, and how they had cleverly managed to accomplish the delicate mission with which they had been entrusted by Tubby Hopkins' uncle.

Then he took up the subject of the tour abroad, where they had been for days and weeks in the battle zone of the contending armies, managing with consummate skill to avoid complications, and eventually succeeding in attaining the object which had been the cause of their undertaking this perilous mission.

All this while the little Scotch professor sucked away at his pipe as though he found great consolation in burning the weed that originally came from Virginia in the time of Sir Walter Raleigh, and was therefore a strictly American product. Now and then he would let his shrewd eyes roam from the face of the enthusiastic judge to the burning one of Rob Blake, and at such times Andy always noticed that he would nod slightly, as though better pleased than ever.

Andy, by the way, was enduring all manner of torture on account of the suspense; he had had a glorious prospect opened up before him, if only the curtain would not suddenly fall and shut it out.

"That is not nearly all that these gallant boys have done," declared the narrator, after a time. "I could sit here for an hour and tell you innumerable instances where Rob, and some of his chums into the bargain, did things that would be counted big under ordinary conditions. Why, it has come to that pass in Hampton nowadays that when anything beyond the ordinary is attempted they have to get the scouts interested in it first, and then people begin to believe it must have some merit."

"What you tell me is indeed wonderful," declared the professor. "After that recommendation I am strongly disposed to offer them the carrying out of my mission if they could see their way clear to accept the task."

"It would give them a chance to spend some weeks at the Exposition without incurring any expense, is that the idea, Professor McEwen?" asked the judge, who looked as happy as though he had discovered some wonderful bug which had been eagerly sought after for years and years by all scientists and collectors.

“Yes, a month, if they cared to stay that long,” replied the other, who seemed to have been fully convinced, and ready to throw the load of responsibility from his own shoulders to those of Rob and his chum. “The particulars can be gone over a little later, either to-night, if they care to see me again, or to-morrow. There is no great need o’ haste, though what I am carrying out to California is being eagerly expected by my colleagues there.”

“Let me congratulate you, boys, on your good fortune,” said the kindly judge, as though he wished to settle the matter in such a fashion that there could be no drawing back on the part of the gentleman. He then shook hands first with Rob and then with Andy Bowles.

Rob was looking a little pale from excitement, but there was also a happy glow in his eyes. As for Andy, he could not prevent a wide grin from spreading over his features. His father owned a livery stable in Hampton, but was not considered at all well-to-do, so that the boy had never been able to do more than dream of taking expensive trips. That one down into Mexico had come like a gleam of golden sunshine, for Tubby Hopkins’ old uncle had footed all the bills.

“Do I understand you to make this proposition to us, Professor McEwen?” Rob asked bluntly, not wishing to be laboring under any delusion.

“Aweel, aweel, I dinna ken how I could do better; and I feel that I am indebted to ye baith for my life. After hearing what bonny lads ye are, from my friend Judge Collins here, whose opinion carries great weight wi’ me, I am mair than pleased to offer to stand all the cost of a trip to California and back; as well as the expense which you will necessarily be under while seeing the great Exposition in San Francisco. Do ye think ye can ha’e the permission of the auld folks to take so lang a journey?”

“There will be no trouble on that score, Professor,” urged the judge. “These lads have so amply demonstrated their sterling ability to look out for themselves that I really believe Rob’s parents would not object if he wanted to go to hunt for the South Pole, or explore the unknown regions of tropical Brazil. And so we shall call it settled, I presume, Professor?”

“I ha’e made the offer, and shall tak’ it hard if they turn it down,” said the peculiar little man of science, whose name, Rob afterward learned, was known throughout the whole length and breadth of the world wherever men of intellect gathered to discuss their theories and discoveries.

“So far as we are concerned,” said Rob, after receiving an entreating look from the excited Andy, “we are disposed to accept right on the spot, subject to the reservation that our parents may have the final deciding of the matter. We will run over here by moonlight to-night, Professor, and if everything is satisfactory, we will talk matters over with you, and make all arrangements.”

“That suits me nicely, laddie,” declared the visitor pleasantly; “and I shall ha’e to think myself unco’ lucky to have found competent and trustworthy messengers so soon after the necessity arose. I shall look for ye then this same evening; and I hope that there may be no barrier thrown in the way of your acceptance of my offer. The mair I see of ye the better satisfied I feel that I will ha’e no regrets after entrusting my mission in your hands.”

Soon afterward the two scouts said good-by to the professor, and started down to the dock. Even in his distress of body and mind, the thoughtful scientist had not forgotten Captain Jerry; and the boys were entrusted with a message to him to the effect that ten pounds awaited his acceptance when he was ready to install that new three-horse-power engine in his launch.

The old bayman was glad of the chance to have his wrecked boat towed back home; and when Rob delivered the message of the professor, the look of concern on his weatherbeaten face vanished as the mist does with the coming of the sun.

All the way across the broad bay the two scouts were jabbering to each other in connection with the astonishing streak of good fortune that had just come their way.

“Seems to me I must be dreaming!” Andy declared for the fourth time. “Please give me a pinch, Rob, to let me make sure I’m awake.”

“Oh! you’ll get used to it by degrees,” the other told him, though he felt somewhat uncertain himself at times, and had to convince himself that it had all actually happened, and was not the result of a fevered imagination.

“Talk to me about luck,” continued Andy rapturously, “there never could happen again such a wonderful combination of things. First, that the feed-pipe aboard the *Sea Gull* should be leaking a trifle; second, that Professor McEwen was aboard the same; then he tossed that lighted match the wrong way, so instead of going overboard it fell down and slipped between the bars of the wooden grating into the oil-covered bilge water, and last of all that we chanced to be close by at the critical moment, ready fixed with a fire extinguisher to put out the blaze, and capable of hauling the shipwrecked mariners aboard.”

“Everything of that kind is always a combination of minor happenings that seem to dovetail in with each other,” Rob explained. “In this case it worked perfectly. All other boats were so far away that there’s no telling what might not have happened.”

“We’re getting close in now, and, Rob, there’s somebody waving to us from the dock. Why, it looks like our inventor chum and fellow scout, Hiram Nelson, the queerest fellow in the Eagle Patrol. He must want us to stop and take him out for a ride on the bay. You didn’t promise him anything like that, did you, Rob?”

“Why, no, not that I remember,” replied the other slowly; “but now that you mention him acting as though he wanted to see us so badly, I remember that Hiram has been talking to me several times lately about some wonderful secret he was carrying around with him. He said he hoped to be in a position soon to open up and take me into his confidence; and that he might have a proposition to make that would give me a great, though a pleasant shock.”

“You don’t say?” chuckled the happy Andy. “Well, seems to me the shoe is on the other foot just now, and that we’ve got something to tell Hiram that will take his breath away for a minute. Look at him dancing around, Rob! I suppose now he’s gone and invented some sort of contraption that never can be made to work, and he wants to tell you he’s saved up enough hard cash to get a patent on the same. But chances are it’ll be money wasted, because, so far as I know, nothing Hiram has done so far has proved much of a success.”

“I’m a little afraid it’s as you say,” added Rob, in a low tone, for they were now fast nearing the dock where the other boy waited for them, his face wreathed in such broad smiles that they could easily see his news was of a pleasant nature. “Three times Hiram has tried to go up in that aëroplane of his and failed. I hope he’s switched his genius off on some safer track than this sky traveling. But we’ll soon know, for here we are at the dock.”

Andy stood by with the boathook to fend off, and old Captain Jerry got in readiness to take charge of his launch and pole it along the border of the bay to the mouth of the creek, up which he had his mooring place.

When Rob had made the motorboat fast to a cleat on the dock, he joined his chum, and the two of them advanced toward the spot where Hiram awaited their coming, his face still betraying the great excitement under which he seemed to be laboring.

CHAPTER IV

A STUNNING SURPRISE

“He certainly looks all worked up, doesn’t he, Rob?” Andy remarked, as he and his companion found themselves drawing closer to the other scout.

“Hiram is a queer stick, you remember,” the patrol leader told him, speaking in a soft tone, as he did not wish the other to catch what he said. “Everybody just knows that he’s gone daffy over this craze to invent something worth while. But unless I miss my guess we’re going to hear some news shortly.”

There was no chance to exchange further remarks, because they had reached a point close to Hiram. The latter was a rangy sort of chap. He could talk as well as the next one when he felt disposed that way, but it had always been a sort of fad with Hiram Nelson to pretend that he was a *real* countryman, and many a time had he amused his chums with his broad accent and his wondering stare, as of a “yahoo” seeing city sights for the first time.

Now, however, Hiram apparently was not bothering his head about having any fun with his fellow scouts. There was an eager expression on his face, as though he were bursting with the desire to communicate his great secret to a chosen few of his chums, especially to the patrol leader, Rob Blake.

“Been alookin’ for you all over town, Rob,” he started in to say, as they joined him. “Took me an awful long time to get track of where you’d gone. Then just by accident I ran across Walter Lonsdale, who told me he believed from what Sim Jeffords said, that Joe Digby had seen you and Andy here hitting it up for the dock, and so he reckoned you must have gone off on your little *Tramp*. And say, Walter was right that time, wasn’t he?”

“He certainly was,” replied Rob, while Andy Bowles chuckled at the roundabout way the other admitted he had received his information.

“Well, Rob,” continued Hiram mysteriously, “course you remember my telling you that sooner or later I might have somethin’ of *vast* importance to tell you, something that would give you one of the greatest thrills ever?”

“Sure, I remember that,” asserted the other, “what about it, Hi?”

The other leaned closer to the scout leader, and in a hoarse whisper exclaimed:

“The time has come now, Rob!”

“Good enough,” said Rob. “Fire away then, Hiram!”

Hiram cast a rather dubious glance in the direction of Andy.

“Oh, don’t mind me one little bit, Hi!” sang out that worthy cheerfully. “I’ll promise to seal my lips if you give the word, and even being burned at the stake couldn’t force me to squeal a syllable. Say on, Hiram; you’ve got Rob and me worked up to top-notch with curiosity, and I know I’ll burst pretty soon if you don’t take pity on me.”

“Oh! well, I guess it’s all right,” the other observed slowly. “Everybody’ll be knowing it sooner or later. You just can’t hide a light under a bushel, anyhow. So I might as well take you at your word, Andy.”

“My word’s as good as my bond, Hiram,” said the bugler of the troop, with some show of pride; whereat Hiram laughed softly, as though possibly he had no reason to doubt that same fact, since Andy would find it difficult work to get anybody to accept the latter.

“Let’s sit down here on this pile of lumber,” Hiram went on to say, “while I tell you what wonderful things happened. The greatest chance I’ve ever struck so far, and you can understand that I’m nigh about tickled to death over it.”

“Huh! bet you’ve gone and spent every red cent you could scrape up paying a patent lawyer to put some wildcat scheme through; and that you’ve got the papers in your pocket showing that you’ve parted from your hard cash?”

When Andy recklessly said this Hiram turned and looked reproachfully at him, and then with his accustomed drawl remarked:

“Everything we tackle in this world is a chance and a hazard, don’t you know, Andy Bowles? And if inventors, people who have the big brains, and get up all the wonderful labor-saving devices you read about, didn’t choose to accept risks, why whatever would become of all you ordinary folks, tell me?”

Andy shook his head.

“Give it up, Hiram,” he said blankly. “But please go right along and tell us what you’ve been and gone and done now. Never mind me. My bark is a whole lot worse than my bite, anyhow.”

“That’s so,” Hiram assured him cheerfully. “Well, you guessed right in one way, Andy, for I have secured the advance notice that a patent is pending on a clever invention of mine, which is as good as saying it’s secured. But that’s only the beginning, the foundation, or, as you might say, the advance agent of prosperity. The best is yet to come.”

“You’re exciting us a heap, Hiram, I admit,” muttered Andy, “but I hope it isn’t all going to turn out a big smoke. There’s some fire back of this talk, isn’t there?”

“Wait!” the other told him grimly. “Get ready to soak in this information, boys. The invention for which I have applied for patent rights is, as p’raps you’ve already guessed, in connection with airships!”

He waited at that point, as if expecting some expression of surprise and wonder; so not to disappoint him, and in hopes of hurrying matters along a little faster, the accommodating Andy gave vent to the one expressive word:

“Gee!”

“Yes, I’ve been tackling one of the hardest propositions we inventors have ever run up against,” continued Hiram pompously, “and to tell you the truth it was only through a happy chance that in the end I stumbled on the key that unlocked the secret. You may know that one of the obstacles to making aëroplanes popular among the masses has been the danger attending these air flights. Even the most experienced pilots are subject to risks that they pretend to make light of. You understand all that, Rob, of course?”

“Yes, I know they are delicate affairs at best when used for sailing a mile above the earth,” admitted the patrol leader; “and that a sudden gust of wind, if it takes the voyager unawares, is apt to bring about disaster.”

“That’s just it,” said Hiram triumphantly. “Rob, I’ve discovered a way to prevent all these accidents, and made an aëroplane as safe for a novice to run as it would be for an experienced pilot with a license.”

“If you have done that, Hiram, you’ve got a feather in your cap!” Rob told him. “Some of the biggest inventors have been lying awake nights trying to fix things that way, so as to take away most of the terrible risk of flying; but so far it doesn’t seem they’ve met with much success.”

“Wait till they hear from Hiram Nelson, that’s all,” declared the happy scout, as he smote himself on the chest in rather a vainglorious fashion, which, however, the other two boys hardly noticed, for they knew Hiram’s fondness of boasting, as he had always been afflicted in that way.

“Tell us the rest, Hi,” said Andy, just as if it bored him to hear so much about the “preliminaries,” when as the inventor proclaimed the best was yet to come.

“All right,” said Hiram promptly. “Now you know what the scheme is I can go on and get deeper into my yarn.”

“Wish you would,” muttered Andy, pretending to stifle a yawn back of his hand, but that was only done in order to hurry the long-winded talker.

“I call my wonderful invention a stabilizer, because that’s the use it’s really intended for,” continued Hiram, as though wishing to fully impress that fact upon their minds. “To tell the truth, I’ve had the legal documents showing that a patent had been applied for, quite some time now, though for reasons of my own I kept it all a dead secret from everybody. Mebbe yeou fellers may have noticed that I’ve been looking kinder mysterious the last month or two? Well, guess with such a *tremenjous* secret on your mind either of you’d a been equally absent minded. But that is past now, and I’ve accomplished my aim.”

“Good!” Andy burst out with. “Let go your bowstring then and shoot, for goodness sake, Hiram.”

“Well, of course I had it all laid out,” continued the other composedly, as if it was beneath him to pay any attention to these pins that Andy was sticking into him, “and my first thought was to get in communication with some enterprising big corporation that manufactured aëroplanes for the market. All inventors have to sell their first few patents, you know, so’s to get money enough to push other ideas; and if I could pick up a few thousand that way, why I’d have to let my stabilizer go.”

“Then you’ve been corresponding with such a company, have you?” asked Rob, knowing that he could tempt the other to hurry his story in this way, just as a witness in court is drawn on by a clever lawyer’s questions.

“Oh! several of them, in fact,” admitted Hiram, as if that were only a minor matter, after all, “but in the end I found that a certain concern meant strictly business, and consequently I dropped all the rest.”

“Have they actually made you a definite offer for your valuable invention?” asked Rob, taking considerable more interest in the matter, now that Hiram’s undoubted though erratic genius seemed to be steadying down with some tangible results.

“Pretty much that way, I should call it,” remarked the inventor, trying hard to appear natural, though trembling all over with excitement. “They went so far as to enclose a check big enough to cover all expenses of myself and a companion – for I was smart enough to say I’d insist on having company for advice along with me – to run out to their main works, and talk the matter over with a view to disposing of my patent rights to the device.”

At that Andy’s face lost the look of sneering incredulity that had been a marked feature of his listening to all this talk.

“Whew! is that a fact, Hiram?” he exclaimed. “Shake hands on it, will you? Didn’t we always say that some fine day you’d be famous, and make the Eagles proud to reckon you as a member? A real check, and not on a sand bank, you mean?”

“Well, I went right away to Rob’s father’s bank and saw the president. He said the check was O. K. and that I could get the hard cash any time I wanted it. Why, he even called it a certified bank draft, which meant the money had been set aside in the San Francisco bank for that purpose, deducted from the account of the Golden Gate Aëroplane Manufacturing Company.”

“What?” almost shrieked Andy Bowles, “say that again, will you, Hiram? Must be my mind’s so filled with that Golden Gate business I just *thought* I heard you mention something like that. Repeat it, please, Hiram!”

“Why, the check came from a San Francisco bank, because you see the company is a substantial concern in California. They make some of the most famous aëroplanes on the market. If they adopt my stabilizer it’s going to be heard of all over the world. And to think what a magnificent chance we’ve got to run out there and take in the great Panama-Pacific Exposition at the same time, Rob! It’s enough to make you think you’re dreaming, eh?”

“Why do you mention *me* in the game, Hiram?” demanded the patrol leader, with a smile on his face, and a knowing wink in the direction of Andy Bowles.

“Because, don’t you see, Rob, I knew I didn’t have a business head on me, and might get cheated out of my boots if I ran up against a smart lot of manufacturers; and so I was wise enough to insist

that I be allowed to fetch along a companion. They never put up a single kick against the expense of the double bill, Rob; but the check covered railroad fare, sleeper, meals, and hotel bills while there a week, as well as the return trip to boot. That means they fancy my invention is going to be a big thing for their house. And, Rob, don't you see, I had you in mind all the while when I wrote about fetching a companion. I want you the worst kind to accept my invitation and go to the Fair at my expense. Tell me you will, Rob!"

CHAPTER V

HEADED WEST

When he made this alluring offer Hiram Nelson was astonished to see Rob turn toward Andy, and that the pair of them actually laughed. Quite indignant at such a showing of skepticism, Hiram hastened to say:

“Don’t believe a word of what I’m saying, p’raps now? Well, seeing that your dad reckoned this little paper was worth every cent it called for, suppose you take a squint at the same, Rob. You, too, Andy, and then you’ll laugh on the other side of your mouth, I shouldn’t wonder.”

He flourished the bank draft in front of their eyes, so that both scouts could see the amount it called for in cash, and that it bore all the marks of being genuine.

“Oh! neither of us is doubting anything you say, Hiram,” explained Andy effusively. “The only thing is that Rob here can’t accept your generous offer, that’s all.”

“Can’t accept?” gasped the other, looking terribly disappointed. “Why not, I’d like to know; and me countin’ on having him along to advise me, and keep me from being caught napping, or robbed of my valuable papers on the road.”

“I’ll tell you why he isn’t able to take the trip to California at your expense, Hiram,” said Andy solemnly. “It’s because he’s already pledged himself to go with someone else. Fact is, Hiram, I’m the one who holds Rob’s word.”

“You – agoin’ to California, Andy Bowles?” exclaimed the astonished Hiram; and his incredulous manner told that he doubted the truth of the assertion, for where could the son of the liveryman of Hampton get all the money to cover the double expense of such a lengthy trip; certainly not through any invention *his* brain had ever conceived; and no boy could ever hope to save enough out of his spending money for that.

“Yes, we’ve just made all arrangements for a month at the Exposition,” said the Bowles boy; “that is, we have to run over to Judge Collins’ place again after supper to-night, and complete the details. We expect to pull out day after to-morrow, and take a through limited train for New Orleans first, then across the plains of Texas, and the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona to Los Angeles.”

Hiram sat there as though changed into stone. He hardly knew whether Andy was trying to hoodwink him or not; for the other had something of a reputation as a joker.

Rob took pity on the poor fellow.

“It’s just as Andy says, Hiram,” he observed seriously. “We’ve had a wonderful experience when out on the bay. A fire happened aboard old Captain Jerry’s *Sea Gull* on account of a passenger dropping a lighted match, so that it caused something of an explosion. The two men, somewhat scorched, tumbled overboard. We were close at hand, and by using that fire-extinguishing torch of mine managed to put out the flames before they’d done much damage. We also hauled Captain Jerry and his passenger aboard.”

“Well, of all things!” gasped Hiram. “If it don’t take you to do wonders, Rob Blake. Go on and tell me the rest, please. My yarn isn’t in the same class with yours, it strikes me.”

Rob quickly put him in possession of the facts that followed fast on the heels of the rescue, and their reaching the Castle of Judge Collins. Hiram continued to shake his head, and draw in long breaths as though almost overcome with astonishment.

“The Arabian Nights never was in it with the things that happen to you, Rob,” he exclaimed, when the story was complete. “And so both of you are expecting to start overland to California right away? Well, I’ve got plenty of money right here, and what’s to hinder our making it a party of three?”

“That strikes me as a good thing, Hiram,” said Rob. “We’re all scouts and comrades, after all; and you say you are afraid you’ll need advice sooner or later in dealing with the manufacturers. We’ll stand by you, Hiram, and there’s my hand on it!”

“Bully for you, Rob!” cried the delighted inventor, whose dejected countenance immediately lighted up. “I was mighty afraid you meant to leave me out of the excursion party. Stand by me, and I’ll do everything I can to help you. Three ought to be even better than just two, when it comes to counting noses.”

“You made a remark just now that struck me as queer,” said Rob.

“Tell me what it was, then, and I’ll try to explain,” Hiram ventured.

“Well, you spoke of wanting a companion along to keep you from being caught napping, or robbed of valuable papers on the way; what did you mean by the last part of that sentence? Have you any idea anyone covets your papers, and might make an attempt to rob you when you were far away from home?”

“Rob, p’raps I’m silly to think that way, but I can’t help it,” Hiram confessed. “You see, one of the companies I corresponded with was in New York. They even sent an agent down here to interview me, and see what I had got. I never liked that man the least bit. He struck me as a sneak, and I made up my mind the company was what you might call a snide one – wanting to steal ideas if they could. I declined to have any dealings with them, and their agent went away as mad as a hornet, even threatening that he’d get the better of me by hook or crook.”

“You don’t say!” ejaculated Andy. “Then, you must have squeezed his toes, Hiram; you made him squeal, and show his true colors. I give you credit for that.”

“Have you heard anything from the company since?” asked Rob, hardly knowing whether to treat the implied threat seriously, or only as the ugly remark of a disappointed man who had found that Hiram was too smart for him.

“Why, every week I get a few lines from this Marsters, the man who came to see me, asking if I’m ready to do business with him. There’s no threat in the letter, but there’s always something to imply that he’s keeping track of what I’m doing, and expects sooner or later I’ll be glad to turn to him for a sale.”

“And you are afraid that he even knows of your dealings with this Golden Gate Company out on the Coast, is that it, Hiram?” continued the scout leader.

“I don’t know what to think,” admitted Hiram. “One letter came that I know had been tampered with. It may be he’s got somebody in our postoffice in his pay.”

“That would be a serious thing if true,” Rob told him.

“It’s lucky they didn’t keep out the letter that had the bank draft in it,” suggested Andy.

“They might have done it,” Hiram said, “only the company was smart enough to register that, and it got to me safe and sound. But, Rob, after all this might only be a big bluff Marsters is putting up. He may never bother his head about me starting off on this trip, even if he hears about it through any paid spy in Hampton. And if I’ve got two good chums along with me, who’s afraid?”

“All the same,” advised Rob, “you’d better keep this thing a dead secret. We’ll agree not to say a word about it to anyone. They can know how Andy and myself have been lucky enough to get a chance to see the Exposition; and let people figure you’re in the deal, too. We’ll do nothing to make it seem contrary, remember that, Andy!”

“I’m on, all right, Rob,” the other hastened to assure him.

“First of all,” continued Rob, “be careful with that draft. If I were you I’d hand it over to my father, and then when you want the money he’ll give it to you. Did you think to ask him not to mention it?”

“Yes, and he said he wouldn’t, after I’d shown him the letter. He shook hands with me, Rob, and said he was as pleased as pie about it – leastways not in just those words, you know, but it meant the same thing. I’ll go up right away and ask him to take charge of it for fear I may lose the paper.”

After making arrangements to meet again in the afternoon so as to talk matters over and lay their plans for starting, the boys went home for lunch. All of them, of course, were fairly bubbling over with excitement; and when the story was told of what had happened on the bay, as well as the wonderful thing that came of the rescue, in at least two Hampton homes there were proud parents.

Of course, no one put the least objection in the way of Rob and Andy taking that wonderful trip. They were thought to be the luckiest boys in all Hampton; and when the news leaked out every fellow in town flocked around to hear the particulars.

That night after supper Rob and Andy rowed over to Judge Collins' and spent a very pleasant evening with Judge Collins and his distinguished guest. Professor McEwen went into matters with a thoroughness that spoke well for his business ability, in spite of the fact of his being a scientist.

In the end it was all arranged. Rob and Andy understood just what they were expected to do in order to carry out the instructions of the Scottish professor.

"Come over to-morrow afternoon, lads, and everything will be here ready for you to take charge of," the satisfied gentleman told them as they were saying good-night. "The Judge ha'e kindly promised to see to things, sinc' I'm muckle sore, and hardly in condition to show myself in public. What I am giving into your charge can be handily carried in your grip; only I ken ye will want to be chained fast to the same all o' the time fra start to feenish."

Since there are so many things waiting to be told that befell the boys later on, there is really little need of our lingering any longer at this point than is absolutely necessary.

On the following afternoon Rob and Andy paid their last visit to the Point, and when they came away they carried a packet with them which they seemed to guard most carefully.

Besides this Rob had in his possession plenty of money to see them out to the Coast, as well as a letter of credit on a San Francisco bank that would insure a future supply.

"And if you should need even more," Judge Collins told Rob in parting, "wire to me of your necessities and it will be forthcoming, because we are both determined that you brave lads shall have the time of your lives while out there."

The boys made all their arrangements, and when the second morning rolled around there was quite a host at the station to see them take the morning train to New York, where they expected to start upon the real journey.

Sleeping-car berths had been secured in advance to New Orleans, and which would in fact carry them all the way through, since it was not their intention to stop over anywhere *en route*.

Among the relatives and friends who had assembled to see the three scouts leave for the far-distant Pacific Coast, were numerous members of the Hampton Troop. Like Rob and Andy and Hiram, these boys wore their khaki suits, and seemed proud of the badges and medals they had won the permission to sport.

Thanks to the caution suggested by Rob, no one appeared to know just how Hiram came to be in the fortunate bunch. Some accounts coupled his name with the rescue of the famous scientist who was visiting Judge Collins; while others were just as firmly convinced that there were only two on board the *Tramp* at the time.

In the end it was set down as something of a mystery which might not be cleared up until the return of the travelers. They knew that Hiram was a very secretive sort of fellow, and that even if he accomplished something calculated to fetch him in money, he would not tell of it until he chose.

The train drew in at the station, and the three scouts got aboard amidst a perfect clamor of shouts, above which could be heard the well-known scout salute. As the conductor gave the signal for them to pull out there was a scene such as had seldom been witnessed at Hampton; which proved just how much Rob Blake, the leader of the scouts, was appreciated in his home town.

Hardly had they left the outskirts of the town behind when Hiram, who was sitting just behind Rob and Andy, leaned forward and said in a low tone:

“I’m not dead sure about it, Rob, but there was a man got aboard this train that looked a whole lot like that tricky agent I told you about, Marsters!”

CHAPTER VI

A FALSE ALARM

“Andy, would you mind changing seats with Hiram?” asked Rob, upon hearing what the boy behind him had just said.

“Not at all; there’s plenty of room still,” replied the troop bugler, quickly slipping out and allowing Hiram to take his place, while he leaned forward over the back of the seat so he could join in the conversation.

“Are you sure it was this same man, Hiram?” asked Rob.

“I only had a quick look at him, and his back was toward me,” explained the nervous inventor, “but I’m most certain it was that agent. He had a rather odd little limp you see, and this feller did, too.”

Hiram had his hand laid upon his chest. Inside his coat he carried the precious papers, and just then the boy seemed to be more concerned about these than he was in connection with the pocketbook that reposed in a back pocket of his trousers, or the tickets he had in another repository.

“Well, keep close to both of us, that’s all,” said Rob. “Even if it is Marsters, the chances are he’s only trying in his mean way to give you a bad feeling. I don’t expect we’ll be bothered with him after we get fairly started on our trip.”

“But what if he tried to steal my papers from me?” said Hiram uneasily.

“He’d have a hard time doing that, with one of us on either side,” affirmed Andy Bowles confidently.

“And I wouldn’t hesitate a second to hand him over to the police if he tried any of his games on us,” Rob added.

“It may be he’s hired some smart pickpocket to rub up against me when we get in the jam at leaving the train,” Hiram told them, showing that his mind was active enough to grasp every sort of possibility, no matter how vague.

“We’ll checkmate him on that easily enough,” chuckled Rob. “In the first place, we don’t mean to allow ourselves to get caught in any jam. When we draw into the station we’ll sit tight until most of the passengers have left. Then Andy here can go and get the particulars as to where our train is standing that will take us South; for it’s all one Pennsylvania station, you know. And I’ll stick close to you every minute of the time.”

“Yes,” Andy went on to say, “you know we’ve got something in Rob’s grip that we have to ‘guard with unceasing vigilance,’ as Judge Collins said, because it is of priceless value in the eyes of scientists; and its safe delivery to the head of the exhibit at the Fair will mean we’ve earned our trip.”

Later on, when they finally left the car, Andy hurried off to pick up the needed information. They had a whole hour before the scheduled time of starting came, so none of them were anxious with regard to being left.

Hiram stood there with his bag between his feet, looking to the right and to the left. He seemed to be in constant fear lest some astonishing surprise might be sprung upon him.

“There he is now, grinning at me like an ape, Rob!” he suddenly muttered, and his voice was certainly anything but firm.

“So, that is your Marsters, is it?” demanded the other, as he discovered a slim man standing at some little distance from them, and with a satirical smile on his dark face.

“Yes, and don’t you think he looks like he’d stop at nothing in order to get to the end he had in view?” asked Hiram.

“He looks like an impudent fellow to me,” Rob advised, “and according to my mind he’s gone to all this bother just to feel that he’s had his nasty revenge on you for treating him so shabbily. To

be beaten in a battle of wits by a mere boy must have riled Mr. Marsters a whole lot. Depend on it, he doesn't expect to go any further than this in the game. He's shot his bolt."

"What makes you think so, Rob?"

"The very fact that he's taking all the pains to stand there and let you see him grinning like an imp," replied the scout leader. "Now, if he really meant to chase after you on the trip, don't you see he would be doing everything he could to keep you from knowing he was around, and on the watch?"

Hiram, after he had been shown, began to see it that way, too.

"Seems as though there might be a good lot of truth in that view, Rob," he admitted. "So let him grin all he wants to. I'll laugh, too, if only to show the feller that he hasn't made me squirm a whit."

With that Hiram bent almost double, like a hinge, and seemed to be tickled half to death over some imaginary joke. He also turned and looked straight in the eyes of the man he had called Marsters, as if to let him know he did not care a snap of his fingers about his continued leering.

"You've settled his case, and cooked his goose for him," commented Rob, a minute later. "See, there he goes over yonder, and I'll be a whole lot surprised if we set eyes on Marsters again."

"But, Rob, I'm determined to act as though I fully expected him to be creeping around all the time. I'm playing up to the old saying that an ounce of prevention is worth more'n a hull pound of cure."

"It's a good idea," was all Rob told him, for just then he saw Andy hurrying toward them, and from his manner guessed the other must have obtained the needed information.

Once they were settled in the sleeping-car, Hiram began to feel better, though it might be noticed that he eyed every person who came aboard as though he more than half suspected the revengeful Marsters, baffled in securing the wonderful invention for his firm, might assume some marvelous disguise in order to be near the traveling genius, so as to rob him on the road.

"We're off!" exclaimed Andy joyously, as the train started, drawn by an electric motor, and heading through the tunnel that would take them under the North River to Jersey, and thence across the Hackensack Meadows to Newark and beyond.

Everything looked bright and cheerful that morning when the three scouts began their long journey calculated to land them eventually inside the portals of the big Exposition on the Pacific Coast, and which was being held to commemorate the opening of the Panama Canal.

Certainly never before had Boy Scouts been enabled to start forth upon a trip of such magnitude, and under such happy auspices. With all their expenses paid, and the grandest possible time looming up ahead of them, it was not to be wondered at that Rob and his two chums counted themselves the luckiest fellows on the face of the globe.

All of them were fond of traveling, and that first day was a constant picnic for the scouts. It happened that Rob and Andy had been over the route before, since it was this way they had gone to Mexico when with Merritt Crawford and Tubby Hopkins. On that occasion they had undertaken the carrying out of that mission connected with the disposal of the cattle on the ranch Dr. Mark Matthews, the globe-trotter and explorer, owned across the Rio Grande, his old-time friend General Villa seeing that he was properly paid with the funds held by the Revolutionary party.²

This being the case, they were able to direct the attention of Hiram to many interesting objects on the way. Hiram had never been a hundred miles outside of Hampton in all his life; and therefore he stared and commented continually as the train rushed along through stretches of the country around Washington and beyond as the day drew near its close.

Remembering what Judge Collins, as well as the Scotch professor, had told them in connection with the contents of Rob's grip, they kept it down at their feet constantly; for they had the whole section, Andy having promised to occupy the upper berth, as he knew Hiram would feel safer in company with Rob below.

² See "The Boy Scouts Under Fire in Mexico."

“You haven’t seen anything suspicious the whole day long, have you, Hiram?” Rob asked him, as they prepared to go into the dining-car for their supper, two at a time, and the third staying to look after things, as well as keep his foot on the precious grip.

“Well, not that you could really call *suspicious*” admitted the other, “but seemed like several parties looked right hard at me as they passed through agoin’ to that meal car.”

“Oh, shucks!” said Andy, leaning across from his seat to speak in a low tone, “that all comes from you being worked up the way you are. Chances are they must a’ seen the budding genius breaking out all over your face in the shape of freckles, Hiram, and wondered who on earth you could be.”

“Well, I always figger that it’s best to be on the safe side, no matter if other people do make out to snicker at you, and call you timid. It’s poor policy to shut the door of the stable after the hoss is stolen, my dad says; and your folks would agree with me there, Andy, seeing that they have a heap to do with hosses. Do I go in with you to grub, Rob, or wait here for my turn?”

“I leave that with Andy,” Rob remarked indifferently; “if he feels too hungry to stay here for us to come back, let him take the first show. Here comes the waiter to give the call.”

Andy immediately said that it pleased him to wait and take his time.

“I like to be easy in my mind when I’m trying to get the worth of a big dollar in dinner,” he continued, “and if I keep on thinking of you fellows counting the minutes while I’m gone, it hurries me too much; and that’s bad for your digestion, you know. So skip along, and I’ll hug the seat here till you get back. Make up your mind, Rob, everything will be safe enough. I’m Johnny on the spot when it comes to standing guard.”

In this fashion all of them managed to get their supper. The night closed in and the full moon lighted up the wonderful scenery of the valleys they were speeding through, headed toward the southwest, and into the land of sugarcane, oranges, cotton and rice.

Hiram, when he could take his mind away from the fascinating prospect of doing a lucrative business with the enterprising firm that had invited him all the way out to the Coast, was full of questions regarding the wonderful things he expected to see later on when they reached a section of the country that was radically different from Long Island.

He had always wanted to visit the South, and this culmination of his hopes filled him with ecstasy. The presence of such a steady chum as Rob Blake did much to add to Hiram’s peace of mind, it can be readily believed; for he felt sure that no matter what troubles might spring up to confront him on the journey, the efficient scout leader would be equal to any emergency.

Hiram had the utmost confidence in Rob Blake. It was founded on what he had seen the other accomplish; and, besides, the things he had heard concerning that Mexican trip, as well as the journey across to the war zone of Europe, had added to his respect.

All that night they boomed steadily on.

Rob slept with Hiram in the lower berth, and occupied the side nearer the aisle, so as to ease the nervous chum’s mind as much as possible. Like most new and inexperienced travelers, Hiram hardly slept a wink that first night; much of the time he had the window-shade drawn back, and lay there staring at the ghostly objects that could be seen flitting past the window – cabins, trees, settlements, barns, orchards, rivers and all manner of things the ever speeding train was passing in its wake.

When morning finally came they were so well along their way that the country had taken on a new aspect, and Hiram’s interest grew by leaps and bounds. What was more, since he could still feel that precious packet inside his coat, where he had at Rob’s solicitation pinned it inside his pocket, Hiram’s confidence became much stronger, and the anxious look began to leave his thin face.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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