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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BOY SCOUTS IN MEXICO; OR, ON GUARD WITH UNCLE SAM ***

BOY SCOUTS IN MEXICO Or On Guard with Uncle Sam

By:

Scout Master, G. Harvey Ralphson

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DEDICATION.

This book is dedicated to the Boys and Girls of America, in the fond hope that herein they will find pleasure, instruction and inspiration; that they may increase and grow in usefulness, self-reliance, patriotism and unselfishness, and ever become fonder and fonder of their country and its institutions, of Nature and her ways, is the cherished hope and wish of the author. G. Harvey Ralphson, Scout Master

BOY SCOUTS IN MEXICO; OR, ON GUARD WITH UNCLE SAM.

CHAPTER I.

PLANNING A VACATION.

"After all, it is what's in a fellow's head, and not what's in his pocket, that counts in the long run."

"That's true enough! At least it proved so in our case. That time in the South we had nothing worth mentioning in our pockets, and yet we had the time of our lives."

"I don't think you ever told us about that."

"That was the time we went broke at Nashville, Tennessee. We missed our checks, in some unaccountable way, yet we had our heads with us, and we rode the Cumberland and Ohio rivers down to the Mississippi at Cairo, in a houseboat of our own construction."

The speaker, George Fremont, a slender boy of seventeen, with spirited black eyes and a resolute face, sat back in his chair and laughed at the memory of that impecunious time, while the others gathered closer about him.

Fremont was ostensibly in the employ of James Cameron, the wealthy speculator, but was regarded by that worthy gentleman as an adopted son rather than merely as a worker in his office force. Seven years before, Mr. Cameron had become interested in the bright-faced newsboy, and had taken him into his own home, where he had since been treated as a member of the family.

"Went broke in the South, did you?" asked one of the group gathered before an open grate fire in the luxuriously furnished clubroom of the Black Bear Patrol, in the upper portion of a handsome uptown residence, in the city of New York. "Go on and tell us about it! What's the matter with the Tennessee river, or the Rio Grande?"

"If you had no money, how did you get your houseboat?" asked another member of the group. "Houseboats don't grow on bushes down there, do they?"

"Oh, we had a little money," George Fremont replied, "but not enough to take us to Chicago in Pullman coaches. The joint purse was somewhere about \$10. We built the houseboat ourselves, of course."

"Must have been a strange experience, going broke like that!" one of the others said. "Hurry up and tell us about it! I believe it does a fellow good, once in a while, to get where he's got to

hustle for himself or go hungry!" he added, glancing at the others for appreciation of the sentiment.

"I suppose it does seem funny for some other fellow to be broke in a desolate land," said another voice, "but it isn't so funny right there on the spot. Little Old New York looked a long way off when we were in Nashville!"

The speaker, a boy of sixteen, short, and heavily built, left a window from which he had been looking out on a wild March night and joined the group before the fire. This was Frank Shaw, familiarly known to his friends of the Black Bear Patrol, Boy Scouts of America, as "Fatty" Shaw. He was the only son of a wealthy newspaper owner of the big city, and in training to succeed his father in the editorial chair.

"So, 'Fatty' was there!" exclaimed one of the group. "How did you ever get him into a houseboat? Must have been a big one!"

"Yes, Frank was there," Fremont replied, with a friendly glance at young Shaw. "His father sent him along to report the expedition."

"I haven't seen any book about it!" broke in another.

"Frank wrote four postal cards and nine letters," laughed Fremont. "The cards were descriptive of the scenery, and the letters asked for more money."

"Why can't we get up a trip down the Rio Grande this spring?" was asked. "The soldiers are on the border, and it would be sporty. We can stand guard with Uncle Sam."

"I want to know how Fremont got his houseboat," said one of the lads. "Perhaps we can get one in the same way. It would be fun to build a boat. Anyhow, I'm for the Rio Grande trip this spring. It would be glorious."

"We might build the boat up in New Mexico," said the other, "and drop down to the Gulf. That is, I guess we could. The Rio Grande is shallow, and large boats run only a short distance up the river, but we might make it with a small one."

"Let Fremont tell how he built his boat and got his provisions."

"Well," Fremont began, "we were standing on the high bridge at Nashville, one day, when Frank Shaw brought out the brilliant thought. He was doing a thinking part just then, for there was a fine chance of our getting good and hungry before our checks got to us."

"Then he was thinking, all right!" a boy laughed.

"Frank explained," George continued, "that the Cumberland river had been placed in the scenery for the sole purpose of providing transportation for us to the Mississippi. Then he went on and told how we could build a flat-boat with a cabin on it and beat the railroads out of our fare to Cairo. So we counted our money, right there, on the bridge, and started for a lumber yard."

"It was a sporty notion, all right! Just you wait until we get a houseboat into the dirty waters of the Rio Grande!"

"When we got the lumber, we all turned to and built the boat. We didn't know much about boat-building, but we used what few brains we had and got the boards together in pretty good shape, considering. Boy Scouts can do almost anything now, since they're learning how to help themselves. There isn't a boy in the room who can't build a fire with sticks and cook a good meal on it. Also, we'll show, directly, that we can build a houseboat on the Rio Grande."

"If we are as slow at building the boat as we are in getting this story out of you, we won't get started toward the Gulf of Mexico until cold weather next fall."

"We bought two pine planks sixteen feet long," Fremont went on, with a smile at the impatience of the boys, "a foot wide, and two inches thick. We sloped the end so the boat would be scow-shaped, and bought matched flooring for the bottom. We put tar into all the seams, joints and grooves to keep the water out. Then we bought half-inch boards and built a cabin at the back end. That never leaked, either. The boat was sixteen feet long and six feet wide, and the bulkiest craft that ever went anywhere. When we got to Cairo we sold it for \$6, and that helped some."

"Tell us about your eatings. We'll have to cook when we get down to the Rio Grande. Where did you get your cook stove?"

"We nailed a piece of sheet-iron on the prowboard," laughed Fremont, "and put the bottom section of an old-fashioned coal stove on that. The hole where the magazine used to fit in made a place for the frying pan, and the open doors in front, where the ashpan used to be, took in the wood we collected along the river. Cook! We could cook anything there."

"What about the sleepings?" was asked.

"That was easy. We bought an old bedtick and stuffed it with corn husks, then a pair of back-

number bed-springs, which we put on the floor of the cabin. Sleep! We used to tie up nights and sleep from nine o'clock until sunrise.

"With the money we had left we bought bacon, eggs, corn-meal, flour, butter and coffee. There wasn't much of it, because we had little money left, but we thought we might get fish on the way down. We never got one. They wouldn't bite. Still, we had all we needed to eat, and found our checks at Cairo. It took us eight days to float to the Mississippi. We were told at Nashville that we would spill out on the rapids, that river pirates would rob us, and that the big boats would run us down or tip us over, but we never had any trouble at all. We'll know better than to listen to such talk when we set afloat on the Rio Grande this spring."

"It was better than walking," said Frank.

"Frank was frisky as a young colt all the way down," Fremont added. "There are little trading places all along the river banks, kept mostly by farmers. When you want to buy anything you ring a bell left in view for that purpose, and the proprietor comes out of the field and waits on you. Frank wanted a record of being the prize bell-ringer, and once he got to the boat just a quarter of an inch ahead of a bulldog with red eyes and bowlegs.

"He holds the world's record for speed," Fremont continued, with a friendly glance at Frank. "The faster he runs the whiter he gets, through fear, and he left white streaks behind him all along the Cumberland river. Now, how many of you boys are ready for a trip down the Rio Grande, and, possibly, over into Mexico?"

Every boy in the room shouted approval of the plan, and Frank said he would go as war correspondent.

"It will be exciting, with the soldiers on the border," Frank said, "and I may make a hit as special news writer."

All was now excitement in the room, the story of the trip down to the Mississippi having stirred the lads' love of out-of-door adventure to the sizzling point. They capered about the handsome room in a most undignified manner, and counted the days that would elapse before they could be on their way.

The club-room was in the residence of Henry Bosworth, whose son, Jack, was one of the liveliest members of the Black Bear Patrol. The walls of the apartment were hung with guns, paddles, bows, arrows, foils, boxing-gloves, and such trophies as the members of the patrol had been able to bring from field and forest. Above the door was a red shield, nearly a yard in diameter, from the raised center of which a Black Bear pointed an inquisitive nose. The boys were all proud of their black bear badge, especially as no Boy Scout patrol was so well known in New York for the character and athletic standing of its members.

On this stormy March night—one long to be remembered by every member of the party—there were only five members of the Black Bear Patrol present. These were Harry Stevens, son of a manufacturer of automobiles; Glen Howard, son of a well-known board of trade man; Jack Bosworth, son of a leading attorney; George Fremont, adopted son of James Cameron; and Frank Shaw, son of a newspaper owner.

They had been planning a trip to the South all winter, and now, as has been said, the mention of the journey down the Cumberland and Ohio rivers to the Mississippi had so fired their enthusiasm for the great out-of-doors that they were ready to start at short notice. They took down maps and hunted up books descriptive of Mexico, and so busied themselves with the details of the proposed trip that it was after eleven when their minds came back to the common things of life.

"Well," Harry Stevens said, then, "I've got to go home, but I'll be here to-morrow night to talk it over. As Glen says, the Rio Grande del Norte is a funny kind of a stream, like all the waterways in that section of the country, bottom full of sand, and all that, but I presume we can float a houseboat on it."

"Of course we can," Glen put in. "It doesn't take much water to run a houseboat. If we get stuck, you can wire your father to send a motor car down after us."

"He would do it, all right," replied Harry. "We'll take an auto trip across the continent, some day. Good night, fellows."

"I must go right now," George Fremont said. "Mr. Cameron is at the office, working over the Tolford estate papers, and he asked me to call at the rooms and go home with him. He's always nervous when working over that case. The heirs are troublesome, and threatening, I guess."

Frank Shaw walked with George to the nearest corner, where the latter decided to wait for a taxicab. The night had cleared, but the wind off the Bay was still strong and cold.

"I've a notion to ride down to the office with you," Frank said, as they waited. "You could leave me at home on the way up."

"I wish you would," Fremont said. "Skyscrapers are uncanny after dark, and the elevator will not be running. Mr. Cameron will be glad to see you. Come on!"

Frank hesitated a minute, and then decided to go on home, so the boys shook hands and parted for the night. Many and many a time after that night they both had good cause to remember how different the immediate future of one of their number would have been had Frank obeyed his first impulse and gone to the Cameron building with his friend.

When, at last, Fremont was whirled up to the front of the Cameron building he saw that there were lights in the Cameron suite. Believing that his benefactor would be there at his work, Fremont let himself in at the big door with a key and started up the long climb to the sixth floor.

The vacant corridors, as he passed them one by one, seemed to him to be strangely still. Even the people employed at night to clean the halls and offices were not in sight. The boy started suddenly half a dozen times on the way up, started involuntarily, as if some uncanny thing were spying out upon him from the shadows.

Then he came to the Cameron suite and thrust his key into the lock of the door. He had been told that he would find the door locked from the inside. Then, his premonition of approaching evil by no means cast aside, he pushed the door open and looked in upon a sight he was by no means prepared to see.

CHAPTER II.

A MEMBER OF THE WOLF PATROL.

When Fremont opened the door of the Cameron suite, facing the Great White Way, he saw that the room before him was dark and in disorder. The place was dimly illuminated from the high-lights on Broadway, and the noises of the street came stridently up, still, there seemed to the boy to be a shadowy and brooding hush over the place.

Remembering his subconscious impressions of some indefinable evil at hand, the boy shivered with a strange dread as he switched on the electrics, half afraid of what they might reveal. Why was the room so dark and silent? The lights had been burning when he looked up from below, and he had not met Mr. Cameron on his way up. Where was the man he had come to meet? What evil had befallen him?

At the left of the apartment, from which two others opened, to right and left, was a small safe, used privately by Mr. Cameron. Its usual place was against the wall, but it had been wheeled about so that it fronted the windows. The door was open, and, although no violence seemed to have been used, Fremont saw that the interior was in a mess, papers and books being scattered about in confusion.

At the right of the room, and near the doorway opening into the north room, stood a large flat-topped desk, most of the drawers of which were now open. One of the drawers lay on its side on the floor, and was empty. The articles on the desk's top gave evidence of rough handling. Papers appeared to be dripping from filecases, and a black pool of ink lay on the shining surface of the desk.

A swivel-chair which had stood in front of the desk was overturned, and its back now rested on the rug while its polished castors stuck up in the air. At first glance, there seemed to be no human being in the suite save the frightened boy.

With his mind filled with thoughts of robbery, George was about to rush out into the corridor and summon assistance, when a slight sound coming from the north room attracted his attention. He hastened thither, and was soon bending over an office couch upon which lay a still figure.

There was no longer doubt in the mind of the boy as to what had taken place there. Mr. Cameron had been attacked and the suite ransacked. The boy recalled the fact that the rooms had been lighted from within when he stood on the pavement, and wondered if it would not be possible, by acting promptly, to capture the assassin, as he must still be in the building, possibly hiding in some of the dark corners.

First, however, it was necessary that the injured man should receive medical help. Fremont saw a wound on the head, probably dealt with some blunt instrument, and then moved toward the telephone in the outer room. As he did so the corridor door was opened and a boy of perhaps fifteen years looked in. When the intruder saw that Fremont was observing him, he advanced to the connecting doorway.

For quite a minute the boys, standing within a yard of each other, remained silent. Fremont would have spoken, but the accusing look on the face of the other stopped him. The intruder

glanced keenly about the two rooms which lay under his gaze and finally rested on the figure on the leather office couch. Then, while Fremont watched him curiously, he went back to the corridor door and stood against it.

"You've got your nerve!" he said, then. "You're nervy, but you ain't got good sense, doin' a think like that with the shades up, the lights on, an' the door unlocked. What did you go an' do it for?"

The sinister meaning of the words took form in the mind of the boy instantly. For the first time he realized that he would be accused of the crime, and that circumstances would be against him. If Mr. Cameron should never recover sufficiently to give a true account of what had taken place, he would be arrested and locked up as the guilty one.

If his benefactor should die without regaining consciousness, he might even be sent to the electric chair, and always his name would be mentioned with horror. While these thoughts were passing through the dazed mind of the boy, there came, also, the keen regret that Frank Shaw had not accompanied him to the building. That would have changed everything—just one witness.

"What did you go an' do it for?" repeated the intruder. "What had Mr. Cameron ever done to you?"

"You think I did it?" said Fremont, as coolly as his excitement would permit of. "You think I struck Mr. Cameron and robbed the office?"

"What about all this?" asked the boy, swinging a hand over the littered rooms, "and the man on the couch?" he added. "Who did it if you didn't?"

"I understand that circumstances are against me," Fremont said, presently. "It looks bad for me, but I didn't do it. I came here to accompany Mr. Cameron home, and found everything just as you see it now."

A smile of disbelief flitted over the other's face, but he did not speak.

"I hadn't been in here half a minute when you came in," Fremont went on. "I had just switched on the lights when I heard a noise in here and there Mr. Cameron lay. I was going to the 'phone when you entered."

"Tell it to the judge," the other said, grimly.

Fremont dropped into a chair and put a hand to his head. Of course. There would be a judge, and a jury, and a crowded court room, and columns in the newspapers. He had read of such cases, and knew how reporters convicted the accused in advance of action by the courts.

"Where did you get that badge?" the intruder demanded, stepping forward as Fremont lifted his arm. "The arrow-head badge with the lettered scroll, I mean."

"I earned it," replied Fremont, covering the scroll with one hand. "Can you tell me," he continued, "what the letters on the scroll say?"

"Be prepared," was the reply.

"Be prepared for what?"

"To do your duty, and to face danger in order to help others."

"What is the name of your patrol?"

"The Wolf. And your's is the Black Bear. I've heard a lot about the boys of that patrol, a lot that was good."

"And never anything that was bad?"

"Not a thing."

"Well then," said Fremont, extending his hand, which the other hastened to take, "you've got to help me now. You've got to stand by me. It is your duty."

"If you belong to the Black Bear Patrol," began the boy, "and have all the fine things you want—as the members of that patrol do—what did you want to go an' do this thing for? What's your name?"

"George Fremont. What is yours?"

"Jimmie McGraw," was the reply. "I'm second assistant to the private secretary to the woman who scrubs here nights. She'll be docking me if I don't get busy," he added, with a mischievous twinkle in his keen gray eyes. "Or, worse, she'll be comin' in here an' findin' out what's goin' on."

"Why didn't one of you come in here before I got to the top of the stairs?" asked Fremont, illogically. "Why did you just happen in here in time to accuse me of doing this thing?"

"I was just beginnin' on this floor," the boy replied. "I wish now that I hadn't come in here at all. You know what I've got to do?"

"You mean call the police?" asked Fremont.

"That's what I've got to do."

"I didn't do it. I wasn't here when it was done," exclaimed Fremont. "You've got to listen to me. You've got to listen to me, and believe what I say. It is your duty to do so."

"What did you want to go and be a Boy Scout an' do such a thing for?" demanded the boy. "Boy Scouts don't protect robbers, or murderers. You know I've got to go an' call the police. There ain't nothin' else I can do."

"If you call the police now," Fremont urged, "you'll rob me of every chance to prove that I am innocent. They will lock me up in the Tombs and I'll have no show at all. Mrs. Cameron will believe that I did it, and won't come near me. If he dies I'll be sent to the electric chair—and you'll be my murderer."

"What am I goin' to do, then?" demanded Jimmie. "I can't go out of the room and testify that I know nothing about it when the police do come. I can't do that for you, even if you do belong to the Black Bear Patrol. I wish I'd never come here to-night. I wish I'd never worked for the scrubwoman."

"To face danger in order to help others," Fremont repeated, significantly.

"Oh, I know—I know," said Jimmie, flinging his arms out in a gesture of despair. "I've heard that before, but what am I to do?"

"Who's your patrol leader?" asked Fremont. "Go and ask him, or the scoutmaster. One of them ought to be able to tell you what you ought to do."

"And you'll take to your legs while I'm gone," replied Jimmie, with a grin. "Good idea that. For you."

"Here," said Fremont, tossing out his key to the door, "go on away and lock me in. I couldn't get away if I wanted to, and I give you my honor that I won't try. Go and find some one you can talk this thing over with."

Jimmie's eyes brightened with sudden recollection of his patrol leader's love for mysterious cases—his great liking for detective work.

"Say," he said, presently, "I'll go an' bring Ned Nestor. He's my patrol leader, and the bulliest boy in New York. He'll know what to do. I'll bet he'll come here when he knows what the trouble is. And I'll do just as he says."

Jimmie turned toward the door, fingering the key, his eyes blinking rapidly, then he turned and faced Fremont.

"If Ned Nestor tells me it ain't no use," he said, slowly, reluctantly, "I'll have to bring the police. I'll have to do it anyway, if he tells me to."

"You'll find me here, whoever you bring," Fremont replied. "I won't run away. What would be the use of that? They'd find me and bring me back. Go on out and bring in anyone you want to. I guess I'll never make the trip to the Rio Grande we were planning to-night—just before I came here."

"The Black Bears?" asked Jimmie. "Were they planning a trip to the Rio Grande?"

Fremont nodded and pointed toward the door.

"Anyway," he said, "you can get me out of this suspense. You can let me know, if you want to, whether I am going to the Rio Grande or to the Tombs."

"Jere! What a trip that would be."

Without waiting for any further words, Jimmie darted out of the door and then his steps were heard on the staircase. Fremont had never in all his life had a key turned on him before. He threw himself into a chair, then, realizing how selfish he was, he hastened to the north room and again bent over the injured man.

There appeared to be little change in Mr. Cameron's condition. He moved restlessly at intervals. Fremont brought water and used it freely, but its application did not produce any immediate effect. Realizing that a surgeon should be summoned at once, the boy moved toward the telephone.

However, he found himself unable to bring himself to the point of communicating with the

surgeon he had in mind. Questions would be asked, and he would be suspected, and the intervention of the Boy Scouts could do him no good. He understood now that his every hope for the future centered in the little lad who was hurrying through the night in quest of Ned Nestor, his patrol leader. If these boys of the Wolf Patrol should decide against him, and the injured man should not recover, there was the end of life and of hope. And only an hour ago he had planned the wonderful excursion down the Rio Grande. That time seemed farther away to him now than the birth of Adam.

And mixed with the horror of the situation was the mystery of it! What motive could have actuate the criminal? Had the blow been struck by a personal enemy, in payment of a grudge, or had robbery been the motive? Surely not the latter, for the injured man's valuable watch and chain, his diamonds, were in place. Stocks and bonds, good in the hands of any holder, lay on the floor in front of the open safe. A robber would have taken both bonds and jewelry.

The one reasonable theory was that the act had been committed by some person in quest of papers kept in the office files. The manner in which the desk and safe had been ransacked showed that a thorough search for something had been made. Directly the boy heard Mr. Cameron speaking and hastened to his side. If he had regained consciousness, the nightmare of suspicion would pass away.

"Fremont! Fremont! He did it! He did it!"

This was worse than all the rest. Mr. Cameron was still out of his head, but his words indicated that he might have fallen under the blow with the impression in his mind that it was Fremont who had attacked him. At least the words he was repeating over and over again would leave no doubt in the minds of the officers as to who the guilty party was. While Fremont was mentally facing this new danger, the corridor door was roughly shaken and a harsh voice demanded admittance.

It was Jim Scoby, the night watchman, a sullen, brutal fellow who had always shown dislike for the boy. Why should he be asking admission? Did he suspect? But the fellow went away presently, threatening to call the police and have the door broken down, and then two persons stopped in front of the door.

Fremont could hear them talking, but could not distinguish the words spoken. It seemed, however, that one of the voices was that of Jimmie McGraw, who had gone out after his patrol leader.

The question in the mind of the waiting boy now was this:

Had Jimmie brought his patrol leader, or had he brought an officer of the law?

And there was another question connected with this one, that depended upon the manner in which the first one was answered:

Would it be the Black Bear Patrol excursion down the Rio Grande, the sweet Spring in the South, or would it be the Tombs prison with its brutal keepers and blighted lives?

CHAPTER III.

THE WOLF ADVISES FLIGHT.

The question was settled in a moment, for a key was thrust into the lock and the door swung open. The night watchman had possessed no key when at the door, for which the boy was thankful. Two persons entered and the door was closed and locked.

"Who's been here?" asked Jimmie, panting from his long climb. "We heard a voice in this corridor, and met the watchman down below. He's red-headed about something. That feller's of about as much use here as a chorus lady painted on the back drop. I told him that you'd probably gone to sleep over your work. Here, Black Bear," he continued, with a grin, "meet Mr. Wolf, otherwise Ned Nestor. You fellers get together right now."

Fremont saw a sturdy boy of little less than eighteen, a lad with a face that one would trust instinctively. His dark eyes met the blue ones of the patrol leader steadily. There was no suspicion of guilt in his manner.

Ned Nestor extended his hand frankly, his strong, clean-cut face sympathetic. Fremont grasped it eagerly, and the two stood for a moment looking into each other's eyes.

"I've brought Ned Nestor to talk it over with you," Jimmie said. "He's a good Scout, only he thinks he's a detective. He gets all the boys out of scrapes—except me, and I never get into any."

That is, he gets out all the honest ones."

"Jimmie told me about the trouble here," Nestor said, "and I came to learn the exact truth from you. If you struck this man and rifled the safe, tell me so at once. There may be extenuating circumstances, you know."

"I didn't do it," Fremont broke out. "I hadn't been in the room a minute when Jimmie came in and accused me of the crime. There is some mystery about it, for no man could get into this building at night unless he was helped in, or unless he hid during the day, in which case he would be observed moving about."

Nestor smiled but made no reply.

"There has been no robbery," Fremont continued. "There are negotiable bonds on the floor by the safe, and Mr. Cameron's watch and chain and diamonds are still on him."

"Do you know," Nestor said, smiling, "that the points to which you refer are the strongest ones against you? Tell me all about it, from the moment you came into the room."

Fremont told the story as it is already known to the reader, Nestor sitting in silence with a frown of deep thought on his brows. When the recital was finished he went into the north room and stood over the unconscious man.

"Fremont! Fremont! He did it! He did it!"

Over and over again the accusing words came from the white lips. Nestor turned and looked keenly at the despairing boy at his side. Then he stooped over and examined the wound on the head.

"It is a hard proposition," he finally said. "It appears to me that his mention of your name is more like an appeal for help than an accusation, however. Jimmie," he went on, facing the boy, "you heard Fremont coming up the stairs?"

"Yes; he was whistling. He couldn't make enough noise with his feet."

"You followed him up here?"

"Yes," with a little grin.

"Why did you do that?"

"Well, I wanted to see if it was all right—his coming in here."

"Very commendable," smiled Nestor. "Do you think he would have attracted attention to himself by whistling if he had had no business here?"

"Anyway," observed Jimmie, "I followed him up. Wish I hadn't, and wish you wouldn't hop onto me so."

"Do you think he was in these room before he whistled on the stairs?" was the next question. "That is, in the rooms within a couple of hours of the time you heard him coming up the stairs?"

"No; I don't think he was. I heard him whistling down at the bottom. There was a light in this room then, and it was put out; or it might have been put out just before I heard him whistling."

"How long was he in here before you came in?" was asked.

"Oh, about half a minute, I reckon."

"Not long enough to make all this muss with the papers?"

"Of course not. He couldn't do all this in half a minute."

"Then you think that if he did this at all he did it before he whistled on the stairs. That he did it and went back, to indicate that he had just entered the building?"

"That's just it, but I'm not sayin' he did it, mind you, Ned."

"Whoever did this took plenty of time for it," said Nestor, turning to George. "Will you tell me where you spent the evening, and with whom?"

Fremont told of the meeting of the Black Bear Patrol, of the plans which had been made at the club-room, and of his parting with Frank Shaw at the corner.

"Frank will know what time it was when he left me," said the boy, hopefully, "and the taxicab driver will know what time it was when he left me at the door of the building. That ought to settle it."

"It might," was the grave reply, "if Mr. Cameron would not speak those accusing words. Your

danger lies there now. For my part, I believe that, as I said before, the words are more an appeal to you for assistance than an accusation, but the police will want to arrest some one for the crime, and so they will doubtless lock you up without bail until there is a change in the injured man's condition."

"The police are dubs!" exclaimed Jimmie.

"We have to figure on the working of their alleged minds if they are," said Nestor.

Then he turned to Fremont and asked:

"You were on good terms with Mr. Cameron?"

"Yes; well, we had a few words at dinner to-night about office work. We did not quarrel, exactly, of course, but he seemed to think that I ought to pay more attention to my duties, and I told him I was studying hard, and that I was doing my best."

"Did he appear to be satisfied with the explanation?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are friendly with the other members of the family?"

"Yes, sir; though I hardly think Mrs. Cameron likes me. She thinks her husband favors me above his own sons."

"Then she would not be apt to believe you innocent of this crime if the police should arrest you? She would not come to your assistance?"

"With Mr. Cameron unconscious and likely to die—no, sir."

"There was silence for a moment, and then Fremont asked:

"Do you think they will lock me up, sir?"

"The police will want to do something at once," was the reply. "They like to make a flash, as the boys say on the Bowery."

"Suppose I send for a man high in authority, here now, and tell him the truth?" suggested Fremont. "Wouldn't I stand a better show than if the matter passed through the hands of some ambitious detective?"

"They are all ambitious," was the non-committal reply.

"You keep the whole matter out of the hands of the cops until you know just what you want to do," advised Jimmie. "I don't like the cops. They pinched me once for shootin' craps."

After further talk, Fremont decided to leave the course to be taken entirely to his new friends, and that point was considered closed. Then Nestor turned to another phase of the matter. Mr. Cameron needed immediate attention, but the office must be looked over before others were called in, so he set about it, Fremont and Jimmie looking on in wonder.

First Nestor went to the door opening into the corridor and examined every inch of the floor and rug until he came to the front of the safe. Then he went through the big desk, carefully, and patiently. Three or four times the boys saw him lift something from the floor, or from the desk, and place it in a pocket. He spent a long time over a packet of papers which he took from a drawer of the desk.

One of the papers he copied while the boys looked on, wondering what he was about, and from another he cut a corner. This scrap he wrapped in clean paper and placed in his pocketbook. During part of the time spent in the investigation Fremont sat by the side of the unconscious man in the north room.

"Now," asked Nestor, presently, "do you know what business brought Mr. Cameron to his office to-night?"

"Yes; he was closing up the Tolford estate."

"He asked you to come and go home with him?"

"That is the fact, but how did you know it?"

"Because he was timid about being here alone?" asked Nestor, ignoring the question.

"Yes, I think so. He was always nervous when dealing with the Tolford heirs. I believe they threatened him. He brought his gun with him to-night. You will find it in a drawer of the desk if the assassin did not take it."

"Where were the Tolford papers usually kept?"

"At the deposit vaults. I brought them over this afternoon."

"See if you can find them now."

Fremont went to the safe and then to the desk, from which he took the packet of papers he had previously seen Nestor examining. It was a sheet from this packet that the Wolf Patrol leader had copied. He passed the large envelope containing the papers over to the other.

"What occurred when these papers were last left in this office over night?" Nestor asked, and Fremont, a sudden recollection stirred by the question, replied that there had been an attempt at burglary the last time the Tolford estate papers were left there at night.

Nestor smiled at the startled face of the boy as he related the occurrence, but made no comment. He was examining a bundle of letters at the time, and ended by putting them into a pocket as if to carry them away with him.

"They concern a proposed transaction in firearms and ammunition," the patrol leader said, in answer to Fremont's inquiring look.

"Now, it appears to me," Nestor said, after concluding his examination of the suite, "that you ought to keep out of the hands of the police until this affair can be thoroughly looked into. Nothing can prevent your arrest if you remain here. What about the proposed Black Bear Patrol trip down the Rio Grande and over into Mexico?"

"I wouldn't like to run away," Fremont replied. "That would show guilt and cowardice. I'd much rather remain here and take what comes."

"If you are arrested," the patrol leader went on, "the police, instead of doing honest work in unraveling the mystery, will bend every effort to convict you. They will not consider any theory other than your guilt. Every scrap of evidence will be twisted and turned into proof against you, and in the meantime the real criminal may escape. It is a way the police have."

"It seems like a confession of guilt to run away," Fremont said.

"Another thing," Nestor went on, "is this. I have made a discovery here—a very startling discovery—which points to Mexico as my field of operations. I cannot tell you now anything more about this discovery, except that it is a most important one. I might hide you away in New York where the police would never find you, but you would enjoy the trip to Mexico, and I want you with me."

"Mexico!" cried Jimmie. "I'll go with you, Mr. Nestor. A houseboat on the Rio Grande. Well!"

"Have you money enough for the trip?" asked Nestor of Fremont, not replying to the generous offer of the boy.

"I have about \$300 which Mr. Cameron gave me yesterday for my Spring outfit," was the reply. "He was very generous with me."

"That will pay the bills until I can get some money," Nestor said, "so we may as well consider the matter settled. This business I am going to Mexico on will pay me well, and I will share the expense of the trip with you."

"Not if you go to protect me," Fremont replied.

"Not entirely to protect you," Nestor answered, "although I believe that the solution to this mystery will be found on the other side of, the Rio Grande."

"It seems strange that the Rio Grande should mix in every situation which confronts me to-night," Fremont said. "What can the affairs of turbulent Mexico have to do with the cowardly crime which has been committed here to-night?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOLF TALKS IN CODE.

"I can't tell you much about it at this time," replied Nestor. "I can only say that you ought to get out of the country immediately, and that Mexico is as good a place to go to as any other. I may be able to tell you something more after we are on our way."

"Me, too!" cried Jimmie. "Me for Mexico. You can't lose me."

"I'm sorry to say that you'll have to remain here," said Nestor, noting with regret the keen

disappointment in the boy's face. "After we leave the building you must call a surgeon and see that Mr. Cameron is cared for. The surgeon will call the police if he thinks it advisable."

"The cops will geezle me," wailed Jimmie.

"I think not," was the reply; "not if you tell them the truth. Make it as easy for Fremont as you can by saying that he had been here only a minute when you came in, and that he had just entered the building. You may say, too, that we have gone out to look up a clue we found here, in the hope of discovering the assassin. Tell the truth, and they can't tangle you up."

"They can lock me up," said the boy. "I'll call a surgeon an' duck. You see if I don't. It is Mexico for mine."

"I suppose you have the price?" laughed Nestor.

"I haven't got carfare to Brooklyn," was the laughing reply, "but that don't count with me. I guess I know something about traveling without money."

Having thus arranged for the care of the unconscious man, and tried to console Jimmie for his great disappointment, Nestor and Fremont left the big building, seeing, as the latter supposed, no one on their way out. As they turned out of the Great White Way, still blazing with lights, directing their steps toward the East River, Fremont turned about and glanced with varying emotions at the brilliant scene he was leaving. He was parting, under a cloud, from the Great White Way and all that the fanciful title implied. He loved the rush and hum of the big city, and experienced, standing there in the night, a dread of the silent places he was soon to visit under such adverse conditions.

He loved the forest, too, and the plains and the mountains, but knew that the burden he was carrying away from the Cameron building would hang upon him like the Old-man-of-the-Sea until he was back in the big city again with a name free from suspicion. Nestor stood waiting while the boy took his sorrowful look about the familiar scenes.

"I know what you're thinking about," he said, as they started on again. "You're sorry to go not entirely because you love the city, but because you feel as if you were turning coward in going at all. You'll get over that as the case develops."

"I'm afraid it will be lonesome down there where we are going," said Fremont. "I had planned something very different. The Black Bears were to go along, you know, and there was to be no fugitive-from-justice business."

"Fugitive from injustice, you should say," said Nestor. "The Black Bears may come along after a time, too. Anyway, you'll find plenty of Boy Scouts on the border. I have an idea that Uncle Sam will have his hands full keeping them out of trouble."

"He'll have a nest on his hands if they take a notion to flock over the Rio Grande," replied Fremont. "It is hard to keep a boy away from the front when there are campfires on the mountains."

The two boys passed east to Second avenue, south to Twenty-third street, and there crossed the East River on the old Greenpoint ferry. Still walking east, an hour before daylight they came to a cottage in the vicinity of Newtown Creek, and here Nestor paused and knocked gently on a door which seemed half hidden by creeping vines, which, leafless at that time of the year, rattled noisily in the wind.

The door was opened, presently, by a middle-aged lady of pleasant face and courteous manner. She held a night-lamp high above her night-capped head while she inspected the boys standing on the little porch. Nestor broke into a merry laugh.

"Are you thinking of burglars, Aunty Jane?" he asked. Then he added, "Burglars don't knock at doors, Aunty. They knock people on the head."

"Well, of all things, Ned Nestor!" exclaimed the lady, in a tone which well matched her engaging face. "What are you doing here at this time of night?"

"I want to leave a friend here for the day," was the reply. "Come, Aunty, don't stand there with the lamp so high. You look like the Statue of Liberty. Let us in and get us something to eat. I'm hungry."

"I suspected it" smiled the lady. "You always come to Aunty Jane when you are hungry, or when you've got some one you are hiding. Well, come in. I'm getting used to your manners, Ned."

The boys needed no second invitation to step inside out of the cold wind. After Fremont had been presented to Aunty Jane, they were shown to the sitting-room—an apartment warmed by a grate fire and looking as neat as wax—where they waited for the promised breakfast.

"She is a treasure, Aunty Jane White," explained Nestor, as the boys watched the cold March dawn creep up the sky. "She really is my aunt, you know, mother's sister. She knows all about my love for secret service work, and lets me bring my friends here when they want to keep out of

sight."

"You said something about leaving me here to-day," Fremont observed. "Why are you thinking of doing that? Why not keep together, and both get out of the city?"

"I can't tell you now," Nestor replied, a serious look on his face. "I've got something to do to-day that is so important, so vital, that I dare not mention it even to you. It does not concern your case, except that it, too, points to Mexico, but is an outgrowth from it."

"Strange you can't confide in me," said Fremont, almost petulantly.

Nestor noted the impatience in his friend's tone, but made no reply to it. He had taken a packet of letters from his pocket, and was running them thoughtfully through his hands, stopping now and then to read the postmark on an envelope.

"Do you remember," he asked, in a moment, "of seeing a tall shadow in front of the door to the Cameron suite just before we left there?"

"I did not see any shadow there," was the astonished reply. "How could a shadow come on the glass door?"

"Because some tall man, with one shoulder a trifle lower than the other, stood between the light in the corridor and the glass panel," was the reply, "and his shadow was plainly to be seen. I thought you noticed it."

"Was that when you opened the door and looked out?"

"Yes; I opened the door and look out into the corridor and listened. I could hear footsteps on the staircase, but they died out while I stood there. The man was hiding in the building, for the street door was not opened, and we did not see him on the way down. I suspect that the watchman knew he was there."

"The watchman, Jim Scoby, is a rascal," replied Fremont. "I don't like him. What am I to do if you leave me alone here all day?" he added, with a sigh.

"Read, eat, sleep, and keep out of sight," was the reply. "I'll return early in the evening and we'll leave for the South at midnight."

"I wish I could communicate with the Black Bears," said Fremont.

Nestor smiled but said nothing. In a short time breakfast was served and Nestor went away. That was a long day for Fremont, although Aunty Jane endeavored to help him pass the time pleasantly. He dropped off into sleep late in the afternoon, and did not wake until after dark.

Instead of its being a long day for Nestor, it seemed a very short one. From the Brooklyn cottage he went directly to a telegraph office in the lower section of the city and asked for the manager, who had not yet arrived, the hour being early. The clerk was inquisitive and tried to find out what the boy wanted of the manager, but Nestor kept his own counsel and the manager was finally reluctantly sent for.

When the manager arrived Nestor asked that an expert code operator be procured, and this was reluctantly done, but only after the boy had written and sent off a message to a man the manager knew to be high in the secret service department of the government. In an hour, much to the surprise of the manager, this important gentleman walked into the office and asked for the boy.

After a short talk there, the two went to a hotel and secured a private room, and two clerks familiar with code work were sent for. When a waiter, in answer to a call, looked into the room he was astonished at seeing the four very busy over a packet of letters.

Then, in a short time, code messages began to rain in on the manager. They were from Washington, from the Pacific coast, and from various forts scattered about the country. The manager confided to his wife when he went home to luncheon that it seemed to him as if another war was beginning. All the military offices in the country seemed talking in code, he said.

"What has this boy you speak of got to do with military operations?" asked the wife, wondering at a lad of Nestor's age being mixed up in a state affair.

"That is what I don't know," was the reply. "He came to the office this morning and sent for me, as you know. When I met him he asked for a code expert and wired to the biggest man in this military division. Then the code work began."

It was late in the evening when Nestor returned to the cottage and announced himself ready for the southern trip. Fremont, who had been impatiently awaiting his arrival, was eager to know the status of the Cameron case.

"Mr. Cameron is alive, but unconscious," was the unsatisfactory reply. "The police ordered him taken to a hospital and his people summoned. It is said that Mrs. Cameron is very bitter

against you."

"That's because I ran away," Fremont said, gravely. "What about Jim Scoby?"

"The watchman has disappeared," was the reply. "He left with a Mexican called Felix who occupied a room in the building. The police are after them."

"And of course they are looking for me—egged on by Mrs. Cameron?"

"There is a reward of \$10,000 offered for the arrest of the guilty party," was the unsatisfactory reply, "and the police officers are raking the city to find any one who was in the building last night."

"Did they arrest Jimmie McGraw?" asked Fremont, hoping that the bright little fellow had not been placed in prison.

"Jimmie ran away, just as he said he would, called a surgeon and left the building before he arrived. The police followed him to a room where members of the Wolf Patrol meet occasionally, but he was not there. The boys who were there, night messengers and the like, who had dropped in before going home, said that he had gone South. I met a boy named Frank Shaw, and he said the Black Bears were getting ready to do something for you, though he would not say what it was."

"Good old Frank!" exclaimed Fremont.

"The Black Bears are loyal," Nestor went on, "and so are the Wolves. We may hear from both patrols after we cross the Rio Grande."

"I wish some of them were going with us," said Fremont, with a sigh.

"If I am not mistaken," Nestor said, with a frown, "we'll have plenty of company on the way down. We may not see our traveling companions, but they will be close at hand."

"Do you mean that the police will trail us to Mexico?" asked Fremont.

"I don't know," was the reply. "I give it up. There are others beside the police to reckon with. Well, we'll see what Boy Scouts can do to protect a friend who is in trouble."

CHAPTER V.

THE WOLF IN THE BEAR'S BED.

The two boys traveled for three days and nights, the general direction being south. There were, however, numerous halts and turns in the journey to the Rio Grande. Three times Fremont was left alone at junction towns while Nestor took short trips on cross lines. Once the patrol leader was absent hours after the time set for his return, and the boy was anxious as well as mystified.

Fremont knew that his traveling companion was receiving telegrams in code all the way down, and knew, also, that his movements were in a measure directed by them. Still, one delay seemed to lead to another, as if new conditions were developing. The movements of the boys, too, were carefully guarded, so carefully, indeed, that it seemed to Fremont that Nestor was continually spying upon some one, as well as hiding from those who were spying upon him.

Time and again Fremont asked his friend to explain the mystifying situation, but never succeeded in gaining satisfactory information on the subject of the frequent halts and seemingly useless journeys back and forth. At various times during the journey he secured newspapers containing wild and improbable theories of the crime which had been committed in the Cameron building. Mr. Cameron's death, the dispatches said, was hourly expected, so the unfortunate boy received little encouragement from his reading of the New York news.

Early in the evening of the third day out the boys reached El Paso, on the Texas side of the Rio Grande. They found the city looking like a military encampment. Soldiers wearing the khaki uniforms of Uncle Sam were everywhere, martial music filled the air with its shrill fifings and deep drum-beats, and there was a gleam of polished steel wherever the boys walked.

It was a scene well calculated to stir the imagination and excite the patriotism of the Boy Scouts, and for a time the excitement of it all forced Fremont's troubles from his mind. The boys dined at a restaurant and then Fremont went to a comfortable room which had been engaged in a small hotel while Nestor went out into the city, "to spy out the resources of the land," as he declared.

Fremont, however, knew that his friend was very anxious over something. There appeared to be some new complication which the patrol leader was having a hard time puzzling out. It may well be imagined that his return was awaited with impatience. His face was very grave when at last he entered the room.

"I'm sorry I have no better report to make," Nestor said, throwing himself into a chair, "but the fact is that we've got to lose ourselves in the mountains across the river as soon as we can do so. We can get across to-night, of course, but must hustle after we get across. We can get provisions at San Jose."

"We've got to carry the provisions into the mountains on our backs?" asked Fremont.

"We surely have," was the reply, "and we've got to lay low while we are cooking and eating them. The Sierra del Fierro mountains, where we are going, are lined with insurrectos, and they are not in good humor just now."

"I'm game for anything, so long as we can get out of the beaten way," replied Fremont. "I've felt all the way down that we were being followed. Anyway," he continued, more cheerfully, "I shall enjoy the sight of a mountain campfire again. We don't have to take any matches with us. I can build a fire, Indian-fashion, with dry sticks and a cord. My Boy Scout experiences will be of service now, I take it."

"And you must fix up a little disguise to get over the river in," continued Nestor. "The New York police are in communication with the officers here, and the latter are out for the \$10,000 reward. As you suspected, we have been shadowed from New York. More than once I threw the shadows off the track, but they landed again. There are most unusual conditions around us, and we must be very discreet. After we get across the Rio Grande the danger will decrease."

"It makes me feel happy again," Fremont said, after putting on a new, cheap suit and tinting his face, "this idea of meeting a different sort of danger. I can't stand this lurking peril—this obsession that some one may spring out upon me from some dark corner at any minute. Get me out by a mountain camp-fire, old fellow, and I'll be game for anything."

There was a short silence, and then the boy went on.

"I don't understand exactly why you are heading for Mexico, but one country is as good as another just now. The police over there are said to be in close touch with those here, and to be brutal in their handling of prisoners. However, let us make up our minds that we will have nothing to do with the police."

"We are going to Mexico for three reasons," Nestor said, in a moment. "I can't tell you all about the three now, but one is to get you out of the way until the real criminal is discovered. The other two will show in time, and are likely to bring out a great deal of excitement."

"I have been wondering all the way down here," Fremont said, "why you copied one of the papers in the Tolford estate packet. I know now. There is in that sheaf of papers a description of a lost Mexican mine—a very valuable mine which has been lost for any number of years. I remember of hearing Mr. Cameron discuss the matter with one of the heirs. The lost mine seems to be the most valuable item in the estate schedule," the boy went on. "At any rate, there has been a lot of quarreling over it. That paper contains the only description in existence, and all the heirs want it."

"So you think I'm going after the lost mine?" laughed Nestor.

"If you are not, why did you copy the description?"

"How do you know that I copied the description?"

"You copied something."

"Yes; I copied the description of the lost mine. I thought it might be of use to us, and it may prove of the greatest importance."

"Then you think the man who invaded the office and struck Mr. Cameron down is interested in the lost mine?" exclaimed Fremont. "You think he committed the crime to get the description? That he copied it, and left the original paper there to throw off suspicion? That the man we are in quest of will go directly to the lost mine? Is that why you are going to Mexico? Is that why you said, from the start, that the clue pointed across the Rio Grande?"

"Don't ask so many questions," laughed Nestor. "There is a shadowy suspicion in my mind that the assassin is interested in the Tolford estate, if you must know, but I may be entirely mistaken. Still, we must remember that on the occasion when the Tolford papers were in the office over night, there was an attempt at robbery. This may be a coincidence, but it is worth looking into."

"I should say so," cried Fremont, with enthusiasm. "I should say it was worth looking into. Now I begin to see what you mean by coming this way, and why you dodged about on the route

down. You think the lost mine man is watching us."

"I don't think anything about it," said Nestor. "I never imagine issues, and I never form theories. One thing I know, and that is that we shall find friends over in Mexico. You may even come upon some of the Black Bears there."

"I hope so," was the cheerful reply.

"In which case," continued Nestor, "you might take the suggested ride down the Rio Grande."

"Not with the mountains in sight, and a lost mine to find," exclaimed Fremont.

"And a brutal assassin to bring to punishment," added Nestor.

"And the third motive for visiting Mexico to develop," smiled Fremont. "I wish I knew about that third motive. I understand the first two—one you told me and one I guessed."

"You shall know the other in time," said Nestor. "Just at present, however, the secret is not mine. Important issues are at stake, and I must keep my lips shut, even when talking with you, concerning our mission."

"All right," said Fremont. "Don't worry about me. I'll get it out of you in some way. See if I don't."

Shortly after this conversation closed Nestor went out into the city to arrange for the trip to the mountains. As he left the little hotel he imagined that he saw men bearing unmistakable stamp of plain-clothes policemen hanging about, and it also seemed to him that he was followed as he walked down the crowded street toward the river.

It was late when he returned to the room where he had left Fremont. His suspicions had proven to be more than suspicions, for he had indeed been tracked from the hotel, and had been obliged to do a great deal of walking in order to leave his pursuers behind. When he entered the hotel he saw that the plain-clothes men were no longer on duty at the front.

He climbed the stairs to his room and opened the door with a little quiver of the lips, for the place was dark and silent. When he turned on the lights, however, he was easier in his mind, for there was the sleeping figure he had hoped to find.

In a moment, however, his eyes fell upon a heap of clothing lying across a chair near the head of the bed. Those were not the clothes Fremont had worn. These were soiled and torn. Whose were they, then, and how was it that they were there?

He shook the sleeper lightly and a dust-marked face was lifted from the sheltering bed-clothes. But the face was not that of Fremont, but of Jimmie McGraw. Nestor started back in wonder. How had the boy come there, and where was Fremont? Had he been taken by the police? Was he already on his way back to the tombs? Then Jimmie sprang out of bed with a grin on his face.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO BLACK BEARS IN TROUBLE.

Left alone in his room by the departure of Nestor, Fremont busied himself for a time with the newspapers which his friend had brought in. On the first page of the evening newspaper he found the source of Nestor's information concerning the movements of the police.

The story, under a New York date line, was highly colored, the reporter taking advantage of every strange happening to bring in paragraphs of what he doubtless termed "local color." From first to last, every clue was bent and twisted so as to point to the guilt of the boy. It seemed that some cunning enemy was directing the reporters.

It was stated that Fremont had been seen in the building earlier in the evening, and that the night watchman had "reluctantly" admitted that he had heard high words passing between Mr. Cameron and his employe. The interview with the watchman had taken place on the very night of the crime. Since that time, the newspaper said, no one had seen him in New York, at least no one who would admit knowledge of his movements to the police.

On the whole, the newspaper made out a pretty good case against the boy, and Fremont was pleased to think that he had taken the advice of his friend and left the city. If he had not done so, he would now be in the Tombs, he had no doubt.

After a time he tossed the paper aside and began walking up and down his room, anxious for Nestor's return, anxious for a breath of mountain air—for the freedom of the high places, for the sniff of a camp-fire. It was then that he heard a footstep at his door.

He turned the lights down and waited, his hand on a weapon which had been given him by Nestor. Then the door was opened softly and an arm clad in khaki was thrust through the narrow opening. Fremont waited, but no face followed the arm into view. Then, approaching nearer, he saw something on the sleeve which sent the hopeful blood surging through his veins. It was the badge of the Black Bear Patrol, and beneath it was the Indian arrow-head badge of the Boy Scouts. With a shout he caught at the door and threw it open. There, with a delightful smile on his broad face, stood Frank Shaw.

Fremont seized his chum about the neck and dragged him into the room, where the hugging and pulling about rivaled the efforts of real black bears. Then Fremont closed and locked the door and dropped into a chair, eyeing his friend as if he would like to devour him, black bear fashion.

"You didn't expect to see me here, did you?" asked Frank.

"I should say not. How did you know where to find me? When did you leave New York? How is Mr. Cameron? Tell me all about everything."

"When you get done asking questions," cried Frank. "First, Ned Nestor told me where to look for you. He told some of the others, too, but I reckon they got lost on the way down. I've been waiting for you half a year—it seems to me—a whole day, any way. And that reminds me that you've got to beat it."

"And how is Mr. Cameron? Is he conscious yet?"

"Not yet, and they say he can't live. Say, I came down here to enlist as drummer, so I could get a stand-in with the army fellows, and, what do you think, they wouldn't enlist me! Said I was too short and fat. Me short and fat! I'm going to write up that recruiting officer and have Dad publish him to the world."

"There is a lot of talk about the case?" asked Fremont.

"Of course there is," was the reply. "But what do you think about that recruiting officer? He ought to be pinched. Me too short and fat! Ever hear me drum?"

"Only once," was the reply. "Then the boys held me while you drummed."

"Never you mind that," Frank replied. "I'm going to tell you now that you've got to beat it. Understand? You've got to get out right away—not to-morrow, but now."

"Yes, I know the police are after me," said Fremont, gravely. "There is some one who is keeping them posted as to our movements. It appears to me that this crime was directed against me as well as against Mr. Cameron. What are you going to do now?"

"Do?" demanded the other. "Do? I'm going to stay here and fight for you. What else could I do? And I'm going to write to father and tell him all about the case, and say you are innocent, and he'll show the other newspapers where to head in at."

"We've got to get the proof first," said Fremont. "The case looks dark for me," Fremont added with a sigh. "Nestor will soon be here, and he'll be glad to see you."

"I hope he'll come before the police, do," said Frank. "I'll tell you, old man, that they're hot after that reward. They know you're in this hotel. I don't doubt that they know the room you're in. You've got to beat it, I tell you."

"I've got to wait for Ned Nestor," said Fremont.

"Say," said Shaw, "do you know who it is that brought you here?"

"Ned Nestor, of course."

"But do you know who he is? He's the best amateur detective in the world. He's always looking for a chance to help those accused of crime. Even the high police officers of New York ask him to look into cases for them. Some day he'll be at the head of the United States secret service department. You see. He'll get you through if any one can. Leave it to him. Here's some one coming now. Perhaps it is Ned."

But it was not Ned, for there were noises in the hall, just beyond the door, which indicated a struggle, and then a sharp voice called out:

"Cut it out, youse feller! Cut it out, or I'll bring out me educated left. Let me alone, I say. I ain't no tramp."

Both boys recognized the voice, and Fremont hastened to unlock the door. When it was

opened the second surprise of the evening confronted the fugitive. Jimmie McGraw stood in the hall threatening an angry waiter with his clenched fists. Although the boy was small, and no match for the waiter, he was exceedingly nimble, and the waiter was unable to lay hands on him.

"He's tryin' to throw me out," exclaimed Jimmie, grinning at sight of the boys. "Tell him it is all right."

"We are expecting the boy," Fremont said. "Kindly let him alone."

"I'm ordered to throw him out of the hotel," roared the waiter. "He's a tramp."

Fremont pacified the fellow with a silver offering and, drawing Jimmie inside of the room, closed the door. Then the three boys, looking from one to the other, broke out in uproarious laughter. For Jimmie was a sight to behold. His clothing was torn, and his hands and face looked as if they had never seen water.

"How did you get down here?" asked Fremont, after a moment. "I left you in New York, to look after that end of the Cameron case."

"Huh!" exclaimed the boy. "You didn't take the railroad iron up with you when you came down, did you? Nor yet you didn't lock up the side-door Pullmans. I got fired as second assistant to the private secretary to the scrubwoman, 'cause she got pinched, so I came on down here to help Uncle Sam keep the border quiet."

"They won't let you drum," interrupted Fatty. "You're too short."

"I don't want to drum," was the indignant reply. "I want to get over into Mexico an' live in the mountains. Say, if you boys have any mazuma, just pass it out. I'm hungry enough to eat the Statue of Liberty in the harbor."

"I'm hungry, too," said Frank Shaw.

"I knew it," observed Jimmie. "Come on. Let's go out and eat."

"Wait," said Frank, "there's something doing here. Fremont's got to get out of this room right away and I'll go with him. There is a window we can climb out of. When we get out I'll plant Fremont somewhere and circle back here with some provisions for you. Understand?"

"Me for the hike out of the window, too," said Jimmie. "I see myself waitin' here for you to come back with grub after you get your share. You'll come back—not."

"Sure I'll come back," replied Frank. "Besides, some one's got to stay here. You for the bed, Jimmie," he added, with a sudden smile on his face, brought out, doubtless, by the arrival of a brilliant idea, "you for the bed, and if the cops come here you're the boy that has the room—see? And there ain't no other boy that you know of. That will keep them guessing. They'll think they've been following the wrong kid, and we'll all get across the Rio Grande before they wake up. You for the bed, Jimmie."

But Jimmie held back, saying that he did not feel in need of a bed, but did feel in need of a square meal. But the boys, laughing at the wry faces and savage speeches he made, helped him off with his clothes, turned out the lights, and dropped out of the window into an alley which ran, one story below, at the rear of the hotel.

They were none too soon in concluding their arrangements, for as they lit on the ground below a heavy knock came on the door of the room they had just left. As they slipped off in the darkness they heard Jimmie doing a pretty good imitation of a snore.

"Say," Fremont said, as they drew up on a street corner after a short run, "they'll arrest Jimmie. If the cops ask the waiters, they'll soon know that there were others in that room, and they'll arrest him for obstructing an officer. I wish we had brought him with us. Poor Jimmie!"

"He'll get out of it in some way," laughed Frank. "They won't hold him long if they do pinch him. Anyway, we want him around there to meet Nestor when he comes back. He'll tell some cock-and-bull story that will put him to the good with the cops."

But Fremont was not so sure of the resourcefulness of Jimmie, and worried over the matter not a little as they walked the streets, quieting down now, for the soldiers had been called back to camp and the citizens of the town were seeking their homes and beds. As for Frank, he was talking most of the time of the supper he was hoping to get before long. The boys did not care to enter a conspicuous restaurant, and so they chose an obscure eating house on a side street.

At first glance the place seemed without customers as they entered, and the boys were glad to have the room to themselves, but as soon as they were seated two men came in and took seats at a table not far away from their own. The men were dusky fellows, with long hair and sharp black eyes. They ordered sparingly, as if they cared little for food, and, after glancing furtively around the room, spent their time in whispered conversation.

Fremont thought he saw something familiar in one of the men, and kept his eyes on his face

until the coarse features, the sullen grin, became associated in his mind with the Cameron building in New York. It did not seem possible that this could be true, yet there was a face he had seen in the corridors of the great building, and every moment the identification was becoming more definite.

"Ever see that man before?" he asked of Frank, nudging the boy and pointing with his fork, held so low down that it could not be seen by the others.

"I'm sure I have," was the reply. "He was at the hotel when I went upstairs to your room," Frank went on. "I remember now."

Before anything more could be said the two men arose and approached the table where the boys sat. Railing at the adverse fate which had brought him in contact with this man after a successful flight from the New York police, Fremont arose and darted toward the door. He gained the doorway before the other could seize him, and there turned to look back.

Shaw had not been so fortunate in escaping the grasp of the Mexican, for such he appeared to be. When Fremont looked back the fellow was trying his best to throw the boy to the floor, while his companion stood by with clenched fists. The boy was about to turn back to the assistance of his chum when he saw with joy that this would not be necessary.

CHAPTER VII.

SIGNALS ON THE MOUNTAIN.

Fremont saw that Frank was putting up a nery battle with the man who had seized him, and was in the act of going to his assistance when Frank made a quick motion which seemed to bring every muscle in his body into action, and the Mexican shot into the air, landing, finally, on the back of his companion, and going to the floor with him.

The movement executed by the boy had been so lightning-like that none of the details had been noted, yet Fremont recognized it as a clever ju jitsu trick he had often seen the boys of the Black Bear Patrol practicing. Frank laughed as the man seemed to spill off his round figure, and before the amazed and raging Mexican could get to his feet both boys were off like the wind, followed at a distance by policemen who had been called by the owner of the restaurant.

"We may as well circle back to the hotel now," Fremont said, as they brought up on a corner to rest and catch their breath. "I'm anxious about Jimmie. We should never have left him there alone."

"If we go back to Jimmie without a cart-load of provisions," laughed Frank, "he'll call the police. Besides, I'm starving. Here's another feed shop, so we may as well load up."

Fremont did not enter the place, but waited in a dark stairway for Frank to return with the food that was to be taken to Jimmie. When Frank showed up he was devouring a thick ham sandwich.

"Now we can face the lad," the boy laughed. "He'll be hungry, though."

When they came to within a block of the hotel, Fremont waited for his companion to bring him news of the situation there. Much to his relief, he soon saw Shaw returning, accompanied by both Jimmie and Nestor. And Jimmie was munching a great sandwich as he drew near to the waiting boy.

"S-a-y!" Jimmie exclaimed, as the boys met and walked away together, apparently free of surveillance. "That was a fresh cop. Wanted to geezle me for a robber. If Ned hadn't come across just as he did, there'd 'a' been a scrap. Say, Ned," he added, turning to the patrol leader, "how did you get your stand-in with the soldiers? Wasn't that a colonel who talked the bull cop out of pinching both of us?"

"That was Colonel Wingate," was the reply. "I can't tell you anything more about the matter just now. Anyway, we've got our work cut out for us to-night. We must be far from the border by morning. There's a train from Juarez about midnight."

There were many questions which Fremont wanted to ask Nestor as the boys, each busy with his own thoughts, crossed the bridge, after giving a password supplied by Colonel Wingate, and took train at Juarez for San Jose, but he remained silent. He wanted, among other things, to ask why they were going to San Jose so directly—as if the town had been the object of the journey from the beginning. He saw, however, that Nestor, who was becoming a good deal of a mystery to him, did not care to talk, and so he held his tongue.

Long before noon on the following day, after a comfortless ride on a bumping train, the boys found themselves at San Jose, a scraggly town on the west shore of beautiful Lake de Patos. As they were both hungry and tired, they secured rooms in a little hotel, ordered dinner served there, and rested for a short time. The dinner was plentiful, but thoroughly Mexican. The menu smelled of garlic, and the walls of the room were decorated (?) with cheap colored prints wherein matadors calmly awaited the onslaught of maddened bulls, while women, shrouded in mantillas and smoking cigarettes, leaned out of their seats and applauded.

After the siesta, provisions were brought and enclosed in neat packages convenient for carrying on the back, and at dusk, after a swift row across the lake, the boys were at the foot of a high range of mountains which looked down upon the lake and the town.

On their way across the lake, and on the gentle slope of the foot of the hills, they had frequently observed parties of roughly dressed men, some with muskets and some without, making their way, by boat and on foot, toward the mountain. Those on the water were in rude, makeshift boats, of which there seemed to be an insufficient quantity at hand, groups waiting on the shore for the return of conveyances in order that they might in turn be carried across.

There was great excitement in the little town, and men, women and children were huddled in the streets, looking apprehensively at the rough men who were hurrying, for some unknown reason, to the east. Finally two men who appeared to know something of the English language asked Nestor for a ride in the rather swift boat he had secured for the trip across the lake. This request was gladly granted, for Nestor was anxious to talk with some one who might be able to tell him something of the movement to the east. He had his own suspicions of the motive of the march, and they were not agreeable ones.

The men taken into the boat proved to be ignorant, sullen fellows, and so little information of the kind sought was gained from them. Presently the boat was left behind and the boys, each with a typical Boy Scout camping outfit on his back—the same including provisions—were soon making their way up the slope.

"Jere!" cried Jimmie, throwing himself on the ground after the first steep climb. "Let's wait for the elevator. What do you expect to find up here, anyway?"

"We're looking for a place to hide a boy, for a lost mine, and for a Mexican with one leg shorter than the other and a withered right hand," laughed Nestor. "Move on."

"That description listens to me like the Mexican we saw in the restaurant," said Shaw. "He had a withered right hand. Say, but he got a drop."

"He looked to me like a man I have seen in New York," said Fremont. "I wonder if there is any one left in New York?" he added, with a grin. "It seems to me that about all the people I ever knew there are on their way south."

"This fellow may be fascinated by our good looks," Frank put in. "He seems to be in need of polite society."

"Polite society!" repeated Jimmie. "You give him a dump on the floor for polite society. Is he the man who is lookin' for the mine youse fellers have been talkin' about ever since we left El Paso?"

"If we should follow him to the mine," George suggested, "and arrest him there, that ought to end the case. It would end the mystery, anyway, and show why the assault was made. I guess you have been after this man all the way down, Nestor," he added.

"When he hasn't been after me," laughed the patrol leader. "But you mustn't be too certain that the arrest of this man would end the case. He may be after the mine, may even have a copy of the description in Mr. Cameron's office, and yet be entirely innocent of the crime."

"He ought to be pinched for trying to geezle me in the eats house," grinned Frank.

The boys ascended the slope until darkness set in, and then rested in a little valley, or dent, between two peaks, and pitched their two small shelter tents. Then they built a fire of such light wood as they could find and prepared supper. As soon as the meal was cooked they put out the fire, fearful that the smoke might betray their presence there. Presently Jimmie called attention to two columns of smoke rising high up on the mountain.

"They're signals," he said, "because there wouldn't be two camp-fires close together. They're signals, all right."

"What do they mean?" asked Nestor, with a smile.

"One column means come to camp," replied Jimmie, "two mean that help is needed, three mean that there is good news, and four mean come together for a council. They are Indian signals, and the Boy Scouts use them in the woods when out hunting."

"Then this means a call for help," said Fremont.

"That's what," from Jimmie.

"It may mean for the man with the short leg to come on," laughed Frank. "I wish I had my drum. I could make him think he had help coming. You wait until I get that drum. I'll show you what's what."

Lights could now be seen moving on the mountain. It seemed clear that men were massing there for some purpose. Soon Frank and Jimmie were asleep. Then Nestor asked:

"George, do you remember whether the bolt in the corridor door of the Cameron suite turned under your key that night? In other words, was the door locked?"

"I thought it was," was the reply.

"But you are not certain?"

"No, because I was dazed when I opened the door and found the room dark and still. I had expected to find Mr. Cameron at his desk, as there were lights there before I entered the building."

"You saw no one on the stairs?"

"Not a soul."

"When did you first meet Mr. Cameron?"

"Seven years ago, when I was selling newspapers."

"He was a customer?"

"Yes, and a good one. He talked with me quite a lot, and finally asked me to come to live with him and take a position in his office when I got older."

"And you were glad to go?"

"Naturally. My life was not a pleasant one."

"Did he ever talk to you about that old life?"

"Often. He asked me lots of questions about my parents."

"And what did you tell him?"

"There was nothing to tell. I could not remember my parents. At first there was Mother Scanlon, who beat me as often as she fed me, and then I was on the streets, sleeping in alleys and stairways."

"Have you seen this Mother Scanlon lately?" was the next question.

"Never, but why are you asking me all these questions? I'm no fairy prince under enchantment. Just a waif left alone in New York. There are plenty such."

"I want you to look Mother Scanlon up when you get back to New York," Nestor said. He might have given some reason for the remark, only Jimmie and Frank awoke and called attention to signals on the mountain.

"I know that wig-wag game," the latter said. "Keep still and I'll tell you what he says."

Four pair of eyes were instantly fixed on the heights above, where a slender column of flame, like a torch on fire most of its length, was plainly to be seen. It was not a stationary column, however, for it moved to right and left in an arc of ninety degrees, starting at vertical and swinging back of it. At times the point was lowered, as if the column had been dipped to the ground in front.

"If he is talking United States instead of Spanish," Jimmie said, "I'll read it for you. The Scouts use those signals. The motion from vertical to right is ONE, that from vertical to left is TWO, and that from vertical to the front is THREE. See! It is United States, for there are two left motions, meaning A. Now there's two twos and a one, repeated. That means two 1's. 'All' is the word."

"That is the way I read it," said Nestor.

"Wait," said Jimmie. "He didn't give the signal which indicates the end of the word. Here's one two and two ones. That means R. One one is I. Two twos and two ones make G. One one and two twos make H. One two makes T. There! He's said 'All Right,' and in English. Now, what are Americans doing up there?"

"That may not be the end of the message," suggested Fremont.

"See the three threes?" asked Jimmie. "That means the end of the sentence. Now, there's double two, double two, double two, triple three. That means for the other fellow, who must be down the mountain somewhere, to quit signaling. He's gettin' exclusive, eh?"

"I don't understand why those signals are in English," said Nestor. "There are plenty of Americans mixed up in this mess, but they are not doing the signaling, so far as I have heard. It would seem that the wig-wag ought to be in Spanish. I wonder if I could get down the mountain to the man there? It would be easier than climbing."

"I'll go with you," decided Frank. "If I fall it will be like rolling a feather bed down the mountains. Besides, you may need assistance."

And before the others could protest, the two boys were on their way down the steep descent.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

It was weirdly lonely in the dark little dent on the side of the mountain after the departure of the two boys, and Jimmie drew closer to his companion. The wind which swept the heights was chilly.

The two lay close together in silence for a long time, each, doubtless, thinking of the Great White Way and the lights which would now be glittering there, of the bay, of the East River with its shipping, and of the hundred things which make New York a city, once seen, to be remembered forever. Then a rumble as of a stone crashing down came to their ears and they sprang to their feet.

"There's some one coming," whispered Jimmie, and they listened, but the only sound they heard was made by a bird winging its way through the dim upper light. Then, in a moment, signals flashed out again.

"One, two, one," counted Jimmie, "Now, two, one, one, two, two, one, and then one, two. That means come. Now, where does he want the other fellow to come?"

"There's a lot going on here to-night," said Fremont. "I wonder if they can see us from where they are?"

"We may as well get away from the tents," was the reply. "There's a good place to hide behind that rock. When Nestor and Frank come we can let them know where we are."

Fremont agreed to this, and the lads were soon hidden in a shallow gully which cut a ridge not far from where the tents had been pitched. For a time all was still, then came the rattling of steel on steel, sounding threatening enough in the darkness.

"Some one's got a gun," whispered Jimmie.

"Our fire may have been seen from above," Fremont ventured.

"Well, they can't find us here," consoled Jimmie. "Anyway, we'll lie here and listen for a few minutes."

The boys lay quiet for a considerable time. There were no more signals then, but they could not banish the feeling that emissitious Mexicans were watching them from the shadows. Directly noises were heard at the tents and a voice asked, in good English:

"Where are they? You said that only two went down the mountain."

"That was right," was the reply. "I don't see where the others can be."

"Do you think they are officers?" asked Jimmie, as the men stumbled about the tents. "They aren't Mexicans."

"I'm afraid they are officers," replied Fremont, "and we must keep pretty still. I presume these are the fellows who were wig-wagging a little while ago."

The intruders were heard moving about the tents for a time, and then they went away, blundering along over loose stones which rattled as they swept down the declivity. When they were some distance off, and still going, judging by the sound, the boys walked back to the tents and tried to sleep, but the excitement of the time was too much for them, and they could not keep their eyes closed.

After a time there came a commotion in the valley below, from the direction Nestor and Frank had taken. There were shouts of rage and then shooting. Jimmie was on his feet instantly.

"They're attacking Nestor," he cried, "and I'm going down there to help him."

Before Fremont could protest the boy was off, scrambling down the mountain in the darkness like a goat. At first Fremont thought of following him, but he was very tired and sleepy and so gave it up.

He crept back into a tent and threw himself down on a blanket, closing his eyes only for a moment, as he thought.

Jimmie pressed on down the slope for some distance without discovering the source of the disturbance, then turned back. When, near the tents, he turned and looked over the valley, a torch far below was spelling out "O.K."

"There are a lot of Americans mixed up in this," the boy thought. "I've heard that this revolt was being financed and executed by our people, but I did not believe the story. Anyhow, they are giving their signals in United states."

As the lad approached nearer to the tents the silence which held the little dent on the slope sent a vague shiver of alarm through his veins.

When he came to the tents there was no one in sight. He whistled softly, but there was no reply. The moon, now peeping around a shoulder of the mountain, struck an object which glistened like silver, and the boy picked it up. It was Fremont's revolver, and the chambers were full. There had been no shooting. Fremont's cap lay on the ground not far from where the weapon had been found.

Filled with apprehension, Jimmie dashed into the tents. They were both empty. The boy had disappeared, leaving his weapon and his cap behind. It was plain to be seen, from marks on the rocks and the thin soil of the dent, that there had been a struggle.

Alarmed beyond the power of words to express, Jimmie crept into the hiding place they had used earlier in the evening and waited. He was angry at Nestor for going away, and angry with himself for leaving Fremont alone. While the latter possessed courage and strength, he was not as apt in such things as they were facing as his companions. He had been sheltered for years in the Cameron home, and was not so resourceful as his companions, not so ready to take advantage of any point which might occur in such a rough-and-tumble game as was now in progress.

Jimmie's fear was that Fremont had been captured by officers, and would be taken back to New York and thrust into the Tombs to await the action of the grand jury, based on the recovery or death of Mr. Cameron. This would be fatal to all his hopes. While the boy pondered and fretted over the matter, the long roll of a drum came around a cliff-corner, and then a file of ragged soldiers, or what seemed to be such, showed in the moonlight, with a diminutive drummer-boy, pounding for dear life, not far in the rear.

In the meantime the two who were in Jimmie's thoughts were making their way down the slope with such speed and caution as they were able to manage.

It was very rough going in the darkness, and more than once Frank received a bump which effectually banished all inclination to sleep. At last he sat down on a ledge and called out to Nestor.

"Dig in! Walk your head off!"

Nestor halted and looked back.

"What's doing?" he asked.

"I'm flabbergasted," was the reply. "How do you think you're goin' to get back up the hill?"

Nestor pointed to a point of flame a little lower down.

"It is only a short ways now," he said.

Frank grunted and arose to his feet.

"They ought to put in elevators," he grumbled.

The boys walked for perhaps half an hour longer and then drew up near to the point of fire which Nestor had pointed out.

"Now what?" demanded Frank.

"I want to see who they are. I'm expecting friends here," was the laughing reply. "Remain here while I investigate."

"If I stand up," grumbled Shaw, "I'll fall down; and if I sit down I'll go to sleep. I never was so sleepy in all me blameless life. You needn't hurry back."

Frank was as good as his word, although he had spoken in jest. No sooner was his companion out of sight than he dropped to the ground, and in spite of his efforts to keep his eyes open, was soon fast asleep. When he awoke an hour later, Nestor was pulling at his arm.

"Don't pull it off," he said. "I may want to use it again. What's doing below?"

"Were you ever in the Cameron building in New York?" Nestor asked, irrelevantly.

"Did you wake me out of me sweet dreams to ask that?" grinned the boy. "Why don't you go on and tell me what's coming off down there in that camp?"

"I've got the New York end of the Cameron case on my mind to-night," was the reply. "Tell me what you know about the Cameron building and the people who work there during the night—cleaning up, and that sort of thing."

"I don't think I was ever in the building, and Fremont never talked with me about the workers. You can ask Jimmie about that."

"Yes, Jimmie worked there. I've heard him talk about the night watchman and predict his future home. The boy came running into my room on the night of the tragedy and almost pulled me out of bed, saying that a member of the Black Bear Patrol was in trouble."

"What do you want to know about the building?"

"I was wondering if Jim Scoby, the night watchman, was permitted to carry a key to the Cameron suite. Jimmie does not know whether he was or not, and I thought you might have heard Fremont talking about matters there."

"I presume Fremont can tell you all about that. Suppose Scoby did have a key? What of it? Fremont says Mr. Cameron locked himself in that night, or was to do so, and that shows that the man who did the job did not need a key. He must have been admitted by Mr. Cameron."

"There were strange doings in that suite that night," Nestor said, almost as if talking to himself. "I can't quite get the hang of it," he added, taking a flat steel key from his pocket, and holding it up for the inspection of the other.

Shaw took the key and held it up in the moonlight, examining every detail of it.

"That is a key to the suite," he said. "Fremont has one like it. Where did you get it? It looks new."

"It is new," Nestor went on. "It looks as if it had been made to order recently. Now, whoever made it did not get it exactly right at first, and was obliged to file it down. I have known night watchmen to make keys."

"An old trick," admitted Frank. "Well, let us take it for granted that Scoby was not permitted to carry a key and that he had one made, for some purpose of his own. What does that lead up to?"

"I found this key in front of the safe," Nestor continued, after a moment's deliberation. "It was undoubtedly dropped there by one of the men who visited the rooms that night. I have been wondering if it was the watchman."

"You have some other reason for supposing it was Scoby," Frank said. "Go one and tell me about it."

"Yes, there is another reason." Nestor continued, smiling at the quick way Frank had taken him up. "I found this Grand Army button and this cloth raveling in front of the safe, too, not far from where the key was discovered."

"Well, did the watchman wear a Grand Army coat that night?" asked Frank. "Lots of unworthy people wear Grand Army coats."

"He did," was the reply. "He wore a blue coat with Grand Army buttons, and one of the buttons was missing from the right sleeve when I saw him in the corridor as I passed out. He probably caught his sleeve on something in the safe and ripped the button off. He either did not notice the loss of the button or had no time to pick it up."

"You're locating him in a compromising situation, all right," Frank said. "But you said 'one of the men who visited the rooms that night.' Who were the others?"

"Wait a minute," said Nestor. "Let me tell you what else I found there. I have in my pocket a piece of paper, a margin cut from a legal document, showing the thumb and fingermarks of a withered right hand. I also have a shoe heel near two inches high. These were taken from the Cameron suite. What do you make of that?"

"I understand," Frank said. "One of the other men was this Mexican, the man with the short right leg, the fellow who tried to geezele me at the El Paso restaurant. Well, that makes two who were there that night—two who were in front of the safe—two who had no right to be there."

"And this Mexican was a tenant of the building," Nestor went on, "and he might have had the key made. At least he was there the night the key was used, looking over papers he had no right to touch."

"It begins to look as if the Mexican went to the building for the purpose of robbery, and that he found a tool in Jim Scoby," said Frank. "Why don't you have the two of them pinched, so Fremont won't have all this trouble on his mind? The Mexican is somewhere about here, and Jim Scoby can't be far away, as the newspapers say he ran away from New York. Why couldn't you have studied this out that night?"

"Don't rush conclusions," smiled Nestor. "I said there were several people in the suite that night. Well, we have made sure of two of them, though we don't know how they go in there if Mr. Cameron had the door locked from the inside."

"If they hadn't used their false key," Shaw put in, "they wouldn't have had it in hand and wouldn't have lost it."

"Very clever," said Nestor.

"Who else was in there?" asked Frank, blushing at the compliment.

"The third man," Nestor continued, "had business with Mr. Cameron. He was there earlier in the evening."

"He didn't lose anything there, did he?" asked Frank, with a laugh.

"Yes," replied Nestor, "he did. He lost his temper."

"You're a corker!" Frank exclaimed. "What else did he lose?"

"His life, possibly."

"Come, children," Frank grinned, "it is time to wake up."

CHAPTER IX.

ABOUT THE THIRD SUSPECT.

Nestor laughed at the puzzled boy's exclamation and sat for some time looking down on the dim camp-fire near the tents he had visited a short time before. The night was cloudless, with a slight wind blowing from the west. Now and then the sound of hoarse voices came from the peaks above.

"The Mexican knocked off his heel there," he finally said, "and Scoby left his coat-button. They might just as well have left their cards in the papers they examined."

"What papers were they?"

"The Tolford estate papers."

"Yes, of course. The Mexican wanted to know something about the buried mine," Frank said. "We're getting at the motive now."

"Now, this third visitor," Nestor went on, "as I have said, went there on business—on business connected with a contract for the purchase of firearms and ammunition. Mr. Cameron undoubtedly opened the door to admit him after he had locked himself in. The door might not have been locked again that night, but that is immaterial at present. This third man, whom we may as well call Don Miguel, the diplomat, was not in the building when I got there. The others were."

"Then why didn't you have them both pinched?" demanded Frank.

"Partly because they were in the building," was the reply. "If they had been possessed of guilty consciences, they would have run away. At least, it looks that way to me. You see, this Don Miguel might have struck the blow and left the offices open and at the mercy of the others. Now you see how useless it is to draw hasty conclusions."

"That's so. He might," Frank admitted.

"No trouble to get Scoby, anyway," said Nestor. "He is asleep in that tent, and here are more exhibits in the case—another Grand Army button and another raveling. I cut them from Scoby's coat as he lay asleep over there."

"You never had the nerve to go into the tent?" asked Frank.

"They are all asleep," was the reply, "so I ran no risk in going in, and it was easy to crawl under the canvas. The Mexican we had been talking about—Felix, Jimmie calls him—is also there, with six or seven rough-looking fellows, probably miners. It is easy to imagine what they are here for."

"They got the description out of the safe, and are going to the mine," exclaimed Frank. "I believe they attacked Mr. Cameron in order to get the description. The man you call Don Miguel would have no motive in attacking him, would he?"

"We'll see about that later on," was the reply. "So far as I can see through it, the case stands as it did before, with three men in the suspect row."

"Gather them in, then," advised Frank. "Send for the soldiers and have these two pinched. Then go to New York, or wherever this third man is, and have him pinched, too. That will clear the atmosphere a little."

"I have an idea," Nestor said, "that this Felix went to New York on purpose to get the mine paper, or a copy of it. He probably had a description of his own, which would not take him to the mine, and went to the Cameron building hoping that he could get the one in the estate papers, and that the two of them, his own and the other, would enable him to reach his goal." "I reckon you have that right," Frank said, "and he got Scoby to work with him."

"I'm going to let him go ahead with his search," the patrol leader said. "He may show the way to the mine. Anyway, it is a chance worth taking. Otherwise, I might, as you advise, arrest him and the watchman with him. But here, again, this third suspect intervenes."

"You appear to think a lot of this third man," grinned Frank.

"Naturally," Nestor replied, "since he is the man who brought me to Mexico."

"You're getting to be a puzzle," exclaimed Frank. "I thought the safety of Fremont was the main thing, with the mine a close second."

"I might have hidden Fremont in New York, and the mine matter could have waited."

"Is this Don Miguel here?"

"He is expected here. I came down to meet him."

"Hope you'll know him when he comes."

"There will be no trouble about that," was the reply. "I know about how the fellow looks. And I rather think he will recognize me."

"He may see you first," suggested Frank.

"If he does, I probably won't see him at all. Well, I must take chances on that. I thought this might be his camp when I came down here."

"What is he coming here for?"

"To kick up a row."

"And is he going to succeed in doing it?"

"That is more than I can say at present."

"I wish you wouldn't be so mysterious," cried the boy. "You've told me all about the other two, why not tell me about this one?"

"There are international reasons," was the grave reply.

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank. "That's why you're hand-in-glove with the army, and why you're in the code row. Say, but you've told me all about how the others were identified as having been in the Cameron suite, now tell me something about this Don Miguel, if you can. Has he got a short leg, or a withered hand, or a long shoe heel? Go on and tell me how he looks and acts, if you can."

"Well, he's a dusky, slender fellow," Nestor laughed, "and shows culture and education. He dined at a lobster palace that night and wore evening clothes. He went directly to the Cameron building from the restaurant, using a taxicab and speaking both French and Spanish, as well as English, to the driver. He is a good dresser, and ordinarily a discreet man, yet he left a schedule of firearms in the Cameron suite when he left. He should have taken that with him."

Frank eyed his companion curiously, his face eager in the moonlight, his right hand rubbing his forehead, as if trying to scour away the cobwebs.

"Quit your kidding," he said.

"It is only a question of observation and inquiry," laughed Nestor. "There is no Sherlock Holmes business about it."

"And you think this man in evening dress will come down here and mix with these ragged bums?"

"I think he will come down here," was the reply.

Frank watched the small camp-fire below, just touching with red light the tents Nestor had so successfully entered a short time before. The logic of the case seemed to be sound enough. Any one of the three men might have committed the crime with which Fremont was charged.

Two of the three were sleeping in that tent, while the third one was expected. What connection could there be between the man in evening dress and the sullen Soby and the villainous Felix? What significance could there be in the schedule of firearms he had left in the suite?

How were the attack on Cameron, the matter of the hidden mine, and the matter of international importance associated together? These questions and many others presented themselves to the boy as he watched the fire die out and waited for Nestor to go on.

"This third man is a diplomat, is he?" he finally asked. "Does that mean that he is in the diplomatic service of some government, and that he is acting here in that capacity?"

"Something like that," was the reply, "though it might be difficult to get any government to father the mission he is really on. He claims, I understand, to be acting for a junta. At least, he has not brought any government into the affair so far, that I know of."

"Well, what does he want?"

"His benevolent purpose is to bring on a war between Mexico and the United States," was the astonishing reply.

"I don't think he's next to his job as a statesman, then," observed Frank, "unless he wants to see Mexico cleaned out."

"However that may be, he believes that a raid on Texas soil from this side of the river would provoke our government to an invasion, as it probably would."

"I should hope so."

"And he believes, too, that in such an emergency the Mexican federals and insurrectos would join hands in fighting the common enemy."

"That is quite likely. He's got that figured out in good form," laughed Frank. "I guess he isn't such a dub, after all."

"He is probably right in the supposition that such a war would stop the fighting over here—that is, the fighting as it is now going on. He seeks peace in his own land at the risk of a war with our country."

"Then he ought to be shot," declared the boy.

"He was negotiating with Mr. Cameron for the purchase of firearms and ammunition," Nestor went on. "His people haven't got the guns, and Mr. Cameron dealt in them."

"I see. Go on—faster," cried the excited boy.

"He went to the office that night hoping to convince Mr. Cameron that he ought to sell him the arms he wanted. He doubtless expected to leave the office with a signed contract for what he wanted—arms and ammunition enough to make the proposed raid at least formidable. He failed. Mr. Cameron would not sell the arms, knowing that they were to be used against his own country."

"Good boy! Hope he gets well."

"Then this diplomat probably asked for the correspondence which had been carried on between the two men. He doubtless feared that Mr. Cameron would reveal the plot to the government, as he would have done."

"Say," cried Frank, "this is getting pretty swift."

"It has been swift from the start," replied the other.

"Did this diplomat get the arms of some one else?" asked the boy, presently.

"I don't know, but it is believed that he did."

"And is coming here with them?"

"Unless they are stopped at the border."

"Then," Frank said, soberly, "I know what all these men are gathering here for. I know what they are waiting for—guns."

"I'm afraid you are right."

"Does the War department know?"

"Certainly."

"You found out about it and told Washington by wire?"

Frank reached forward and seized Nestor's hand and shook it as if he expected to keep it in his grasp forever.

"I know you did," he said. "You needn't say a word."

"The War department has the letters," said Nestor, "the letters the diplomat did not secure from Mr. Cameron. I don't know why he did not get them, I'm sure. They were in a drawer of the big desk. It is quite probable, however, that he was frightened away, as the others were. That must have been quite early in the evening, and who it was that scared him away is what is puzzling me."

CHAPTER X.

THE WOLF MEETS A PANTHER.

The ragged soldiers halted when they came to where the amazed Jimmie stood, and in a moment were joined by the drummer, a slender boy of fourteen, who looked worn out.

When he saw Jimmie he smiled and saluted by extending the right arm horizontally, palm out, three fingers vertical, with the thumb and little finger crossed on the palm.

"Where did you get that?" demanded Jimmie.

"Did stunts for it," was the reply. "And look here."

The drummer swept his left hand down his right sleeve, tapping half a dozen badges. These were those worn by Boy Scouts who had passed as Fireman, Signaller, Pioneer, Marksman, Horseman, and Musician. The officer in charge of the squad looked on with an amused smile as the drummer exhibited his honors.

"The kid is crazy over the Boy Scouts," he said. "He's been hunting for comrades among the Mexicans, and I reckon he found a few, at that. Well, I'm in favor of the organization myself. It teaches, honor, manhood, self-reliance, and has made a man of many a flat-chested, cigarette-smoking youth. It will be the saving of boys in the city slums if carried out properly."

"Sure it is all to the good," cried the drummer. "A Boy Scout can find friends wherever he goes—and friends that will stick by him, too. We get into the game ourselves and do things, instead of sitting on the bleachers and smoking cigarettes while others get the exercise."

The little fellow smiled winningly at Jimmie, cast his eyes up the mountain, and then asked:

"Where did you come from? What patrol do you belong to? I'm Panther Patrol, New York."

"New York Wolf Patrol," was the reply.

"What you doin' here with the ragged army? Say, but they'd make a hit on a Bowery stoige, them soldiers."

"What do you know about the Bowery?" demanded the drummer. "Have you been reading about it in the Newsboy's Delight?"

"I know every inch of the Bowery," was the indignant reply. "When I walk down to Chatham Square the lamps bow to me. I'm hungry for it right now."

The drummer threw out his arms in a gesture of approval.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, then.

"I'm editing this end of a detective case," laughed Jimmie.

"All alone?" grinned the drummer. "Where are the others?"

"Lost," cried Jimmie. "Jere! I wish Frank Shaw was here and had hold of that drum. There'd be something doin'. He came down here to drum for Uncle Sam, but they wouldn't have him. They said he was too short an' fat."

"Fatty Shaw!"

The drummer held his sides with his hands while he laughed, and then dropped down on a convenient rock. The officer in charge of the file of soldiers shook him by the shoulder, though he was laughing too.

"Get up," he said. "What kind of a minstrel show is this?"

"Frank Shaw!" roared the drummer, paying no attention to the order. "He got sore because I told him I'd enlisted as a drummer and lit out. His father'll be sending after him, though. He's a good scout. Where is he now?"

"Lost," repeated Jimmie. "I don't know where he is. Just dropped into a hole."

"Not into any small hole," observed the drummer. "Are those your tents?" he added, with a longing look at the soft blankets.

"Sure," replied Jimmie. "Want to sleep? Go to it then. You're welcome."

"You bet I will," said the drummer.

He started for one of the tents and then turned back.

"Did you see the wig-wagging awhile ago?" he asked.

"Sure I did," was the reply.

"It was brief," said the officer in charge of the file, "but, still, long enough to convince me that we arrived here at the right time. There is an army forming here, no one seems to know what for, and renegade Americans are mixing in the game. The signals called for a gathering some distance above us."

"That's the way I took it," observed Jimmie. "They are calling the men together, I reckon, and there must be Americans in charge for they talk United States."

"When you came up," began the officer, "did you observe the fellows near the bottom? They seemed to me to be asking questions of the ones up above."

"We saw no one except stragglers when we came up," was the reply. "After the signals came, Ned Nestor and Frank Shaw went down there to see who they were, and they are down there yet, I guess. At least, they haven't returned."

The soldiers, who were now laying aside their weapons and preparing to cook supper, late as the hour was, observed the lad eagerly at the mention of Nestor's name. The lad noticed, too, as they gathered about him with questioning looks, that they were not at all like Mexicans in appearance, now that they had thrown off their outer clothing. Jimmie glanced from the officer to his men.

"You don't look like Greasers to me," he said.

The officer laughed but made no reply.

"You came in with Ned Nestor?" he asked.

"Sure I did."

"And you say he went back down the mountain to see who was signaling down there?"

"That is what he said when he went away."

"What did he say about coming back?"

"Of course he'll come back," declared Jimmie. "He's needed here. Since his departure the boy he left here with me has been geezled by some one. I left him alone just a minute, and when I returned he wasn't here. They're all lost but me, and I'm from the Bowery, so nobody can lose me."

"Who was it that was taken from the camp?" asked the officer.

Jimmie hesitated, for he did not know what reply to make. These men might be in quest of Fremont. Tempted by the large reward offered for the capture of the boy, they might have crossed the river and followed Nestor into the mountains.

On the other hand, if they were not in search of Fremont, they might render valuable assistance in running down the men who had taken him away. It was rather a hard place to put the loyal little fellow, but he proved equal to the occasion by reserving his decision until further information concerning the new arrivals should be at hand.

"His name is Smith," he replied, shortly.

"And why did these unknown people abduct Smith?" laughed the officer, who understood from the manner of the boy that the name was a fictitious one.

"I don't know," was the truthful reply.

"Well, we'll look into this later on," said the officer. "Just now we've got to travel down this hill and see what Ned Nestor is about."

The officer talked with his men in whispers for some moments, and Jimmie saw that they were all anxious about something. Finally, directing two of his men to remain under arms at the tents, he set off down the mountain with the other four. As they disappeared Jimmie beckoned the drummer aside.

"What do they want of Ned Nestor?" he asked.

"They want some information he has," was the reply. "They were sent here to confer with him. Did you think they were Greasers because they wore the ragged clothes over their good ones? Huh! They had to do that, and talk Spanish, too, in order to get in here. The insurrectos think they're new recruits."

"Who are they?" asked Jimmie. "What do they want to see Nestor for?"

"They are United States secret service men," was the reply. "They are here on a clue provided by Nestor, and they want to confer with him, as I said before."

"Jere!" cried Jimmie. "I didn't know that Ned was in partnership with the United States army. What is it all about?"

"You'll have to ask Ned," was the unsatisfactory reply. "He has been keeping the wires to Washington hot ever since he left New York, and these men were sent here at his request. There's something doing here, but I don't know what it is."

"I thought they were here to arrest Fremont," said Jimmie. "If I had known who they were, I wouldn't have lied about the boy. I said his name was Smith."

"Oh, it is George Fremont, is it?" asked the drummer. "That is the boy wanted for robbery and attempted murder in New York. Did Nestor bring him here?"

"Yes," was the reply. "He wanted to keep him away from the officers until the truth is known. Now he's gone and left us, and Fremont has been captured."

"Perhaps United States officers captured him," suggested the drummer. "If so, he is now on his way back to New York. I'm sorry."

"I don't believe civil officers got in here," said Jimmie. "When the secret service men come back, I'm goin' to ask them to help find him. I recon, now, that the Greasers caught him. I hope so, that is, I would rather they would have him than the others. We may get him away from the Greasers, but we couldn't get him away from officers."

A new view of the incident was now presented by one of the secret service men, who began questioning Jimmie about the boy he had called Smith. The boy thought best to tell him the truth, and did so.

"It may be all right," the secret service man said, after hearing the story. "It strikes me that the Greasers mistook Fremont for Nestor. In that case, they may release him as soon as they discover their mistake."

"Don't you ever think that," the other man cut in. "They are more likely to stand him up against a wall and shoot him. When the lieutenant comes back we'll see what can be done about it."

"But why should the Greasers want to capture Ned Nestor?" demanded Jimmie. "You said they might have mistaken Fremont for Ned."

"I can imagine that the man responsible for this gathering is interested in papers Nestor

has," was the reply.

Jimmie and the drummer were now advised to get what sleep they could, the guards explaining that they were "expecting company," and that the talking might frighten the prospective callers away.

It was now nearing midnight, and Jimmie tried hard to lose himself in sleep, but, tired as he was, this seemed to be impossible. Fremont might be in deadly peril, and Nestor and Shaw were still unaccountably absent. His idea now was that the secret service man had advanced the correct theory regarding the abduction of Fremont. He had no doubt that the boy had been mistaken for Nestor.

Besides, the boy's mind was naturally excited over the strange revelations of the night. The arrival of the secret service men, the announcement that Nestor was working with the War department, the story that he had been in communication with the government at Washington ever since leaving New York, the hint that he held very important papers in his possession, all these supplied food for thought.

Under ordinary conditions the boy would have enjoyed himself to the limit in the mountains. He loved the forests and the wild places, the great spaces; he loved the light of the campfire and the rustle of foliage in the night. However, he was now by far too anxious to appreciate the outing he was having.

While he lay there trying to sleep he heard the guards whispering together. They were speaking of the important part Nestor was playing in the happenings there, and the boy was proud of his association with the resourceful patrol leader.

In a short time the boy heard the guards moving about as if acting under strong excitement. There was also the rattle of arms, as if they were preparing to meet an enemy.

Jimmie crept out of his blankets and crawled to the opening of the little tent. The guards were crouching low in the shadow of a rock, with their guns in hand, and the boy joined them.

"I thought you were asleep, kid," one of the men whispered. "Better go back to your tent. There may be shooting here."

"I didn't come down here to skulk," replied the boy, indignantly. "Are the stragglers coming here again?"

"There is some one moving about," was the reply.

"Perhaps it is Fremont, coming back," suggested Jimmie, hoping with all his heart that he had solved the riddle.

"If Fremont ever gets back here," the other guard observed, "we will have to bring him back. The men who took him away doubtless thought they were getting Nestor, and they will be so angry when they discover their mistake that the boy will receive very little consideration," was the discouraging explanation.

"Then we may as well be out after him," declared Jimmie. "I'm not goin' to lie in any old tent while they are killing him. I'm going out to find him."

"In that case," said the guard, "we'll have to go and find you. Wait until the lieutenant returns, and we'll see what can be done. He may bring Nestor with him, you know, and he can assist."

Although this seemed good sense, it did not please Jimmie at all, and he went back to his tent resolved to get away from the guards as soon as possible and do what he could to find Fremont. At the very door of the tent, however, he came to a halt, for the signals were going again, and a great rocket flashed across the sky.

CHAPTER XI.

BLACK BEAR AND DIPLOMAT.

"It looks to me as if there might be civil war down here, with all these men waiting for guns and ammunition," said Shaw, as Nestor concluded the story of the letters which had been forwarded to Washington. "I didn't know what I was getting into when I left New York. I wish I could send that story to my father. What a scoop he would have on the other newspapers!"

"That is the very last thing you should think of," declared Nestor. "The publication of the

story now might bring about the very thing we are trying to prevent. There is no knowing what the Texans would do if they learned of the plot to invade their state. We are here to defeat the plot to arm these men who are waiting to cross the river, and not to furnish newspapers with scoops, as you call them."

"How are you going to do it?" asked the boy.

"The intention originally was to stop the purchase of arms. That failing, it was determined to prevent the purchases crossing the Rio Grande. If that cannot, or has not, been done, then some other means must be resorted to. That is why I am here, and that is why United States secret service men are waiting for me somewhere about here."

"I see," said Shaw, "and you thought your men might be down here? Well, if it is the other end of the conspiracy that we find in this camp, at least the other end of the Cameron robbery conspiracy—anyway not your associates—what then?"

"I am expecting the diplomat," was the reply. "If I can't get the arms I hope to get him."

"Would that check the invasion of Texas?" asked the boy.

"It might delay it until we have a strong force on the other side of the river."

"I believe you mean to kidnap him," cried Shaw. "Is that right?"

"I'm going to do something to disarrange the plans of the conspirators, if I can. We don't want a war with Mexico just now. Such an event might bring on complications with other nations, at least with one other nation."

"You mean Japan," cried Shaw. "I've heard that Mexico is full of Japs, all trained and ready to fight. And I've heard about a secret treaty between Mexico and Japan, too. Let the Japs butt in, if they want to. We'll drive them into the Pacific."

"I have said nothing about Japan," replied Nestor. "I don't believe half this sensational stuff about Japan's warlike attitude toward the United States that the newspapers are printing."

"Well, you didn't say Japan, but I know what you meant, all right," declared Shaw. "How much longer are you going to watch that camp?"

"I'm not watching the camp," replied Nestor. "I'm waiting to see if some important individual doesn't make his appearance here, bound for the peaks above."

"You mean the third man—the diplomat?"

"Exactly. He'll be here to-night, according to all reports. I thought it might be his party wig-wagging when I came here, provided it was not my associates. If he doesn't come pretty soon I'll return to our camp. The boys will be getting anxious over our long absence."

Presently, while the two waited, a signal rocket came blazing out of the east, swept a wide curve in the sky, and dropped out of sight. It was almost immediately followed by a blue rocket, sent up from the foot of the range, not very far away. Then the men in the camp below were heard moving about.

"The fellows down there," said Shaw, "appear to be about as astonished as we are at the display of fireworks. I don't think they are next to this game at all. They have their minds too crowded with mine-dreams to leave room for any international complications, I guess."

Indeed, this seemed to be the case, for the night watchman, the Mexican, and the miners were now assembled in a little open space before the tents, gazing perplexedly into the sky, which now showed red and blue rockets, apparently sent up in answer to each other.

"There's our third man," said Shaw, as a moving light appeared not far away. "Listen, and you'll hear him coming."

The boy almost danced up and down in his excitement.

"Let me geeze him," he whispered. "Let me make a record for valor down here," he added, with a grin. "I might get a Carnegie medal."

"You'll probably get a bullet if you don't keep quiet," advised Nestor. "Come, we may as well hide ourselves in the thicket over there and await the turn of events."

Within ten minutes the sound of hoofs was heard, indicating the advance of, perhaps, half a dozen horsemen, and then came a challenge from the night watchman's camp. There followed a short conversation in Spanish, only a portion of which Nestor could understand. However, he learned from what he did hear that the party just coming in had missed a guide, and was seeking the easiest way to get to the top of the range.

After a short time the conversation suddenly changed into English, and Nestor heard a soft

voice ask:

"Are you going up?"

"In the morning," was the reply, in the voice of the night watchman.

"Why not go now and guide us?" came another question.

"Because we prefer to wait until morning," was the gruff reply.

"Have you seen any men going up?" was asked, then

"There are stragglers all about," was the ungracious reply. "We have been disturbed by them before."

There was a short silence, then a shot and a struggle.

"Say," said, Shaw, "the newcomer is tying Felix and Scoby up, and the miners have all taken to their heels. What do you think of that?"

"I think that our friend, the third man, needs a guide up the mountain, and is not at all particular how he gets one. The Mexican seems to be the one he wants."

"He's got his nerve," Frank grinned.

"That is only his pleasant little way," replied Nestor, with a quiet smile. "He is a very arrogant fellow."

"If that is really the third man," Shaw said, presently, as the soldiers came up the hill, Scoby and the Mexican being almost forced along, "we've got 'em bunched. We've got the three men who were in the Cameron suite that night all in a heap. Guess you can pick out your man now. I reckon you did some thinking before you planned this trip to Mexico, Ned."

"Don't forget that the United States secret service men had a hand in the deal from the beginning," replied Nestor, modestly. "Within six hours of the time I left the Cameron building I was talking with Washington. The fact that the Mexican and the night watchman are also here now is a lucky change, that is all. The trap was laid for this diplomat. The others could have been found later on."

"Oh, you didn't do a thing, I guess," laughed Shaw as the two turned up the acclivity, planning to keep some distance in advance of the party behind. "Say, do you think this third man recognized Scoby as a person he had seen in the Cameron building? What? That might be one reason for marching the two off."

"I can't say," Nestor replied, "but the diplomat probably had his eyes open when he was in that building. Don't ask so many questions."

Twice within a few moments the boys heard some one approaching them, coming down the mountain side at a great pace, and twice they saw a man hasten by the place where they had hastily secreted themselves and confer with the party below.

"Spies! Messengers! Japs!" commented Shaw. "I heard that jargon in a Jap restaurant in New York. What about it?"

"You are as full of the Yellow Peril scare, to-night, as the sensational newspapers," replied Nestor, as they moved on up the mountain side. "We are not looking for trouble with the Japs, but we can take care of ourselves if it ever comes."

After a time the boys paused on a ledge of rock and looked over the moonlit space about them, Nestor expectantly, Frank with apprehension. The party with the unwilling guide was now far below them, and during the last few moments they had walked boldly, Nestor watching for a signal which he now thought he saw.

While they stood there a light flashed for an instant in a little gully off to the right, and Nestor replied with a bird-call which was so natural that Shaw gave a little start and looked about for the bird. There was another flash of light, and then five men made their appearance. There was a further exchange of signals, and then the newcomers advanced to where the boys stood.

"You are Ned Nestor?" the leader of the party asked.

"And you are Lieutenant Gordon?"

"The same," replied the other, grasping Nestor by the hand. "We found your camp but you were not there, so we came on down to the place where the boy said you had gone."

"Weren't there two boys there?" asked Frank, a sudden fear gripping him. "We left two there."

"I'm sorry to say that we found only one," replied Lieutenant Gordon. "The other had been kidnapped, the little fellow said."

"Come on, then," Shaw shouted, speeding away as rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit. "We've got to go and find him. Was it Fremont who was taken?" he added, turning back for a moment.

"The boy we saw told us his name was Smith," laughed the lieutenant.

"He probably thought you were after Fremont," Nestor said. "We must hasten up there, after we do a little important business here."

Lieutenant Gordon and the patrol leader conferred together for some time, and then instructing Shaw to make his way to the camp as quickly as possible, the little force of six awaited the arrival of the other party. In half an hour they came up, panting, their horses having been left behind as not being adapted to mountain work. When they stepped out on a little plateau they found themselves looking into the muzzles of six automatic revolvers, held in the hands of the civil service men and Nestor.

"You are Don Miguel?" asked the lieutenant of a tall, well-dressed man who was in the lead.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" demanded the man addressed. "We are citizens of Mexico, going about our legitimate business."

"You are mistaken," replied the lieutenant, grimly. "You three," indicating Don Miguel, Felix and Soby, "are citizens of the United States. We are in the secret service of your government, and place you under arrest for treason and robbery. Take their weapons, Charley," he added, addressing one of his men, "and if one of the soldiers lifts a hand, shoot."

The weapons were quickly surrendered, the soldiers standing aside with fright in their faces. Then Lieutenant Gordon and Nestor held a short but earnest conversation with Don Miguel, at the termination of which the latter ordered his soldiers back to the valley, "to await the execution of plans now proposed," as he said.

"It is an outrage," Don Miguel complained, as the soldiers disappeared, "and my government shall hear of it. You shall all suffer for what you are doing."

"You are a naturalized citizen of the United States," the lieutenant repeated, "and you are under arrest for treason. The others are held for attempted murder and robbery. Now, this being understood, we may as well proceed to camp."

The night watchman and the Mexican also made vigorous protests against their arrest, but no attention was paid to them. Nestor was at that time too anxious over Fremont's disappearance to halt for a lengthy explanation.

CHAPTER XII.

WOLF AND PANTHER AFTER BEAR.

When the rocket flared across the sky Jimmie rushed into the tent where the drummer was sleeping and shook him savagely.

"Get up an' blow out the gas!" he cried, as the boy gasped and sat up, rubbing his eyes. "Get up!"

"This must be the Fourth of July," the drummer grunted, as another rocket, this time a blue one, flashed across the zenith. "What's doing?"

"They're bombardin' us with red an' blue fire," whispered Jimmie! "Get up. I'm goin' out to see what's comin' off here. Want to go?"

"Of course I want to go," replied Peter. "I didn't come down here to sleep my head off, did I? Shall I take my drum?"

Jimmie sat down on the ground and chuckled.

"You an' your drum!" he exclaimed, being careful to speak in a tone which would not reach the ears of the guards.

"That is a fine drum," urged Peter, the drummer.

"What do you want to lug it around for, then?" demanded Jimmie. "They won't let you beat on

it."

"That's what I came down here for—to drum," was the impatient reply. "Think I came down here to get my hair cut?"

"You may get it cut off under your chin before you get back to the Great White Way," Jimmie said. "This is no joke."

"I haven't had a chance to drum since I got here," complained the boy. "The time you heard me is the only one. That's rotten!"

"Why did they let you drum then?" asked Jimmie.

"I just rolled it out before they could stop me."

"I was wondering," Jimmie said, with a sly smile, "if these secret service men went sleuthing with a brass band ahead of them."

"Indeed they don't!" declared the drummer, in defense of his friends. "They found me broke and lost and picked me up, which was mighty good of them. Say," he added, with a slight scowl on his face, "this is a fine, large country to get lost in."

"I should think so," agreed Jimmie. "I wasn't lost, but I hadn't any more money than—than—than a—a—a rabbit when I found Fremont and Ned at El Paso. And my clothes looked like they'd come out of a ragbag. Wore 'em out reclinin' in my side-door Pullman."

"You're fixed up all right now for clothes," observed the drummer, looking the boy's well-dressed, muscular figure over with approving eyes.

"George Fremont bought these," said Jimmie, looking down at his suit. "All right, ain't it? I'm goin' to pay him back when I get to working again. I don't want anybody to give me anything."

"Lieutenant Gordon's son is a patrol leader at Washington," the drummer said, after a thoughtful pause, "and I suppose that's the reason he helped me out. I reckon a Boy Scout can find friends in any part of the world, if he is deserving of them. I found a Mexican boy, over here in the hills, who belongs to a patrol he calls the Owl. We may meet him if we remain about here very long."

"A Boy Scout who is on the square won't have trouble in getting through," Jimmie observed, "but we've got to be moving. I imagine the guards want us to remain here, so we'll have to sneak off if we leave camp. The guards seem to think we couldn't find our way back. We'll show 'em."

Without further words the boys crept out of the tent, waited until the guards were at the other end of the little valley, and dashed away into a shadowy place behind a rock, which they had no difficulty in leaving, presently, without being seen.

Once away from the tents, they turned toward the high peak from which the rockets had been sent up. The way was steep and rough, and it was hard climbing, and more than once they stopped to rest. It was, as has been said, a brilliant moonlit night, and, from the elevation where the boys were, the valley below lay like a silver-land of promise.

"It is a beautiful country," the drummer said, as they paused to rest on a small shelf in the rock. "It is a rich and fertile country, too, one of the most desirable in the world, but I'm afraid the people don't get much out of life here."

"They are selfish and cruel," Jimmie said, "and no nation of that stripe ever prospered. What they need here is less strong drink and more school-houses—more real freedom and less mere show of republican government. We read up on Mexico in the Wolf Patrol when this trouble broke out. We always do that—keep track of what's going on in the world, I mean."

"I know something about the country, too," the drummer said, looking in admiration down on the beautiful valley below, bathed in the sweet moonlight, "and sometimes I wonder that the people are as decent as they are. Although they have never had much of a show, and although they come, many of them, of rude ancestors, the people of Mexico compare favorably with those of other countries."

The boys climbed on again, mounting higher and higher, their aim being to gain the very top of the ridge. After half an hour's hard work they stopped and sat down, to look over the valley again.

"There are no written records of the origin of these people," the drummer said, almost as if thinking aloud. "No one knows the origin of the people. Cortez found them here when he arrived with his brutal soldiers. All that is known is that the inhabitants came from the North."

"Twice the country was populated from the North," Jimmie put in, the readings at the Wolf Patrol club coming back to his mind. "Now I wonder why, in reading history, we always find that invaders came from the North?"

"I've read," the drummer went on, quite enthusiastic over the subject in hand, "that the present North Polar regions were tropical in temperature and in animal and vegetable life, a long time ago."

"Yes, they find there, skeletons of animals which now exist only in the tropics," said Jimmie, "and tropical trees deep under the ice. The earth, they say, shifted in its orbit and it grew cold up there. I guess that is why we read of people always coming down from the North."

"They had to get out of the North," the drummer mused, "because during the Glacial period an ice-cap miles in thickness covered the world down as far as the dividing line between the British possessions and the United States. That is the way California and Mexico and Central America were populated, anyhow."

"You mean that the immediate ancestors of the people of those countries came from the North," Jimmie criticized. "For all we know, the people who lived before them came from the South. They left no records to show that they ever existed, but the earth was not bare of animal life back of the period our scientists figure from."

"The first ones came from the East, by way of Iceland, Greenland, and Baffinland; from the Eastern continent, and about the vicinity of the Caspian sea, and so kept on South on this continent as the climate grew colder. But we were talking of the people of Mexico. I wanted to show you that they have never been favored as the people of our country have, and that they've got years of national childhood to go through yet before they become a great people."

"Go on and tell me about it," urged Jimmie. "We may learn as much about what's going on here by sitting on this plateau as we could by climbing our heads off."

The boys listened a moment, but there were no suspicious sounds about. The mountain lay as silent under the moon as if no human foot had ever pressed its surface. There were lights far down in the valley, but none on the slopes in view.

"About as far back as the books go in Mexican history," the drummer began, "is the seventh century, even when England wasn't much. About that time the Toltecs came out of the North and took possession of the valley where the City of Mexico now is. They were industrious, peaceful and skilled in many of the arts. They kept their records in hieroglyphics.

"They had a year made up of eighteen months of twenty days each, the other five and a fraction being chucked into the calendar any old way. They knew about the stars and eclipses, and built great cities.

"When they build their temples, it is said, they found ruins of other temples beneath them. And the ones who built the temples, the ruins of which the Toltecs found, doubtless found ruins of temples when they began to dig. It is wonderful. The ages and ages that have gone by, with new civilizations growing up and dying out."

"I feel like I was in a land older than the solar system," said Jimmie. "What became of the Toltecs?"

"They were crowded out by the Aztecs somewhere about the twelfth century. The Aztecs were warlike and cruel. It is said that they murdered twenty thousand victims a year on the altars of their gods. They were able people, too, but murderous in all their instincts. They were cultivated to a degree far above the other peoples of the North American continent at that time, but they lacked the feelings of humanity as expressed to-day.

"They built temples—mounds of clay faced with brick, surmounted by great towers where the priests dwelt. It was at the summits of these mounds, on a sacrificial stone, before all the people who could get in view, that the victims of their religious frenzy were slain.

"Then Cortes came, in fifteen hundred and something, and the deluge of blood began. If you have read up on the subject at all, you doubtless know how merciless the Spaniards were in their attitude toward the Aztecs. They killed them by thousands, in open battle and by treacherous means, and they tortured Aztec priests to force them to reveal the places where the vessels of gold used in worship were hidden.

"It is easy to see where the modern Mexican gets his ideas of amusement, as shown in the bull fight. The Aztec-Spanish blood is still in his veins. Of course there are cultured and refined Mexicans, but the great mass of the people are pretty primitive. Outside the cities, in many instances, old tribal relations continue, and the people are unsettled in habitation as well as in spirit, selfish and cruel, too.

"One revolution after another—brought about by unscrupulous leaders in the hope of personal gain—has devastated the country. It seems easy to stir up a revolution in Mexico, for the people are volcanic in temperament, like the earth under their feet, and their eruptions do not always follow usual lines, either, but break out in unexpected places and for unheard of reasons—just as the volcanoes refuse to follow the central mountain chains, but break out in undreamed of localities."

"It requires a strong hand to rule such a people," Jimmie mused. "I guess Diaz has troubles of his own."

"There is no doubt of it," the drummer continued. "In future years Mexico will become one of the garden spots of the world. It is clear why one people after another selected the Valley of Mexico for their abiding place. But blood will tell for evil as well as for good, and the bad strain here must be thinned down. The hills are rich in minerals, and the valleys are fertile, and all the land needs is a race of steady, patient workers—fewer bull fights and less pulque and more days' work."

As the drummer ceased speaking, Jimmie laid a warning hand on his shoulder and bent his head forward in a listening attitude.

"Listen!" he said. "There are men talking just over that slope."

CHAPTER XIII.

CAPTURED THE WRONG BOY.

As the boys listened voices came distinctly to their ears. It was evident that the men who were talking had only recently arrived at the spot where they stood, for all had been quiet a short time before.

The boys crept closer and saw a party of rough-looking natives gathered about an evil-looking man, who appeared to be an Englishman, and a slender figure which Jimmie had no difficulty in recognizing as that of George Fremont. The sinister Englishman, undoubtedly the leader of the party, was a giant of a fellow.

As the boys looked, he reached forth a great hand and, seizing Fremont by one shoulder, shook him fiercely. Then it was seen that Fremont's hands were tied behind his back. Jimmie started forward, involuntarily, at sight of the brutality of the act, but the drummer drew him back.

"You'll have to remain quiet," the latter said, "if you want to help your friend. We can't fight the whole party. Have you a gun with you?"

Jimmie nodded and laid a hand on his hip.

"I am unarmed," the other said, in a minute, "and so couldn't do much in a fight; so, perhaps I'd better go down and bring up the guards."

"Just the thing," whispered Jimmie. "I'll remain with this gang of bandits and manage to leave a trail that can be followed if they leave the place. Go on down an' bring the guards. And," he added, a half smile on his anxious face, "don't forget to bring your drum."

"My drum!" repeated the other, in amazement. "What is the good of bringing a drum, I'd like to know?"

"Bring it, anyway," directed Jimmie. "If you hear a shot up here, play it to beat a band. Beat it for keeps. Rattle off a charge, and make a noise like a regiment of cavalry. And if you can't make good time climbing down, slip on a rock an' roll down. Somethin' must be done quick!"

"I don't believe they will shoot him," the drummer said, tentatively, hesitating for an instant.

"If that big lobster gives the order to do it," Jimmie said, his eyes flashing, "I'll get him before the order can be obeyed. They may get me after that, but I'll have the satisfaction of knowin' that I got to him first. Now, run!"

The dawn was strong in the east when the drummer disappeared down the side of the mountain. It had been an eventful night, a long one to the boy standing there watching for an opportunity of making his presence known to the prisoner. There was a deal of talking going on in the group about the prisoner, but Jimmie could catch only part of what was said.

The soldiers—if the ragged, sullen-looking natives might so be termed—talked fast and in a villainous tongue which did not seem to be Spanish. They appeared to be greatly excited, and it was only when the heavy voice of the leader boomed forth that they reverted to silence.

Jimmie could not understand what the prisoner had been brought there for. If the idea of his captors was to restore him to his friends, that would be the work of only a minute. They would only have to cut the bonds and Fremont would do the rest. If the idea was to murder him, why the delay? It had been hours since his capture, and it would have taken only a minute to discover that

the wrong boy had been taken.

If, as Jimmie considered gravely, the big man should prove to be a civil officer from Texas, a man with a warrant for Fremont, then it seemed that he would be getting him across the border as quickly as possible, taking no chances with slow Mexican criminal procedure. This last view of the case was the one which Jimmie feared most. He might be able to get his friend away from Mexican bandits, but not from a Texas sheriff.

The next words of the leader settled every doubt on the question the boy was puzzling over. Although they showed that Fremont was in immediate peril of his life, the watcher was in a measure relieved at the knowledge they brought him. So long as Fremont was held a prisoner by those who were breaking and not enforcing the law in doing so, there was hope of rescue.

"Nestor," the Englishman said, thrusting his bewhiskered face into that of Fremont, "tell me where the papers are, and I'll set you free in an instant."

"I know nothing about the papers you speak of," was the reply. "I have never had them in my possession."

The renegade whispered with his companions for a moment. Jimmie could not hear what was being said, but the soldiers seemed to be insisting on some point which the leader was not quite certain of. Then the latter asked:

"You are certain you made no mistake?"

The others nodded and pointed at Fremont.

"It is as you commanded," one of them said, in fair English.

Then the big man turned back to the prisoner, an ugly frown on his repulsive face.

"You are not telling me the truth," he said. "You know well enough where the papers are. It is useless for you to deny."

The leader believed the prisoner to be Nestor. That was plain now. And Fremont had been captured by these brigands in the absence of the leader, and he was taking their word that they had abducted the right boy. This might account for the delay. The leader might have joined his men only now.

"I don't know anything about the papers," insisted Fremont.

"Huh!" muttered Jimmie, from his hiding place. "Why don't he tell his nobbs who he is? Then he might be released."

Jimmie did not know that Fremont had long been considering this very point, and finally decided that the correct course for him to pursue would be to permit his captor to remain in ignorance of his identity. The instant he knew that his brigands had made a mistake, the fellow would be out after Nestor with a larger force, and that would make it dangerous for the boy, would hamper him in the work he was there to do. Besides, he believed that the course he proposed would gain time, and that Nestor would certainly come to his rescue.

"You are making a mistake," the big man threatened, as Fremont again denied knowledge of the papers. "You are known to have been in the Cameron building that night. You are known to have taken the papers away from there, and to have made use of them. I won't say what treacherous use now. If the papers are not on your person, they are hidden somewhere."

Fremont only shook his head. In the growing light Jimmie could see that he was very pale, that he seemed tired out, as if he had been traveling all night. However, the white face he saw had a determined look, and Jimmie marveled at the mental processes which should so obstinately defend a wrong idea, which, of course, he only guessed.

"Everything you have done since you left the building that night is known to me," the big man went on. "You deserve death for the marplot that you are, but I will release you if you will restore the papers."

Fremont made no reply whatever to this. As a matter of fact, he did not even know the nature of the papers which were so in demand, Nestor having told him little of his real mission to Mexico. In the meantime Jimmie was trying in every way he could think of, without revealing his presence, to catch Fremont's eye and make him understand that help was at hand, and that he ought to reveal his identity and so create delay, as well as escape whatever cruelty the big fellow had in store for the boy he was being mistaken for.

"I'll give you three minutes, Nestor," the leader finally said, "to tell me where the papers are. At the end of that time, if you remain obstinate, I'll order you shot. Decide!"

Jimmie twisted and wiggled about until he became fearful that the noise he was making must disclose his presence, but Fremont did not cast a look in his direction. The leader stood grimly in the foreground with watch in hand. The seconds seemed to Jimmie to be running by like a mill-

race.

"Two minutes."

Fremont's face did not change, except for a slight tightening of the lips. Jimmie listened intently for the sound of a drum on the mountain side below. It now was quite light, and the watcher could see every movement made by the men he believed to be brigands and their prisoner. A chill of terror ran through his veins as he saw the ragged squad examining their guns as if they expected to use them at the expiration of two more minutes.

"One minute."

The leader snapped out the words viciously; his evil eyes sparred for an instant with those of his captive and were then lowered to the ground. Jimmie took his revolver from his pocket and held it ready for action. As he had declared to the drummer, it was his deliberate intention to shoot the leader an instant before he gave the order to fire. He knew that the discharge would point out his place of concealment, and did not doubt that the volley intended for Fremont would be turned upon himself, but the knowledge did not swerve him from his purpose.

He counted the next seconds by his own fierce heart-beats. Thirty-four. Thirty-five. Thirty-six. It seemed to him that a second was never so short before. At sixty he would fire if he saw no evidence of weakening in Fremont. And he did not believe that Fremont would weaken. He was coming to understand that Fremont was obsessed with the idea that he was protecting Nestor by the course he was taking. This being true, he would remain loyal to the very end.

Thirty-nine. The leader seemed about to lift his hand as a signal for the squad to level their guns, when a shout came from up the slope, and a figure every whit as ragged and disreputable in appearance as the men gathered about the prisoner swung into sight, leaping over ledges and lifting voice and hand in warning as he advanced.

The men, now swinging their guns into position, paused and held them motionless while they gazed at the intruder. The leader shifted about uneasily and muttered something under his breath. Released, for the moment at least, from the strain he had been under, Jimmie dropped back in his hiding place, his weapon clattering to the ground. It was not the fact of his own peril that had wrought him up to the point of breaking, but the thought that it might be necessary for him to take a human life.

It seemed to the boy that there was displeasure half hidden in the leader's manner as he conferred with the messenger. He did not appear to approve of the interruption.

"Why didn't you tell me that you had made a mistake and taken the wrong boy?" he demanded, then turning to the men. "Why didn't you tell me this was not Nestor?"

The men made no reply except that one of them grumbled that they had captured the boy whose description they had been given, and the leader turned to Fremont.

"Why didn't you declare your identity?" he demanded.

"I had no reason to believe that anything I could say would be credited," was the cool reply. "You saw fit to disbelieve what I said about the papers."

"What is your name?" the other asked, laying a hand on the boy's arm.

Fremont remained silent, but the messenger stepped forward and declared that he knew the fellow well by sight, and that his name was George Fremont.

"Is that true?" demanded the renegade, and Fremont nodded.

Somehow it seemed to Jimmie that the renegade expected the answer that he had received, and that he was angry with the messenger for bringing out the boy's name. At any rate he glanced furtively at his men as the name was mentioned.

"And so," he said, then, "you are the boy wanted in New York for attempted murder and robbery? The boy with a reward of \$10,000 on his head."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CASE IS WELL STATED.

It was a long, tedious climb back up the side of the slope. With almost every step the night watchman and the Mexican clamored for a hearing, for details of the charge against them, but

they met with scant courtesy. Both Nestor and Lieutenant Gordon understood that they were fearful that they were to be taken at once back to New York, in which case they would be deprived of a chance to plunder the hidden mine, which they had come so far to find. Nestor had explained, very briefly, to the lieutenant that the Mexican and the watchman were there in quest of treasure, but had not confided to him the whole story of the Cameron tragedy, it being separate and distinct from the issue which had brought the secret service men to Mexico.

Don Miguel maintained a dignified silence—as dignified as a panting man can hold—throughout the tiresome journey, except on one occasion. Once, while the night watchman was violently demanding information concerning the crime with which he was to be charged, the diplomat asked:

"Why are you so silent concerning the man's alleged crime? It appears to me that you are conducting an abduction rather than an arrest. I, also, am anxious to know something of the charges against me."

"You shall know in good time," replied the lieutenant.

"I believe," Don Miguel went on, "that I can convince even you, prejudiced though you are, that you are making a great mistake—a costly mistake, both for yourself and your government."

"When we reach the tents I will listen to you," was the short reply, and the little party went on its way in silence for a long time, silent save for the mutterings of the Mexican and his fellow-conspirator, as Nestor believed the watchman to be.

Moonlight lay like a silver mist over the stubborn paths the party was following. Moving objects could be observed at a great distance, where the character of the surface permitted, and now and then moving bodies of men were discernible on the slopes of faraway peaks. Don Miguel's dusky face seemed to brighten, his eyes to gather almost a smile, whenever such parties were seen. It was plain to his captors that he looked upon the wandering bands as friendly to his interests.

Always the marching men—if scrambling up a mountain side in undignified positions may justly be described as marching—were headed for heights above. All were proceeding as silently as possible, too, and that gave an air of secrecy, of mystery, to the wild scenery and the romantic moonlight. Occasionally the flickering gold of a camp-fire mingled with the silver of the moon.

Just before dawn, when the members of the party were nearly ready to drop from exhaustion, a sharp challenge rang out ahead, and Lieutenant Gordon gave a word which caused a cautious guard to withdraw his threatening gun, and to hasten forward to greet his chief. With his first breath he asked a question.

"Have you seen anything of those confounded boys?"

"The drummer and the Bowery lad?" asked the lieutenant. "Why, we left them with you when we went down the hill."

"Well, they're gone!" exclaimed the guard, despondently.

"Gone!" repeated Nestor, stepping forward. "Where have they gone? Has anything been heard of Fremont?"

"Not a word," said the guard, answering only the last question. "It is my idea that the other boys sneaked off in the hope of finding him. I sent them into one of the tents to sleep, and when I looked in a short time later, they were not there."

"It is certain that they were not carried off?" asked Lieutenant Gordon.

"Certain," was the reply. "We watched the tents every second."

"And yet the boys got away without being seen," said the lieutenant, angrily.

"I don't see how they did it," was the abashed reply.

"I have little doubt that they have been carried away by the men who captured Fremont," Nestor said, gravely. "Still, it may be that they have only wandered off in search of the boy. It is a serious situation."

"The mountain is swarming with men," the lieutenant said. "The only wonder is that we have not been attacked. I fear that the boys have been captured, even if they only wandered away to look for their friend."

Nestor walked restlessly about the little camp for a moment and then looked into the two tents, as if expecting to find some one there.

"Where is Shaw?" he asked, then, alarm in his voice. "Where is the boy we sent on ahead of us? He must have reached here a long time ago."

The guards looked surprised at the question.

"Why," one of them said, "no one came here from below but yourselves. We have seen no one."

Nestor stood for a moment as if he thought the men were playing a trick on him, then the gravity of the situation asserted itself. What mischief was afoot in the mountains? Why had the boys disappeared, while there had been no attempt to obstruct the passage of the secret service men as they moved about?

"It seems, then, that there is another lost boy," said Lieutenant Gordon. "That makes four. It is most remarkable."

"Yes," said Nestor, "Fremont, Jimmie, Shaw, and this drummer you told me about. I think we have our work cut out for us now."

"It is the second time Peter Fenton has been lost to-night," Gordon said, with a smile. "He was lost and we found him—lost and hungry, but full of courage."

"Peter Fenton!" exclaimed Nestor. "I know him well as a member of the Panther Patrol. A bright boy, and full of information concerning Mexico. I have often heard him speak of this country. Well, let us hope that the four boys are all together, wherever they are. It seems strange that the outlaws should go about picking up boys."

"It will soon be daylight now," Lieutenant Gordon said, "and then we'll see what we can do. It may be that the lads will return and bring Fremont with them, though that is almost too much to hope for. Anyway, it seems to me that we have accomplished the principal object of our journey here," he added, with a glance at Don Miguel.

The diplomat turned about and faced the lieutenant with a sneer on his face.

"You are not the only one who is making progress here to-night," he said. "If you wish the return of your friends, release me and I will restore them to you."

"I think we'll take chances on finding the boys," Gordon said. "You are wanted very particularly at Washington."

"Then permit me to send word to my friends," urged Don Miguel. "I can cause the patriots who doubtless have the boys to return them to you. Odd that they should have carried them off," he added, with a scowl.

The man's inference was that the boys were being held as hostages, but this Nestor did not believe. Fremont had been taken away before the arrest of Don Miguel.

"That would be a very good move—for your interest," Nestor said, in reply to the suggestion. "As the lieutenant says, we prefer to take our chances on finding the boys. Your friends might want to interfere with your trip to Washington if they knew our intentions concerning you."

"You will soon see your mistake," was the significant reply.

During this talk the night watchman and the Mexican had remained silent, but it was plain that they had not lost a word that had been said. Especially when the talk of restoring Fremont to his friends was going on, the watchman had cast significant glances at Felix.

"Was it a part of the conspiracy," Nestor asked, facing the three men, "to abduct Fremont if he left New York? Or was it the intention to murder him there?"

Don Miguel turned to Nestor with a sneer on his rather handsome face. It was evident that he did not relish being questioned by a mere youth.

"I know nothing of the urchin to whom you refer," he said, scornfully. "I do not deal with precocious infants."

Nestor checked an angry rejoinder, and Don Miguel directed his attention to Lieutenant Gordon, whom he seemed to consider more worthy of his notice.

"Down there on the mountain side," the diplomat said, "you promised to further inform me as to the reasons for my being held a prisoner, deprived of freedom of action. I am waiting for you to speak."

Lieutenant Gordon smiled and referred the diplomat back to the boy.

"I know very little about the matter," he said. "I am working under orders from Washington, definite orders, which leave me virtually under the direction of Mr. Nestor. If you ask him to do so, he may be willing to go into the details of the matter with you."

"Must I deal with the infant class in such an important matter?" demanded the other. "Then perhaps, you will condescend to do as the lieutenant suggests," he added, turning back to Nestor,

with a look of helpless rage on his face.

"I have no objection whatever," replied Nestor, seeing in the request a chance to inform the lieutenant, in the presence of the prisoner, of the exact status of the case, and also to observe the effect upon the latter of a statement dealing with the particulars of his treasonable actions.

"Proceed, then, my boy," said Don Miguel, patronizingly.

"A few weeks ago," Nestor began, only smiling at the weak condescension displayed, "you entered into correspondence with Mr. Cameron, of New York City, with reference to the purchase of arms and ammunition in large quantities. At first your letters met with prompt answers, for Mr. Cameron was in the business of selling the class of goods you had opened negotiations for. Then your letters grew confidential, finally suggesting a private arrangement between Mr. Cameron and yourself under which the arms and ammunition to be purchased were to be delivered to secret agents on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande."

Don Miguel's face was now working convulsively, his hands, clenched, were fanning the air in denial, and it seemed as if he would spring upon the boy.

"It is false!" he shouted. "All false!"

"Suspicious that the arms and ammunition were to be used against his own country, Mr. Cameron drew you out on this point, how cleverly you well know, until the whole plot lay revealed. You were purchasing the goods in the interest of a junta which proposed to arm such outlaws and rag-a-muffins as could be assembled, and to send them across the Rio Grande on a hostile mission in the guise of Mexican soldiers."

"False! False!" almost howled the diplomat. "How is it that you, a boy, a mere child, who should be with his mother in the nursery, should know such things?" he demanded; then seeing his error, he added, "should place such a construction on a plain business transaction?"

"It was the purpose of this junta," Nestor went on, not noticing the interruption, "in marching this ragged army across the border to precipitate war between the United States and Mexico. With an invader on their soil, the members of the junta reasoned, all Mexicans would flock to the standard of their country, and the war with the United States would be fought out by a united Mexico."

"Lies! Lies!"

Don Miguel was now walking fiercely about the little dent in the side of the mountain where the camp was built, pressing close to the loaded guns of the guards, each time, before he turned back to swing and rave over the ground again.

"This very pretty conspiracy to involve the United States in a war with Mexico," Nestor continued, "was unwittingly foiled by a desperate crime—perhaps committed by yourself."

CHAPTER XV.

ACCUSING EACH OTHER.

Don Miguel stopped in his nervous pacing of the small space in front of the tents and thrust his passion-swept face to within a foot of that of the speaker.

"A desperate crime!" he repeated. "Do you have the temerity to mention my name in connection with crime?"

"On the night of your visit to Mr. Cameron," Nestor went on, coolly, "you dined at one of the famous lobster palaces on Times Square. Early in the evening, let us say not far from nine o'clock, you left the restaurant and took a cab for the Cameron building. You spoke both French and Spanish to the driver, as well as English, and tipped him liberally, paying the charge in gold."

Don Miguel swung away again, his face expressive of a desire to do murder.

"You found Mr. Cameron in his office," Nestor continued, "busy with the papers of the Tolford estate. There are only two persons who know what took place at that interview, Mr. Cameron and yourself, but we are certain that the purpose of it was to urge Mr. Cameron to complete the contract for munitions of war which was under discussion. It is also quite likely that, failing in this, you sought the return of the compromising letters which you had written to him."

The enraged diplomat made a desperate dash for the freedom of the hills, such a short distance away, but was brought back by a guard—brought back almost frenzied with the hate of

the boy that possessed him.

"Sit down," thundered the lieutenant. "Another break of that kind will lead to handcuffs."

Don Miguel obeyed, throwing himself on the ground as far as possible from his accuser. With a smile Nestor moved closer to him and went on.

"You did not get the letters. They are now safe in the vaults of the War department. Why you did not secure them I cannot say, for they were later found on the desk. One strong point in your favor, when the accusation is weighed, is that you did not take the letters. Had you left Mr. Cameron unconscious, you certainly would have secured them."

The harassed man lifted his eyes as if about to comment on the spoken words, but finally decided to remain silent.

"Mr. Cameron was attacked that night by some person having murder in his heart, and an innocent boy is accused of the crime. As I stated a moment ago, the fact that the incriminating letters were not taken speaks in your defense, still, you might have been frightened away after striking the blow."

Jim Scoby and Felix, who had been listening intently to the conversation, now whispered together for a moment, glancing malevolently toward Don Miguel as they did so. The latter saw the looks of hate and said a few words in Spanish which Nestor could not understand.

It seemed to the boy that the three men were endeavoring to arrive at some mutual defensive understanding with each other, so he asked Lieutenant Gordon to separate them. He did not propose to have any secret compact made there before his eyes.

"But there is still another view of the case," Nestor continued, after listening for a moment to the enraged protests of the three prisoners, who objected to the action that had been taken, "for, even if you did not attack Mr. Cameron, you might have sent some person in to do the work after your departure. You might have depended upon this accomplice to secure the letters. I don't know. The courts must decide.

"Anyway, whether you left Mr. Cameron in an unconscious state or not, his suite was visited by others soon after your departure. At least two persons were there, but I do not know whether they entered at the same moment or not. These men copied a paper they found in the Tolford estate envelope—the description of a lost mine—and went away. When Fremont entered the rooms, after all these visits, he found Mr. Cameron unconscious.

"It seems reasonable to suppose that one of you three men attacked Mr. Cameron—either Jim Scoby, Felix, or yourself, Don Miguel. We do not know which one dealt the blow, or whether you were all in the conspiracy against him, so we are taking you back to New York for trial. The matter of treason against you can be taken up later on."

"Your story is not exact, and your suppositions are forced," Don Miguel said, with a sneer, as if about to confound the conclusions of the boy with the logic of a man. "As purchasing agent for a perfectly legitimate concern, I visited that suite that night in the interest of the contract referred to by you. I was disappointed in the outcome of the negotiations, but I did not ask for the letters. They were confidential, and Mr. Cameron promised to regard them as such. When I left his office, Mr. Cameron was at work at his desk. That is all I have to say."

"And I was in that suite that night," Jim Scoby broke in. "I went in with a key I had had made, for the night-lock was on. I found Cameron unconscious on the couch. Felix, the man who sits there, entered with me. We were after the mine paper, and we got a copy of it. He will tell you whether what I have said is the truth."

"What Scoby says is the truth," Felix grunted.

The three prisoners had the earnestness of men telling the truth. They admitted having visited the Cameron suite on the night of the tragedy, and told how and why they went there. At least they gave good reasons for going, that of Don Miguel being legitimate, that of the others based on crime, for they admitted that they went there to steal a paper from the Tolford estate envelope, or, at least, to copy it.

The three admitted all that Nestor had discovered, and nothing else. Was this because they knew that he was certain of his facts regarding the visits and the men who had made them? Anyway, there was no dispute as to the details. It was the important conclusion that was denied.

"If you found Mr. Cameron lying there unconscious," Nestor asked of Scoby, "why didn't you summon help? You had no cause for enmity against him, had you?"

"I wasn't there as first aid to the wounded," replied Scoby, sullenly. "I was there on business, and in danger of being caught at it, at that. Besides, I looked Cameron over, and thought he was out for the count and nothing more. Why don't you ask that foxy-looking guy over there," pointing to Don Miguel, "what he done it for?"

Don Miguel glared at Scoby, but said nothing.

"He says Cameron was well and hearty when he went in there. Well, Cameron wasn't well at all when he went in there, and I don't believe there was anybody in there between us. You search him for a reason."

"Were the lights on when you went in there?" asked Nestor.

"Yes," was the reply.

"And you switched them off?"

Scoby nodded and glanced toward Felix,

"How long was it after you left the room that Fremont came up?"

Both men refused to make any definite statement as to this, and Nestor saw that they were concealing something, that he had struck a feature of the case upon which they had made no agreement as to what should be told and what kept secret.

"These men are trying to put their crime on me," Don Miguel now said, fury in his tone. "They know that I left Mr. Cameron working at his desk. They were in the corridor and saw me pass down the elevator, which was making its last trip at that moment. They were whispering in a corner, in sight of the door to the Cameron suite. They took advantage of circumstances to place the crime on me."

This was what Nestor was aiming at. The three men, the only ones there that night, so far as he knew, were quarreling with each other. This would help in bringing out the truth. He decided to talk no more on the case for the time being.

"We ought to be looking up the boys," he said, by way of changing the subject.

"It will be daylight very soon now," Lieutenant Gordon replied, "and then something may be done. Rest assured that we shall do all we can to bring them back."

"It appears to me," Nestor said, thoughtfully, "that you ought to be getting these prisoners over the river."

"Yes, that is important," said the lieutenant.

"We do not know what is going on over there," the boy continued. "The arms which this man succeeded in purchasing may be on this side, for all we know. In that case, war may break out at any moment."

"Perhaps I would better start at once," agreed the lieutenant.

"Our boys over the river are prepared for a raid?" asked Nestor.

"Yes, all ready."

"Then you would better get the prisoners over before the trouble begins."

He turned to Don Miguel with a smile and asked:

"How is it? Were the arms you bought delivered on this side, or did the United States troops stop them?"

"They were to have been sent across last night," with a grin of triumph.

"And the signal from the peak shortly after midnight?"

"The O.K. signal meant that the men were there ready to receive them."

"Then you anticipate rescue almost immediately?" asked Lieutenant Gordon.

Don Miguel shrugged his slender shoulders.

"The hills are full of men," he said. "If they are armed—well."

"And you will accompany us?" asked Gordon of Nestor.

"I shall remain here and look after my friends," was the reply. "After all, one may be able to accomplish more than half a dozen. Get the prisoners over the border before the shooting begins, and I will find the lost boys."

When the secret service men turned down the slope, Nestor moved toward the summit.

CHAPTER XVI.

WOLVES ON THE MOUNTAIN.

"And so you are George Fremont, the scoundrel wanted by the police of New York City for attempted murder and robbery—the rascal for whose capture there is a reward of \$10,000 offered!"

As the renegade repeated the accusation, his eyes flashed malignantly. Fremont listened silently, apparently unmoved by the vilifying words.

A moment's reflection convinced Jimmie—still observing the group from the shelter of his rocky hiding place—that the arrival of the messenger had slightly improved the situation so far as the interests of his friends were concerned. The critical moment had for the present passed or been delayed, and the prisoner was no longer threatened with immediate death. Jimmie, too, had been temporarily relieved of the responsibility of the act he had decided upon—the shooting of the renegade if he lifted an arm to signal the murder of the prisoner.

Still, Fremont was yet in the power of the renegade, and might soon be, through the latter's malice and greed, in the hands of the Mexican police and on his way back to the Tombs unless something was done immediately. Before, the renegade had been alone in his wish for the destruction of the boy; that is, alone of all the group about him, and of all the outlaws gathering in the mountains. Now, with the news of the reward published abroad by the messenger and the renegade, every native man, woman and child in Mexico would take a personal interest in delivering the prisoner to officials competent to hand over the large reward.

Jimmie listened intently and with a fastbeating heart for the strident voice of a drum. It seemed to him that Peter Fenton had been gone long enough to gain the camp. The secret service men, he knew, had not had time to reach the point of danger, but they had, he thought, had time enough to make a noise like an advancing army. There were bright-plumaged birds singing in the early sunshine, but no indications of the approach of the help Fenton had gone to arouse. What the next move of the renegade and his companions would be the boy could not even guess. He hoped, however, that the party would linger about the vicinity until the secret service men could come up.

This hope, however, was soon shattered. The renegade Englishman consulted with the messenger for some moments, pointing away to the north, as he did so, and then the outlaws were ordered into line, Fremont placed in the center, and all moved in the direction which had been pointed out.

The course of travel, although due north in general, wound among crags and through little canons, over level plateaux and along dangerous precipices, it being the possible desire of the renegade to work his way to the Rio Grande without coming into contact with officers or hostile groups of armed men who might demand a division of the fat reward offered for the arrest of the boy.

Owing to the character of the surface, Jimmie was obliged to wait for some moments before following on after the party. In fact, it was only by moving cautiously and keeping cliffs and crags between himself and the renegade's group of outlaws that the boy could make progress without being seen.

Before leaving the spot where the prisoner had stood, Jimmie selected a rock of the size of a two-gallon jug, placed it in plain view, and laid on top of it a smaller rock. At the left he placed another stone, the size of the one on top. This would direct any of the boys who might come too late to his relief.

During his Boy Scout excursions the boy had often used this "Indian talk" to inform his friends of the course he had taken. All Boy Scouts are supposed to be versed in "Signs in Stones." The large rock with the small one on top read, "Here the trail begins." The smaller stone to the left read, "Turn to the left." If the stone had been placed on the right it would have read, "Turn to the right." If he had built a pyramid of three stones, two on top of the large one, it would have read, "You are warned: Proceed cautiously." Jimmie knew that Fenton understood signs in stones, and would therefore have no difficulty in following him if he came up later on.

As the boy followed on to the north, now and then sliding down declivities, turning with dizzy eyes from great heights, but forever keeping the direction taken by the hostile party ahead, he listened for the sound of a gun, for the rattle of Fenton's drum, but listened in vain. He feared that the boy had been captured on his way down.

Finally, after a rough journey of several hours' duration, the renegade came to a halt at a point where the summit fell away in two directions, to the north and to the east. The divide seemed at least three hundred feet lower than that to the south, and sloped gradually, on the

east, to a desert-like plain, beyond which ran the river. Here the party turned east toward the river and the boundary.

Jimmie, perched on a ledge facing the north, watched Fremont moving away with a desire in his heart to send a bullet after the Englishman. He tried to attract the attention of the captive, but did not succeed. While the boy lay watching and listening for any sounds of rescuers coming up the slope, a great rock, somewhere to the south, went tumbling down the mountain, carrying smaller rocks with it until the rattle of falling stones sounded like the din of a battle.

The renegade started and looked about suspiciously, doubtless fearing that the slide had been caused by the incautious feet of a pursuer, but his companions smiled and informed him that such incidents were common there and not at all alarming.

Jimmie smiled, too, for when the rattle ceased he heard a Black Bear growling in a ravine not far away. In a second the snarl of a Wolf answered the growl of the Bear, and then, almost before he became aware of their stealthy approach, Frank Shaw and Peter Fenton lay beside him in his hiding place. It seemed to the boy, as they lay there panting from their long climb, that they had dropped out of the sky.

He gave each one a friendly kick and waited, with a grin on his face.

"Say," grunted Shaw, rolling over on his back, "I'm all fried out."

"You have plenty of fat left," grinned Jimmie. "How did you fellows get here?"

"By following the signs in the stones," Frank replied.

Then Jimmie turned to Peter, also panting from his climb.

"Where's the drum you went after," he demanded, tauntingly.

"I got lost on the way down," Peter explained. "I didn't think I'd ever see or hear a drum again. Then I came upon Frank. He was lost, too. I was on my way down to the camp, and he was on his way up to the camp, and we met half a mile to the south of the camp, both trudging along like fools."

The situation was explained in a few words. Both boys had missed the trail, and had found, not the camp, but each other. They had last met in New York. Frank had not the slightest notion that Peter had left the city. It was a fortunate meeting, for the two, after greeting each other like chums, had studied the situation out much better than one could have done, with the result that, after many false trails had been followed, they had struck the one left by Jimmie.

"Where are they going with Fremont?" Frank asked, in a moment.

"They seem to be going after the reward," replied Jimmie.

"He'll get all the reward that's coming to him before he gets over the river and claims the money," Frank exclaimed. "Do you think Fremont knows that you are here?"

Jimmie shook his head.

"I've had to keep back," he said, "and Fremont never will look my way when I get close up to where he is."

"He ought to know," the drummer said.

"I've done my best," Jimmie said, in a discouraged tone.

Frank Shaw smiled and dropped down behind a huge rock.

"Just wait a minute," he said. "Just wait until I catch me breath, and I'll put him wise to the fact that there's a Black Bear somewhere in this turned-up-on-edge country. Watch, and see him jump."

Frank put his hand to his throat and emitted a growl which would have done credit to a genuine black bear, a bear in a museum warning the inquisitive to keep away from his cage. The threatening sound, however, seemed to come from the other side of the slope where the prisoner stood.

The Englishman drew a revolver and glanced sharply around, while the outlaws seized their guns and held them ready for action. It was clear to the boys that they had been completely deceived by the signal, and were expecting an attack from the animal at any moment.

Fremont did not seem to notice the signal, which was one the members of the Black Bear Patrol had long practiced both in the forest and in their club room, but his eyes were for an instant lifted toward the hiding place occupied by the three boys.

"He's next," whispered Fenton.

"I should say so," grunted Frank. "I guess he'd know a Black Bear signal anywhere. We didn't learn that call by any correspondence school method. It is the genuine thing. We got it by dodging the keepers and stirring up the black bears at Central Park."

The outlaws were now making timid runs out toward the point from which the sound had come, and the boys thought best to drop back a short distance, still keeping Fremont in sight, however. Directly the outlaws assembled again and stood talking in the villainous lingo which they had used before. It was evident that they were not a little alarmed at the thought of a wild animal being so close to them.

"They'll think there's more than one Black Bear after them," Shaw whispered as the men turned down the eastern slope and again moved toward the desert-like plain which lay between the mountains and the river.

"There's a Wolf after them, too," grinned Jimmie. "If I had some of the Wolves I left in New York we'd eat 'em alive," he added. "I'm hungry enough to eat that big lobster at three bites."

As the boy ceased speaking a pebble struck him on the top of the head, and the whine of a wolf reached his ears. There was silence for a moment, and then the sharp, vicious, canine-like snap of a wolf on scent was heard.

"I reckon all the Wolves in the world are not in New York," Shaw said. "That was a patrol signal, Jimmie. Go out and find your chum."

"It's Nestor!" almost shouted the boy, and Nestor it was, climbing laughingly toward the astonished group.

"Get down! Get down," warned Frank. "You'll give us all away."

Nestor pointed to the ridge, from which the outlaws had now disappeared, and threw himself down by the side of the boys.

"Did you bring anything to eat?" demanded Frank, rubbing his stomach.

"Where are the secret service men?" asked Fenton.

"This looks like a Boy Scout convention," Jimmie put in. "Where did you come from, and why didn't the guards come with you?"

In a few words Nestor explained the situation. He had left the secret service men to convey the prisoners to El Paso, and had entered alone upon a search for his friends. In a short time he had come upon signs in stones left by Shaw and Fenton, and had followed them to the place of meeting.

"What's the matter with the secret service men?" asked Shaw.

"Aw, they're jealous of Nestor!" Jimmie put in. "I reckon they wouldn't much care if Nestor had been geezled instead of Fremont."

"They did all they were ordered to do," Nestor replied. "It is now up to us to release Fremont. I'm glad he knows we are here," Nestor added, after due explanation had been made by Jimmie and Shaw. "He'll be on the lookout for us."

"How are you going to get him?" asked Fenton.

"You've heard of cutting cattle out of a herd?" smiled Nestor. "Well, that is the way we are going to get Fremont. We're going to cut him out."

CHAPTER XVII.

PLENTY OF BLACK BEARS.

"There's four of us now," Jimmie urged, "and we've all got guns, so we ought to go after the lobsters and get Fremont away from them."

"They look like dubs," Frank put in, "and I believe they'll run when they hear us shooting. If you won't let me drum, you must let me shoot."

"You got no drum!" grinned Jimmie.

"I'm afraid they would turn their guns on their prisoner if we attached them," said Nestor. "We've just got to wait until we can cut him out."

"I'm hungry enough to eat 'em all alive," cried Frank.

"I could get along pretty well if I had a couple of gallons of water," said Peter.

"If them lobsters find anything to eat or drink down there," Frank said, "we'll go down and take it away from them. Looks like they were making for a feed."

The boys now clambered cautiously to the summit and looked down the slope to the east. The renegade and his men were slowly making their way toward the bottom. The prisoner was moving forward as briskly as any of them, and the big fellow appeared to be paying special attention to him, as he was walking by his side most of the time.

The distance to the level plain below did not seem to be great. Although the peaks of the Sierra del Fierro range seem high when looked upon from the level of the Rio Grande, they do not appear to be so lofty when viewed from the plateau upon which the actual ascent begins.

The level table-lands or plateaux of Mexico lie from four to nine thousand feet above sea level, making many distinct climates as one goes up or down. These plateaux are girt by mountain chains. The high summits are those of Cofre del Perote, 13,400 feet; Origava, 17,870 feet; Istaccihuatl, or the White Woman, 16,000 feet, and the famous Popocatapetl, known as "Smoking Mountain," which lifts its fire-scarred head 17,800 feet above the level of the ocean.

It seemed to the boys that the distance between the summit where they stood and the plain below might, even at the slow pace at which the outlaws were moving, be made by nightfall. The eastern slope was not so rough and broken as that on the west. In fact, the outlaws were now traveling down a declivity so clear of cliffs and breaks that the boys did not dare follow them. To be observed by the renegade at that time might prove fatal to the hope of the immediate rescue of Fremont, as the outlaws would then be on their guard.

"We've either got to wait until night, or wind down through the wild places off to the south," Nestor said, after looking over the locality for a time.

"We just can't wait until night," Jimmie said. "There's no knowing what treatment Fremont will receive at their hands before that time."

"We may actually gain time by waiting," Nestor advised. "We may be obliged to travel scores of miles around precipices and canons if we take to the rocks."

"Suppose we wait, then," Frank said. "We can go over into the bumps to the south and get out of the sunlight, then. I'm about roasted. There may be a cave over in that direction, or a ruined temple."

"Or a Turkish bath, or a lobster palace," grinned Jimmie. "We might find a pie-counter over there, too," he added, with a poke at Frank.

"There are no ruined temples in the State of Chihuahua," declared Peter Fenton, glad of an opportunity of unloading his knowledge of the country, "at least, I have never heard of any being here. The teocalli, or temples, are farther south, down in the State of Chiapas, and in Yucatan."

"But we might find some underground temple up here," insisted Jimmie. "The natives worshiped in this region, didn't they?"

"They built their temples on top of pyramids," continued Fenton, "and not underground. There is one at Palenque said to be built on the lines of Solomon's temple. It has sanctuaries, sepulchers, cloisters, courts, subterraneous galleries, and dismal cells where the priests lived. No one knows how old the ruins are. No one knows how many distinct civilizations have held sway there, one, literally, on top of the other."

"It is too hot up here to talk ancient history," said Frank, "and I'm hungry, too, but I'd like to know where you find any pyramids in Mexico."

"The pyramid-temple of Cholulu," went on the delighted drummer, "is the largest and best known. It makes the pyramids of Egypt look like thirty cents in comparison, for it is nearly fifteen hundred feet on each side and almost two hundred feet high. Gizeh, the big Egyptian pyramid, is only 763 feet along the sides, but it has the Mexican one beaten in height, it being over five hundred feet high. Perhaps you fellows will wake up, directly, and find out what a wonderful country you are in."

"Who built this pyramid-temple?" asked Jimmie.

"No one knows," was the reply. "Whoever did it had correct ideas of architecture and knew lots about decoration. The ruined city of Palenque had temples, palaces, baths, and aqueducts. It was twenty miles long, and must have had an enormous population. It is said that there is not a record left. Cortes and his gang took care of what the Toltecs and Aztecs left."

"It is a wonderful country," Nestor said, "but it needs stability in population. Just now, however, we need rest. It is evident that the outlaws are headed for the plain below, and we must catch up with them when they camp for the night."

"I wonder what Fremont will think?" observed Jimmie. "I'll bet he's thinkin', right now, that we've gone back on him."

"There is no other way," explained Nestor. "It would be folly to attempt rescue now, and worse folly to attempt to follow the party down this slope, in the broad light of day. Did any of you boys notice a square package I had on a shoulder-strap as I came up? I laid it down somewhere. It contained a dozen egg and ham sandwiches," he added, with a provoking smile.

"Great Scott!" cried Frank Shaw, springing straight up in the air, like a rubber ball. "Holy smoke! You haven't lost it, have you?"

Nestor sat back and laughed at the hungry boy's antics and then brought forth the precious packet. The boys gathered around him, but he motioned them away.

"I'm not going to open it here," he said. "What until we find a place where we can rest a bit. There must be a cliff-hole over there somewhere."

Disappointed, and making wry faces, the boys followed Nestor to the south until they came to a shelf of rock which faced the east. The ridge above sheltered the spot from the hot sun, and there was a cavity in the cliff which promised a secure resting place. As he stepped out on the shelf Nestor paused and pointed to a collection of three rocks lying in plain view.

"What is it?" asked Jimmie, his eyes on the sandwich packet.

"Read it," replied Nestor.

"Head to the south!" shouted Shaw. "Who put that here?"

Nestor looked keenly into the astonished face before him.

"No tricks, now," he said. "Which of you boys placed this stone signal?"

No one made answer, and Frank bent down to make a closer inspection of the rocky floor of the shelf. Presently he gave a wild whoop and arose to his feet with something in his hand.

"What do you know about this?" he demanded. "What do you know about it, anyway?"

"Crazy," grunted Jimmie. "What is it?"

"The badge of the Black Bear Patrol," was the amazing reply. "Now, who put it there? Some of the Black Bears said they were coming down here, but how could they get to the top of this range?"

It was, indeed, a puzzling find. The stone sign had certainly been placed where it had been found within a few hours, for one side of the large rock was still a trifle damp, having undoubtedly been taken from some shady place.

But how should the Black Bears of New York reach that almost unknown country? That was the question.

"They said they'd sleuth on Fremont," Frank said, after a pause.

"But they couldn't have followed him here," insisted Fenton. "And, if they had, they would not have been putting up stone signs when we were only a few yards away."

"The sign says, 'Keep to the south,'" Nestor observed, "and we may find the solution of the mystery there."

Anxious for a sight of his old chums of the Black Bear Patrol, and unable to control his feelings, Shaw darted on ahead, passed around a corner of rock, and disappeared from the sight of the other members of the party.

"I hope he won't go an' get lost," Jimmie said, taking a swifter pace.

In a moment, however, it became evident that Shaw was not lost; that, in fact, he was very much found, and with an undiminished lung capacity. Such Black Bear growls and sniffs as came from around the corner of the cliff were never heard before outside of a Wild West show. There seemed to be half a dozen Black Bears growling at, and ready to devour each other.

When Nestor turned the corner of the cliff he saw four boys mixed up in what seemed to be a desperate struggle. It was from this group that the wild growls were coming. Now and then a word of greeting or a joyful laugh came from the storm-center, but the playful struggle went on.

"Holy Smoke!" Frank cried presently, drawing himself away from the bunch. "What do you think of it? Look who's here! Three Black Bears, Harry Stevens, Glen Howard and Jack Bosworth. How did you get here, boys, and did you bring anything to eat with you?"

The three Black Bears were introduced to the other members of the party, then tongues ran swiftly, and they all talked at the same time. Occasionally Nestor stepped to the shelf, just around

the angle of the cliff, and looked down on the outlaws, making their way to the plain below. When Harry Stevens asked about Fremont, the boys pointed at the distant party and told the story of his capture.

"We'll have him back before night," Stevens declared. "There are seven of us now, and that's enough to put up a lively fight."

"But how did you happen to light on this mountain?" asked Frank, still staring with the wonder of the meeting.

"It was as easy as following a white elephant," laughed Stevens. "The El Paso papers told all about Fremont being there, and about his escaping to Mexico. We were there the morning after you left. We took train for San Jose, and found where you had purchased provisions. Then there was the boatman who took you across the lake, or lagoon, and the guards coming down the slope with three prisoners. Oh, it was easy as falling asleep until we left your little camp. In an hour, however, we came upon the trails left by Jimmie and by Shaw, and came on. For the past two hours we have been higher up than you, so we did not see each other."

"You're a nice lot of fellows to go sleuthing," laughed Jack Bosworth. "Why, it was no trick at all to follow you. If the police are as prompt and industrious as we were, they're out here in the hills somewhere right now, after Fremont."

"Another matter kept us in the vicinity of this alleged civilization," replied Nestor, referring to the necessity of capturing Don Miguel, "but now that is over, and we're going to burrow like rabbits in the mountains, after we get hold of Fremont, until the truth is known."

"Well," said Stevens, "there's a good place to hide back here—a cave, with no one knows how many rooms. It was a fine residence some day. Come on. We found it while looking for a place to rest."

"And you said there were no subterraneous temples in Chihuahua," said Shaw, addressing himself to Fenton. "You said they were all in the neck of Central America."

"You wait a second, and you'll see whether there are or not," said Glen Howard.

Then the speaker led the way to the entrance of what appeared to be a very large ante-chamber, there being openings which resembled doorways at the back. Both the side walls and the floor were of rock, and showed evidences of the work of man. A square of light lay on the floor, the sunlight falling through a cut in the rocky roof.

"We haven't ventured any farther than this," Glen said. "We were shaky about coming in this far, for there is no knowing what one will find in these holes. It is dark in the rooms beyond, and it is what one can't see that he is afraid of."

"Besides," Jack Bosworth cut in, "we were hungry when we got here, and—"

"Great Scott!" shouted Shaw. "Do you mean that you've brought something to eat? Lead me to it. I never was so hungry in all my blameless life."

Following the custom of Boy Scouts when preparing for a trip into an unknown country, the three boys had provided themselves with a good supply of provisions, and the hungry ones they had found were soon enjoying a very satisfying meal.

"After we fill up," Frank said, busy with a whole pie, "we'll get our flashlights and see what's in those other rooms. Say," he added, turning to Nestor "what's the matter of bringing Fremont here—when we get him?"

"I'll bet these rooms are ten thousand years old," said Peter.

After the repast was over Nestor drew Frank aside, while the others were searching their outfits for the electric torches, and asked:

"You remember what I said about there being three men in the Cameron suite the night of the tragedy?"

"Of course," was the reply. "Got something new on the subject? I guess you have that matter on your mind day and night."

"I have," was the reply. "I'm always thinking about it. Well, I now believe that there were four men there, but I can't think what the fourth man wanted."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FREMONT AND THE RENEGADE.

While the boys were discussing the situation in the outer chamber of what appeared to be a subterranean, prehistoric temple, or at least an ancient habitation or place of shelter, George Fremont was moving down the slope of the mountain at a slow pace, the outlaws showing signs of exhaustion.

The big Englishman, known as "Big Bob" by the messenger who had identified the boy for him, had ordered the boy's bonds removed, and so he was scrambling along in comparative comfort, the way being quite free of dangerous cliffs and fissures.

Occasionally Big Bob approached him with some question connected with the night of the tragedy, but at first Fremont refused to talk on the subject, well knowing that the big fellow would only criticize what he said. After a time, however, Fremont decided that it might be to his advantage to draw the fellow out, and the next time he came up he asked, abruptly:

"What do you know of Nestor's movements that night?"

"Did I say that I knew anything of them?" was the astonished reply.

"When you thought you had captured Nestor you said you knew of every move he made that night. Not my movements, but Nestor's."

"Don't get gay, now," growled the other. "I'll talk about that with Nestor, when I find him. I'll talk about your movements with you. There's plenty of proof that you did the job there."

"And you've got it, of course?" said Fremont, with a shrug of disbelief.

"Of course I've got it. The only thing I can't dope out is the motive you had."

"You ought to be able to find that," sneered the boy. "Your imagination seems to be working well to-day. Were you there that night? If not, how does it come that you know so much about what didn't take place?" he added, provokingly.

"You were seen to strike the blow," was the blustering reply.

"Where were you at that time?" asked Fremont, knowing, of course, that the fellow was lying to him, and hoping to confuse him by the abruptness of the question.

"That does not matter," was the reply. "It is known that you sneaked into the building after the elevator stopped, and went up to the Cameron suite. After stopping there for some moments, long enough to create the disorder that existed there, you returned to the lower floor. Then you started up, giving notice of your approach by whistling."

Fremont could not repress a smile at the positive manner of the man as he described a situation which was purely imaginary. Then, anxious to learn what other untruths the fellow would relate, he asked:

"You know Jim Scoby, the night watchman, and Felix, the Mexican?"

"I know nothing of them," was the reply.

The two walked on side by side for some time in silence, the big fellow turning now and then to look with disapproval at the smiling face of the boy. Indeed, if the proof against him was no stronger than this, the boy could well afford to smile, for lies in evidence discredit any truth there may be on the side of the falsifiers.

"Where are the men you refer to?" the big fellow asked, at length.

"They are down here looking for the Tolford mine," was the reply. "They stole a description of it that night. Ever hear of the Tolford mine?" he added abruptly.

The renegade gave a quick start at the question.

"How do you know they are down here?" he asked.

"Nestor says they followed on down after us. Were you there when they got into the office and got the description?" he continued.

"I've heard of this mysterious mine," was the guarded reply, "and I understand that this boy Nestor has a copy of the description."

"Is that why you wanted Nestor?" asked Fremont. "Are you after the mine, too?"

The big fellow walked on in silence. It was plain to Fremont that his abrupt questions were irritating him, so he decided to go on with them.

"Are you one of the Tolford heirs?" he asked.

No reply, save a threatening scowl.

"Are you the heir who has been making Mr. Cameron so much trouble?" persisted the prisoner, glad to note that Big Bob was fretting under his cross-examination.

"Do you expect to find the mine down there in the sand?" continued Fremont. "That doesn't appear to me to be a good place to look for gold."

"It is a good place to look for a reward for a fugitive from justice," snapped the big fellow. "Now cut out the gab!"

"You think you can get me across the border without meeting with opposition from my friends?" asked Fremont, not obeying the latest command.

"Your friends!" ejaculated Big Bob. "Who are your friends? A mess of school-boys who get lost in the hills! A gang of high-brows who can't take care of themselves off Broadway! Your friends!"

The idea of meeting with any effective opposition from Fremont's boy friends was so amusing to the big fellow that he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Your friends!" he repeated. "Ho! Ho! Baby dudes!"

"About this reward," Fremont went on, resolved to keep Big Bob talking if he could, "about this blood money! You will have to cut it up into several piles, won't you?" glancing around the file of outlaws. "Or do you intend to cut the throats of these fellows instead of cutting up the reward? That would be something in your line, and quite profitable."

"I'll cut your throat," threatened Big Bob, "if you don't close your yawp. Speak when you are spoken to!"

"All right," replied Fremont. "I'm spoken to now. Did you steal the Tolford will out of the envelope that night? If you are the heir who has been trying to get it, you certainly got a chance then."

Big Bob started violently, walked rapidly for a few moments, and then dropped back to Fremont's side, just as the boy had figured on his doing. This talk of the Tolford estate seemed to be attractive to the fellow. Fremont saw that it was, but could find no reason why it should be unless, indeed, he had hit on the truth in one of his questions, and the fellow was really an heir.

"What do you know about that will?" Big Bob asked as he took step with his prisoner.

"Not a thing, except that it has been in good demand for a long time, and that it has made trouble for Mr. Cameron."

"You have had charge of the Tolford papers, including the will, on several occasions? You have taken the papers to and from the bank?"

"Sure," answered Fremont. "Where did you learn so much?"

"Never mind! You would know the will if you saw it anywhere?"

"No; I never looked at it."

It seemed to the boy that this answer brought forth a sigh of relief from the breast of the big fellow, so he decided to keep on with his questions about the will.

"You have seen the will?" he asked.

"Never. What caused you to think I had seen it?"

"You talk so much about it."

Big Bob grunted and walked on in silence. Fremont turned back for an instant and swept his eyes over the slope, hoping to catch sight of one of the Black Bears. Not a friendly face or form was in sight, however, and he trudged on, wondering what line of questions would be most likely to throw the big fellow off his guard.

"Why don't you take my advice and confess?" Big Bob asked, presently.

"I might do so," Fremont replied, provokingly, "but for one thing."

"And what is that?" was asked eagerly.

"I want to see the guilty man punished!"

"If you confess," the other went on, angrily, "you'll get a light sentence if Cameron lives, and a life sentence instead of the electric chair if he dies. There is always hope in a life sentence—and you are young!"

"Why do you ask me to confess?" demanded Fremont.

"Well, to tell you the truth," was the reply, "I have a friend who may be accused of the crime. He can't be convicted, of course, for the proof goes to show you to be the guilty one, but the cops can make him a lot of trouble and expense!"

"So you want me to confess and skip the country?"

"Yes, to skip out of the country, just as you skipped out of New York."

"And permit this friend of yours, who committed the crime, to go free?"

"My friend did not commit the crime!" threateningly.

"Oh, yes he did! Who is your friend—yourself?"

Big Bob lifted a hand as if to strike the boy, but he changed his mind, or got control of his temper, and lowered it again.

"At least," Fremont said, "you know who did commit the crime. That is something."

The big fellow grumbled out some sarcastic reply and trudged ahead. Fremont, knowing that a valuable point had been gained, hastened along by his side.

"And, with my false confession in your pocket," the boy went on, "you would find it convenient to leave me out there under the sand?"

"You're a plucky cub to talk like that to me."

Big Bob was in a great rage, but he did not lift his heavy hand again.

"I was wondering if your friend would pay for leaving me out there," the boy said. "If I went back to New York, you know, I might deny the confession, or claim that it was secured under duress. You know what a confession is worth when secured under duress? What about it?"

"You're a fool!" shouted Big Bob so loudly that the others turned inquisitive faces toward him. "That was only a joke, that about my friend. I wanted to see what you would say if I asked you to confess, and then when you asked why I wanted a confession I gave you the first reason that came into my head. So shut up about it."

"Sure," said Fremont, "after you give me the real reason you asked for a confession."

Big Bob saw that he had made a mistake in talking with the shrewd youngster, and decided to get out of it the best way he could.

"All right! I'll tell you," he said. "A reward will be paid right down on the nail when a confession is filed with the prisoner. Now you know all about it!"

"Your imagination is working all right to-day," Fremont laughed. "The last explanation is more foolish than the first. You knew very well that the payment of the reward would follow conviction, and you know that I am innocent."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you know who the real criminal is."

"That is not true!" thundered the other. "Now, I've had enough of this. You mope along and keep your mouth shut or it will be the worse for you."

Fremont knew very well that Big Bob was considering a desperate means of retrieving the error he had made in speaking of a friend who might be accused of the crime. The boy was afraid that he had gone too far in his desire to provoke the big fellow.

For there would be no one to ask questions if the boy should never leave the hills alive. Unless the Black Bears were within striking distance, no one would ever know what had become of him. He looked and listened again for some signs of his friends, but the slope behind told him nothing.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT WAS FOUND UNDERGROUND.

While Fremont was clambering down the eastern slope, studying the renegade Englishman whenever opportunity offered, and puzzling over the source of the fellow's information concerning the Cameron building and the Tolford estate papers, Ned Nestor and his companions were preparing to visit the interior of the strange shelter-place in which they found themselves.

The outer chamber, which, for convenience they marked "Chamber A" on the rough map they afterward made, was 30x40 feet in size, with the eastern side running parallel with the almost perpendicular face of rock which shot upward from the shelf which has before been alluded to. The opening faced directly east, and from it one could look miles over the desert of sand lying between the foot of the range and the Rio Grande del Norte, something like a hundred miles away.

To the north and south of this main chamber the boys found niches in the rock, evidently hewn there by man hundreds of years before. The rock was very hard here, and it seemed that work had ceased for that reason.

On the west side of the chamber there were two openings, perhaps four feet by six, each leading into a chamber 20x30 feet in size. Before entering these rooms, which held an odor of dampness and decay, the recently arrived Black Bears produced electric flashlights.

"We looked up Old Mexico," Harry Stevens said, turning on the flame, "and knew we'd be nosing around in caves and tunnels before we got back to God's country, so we brought our glims along with us."

"Well, don't burn them all at once," advised Nestor. "We shall need them for several days, probably, and there are no shops in the next block where dry batteries can be bought. Leave one out and put the rest away."

"We have a few extra batteries," said Harry. "We looked out for that."

"We shall doubtless need all you have, no matter how economically they are used," Nestor said. "Let me take the one you have, and I'll go on an exploring expedition into the south chamber."

"Me for the exploring expedition too!" cried Harry. "I want to see how it seems to go into a room ten thousand years old."

"Nixt ten thousand years!" observed Jimmie.

Harry nudged Peter Fenton and pointed to the west wall of the chamber, across which he threw the brilliant circle of the flashlight.

"There is the record," he said.

"Nix ten thousand years old!" insisted Jimmie.

"No one knows how old," Fenton said. "No one has ever been able to translate the picture talk of the very early inhabitants. The man who carved those lines might have existed when the sandy desert out there was under water."

"Speaking of water, let's go on and see where they got their drinkings," put in Frank Shaw. "I'm nearly choked, and I'll bet there's a spring about here somewhere."

"Any old time you don't want something to eat or drink!" laughed Harry. "Well," he added, handing the flashlight to Nestor, "we may as well go in and see if there is a water system here."

"There surely is," Fenton said. "The people who dug this shelter out did not work where there was no water. If Nature did not supply it, they built aqueducts to convey it to locations where it was wanted. But Professor Agassiz says they lived ten thousand years ago, so, if they did put in a water system here, it may be out of commission now."

"How does he know how long ago they lived?" asked Jack.

"By their bones," was the reply. "Near New Orleans, under four successive forests, one on top of the other, and each showing traces of having been occupied by man, explorers recently discovered a human skeleton estimated to be fifty thousand years old. That fellow must have lived just after the last glacial epoch."

"I don't believe they know anything about how long ago he lived," observed Jimmie. "How can any one tell how long ago the last glacial epoch closed?"

"Figure out how far the melting line traveled from south to north," said Fenton, "then figure that the glaciers receded at the rate of only twelve feet every hundred years, and you'll know something about it."

"Come on!" cried Frank, "let's get in there and find their Croton system. I'm so thirsty my throat sizzles. Come on!"

Nestor, closely followed by the others, led the way into the south chamber, called, for convenience, "Chamber B" on the rough map made later on. The place was damp and cold, and a current of air came from the southwest corner, indicating an opening there.

After clearing away a heap of rocks and loose sand, which might once have been rock, the boys found an opening which had been, apparently, closed for a long period of time. When finally cleared, after an hour of hard work, the opening from which the current of air had come was discovered to be a door like arch in the west wall of the main chamber.

The electric flashlight, however, when introduced into the opening, showed a narrow passage beyond the opening instead of a square room. This tunnel-like passage was not far from six feet in width and about that in height. The walls showed that it had been cut through solid rock.

The boys listened for some indication of life or motion in the tunnel, but all was silent. Not even a bird or creeping thing disturbed the stillness of the place.

"Shall we go in now?" asked Nestor.

"Sure!" replied Shaw. "We may find a well in there!"

"Or a soda fountain, or a modern filter," grinned Jimmie. "How would they ever get a well down through this mountain?"

"Water in wells comes from elevations before it gravitates to the bottom of the holes from which we pump it," Shaw declared, in defense of his suggestion. "There may be a reservoir here somewhere."

"How far is this cavern floor from the surface above it?" asked Harry Stevens, with a judicial air.

"About four hundred feet," was the reply. "We must be about that distance from the highest point here."

"Then there is no reason why there should not be a reservoir above us," said Harry. "Water would filter through these rocks, all right."

The boys passed on in a southwesterly direction to the end of the tunnel, which was about fifty feet from the opening. Here they found a chamber about 10x16 feet in size. At the south side of this chamber was a trough-shaped place cut in the rock, and through this a small rivulet of water ran.

"I knew the people who built this shop wouldn't put in their time where no water could be procured," declared Fenton. "Why, this is simply fort, a mountain residence, where valley people came in time of war and secreted themselves. If we could read the hieroglyphics on the walls, we would be able to write a history of their troubles."

"Were they the real thing in cave-dwellers?" asked Jack, who was not noted for his studious habits, and who depended on his companions for a knowledge of the countries he visited as a member of the Black Bear Patrol.

"Earlier than some of the cave-men," replied Harry. "I wonder if this water is any good to drink?" he added, looking longingly at the crystal stream flowing under the round circle of the flashlight. "Who wants to try it?"

Frank Shaw did not wait to make many tests. Tormented with thirst, he felt of the water by rubbing it between his thumb and fingers, smelled of it, put it cautiously to his lips, and then, experiencing no bad effects from this contact, took a few drops into his mouth.

"It is fine!" he shouted, then. "Cold as ice and sweet as sugar! This beats a soda fountain, Jimmie!"

"Now, was this tunnel constructed on purpose to reach this spring?" asked Harry.

The lads examined the walls minutely, but there was no opening from the chamber, save the one by which they had entered.

"This must have been the milk house," laughed Frank, always ready to turn any subject under discussion into a joke. "I wonder if they kept their cows on the top of the peak? If they had tied their tails together and put one over each side, they never could have run away."

On their way back to Chamber B the boys discovered an opening in the north wall of the tunnel. This led to another tunnel, running in a northwesterly direction for about one hundred feet and ending in a chamber larger than any of the others. Nestor caught sight of a sparkle on the walls as he swung the flashlight about and pointed glittering sections out to the boys.

"Gold!" cried Frank.

"I'll bet a cooky we've found the hidden mine!" cried Jimmie.

"It is gold, all right," Harry Stevens said, "but there's no knowing whether it is here in quantities sufficient to pay the expense of mining and crushing the ore."

"Huh!" cried Jimmie, in a tone of reproach. "Don't you know that rock that will produce a dollar a tone is worth working? Well, then, look at this! There's ten dollars worth in the spot I cover with my hand! We've found somethin', boys!"

"So it wasn't to escape their enemies that the old chaps sequestered themselves here," said Fenton. "It was to dig out gold!"

"I never heard that there was gold in this part of Mexico," observed Jack. "I reckon we'll wake up when we get out into the sunlight."

"If you'll read up," Fenton replied, "you'll find that the state of Chihuahua abounds in niter and other salts, and is rich in mines of gold and silver. Do you really think we have come upon the deserted mine Jimmie talks about so much?" he added, turning to Nestor.

The latter took a folded paper from his pocket and examined it under the light of the electric torch.

"It seems that we have," was the reply. "I was not thinking much about the mine as I ascended the mountain, but now it strikes me that I unconsciously followed the directions given in this paper."

"That big lobster of an Englishman was looking for the mine," Jimmie said, "and so it was natural that he should lead you to it. I can't see how it belongs to any old estate, though," he added. "Looks like everybody's property to me."

"Perhaps it was the knowledge of the whereabouts of the mine that had value," suggested Nestor, "and not the fact of ownership. Anyway, we've found it."

The walls of the cavern appeared to blaze with gold, in flakes and in small nuggets. Here and there were empty pockets which appeared to have been stripped of their rich holdings. Upon inspection the floor of the chamber was found to be covered, in places, with crushed rock, where blocks cut from the walls had been broken up.

"There is no knowing how many million dollars worth of gold have been taken from here," Nestor said, "and there is no way of estimating, at this time, how far this rich rock extends into the mountain. The fact that the mine was abandoned may indicate that the ore became less valuable as the workers cut out from the center."

"It is rich enough now to pay for working, all right!" cried Jimmie.

"There appears to be millions in sight," Nestor said, putting away his paper.

CHAPTER XX.

BLACK BEARS TO THE RESCUE.

Frank Shaw drew Nestor aside as the boys searched about the cavern for nuggets. As a small one was occasionally discovered, the quest was conducted with an enthusiasm which left the two to themselves.

"It is a strange chance that has brought us to this mine," Nestor said, thoughtfully. "It seems like a fairy tale come true."

"Do you really think this is the long lost Tolford mine?" asked Frank. "I think it is," was the reply. "The location is right, at least."

"It is remarkable," Frank said, "but we can talk of that at another time. I called you over here to ask you more about the fourth man—the one you referred to, but a short time ago, as having visited the Cameron suite that night. I didn't think much of the idea when you suggested it, but, somehow, I can't get it out of my head. Do you still believe there was a fourth man? If so, what was he there for?"

"That will show in time," replied Nestor, with a little pause after each word.

"But," insisted Frank, seeking to argue the matter in order to bring out the opinion of his chum, "these other men had strong motives in doing what was done there, and you don't indicate any motive the fourth man might have had!"

"I have a faint hint of a motive humming in my brain," Nestor answered, "but it is not sufficiently well developed to talk about now. There was something afoot in the building that night that has not yet come to the surface."

"You surely don't believe the tales told by Scoby and Felix, or by Don Miguel, either?" asked Frank.

"They may be telling the truth, or part of the truth. However, Scoby and Felix are not sincere in their statements. There is something they are not telling."

"Well," Frank observed, "we ought to be getting down to brass tacks. If we get Fremont away from those ruffians to-night he'll want to be jumping at something right away, and there ought to be a line of work laid out."

"Don't get excited," laughed Nestor. "We're getting along pretty well. We've found the mine, and we've taken three prisoners. If there was a fourth man in the mixup that night, we'll soon know who he was and why he was there."

"I wish I knew whether the munitions of war got across the border," Frank said, after a pause.

"The mountain has been remarkably quiet to-day," suggested Nestor.

"What does that mean?"

"Don't you think the men would be making a lot of noise if they had arms in their hands?" Nestor asked.

"Perhaps they are making noise somewhere."

"They may make all the noise they want to, if they keep off Texas soil," replied Nestor.

"I have been talking with Stevens," Frank went on, "and he gives a doleful account of the situation in New York. They left nearly two days after you did, you remember. It is said that Cameron is not likely to recover, and that he still, in a rambling way, talks of Fremont as the person who assaulted him. That looks bad."

"It is fortunate that we got the boy out of New York," replied Nestor. "Even the temporary captivity he is undergoing is better than the Tombs."

"I'm afraid he's on the way to the Tombs now," Frank said. "He surely is unless we can do something immediately. The big rascal may come upon a band of outlaws any minute that would be too strong for us to attack."

During this talk Jimmie had been searching for nuggets on the eastern side of the chamber, finding a small one occasionally when the light was turned toward him. As Shaw finished speaking the boy found another, and the watcher was wondering how rich the earth was.

Then he saw the boy, stooping to the floor of the cavern, evidently in quest of more gold, he being at that time close to the east wall, suddenly throw up his arms and disappear, apparently through the very floor of the chamber.

Frank stood for a second looking toward the place where this strange disappearance had taken place, rubbed his eyes to make sure that he was wide awake, and then uttered a cry which brought the others hastily to his side.

When the boys reached the point of disappearance they looked for a fissure in the rocky floor, but found none. Instead, they saw a round, smooth opening into what seemed to be another tunnel. The light, when held into the dark break in the rock, revealed a landing about six feet down, but Jimmie was not in sight. Presently, however, the alarmed boys heard his voice, coming up out of the darkness.

"Hey, there!" he said. "Get a rope and a light! I'm on a toboggan!"

"In a second," Harry replied. "Are you falling?"

"No, I'm hangin' on with me toes!" was the reply. "Hurry up, you fellers! I'll drop clear into the middle of the world if I let go!"

Harry darted away to the outer chamber and brought a line from his camping outfit. Tying a piece of stone to one end, to act as a sinker, he dropped it into the mouth of the tunnel.

"Catch it!" he called to the boy.

"Nothin' doin'!" returned Jimmie. "I'm hangin' out in space. If I should let go with one finger or one toe I'd take a tumble through to China. One of you fellows come down on the rope. Hurry!"

"Are you hurt?" asked Nestor, anxiously.

"Not on your life, only in me feelings," replied Jimmie. "It breaks me tender heart to get into a hole I can't help meself out of! Come on down with that rope!"

Nestor drew up the line, tied one end about his waist, and, wondering what might lie within the forbidding place, and where it might lead to, was slowly lowered into the tunnel. The flashlight showed a level space about two yards in extent at the bottom of the shaft, directly under the opening, but beyond that the tunnel dropped away toward the east and the middle of the Chinese empire, as Jimmie declared. The fall of the passage, which was not more than six feet in diameter, was at least fifty degrees.

As soon as his feet struck the little landing Nestor saw Jimmie lying flat on his stomach on the incline below, hanging on with his fingers for dear life. As Nestor looked the boy's fingers slipped on the smooth rock and he started, feet foremost, down the dark passage.

Calling to the boys above to cling tightly to the rope and to pay it out slowly, Nestor slid swiftly downward until the slack of the line was gone, and was then brought up with a quick jerk, with the still slipping boy's head a foot away from his hands. He whirled about and dropped his feet down the passage.

There was a second of nervous strain, and then he felt Jimmie's hands clinging to his shoes. He called to the boy to hang on and to the others at the top to draw the line, and both were soon on the landing at the bottom of the shaft.

"I wonder where that hole goes?" Jimmie asked, examining his fingers, the ends of which were torn from slipping on the rock.

"You came near finding out," Nestor replied. "Regular rabbits, these old-timers were, to dig tunnels!" he added.

Then assisting Jimmie out of the shaft, Nestor asked the boys to get all the rope they had in their outfits, making a line as long as possible, and ease him down the steep incline. In five minutes all was ready and, with a line 400 feet long attached to his waist, Nestor started down the tunnel.

As he passed along, half sliding, with the rope holding him back, the flashlight in hand, he saw that the passage had been cut along the line of a natural fault in the volcanic rock. It was clear that, during some seismic disturbance, probably hundreds of years before, the continuity of strata, until then on the same plane, had been broken, leaving a fissure where the drop had taken place.

There was no means of estimating the extent of the vertical displacement, but the boy was satisfied that it was the difference between the height of the range at the place where the cavern opened and the height to the north, probably three hundred feet or more. The north end of the range had dropped down. The horizontal displacement was not more than six feet, and it was through this that the tunnel ran.

The walls of the passage were smooth, and the floor was like polished glass, a fact which the boy was at first at a loss to account for. On the north side the wall was dark and there were no traces of gold, while that on the south showed spots of precious metal.

Nestor proceeded down the incline until there was little more rope left, as the boys called out from above, and then came to an opening. He was now nearly 400 feet from the gold chamber. When he looked out of the round opening to which he had come he saw that beyond ran a deep gully, or canyon. At the point where the opening cut the wall of the canyon, however, there was a gradual descent for perhaps 400 feet to the bottom of the break in the mountain.

Elsewhere the walls of the canyon seemed to stand perpendicular, and Nestor was for a moment puzzled to account for the filling of the break at that particular spot, as if a rude stairway had been laid to the ground below. Then the truth flashed upon him. The tunnel had been built as a chute for the disposition of the rock crushed in the mine.

There was no knowing how many years the natives had worked in that underground mine, crushing out the gold with rude appliances and disposing of the refuse by means of the tunnel cut through the fault in the rock. The canyon into which the crushed rock had been cast was a wild and almost inaccessible break almost at the top of the mountain range, and might have been used for years—perhaps for centuries—without the truth of its gradual filling up becoming known to hostile peoples.

Looking down into the canyon, Nestor wondered if an easy route to the bottom might not be found there. He was already more than 200 feet below the shelf of rock from which the mine opened. The floor of the canyon was at least 400 feet below him, and at the south another cut, running east and west, seemed to connect with the first. He heard the trinkle of water below, and was satisfied that there was a succession of canyons leading to the plain below, in which case descent would be comparatively easy.

This piece of good fortune, Nestor congratulated himself, would enable the boys to reach the camping place of the renegade and his men shortly after dark, as the approach to the sandy plain

would be comparatively free of obstruction. This was an important thing, as there might be many miles to travel before the next day after Fremont was rescued.

It was not so easy getting back to the shaft, but in a short time Nestor made his way there and was soon in consultation with his friends. All were eager to pass through the tunnel, and so, one by one, they were let down until all were at the slope which led to the bottom of the canyon.

They found it easy to clamber down the heap of crushed rock to the floor of the canyon, and also to pass along the bottom at the edge of the small stream of water which flowed toward the south. The water had cut a passage under a ledge at the south, and now flowed eastward, toward the plain.

Following steadily on, now stooping under natural bridges in the rock, now wading through cuts which the water covered, and which must have been roaring torrents during time of storm, the boys finally came to a little shelf looking east from which the renegade and some of his companions could plainly be seen.

"Fremont is not so very far away now," Jack said, "and we ought to swarm down there and take him back with us. We ought to take the big lobster Jimmie seems to have on his mind back with us, too!" he added.

Nestor shook his head, for, much as he desired to hasten the hour of Fremont's release, he saw that an attempt at rescue now would be dangerous. It was certain that the outlaws, not suspecting that they had been trailed over the mountain by the tireless Boy Scouts, would be off guard at night.

"Of course we want to capture that big lobster," Jimmie said. "We want to know why he was so anxious for Nestor's society!"

"I think that question can easily be answered now," Nestor said, but he did not answer it.

Leaving the view of the spot where Fremont was a captive reluctantly, the boys went back to the gold chamber by the series of canyons by which they had left it. It was not an easy journey, for there were places where strength and skill were required, but at last they drew themselves up the chute by means of the rope, after which they again fell to investigating the provision boxes which the newcomers had brought in.

By the time they had finished a second tolerably satisfactory repast, it began to grow dark, although the sun was still an hour from setting. Black masses of clouds were forming, and now and then flashes of lightning, darting from cloud to cloud, and from cloud-mass to earth, cut the gathering darkness.

Then a drenching rain-storm came on, and Nestor believed that the time for the attack on the captors of his friend had arrived. In the darkness and storm the outlaws would not be expecting danger. The wind almost flung the boys from their feet when they came to open shelves of rock on their way to the plain below, but they kept steadily on their course.

CHAPTER XXI.

WOLVES BECOMING DANGEROUS.

On the last slope of the mountain, where the sand of the desert crept up to the ridge of rock which might, at some distant day, become sand, too, Big Bob and his band of cut-throats came upon a deserted hut which had undoubtedly been used at some time by men who were searching there for gold.

The storm-clouds were shutting out the light of day when they paused before the one-hinged door of the two-room habitation. Seeing the approaching tempest, the renegade ordered his men to gather fuel and build a fire on the hearth, preparatory to passing the night there. This order was obeyed with reluctance, for the men were worn out with their exertions and ready to roll up in their blankets and seek rest without the comfort of a fire. Besides, fuel was not plentiful there, and it was a long time before enough to satisfy the renegade could be gathered.

Fremont was placed in a room to the west, a room only roughly partitioned off from the other. There was one window opening to this room, and that faced the west and the mountain range.

The storm was soon dashing in fury against the roof of the hut. The frail structure trembled beneath the blows of the wind, and the clamor of the beating rains made all interior sounds inaudible. The prisoner knew that the outlaws were sitting before the fire in the outer room, probably jesting and smoking, but they might have been far away for all evidences of their presence he heard.

With individual noises thus shut away by the noise of the downpour, the boy felt himself isolated and alone. For the first time since his capture, his courage was wavering, not so much because of the peril of the moment, but because of the general hopelessness of the situation.

Only a few days before he had been a trusted and respected member of the Cameron family, one of the wealthiest and most exclusive in New York. Now, discredited and in danger from the threatened exercise of a law he had not violated, he was presumably a prisoner on his way back to the Tombs. And yet, was he really on his way there? That was a question fully as puzzling as any other feature of the case.

It seemed a short time since he, with other members of the Black Bear Patrol, had visited in their luxurious club-house, planning a trip to Mexico. He had reached Mexico, all right, he thought, bitterly, but under what adverse circumstances. Instead of the companionship of his friends, instead of the jolly camps on the hills and long, pleasant days on the river, he was here a prisoner.

And he was the prisoner of a man who was desperate enough to take his life at any moment. Indeed, the renegade might not be taking him to the border at all. Fremont suspected another purpose. With this thought came the memory of the signals he had heard on the mountain, and he arose and went to the window opening, barren of sash and glass, and looked out, hoping to again hear, above the rain, the calls of the Black Bears. But no such sounds greeted his ears. There was only the rush of the rain.

Fremont knew that the renegade would not be paid the reward until after conviction, and he did not believe that any jury would convict him. It was not the fear of a penalty that had caused him to consent to flight, but the dread of the waiting in prison. He had an idea that Big Bob knew that he could not secure the reward at all unless he succeeded in securing a confession, and that he had given this up.

Under these circumstances the renegade might not go to the trouble of taking him to the border. Still, he seemed to be making for Texas with all secrecy and speed. Was there some other motive for landing him on Texas soil? The renegade had shown a strange familiarity with conditions in the Cameron building, and might be in some way interested in some other affair there. There seemed to be no answer to the puzzling questions the boy asked himself.

Looking into the immediate future, the boy could see but one ray of hope, and that centered about Nestor, Jimmie, and the Boy Scouts. He knew, from the call of the Black Bear Patrol signal, on the mountain, that his friends, loyal to the core, were not far away, but he did not know how many there were in the party, or what chances of success they had.

"Good old Black Bears!" the boy whispered. "They are in the hills somewhere, and will make themselves known when the right time comes."

After a couple of hours of such unpleasant thoughts as no boy of his years ought to be obliged to entertain, Fremont arose and again went to the window looking out on the mountain. The rain came a little less swiftly now, and the thunder heads were rolling away in heavy masses, leaving lighter spaces in the sky. He knew that a guard was at the angle of the building, placed there to prevent his escape, for he could hear the angry mutterings of the fellow as he moved about.

While he stood before the small window, he heard the call of a wolf not far away on the mountain. He bent nearer to the window and listened intently. Yes; that was the whine of a wolf, but such a whine as he had heard Jimmie give in showing the call of the Wolf Patrol.

His friends—the loyal Boy Scouts—were not far away! He wondered for a moment why the call of the Wolf Patrol had been given instead of the call of the Black Bears, and then remembered that there were really wolves in the mountains, while there were no black bears.

The guard at the corner growled something under his breath as the second signal came, and finally called out sharply:

"In the hut there!"

There was a short silence, silence except for the falling rain and the lashing wind, and then the voice of the renegade was heard.

"What do you want?" was asked.

"How much longer am I to remain here?" demanded the guard.

"Until there is no longer need of guarding the window," was the reply. "You are the only man here I can trust. You must remain on guard."

"He has as yet made no move to escape," the guard said, in fair English.

"I know that very well," came in Big Bob's voice, "for I have heard no shooting."

So that was why he had been left alone there so long! He was to be permitted to leave the hut by way of the window, and was to be murdered as soon as he touched the ground. The renegade

figured that there could be no penalty for shooting at an escaping man who was charged with a serious crime.

"Perhaps it is just as well," Big Bob said, directly, "for I have not talked with him yet."

"Then you'd better do so at once," grunted the guard. "This is no picnic out here in the rain!"

"Have patience!" replied the renegade, and the voices ceased.

In a few moments Fremont heard the renegade at his door, speaking in a whisper to the guard there. Then the door was opened and the big fellow came bulkily into the room.

Fremont glanced up at the brutal face, only half revealed by the flaring candle he carried on a level with his enormous ears, but did not speak. From the outer room came a clatter of Spanish words.

"I have been wondering," the fellow said, in a voice which showed a degree of education and culture not proclaimed by the coarse face, "why you attacked Cameron?"

"I didn't!" replied Fremont, hotly.

"The proof is against you!"

Fremont did not answer. He was listening for the call of a wolf on the mountain.

"The proof is against you, boy," repeated the renegade.

After hearing the brief talk at the angle of the hut, Fremont had little desire for a conversation with the fellow. The inference to be drawn from that conversation was unmistakable. He was to be murdered by his captors. However, the boy could let this repetition of the charge go unchallenged.

"Remember," he said, "that you have heard only one side of the case. I do not know where you receive the information you claim to possess, but it goes without saying that it came from an enemy—probably from a man implicated in the crime with which you charge me. In fact, you have already opened up negotiations with me in the interest of the criminal."

"How so, boy?" demanded the other.

"You offered me my freedom if I would make a false confession. Why should you want a confession unless in the interest of one connected with the crime?"

"I told you why I wanted the confession," replied Big Bob, trying to force a little friendliness into his voice and manner. "It would give you a lighter sentence, and it would make it easier for me to get the reward."

Fremont made no reply to this. The manner of the fellow was so insincere that he could find no satisfaction in talking with him. Big Bob, however, did not go away. Instead, he sat down on a packing box which stood in the corner of the room and stuck the candle he carried up on the floor, under the window ledge so the wind would not extinguish it, in a pool of its own grease.

"If Cameron gets well," he said, "he'll be likely to forgive you if you do the right thing now."

No reply from the prisoner, sitting not far from the window, listening for another wolf call from the mountain.

"Cameron has always been your friend," the other went on.

"Indeed he has!" exclaimed the boy, almost involuntarily testifying to the kindness of the man who had taken him from the streets and given him a chance in life.

"He took you from the gutter?"

Fremont looked out into the rain, only faintly seen in the glimmer of the flaring candle, and made no reply.

"He took you into his family?"

Fremont arose and went nearer to the opening where the sash had been, and stood for an instant with the rain beating on his face.

"How did he come to do it?"

Fremont began to see a purpose in this strange form of questioning. Nestor had asked questions similar to these, and had suggested that Mother Scanlon, the woman who had cared for him in a rough way at one time, be looked up on their return to New York. Why this suggestion?

"Where did you first see Cameron?"

The voice of the renegade was threatening. Fremont heard only the sweep of the rain outside for a moment, and then the voice of the guard came through the sashless window opening.

"I'm going in to warm up a bit," he said.

"All right," the renegade replied. "I'll let you know when to go on guard again. Boy," he added, facing Fremont with lowering brows, "I can make it to your advantage to tell me all about your connection with Cameron."

Fremont heard the words dimly, for as the door of the hut slammed behind the drenched guard and his voice was heard in the outer room, the howl of a wolf came from the darkness just outside the window.

"Confound the wolves!" the renegade snarled. "They are becoming dangerous!"

"What you say may be true, so far as you are concerned!" Fremont replied, grimly.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CALL IN THE RAIN.

There was a sudden splash, heard above the downpour of the rain, followed by an exclamation of surprise, and then Jimmie's voice called out:

"Say, you fellers, throw me that life preserver!"

Nestor turned the flame on the electric flashlight and directed it toward the spot from which the voice had come. Jimmie, who had been feeling his way cautiously a few paces in advance of the party, was seen floundering about in a pool of water.

"Come on in!" the boy cried out. "The water is fine!"

"What you doing in there?" demanded Frank, nearly choking with laughter at the odd plight of the little fellow.

"I came in to get measured for a suit of clothes!" replied Jimmie. "Say, you fellows, give me a hand and I'll climb out."

The pool was neither wide nor deep, and the boy was soon on solid earth again. The storm had filled one of the depressions in the canyon the boys were following, with muddy water, and in the darkness Jimmie had tumbled into it.

"You're a sight!" Nestor said, turning the light on the boy, whose clothes were now a mixture of mud and briars acquired while descending the mountain slope above.

"I ain't any wetter than you are!" retorted the boy, as the rain switched his hair about his face. "Why don't you let me take the light when I go on ahead, then?"

"For the same reason that we do not head our procession with a fife and drum," laughed Frank. "We're not supposed to be here at all!"

"There's nobody out lookin' for a light in this canyon to-night," grumbled Jimmie.

As he spoke he seized Nestor by the arm and drew him back.

"What's that square of light down there?" he asked.

"Probably the camp we are bound for," was the reply.

"Then we've made better time down here than that lobster of an Englishman did," the boy exclaimed. "It took him most of the afternoon to climb down the hills, and we've been only about two hours on the way."

"It seems that we came by a much shorter and easier route," Nestor replied. "Where the other party was obliged to wind around precipices and crags, we made our way along the beds of what was once a succession of streams, cutting the side of the mountain into canyons. Wait here, boys," he added, "until I go down there and see what the situation is."

"Just you hold on until I let Fremont know we are coming!" Jimmie said, and the next moment the wolf-cry which Fremont had first heard rang out.

"Sounds like a wet wolf!" declared Frank.

"I know of a Black Bear that ain't any dryer!" replied Jimmie.

Nestor reached the level space in front of the west window of the hut just as the guard left the corner in the interest of a little warmth. The steady fall of the rain and the swish of the wind drowned any noises he made, and so he crept up to the wall of the structure without fear of discovery.

During the talk between the renegade and Fremont the patrol leader crouched under the window, listening. He heard the inquiries concerning Fremont's early connection with Mr. Cameron with surprise. Who was this man, he asked himself, who knew so much of Fremont's early life? What motive could he have in seeking to learn more about it than he already knew?

Unable to solve the problem, and realizing that the time for prompt action had come, he retreated from the window and with a low whistle summoned the boys to his side. As they joined him, led on by the irrepressible Jimmie, the boys gave the wolf call again.

"Just to let the kid know we're comin'!" Jimmie explained.

Then, while the boys stood considering the course to pursue, the square of light was cut by a figure standing between the flame and the window space. The watchers could not, of course, see the face which was looking out on the stormy night, but they knew that it was Fremont who stood there.

"There's no one in the room with him but that big lobster," Jimmie whispered, "and there's no one watching outside! If I were in his place I'd take a dive into the night! You bet I would."

"Perhaps he will," Nestor replied. "It would be a good thing to do provided he can get out of the window and out of the little circle of light before the Englishman can get out his gun and shoot."

"I'll give him a little advice on the subject," Frank observed, and the next moment the low whine of a bear sounded through the storm. It whined, then lifted into a deep growl, then died away into a whine again.

"What does that mean?" asked Jimmie.

"That is one Black Bear telling another to take to his heels!" was the reply. "You will see Fremont making for that opening in a second. Here he comes!"

Fremont was indeed springing through the opening where the sash had been. The boys saw the renegade clutch at his clothing, saw the cloth hold for an instant, then tear away under the impetus of the boy's movement, and heard Fremont's answer to the call as he struck the ground under the window.

Instead of going through the outer room and leaving the hut by means of the door, for some reason Big Bob concluded to follow the boy through the window. The opening was large enough for the passage of his burly frame, but he was clumsy in getting through, with the result that Fremont was nearly beyond the circle of light when at last he came to the surface outside.

Then the renegade made another mistake, a fatal one. He lifted up his great voice in warning the boy to return, and fired his revolver into the air as a means of intimidation. As he did so, the door of the hut, situated on the east, flew open and the outlaws rushed out, doubtless under the impression that they had been attacked. They left the door wide open, and a red square of light lay on the rain-soaked ground before it.

The only members of the party who did not exit by way of the doorway was the messenger who had identified Fremont. He dashed into the inner room when the cry and the shot came and looked from the window opening, there being no one in the room.

For hours this man, known to his companions as Ren Downs, had been observing the actions of Big Bob with suspicion. When the renegade talked with the prisoner, as he had many times on the way down, Ren sauntered close to the two in a vain attempt to hear what was being said. He doubted the honesty of the big fellow, believing that it was his purpose to break away from the others, himself included, and so escape the necessity of dividing the reward.

Doubting the loyalty of the renegade as he did, it was natural that he should decide that the fellow was planning an escape with the boy. Therefore, when he saw Fremont disappearing from view in the darkness, with Big Bob close after him, he drew his revolver and fired at the renegade. The shot took effect and Big Bob dropped to the ground.

"I hope he's killed him!" Jimmie said, heartily.

"No such luck as that!" Frank exclaimed. "See, the lobster is getting out his own gun!"

Big Bob lay in an awkward pose on the ground, his face and the muzzle of his automatic revolver turned toward the window. The boys almost held their breath as the figure of the messenger appeared, blocking the opening. When they saw what the purpose of the wounded man was they shouted to Downs to warn him, but were too late.

The automatic sent a hail of bullets toward the opening, and Downs fell limply across the window-ledge. At the fusillade of shots the outlaws came to the corner of the hut and glanced fearfully about. The square of light before the windows showed Big Bob lying on the ground and Downs hanging, head downward, from the window. Their natural supposition was that the hut had been attacked by a large force, so they took to their heels and were seen no more by the boys.

After a minute devoted to Black Bear hugs, and handshakes, and words of congratulation over his escape, the boys left Fremont in the shelter of the darkness and advanced to where Big Bob lay.

"It is all off with me, lads!" the big fellow said, as he turned his face to the boys. "I can't walk, for he shot me through the back. Will you get me into the hut?"

"Sure!" replied Jimmie. "You're pretty tough as a human proposition, but we can't see you suffer out here in the rain."

"Before you go any further," the man said, then, "see if Downs is dead. If I didn't get him right, he'll kill some one before he dies."

Nestor and Frank walked over to the body and made a quick examination.

"Stone dead," they said. "He never knew what hit him!"

"I am glad of that," Big Bob said. "Now get me into the hut."

The wounded man was carried into the hut and laid down on a heap of coats before the fire. It was easy to see that he was fatally injured, and the boys gathered about him with pale faces.

"I'm glad none of us shot him!" Frank said.

The storm grew wilder at midnight, the wind blowing in great gusts and the rain falling in sheets. By dodging out into the rain now and then the boys managed to keep the fire going. Big Bob lay perfectly silent before the fire for a long time and then motioned to Fremont.

"You're a good lad!" he said.

"Not long ago you were accusing me of crime," the boy said.

"Gather the boys around," the man said, then, "I want them to hear what I am going to say. You may write it down if you want to."

The wounded man did not speak again for a long time, and while the watchers waited a call came from outside of the hut—a long, wavering scream, as of some one in dire distress.

"Some one lost on the mountain!" Frank exclaimed.

Nestor opened the door between the two rooms so that the light of the fire might show through the open window from which Fremont had escaped. The candle used by Big Bob had long since burned out.

The cries continued, seeming to come no nearer, and Frank went out into the storm with the flashlight, watched by the others from the window. They saw him force his way against the wind until he came to the end of the gentle slope which terminated at an outcropping of rock, then they saw him halt and stoop over.

In a moment more he was back at the hut, his face paler than before, his eyes showing terror.

"There's some one out there with a broken leg," he said, "and we must go and get him in."

"Who is it?" asked Jimmie.

"I don't know," was the reply. "It seems to me that I have seen him before, but I can't place him now."

"What hurt the man?" asked Jimmie. "Is he shot?"

"He says he fell down the mountain," was the reply. "He heard the shooting, and made his way here. Come on. Let's go and bring him into our hospital!"

Three minutes later Fremont sprang to his feet as the man's face showed in the light.

"The night watchman!" he cried, and Jimmie echoed the identification.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOME UNEXPECTED ARRIVALS.

Nestor gazed into the pain-drawn face of the newcomer with a feeling akin to awe. There seemed something uncanny in the fellow being there at all. Had there come some new and unexpected development, in consequence of which he had been released by the secret service men? Or had he managed to elude their vigilance? If the latter, had Don Miguel and Felix also gained their freedom?

And how had the man succeeded in crossing the mountain in the weakened condition he was in? He was now so weak and faint from loss of blood and long suffering that he dropped to the floor like a dead man. Had he escaped, or been released soon after the departure of the party for San Jose, and spent the entire day among the crags and canyons? The man on the floor seemed a trick of the imagination, or, at least, a case of mistaken identity.

Nestor did not believe that Lieutenant Gordon would release the fellow under any circumstances. There was some mystery about his appearance there that could only be solved by the man himself, and so such restoratives as the Boy Scouts carried in their camping outfits were hastily brought forth.

There were bandages and a small flask of brandy which had formed a part of many an outfit and had never been uncorked, and these were soon on the floor by the side of the sufferer. The injury proved to be a compound fracture of the right leg, and Nestor shook his head gravely as he inspected it. Little could be done save to force the shattered bones back into place and bind the whole up firmly.

The acute pain of the operation and the stimulating drink that was given him caused Scoby to open his eyes and, screaming with the agony of the injury, look about the room. His pale features contorted with rage or some other strong emotion, as he looked upon the renegade. Big Bob eyed the fellow malevolently.

"You chaps appear to know each other pretty well," Nestor said, glancing from one to the other. "It would be interesting to know where and when, and under what circumstances, you last met."

The wounded men glared at each other but made no reply. Big Bob then turned his head away with an exclamation of rage. Scoby pointed to the brandy bottle and moved his white lips. Frank, who held the stimulant, asked a question with his eyes.

"Yes," Nestor said, "give him a stiff dose. He is about all in."

The drink was taken greedily, and in a few moments the fellow appeared to be gaining temporary strength. Then Nestor asked:

"Where are Don Miguel and Felix?"

"I know nothing about the foxy guy," growled the watchman.

"Then where is the Mexican?" was the next question.

Scoby fixed his gaze on the brandy flask longingly, and Nestor saw that he was bargaining for another drink of the liquid.

"Very well," he said. "Tell me what I want to know, and you shall have more."

"What do you want to know?" growled Scoby.

"How did you manage to escape from the secret service men?"

"We, Felix and I, got away while they were arranging for a boat to cross to San Jose. They chased us up the slope and fired at us, but there were so many men in the hills that they did not care to follow us in."

"And Don Miguel?"

"We left him with the officers. He would not even try to get away."

"And why did your flight take this direction?" asked Nestor, glad that the diplomat was still in custody, where he would be obliged to give an account of his doings.

"We came to look for the mine," was the impatient reply.

"And you found it, and left Felix there?"

Scoby's haggard face again contorted with anger.

"There is no mine!" he almost shouted. "We have been on a fool errand! The map is a fake

and a lie!"

The boys glanced at each other and smiled triumphantly. Scoby caught the expression on their faces and dropped back hopelessly.

"And so you found it?" he said, consternation as well as inquiry in his voice.

"Never mind that now," Nestor replied. "Where is the Mexican?"

"Dead!" was the startling and unexpected reply.

"You quarreled, then?" asked Nestor.

"He fell over a cliff," was the reply. "I tried to save him, but he drew me over with him. I broke my leg and he broke his neck. Give me the flask!"

The request was complied with, and the fellow drank thirstily, the strong liquor slipping down his throat like water. He passed the flask back and closed his eyes. Then Big Bob, who had evidently been listening to the conversation, beckoned to Fremont. Wondering what the fellow could have to say to him, the boy approached the side of the dying man.

"You recall my asking about your first meeting with Cameron?" Big Bob asked.

"Yes, and I wondered at it."

"There was a photograph in the Tolford envelope. Have you ever seen it?"

Fremont shook his head, wondering if the man was going out of his mind. He had often handled the papers, and had never come upon a photograph.

"There was one there," the other insisted. "When you get back to New York look it up. It will pay you to do so."

"Very well," replied the mystified boy, "but why talk of that at such a time?"

Big Bob regarded the boy questioningly, as if doubting his word.

"When the man of the photograph," he said, weakly, "was of your age, he must have looked exactly as you look now. It is no wonder that Cameron recognized in the newsboy the heir to the Tolford estate."

Fremont looked from Big Bob back to Nestor, then swept his eyes around the circle of interested faces.

"He is raving!" the boy said. "What have I to do with the Tolford estate?"

"There can be no mistake," the other declared, with a long pause between the words. "Cameron knew who you were, and that is why he took you into his own home; that is why the settlement of the estate was delayed year after year. He was waiting for you to come of age."

Jim Scoby was glaring at the speaker as if he thought to finish him by a look. The night watchman appeared to be waiting for some development which had not yet been put into words—possibly some revelation regarding the night of the crime.

Nestor saw the look and understood it. Fearful that Big Bob would not have the strength to speak the words which appeared to be forming on his lips, he bent over him and whispered:

"What about that night in the Cameron building? We can work out the problem of the heirship later on. Tell us what took place in the Cameron suite on the night you went there last—the night of the crime."

"Let him tell the truth, then!" almost shouted Jim Scoby. "Let him tell the thing as he found it!"

"So you saw him there that night?" asked Nestor, turning to Scoby.

"Let him answer!" was the rasping reply. "Only make him tell the truth! He might put the crime on the wrong shoulders."

It was long after midnight now, and the storm had died out. Save for an occasional dash of rain and an infrequent roll of electricity over the mountains, the night was normal, and here and there a star crept out to meet the coming dawn.

"I was in the Cameron building that night," Big Bob said, glancing painfully in the direction of the night watchman. "I saw him there!"

"The fourth man!" whispered Frank, nudging Nestor with his elbow. "The fourth man you have been talking about!"

The dying man opened his lips again, but did not speak, for voices were heard outside, and then a sharp command was given. The order was to shoot if resistance was offered by those inside. Then the door was thrown open and a bit of polished steel flashed in the light of the fire. The alarmed boys dropped the weapons they had drawn at a signal from Nestor.

The man in the doorway, wet, draggled, and exhausted with the exertions of the night was Lieutenant Gordon, and back of his stalwart figure the light showed a dozen armed men in plain clothes. Some of them, at least, were known to Nestor.

"You are safe, then?"

With a sigh of relief the lieutenant dropped down on a rude bench that stood against the wall and beckoned his men into the shelter of the hut. Then he noted the two men on the floor and turned inquiringly to Nestor.

"Wait!" the latter said. "We shall have plenty of time for explanations later on. This man is dying, and there is something he wishes to say."

The secret service men, standing before the fire and swarming over the two rooms, uncovered their heads and checked the questions on their lips.

Again Fremont stooped over the big fellow, and again the lips opened, but again there came an interruption. A sharp report came from the outside and Lieutenant Gordon hastened to throw the door open. A rocket was mounting the sky, its red light giving the floor of the hut a tint of blood.

It was followed by another, and another, then the lieutenant stepped out and saw code signals flying in the night above the peaks to the west!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STORY OF THE CRIME.

Lieutenant Gordon stood for some moments reading the signals flashing from the mountain, and the boys, regardless of the storm, clustered about him. They were unable to understand what was going on, of course, not being familiar with the code, but still they were greatly interested in the proceedings.

"It must be good news!" Jimmie whispered to Frank Shaw. "Look at him grin!"

The lieutenant did appear to be pleased with the information he was receiving by means of the vaulting rockets, but he said nothing until the signaling ceased, and then he made his way into the hut. He was about to speak when Nestor laid a hand on his arm.

"Wait," the boy said. "This man cannot last much longer, and it is imperative that we listen to what he has to say."

Jim Scoby, sitting against the wall near the hearth, groaning dismally with the pain of his broken leg, cast a keen glance at the big fellow and smiled—an ugly smile which informed those who saw it of his belief that Big Bob was now beyond the power of speech. Indeed, this did seem to be the fact for a moment, but then the renegade opened his eyes and motioned to the lieutenant.

"I want to tell you who attacked Cameron!" he said.

A string of curses escaped the lips of the watchman, but they were almost unnoticed in the excitement caused by the words of the dying man.

Nestor and Fremont drew nearer at a motion from Big Bob. Seeing that his profanity did not avail, the watchman set up a loud cry, in fact, a succession of loud cries, as if with the intention of drowning the voice of the speaker. He was silenced only when one of the secret service men threatened him with a billet of wood picked up from the floor.

"I reckon this story ain't goin' to do that geezer no good!" Jimmie said, in a shrill whisper which brought smiles to the faces of his companions.

"Sure not!" returned Frank. "This is the fourth man, and he was there that night. Can you guess whom he will accuse?" he added, with an eager glance at Jimmie, who promptly shook his head and came closer to the group on the hearth.

"I had been hanging around the Cameron building for some days," Big Bob began, feebly,

"hoping to get a look at the Tolford papers. I had bribed Scoby, and he was helping me all he could. It was for me that he got the key to the suite made."

Seeing that the man would not be likely to survive long enough to tell the story as he had begun, Nestor said:

"Wouldn't it answer if I asked you questions on the points we are most interested in clearing up? We can get through quicker that way."

Big Bob nodded, and the boy asked:

"You saw Don Miguel there?"

"Yes; he was there."

"Nod or shake your head if you find your voice failing," advised Lieutenant Gordon, and the big fellow expressed his satisfaction with the arrangement by a look.

"Was Mr. Cameron working at his desk when you left him?"

An emphatic nod.

"Then that clears Don Miguel," said Nestor. "Who next entered the room?"

Big Bob glanced toward Jim Scoby, still snarling at the group.

"Was Felix with him?"

"Yes; Felix and myself," was the unexpected reply.

"It is a lie!" shouted Scoby. "I never saw him that night."

"You'll see stars in a minute, if you have got a broken leg, if you keep on interrupting!" said the secret service man, and Scoby subsided for the time being.

"Was the door locked when you entered?"

A nod from Big bob.

"And was Mr. Cameron there, sitting with the door locked, still at work at his desk?" was the next question.

"He was not there. He had been called away."

This was a new feature of the case, for Nestor had not considered Mr. Cameron's absence from the room as among the possibilities.

"Was he out of the building?" he asked.

Big Bob shook his head.

"And while he was away you three entered with the false key?"

Another nod. Fremont motioned for him to go on, but Nestor laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Let me see if I can't help you," he said. "I think I can state the case now. You were waiting about the building to secure the Tolford papers, and Scoby and Felix were with you. After the departure of Don Miguel you caused a telephone call to be sent to Mr. Cameron—a call taking him to another part of the building. Is that right?"

The injured man smiled faintly and nodded.

"There were no telephone calls there that night!" howled the night watchman. "He is lying to you!"

"Mr. Cameron left the room, locking it after him," Nestor went on, "and you three entered and began looking for the Tolford papers? Is that right?"

Another nod from the big fellow on the floor.

"And you found the papers, after searching the safe and the desk, and Felix held the mine description while you copied it?"

"He read it off to me," was the reply.

"Now, what other paper in the Tolford envelope did you copy?"

This question brought a shake of the head.

"The will was there?"

"Yes," huskily.

"And you took that away with you, leaving a forged instrument in its place?"

It was now Fremont's turn to look amazed. He turned to Nestor with an eager look in his eyes.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

Nestor motioned for him to remain quiet. It was clear that Big Bob's hours were numbered, even his minutes.

"You are one of the heirs to the Tolford estate, and you objected to the manner in which the property was left by Julius Tolford, especially as it was left mostly to Cole Tolford and his heirs. So you made a new will, as much like the old one as you could manage, and left it in the envelope?"

"Yes, I did that!"

"I thought so," said Nestor. "And you made a bad job out of it, for I had no difficulty in discovering the deception when I looked through the papers that night. The false will was on stained paper, like the other instruments, but the others were stained with age, while the one you introduced into the lot was colored with chemicals."

Big Bob nodded and looked with astonishment at the boy.

"And Mr. Cameron came back and found you three in the suite?" Nestor went on.

Big Bob shook his head.

"You left before he returned?"

Another shake of the head, then the man whispered:

"Scoby was watching for him outside."

The night watchman seemed like a man about to throw a fit. He writhed about the floor, regardless of his injured leg, and tried to reach the speaker.

"And Scoby struck him down?" asked Nestor.

There was a strained silence in the room as they all waited for the reply, already suggested by Big Bob's previous words.

"Yes," he whispered. "Scoby struck him down with a billy."

The accused man dropped back against the wall and his eyes closed. It was plain that the words, together with his previous exertions and pain, had taken the nerve all out of the fellow.

"But Scoby did not do this of his own notion," Nestor went on, remorselessly. "It was done by your orders. You had bribed him to do it. It was your idea that if Cameron was killed no one would ever be able to detect the substitution of the false will for the original one."

Big Bob nodded, but did not stop there.

"I wanted to take no chances," he said, with a choke in his voice. "I wanted the property! I did not care for the mine especially, but I told Scoby that that was my motive—the securing of the description. I wanted to clear my title to the entire estate. If the boy working there that night had not followed Fremont into the room, he, Fremont, would have been attacked also."

"Then Fremont stood in your way?" asked Nestor.

Fremont, remembering Big Bob's talk with him about his early association with Mr. Cameron, his mention of the will, bent closer, a startled expression on his face.

"Yes, he stood in my way," was the reply. "He is the son of Cole Tolford, who was killed in New York a long time ago, and would have inherited the property."

"And Mr. Cameron knew that?" asked Nestor, his old suspicions, voiced to Fremont at the time they talked of Mother Scanlon, recurring to his mind.

"Of course he knew," was the reply. "With Cameron out of the way, and the boy ignorant of his parentage, I would have been safe. Still, I thought best to put Fremont out of my way also. Then there could have been no danger, for I was the next heir."

"I understand!" Nestor said, greatly shocked at the revelation of the cold-blooded murder plot. "You had seen Fremont about the building, and yet you pretended not to know him after your men had taken him prisoner?"

"I knew him," was the faint reply. "My men captured the boy I described to them. I preferred that my men should think I had captured a marplot who had ruined their plans. Then they would have thought nothing of my killing him. But Ren Downs interfered."

"That is the man who lies dead out there?"

Another nod from the injured man, now almost too weak to talk.

"It was your intention to kill Fremont? You wanted him to try to escape and have him shot down by another?"

"Yes, that was my plan. And Scoby and Felix if necessary. I came here for that."

"Great Scott!" whispered Frank. "I reckon this chap got just what was coming to him! Only he ought to be hanged!"

"Hush!" whispered Nestor. "Look!"

Big Bob opened his eyes wider, shot out one hairy hand, gave a convulsive motion which shook his great frame so that the floor of the frail hut trembled, and then the end came. Later, when the body was given rude burial, the original will was found in a pocket of the dead man's coat, together with letters from his brother, Cole Tolford, asking him to go to New York, search out Mother Scanlon, and protect his son.

"Congratulations are in order, Mr. Black Bear!" Shaw whispered, as the papers were handed to Fremont, "but, somehow, I feel like waiting until we get back to little old New York before showing any enthusiasm. This has been a tragic trip."

The other members of the party seemed to feel the same way, for the revelation of the dreadful plot and the death of Samuel Tolford, known as Big Bob, had cast a gloom over the party which not even the clearing up of the mystery could shake off.

CHAPTER XXV.

READY FOR THE CANAL ZONE.

"This is the end of the case," Frank Shaw said, covering the face of the dead man with a handkerchief. "Fremont is free to go back to New York, taking his mine with him! Nestor was right when he declared that the solution of the Cameron mystery lay on this side of the Rio Grande."

"But the object of our visit has not yet been accomplished," Nestor said, "and so I can't go back with you. Perhaps you would better leave me in charge of the mine!"

"You are wrong," Lieutenant Gordon said, then, "the object of our journey is accomplished. I was ready to announce the fact when you stopped me to listen to the last words of the poor wretch who lies there."

"Do you mean that the arms and ammunition were stopped on the other side?" demanded Nestor.

"That is what the signals said! When I left Don Miguel in charge of the secret service men at San Jose and came back into the hills to find you, I left word with the men to climb to the top and signal if the news came that the arms had been stopped. I don't know just how they got the news, but it is undoubtedly reliable. The arms are in Uncle Sam's possession. The rag-tag-and-bob-tail-of-creation fellows we have seen skulking about here will have to go away without a fight."

"That is too bad!" grunted Frank. "I wanted to see a raid!"

"It is better as it is," replied Nestor.

"And the signals told me something else," continued the lieutenant. "Something about your end of the case," he added, turning to Fremont.

"About Mr. Cameron?" asked the boy, excitedly. "He is—"

"In his right mind again, and knows who struck him."

Then the Black Bears and the Wolves joined hands and actually danced about the old hut until it seemed about to collapse. The secret service men looked on and smiled at the sight of so much happiness. Then Fremont asked:

"And he will live?"

"There is no doubt of it," was the reply. "I do not know the details, for one rocket told me that he was in his right mind again, and another that he would live."

"Then we can all go back to New York and get ready for the trip down the river!" said Jimmie. "You fellers can ride on cushions and I'll hoof it."

"Say," cried Stevens, in a moment, "if this raid scare is all over, get a couple of drums and let Frank and Peter drum their heads off."

"I don't want to drum," Frank said, "not here, anyway! I don't want to go down the Rio Grande, either. I've had enough of Mexico."

He turned to the night watchman with a shudder and bent over him. The man's face was whiter than before, and his form seemed rigid. Seeing the boy's action, Lieutenant Gordon also stooped down. When he arose his face was grave.

"Prussic acid!" he said. "It seems that he was prepared for an emergency!"

"The last of the three conspirators!" Nestor said. "To wander through the world until past middle age and then to come to this! But it is better so."

It was daylight now, and the burials took place. After taking a very light breakfast, the party started back over the mountain. They passed up the ravines and canyons to the mine, and Lieutenant Gordon ascended the mountain of crushed rock and entered the gold chamber.

"There is a fortune here," he said looking about. "What are you going to do with it?" he added, turning to Fremont.

"I had not thought of that," was the reply.

"You'd better be thinking about it!" said Jimmie. "Some one will come down here and geeze it!"

"No one will ever find it," Fremont said.

"But we found it!" Stevens remarked.

"There are a couple of men in my company," the lieutenant said, then, "who are anxious to get out of the service. Why not leave them here to keep possession? After this revolution is over, you can come down here and work it, or they can handle it for you. They are honest and capable."

When spoken with about the matter the men were eager to undertake the task of guarding the mine until peace should be restored, after which they were willing to undertake its development. And so, when the party left, these men stood on the shelf of rock by the opening, reminding Lieutenant Gordon and Fremont for the twentieth time to be sure to send up provisions. It is needless to add that the provisions were sent!

When the party reached El Paso one of the first men they met was Don Miguel, who smiled in a sarcastic manner as he greeted Nestor.

"And so you were released?" the boy asked.

"On orders from Washington," was the reply.

"The case ended when the arms were captured," Nestor said.

"And if they had not been taken?"

"If a raid had actually taken place, you would have been charged with murder," was the quiet reply.

"Only for you," snarled the other, "my plans would have succeeded."

"Only for the strange combination of circumstances which brought us both to the Cameron building that night, you should say," Nestor replied. "It chanced that we appeared on the scene in time to interrupt a murder plot."

"It is fate!" Don Miguel said, with a frown. "It was to be. Why, half the police officers in New York might have visited the suite without seeing anything significant in those letters. And even if they had found them interesting reading, they would not have been capable of smashing all our plans. At the beginning of the world it was set that you were to be there that night! It is fate!"

Don Miguel bowed to the boy and took himself off. The government, fearing international complications, had ordered his release, and the boy was glad of it. The boys were all back in New York in two days, accompanied by Lieutenant Gordon, who was interested in seeing that Nestor received a suitable reward for what he had done. When the check finally came from Washington Nestor was so surprised at its size that he sought the lieutenant, who laughed at him.

"Uncle Sam always pays well," he said, "and he wants a little more of your time!"

"Wants me?" asked Nestor.

"Well, he asks me to get some keen fellows together and go down to the Canal Zone and look into a bit of treason."

"And you want me to go?" cried the boy, almost disbelieving his own ears.

"It is just this way," the lieutenant said. "I want some one with me who can act and act quickly, and who can think on the spur of the moment. Also some one who will not be suspected of being in the secret service of the government."

"I see!" cried the boy, his eyes flashing.

"And so," continued the lieutenant, "I was thinking that you might get some of the Black Bears and Wolves we had in Mexico to go down there and look about. Where is little Jimmie? I like the boy."

"Fremont has about adopted him!" laughed Nestor. "I guess the boy will have an easy life from this time on."

"And Fremont is now the acknowledged heir?"

"Oh, yes. Mr. Cameron is holding the property until he comes of age, but is giving him the income, which is very large, to say nothing of the mine."

"Mr. Cameron, of course, knew that Fremont was the heir?"

"Oh, yes, he knew, and he had statements from Mother Scanlon to prove it. It was all clear for Fremont before the crime was committed. A lucky boy!"

"Of course he appreciates your efforts in his behalf?"

"Does he? Why, he wants me to stop working and come and play with him for the remainder of my life! Suppose I take him to Panama if you really want me to go?"

"I certainly do, and for the reason given," was the reply. "Get some of the Black Bears and Wolves together and organize an excursion to the Canal Zone. You must not mix with me, or the other secret service men down there, but you must keep us posted as to what you discover."

"That will be a picnic," cried Nestor. "What is doing down there?"

"I don't know much about it myself," was the reply, "except that it is a plot to stop the building of the canal. You'll find out soon enough when you get down there. When can you go?"

"In three days," was the answer. "Just as soon as I can round up the boys. The folks down there will think a menagerie has struck town when they see all the wild animals creeping in on them. Say, what would Uncle Sam do if it wasn't for the Boy Scouts of America?" he added, with a laugh.

"Couldn't exist!" smiled the lieutenant.

It is needless to say that the prospect of a trip to Panama, with a little intrigue thrown in, pleased the boys greatly, and in three days they were ready to start, waiting only for orders from Lieutenant Gordon.

THE END.

What they did and what they saw and heard in the Canal Zone will be told in the forthcoming book of this series entitled, "Boy Scouts in the Canal Zone; or Plot Against Uncle Sam."

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

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