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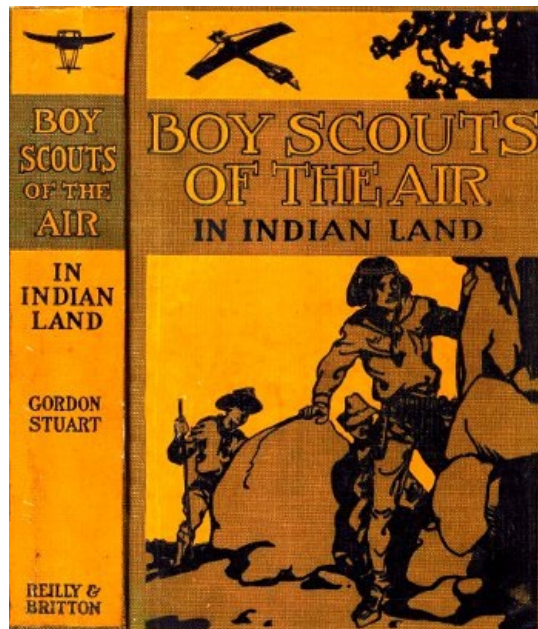
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The Boy Scouts of the Air in Indian Land

Boy Scouts of the Air Books

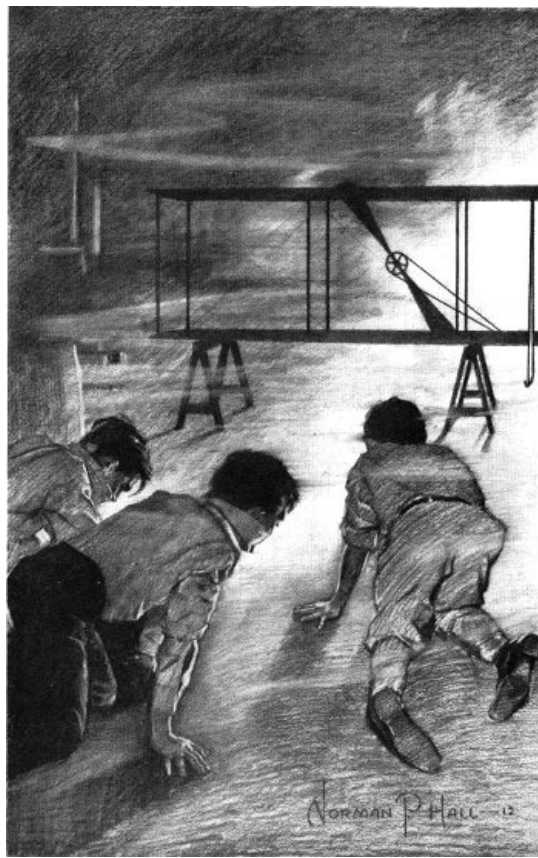
BY GORDON STUART

Illustrated by Norman P. Hall

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THE BOY SCOUTS OF THE AIR IN INDIAN LAND



They crept, wriggled and crawled toward the machine. The air was stifling and they could hardly breathe, but, groping in the smoke and darkness, Carl finally got his hands on the truck.

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[They crept, wriggled and crawled toward the machine. The air was stifling and they could hardly breathe, but, groping in the smoke and darkness, Carl finally got his hands on the truck.](#)

["Now, scouts," said Mr. Hawke, amused at their excited exclamations, "we'll put this together, and I'll show you the model of the 'Thunder Bird Aeroplane.'"](#)

[Carl stopped short. In front of him stood a tall, stately, blanketed Indian. His whole face was hideously painted in various colors, and his countenance was set and expressionless.](#)

[The struggle promised to be a long and hard one if Carl were left to fight it alone. But this the other boys did not propose to allow, and they immediately began to cross on the rope ladder.](#)

Boy Scouts of the Air In Indian Land

CHAPTER I

A RIDE AND A RUNAWAY

"There she comes," exclaimed a boy, one of a crowd awaiting the evening train in the hot little box of a depot at Silver City, New Mexico. A speck of yellow had suddenly appeared far down the light, worn rails to the east. Fifty loungers moved forward. The evening train was coming at last.

"If mother don't look out," added the speaker, who was a tall, slender young chap with strikingly black hair and eyes, "she'll miss the train an' the folks that are coming. Mother seems to like to be late—always."

"Don't get excited, Jerry," broke in a second boy, this one with big shoulders, a square determined face with a winning smile, and, his chief characteristic, a big mop of yellow hair. "I think Ike and your mother are coming right now."

While the headlight was yet only a growing star on the far-away plain, a military hack, drawn by two nervous horses in charge of a colored soldier in uniform, dashed up to the now lively depot in a cloud of dust.

Those awaiting the arrival of the train made a fair picture of the people living in that part of the half-desert Southwest. There were miners, soldiers, sheepmen, freighters, loafers not easily classified, and the usual mixture of Mexicans and civilized Indians. The arrival of the train meant little to any of these except that it brought the daily mail, strangers in the shape of prospectors, or drummers who might spend a few dollars, and nearly always some one going to the Fort.

All soldiers know Fort Bayard. It isn't a real fort any more, although a few cannon sit idly about the big white stockade and new brick buildings, but the tired and sick soldier in the Philippines, in California or in New York, knows that here, when all else fails, he may be sent to find rest and new health. Uncle Sam has selected the old post as the best place in the United States to put new life into his ailing soldiers.

That's why, the Indian and his troubles having disappeared, and consequently the need for armed militia, that old Fort Bayard has been dismantled, new buildings put up, and the old structures repaired and whitewashed and put in charge of a medical staff.

Here, at the time of this story, Captain H. Wilmot Crawford was in charge of the Post, he and his under officers and the medical staff living apart with their families in their own homes. This made the Post quite a settlement. The Fort was six miles from Silver City. Every foot of the intervening military road climbed upward to the big plateau, high and dry, and looking in all directions toward the still higher mountain ranges. The Post was an ideal home for the officers detailed there.

The lady in the hack that had reached the station just as the train arrived was Mrs. Wilmot Crawford, wife of the Post commandant. She was also the mother of the first boy speaker, Gerald Crawford, commonly known as Jerry.

The interest of Mrs. Crawford and the two boys in the approaching train was due to the fact that on it Mrs. Windham of Cleveland and her son Fred were passengers. Mrs. Windham was coming to visit Mrs. Crawford, her old schoolgirl friend, and, as her son was with her, it meant a boy to join the Post quartette of kids. That his coming was eagerly anticipated by the boys at the station was indicated by the actions of the latter.

"I s'pose Windham won't think this is much of a place," remarked a third boy as Jerry Crawford sprang to attend on his mother. "After living in a big city like Cleveland, I reckon he'll think this is rotten," went on the boy. "I hope he ain't stuck up, Dunk. It wouldn't seem just right to take a fall out of Jerry's guest."

"Say," answered the boy addressed as Dunk, grabbing the speaker by the arm. Then Dunk stopped, thrust his hands deep in his pockets and said, with emphasis, "If I were you, Fly, I wouldn't fret about our new friend liking us or the place. He ain't visitin' to our houses. It's up to Jerry to entertain him an' keep him right. But, as far as that goes, he may take to it like that New York kid who's over to Brett's ranch. Graystock just took one look at a cow pony and the mountains and gave it out cold he didn't care whether he ever went back to New York. And New York's a heap sight bigger than Cleveland."

"I ain't looking for trouble," protested the boy addressed as Fly. "But I hope he's all right. The summer's pretty long down here, and they ain't many of us. So, what there are of us ought to be

right if we're goin' to pull together."

Little did any of the boys think when they heard that a Fred Windham was to arrive from Cleveland, what a whirl of events was to arrive with him! Mrs. Windham's doctors had advised her to go to New Mexico. Jerry, Dunk and Fly had driven over in a four-horse freight wagon from the Post. Mrs. Crawford had come to Silver City earlier in the day to do some shopping. As Mrs. Crawford dashed up to the station, the dusty but well appointed hack, the spirited horses and Mrs. Crawford's half western, snappy costume indicated that life at the Post was probably not without pleasures of its own. In fact, an invitation from one of the Post families to spend a few weeks at Fort Bayard in the summer was generally considered a special favor.

With a growing rumble and spreading glare of light the swaying train at last stopped before the station. Jerry darted from his mother and with his two companions was at once lost in the crowd. Mrs. Crawford remained in the hack awaiting her old friend. There was so much confusion on the platform that, at first, the expected guests were not seen.

Jerry separated from his crowd, but, not knowing the Windhams by sight, he had not much hope of recognizing them. However, seeing a rather undersized boy before him, he raised his voice without hesitation.

"Say, your name Windham?"

"You bet!" The other's face broke into a smile. "You're Crawford? Glad to meet you. Here's my mother, Crawford."

"Come right along," laughed Jerry, after shaking hands. "My mother's right over here."

He led them out of the crowd, and a moment later the two ladies greeted each other while Jerry introduced his friends to the northerner.

Fred Windham was small for his age, but this was offset by a striking face. High forehead, twinkling gray eyes with flecks of brown in them, a mouth and jaw like a steel trap, and quick, firm handclasp won him a place at once among the other boys. Fly seemed satisfied.

Mrs. Windham met the boys; then the two ladies entered the hack. Evidently Mrs. Crawford's guest expected her son to follow her.

"Oh, he'll drive with the boys," laughed Mrs. Crawford, "unless he's afraid of the jolting."

"Sure I will!" grinned Fred. "If it's all right with you fellows?"

"What do you think we're here for?" responded Dunk, vigorously.

"Go ahead, Ike. We'll load up the trucks and be right behind."

The hack started off with lighted lamps, while the four boys got the Windham trunks and piled into the waiting freight wagon on top of them, Jerry taking the reins.

The boys in the freighter escorting Fred Windham up the mountain road to Fort Bayard were members of the Post quartette. The fourth member of the gang, however, although a constant comrade and companion of the three who had gone to meet Windham, was an Indian—an Apache boy known as Carlito. The other lads were Gerald Crawford, son of the Post commandant; Duncan Rivers or "Dunk," son of Lieutenant Rivers of the Post staff, and Art Giles, known as Fly for reasons that will soon be apparent. There were other boys in the neighborhood, however. One of them was Herb Phipps, the son of the owner of the big B. P. ranch five miles east of Fort Bayard, and another was his cousin Howard Graystock, already mentioned by Dunk. Art Giles was not the son of an officer; his father was post mechanic, and the boy, brought up with little schooling, had known no life but that of the West. He was straightforward, impetuous and full of enthusiasm. His red hair was no untrue index of a sunny and lively disposition. More than one boy's share of freckles was distributed over his bright, frank face.

Jerry's four horses were headed toward the Post plateau with its picturesque mountains and deserts to the north and west. The road was rough. It was now pitch dark, for there was no moon, and a slight haze somewhat obscured the brilliant stars. Jerry soon caught up with the lights of the hack, and then his team jogged along a few yards behind.

"Say, Windy," began Dunk, giving Fred the most natural nickname that occurred to him, "it's all in the family now, so just wise up that I'm Dunk, Gerald's Jerry and Art's Fly."

"Much obliged," said Fred pleasantly. "I'm used to Windy, but why the Fly?"

"Oh, those boneheads know I've been studyin' aeroplanes," answered Art. "Say, I clean forgot to tell you guys that Tender Gray called up this afternoon and we're all going over to-morrow."

"Aeroplanes?" repeated Windy, the newcomer impolitely ignoring the message from Tender Gray. "How can you study aeroplanes way down here almost out of all creation?"

"Easy," answered Fly. "I've never seen a real flying machine but I guess every boy's got some angle. My father takes a big English magazine about flying machines."

"And Red-head's gone crazy over them," exclaimed Dunk. "You ought to see the fine little machine he made a couple of months ago. He made it just from reading about them in books, and it was a dandy too. Of course it wouldn't fly, but it looked just like an aeroplane."

"I'd rather see a real one than find a silver mine," announced young Giles promptly. "But nothin' doin' in airships on this plateau."

"They're great," broke in Windham. "I've seen a lot of them. Who's Tender Gray?" he concluded with boyish curiosity, recalling that Fly had mentioned another lad.

"Oh," answered Dunk Rivers, Jerry being busy with the horses, "he's a cousin of Herb Phipps. Mr. Phipps is the richest man in this part of the country. I guess he's a millionaire. They live over here about five miles east on the big home ranch. Mr. Phipps goes in for sheep you know. But he's got a lot of sheep ranches, and mines too. They call the one over east the B. P. ranch. That's the brand too. Of course it means Brett Phipps, Mr. Phipps' name. But we all call it the Bread Pudding ranch."

"What's the cousin's name?" went on Windham, pulling off his light straw hat to keep it from blowing away as the big freight wagon rolled upward on the mountain road.

"Oh," answered Dunk, "he's Tender Gray. His name's Howard Graystock. We call him Tender Gray because he's what they call a Boy Scout up there in New York."

"Boy Scout," almost shouted Windham. "Why, I'm one of them myself. I want to know Graystock, you bet."

"That won't be hard to do," broke in Fly. "Him and Herb are over to the Post about half the time. And anyway, we're to go over to the B. P. to-morrow."

"I suppose you call him Tender Gray because he's a tenderfoot scout," remarked Windham.

"I reckon," chuckled Duncan. "That or because he's tender on the subject of Boy Scouts. He's sure a bug on that question. But you'll like both the B. P. kids. Herb goes to college every winter."

"You say you're a Boy Scout, too," called back Jerry over his shoulder.

"Yes, I'm a Boy Scout, first class, and I've got the badges to prove it too."

"What are they?" inquired Dunk eagerly.

"One's for athletics—basketball's my game—one's for handicraft, and the other—" Fred paused an instant with a smile—"the other's for aviation."

There was a gasp of surprise, then Fly stuck a hand across the trunks. "Shake old man!" he cried. They shook hands solemnly.

For some minutes, while Jerry's team lunged ahead and the freight wagon swung like a vessel adrift, Windham and Fly forgot even Boy Scout matters. But there was no time for prolonged talk, although each boy related what he had studied on the subject of aviation. The exhilaration of the ride was too much.

"Tell you what," Windham almost shouted, "I'm certainly glad to get out here. Airships, Boy Scouts and a ranch too—Whoopee! Real cowpunchers and roundups!"

He paused as a shout of laughter went up.

"Wait till we put Herb next!" gasped Jerry. "Wow! Ain't that a peach though. Cowpunchers!"

"Well, I'll bite," exclaimed Fred. "What's the joke?"

"Roundups!" shouted Dunk. "Roundups and cowpunchers! Why, Brett Phipps ain't got a puncher on the place!"

"Thought you said it was a ranch," protested Fred.

"It is," explained Jerry. "Sheep ranch though. All the punchers you'll see will be Greaser sheep herders. 'Bout a million sheep on the Bread Puddin'—Hello! See that?"

"What?" cried the others.

"Look out!" yelled Windham suddenly. Everybody dodged as a great gray and white shape drove down through the air beside them and was gone on the instant. A shriek went up from the hack in front, followed by a wild shout from Ike.

"Runaway!" cried Dunk. "After 'em Jerry!"

The latter needed no urging. He had already caught a glimpse of Ike's form falling headlong from the hack seat as the two terrified horses plunged into headlong flight. With a shout of encouragement to his mother and Mrs. Windham, Jerry doubled the reins and lashed his four horses into a run, barely missing Ike's body as he passed it.

"What was it?" called Dunk, between jolts.

"I couldn't see," shouted Jerry.

The hack before them was careering madly over the sand and stones. The glimmering lamps showed the sweating flanks of the two horses that were running frantically. The freight team behind gained rapidly, however, and slowly drew abreast of the runaways. Jerry was urging his horses on with hat and reins when a dark shadow threw itself at the forward team. Something

seized the bridles and hung there, dragging down the horses' heads, and Jerry barely managed to draw up his four as the hack stopped abruptly.

Instantly the boys were helping Mrs. Crawford and Mrs. Windham to the ground. Assured of their safety Jerry and Dunk ran to the heads of the hack team.

"Carlito," cried Jerry, gripping the shoulder of the slim young fellow who stood there. "Old man, I'm—I—darn it all, come on back!"

"It's Carlito, mother," he shouted, dragging the reluctant young figure with him. "Carl stopped 'em!"

The rescuer reached for his sombrero, which had fallen from his head, as Mrs. Crawford held out her hand.

"You are a brave boy, Carlito!" she said gravely, her face pale. "You've saved us all, I guess. Mrs. Windham, this is Carlito, one of the finest boys at the Post."

As their rescuer turned, his face came into the light of the lamps, and Mrs. Windham started, for she saw he was an Indian. Quickly recovering, she thanked him warmly.

"It wasn't much," said Carlito, smiling composedly. "The horses were stopping themselves."

"Not on your life they weren't!" cried Dunk, hotly. "Jump in and go with us to the fort, Carl."

"Can't. Going to town," replied Carl, putting his hands to his mouth and emitting a strange sound. There was an answering whinny and he walked in the direction from which it came.

"That's the way he finds his pony at night, or when he doesn't know just where it is. He certainly can make it loud too, when he wants to," explained Jerry.

As Carlito started down the road, he met Ike loping along rather lamely.

"Anybody hurt," gasped the driver as soon as he was within hearing distance.

"No. How about yourself," Jerry answered, surprised and at the same time relieved to see the darky had not sustained any injury.

"Oh, I'm tough," grinned the driver, resuming his seat. "Say, what was dat thing? I heard a rush and somethin' soft give me a swipe in de face jest as the hosses broke, an' over I goes."

"Was it in the air?" asked Dunk. "Bird mebbe."

"Bird nothin'," contradicted Jerry. "It felt a heap bigger'n any bird I ever heard of."

By this time the ladies had again taken their places in the hack and Ike took up the reins.

"Better come along, Carlito," urged Fly, but the Indian boy shook his head.

"See you at the B. P. ranch to-morrow," he said. "Get there about eleven and you'll hear something worth while. So long." And the Apache sprang on his pony and disappeared into the night.

CHAPTER II

THE DESTROYER

"Who's that good-lookin' Indian, Jerry?" asked Fred, as the light of Fort Bayard came into sight.

"Araviapa Apache," came the reply. "He's been chasing around the Post 'most all his life. Came from the San Carlos agency, I guess, so folks called him Carl. Used to be a Dutchman named Carl here, and the Greasers called the Injun Carlito, or Little Carl. He goes by both names. He's the cool guy, you bet, and a wise one, too."

"But what does he do?" persisted the practical Fred. "He can't live on air, can he? Does he get his living for nothing?"

"Don't you think it! Not him," returned Dunk warmly. "He does a lot of work for us—trailin', and things like that. He's a bird at it."

"Yes, and he's learned to read and write," added Fly. "You kids ought to see some of the books and stuff he's got."

There was no more time for conversation, as they now drew into the Post grounds and drove up to the house occupied by the Crawfords, where the guests were to stay. The captain and two or three of his brother officers met the new arrivals. At the tale of the runaway there was great excitement on the veranda and Captain Crawford called Ike up from the drive. After examining the teamster and the boys, he gave up the effort he was making to solve the mystery of the runaway.

"It must have been a bird," laughed Dr. Rivers, who bore the title of lieutenant.

"That seems to be the only explanation," admitted the captain. "Are you sure the thing hit you, Ike?"

"Yessah," maintained the teamster stoutly. "It was the s'prise more'n anythin' else that knocked me off, Cap'n. Felt like a bird, though."

"It was too large, father," protested Jerry. "There ain't no bird as big as that. Mebbe it was an aeroplane."

The officers laughed, but Jerry stuck to it that the "thing" was not a bird. The examination ended in nothing. The boys had brought the mail over with them, so as soon as the ladies had retired the officers went over to the quartermaster's office while the four boys separated for the night.

The next day was a perfect one such as only the New Mexican hills can produce. To the north and west of Fort Bayard stretched a wilderness of deep valleys and mountain peaks as far as the Rio Gila. The Bread Pudding ranch, as the Circle B P was locally known, lay five miles to the east.

After breakfasting, Fred and his mother were driven around the garrison. There was plenty to be seen, and neither Jerry nor Fred realized how the time was flying until Dunk approached.

"Hey, Jerry," called the latter, with some show of indignation. "What's the mater with you? We've been waiting more'n an hour."

After hastily explaining to the older members of the party that they were going over to the ranch for the day, Jerry and Fred accompanied Dunk to the stables. Here they found Fly and Carlito waiting and after saddling up they speedily left Fort Bayard behind.

"Ever ride much?" asked Dunk, seeing that Fred experienced a little difficulty with his saddle.

"Sure, lots!" replied the Cleveland boy.

"Never ran up against this kind of saddle, though. Spanish, ain't it?"

"Used to be," grinned Jerry. "Good U. S. now. Say, Carlito, what was that thing that scared our horses last night?"

"You'll hear more of that when we get to the ranch," replied the Apache, looking away. Fred noticed that Carlito spoke slowly and used exact English, probably gained from books. "I do not know what it was but—"

"Well, but what?" prodded Dunk.

"I think it must have been the Thunder Bird!" concluded Carlito.

A shout went up from all except Fred, who asked wonderingly what the Thunder Bird was.

"It's one of the old Injun gods, Windy," explained Dunk. "He made the lightning and thunder and had something to do with the rain and crops. General boss of the gods, wasn't he, Carlo?"

"Pretty near," nodded the Apache gravely. "The Thunder Bird not only represented the Deity but he had great power over rain, which is important in this part of the country. Our people used to have great sacrifices to him twice a year."

"Human sacrifices?" asked Fred innocently. At this even Carlito burst out laughing.

"Where'm I off now?" cried Fred.

"There were no human sacrifices," replied the Indian boy. "Only the Aztecs used to have them. Our people and the other Apaches, the Navajos, Moqui and neighboring tribes used to appoint deputies twice each year. They'd go to a certain place where the medicine men went through elaborate rituals, the deputies representing the tribes. No people is so symbolical as we are—or were. I mean by that in religious rites. For instance, every line of paint and every article used has a symbolical and often mystical meaning."

"That Gov'ment shark from Washington," said Jerry, "who was here last summer, knew a lot about that. He sent dad one of his books, and the whole thing explained a single six-day Zuni corn feast!"

"Say, speed up, fellows. You jog along as though we had all day and to-morrow," and Fly spurred up his pony, calling back, "Race you to the turn of the road."

For a few minutes the boys made the dust fly, and, despite the good start Fly had made, Windy came in first with Carlito a close second. They kept up a brisk canter all the way to the ranch.

"Here come the other fellows, Windy," said Dunk, as they reached the B. P. Windy saw two horses leave the corral now only a few hundred feet away. The two approached at a gallop and a moment later met the Post boys with a yell. One of the B. P. boys was roughly and carelessly dressed and was brown as an Indian. He was introduced to Fred as Herb Phipps. The second wore a Boy Scout tenderfoot emblem on his flannel shirt. This was Howard Graystock, the New Yorker. His face lit up as he saw the first-class and merit badges that decorated Fred's shirt.

"How long you been a scout, Windham?" he asked as the party whirled and rode up to the corral.

"'Bout three years," replied Fred, dismounting.

"Wish I was first-class!" rejoined Gray. "I swore in about a week before I come out here." He lowered his voice slightly, "Say, you back me an' Phipps up strong, will you? Don't say anything—you'll see pretty quick."

Fred laughed assent as all dismounted, and they joined the others. After turning the horses into the corral the party started up to the house but were stopped by a hail. Looking around, they saw a large man striding around the opposite end of the corral. The boys from the Fort gave him a shout of greeting and all waited for him to come up.

Brett Phipps was big in every sense of the word. He had fought his way up from cowpuncher to millionaire by sheer strength of will and brains. Although he had started on a Texas ranch and fully shared the prejudices of the cow-men against the sheepmen, he realized that there was big money in sheep. Therefore he had started the large Circle B. P. sheep ranch near Fort Bayard where there was good water, although he owned a large cow range in the Taos country as well.

Like the boys he was dressed in flannel shirt and wide Stetson. Over his trousers he wore chaps of plain leather, to protect his clothes from the wear of the saddle, and his legs from rattlers. He greeted the party vigorously.

"Well, I'm sure glad to see yuh, boys! Hullo, new member? Windham? Glad to meet yuh! Hang up on the veranda, boys, till I get these chaps off. Right back."

He disappeared inside the house, and the boys "hung up" on the wide veranda which was littered with canvas, reed and other easy-chairs. Indeed, the veranda of the ranch-house served largely as an office and living room combined. Both Mr. Phipps and the boys spent a large share of their time there.

In a few moments the rancher returned minus his chaps, followed by a Chinaman, the ranch-house cook, who greeted the boys with a cheerful grin of recognition.

"What'll it be?" inquired Mr. Phipps, as he sank into a big chair and glanced around.

"Lemonade!" arose the shout, and the "Chink" vanished.

"Carl hinted last night that you had something special on, Herb," began Dunk to the rancher's son. Herb grinned and looked at his father.

"Not me," he said. "I reckon dad has somethin' under his hat, though."

At this moment the Celestial returned with a gigantic olla or Mexican jar full of lemonade, together with glasses.

"Well, John, didn't take you long," said Mr. Phipps, as he tossed off a glass with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Him all leddy," grinned the Chinaman.

"Let's get together, boys," commanded Mr. Phipps, with a sweep of his broad hand. "I've got to get over to Three Mile Crick after lunch, so I reckon we'll hold a confab right now."

The boys hitched their chairs up closer to Mr. Phipps and the lemonade, and when their glasses had been refilled the ranchman continued.

"Mebbe y'all don't know it, but there's been a lot o' devilment goin' on for quite a spell back. We've kep' it dark, hopin' to catch whoever done it, but no chance. There's somethin' or some one raisin' Cain with my sheep. We've missed a lot o' lambs, plumb gone. We've found sheep with pieces o' their backs clean torn out, an' last week I come across a big ram all smashed to bits like he'd been dropped off a cliff.

"Night 'fore last young Morales who has a hut ten mile north of here, hears somethin' doin' and rushes out of his hut. Bein' a Greaser he don't know any better than to yell. Somethin' jabs him in the shoulder and he lets off his sixgun. Then, he swears he heard wings an' was carried up in the air for a minute and was dropped. O' course all that's pure guff—yuh can't believe what a Greaser says nohow. But Jap Fisher, my foreman, finds him yesterday lyin' with his leg broke, a couple hundred yards from the hut."

"Mebbe he wasn't lyin', Mr. Phipps!" broke in Jerry excitedly. "Listen." And he rapidly sketched their adventure of the night before. It was now the turn of Herb and Gray to stare, while Mr. Phipps listened in growing surprise.

"Jehosaphat!" he exclaimed when Jerry finished. "That sure beats me! I figured Morales was doin' a heap o' fabricatin', but he may 'a' told the truth for once. Anyhow, here's what I had in mind. Gray has been fillin' me and Herb up with his Boy Scout stuff, so I want to know why y'all don't get busy? If yuh will, I'll put up for the equipment on condition that yuh get right after what's raisin' thunder with them sheep. You boys have a heap o' time hangin' heavy on your young hands, and yuh might as well be doin' somethin' useful. It'll save me bringin' in a lot o' men from Silver City, an' as far as brain goes yuh'll have 'em beat a mile. How about it?"

Fred caught an appealing glance from Gray, and though he hesitated to put himself forward, he was a loyal scout, and as he had taken a decided liking to the clean-cut New Yorker, he felt obliged to comply with the earnest request Gray had made when they met.

"I think it's bully, Mr. Phipps," Fred gathered courage to say. "Of course I'm new out here an' all that, but I've been in the scouts pretty near three years now and it's done me a heap of good. More fun than a circus too."

"Sure, we'll do it!" cried Dunk. "We'll lay for that Thunder Bird of yours, Carl, eh, Jerry?"

"Bet your life!" answered Jerry fervently.

"Here wait a minute," cried Mr. Phipps. "What's this about the Thunder Bird, Carlito? What do you know 'bout this thing?"

"Nothing, sir," replied the young Apache with a smile. "I just guessed that it was the Thunder Bird. Of course, I don't believe that. We could certainly have some fun besides being of possible use to you."

"Count me in too," cried Fly. "Aviator's badge for mine!"

"Same here," "Me too." "That's what I say," came from all the boys.

"Good," shouted Jerry enthusiastically. "Carl can run the trailin' end of it an' Dunk can boss the first-aid work an' Windy'll be chief cook and bottle washer o' the whole bunch!"

"There's the lunch gong," laughed Mr. Phipps, springing to his feet. "Come on to grub pile! I've got to get away pretty quick, but y'all can have the ranch to yourselves all day. Comin', Hop Sing, comin'. Chase along, boys!"

CHAPTER III

THE LEGEND OF THE THUNDER BIRD

Immediately after lunch Mr. Phipps hastened off and the boys returned to the veranda to form their patrol. Herb Phipps was acclaimed chairman and the meeting was on.

"First thing's nomination of officers," announced the chair. "Shoot in some names, yuh guys!"

"The patrol leader's got to be a first-class scout," grinned Gray. "Stand up, Windy! I move the nom'nations be closed!"

"Here, hold on!" Fred sprang up at once. "I'll only be here a few weeks, kids. What's the use? One of you had better—"

"Aw, beat it." "Sit down!" "Cut it out!" came from the others. Dunk gained the floor.

"Second the nomination, Mr. Chairman! Let's make Windy leader while he's here, anyhow."

"All in favor?"

"Aye." And Fred was elected. Carlito was then put up against Gray for assistant, but the New Yorker promptly withdrew and the young Apache got the honor. The boys were then sworn by Fred and Gray together, and the patrol was a fact.

"What we goin' to call her?" asked Fly. Various titles were proposed and voted down but finally Carl came across with "The Thunder Bird Patrol." This was greeted with a yell of delight, and was chosen without delay.

"Oh, Windy!" called Jerry from a swing at the other end of the veranda. "Chase out to the kitchen and tell Hop Sing to give you the rattler lariat, will you? This swing needs tying up."

Fred promptly rose and vanished, suspecting nothing. At Fort Bayard the men had a standing joke on all tenderfeet. They sent them all over the fort asking for the "rattler lariat"—which is slang for whiskey—and as whiskey is a thing forbidden at the fort, the unhappy tenderfoot usually ended up under arrest. The crowd on the porch expected that Hop Sing would catch the joke as he had done before, and send Fred out to the bunkhouse or corral to some of the men who would send him on farther.

"Thought mebbe it'd be good for him," grinned Jerry in expectation. "Windy's pretty solid, but he's liable to get the notion that being from the East he knows 'bout everythin' that's—Wow!"

The speech ended in a startled yell. Jerry and Fly had been sitting in the vine-shaded swing at the end of the porch, and from the vines beside them came an unmistakable rattle. Jerry took one flying leap, lost his balance, and crashed into Dunk's chair. Fly followed him so closely that he tripped and all three rolled headfirst into Carlito. At the same instant there was a rustle among the vines and Herb jumped to the wall, where a revolver was hanging.

"Don't shoot!" came the laughing voice of Fred. As he poked his head through the vines a shout went up and Fred came around the corner of the veranda. "Pretty slick," he laughed, as Jerry scrambled up. "Hop Sing put me wise, though!"

"Say, did you make that blamed rattle?" inquired Fly uneasily.

"Sure," grinned Windy, holding up a string of rattles. "Hop gave me these and showed me how to use 'em."

"Oh, what I'll do to that Chink!" groaned Jerry as the crowd shouted with laughter. But just then Hop Sing appeared with a platter of doughnuts as propitiation, and peace was made.

During the afternoon Fred and Gray measured the others for their uniforms. These would consist of the breeches, puttees and coat, the latter being only necessary for trips up into the mountains where it was chilly. A complete list of everything that was wanted was made out and given to Herb, who would hand it over to his father to be ordered at once.

"Ever see a cliff dwelling, Windy?" asked Dunk, after they had been measured.

"No," answered Fred. "Any 'round here?"

"Sure," cried Fly eagerly. "Feller over at Silver City has a tame one—built it himself! Collects two bits each from tourists to see it."

"Shut up!" laughed Dunk, and fired a pillow at Fly. "There's a mighty good bunch of 'em over north of the post, Windy. Five or six real old Mojaves there too. Make baskets and stuff to sell. S'pose we ride over there to-morrow, fellows."

This proved agreeable to all save Fly, who was to help his father with some work. So it was arranged that Herb and Gray should come over early for the others and all would take a trip who could do so.

"Tell your dad," said Jerry to Herb, "that we'll start work Monday. This is Tuesday. If our uniforms ain't here it won't matter."

"Monday night, then," replied Herb. "I can't see what there is to do 'cept just sit around and keep an eye on the sheep all night. We'll prob'ly scatter all over the range."

The party returned to the garrison in time for dinner. All were in high feather at having actually formed a patrol. When the news spread around the fort that evening it met with general approval.

"Good for Phipps!" exclaimed Captain Crawford, at dinner. "Guess we can spare you chaps some service revolvers if you want 'em. How about it, Gerald?"

"Fine!" cried Jerry delightedly. "Sure we want 'em."

"We won't really need them, I s'pose?" asked Fred.

"You may," returned the captain. "Especially if you're going up against that sheep-destroyer of Phipps'. Looks to me like it was some cattle men from the ranges over beyond the Circle B. P. If it is you'll have to pass it up. If it's some animal or other, go to it!"

Herb and Gray arrived before the sunrise gun boomed next morning, and after a hasty breakfast the party rode to the northwest. They soon found themselves among the hills that bordered the river, and about ten o'clock Carlito halted them.

"See that cliff yonder?" Jerry pointed to a steep ascent that rose above the low water across the river. Halfway up could be seen a crumbling ruin from which rose a trail of smoke. "There's a cliff dwellin', Windy. Looks like old Tommy's home too."

"Tommy's the only Mojave there who can talk any English," explained Dunk as they splashed through the river. "We'll leave the horses down here an' hike up."

Leaving the ponies to graze along the river bank the boys began the ascent of a well-worn path. It had been hollowed out in places and made easier for visitors, so that they had no difficulty in reaching the cliff dwellings on the ledge. As they did so, Fred, who had followed Carlito closely, saw two wrinkled and blanket-clad Indians with a couple of fat squaws, seated over a small fire. One of the chiefs was hideously tattooed on the forehead and chin, and the women were heavily ornamented with strings of many-colored beads and gaudy pendants. Two of them wore large brass earrings. All had a miscellaneous supply of brass buttons distributed over their blankets.

"Hello, Tommy!" called Jerry cheerfully as he gained the ledge. "Better bring over some more stuff! We've got some new people at the post. Sell some baskets easy."

The eldest Mojave shook his head without looking up. "No tadavia," he returned. "No got. Nex' week, mebbe. All gone."

"You fellows show Windy over the place," said Carl. "I'm going to talk to Tommy." Squatting down beside the other Indians, he broke into a flood of Mexican.

"Come on, Windy," laughed Dunk. "Carl ain't got no use for us now."

At first Fred was somewhat disappointed in the cliff dwellings, or what was left of them. Only part of the walls were standing in many cases, the roofs having caved in, the remainder of the buildings being surrounded by fallen rocks and mortar.

"I suppose these are a good many hundred years old," he said as he stepped into one of the better preserved caves which the Indians had taken possession of. There was a rounded hole in the

center of the stone floor where the inhabitants had ground their corn, and this was still in use by Tommy and his friends. All the arrow heads and broken pottery had been taken away by previous visitors, but the walls were inscribed with strange characters, the sign language of the vanished race. Queer animals of all sorts drawn in crude fashion, mingled with figures of dogs, snakes and mysterious marks of their own, were among the rough drawings.

Very little light came in through the narrow door and single small window, and when Fred emerged and stood at the edge of the terrace the bright sunshine made him blink his eyes, and the fresh beauties of nature were a strange contrast to the dark, dusty interior of the cliff house. They were now far above the river, which could be heard below. Opposite was a low hill or two and beyond the hills the blistering yellow and red of the desert. They were facing the garrison, which was hidden by the hills. Behind them lay the mountains, and to the west a far-off snowy peak was just visible around the corner of the ledge.

"She's fifty miles away," said Herb, as he pointed to the latter. "Looks about ten, eh? Seems like yuh could toss a stone into them hills yonder."

Fred had not yet become used to judging distances in this country, where the atmosphere was wonderfully clear. It seemed almost incredible to him that the mountain was so far away. He would have liked more time to explore other of the cliff dwellings, for the strange sights held his interest, but the other boys, who had been over the ground many times, seemed to be growing impatient, and they all returned to where Carl was still talking to Tommy. They stood behind the silently working Indians, whose faces were as expressionless and inhospitable as their bent backs.

"Just see 'em weave," exclaimed Fred, as the large but deft fingers wound in and out through many colors of straw.

"And listen to Carl and that Indian jabber," he continued. "I didn't know they could talk so fast."

"Oh, the Indians around here are partly civilized," said Jerry, who had been watching with them. "As long as they can get good trade for their baskets and beadwork, and do some swapping now and then, they seem satisfied."

Carl finally ended his conversation with Tommy, and springing to his feet, in true Indian fashion, he joined the other boys and sat down to eat the lunch which they had brought with them. After Fred had induced Tommy to part with a beaded buckskin knife sheath for a dollar, all returned down the winding path to the river.

"Well, I've got some red-hot news for you," announced Carlito, as they left the river behind and headed back through the low hills toward the fort.

"Yuh must 'a' got it from Tommy, then," returned Herb. "Yuh ain't done nothin' but jabber Greaser to him and old Alche-say. What's on your mind?"

"Why, Tommy's the oldest buck anywhere around here," replied Carlito. "I thought maybe he'd give me some dope on the Thunder Bird. I don't know anything but what I heard when I was a little kid, but I got him to loosen up. Want to hear it?"

"Sure," cried Dunk, and drew back his pony beside Carl. "Come on back here, Windy! Slow down, Jerry. Now we're fixed."

"What I told you before," began Carlito when all were riding in a bunch around him, "was true enough. Deputies from the tribes met twice a year, spring and fall. This was all long before the white men ever showed up. Tommy says—and he ought to know if anyone does—that somewhere up in the mountains north of here was the shrine of the Thunder Bird. It seems that there were three medicine men who kept an altar for offering sacrifices to the Thunder Bird three times a year, and there were great festivities in which the people took part. One year there was a big scrap on between the Navajos and some of my own people. While the deputies were worshipping at the altar that fall, somebody said something, and the Apache delegates pulled out hidden knives and killed a Navajo. It was a rule that no weapons were allowed on the sacred place, and no sooner had the blood been shed than the Thunder Bird came down in a big-storm and killed the whole bunch with his lightning arrows."

"And that's the kind of a monster we have to fight!" exclaimed Fred.

"Oh, well, that's the way Tommy told it. I suppose they really got struck by lightning. Anyhow, everyone was killed, even the medicine men, except one brave who crawled away with the news and died. It was a sacred law that no one could visit the shrine in the daytime except during the sacrifices. Everybody was scared to go after the bodies until next spring. Then some medicine men tried it. They got about halfway when the Thunder Bird flew down in the dark and beat them off the path. After that it was said that the Thunder Bird was angry; so the sacred spot was left alone and gradually forgotten. Each tribe of Indians worshipped him at home, and the old custom was passed up. Tommy says that nobody knows now even where the sacred spot is. When he was a boy an old man told him it was on a high peak in the mountains, but hidden by some rocks and boulders so nobody could find it. It's all a legend now."

"That's funny," exclaimed Jerry, as Carlito paused. "How did the Thunder Bird knock those chaps around that way?"

"Search me," responded the Apache. "He says the Thunder Bird was angry at having his shrine profaned with blood and wouldn't let it be used again."

"Sounds a whole lot like the Thunder Bird was after them sheep, Herb," laughed Dunk. "Better get us medicine men's outfits, Carl! We may need 'em!"

"I think we'll need six-guns more," replied the Apache gravely.

"Gee, it's goin' to be a real adventure," exclaimed Fred, his bright eyes snapping. "But how are we goin' to start?"

"Well, if the Thunder Bird lives up in the mountains, why not try and find out where he roosts?" suggested Herb.

"Anyhow, while we're waiting for our uniforms, we might take Fred on a little hunting an' fishing trip up in the mountains, and mebbe do some investigating on the side," added Jerry.

"And talk over how we're goin' to get at the sheep stealer," went on Fred.

So it was decided that on Monday the boys would go for a hunt and map out their plans. But they did not know what was to happen in the meantime to help solve the problem for them.

CHAPTER IV

AN AVIATOR APPEARS

"Hello, who's that talkin' to father?" exclaimed Jerry next morning as he and Fred came back from the range where they had been having a target contest to try out the service revolvers Captain Crawford had lent them.

Captain Crawford called the boys over and introduced the stranger, a tall, trim-built young man, as Mr. Hawke.

"I'm sure you boys will like Mr. Hawke," he said. "He's from the military aviation school at Fort Omaha, and knows how to build aeroplanes."

This was enough to make the boys look upon Hawke as a friend and hero, even if he hadn't smiled encouragingly and held out his hand.

"I'm sure I'm going to like you too, boys, and I'm glad to know you're interested in aviation. I always like to see boys up-to-date."

The boys hardly knew what to say to such a warm greeting as this, but Fly put in his appearance at that moment and saved them from further confusion.

"Come on over here, Fly," called Jerry.

"He's just crazy about airships," he explained, turning to Mr. Hawke.

"Then I want to meet him," said the aviator, his genial face lighting with a smile.

"I'd rather meet you than Santa Claus," exclaimed Fly, enthusiastically, feeling at home at once with the newcomer, and experiencing none of the embarrassment of the other boys. "I hope you're goin' to stay."

"Well, I'm planning to spend my vacation here. I didn't expect to arrive so soon, but some friends were coming this way, so I dropped in unannounced."

"We all like this kind of a surprise," assured the captain, just as Dunk Rivers came up and said he was wanted on the telephone.

"I guess I can leave you with the boys, Hawke," said the captain, after introducing Dunk.

"You bet. I like boys—especially aeroplane boys."

"Maybe you can give them some pointers about the mystery at the Phipps ranch," Mr. Crawford called back as he hurried away.

"We'll tell you about that," volunteered Jerry, in answer to Mr. Hawke's look of inquiry, and, assisted by Fly, Dunk and Fred, he told the story of the runaway and the loss of sheep at the ranch.

"And this trouble has been going on about a month?" asked Mr. Hawke. "Looks to me as if your Indian friend is pretty near right. It must be some kind of flesh-eating animal or bird that is doing the damage. So you boys are going to trail him down?"

"That's the idea," answered Dunk.

"We've formed a Boy Scout Patrol," continued Jerry; "ordered our uniforms an' everythin'. Fred's leader."

"Splendid," exclaimed Mr. Hawke heartily. "I used to be scout master of a bunch of fellows down at Fort Omaha, but my work got so pressing that I was obliged to give it up. I enjoyed it though."

"Gee, that's fine. Glad you're goin' to stay all summer," exclaimed Fred.

"How are you going to carry on this hunt?" asked the aviator.

"We haven't just decided yet," replied Jerry. "Got to figure that out."

"If it's a bird it seems to me you ought to have an aeroplane," suggested Mr. Hawke, his eyes twinkling as he watched for the effect this would have on the boys.

"It would be just the thing," cried Fly.

"Of course," chimed in Dunk. "We could fly right after him then."

"That would be the way to do it," said Mr. Hawke, pleased with their enthusiasm. "Can't you manage to build a machine here at the fort?" he added.

"Mebbe Mr. Phipps would help us out," cried Fly at once, taking the suggestion seriously.

"That's right," assented Jerry gravely.

"But we don't know nothin' at all about it," said Dunk.

"Well, you boys come up to my room to-night," responded Hawke. "I'll show you something you'll be interested in. Come along and bring your friends. I suppose there are some other boys around here."

"You bet; three more in our crowd. They're all bugs on aviation too," Dunk assured him. "We want to get the Boy Scout aviation badge."

"Bully for you. That's the kind of talk I like to hear." Hawke gave Dunk a friendly slap on the shoulder. "Now, I'm going to spend the afternoon with your father and Captain Crawford. Good-bye till to-night."

"Ain't he a peach?" exclaimed Fly, when Hawke was out of hearing.

"He's a *looloo*! Gee, this is luck. Aviator—scout master—everything nearly," agreed Jerry warmly.

"Wonder what he's going to show us to-night," queried Fred.

"Mebbe he's got some more ideas about the Thunder Bird that he didn't tell us," suggested Dunk.

"He's a prince anyway," Jerry exclaimed. And in this all the boys agreed.

Fly had to go back to his work, and it was decided to call up Herb Phipps and Tender Gray, telling them to come over that evening on the aviator's special invitation. Dunk said he would notify Carlito.

At eight that night all the boys met at Jerry's and went together to Mr. Hawke's quarters on the third floor of the old barracks. Graystock wore his tenderfoot badge, while Fred had pinned on all his medals, including the one for aviation.

Carlito, Herb Phipps and his cousin edged into the room somewhat timidly, but the aviator's cordial greeting caused them instantly to forget their embarrassment.

"I'm glad you managed to round up the bunch," Hawke said, after the new trio had been presented. "This lesson won't have to be repeated. And," he continued, observing Fred's decorations, "all of you scouts ought to be wearing aviation badges soon. That is, if you give careful attention to what I'm going to tell you."

"We'll listen, all right," promised Fred. "That's what we're here for."

Hawke smiled. "That reminds me. You fellows came pretty near missing the surprise I've got for you. When Ike went down to Silver City they told him my trunks hadn't come. He waited, however, and they arrived on the next train. He delivered them only a few minutes ago."

The boys exchanged glances of inquiry. What had Ike and the trunks to do with it?

But Hawke soon answered them by pulling a large steamer trunk into the center of the room.

"Get down here," he said, throwing back the top. The boys gave a gasp of surprise and were down on their knees beside him. Lying in the trunk were the parts of a miniature aeroplane.

"Now, scouts," said Mr. Hawke, amused at their excited exclamations, "we'll put this together, and I'll show you the model of the 'Thunder Bird Aeroplane.'"



"Now, scouts," said Mr. Hawke, amused at their excited exclamations, "we'll put this together, and I'll show you the model of the 'Thunder Bird Aeroplane.'"

"Gee whiz!" exploded Fly, who was the first to find his tongue. "What do you know about that, fellows? That's the name of our patrol."

But the other boys were too deeply interested in what Hawke was doing to pay attention to Fly.

The aviator took the parts to the table and began putting them together.

"We'll make this a lesson," he said. "So fire in your questions."

"Well, I'd like to know how much that weighs?" complied Fly at once.

"About thirty pounds."

"Is it all there?" continued Fly.

"All but the engine."

"An' how much does a real one weigh—I mean a big one?" asked Dunk.

"Well, a full-sized machine built after this design would reach a weight of about 1,100 pounds or over, with the load."

"How fast would it go?" asked Herb.

"About forty miles an hour," replied Hawke.

"Whoopee!" cried Jerry. "That's sure goin' some."

"It doesn't seem to go that fast when you're up in the air," explained Hawke. "If you are gliding close to the ground the speed seems terrific, but after you reach the high altitudes you hardly notice that the machine is moving."

"They looked as though they was moving when I saw them at Nassau Boulevard meet," put in Tender Gray. "There was a half dozen of them up in the air at once most of the time."

"All biplanes like this one?" asked Fly, a little proud of his knowledge.

"Monoplanes too. Bleriot's, Dumont's, Curtiss, Wrights, all kinds."

"What you fellows talking about?" asked Dunk, who knew little about the subject.

"Well, we mean, did they have two wings or one?" answered Fly, in an offhand tone.

"What's wings?" persisted Dunk, not to be put down.

"Why this is a biplane," explained Fly, with assumed grandness, putting his thumb under his armpit, "'cause it's got two wings, top and bottom—this and this." He pointed to the main planes. "A monoplane has only one wing, the top. And—"

"Stand back and give the professor room," interrupted Dunk, with mock solemnity.

"These wires look awful slim to me," said Jerry, when the general laugh subsided. "You don't go much on 'em, do you?"

"You bet, lots depends on them," answered Mr. Hawke, who was stringing light wires through miniature pulleys on the upper and lower wings. "They may look frail but in the full-sized machine they are the strongest piano wire."

"What do they do?"

"They really take most of the tension, and these struts take what is called the compression stresses. They're made of the lightest tough wood in the world—comes from Canada."

"Wish't I understood all that," said Tender in a rather discouraged tone.

"You can't understand everything in one lesson," put in Fred.

"Yes, that's right. We'll have to start at the beginning and go through," responded the aviator, with a good-natured smile. "But, of course, we haven't time for that to-night. I'm just giving you a general idea."

Carlito had said nothing up to this time, but he had been looking on very carefully, and listening with rapt attention.

"Looks like it would fly just like a bird," he said, when the model was finally completed, and the boys were inspecting it.

"That's just it," cried Jerry, remembering the conversation of the morning, "and we want one to chase the Thunder Bird with."

"The question is, how are we going to get it?" objected Fred, businesslike as usual. "We fellows ain't got enough money."

"Yuh ought to talk to father," said Herb. "He said he'd give anything to get that rascal that's killin' our sheep. Besides," he added, laughing, "I've been digging for an aeroplane for a long time."

"Do you think he'd help us out?" asked Fly eagerly.

"I think a talk with Mr. Hawke would do a powerful lot," responded the southerner. "Cain't you-all come over Sunday afternoon? Dad's going to Santa Rita to-morrow morning to be gone till then."

"Yes, please go over and tell him what the aeroplane could do," urged Fly, anxious to realize the dream which seemed almost too good to be true.

"Sure, won't you, Mr. Hawke," chimed in Jerry.

"All of you fellows come, cain't yuh?" asked Herb.

There was a rapid fire of affirmatives.

"How about yuh, Mr. Hawke?" persisted the rancher.

"Why, of course. I'll be glad to take a ride over with the boys and meet your father."

"All right, then, that's settled, and now it's time for us guys to go. Tender and I have to ride to the B. P. yet. Good night, Mr. Hawke. If it wasn't so late we'd sure like to give yuh three cheers."

"Instead, I'll shake hands with you all," responded the aviator, as they filed past him at the door. "And remember, I'm yours for the medals and the Thunder Bird hunt. And—if we can get it—the finest aeroplane that's been made yet."

CHAPTER V

AT THE B. P. RANCH

Although the sun was hot when the boys and Mr. Hawke started for the ride to Phipps' ranch the following Sunday afternoon, the air seemed cooled by an almost imperceptible breeze. It had rained the night before, and while the road was quite dry, there was less dust than usual. On one hand stretched the refreshed green pastures, spotted with many-hued wild flowers, making a gorgeous pattern of color. On the other hand were the towering mountains, their snow-capped peaks in marked contrast with the thick foliage of the forest which climbed halfway up their rugged slopes. Rising above the timber line were bare gorges of rock. Below lay the irregular foothills, thickly covered with cedars, pines and firs.

But despite the compelling beauties of nature, which Hawke and Fred were enjoying in silent admiration, it was not long before the others, more accustomed to the sight which charmed the new-comers, began talking of the thing which they had all probably dreamed of the night before.

"Say, Mr. Hawke," queried Jerry, who had been turning the matter over in his mind, "if Herb's dad'll stand for that aeroplane, how long'll it take to get it?"

"If Mr. Phipps should make such a decision as that," replied Mr. Hawke, who really had some doubt that he would, "we'll have it done in two weeks."

"We'll have it done?" echoed Fred. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why, I mean that I want you boys to help me build it," replied the aviator coolly, watching out of the corner of his twinkling eyes for the effect his words would have on the boys.

"What's that?" cried the astonished Dunk, unconsciously digging his heels into his pony, which reared, and started off at a brisk canter.

Mr. Hawke smiled broadly. He was growing more and more fond of the enthusiastic and manly Fort Bayard boys, and was especially amused at Dunk's frank expressions.

After going a few rods, the latter got control of his horse and slowed the animal down for the rest of the party to catch up.

"Do you really mean that?" asked Fly with flashing eyes, when they were all riding quietly again.

"Why not? We can get the material here in a week or less. Then we can probably find a machine shop around here to work in, and, when we need it, build a hangar of our own."

"Gee, that sounds bully," exclaimed Jerry.

"You can use our place," volunteered Fly. "We've got all kinds of tools, a bellows and most everything you'd need, I guess."

"An aeroplane could almost be built in a carpenter shop," replied Mr. Hawke. "There's very little metal on them. Mostly good strong spruce, bamboo and well-seasoned woods of different kinds."

"What a chance that would be," reflected Fly, more to himself than anybody in the party. "But, what if it shouldn't be a bird after all?" he asked suddenly, his face growing grave and anxious. "Then we wouldn't need an aeroplane and everything would go to smash."

Instantly a cloud seemed to fall over the faces of all the boys, as they looked instinctively at Mr. Hawke. The latter found the sudden change in affairs too much for his humorous vein, and with a hearty laugh he dispelled the gloom as quickly as it had gathered.

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," he said, finally regaining composure.

"Give Fly a good punch, Dunk," exclaimed Jerry. "You're next to him."

"There ain't no use in you givin' us all cold feet like that, Fly," admonished Dunk, by way of complying with Jerry's request.

"Oh, it just seems too good to be true," defended Fly. "I think I must be moving in a pipe dream."

"Leave it to Mr. Hawke," assured Fred.

"By the way," said the aviator genially; "Hawke is good enough for me. Cut out the *Mister*."

"All right, Hawke," returned Fly, with a strong accent on the name.

The path turned to the left at that point, and took them through a rather scant growth of pine trees. The boys welcomed this meager shade, which was the first cool spot they had reached since leaving the Fort. They stopped under the trees for a few minutes, and turned aside from the main road while a large freight wagon, loaded several feet above its top and covered with canvas, passed, drawn by six strong horses. It was followed by a smaller two-horse wagon. Both of the drivers were Greasers.

"What you got on there," yelled Dunk mischievously.

The Mexicans replied with a curious glance, and one of them gave the usual, "No sabe!"

After wiping their perspiring faces with their handkerchiefs, the boys and Hawke pulled out from under the trees and rode out into the sun again. It was not an unusually warm day for New Mexico, but warm enough to give them some discomfort.

"We might go out of our way a little and get a drink at the river over here," suggested Dunk.

"We'll have something better'n that to drink when we get to Phipps' I bet," answered Jerry scornfully. "He always treats us great whenever we go over there—and besides, we got company to-day."

"I don't want to say nothin'," interjected Fly, who had been thinking on the subject since his last remark. "But I do hope it is a bird."

"Say, you joy-killer, you calamity howler, cut that out, will you?" Jerry pulled his pony over and

gave Fly a jab in the ribs. "If you don't quit, this will turn into a funeral procession. I'm gettin' cold feet already."

At that moment Carlito, who had been riding silently a little in advance of the others, spurred up his pony, and with a hasty "I think I see something," dashed on ahead.

After a moment of surprise and hesitation, the others galloped after him. Carlito did not go far, however, but before he stopped the others saw what he was after. When he pulled up, four or five chattering magpies flew complainingly from the ground, where they had been feeding on a dead lamb.

Carl slipped off his pony and the others followed his example. The party gathered around the Indian, who was stooping over the animal and examining it closely. It was frightfully torn under the belly and its back was broken.

"There's been somethin' doin' in the sheep stealin' line again," said Jerry. "What do you think about it, Carl?"

"It's so badly smashed up I can't tell much, but it does look to me as if there were marks of claws—large claws," answered the Indian finally. "But I can't tell for sure."

"This must be one of the B. P. herd," conjectured Dunk.

"Does it look like some bird had him?" asked Fly, eager to settle the doubt which had arisen.

"It looks like talons, all right. But I can't say positive. He's too riddled. I'll look around."

Carl separated himself from the circle and patrolled the ground round about.

"If there was any tracks the rain last night washed them away," he said finally, satisfied that nothing could be learned by further search.

"There could be no tracks of a bird, could there?" asked Hawke.

"If it's a big one, sometimes there's the sweep of the wings when they bear down on something."

"Well, let's ride on and see what Mr. Phipps has to say about it," suggested Dunk, after they had thoroughly inspected the animal a second time.

It was a hot, dusty and rather excited party that greeted Herb half an hour later at the B. P. corral.

"Lost any sheep last night?" asked Fly, as soon as the few words of greeting had been said.

"Half a dozen of 'em," replied the rancher's son. "Dad's mad as all get out. Says he's goin' to watch every night, and when that thing comes again he's goin' to blow it to kingdom come."

"Well, we saw one sheep down the road," informed Dunk, "all cut to pieces."

"A nice little lamb too," said Fred regretfully.

"Shouldn't be surprised. We found a couple, and they sure was done for. Now's the time for us to hit dad hard for that aeroplane."

"Glad to know yuh; come right up," was Mr. Phipps' cordial greeting as he came halfway down the veranda step to meet the aviator and welcome the boys. His cool, spotless linen suit was quite a contrast to the somewhat grimy appearance of the visitors.

"We're pretty warm after that ride," apologized Hawke, mopping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Mebbe yuh'd like to go inside and wash up," suggested Mr. Phipps amiably, and his invitation was heartily accepted by all the party. "Herb, show them around," commanded the rancher, and his son readily complied.

The ranch-house, which Mr. Phipps had built himself, was a duplicate of the old homestead in Texas. The roominess which the large, square exterior suggested was carried out in the great, wide rooms and high ceilings within. The spacious halls and stairways reminded one more of a magnificent southern home than of a New Mexico ranch-house. Oriental rugs in delicate shadings covered the highly polished floors, and the massive mahogany furniture and tasteful hangings gave the whole an appearance of elegance and refinement such as sheepmen are not reputed to have.

"This is one of my venerable ancestors," said Herb, when the party filed downstairs, refreshed. "Yuh see, father's folks was French. This fellow is General Dupont, and fought some good fights in the Franco-Prussian war. They say he never would have been killed, born under a lucky star like Napoleon—only he lingered too long with a wounded comrade at the siege of Paris."

"And this lady?" asked Hawke, pointing to a large portrait of a slim, dark beauty, dressed in white, and wearing a cluster of yellow roses at her waist line.

"That's my mother." Herb lowered his voice a little as he answered. "She died when I was a little tad, yuh know."

"A very beautiful woman," said Mr. Hawke, quickly passing on to spare Herb's feelings. "And this

man looks like your father."

"That was painted a long time ago," said Herb.

"It looks like you now," put in Jerry, who had been inspecting the same painting, while the other boys walked up and down the halls and made an interested examination of the many large oils which lined the walls.

"This is father's sister, who used to keep house for us. She died a few years ago. Then we got Hop Sing."

There was, then, Hawke reflected, no woman in this immaculately-kept house, where there seemed to be so many evidences of the feminine touch. The rough rancher, it seemed, had that strain of tenderness so often found in outwardly brusque men, which expressed itself in his home.

"This is just the way the house down South looked when mother died," said Herb, as if in answer to the visitor's thoughts. "Dad never wants anything changed. Even her room is the same, and no one ever sleeps in it. One night we had so many visitors we thought we'd have to use it or be rude, but father slept in the herder's cottage instead. You'll always find a bunch of yellow tea roses in her room—she was very fond of them, and father grows them himself in the greenhouse."

Herb shook his head back with a sudden jerk, as though shaking off a painful twinge, and passed on to some relics which were hung in the next room.

"This is General Dupont's sword, and a medal which Napoleon gave him for his services."

After a few minutes they all returned to the veranda, where they found Mr. Phipps mixing some purple colored stuff in a huge punch bowl. The clink of the ice was an agreeable sound, for they were all thirsty.

"This is my own grape juice punch," said Mr. Phipps, as he filled glasses for the Chinaman to pass around. "My scheme is to have Sing make it, and set it out here. Then when the guests appear I am stirring it industriously, as though it were my own job."

Sitting in the shade of the vine-covered veranda, and sipping the iced punch, it was not long before Mr. Hawke and the boys were thoroughly refreshed and rested. The aviator felt entirely at home with the hospitable rancher, and they chatted like old friends. Hawke noticed that besides holding vases of flowers, the tables were stacked with the latest magazines and popular books. He caught sight of a New York newspaper, and some from other parts of the country. There were hanging baskets suspended from the roof of the veranda, and the whole scene was restful and quiet, and even luxuriously comfortable.

CHAPTER VI

WINNING AN AEROPLANE

"Well, I see that the boys have got you into this sheep stealing mystery," began Mr. Phipps, when the glasses had been taken away. "Another bunch of my sheep killed or ruined last night. It beats the world what's happening to 'em."

"Fly said they found one of them lying down the road," said Herb.

"I looked him all over," spoke up Carlito, "and it looked to me like something with big claws had been at him, but he was in such shape that you couldn't tell for sure. Then there were a lot of magpies feeding on him when I rode up and the claw marks might have been those of some bird that had alighted on him after he was dead."

"Well, this thing has got to be stopped someway, somehow." Mr. Phipps spoke with an emphasis that meant business. "Herb and I have been talking it over all morning. He says yuh had an idea, Mr. Hawke, we might chase the thing, whatever it is, with an aeroplane."

"I suggested that to the boys on the assumption that it was a bird," replied Mr. Hawke, noticing, with a twinkle in his eye, that the boys were moving their chairs closer and listening with tense interest.

"We're sure it's a bird," chimed in the enthusiastic Fly. "We were hit by it ourselves coming from Silver City—and that rancher was picked up by it. What else could it be? You never see tracks."

"It must be something that flies, anyway," argued Dunk. "Everything shows that."

"But how could you get around flying after it at night," objected Mr. Phipps. "It never seems to come around in daytime."

"Oh, Mr. Hawke can fix that," exclaimed Herb confidently.

"With an equipment of acetylene lamps," assented Mr. Hawke. "They would give all the light we would need."

"But you would probably have to shoot at him," protested Mr. Phipps. "I don't see how that could

be done."

"Carl's the best shot there ever was," assured Jerry. "He can shoot anything. Even in the dark."

Mr. Phipps and the aviator smiled broadly at this.

"I should think if it were a bird," said the latter, leaning back in his chair, "the thing would be to chase it to its haunt and trap it."

"That's not a bad idea," agreed Mr. Phipps. "With an aeroplane you could follow it at its own speed."

"Of course, Mr. Phipps, an aeroplane would not be an inexpensive proposition, and I do not say it would positively do the work, but the boys are very much interested in aviation and I suggested that they might help me build a biplane here which we could use in clearing up this trouble."

"You mean, let us help in building it?" Herb leaned forward in his chair while Tender Gray's eyes grew large with excitement.

"That was my thought."

"Dad, that'd be great," exclaimed Herb, his dark cheeks flooding with deep-hued red. "Let's do it! You said I could have an aeroplane sometime, anyway."

"I didn't expect to be taken so seriously," laughed Mr. Phipps good-naturedly, though there was no finality in his tone.

During this conversation the boys had been suppressing their anxiety with difficulty. Their eager, impulsive faces changed with every new argument put forth, according to its effect on their project. Only Carlito, the Indian, sat impassive and solemn. But he was paying strict attention to all that was said.

"Hawke ain't talking hard enough," protested Fred in an undertone to Jerry. But Jerry gave him a kick and his lips formed the admonition "keep still."

"How much would the thing cost?" asked Mr. Phipps. Dunk gave Fly a punch with his elbow and Fred hitched his chair closer.

"About a fourth the cost of a factory-built machine," answered Hawke. "You see, I can buy the material at first cost. With the help of the boys it can be built at the fort and I have an engine of my own which I can furnish. Altogether, eight hundred dollars would see us through."

"Eight hundred dollars, eh?" Mr. Phipps seemed to be turning the matter over in his mind.

"But you've lost a thousand dollars' worth of sheep already," urged Herb, feeling that this was the time to press his strongest arguments. "If it keeps on we won't have any sheep left. Besides, you know that the ponies got frightened a little while ago and broke down part of the corral. What if they'd all get out and run away? They're worth two thousand dollars themselves. And gee whiz, Dad, think of what I'd learn in helping to build an aeroplane. Just what I want."

Tender Gray gave Herb's arm a squeeze while the other boys regarded him with grateful eyes.

"How long would it take to get this material?" asked Mr. Phipps, seeming to disregard his son's remarks.

"About a week. I can get most of the stuff from Kansas City. The northern spruce comes from Denver. I'd have to order the bamboo from a New York house. My engine is at Fort Omaha."

"I suppose you would teach the boys how to run the machine," queried the rancher, who appeared to have reached his decision and merely wished further assurance.

"Oh, certainly, that is part of the plan," responded the aviator.

"Well then, go ahead and get things together as soon as you can. But I guess a government aviator knows his business." Extending his cigar case to Mr. Hawke, the southerner prepared for a leisurely smoke, as if, having settled the question, he would worry no more about it. Mr. Hawke settled back into the depths of his large wicker chair and lighted his cigar.

The boys, however, did not take the matter so calmly. They broke into excited yells of delight. Herb and Tender Gray did something like an Indian war dance on the front steps. Fred was pummelling Jerry with a will, and Dunk and Fly stood talking with bright eager faces, making gestures with their hands and arms. The Indian, though he smiled with satisfaction, sat quietly and looked on.

"Gee, Dad, you're a brick," exclaimed Herb, slapping his father affectionately on the back.

"I like the enthusiasm of these boys," Hawke told Mr. Phipps, when Herb had joined his companions. "In all my experience I never came across a more promising bunch. There isn't a dullard in the lot."

"To tell you the truth," answered the rancher, after a long drag at his Havana, and regarding with kindly eyes the group at the end of the veranda, "the idea of showing them how to build the machine appeals to me about as much as the bird—or man—hunt, although that is an important factor of course. And I hope you may be able to land the thief, whoever or whatever it is."

"Say, boys," he added, in a louder tone, "you'd better all stay for dinner to-night, and we'll have a little moonlight party on the veranda here—how about it, Mr. Hawke?"

"Sure—you'll stay, won't you, Hawke?" queried Jerry, while all the others nodded their ready assent to the rancher's proposal. Hawke was easily induced to fall in with the scheme.

"And by the way," continued Mr. Phipps, "why don't you take Hawke for a scouting expedition up in the mountains to-morrow, while you're waiting for your uniforms and the material?"

"We'd just been talking about that," assented Fly. "We thought mebbe we'd find the place where the bird lives."

Mr. Phipps and the aviator smiled at this naïve response.

"Carlito can take you," said the southerner, "and Herb wants to try out a new gun he has. Suit you, Mr. Hawke?"

"I'm here on a vacation," responded the aviator. "And anything like that sounds good to me."

After a while the boys grew more calm, and the party on the veranda settled down to the quiet of the waning afternoon. Mr. Hawke and the southerner found topics of conversation in politics, aeronautics and affairs of the day. The boys separated into groups of two, some reading or glancing over the illustrated magazines, others talking in low voices, flipping penknives or whittling. At last the sun sank in a bed of red, gold and purple behind the tallest mountain peak, lighting up its snowy whiteness with vivid crimson and yellow, and deluging the sky with beautifully mingled colors, which gradually trailed off at each side into faint lavender.

"This is the country for sunsets," said Mr. Phipps, as they sat watching the beautiful scene. "No king ever wore a more glorious crown than nature places on that old mountain's brow every evening, shining with colors as brilliant as the finest gems ever mined."

When the last soft light had dwindled, twilight quietly settled over the scene, and the stars, like faint sparks of the sun's final salute, gradually came out clearer against the growing darkness.

It seemed like an interruption when Hop Sing announced dinner, but his voice broke the spell, and the boys resumed their noisy chatter as they filed into the house.

"This is Thunder Bird roast lamb," announced Mr. Phipps, as he whetted the carving knife. "The poor animal escaped the ravages of the destroyer only to be seized by the cruel headsman and quartered for my pleasure."

The party had seated itself, with some commotion, around the great round table. The spacious dining room was softly lighted with shaded lamps. The snowy table cloth, shining glasses and silver, and a huge bunch of white carnations made the tempting viands look even more appetizing. There was no formality about the service. Mr. Phipps knew the capacity of growing boys, and saw that they were helped to liberal quantities of everything. Hop Sing was kept busy hopping from one side of the table to the other. The young fellows were entirely at their ease, and did not hesitate to ask for whatever they wanted, and as much as they desired.

"Hop Sing is some fine cook," said Fly, as the Chinaman good-naturedly passed him his third helping of mashed potatoes.

The celestial grinned. "Melican show me," he said, pointing to the rancher.

"Whoopee, what'll Hop say when he sees our aeroplane!" exclaimed Jerry, and all the boys joined in the laugh that followed.

"He'll want to go to a Chinese heaven in a chop suey bowl sure," said Herb. "He scrapes in front of his idol whenever he sees an automobile, which isn't often in these parts."

The subject being thus introduced, considerable talk about the new aeroplane ensued, and when, happy and satisfied, they all returned to the veranda, they found Sing putting up the last Japanese lantern.

"Give us some coon songs, Dad," asked Herb, and instantly there was a clamor from all directions.

"No—I don't do that any more," objected Mr. Phipps, but his misgivings were overruled when Herb appeared with a banjo and guitar.

"Come on, let's give 'em 'Drag the Chariot,'" coaxed his son, strumming on the guitar.

The boys, with Hawke, had gathered around the rancher and Herb expectantly.

"What's this yuh got me into, yuh young scalawag," exclaimed Mr. Phipps, with mock anger, but he took the banjo and struck up a lively tune.

One song was followed by another, until the whole bunch of boys, unable to sit still under the enchanting strains, had risen to their feet and were performing jigs of one style or another. It was soon noticed that Fred had some skill in this direction, and he was urged to jig "Turkey in the Straw," and numerous other dances, until he sank down panting for breath.

In the midst of their festivities there was a series of sharp barks in the direction of the corral, and

then a regular din of neighs from the horses, violent barking from the dogs, and an occasional bleat.

Mr. Phipps threw his banjo aside and quickly ran down the steps in the direction of the corral. The others followed him. They found the horses greatly excited, running pell-mell around the enclosure, almost pushing each other over, and some of them trying to climb up on the fence. The dogs were baying, and running about in a confused fashion. Three sheep had apparently strayed from the herd and were standing by the side of the corral.

"It's that confounded thing again," exclaimed Mr. Phipps, calling to the horses to quiet them, while Herb went inside and endeavored to calm them. After a time the dogs, remembering their offices, got after the sheep and drove them back to the fold.

"Doesn't look as though there's any damage done, but you'd better get Mike to go down and look over the sheep."

As Herb went off on this errand, the others returned to the house.

"Bothering the horses too," said Hawke, when they had seated themselves. "That looks bad."

"Must have been chasin' those three sheep," Mr. Phipps conjectured.

"I looked around, but couldn't see a sign of anything," said Carl.

When Herb came back, he said he had gone down to the sheepfold but, as far as he could see, there was no further damage there.

After a little further conversation, Carlito and Herb went after the ponies and led them up to the veranda. Somewhat subdued in spirit, and a little disturbed, the party started off through the moonlight for the Fort, after bidding a cordial good night to the hospitable rancher, his son and Tender Gray.

"Hurry along with that aeroplane, boys," Mr. Phipps called after them, and the boys cheered and waved their sombreros in reply.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE MOUNTAINS

Early next morning Carlito was waiting for them at an appointed place with an Indian pack pony. By seven o'clock all the party had assembled, including Fly, who had succeeded in begging off from work. Each of the boys had a stock of provisions, a coat as a preparation for the cold of higher altitudes, fishing tackle, lines and rods, all of which Carlito strapped on the back and sides of the pony. Each of the boys and Hawke wore a cartridge belt and carried a stout stick to aid in climbing. Herb had a brand new service revolver. Fred, Jerry and Hawke carried guns, Carl carried a bow and arrow, while the others brought rifles. Fred had a camera and Jerry a field glass.

After an hour's tramp they reached the mountains. Lower down the slopes the ascent was easy. Patches had been worn by the feet of many travelers, here and there stepping stones had been roughly cut, no telling how many generations ago, and other rude steps had been formed by piling comparatively symmetrical stones upon each other. There were numbers of deserted cliff dwellings along the ledges, tucked in under overhanging rocks, and, higher up, perched in perilous spots over deep ravines and rushing torrents. The largest part of the snow had melted by this time, and the mountain streams were swollen to their utmost. Farther down, their descent was not so remarkable, but before the day was over, the party stood awestruck on the side of many a rocky cliff and looked below at foaming, seething waters, dashing down the rocky ways.

They had not gone far when they came across a group of Indians, of which Tommy was one, squatting on the ground, gambling. There were two squaws in the group, and they, like the men, were smoking. They were playing the stave game, Carl explained, and sat, with stolid faces, throwing their sticks in turn. Occasionally they would allow themselves a grunt of approval or displeasure, as their luck prompted.

"How's it going?" Carlito asked Tommy, in Mexican.

The Indian shook his head in reply, while one of the others grinned.

After watching them awhile, Carlito, followed by the others, started on.

This was practically Fred's first mountain journey, and he was very much worked up over the event. The cliff dwellings interested him exceedingly, and he wanted to explore them all, no matter how dangerous their approach. He had the eastern boy's desire for relics and kodak pictures, and in a short while his pockets were half filled with stones and other things picked up along the way.

"Gee, I wish we could get into that one," he said, pointing to a particularly lofty cliff dwelling, separated from them by a somewhat narrow, but deep ravine, and almost hidden by a great

projecting rock and overgrown poplars. But when he worked nearer to the edge, and saw the rushing water below, and the sharp, jagged rocks that lined the ravine, he was dissuaded from the idea and satisfied himself by taking a picture of it.

"A little farther up there's a dandy place to fish," said Carl. "The water runs easy for quite a ways, and there's lots of trout waiting to be caught."

"Head for that," commanded Fly, scrambling over a cactus bush which he had not noticed. "Ow, wow!" he yelled, as some of the sharp thorns grazed his palm.

"Bring down one of those turkeys," said Jerry to Dunk, as a flock of wild turkeys flew over their heads.

None of the boys claimed to be expert marksmen, but they soon found that Hawke deserved that distinction. He succeeded in bringing down one of the flock Jerry had referred to, though it was flying at a good height. It was nothing more than the boys naturally expected; in fact, they would have been disappointed if he had not proved himself excellent in everything.

"There's just nothin' he can't do," Dunk had said, and in this all the boys heartily agreed.

"Don't shoot too much before dinner," warned Carl, as though he feared they might clean out all the game. "We don't want to do much of that till afternoon. Too heavy to carry."

"Oh, I guess we won't have much of a load," responded Fred, who had made three unsuccessful attempts.

"I guess I don't know how to handle this new gun," was Herb's excuse, when he failed to bag his game.

By ten o'clock they had reached the point in the river which Carl advised was good fishing territory.

"We'll fish till noon," announced Tender Gray, "and then cook 'em."

"Yum, yum," came from several of the boys, who knew what a camp-baked mountain trout was. "I'm hungry already," said Fly.

"Where's your line, Carl?" asked Fred, when all but the Indian had sat down and cast their bait.

"I never use one." The Indian was standing with his bow and arrow, looking intently into the water.

"Just watch him," whispered Jerry.

After that there was little talking. Perhaps there was a little unspoken competition among the boys for the first catch. Now and then a trout came up for air, but for a while they seemed to be running the gauntlet of lines successfully.

Dunk's line caught on some floating weed, which he pulled out with a "shucks" of disappointment.

Finally there was a whirr and a splash, and Carl's arrow flashed into the water. When he dragged it to shore with his bow there was a fine big trout attached to it, speared through the head.

Fred and Hawke watched him with interest, but none of the others paid much attention. They had frequently seen him catch fish in this way.

"Hullo, there, Windy, what's dragging your line?" yelled Dunk.

Fred had been so busy watching Carl that he hadn't noticed his shaking line.

"More weed," said Dunk good-humoredly. But Fred fooled him by landing a fine trout.

Contrary to the expectations of most of the boys, Hawke did not make any particular mark as a fisherman. He caught but one fish, and that smaller than the others.

"Guess my luck is going against me," he said, and the boys were very ready to believe it ill fortune instead of lack of ability.

They had been fishing about an hour and a half, when a loud call from Carl attracted their attention. The Indian had been scouring the ground for evidence of game, and had probably found something.

"Come here, fellows," he shouted, "you've got enough fish for dinner."

They all came running over, and examined a freshly dug hole he had found.

"Now, Boy Scouts, what's that?" asked Hawke, his eyes twinkling.

Tender Gray studied it seriously for a few minutes, and then announced:

"Looks like a shepherd dog might have done it."

"I don't know much about wild animal prints," said Fred, "but I suppose it was a bear."

"That's a grizzly's trick," said Carl. "He's been digging a root for his breakfast."

"A grizzly," gasped Tender Gray.

"Do you think you could get him?" exclaimed Fly.

"If I can find his hole," said Carl.

"But how do you know he is there?" asked Herb.

"We'll follow these prints."

The boys and Hawke walked along beside Carl as he pointed out the footprints of the grizzly. Then he stopped.

"See this little trail where the dirt has been dragged along?" asked Carl. "Well, that shows he was dragging something in his mouth, and he's probably gone home to eat it. The marks are fresh, so it wasn't long ago."

"Wouldn't it be a prize to have a grizzly!" exclaimed Fred.

"You fellows had better wait here for a few minutes, till I see if I can find his hole," instructed the Indian. "If I can find that, we're sure of getting him or of him getting us."

"Suppose he gets after you, Carl. Better fire a signal," said Fly anxiously.

"He can't fire with his bow and arrow, bone-head," gibed Herb.

"I'll just shout," said Carl. "But I can get around him all right."

"I hope Carl don't kill him before we get a chance," said Fred, when the Indian was out of sight.

"He won't unless he has to," said Jerry. "He's a mighty square fellow."

"Wouldn't mother have a fit if I should bring back a bear. And the scouts in Cleveland!" Fred's bright eyes shone with the prospect. In imagination he had already laid the grizzly low.

Carl finally came back with the news that he had found the cave.

"Now you just follow me—and don't make any noise. I'm going to walk way around and come up behind the cave—you follow. Keep still."

The Indian started off like a stealthy panther, scarcely moving a leaf or twig. He leapt with the agility of a cat over rocks that lay in his path, and was obliged to pause now and then for the rest of the party to catch up, as they had considerable more difficulty. The low branches were inclined to swish as they passed, and it was not an easy matter to avoid crackling dry leaves and twigs underfoot. They fell and scrambled over rocks, and unlucky Fly got into another bunch of cactus.

Finally they came to an open space, and Carl pointed to a formation of rock.

"In front of that is a hole," he whispered. "That's where the grizzly is. Crawl up on top of the rock, over the hole, and get your guns ready. Aim just as soon as you get a chance at him."

The boys, though they were stout-hearted fellows, followed nervously. Hawke had trailed and shot grizzlies before, and, though his sporting blood was aroused, he was willing to stand aside and let the boys try for the game. All of the other boys, except Fred and Tender, had previously been close to live grizzlies, but only Carl had actually trailed one.

The rock was large enough for all to climb upon, squat down and hold their guns. Not one of the boys was at all afraid, yet the excitement made their hearts beat fast, and in their eagerness to succeed, they held their guns with rather unsteady hands.

Carl leaned over the edge of the rock, and deliberately yelled into the mouth of the cave. There was a low growl as he sprang back, but, after waiting several minutes, no grizzly appeared.

The Indian boy then took a coat which he had brought along, and dropped it down in front of the grizzly's hole.

There was another growl, stronger than the first. And then another. It is difficult to describe the feelings of the boys as they sat there, almost on top of a real grizzly, and a live one at that. Yet they dared not speak, and could only sit still, everyone at high tension, until something, they scarcely dared think what, happened. They felt a measure of safety, however, with Carl and Hawke along.

Finally the grizzly came out and sat down on the coat, looking around. Then he raised himself on his haunches, and smelt the air. Just as he caught sight of the boys, Carl whispered as loudly as he could—

"Now!"

Two guns boomed—Herb's and Fred's. The big animal rolled over with a furious growl, and lay kicking for a second. Then he regained his feet, and, his teeth and red gums showing, was about to make a spring at the party on the rocks. Jerry could not suppress a shriek, and Fly was too excited to do anything but cling to Dunk. Hawke, however, was quick enough for the animal. He let him have it just before Carl's arrow wedged itself in the animal's forehead.

This time the grizzly rolled over for good, and gave very few parting kicks.

Carl sprang down from his point of vantage, and gave the bear a violent push with his foot, almost rolling him over on his back.

The blood was flowing freely from the wounds, while the grizzly's open mouth filled with froth and blood, and his glazed eyes told plainly that he had dug his last root.

"Is he sure dead?" asked Fly, who with Jerry and Dunk, had remained on the rock for safety.

"Did you ever see a live grizzly act like that?" returned Herb, poking the animal in the side to show that he, at least, was not afraid.

At this show of bravery all the boys came nearer.

"Well, let's carry him to camp," ordered Carl, and, under his direction, the boys found two stout sticks which they run through the bear's feet, one through the fore and one through the hind feet where Carl had made slits. When they got him back to their camp they strapped him on the pony and prepared for dinner.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STORM

"Gee, I could eat bear meat raw," exclaimed Fly. "Fur and all."

"Well, get busy, put on this grub," ordered Jerry.

Hawke made himself one of the boys, put on the wooden plates, helped clean the fish, and broiled two of them.

The Indian had made a good fire of twigs which he had gathered, and had buried some of the fish underneath in the sand, to bake, throwing potatoes into the fire to roast.

"Look, fellows, mother put in a homemade cake," announced Jerry, setting a tempting chocolate-covered cake on the papers which served as a table cloth.

"Doughnuts and pickles," announced Fly, filling some wooden plates.

"Wow, chili sauce—hot—for baked fish."

"Con carni for anybody that wants it—I don't," put in Herb.

"Bread," "Sandwiches," "Olives," and so on each boy announced gayly as his contribution to the feast, and, when they finally sat down in a circle, they proved their keen appetites by the way things disappeared.

There was not much conversation during the meal. They were all too hungry to talk.

"What's the use of hunting any more, fellows?" said Dunk, at last, when there was some show of abatement on the part of the diners. "We can't do much better'n a grizzly."

"What if we should get a deer," encouraged Tender Gray. "I saw some prints around here."

"Suppose you know as much about deer prints as bear prints," teased Herb, remembering Tender's mistake.

"I guess those were our pony's prints," said Fly, helping Herb along.

There was a general laugh, which Tender took in good part. "Well, I ain't been a scout very long," he apologized.

"We're hunting for a thunder bird, too, you must remember," reminded Dunk. "Wish't some of you could read tracks in the air."

"Let's look around and see which way we're goin' this afternoon," suggested Jerry, producing his spyglass.

"There's pretty thick timber in that direction," said Carl, as Jerry pointed east.

All the boys had a turn at the glass. "That's a funny looking rock up there," said Fred, looking westward. "Looks like a cliff dwelling."

"You've got cliff dwellin's on the brain," remarked Fly. "That's nothin' but a rock."

"You look and see. If that ain't windows in there I'm a fish." Fred handed Fly the spyglass.

"Well, it does look kind of queer," admitted Fly. "You look, Hawke."

"Looks to me like a tower," announced the aviator, when he had studied the spot for some time.

"Like a square tower with windows!" prompted Fred, glad to have his suspicions confirmed.

"I guess that's one of these lookout towers," said Carl, when he inspected it. "Pretty high up,

though."

"Let's go up that way," suggested Herb. "Might as well as any other. Looks easier to climb, too."

"I'd like to get a picture of it to take home too," said Fred, whereupon Jerry grabbed his hat, and gave him a tussle for it.

"Don't you want one of the windows for a souvenir," joked the Southerner. "Gee, I wish I'd gone into the souvenir business before you came. I'd gotten rich off of you."

It was finally decided, however, to follow the direction Fred had chosen, principally because it seemed to be less thickly timbered.

It was a problem what to do with the pony. He would stand without tethering, but he might be bothered by wild animals.

Carl, however, soon solved the problem by clearing the ground for several feet around him, and then, gathering twigs and sticks, piled them around the pony in a wide circle. He then set fire to them, and, after they had a good start, smothered the flames carefully so they emitted a thin line of smoke.

"I think that'll keep most animals away," he said, as they started for the climb.

"It wouldn't take us long to get up there if we had our aeroplane," said Fly. "Would it, Hawke?"

"It won't be many moons before we have it now," responded the aviator. "I've ordered all the supplies, and I telegraphed to New York this morning so they'd make an extra special rush on that bamboo."

"How many will it carry?" asked Jerry. "Can we all go?"

"I'm figuring on using a special patent of my own," said Hawke. "I have a certain device which I have worked out which will so equalize the balance that I believe I can carry six in safety. Ordinarily, three is about the limit."

"Gee, I'm glad of that," put in Herb. "I'd like to have all the fellows on."

"You'll all have plenty of it, turn about," said Hawke. "Besides, I'm not saying anything, but I believe, when I get to work on the thing, I can fix it so we can take more. But I don't want to hold out any false hopes."

"Do you think we can build it in two weeks?" asked Jerry. "That seems pretty good for amateurs."

"Not for such energetic young fellows as you," responded Hawke, smiling. "And there's enough of us, if we all work hard."

"I'll work hard, all right—we all will," exclaimed Tender Gray.

"You bet," chimed in Dunk.

They had come to a rather difficult climbing place, and had to depend a good deal on their sticks as boosters. By catching hold of shrubs and pushing one another, they finally gained the top of a rather high point, with almost perpendicular ascent.

They found themselves almost on the edge of a cataract, which they had heard roaring for some time. The foaming water was rushing down in great cascades, sending up white spray as fine as steam.

"Let's see that thing now," said Fred, borrowing Jerry's glass.

"If that's a rock I'll eat it," he added.

Hawke also made another examination, and said as before that it looked like a cliff dwelling or tower.

"It's quite a ways up there yet," he said. "We'd better get a move on us."

They entered a heavy growth of timber shortly, and Carl was obliged to come and take the lead. It was beginning to get cold, and all the boys had put on their coats.

"It's most three, ain't it?" asked Jerry, who had not brought his watch.

Hawke took out his timepiece and said, "Just three." Then he added: "Do you think we can make this to-day?"

"We can tell better when we get out of these woods," answered Carl. "I think you'll be quite near it then."

In a short while they reached the outskirts of the timber growth, and, as Carl had predicted, found themselves very near the spot they had aimed for. They could see it plainly now, a sort of square dwelling or tower, the base of it thickly covered with various green shrubs and vines. But they were hopelessly separated from it by a deep and wide ravine, down which rushed a great torrent of roaring water.

"Guess we can't get at that," said Herb after they had stood for some time silent on the bank of

this cataract. "Let's go back—unless Fred wants to take a picture."

"It's gettin' kind of dark for that," said Fred. At this remark the others suddenly noticed that the sun had disappeared behind a cloud and the sky looked black.

"Say," exclaimed Fly, "that looks like a pretty ugly cloud over there."

"What if there should be a bully storm?" exclaimed Jerry, eager for the excitement.

"Gee, I was in a mountain storm once," recounted Herb, "and it was great. There was a couple of tenderfeet with us, and they was scared to death. Yuh scared, Windy?"

"Naw," replied Fred scornfully. "Anyhow, looks as though the sun has just gone behind a cloud and will soon be out again."

"Kind o' cold," complained Fly, buttoning his coat. "Say, I wonder—" he stopped, for there was an ominous rumble among the darkening clouds which were hurriedly crowding together like a dark-clad army maneuvering for a sudden attack.

"That's old man Thor," said Dunk, who was something of a poet at times, and had read more extensively than the average boy of his age. "He's gettin' ready to hit us between the eyes. Ain't you awful afraid, Tender?"

Just then a blinding streak of fire cut its zigzag way through the black sky, lighting up every peak and crevice, followed by a sharp crack that broadened into a deafening roar and made the boys jump with surprise.

"We're in for it, all right," said Herb laughing. "My, this is going to be terrible, Windy," he added with mock solemnity.

They stood not far from the cavernous ravine, where, almost beneath them, they could hear the water tearing over the rocks. Soon a swift, strong wind rushed out of the forest behind them, the trees bending and swaying helplessly before the mighty torrent of air.

"There goes my hat," cried Jerry, as his sombrero was swept from his head.

"No use going after that," laughed Hawke, for the hat was speedily blown over the precipice and whirled down into the ravine. The other boys quickly pulled their headgear down more securely.

"That old tower looks like a picture," exclaimed Dunk, as a bolt of lightning lit up the ancient structure and painted its somber walls with a vivid light more brilliant than sunshine.

"Why don't you take a picture of it, Windy?" asked Tender.

"Fine idea," exclaimed the Clevelander, adjusting his camera. "I never had a chance to take a flashlight like this."

Almost as he spoke there was a report like that of a huge gun, and an accompanying line of fire.

"Did you see that, fellows?" exclaimed Fred, when the noise had died down.

"What?" came in a chorus from the boys.

"Didn't you see it?" Fred repeated.

"What yuh talkin' about?" asked Herb, a little impatiently.

"Was you looking?"

"Come across, Windy," exclaimed Fly. "What are you driving at anyhow?"

Before the Clevelander had time to reply to this question, they were startled by a most peculiar shriek which pierced the air, and seemed to cut to the very marrow of their bones.

It came only once, but left the party hushed and silent.

"Must be an eagle," said Carl finally, "though it's the fiercest I ever heard."

"What was it you saw, Fred," asked Hawke.

"Well, when that light came, and I snapped the picture, I thought I saw something big and black floating around over there by that old tower."

"I didn't see nothing and I was lookin'!" deprecated Tender, doubtfully.

"Did you see it, Hawke?" persisted the young photographer.

"I blinked my eyes when the lightning flashed," replied the aviator.

"Well, I tell you I saw something." Fred spoke with conviction. "And it looked like a bird."

"Maybe it was—the one that yelled," said Dunk.

"The Thunder Bird, maybe," shouted Carl.

"Gee!" said several of the boys at once.

"I'll bet we're near his shrine," continued Fred excitedly, "and he's raising this storm."

"Aw, come off, you're dreamin'," discouraged Tender, though half convinced.

"I didn't see nothin' either," added Jerry, unwilling to admit that he was a little scared at the supernatural aspect things were taking.

"Maybe the picture will show," said Hawke.

Bang—a cannon seemed to be hurling great balls against an iron wall with a shock that reverberated in all directions. The tumult became so continuous as to make conversation impossible, and the frequent flashes of light gave the timber the appearance of being on fire. The boys stood silent, rather enjoying the spectacle, though they were shivering with cold.

After a while the clouds spent their gathered energy and the rain fell in great torrents. Very soon the boys were drenched to the skin, but there seemed no escape. To go into the timber was dangerous, and blocking them in front was the yawning chasm.

"If we could only get at that old cliff dwellin'," suggested Fly, "we might find cover."

"We'll have to wait until we get our airship, to do that," laughed Hawke.

"There's a big rock down here," said Carl, returning from a short excursion which he had made along the side of the cascade, looking for shelter. "I think we can crowd under it till this is over."

The others hastily followed him, and were soon shielded from the rain under a huge, projecting boulder situated almost perilously on a smaller rock.

There they waited for some time, and about five o'clock the storm abated as quickly as it had arisen.

"Wonder where our pony is by this time!" speculated Fred.

"No telling," answered the Indian boy. "I'm afraid he's gotten scared and run away."

"With the grizzly!" Tender's tone was regretful.

They started back in the gray light of the obscured sun. Hawke hurried them, having an older person's concern for their welfare, and fearing they might suffer some bad results from wet clothing and cold.

CHAPTER IX

A STRANGE MEETING

"There ain't no chance of our pony's bein' there," remarked Tender, thinking more of the grizzly than anything else. "They'll think we're tellin' a fish story about that bear."

"If it was my own pony," said Carlito, "I wouldn't be afraid to bet my best quiver that he'd still be there. This one I don't know."

Their homeward journey was somewhat different from the climb upward. The ground was soggy and wet with soaked leaves and mud, while water constantly dripped upon them as they passed under the trees. The sun, now setting just above the peak, gave a wan light through a half-mist, half-fog, which had arisen. They were still in rather high altitude, and the air was moist and cold. Creeping things, frightened into their holes by the storm, now ventured forth and skimmed across the ground frequently, disappearing again under the scraggy underbrush.

"Soon be time for the bats and owls," observed Dunk, as a surprised lizard hurried across their path.

Though they were all damp and chilled and anxious to regain their original camp, the boys kept up a cheerful conversation all the way.

"Funny you fellows didn't see that bird," said Fred.

"There wasn't no bird," twitted Jerry. "You just blinked your eyes when that flash came, and dreamt the rest."

"On the square though, fellows," seriously commented Herb, "Fred may be right, and that old tower may be the very place we're lookin' for."

"It's worth while thinking about," said Hawke. "We'll fly up there anyway, as soon as we get the aeroplane going."

"Seems to me that's too good to be true," reflected Fly. "I never thought, when I was readin' all that stuff about machines, that I was goin' to see a real one, and help build it myself."

His tone was so droll that some of the others laughed. "Give Fly a handkerchief," groaned Tender. "He wants to blubber, he does."

"Don't feel so bad about it, old boy," comforted Jerry. "Maybe the train with the stuff on it'll be wrecked, or Hawke'll change his mind, or we'll find out that it's been Greasers doin' the dirty work."

"Guess I'm kind of a howler," admitted Fly. "But watch me work when we get at that plane."

Just then Carlito picked up a long, thin snake, which had wiggled across the ground in front of him, and, swinging it around and around by its tail, sent it whizzing through space.

"Nothing but a garter snake," he explained, laughing, as Gray unconsciously ducked his head, and Fred gasped with astonishment. "I usually twist their heads off."

"Wonder you don't get your foot in it some time, Carl," declared Fred. "Ain't you afraid of nothin'?"

"No bad luck can happen to me," said Carl confidently, though with a smile. "See this?" He pulled out from under his wet shirt a string to which was fastened a large blue and white streaked stone bead.

"What's that?" asked several of the boys.

"A charm. Taken from the grave of one of my ancestors. There were just two in our tribe, and an old squaw gave it to me before I came to the Fort. Some one else in the family has the other one. She said it was the family charm and nothing could happen to me as long as I wore it."

Hawke smiled at this characteristic explanation, but the boys took it very seriously.

"Remember anything about your father, Carl?" asked the aviator, interested in the story nevertheless.

"They told me he was the bravest man in his tribe, and the swiftest runner. They wanted to make him chief, but his older brother, who was not so well liked, wanted to be made chief also and grew jealous of my father. One day a party of them went out on a hunt, and my father was separated from the bunch. They found him later in the forest, lying face downward with an arrow straight through him. Everybody thought my uncle did it. He went away soon after."

"What about the old squaw?" inquired Gray.

"Oh, she died just before I came here. She was over a hundred. I have her old pipe. She gave me a lot of things that were my father's—a fine quiver and his bow. I remember what she said when she gave it to me. 'Your father was a brave man and a great hunter,' she said. 'See that you do not disgrace him.' I have the arrow that killed him, and the blanket which my mother wove. They're in my room at the fort."

By this time the mist had lifted and the sun had gone down. They were walking in a narrow passage which almost amounted to a gorge. Huge jagged rocks jutted out here and there on either side, many of them squeezing between them some deserted cliff dwelling. Rugged brown shrubs clung stubbornly to the sides or grew sparsely on the surface wherever they could find soil. The whole scene was softened by the warm colors of the departing sunlight.

"Good-bye pony!" exclaimed Fred, when they reached the spot where they had left the animal.

"Nowhere in sight," added Fly.

"Call him, Carl," urged Herb.

The Indian gave a series of calls, but there was no response. The wind and rain had entirely annihilated any trace of the fire they had made for the pony's protection.

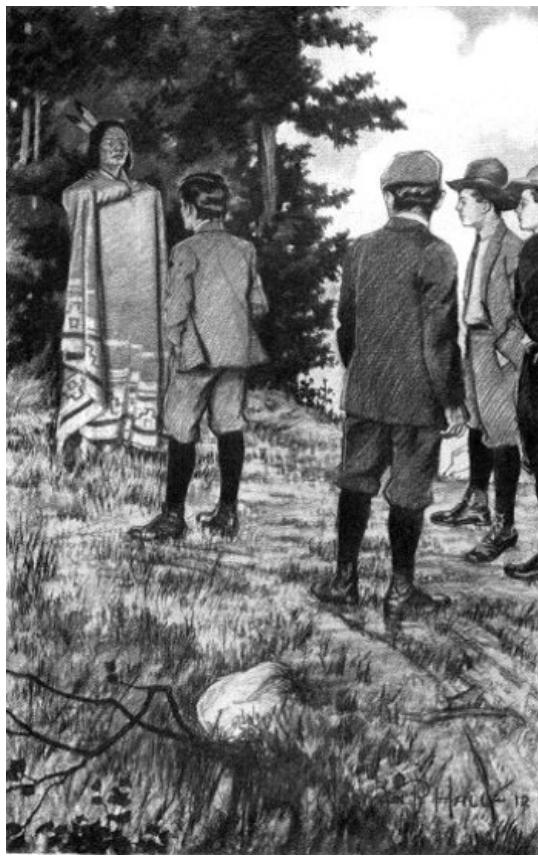
"Maybe he doesn't answer to a call," said Carl. "Or maybe I didn't have the right one. Just for fun I'll try an old one."

More in jest than in earnest he emitted a peculiar weird sound, based on several tones of the scale.

No answering whinny came. "I didn't think he'd know that anyway," said the boy. "I never heard it but once. An old chief taught it to me and said it used to be my father's call."

"Let's scour around a little," suggested Gray.

"All right. You stay here, and I'll see what I can find," replied Carl turning to the left. But he stopped short. In front of him stood a tall, stately, blanketed Indian. His whole face was hideously painted in various colors running in stripes backward from the nose, across his forehead and chin. His arms were folded, and his countenance was set and expressionless. A flashing pair of beadlike eyes, almost snaky, were fastened on Carl.



Carl stopped short. In front of him stood a tall, stately, blanketed Indian. His whole face was hideously painted in various colors, and his countenance was set and expressionless.

"Whilligers, where'd he come from!" whispered Fred, as the boys stood perplexed and amazed at this apparition. Nobody had heard him approach, or seen him, until they discovered him standing like a carved statue, coolly regarding Carl.

"Hello, what do you want?" chirruped Carl, cheerfully, not at all abashed.

The older Indian drew himself straighter, if possible, and replied in his own tongue, which Carl afterwards said was original Apache.

"Where did you learn that call?" demanded the tall stranger, almost fiercely.

"It belonged to my tepee," responded the boy.

"You Apache?"

"Yes."

"Umph," grunted the Indian, and stood silently, with his penetrating eyes fixed on Carl.

"You are no true Apache," he said finally. "You wear the clothes of the palefaces, and live with them. You hunt with them. You care nothing for the trials and sufferings of your fathers—the big chiefs in the land of the happy hunting ground."

Carl said nothing, but watched his critic curiously. He had unconsciously drawn himself up to his full height, and, though slighter, his form matched in symmetry, grace and stateliness that of the older man.

"I bring back to my people the religion of their fathers," continued the stranger. And he threw open his blanket. Carl and the others started, almost with horror. The broad, brown chest was entirely tattooed in flaming vermillion with the design of a huge and ferocious form of an eagle.

"I go to look for the Thunder Bird and his shrine," said the Indian, wrapping himself again, and pointing majestically upward. "My people shall worship him again, and thus shall I gain favor with the Great Spirit whom I have displeased."

He turned and started off in the direction from which the boys had come.

Suddenly he stopped short and turned back. "Where is your tepee?" he demanded of Carl.

"At the fort."

"The tepee where you learn the call?" impatiently reiterated the questioner.

"In the far-away country," answered the Indian boy. "I do not remember now. I was taken away when a child."

The older Indian looked at him steadily, as though he would penetrate the boy's soul and read the history of his life. Then he grunted and went on.

"Well, I never saw him before," was Carl's first remark, as the retreating figure disappeared around a bend. Then he translated to the boys the queer conversation.

"And he's looking for the Thunder Bird," repeated Hawke. "That does seem odd, doesn't it?"

"He went in the direction of the tower, too," put in Fred, glad to have his contention strengthened by this occurrence.

"Acts to me as though he'd sort of lost his mind," went on Carl. "Some of the Indians get to thinking about their wrongs until they go bugs."

"Better lookin' than any of the old Indians around here," remarked Dunk, thinking of wizened and wrinkled old Tommy.

"Funny he knew that old call," reflected Carl. "Wonder where he came from anyhow?"

"Well, I suppose he'll turn up again, if he's wandering around here long," commented Jerry. "Looks kind of savage."

"Anyhow, that's not findin' our pony," reminded Fly, and Carl started off to explore the near-by timber.

"Or gettin' home and gettin' warm," added Herb, registering the first complaint.

"If Fly don't dry his hair it'll get rustier," chimed in Jerry.

"Might as well go back," advised Carl, returning from a short, unsuccessful search. "No use of us standing around here shivering. Maybe our friend the big chief took him along."

"Perhaps he thought he was white man's property and would take him for some of the debts we owe the race," suggested Herb. "But I don't care for nothin' but the grizzly."

Two hours later, when they reached the fort, dirty, tired, muddy and damp, they found, to their great surprise, lying on the captain's front porch, stretched out at full length, the dead bear.

"Hello, fellows," shouted Captain Crawford, coming out of the house. "We were getting worried about you. Glad you showed up. The pony came back, and I see you got acquainted with a grizzly."

The ladies appeared in the doorway, while Jerry's father went over and gave the bear a push with his foot.

"That's a beaut," he exclaimed. "Who bagged him?"

"Hawke," came the instant response.

"We all did," corrected the aviator. "And we had a great time doin' it."

"Gee, we've had a corker of a day," exclaimed Jerry. "Lots of things happened."

"Get inside here now," ordered the captain, and the ladies quickly approved this advice. "Take off your wet duds. Jerry, give the boys some clean things."

"Guess we'll go home," said Fly, speaking for Carl and Dunk. "Say," he added, anxious to break the news, "we think we've found the Thunder Bird nest."

"You better get under cover before you catch the rheumatics," laughed the captain.

It was nearly dusk now, and the white moon had appeared in the east, floating gently over restless, shifting clouds, but the evening was as serene and clear as if it had succeeded a calm, uneventful day.

After putting on an outfit of dry clothes, Herb and Tender started for the ranch, where they found Mr. Phipps waiting for them, and Hop on hand to take care of their wants. After some warm broth they sat up late into the night relating the day's events to the interested rancher.

As for Carl, he sat up for an hour studying as was his custom, then lay awake for some time staring thoughtfully into the darkness of his little room, which was a small one over Fly's machine shops.

"Wonder who that Indian was," he pondered. "A real Apache, and he knew that old call. Lookin' for the Thunder Bird. What if he had known my folks?" But soon his thoughts trailed off into dreamland, and he slept as only active boys can, until another day of promise dawned. For every sunrise in the life of a boy foretells a day of events.

THE PATROL BECOMES A FACT

When Ike returned from his customary daily trip to Silver City the following Wednesday morning, he brought with him two large boxes addressed to Herb Phipps, and a letter for Fred bearing the return address of a large Boy Scout furnishings firm.

"I'll bet it's the uniforms," exclaimed Jerry, referring to the boxes. "See what the letter says, Windy."

"Guess it's answerin' the letter I wrote 'em about the patrol," remarked Fred, tearing open the envelope.

"Yep," he announced, "it's from the scout commissioner at Albuquerque. Listen to this:

"Dear Sir:" (Fred swelled his chest, and looked very dignified.) "I am glad to know that you have formed a scout patrol at Fort Bayard and I certainly wish you every success. I am sending under separate cover a Boy Scout Handbook for each member of your patrol, badges bearing the insignia of an Eagle, the nearest thing that we can get to the name of your patrol. Learn the call of the eagle, if you do not know that of the thunder bird, as it is the signal of your patrol. You will also receive a flag with a picture of your patrol animal stamped on each side.

"I happen to be acquainted with Mr. Hawke, who is sojourning in Fort Bayard. He would make a capital scout master and I am asking him by this mail to accept that appointment. I am sure he will be of great assistance to you in training the members of your band, and in helping them to earn merit badges and medals, for I know you are all ambitious to gain as many as you can.

"Yours very truly,

"GEORGE STANTON,
"Scout Comm'r."

"Whoopee, what do you think of that?" yelled Fred, throwing up his hat. "With Hawke to help us we'll make a crackerjack out of this patrol and run them out of merit badges and medals. Maybe I can get the eagle medal."

"What's that?"

"It's the medal they award to the scout gettin' twenty-one merit badges. You know I only have four now," answered Fred.

"Let's call up Herb before Ike starts over to his place, and tell him the things have come."

"All right," assented Fred eagerly, as he followed Jerry into the house and to the telephone.

"Hello, Herb," called Jerry, when he had obtained the connection. "Things doing over here at the Fort."

"That so? What now?"

"Think the uniforms are here—at least there are two big boxes—one from Kansas City and another from New York."

"Gee whiz," shouted the southerner. "That's what they are, all right. Dad got a letter yesterday sayin' they'd be here soon. Say, yuh just hold 'em till Tender and I get over there; we're just gettin' ready to ride over to the fort."

"All right. Hurry up. Got somethin' else to tell you," said Jerry, remembering Hawke's appointment.

"What is it?" asked Herb eagerly.

"Just wait till you get over here," teased Jerry.

"All right, stingy."

"And say, Herb, father's got some business on hand this morning with a fellow from San Jose. Guess we can't have the mix-up here; makes too much noise. Let's have Ike take the boxes to Carl's room."

"That's fine. And don't open 'em till we get there. Tender an' I will be over in a jiffy."

"Fine work!" declared Carl heartily, when Jerry and Fred called on him and informed him that the uniforms had arrived. "Sure, bring them all over here."

"I'll go and get Dunk and Fly," volunteered Jerry; "Fred can look around at your things," for he noticed that his companion had already begun an inspection of Carl's small library.

The Indian had built a workmanlike row of shelves around his room, and these were crowded with books of all sorts, some of which he had bought out of his scant earnings, and some of which had been given him. Everybody at the Fort knew that Carl was what they termed a "bookworm"

and at Christmas he was well remembered with the article he craved. There was very little fiction, but Fred found ten grammars, six arithmetics, four histories—two of the United States—spellers, algebras, two biographies of Lincoln and Franklin, and the life stories of nearly all the great men of America. There were even text books on chemistry, astronomy and architecture, for, in his thirst for knowledge the young Indian found all subjects attractive. The Clevelander was also surprised to find a Bible, which his interest prompted him to open and examine. There were marginal notes in a youthful hand, presumably Carl's writing, and passages underscored.

The Indian boy then, thought Fred, was as straight and true as his stature, and the high degree of honor which the boys and all at the Fort ascribed to him was well deserved.

There was a cot and several chairs in the room, all of which had been made by Carl himself. A worn blanket was stretched across the spotless floor. In one corner stood an old bow over six feet long, the one Carl had spoken of as belonging to his father.

There was but one picture, and it puzzled Fred somewhat. It was a large engraving of an imposing structure, much like a university building. There was no inscription, and the style of engraving stamped it as old.

"What's this?" he asked Carl, who was stringing his bow and seeming to take no notice of Fred's examination.

"One of the soldiers here gave it to me and said it was the college he graduated from. I like to look at it." Then in answer to Fred's look of inquiry, the Indian added: "It helps me to save my pennies when I want to spend them for a traveling show at Silver City."

"Helps you save your pennies?" puzzled Fred, not comprehending the Indian's meaning.

"Yes. I'm trying to earn enough to go to a real school when I'm twenty. Never too late, you know. I've been through the grammar grades."

"You have!" exclaimed Fred. "I thought the boys told me you hadn't been to school."

"Correspondence school," explained Carlito. "Here's my certificate."

He had arisen and taken a long envelope from the top drawer of the chest.

The certificate testified that Carlito had satisfactorily passed all examinations, and was a full-fledged graduate of the correspondence school.

"How did you do it?" exclaimed Fred, his frank eyes shining with admiration. Just then Jerry, Fly and Dunk came into the room.

"Do what?" inquired Jerry.

"I was looking at Carlito's certificate," replied Fred, assuming that the other boys had seen it.

"Oh, I studied nights a little, and whenever I got a chance," answered Carl, modestly.

"A little!" echoed Fly. "He just studied his old head off."

"Why didn't you go to college when Phipps wanted you to, Carl?" asked Dunk. "He was willin' to pay your way."

"I was afraid I could never pay him back," said Carl. "An Indian has no business owing anything to a white man, anyway."

"Here's Herb and Tender," shouted Fly, who had gone to the window.

The southerner and his cousin were soon in the room, hot and perspiring from their rapid ride over.

"Good mornin', gentlemen," greeted the rancher's son cheerfully, throwing aside his hat, and pouring out a glass of water from a pitcher which stood on the table. "Have a drink, anybody? No? Then I'll drink it myself," and he drained the glass. Carl quickly brought another one for Tender Gray.

"Make room for Ike," ordered Herb, as the darky came laboring up the stairs, a huge box on his back. The boys met him at the landing, and helped him to deposit his heavy load on the floor.

"Dere's some more," announced Ike. "Greaser just brought one over for Mr. Fred Windham."

"What's that," exclaimed the latter in surprise. "Oh, I guess it's that stuff Mr. Stanton spoke about in the letter," he recollected.

"Yuh fellahs must be gwine to start a store foh sure," exclaimed Ike, as he dropped the second box with a thud.

"Look out—that one was full of ripe watermelon," responded Gray.

"Oh, golly," groaned the negro, "An' I 'most drapt it."

"Be very careful of the next one," warned Jerry, with mock seriousness. "It's loaded with spring chickens."

"Oh, das easy—I'll jes' open de box and let 'em fly up," answered the darky, dodging the hat which Gray pitched after him.

"Eeny, meeny, miny, mo—which one shall we open first?" queried Herb, when the three boxes had been set down in the room.

"Let me do it," volunteered Ike, with some curiosity, but a hasty chorus of protest stopped him.

"We want to do it ourselves," explained Fly. "It's more fun."

"You'er gwine to litter up this here room scan'lous," was the negro's comment, as he departed regretfully.

"I'll clean that up," hastily assured Carl.

"The big one first," urged Dunk.

"All hands on deck," ordered Herb.

"Say, Windy," interrupted Jerry, halting the proceedings. "Show the kids your letter."

"I clean forgot that," ejaculated the eastener, pulling a soiled envelope out of his pocket.

"I been readin' it," he explained guiltily, referring to its murky condition.

Work on the boxes was suspended for a few minutes, while Fred read the letter aloud.

"Things sure are comin' our way," said Herb, when the general shout of approval had died down. "Where's Hawke this morning?"

"I saw him right after breakfast, and he said he was coming over. He got the letter about being scout master, and—"

"There he is now," broke in Carlito, hearing a firm step on the stairs.

"Howdy, fellows," hailed the aviator, as he came into the already crowded room.

"Good morning, Scout Master," greeted Dunk, bowing low, while the other boys followed suit.

"I see I have another job on my hands now," said Hawke, good-naturedly, "But then I don't think you'll be hard to train."

"We're sure glad you're going to be one of the bunch," answered Herb cordially.

"These are our scout outfits," explained Fred, noticing that Hawke was regarding the packing boxes with wrinkled brows.

"Just going to open them," added Fly, anxious to get at the work.

"Let me help," exclaimed Hawke, peeling off his light coat, and rolling up his shirt sleeves before any protest could be made.

For the next few minutes they busied themselves with the lid of the largest box.

"Uniforms," they shouted, when Herb had opened one of the smaller pasteboard boxes of which there were a number contained in the larger enclosure.

"This is yours, Fly," he added, noting the name and measurements which were pinned on the trousers.

As the packages were properly labeled, each boy was soon in possession of his own suit.

After a quick but admiring inspection of the outfits, the second box was eagerly torn open. It contained a hospital corps pouch for each boy, penknives, haversacks, mess kits, signal flags, whistles, sanitary drinking cups, canteens, Red Cross first aid outfits, camp supplies, and last, but not least, seven brand new shining Remingtons.

Each new article was met with shouts of delight and surprise.

"I don't remember ordering these," gasped Fred, when at last they had reached the bottom of the box.

"Oh, dad thought yuh might as well have a good supply," explained Herb, "so he wrote to a friend of ours in New York and got these to surprise yuh."

"Ain't your father never going to quit doing things for us kids?" asked Dunk, stroking the slender, glittering barrel of his new gun.

"I wish we could do somethin' real fine for him," chipped in Jerry.

"Dad don't want thanks. He just likes to be doin' somethin' for somebody all the time," Herb assured them. "He always was that way."

"Well, we're certainly going to get after that sheep stealer," declared Carl.

"You bet," echoed Fly, with a will.

CHAPTER XI

A SURPRISE FOR MR. PHIPPS

The third box, addressed to Fred, proved to be from Mr. Stanton, containing the handbooks, badges and patrol flag.

After distributing the badges, and admiring the flag, each of the boys made a hasty examination of his book.

"How we goin' to learn about first aid to the injured?" inquired Gray.

"Oh, dad'll teach you that," responded Dunk readily. "He said he would."

"And Hawke's going to teach us aviation, and Carl can show us trailing," began Jerry.

"And my dad'll show you craftsmanship and machinery, and we all know swimming," cut in Fly.

"Whoopee, fellows," shouted Fred, "we've got nearly all the badges now!"

"Who knows all the states in the union?" asked Hawke with a smile, reading from the Scout Handbook.

It was found that only Carl and Fred could stand this test.

"Who can tie a bowline knot?" demanded Dunk.

"Say, this ain't no schoolroom," objected Jerry. "I see we've got to work some for those badges," he added thoughtfully, "but it's fun just the same."

"Tell you what we'll do," burst out Herb suddenly, throwing down his book, his dark eyes snapping.

The boys were ready in an instant for anything he might suggest.

"Let's get on all these duds," proposed the rancher, "have a regular scout tramp over to the ranch and surprise dad with a dressed-up parade."

"Bully for you," shouted Fred.

"Can't we borrow a drum somewhere?" suggested Dunk.

"Dad's got one I can get," offered Jerry.

"Jerry's some drummer too," said Fly.

"All right, get a move on you," ordered the southerner. "It's just ten now, and if we start right soon we'll get there about time for dinner."

About a half hour afterwards, Captain Crawford was drawn to his window overlooking the parade grounds, by the martial sound of drum beats.

"Well, I never," he exclaimed to his wife, who hurried to join him.

Filing past the house two by two, in regular order and military step was the new Boy Scout Patrol, uniformed and carrying bright new rifles. Fred, bearing the flag, was slightly in advance, while just behind him was the tall form of their son, dexterously flipping the drumsticks and rolling out rhythmic march time.

Not once did any of the paraders turn in the direction of the house, although they felt they were being observed.

Captain Crawford leaned out of the window.

"Hurrah for the 7th infantry," he shouted. "I mean the seven infants," he amended laughing.

The boys maintained their composure with difficulty at this sally, but following Fred's leadership, wheeled and marched up, abreast, to the front steps, where they stood marking time.

"At your service, Captain," announced Fred, saluting.

"Present arms, shoulder arms, port arms, order arms!" commanded Jerry's father.

The bewildered company started to comply, but the orders came too fast for them, and soon their efforts were checked by a merry shout from the captain.

"Back to training camp," he ordered. With a general laugh the boys broke ranks.

"We're goin' on a scout tramp over to Phipps' ranch," announced Jerry.

"This is a good day," assented the captain. "Been kind of cloudy all morning, so you won't find it very warm walking."

"How do you like us," asked Fly, looking down at his khaki trousers, while the others looked up

expectantly.

"You look like regular soldiers," commented Mrs. Windham, who had joined the captain and his wife at the window.

"Your suits are very pretty," put in Mrs. Crawford.

"Ha—Ha!—your mother says the suits are pretty," reiterated the captain. "Guess that's handing it to you."

"Oh, as for us," retorted Fred. "We're just plain handsome."

"Tell Phipps he's spoiling the whole bunch of you," enjoined the captain, as the party started down the road that led to the ranch.

They had been unable to bring all their new equipment, but the canteens were strapped on and each boy carried his Remington. The whistles, drinking cups and penknives were safely stowed away in trouser pockets. On their shirts were pinned the new Boy Scout badges.

"Sorry Hawke couldn't go," said Dunk. The aviator had some business letters on hand, and chose to remain at the Fort.

"Ever develop that picture you took in the mountains?" asked Fly of Fred.

"Yes, but it was no good. Something the matter with the plate. Hawke's got the proof," responded Fred. "Order, now," he added, with pretended severity. "Remember, left, right, left, right, ready," and the boys started off in correct step.

About midway in their tramp they met a group of Indians, of which Tommy was one, returning from a search for customers for their baskets and bead work.

"Pike along slow, fellows," said Carl. "I'm going to see if Tommy knows anything about our friend of yesterday."

He engaged the old Indian in conversation, while the other boys parleyed with the squaws over their wares. After some good-natured teasing, Fred bought a particularly attractive woven basket for his mother, and Gray purchased a bead belt, which he intended to take to his sister when he went back to New York.

"Tommy doesn't seem to know very much about him," informed Carl when he joined his companions. "Says he showed up here about a week ago, and wanted to know if anyone could tell him where he could find the old Thunder Bird shrine."

"Did Tommy ever see him before?" asked Dunk.

"No. None of these Indians around here ever did. He says he has been down in the Mexico mining districts, but claims to be an Araviapa Apache. That's what my father was, and he looks to be of the same tribe."

"Looks somethin' like you," remarked Fly.

"I think so too," chimed in Fred.

"Well, Tommy says the old scout has an idea he has done something to offend the Great Spirit," continued Carl, "and, unless he makes some kind of reparation, he won't get into the happy hunting ground with his ancestors."

Carl smiled at this fallacy which he had long since abandoned.

"Did he say what he had done?" inquired Herb.

"No, merely said that a medicine man told him he was on the wrong side of the deity and that he'd better make up. Seems that he thinks if he puts the Thunder Bird back on its shrine again everything will be all right. I think he's got the talk of some missionaries and his own ideas mixed. It isn't like an Indian to be making up for bad deeds."

"Get in line there, you scouts," ordered Fred, for his patrol had disorganized during Carl's conversation.

"Remember you have to stick to the rules," added the leader, trying to be severe.

The boys fell back at once, and started on two and two, keeping step and order the rest of the way.

Though shorter than any of the other boys, young Windham had the personality of a commander, and, as he marched on ahead, his head erect, and square shoulders set, he gave promise of being an influential leader later on in life.

It was about two hours afterward that they reached the outskirts of the Bread Pudding ranch, tired but by no means fagged.

They stopped for a few minutes' rest and adjustment. After a long drink from their canteens, which they had filled with ice water before leaving the Fort, they laved their faces and hands. Then refreshed but somewhat excited, they started for the ranch-house.

It was agreed that Jerry should not begin drumming until they had come very near, planning to take a path on the other side of the house which brought them very close without disclosing them until they were within full view of the veranda.

As they came up, the drum rolling, they saw Hop Sing, who was gathering vegetables for dinner, stop, look, and then make for the kitchen as fast as his thin legs would take him.

"Look at those chop suey drumsticks," laughed Fly, as the Chink vanished through the doorway.

"Never recognized us," laughed Jerry, giving his sticks an extra twirl, and, consequently, producing more noise.

They saw Mr. Phipps before he sighted them. He had arisen from his seat on the veranda, where he had been enjoying his newspaper before dinner should be announced, and was looking down the road for the source of the commotion. As the boys turned sharply at the east wing of the big house, they were brought into full view. They walked steadily on, as straight as comfort would allow them, keeping step like a squad of trained soldiers, and looking neither to the left nor the right, although several of them could not help smiling. Mr. Phipps gave them one puzzled glance, then threw up his hands, and bending back his head, laughed long and loud.

"You young rascals," he roared. "Here I thought the state militia was out after my hide."

Fred led his small company around in a circle in front of the house, then made several zigzag figures which he had learned for a drill while in Cleveland. Finally they drew up, abreast, before Mr. Phipps, and, solemnly saluting, gave three hearty cheers.

"Fine, fine!" exclaimed the rancher. "My, but you all look brave and ferocious. You might be able to meet a real enemy—with his back toward you. Let's see how they fit."

The small army marched up onto the veranda, while the rancher gave them a critical survey.

"Couldn't be better," he finally announced satisfied. "Not if you had had them tailor made."

"They're certainly great," returned Fly, a little awkwardly.

Then he looked at Jerry, and the other boys followed his example.... There was a sudden silence, as they drew in a closer circle around Mr. Phipps. It had been planned that Jerry should make a short speech of thanks to their generous patron. But though he was brave enough when the suggestion was made, now that the time had come the boy felt himself growing shaky and confused.

The surprised rancher looked around at the quiet group a little puzzled. Finally Fly gave Jerry a nudge, at which the latter collected himself as well as he could, and with something of a tremble in his voice, which seemed suddenly weak and faint, he began what he had planned to make a very grand speech.

"Mr. Phipps," he said, his cheeks growing rapidly redder and hotter, while his knees shook, "we—we—we all want to thank you very much for—"

"Oh, forget it," entreated the man, giving the relieved Jerry an affectionate pat on the back. "Why, you boys have nothing to thank me for. You're just like my own sons—you're Herb's playmates. Yuh see Herb hasn't any mother to—to—but I tell you, I like to have him associated with a fine lot of lads like you. Get into the house here, and we'll see if we can pick up some grub." The rough rancher spoke cordially, but there was a slight shake in his voice.

"We're always grabbin' fodder over here," apologized Fly, as they made for the dining room.

"And I guess we're here with our appetites to-day," put in Dunk. "That was a fine tramp for a hungry fellow."

"Well, go to it."

"Lose any sheep lately?" asked Dunk, as the usual hearty meal progressed, or rather disappeared.

"They haven't bothered us since Sunday night," responded Phipps. "About time for something to be doing."

"I've got to get back early this afternoon and go to work," said Fly, when they arose from the table—"filled to the eyes," to use Gray's words.

"Guess we'd better go back," said Jerry.

"I've got to go to Silver City to-day myself," said Mr. Phipps. "Suppose you all pile in my hack and we'll drive over."

This was a welcome suggestion and the boys quickly accepted it.

CHAPTER XII

THE THUNDER BIRD ATTACKS

Thinking that experience was the best teacher, Hawke decided to discontinue lessons on aviation until the materials for the biplane arrived and they could begin actual work.

During the rest of the week, therefore, the boys, with the assistance of Captain Crawford, Dr. Rivers and the aviator, put in their time mastering some of the Boy Scout requirements.

They organized a bucket brigade, and, by several mock fire fights fitted themselves to take care of a blaze should one occur at any time.

"That's what we've been needing at this fort for a long time," remarked Captain Crawford, when he saw the young fire fighters practicing. "In case of a fire here we'd have to depend on the volunteer bunch at Silver City, and everything would be up in smoke before they could get here."

Dr. Rivers gave the young scouts a thorough drilling in first aid to the injured. In his laboratory, which was a large and heretofore mysterious room at the top of the house, he taught them many things which they did not know about the human body and its needs in case of accident—how to construct an emergency stretcher, prepare splints, roll and apply bandages, and stop the flow of blood from an artery by means of the tourniquet.

"I guess I'm beginning to know something," said Jerry, a little proudly, when they left the doctor's office just at dark Friday evening after an interesting lesson.

"I got real well acquainted with that handsome skeleton," remarked Gray, who had been a little sensitive at first about approaching the uncanny bony structure which Dr. Rivers called one of the "ornaments" of his experimenting room.

Although Herb and Tender were urged to remain at the Crawford's for supper, the former thought it best to go on home.

"I can't be very long away from dad," he explained, "or he has a search party out after me."

"I didn't realize how much this Boy Scout affair was going to do for you," observed the captain that night at the supper table, when Jerry and Fred had been relating their new accomplishments. "I was a little skeptical at first—thought it was a waste of time—but I'm getting pretty much interested in it now myself."

"I think it is a splendid idea," agreed Mrs. Windham, who, mother-like, was in favor of anything that safeguarded the interest and welfare of her boy.

"And his aeroplane stunt strikes me as pretty fine," went on Jerry's father. "As a whole, this vacation is doing more for you boys than a year of schooling, and—" he was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone bell.

"Hello—Phipps, yes, this is Crawford," they heard him say. "What's that? Well, that's strange. Oh, I don't think it can be anything serious. The doctor is not at the house? Gone to Silver City? Well, we'll start right out."

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Crawford, as the group at the table arose and surrounded the captain.

"Phipps says Herb's horse came home alone, wounded in the back. He's afraid something has happened to him and Graystock. Thinks it may be that thing that's killing the sheep—or thieving Greasers," explained captain, speaking hurriedly, at the same time putting on his hat and ringing for the maid.

"Tell Ike to get the horses and saddle them at once—three of them," he ordered when the servant appeared. "Tell him to stop and get Carlito, and have them all here as soon as possible."

"Come on, boys—Phipps says he's just starting. He says he telephoned for Dr. Rivers but he isn't home. What'll we do in case either of them is badly hurt?"

"We fellows ought to put our learning into practice," spoke up Fred at once.

"Yes, we'll take our emergency kits," said Jerry.

"I doubt if you can do anything," replied the captain, as they left the house. "You haven't had any practical experience yet."

"We'll do anything we can for Herb," responded Jerry warmly.

"Why not get Dunk?" suggested Fred. "He was the best of the bunch, his father being a doctor."

"All right," agreed the captain, swinging into his saddle, just as Carlito dashed up.

"What's the matter?" he asked, breathlessly.

They told him the situation in a few words.

"I'll go right on," he exclaimed, digging his heels into the pony's flanks.

On the way over to the Rivers' residence, the captain and the boys met Dunk and Fly mounted on their horses. Mr. Phipps' telephone message for the doctor had told them the news.

"Well, if anything's the matter," said the doctor's son, "both of them have their Red Cross materials with them, if they're able to use them. You go on ahead," he added. "Fly and I are going to bring that stretcher we made to-day, and some bandages and stuff. We'll be right along."

The two boys wheeled their ponies, and the rest of the party galloped into the darkness after Carl.

It was an unusually dark night, and very few stars relieved the dense blackness overhead. Fortunately, the riders were familiar with their road, or it would have been impossible for them to keep up the pace they did.

"Carl'll be sure to find them if they're anywheres along here," said Fred, breathlessly, when they were obliged to slow up at a particularly rough place.

They urged on their horses again, and for a time nothing was heard through the moonless silence of the night but the sound of hurrying hoofs and the croaking of the frogs as they vied with the monotonous singsong of the crickets. Occasionally, from somewhere far out on the prairies, a lonesome coyote would wail dismally.

After about a half hour of riding, the party on horseback descried through the darkness a glimmering light almost in the center of the road. As they came nearer, Jerry blew his whistle.

"We're here," came the answer.

"That's Phipps." The captain breathed a sigh of relief.

"He's not badly hurt," Carlito was saying as they drew up to where the Indian and Tender Gray were bending over Herb, bandaging his arm while the father held the boy's hand.

"I'll be all right," faintly assured Herb. "Don't you—" but his voice trailed off into silence, and the upraised arm grew limp.

"Here, I brought some ammonia," exclaimed Fred, springing forward, and placing a small bottle to Herb's nostrils, while Gray and Carl rubbed his arms and legs vigorously.

"I wish we had a stretcher," exclaimed Mr. Phipps, his voice shaking with anxiety.

"Dunk and Fly are coming along with one," responded the captain.

"Thank heaven for that," exclaimed the rancher gratefully. "Carl snatched some branches off of the trees coming along," he continued "and made some splints on the run." He laid his hand affectionately on the Indian's bent shoulders.

A few moments later Dunk and Fly came up, bearing a stretcher between them. Riding had been rather difficult with this clumsy load.

It was not long before Herb was comfortably stretched out on the improvised bed, and, resuscitated by the liberal whiffs of ammonia which Fred faithfully applied, and the constant massage, he soon opened his eyes and smiled, as a sign that he had regained consciousness.

"It's mostly jolt," said Dunk, who began applying more bandages. When the arm was well bound up, he went over Herb's body carefully in search of more injuries.

Finding none, Mr. Phipps suggested that they start for the ranch.

Carl, Dunk, Fly and Fred immediately picked up the stretcher.

"Feeling better, son?" asked the father gently as they started off, the four boys carrying the stretcher, while those on horseback led the ponies.

"Better all the time," answered Herb, trying to speak firmly. While his voice was not normal, it was stronger than when he first spoke.

"What happened anyway?" asked Fly of Tender Gray.

"All I can say is, it's just about like that time you got mixed up when you met Windy at Silver City," answered Tender. "I didn't know anything was wrong until I heard Herb yell, and the next minute he was thrown from his horse, while the critter ran off like wild."

"Didn't you see anything?" urged Fred.

"It was too dark—anyhow I didn't look for anything. I got busy with Herb," responded Gray.

"That's right," approved Mr. Phipps. "But it looks to me as if it was the same devil that's been botherin' my sheep—horse's back is cut pretty deep."

When they reached the ranch-house, Sing informed them that Dr. Rivers had telephoned, and was on his way over. They had scarcely put Herb on the bed before the doctor arrived. After listening to a hasty explanation, he made a thorough examination of the wounded boy.

"Well, it's just a minor fracture of the forearm," he announced finally. "Nothing serious. I'll have to set it though."

"It may hurt you a little," he warned Herb, as he removed the bandages and splints, but, though his patient did wince once or twice, he set his lips tightly, and did not emit a sound of complaint.

After it was all over, however, he sank back with a sigh of relief and exhaustion. With the aid of a sleeping potion, he was soon quietly resting.

Mr. Phipps, though relieved by the doctor's reassurance, was greatly agitated over the accident, and continually paced the floor in the big library, his face pale and his lips set.

"I'll be over early to-morrow," the doctor told him. "It's only a green stick break and will soon knit. The bandaging was splendidly done—I couldn't have put those splints on better myself," he added. "By the way, did you do it?"

"The boys did," answered the rancher, with a faint smile, looking affectionately around the anxious group.

"You certainly did well," said the doctor heartily. "I had some doubts about instructing you at first, but I must admit you have profited by your lessons wonderfully."

As there was nothing more to be done, the party from the fort prepared to start back, the doctor going ahead with his machine.

"We've got to get that confounded animal that's causing all this trouble," exclaimed Phipps as vigorously as his shaking voice would permit.

"We're goin' to get him, all right!" responded Jerry heartily.

"You bet we are," reiterated Fred, with determination, while the other boys made similar assurances.

It was a sober party that rode slowly away, and for a long time nothing was said.

"It's so quiet to-night it makes me think of spooks," remarked Jerry, finally breaking the silence.

"Something makes me feel queer too," said Fred.

Just then a shrill, weird inhuman shriek came from somewhere in the direction of the mountains: "Kreee-kreee-ee," almost blood-curdling in its penetrating sharpness, cutting through the air like a keen knife blade, and sending unpleasant shivers down the backs of all who heard.

Again and again it came, threatening, foreboding, like some evil spirit about to swoop upon its prey.

They listened, spellbound, thrilled in every nerve. It was not fear that seemed to clutch at their hearts and make them pound, or that struck them silent, it was an awing sense of something supernatural, something not quite real. It was as though they had suddenly caught a glimpse of a demon of the underworld.

The dread cry continued for some minutes, then gradually grew fainter, until it seemed smothered by the intervening hills.

Before any of the party gathered courage to speak, a tall figure, like a fleeting shadow, glided across the path in front of them, and rapidly disappeared into the darkness. He seemed bent on an errand and was going toward the northeast mountain ranges.

"It's the Indian," whispered Carl, as the form hurried into the darkness.

"What do you suppose that noise was?" queried Jerry in a low tone.

"Was it a hawk?" asked Fly cautiously, crowding nearer to Carl.

"I've heard hawks cry and eagles scream, but never like that," returned the Indian, his voice growing louder.

"What was it then?" asked Fly in a natural voice, gathering courage as the conversation progressed.

"I never heard one, of course," replied Carl slowly, "but I think that was the Thunder Bird."

"That's just what it was," exclaimed Dunk at once.

For some moments nobody spoke, then Carl said reflectively: "I suppose that Indian friend of ours heard it too, and is on the trail."

"You'd better look out or he'll get it before you do," commented the captain, who had heard of the mysterious stranger.

CHAPTER XIII

AT WORK ON THE AEROPLANE

The following day the first box of material arrived from Kansas City, and was taken to Mr. Giles' machine shop, which, having formerly been the army stables, was a great deal larger than was needed for the machinist's work, and he was able to give Hawke and the boys a roomy space at the rear.

A box from Denver came on Monday morning, and in the afternoon there was a consignment from

New York. The engine was to be sent by freight from Fort Omaha, and would take some time to reach Silver City, but, as Hawke explained, it was the last thing to be used and the delay would not matter.

By Wednesday morning, therefore, which was the day after the Fourth, all was ready to go ahead on the aeroplane. The Fourth had been unusually quiet for the boys because Herb could not take part in any active festivities. While his injury had been slight, and was now practically healed, his father insisted that he should remain perfectly quiet and not become excited by unwarranted celebration. This was a hardship for so active a boy as Herb, but to please his father he obeyed without complaint.

As reparation, the rancher ordered a lavish display of fireworks from Albuquerque, and in the evening the boys were entertained by an exhibition that was worthy of young princes.

The exhilaration which followed this event, their sympathy for Herb, the gratitude they felt for the generous rancher, and their eagerness to solve the mystery of the Bread Pudding ranch, which was heightened by the incidents of the last few weeks, coupled with their growing interest in aviation, gave the boys an enthusiasm for the work of constructing the biplane which guaranteed success.

Hawke set up his model in the shop for their guidance, and, desiring to start them with fundamentals, he dissected the wing of a hawk, and, the first thing Wednesday morning, explained to them the first principles of plane construction, using the formation of the wing as an illustration.

"The early planes were straight," he explained, "but we have since learned that the curved surfaces are far more efficient. Keep in mind the idea of the bird, the shape of his wings, and you have the best working basis for building a plane." The aviator believed, with some other specialists, that examples taken from nature were the best sort of instruction for the novice.

The materials were unpacked, including all necessary tools, and without wasting much time on preliminaries, the boys set heartily to work.

"I am planning to equip this machine with swinging wing ends," said Hawke. "This is something not used on many biplanes, but it will be necessary to have them if we are to follow the maneuvers of a bird. If the wing tips are made with a down curve at their ends, the result of swinging them to the rear will be to increase the lifting power, while at the same time reducing the resistance of the air to forward movement. This would afford an ideal method of steering, being exactly like that employed by birds."

Later, when work was begun on these wing tips, the boys fully understood Hawke's theory.

Another innovation which Hawke planned for the machine was a mica window in the forward part of the fuselage, which would enable them to see what was passing below them, without leaning over or altering the angle of the planes.

While the boys worked and followed directions, Hawke explained the parts and their use on the machine. Fred and Fly proved themselves the most accomplished at first, owing to their previous experience with mechanics and aeroplanes. Gray also had a previous knowledge of the possibilities of aeronautics, and it was not long before all of the boys were intelligently working on Hawke's model and making progress.

Mr. Phipps rode over from the ranch almost every day to see them at work, and was much pleased with the rapid advance his son was making. Entirely recovered from the accident, Herb was as useful as any of his companions, and, besides evincing a great deal of mechanical skill, which he had never been called upon to display before, he readily grasped the principles Hawke continually ground into his pupils.

"You see, Dad," Herb said, when the rancher had inquired, on the occasion of one of his visits five or six days after work had been begun, about the use of the propeller, the particular part on which Herb was working, "the propeller is everything on an aeroplane. It's got to be made just right, or the whole thing goes to smash. If it wasn't for the propeller the machine wouldn't go at all," he finished triumphantly.

"Oh, indeed," remarked the southerner, an amused twinkle in his eye. "And what's the reason for that?"

"Well, yuh see," replied Herb, seriously, not noticing the smile playing about his father's mouth, and anxious to display his newly acquired knowledge, "it's the thing that moves the machine forward, and it has almost everything to do with the pitch and speed. The surfaces of the aeroplane are called the skin, and there is some friction of air against these surfaces, and that is called skin friction. Well, yuh see, the propeller has to make the machine move through the air with the smallest amount of skin friction. It has to travel through as large an amount of air as possible in a certain time, and take as little power as possible. Yuh understand?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed the rancher, unable to restrain a short laugh. "How about that, Hawke?"

"He's right," responded the aviator, slapping his young pupil on the back. "He's got the dope exactly."

"Yes, but a good deal depends on the operator," chipped in Fly, who was ambitious to excel as an

aviator, and could scarcely wait until the machine was finished to try his hand.

"I'm working on the box-girder," said Dunk, feeling called upon to give an account of himself.

"What's that," asked Mr. Phipps indulgently.

"It's the part that really bears the greatest weight—a sort of a beam with the weight in the center, fixed so it bears the load equally distributed. You can see one on Hawke's model."

"And one of the important things," said Jerry, not to be outdone, "is to build the plane so the guy wires remain taut, and the main spars, ribs and struts are properly placed."

"Yes, and then we have to remember to build it as light as we can and as strong as we can," put in Gray. "We want to go fast, but we don't want accidents, so we can't make it as light as we'd like. Oftentimes we have to make a part heavier to be sure it's strong enough."

Other technical information was glibly imparted when Captain Crawford dropped in occasionally. Dr. Rivers also paid the shop frequent visits, while the ladies did not neglect to show an interest in the work.

In fact, everyone in and about the fort shared the enthusiasm of the young aviators, and the aeroplane got to be the most important topic of conversation. Hawke was obliged to put a sign on the door of the shop: "NO ADMITTANCE," in order to keep away the soldiers, Greasers, loafers, and even Indians who had a habit of dropping in and interrupting the work.

About eight days after construction started they were ready for a hangar. As Mr. Phipps sent over two of his idle Greasers to erect this, work on the aeroplane was not stopped. The shed was erected just north of the machine shop, facing the old parade grounds, which was an ideal spot for the first try-out.

"I'm anxious to test my new feature of equalizing the stress and distribution of weight," Hawke explained to Mr. Phipps, who had come over with the Greasers. "I want to be able to carry all of the boys, if possible, and this is a difficult feat, for the greater the number of passengers carried the greater is the tax on the stability of the machine. The boys have shown such unusual ability in carrying out my ideas, however, that I think I am going to be able to perfect the device and prove its efficiency in a flight or two."

The day the hangar was completed, the engine arrived. A small truck which Mr. Giles had in the shop was to be used in wheeling the aeroplane out of the shop through the big middle doors of the stable, and into the hangar.

"My, ain't she a beautiful bird," exclaimed Jerry, when they put away their tools, and were proudly viewing the result of their work, for the aeroplane was set up complete with the exception of the engine, and stood mounted on the small wheeled truck ready for removal. A trial flight was to be made in the morning.

"You can't beat that anywhere in the world," said Dunk, proudly.

"I almost feel as though she were alive," commented Herb.

"I must say you did a mighty fine job, boys," said Hawke, "and if she flies as well as she looks, we'll put in our application for medals."

"Is there any chance that she won't fly?" asked Fly anxiously.

"You never know what a brand new plane is going to do," responded Hawke, "and you're never sure till you're gliding safely up in the air, whether or not all the cogs are in tight. But I don't think there's much danger that this one won't fly."

"We'll steer straight for that old tower," said Jerry, "and see if we can't roust out the Thunder Bird—or devil bird, whatever it is."

"Better watch for it some dark night near the sheep fold," suggested Herb. "It's about due to be around here now. We haven't seen it for some time. But another rancher several miles north of father says he's had some sheep hurt and taken, so I suppose it's shifted its hunting ground for a while."

"Gee, I'm awful anxious to find out just what it is anyway," exclaimed Fred. "Certainly is a mysterious animal."

"Have you seen that old Indian snooping around here?" inquired Herb, changing the subject. "I saw him a minute or two ago peeping in through the door over there, but I didn't say anything at the time."

"Oh, I suppose he has some superstitious idea that this is a destroying evil spirit we're building," said Carl. "Only I wish he would keep away. The way he stands around and peers makes me nervous."

"He doesn't seem to pay any attention to the "No Admittance" sign," remarked Hawke, smiling.

"Suppose he can't read English," said Carl. "But I have a sneaking suspicion that he can understand it. It's an old trick of the Indian to stand around and look as innocent as a brick wall, and yet take in everything you say."

"We've been talking a lot about the Thunder Bird lately," observed Fly. "Maybe that's interested him."

"I wouldn't be surprised if he's planning some devilry," Carl remarked as they left the shop. "He's got some exaggerated notion about the Thunder Bird already."

As they entered the parade grounds they saw the retreating form of the strange Indian.

"I'll bet he's been listening," exclaimed Carl, a little disturbed. "There's no tellin' what a half-cracked, superstitious Indian may get into his head."

CHAPTER XIV

THE FIRE

"You fellows have certainly made wonderful progress," Mr. Giles said to Fly that evening as he sat on the porch of their residence with his wife and son. "That man Hawke is a wonder. I'm as proud as anybody of that fine aeroplane, and mighty proud that my boy helped in building it."

"You ain't any prouder than I am," said Fly, while his mother stroked his red locks affectionately. "Hawke says he thinks I'm going to make a good flier. Gee, won't it be great to be up in the air sailing around like a bird!"

"I'm a little afraid of accidents," said Mrs. Giles, who had been somewhat worried about the safety of the venture, but had not wished to dampen her son's enthusiasm.

"Oh, leave that to Hawke," exclaimed Fly confidently. "He's going to make the first flight, although I wouldn't be afraid to go with him. Besides, we've got to get that sheep stealer. Herb's dad has been mighty good to us. We fellows are just crazy to find out what that killing thing is anyway. Gee, you ought to hear the way he howled the night Herb got hurt!" Even now, Fly thrilled at the memory of the experience.

"Hello," he broke in, as Dunk appeared some yards from the house. "Come on over."

"I'm tired," sighed Dunk, as he sat down beside Fly on the stoop, "but I can't think of going to bed, I'm so excited over that plane."

"To-morrow we get it in the hangar," began Fly, "then the engine and then, whoopee, up she goes!"

Fred, Jerry and Carlito strolled by at that moment, and, when they had joined the pair on the porch, made the same complaint as Dunk.

"I'm a little cut up over that old Indian, too," pondered Carl. "I wouldn't be afraid to meet him single-handed, but when a redskin gets to plotting things behind his paint, watch out!"

"Oh, don't worry about that," protested Dunk, who did not understand as well as Carl the malicious nature of a semi-wild Indian. "He's just a little bit cracked, that's all."

"Sure," corroborated Jerry. "The bunch of us wouldn't do a thing to him if he got actin' funny."

Carl had apparently dismissed the subject, however, for he was throwing his knife with a dexterity that only an Indian could have displayed. His action invited competition, and soon there was a lively contest in progress. Mr. and Mrs. Giles withdrew and left the boys to their game.

"Say, what's that?" exclaimed Dunk suddenly, in a voice of alarm.

"Smoke," yelled Jerry, jumping to his feet.

"Fire in the machine shop!" fairly screamed Carl as he started off on a run.

"The aeroplane!" gasped Fly.

"Get your buckets, quick!" ordered Fred, the coolest one of the bunch.

The boys ran to the side of the old barracks, just south of the machine shop, where the buckets were kept, yelling "Fire! Fire!" at the same time.

As they turned the corner of the barracks sharply they unexpectedly bumped into the mysterious red man, who was crouching and feeling his way along the wall. They were too excited to attach any importance to the occurrence at the moment, and the Indian was soon making swiftly for the open prairies to the west.

Aroused by the commotion, people were now running from all directions, and in an incredibly short time there was a good-sized crowd at the scene of the fire.

Carl had gone immediately to the shop. "Get a hose," he shouted to some idly gaping Greasers and soldiers who stood looking at the smoke which poured from the cracks of the doors and windows.

"Bring some buckets," he ordered to another group.

Carl made for the double doors, where a soldier was struggling to throw them apart.

"Here, keep those shut," he commanded. "Do you want to eat the place up with drafts?"

"We must keep it away from the plane," gasped Hawke, who had arrived a second before.

The small brigade had formed a double chain from the well to the machine shop. One line passed the filled buckets and the other returned them empty. Soldiers and Greasers were put to work.

"It's in the front," Fred announced.

Immediately Carl smashed in a front pane with his fist, for the window was locked on the inside.

"Shove that hose in here," said Fred, as the soldier came up with a small garden hose which gave forth a shallow spray of water.

Carl smashed in the companion window, and started to get inside.

"Here, hold on, Carl," protested Hawke. "That won't do."

But Carl shook him off and sprang through.

"Hand some buckets to me," he said. Fly, standing at the well, filled the buckets, passing them on down the line until they reached Carl, who threw them on the flames and then handed them back.

Hawke leaned through the window and tied a wet handkerchief over Carl's mouth and nose.

It had now grown quite dark, and there was little evidence of the fire from the outside of the building, except for the smoke which poured through the windows and cracks of the doors.

After a few minutes Carl sprang out of the window.

"It's eating its way toward the center," he announced hurriedly, snatching the handkerchief from his face. "We'll have to take a chance on getting the plane out. Keep fighting though."

Fred took up his position outside and they fought the fire as best they could through the open windows. Hawke, Jerry and Carl went to the side double doors.

Captain Crawford and Mr. Giles arrived at this time, and took turns relieving the boys, whose arms were aching from swinging the heavy buckets.

While the structure was of substantial brick, and the equipment of the machine shop consisted mostly of iron and metal and little combustible material, a large amount of debris had been piled in one corner of the shop, awaiting removal, and this burned quickly, giving the fire a good start. The one thought in the minds of the boys was to keep the flames from getting back to the aeroplane.

Hawke, Carl and Jerry had decided to open the double doors and go inside the burning building. As the others were at the front fighting the fire, there was no one to protest, except some of the frightened Greasers who insisted that "You fellows'll get killed."

"Close those doors as soon as we get in," said Carl in answer to their protests. "And the minute we give the signal open them again."

"Don't lose any time opening them, either," warned Hawke. "We'll all be needing air by that time."

"Jump in as quick as you can, Jerry," said Carl, as they slid the door back just enough to make an entrance.

Once inside, all three dropped on their hands and knees, first tying about the lower parts of their faces handkerchiefs which they had dampened.

They crept, wriggled and crawled in the direction of the machine. The air was stifling, and it was with the greatest difficulty that they could breathe, but, groping in the smoke and darkness, Carl finally got his hands on the truck.

Jerry and Hawke were quick to give him assistance, though none of them could do much more than fumble, handicapped as they were by the smoke and heat and their awkward position. The truck was a frail affair, and it would have been slow work at best. Under present conditions, the peril of upsetting the plane and of damaging it if not losing it in the fire trap, demanded double caution.

Speech was impossible, but the three rescuers were practically of one mind, all realizing the importance of the hazardous mission they had undertaken, as inch by inch, they cautiously moved the plane nearer to the closed door. Hawke slowly pushed from the rear, while Carl and Jerry crawled on each side, steadying the machine with upraised arms. Their position was awkward and uncomfortable. After a few minutes it grew actually painful, their arms and bodies aching from the strain, and they felt themselves gradually growing weaker.

The fire had now about reached the center of the shop, and they could hear the shouts of the boys and others, ignorant of their plight, outside. Jerry could hear his father's voice raised in command, now and then, but, though he was gaining ground, the voices outside seemed growing

fainter and fainter.

"Doctor Rivers has gone to Silver City with his machine to bring down the fire department," said Captain Crawford, his shirt soiled and wet and his face grimy with smoke.

The bucket brigade had kept up a continuous fight, and had done admirably in keeping the blaze in check. The fire had had such a start, however, that it seemed almost impossible to save the building. They were all, therefore, very much relieved to learn of Dr. Rivers' action and that help might soon be forthcoming.

"Maybe we can keep it under way until that time," said Fred, swinging a bucket in his aching arms. Two reels of hose had been found about the fort, and these were being used by Dunk and Captain Crawford. Three or four lanterns had been lit, but their pale light was scarcely needed, for the moon shone down full and bright, and this, aided by the light of the fire, which had eaten through the front of the building, made the fort as bright as day.

"Where's Carl?" suddenly asked Dunk.

"Jerry isn't here either," exclaimed Captain Crawford, hastily inspecting the line of boys.

At that moment a soldier rushed up to the captain.

"Three of your fellows went into the shop quite a while ago," he shouted above the din. "They told us not to open the doors until they gave the signal. Said they were going to get the aeroplane out. Seems they've been there a long time."

The captain paled and dropped his hose, starting after the soldier on a run. After disposing of their buckets, which they put into the hands of two watching Greasers, Dunk and Fred started after them.

A loud toot was heard just then, and Dr. Rivers came dashing up, his machine loaded with men from Silver City, the hose cart being attached to the back of the automobile. The new firemen started to work at once, a great relief to the tired boys and men of the fort. A second after, Herb and his father galloped into the parade grounds.

"Throw open those doors," gasped the captain, when the party reached the rear of the building. Fred and Dunk readily complied. The air poured into the interior, driving the smoke back and a sheet of eager flames mounted to the ceiling.

Within a foot of the door, however, was the aeroplane. As Fred rushed into the building he stumbled over the prostrate body of Carl, who had managed to crawl as far as the door to give the signal but had lost consciousness at the last moment. He was quickly dragged out into the open air, while the captain, Herb, Dunk and Fly, throwing themselves down on all fours, crept after the other two. They located them not far from Carl, by the side of the machine, and all three were soon receiving careful attention from Dr. Rivers.

Jerry and Hawke were soon revived, and taken to the Crawford residence where they were put under the care of Mrs. Crawford and Mrs. Windham.

Carl's condition gave some alarm. All efforts of the doctor to bring him to consciousness seemed fruitless. There was a great bump over his left temple, showing that he had hurt himself in falling, and the blow had partly stunned him.

At last, however, to the great relief of everybody, he opened his eyes. At first he looked bewildered at the anxious faces above him. Then catching sight of a bucket which Fly held in his hand, he seemed to realize the state of affairs at once.

Suddenly, without warning, he jumped to his feet.

"I must get the money out of my room," he cried, lurching forward, but fell back again limp.

The boys looked from one to the other. For the first time since the fire began they remembered that Carl's room was over the shop, and by this time, was completely ruined.

CHAPTER XV

REPAIRING THE PLANE

There was no time to be lost. Dr. Rivers and Mr. Giles carried Carl to the latter's home, where he lay in a semi-conscious condition the rest of the night, talking incoherently about going to college, saving his money, being robbed of it, and calling now and again for the old squaw who had given him his charm and had told him the story of his father's death. At intervals he would break out with fierce denunciations against the mysterious redskin.

Meanwhile, satisfied that their brave friends had been taken care of, Fred and Dunk ran back to the shop, which was now enveloped in smoke, flames shooting out of the upper story. As they reached the opening, near which the plane stood, several threatening creaks warned them of the danger of entering.

"That roof's going to fall," exclaimed one of the soldiers.

"Hey, are you crazy!" shouted another. "Don't go in there!" But before they could be detained the two boys darted into the smoke. They were just in time to escape the restraining hand of the captain and Mr. Phipps, who were running a few yards behind. There was a moment of terrible suspense, then a crash, and the plane pitched forward into the parade grounds.

The captain and the ranchman, in a tremor of apprehension, started into the smoke, but a soldier's voice arrested them.

"They're under the machine," he shouted.

Quickly tipping the plane back into position, the men found the boys, who had been pinioned under it. Their clothing was torn, and covered with mud, but the boys, fortunately, were unhurt.

"Is it safe?" gasped Fred, jumping to his feet.

"Is it all right?" was Fly's first question.

But there was no time to inspect the machine carefully for damage. It must be hauled into the hangar as soon as possible. The draft-fed flames were shooting hungry, livid red tongues skyward, and the almost deafening noise of falling bricks and timber too well foretold the fate of the building.

"Here, everybody lend a hand," said Herb, perspiring from the intense heat of the fire.

"Pick the machine up on your shoulders," Mr. Phipps ordered several of the idlers.

"And get away from this building quick, before the side wall falls," commanded the captain. This note of warning served to send all the onlookers scurrying to a safe distance.

Soon the precious aeroplane was safe in the new shed.

"Suppose there's two weeks' repairs on it," lamented Fly.

"Never saw such luck," complained Herb, but added quickly, "We ought to be glad, though, that nobody got hurt."

They turned from their task of lodging the machine, just in time to see the walls and roof of the shop cave in completely. A choking mass of thick smoke rolled out of the debris. The blaze was soon extinguished, but the building was a complete ruin.

"Now, how do you suppose that fire started?" asked Dunk, when, an hour later, and long past midnight, the tired boys started for their homes. All was quiet at the Fort now; everybody had gone to seek their long deferred rest, except Dr. Rivers, who had taken the fire fighters back to Silver City.

Before the rising sun had gilded the mountain tops, Dunk and Fly, tired but too restless to sleep, were again at the feebly smoking ruins.

They were soon joined by Herb Phipps, his father and Tender Gray, who had remained at the Fort overnight.

"Too bad about Carl," reflected Fly.

"He was saving that money so long too," continued Gray.

"Wish't I'd thought of it," said Dunk; "I'd risked my neck to get it."

"Just shows what Carl is," added Herb. "He went in after that plane and never thought about his own stuff."

"I'll make him let me put up for it," put in Mr. Phipps. "The boy deserves it for his bravery."

"How is he this morning, Dunk?" asked Gray.

"He's all right now. I left him eating his breakfast in bed. He wanted to get up, but father says he might as well take it easy for a half a day or so until he gets stronger."

"Hello, fellows," greeted Jerry heartily. "What do you think of the heroes?" The aviator, paler, but smiling as ever, accompanied young Crawford, and they both jokingly demanded the reward of the brave.

"You deserve it too, and no kiddin'," observed Herb seriously.

"Well, let's take a look at the plane," said Hawke. "Wonder how much damage there is."

"Right upper wing pretty badly jammed on the left side," he said, after he had given the plane an inspection. "These wires will have to be restrung. Oh, I guess we can fix her up in a couple of days."

"That's lucky," said Fly. "Thought we'd have to take her all apart."

"Lucky thing Ike didn't bring that engine over to the shop," commented Dunk. "We never would have gotten that out."

"Pretty good luck all around," responded Hawke, optimistically. "So cheer up, and let's get busy right away this afternoon repairing the *Thunder Bird*. If we're goin' to chase thieves we've got to get at it soon."

In the afternoon, Carl, whose active spirit chafed under the restraint put upon him by Dr. Rivers, broke bonds and escaped from the sickroom. The boys were industriously working on the plane when he appeared, a little haggard and hollow-eyed, at the hangar.

"Hello there, old scout," exclaimed Herb heartily. "Glad you're out."

"Was she much smashed up?" asked the Indian, smiling rather forcedly.

"Not much, we can mend her up in a couple of days," responded Hawke.

"Too bad we went under before we got her clear out," continued Carl, "but I'm glad it isn't damaged worse than it is."

"Guess I'll take a walk over to the cliffs," added the Indian, reflectively. "There's enough of you working on this."

"The cliffs?" echoed Fred interrogatively.

"Yes, I'm going to see if I can scare up that confounded Indian," responded Carl, shutting his lips rather tightly, a light in his eyes which the boys had never seen there before.

"The strange Indian?" repeated Jerry uncomprehending.

"Sure thing. He's the fellow that's done all this," said Carl. "And he's going to meet me on the warpath for it too."

"Better not get mixed up with him, Carl," advised Hawke, seeing that the boy was rather excited and fearing that his savage nature might assert itself. "Wait till he turns up here and we'll all get after him."

Carl did not reply, but, turning, walked away in the direction of the mountain trail.

"Maybe it was the old scout," reflected Dunk. "You know what Carl said the very afternoon of the fire."

"And we bumped into him snooping back of the barracks right after the fire started," continued Fly.

"He's after the Thunder Bird, too," went on Gray. "Say, I'll bet he did it, all right."

"Dad went in to see Carl this morning," said Herb; "wanted him to let him make up the money he had lost, but Carl wouldn't hear to it. Maybe he'll come 'round in a day or two, when he has time to think it over."

"Say, fellows, did you see in the paper that Chance, the big New York aviator is going to fly over this way in a week or so?" asked Hawke, changing the conversation.

"No—haven't looked at a paper to-day," responded Fly. None of the other boys had heard the news.

"My, that'll be great," exclaimed Jerry. "What's he coming this way for?"

"We're on the route. You know, he's in the contest for the \$10,000 longest distance record," answered Hawke.

"Is he the guy that won the highest altitude prize," asked Dunk.

"That's the one. He's gone into teaching lately in New York City, and charges \$500 for four hours."

"Whew! I'll take a minute and one-eighth," laughed Gray.

"Do you know him?" asked Fred.

"Yes, met him once in New York. Fine chap. Nerves like cast iron," answered Hawke.

"Gee, can't you write and ask him to stop here," asked Fly.

"He's going to make a stop at Albuquerque, according to the newspaper account, so I don't suppose he'll drop off here."

"Wouldn't it be sport to meet him with our plane!" exclaimed Fly.

"Maybe we can," said Hawke. "We might run him a race for a mile or so."

"Jiminy, that'd be great," cried Jerry, almost dropping his hammer.

"Hope I can fly by then," commented Fred.

"Me too," eagerly exclaimed Fly. "Wonder if I'll ever be tryin' for a record," he added wistfully.

"Can't tell," laughed Hawke.

That evening when Carl returned he reported that he had been unable to find the Indian, and that he had not been seen around the cliff dwellings for several days.

"Tommy says the last time he saw him he told him he was going up into the mountains to look for the Thunder Bird," said Carl. "That's the bee in his bonnet, all right."

"So long as he don't come 'round here making bonfires out of our *Thunder Bird*, we'll leave him alone," commented Jerry.

Though Carl visited the cliffs every day after that, the Indian either religiously avoided him or had previously disappeared.

Three days later the aeroplane was again in first-class condition, and Monday, the first week in August, was set for the try-out day.

The news was noised abroad, and people for miles around were planning to be present at the event. Great excitement prevailed at the Fort, where the boys and their handiwork became the center of interest.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FIRST FLIGHT

A group of curious spectators stood around the *Thunder Bird* open-mouthed and wide of eye.

"You tell me that thing go up—up high? No!" expostulated one of the Mexicans with a gesture of skepticism.

"Da boys make him fly," said another, grinning, and showing an even row of milk-white teeth.

"Na, not da leetle boys?" protested a third, mopping his perspiring swarthy skin with a red bandanna handkerchief, for the day was a warm one and the sun had almost reached the middle of its daily course.

"Funniest lookin' thing I ever seed," put in a lame soldier, hobbling around the machine and scrutinizing it doubtfully. He had, like a number of his comrades, spent the last decade or so in and around the fort, hearing little of the outside world.

"Who's goin' to shoot it up?" asked a sheep herder, with some notion of a sky rocket. He had begged the day off in order to be present at the first flight.

"Da leetle kids," replied a fat, indolent-looking Greaser, spitting a generous supply of tobacco juice. "I na believe it," he added, with a foolish grin which was intended to betoken shrewd disbelief.

"That so," laughed the soldier. "What you think, John?" he asked another.

"No sabe," responded the Mexican, spreading out his palms. "Spak no Angloise." He turned his attention to the machine which he had been inspecting with childlike interest.

"I'd give a dollar for a cool breeze," sighed a soldier, skimming off the moisture that had gathered on his face and neck.

Grouped about Hawke were the aspiring young aviators—the Fort Bayard bunch and the two from the Bread Pudding ranch. Their bright faces were rosy with excitement, and Hawke's was flushed with eagerness.

"Suppose it shouldn't work," whispered Fly, breathlessly, afraid to sound aloud the unconfessed fear which he did not share alone.

"Forget that noise," reproved Jerry. "Just leave it to Hawke. He says she's going to."

"Dry up, old man," chided Dunk. "Didn't we make it—then it's all right."

"You bet it's goin' to work," confidently assured Herb, unwilling to allow himself a moment's doubt.

Perhaps Hawke himself was a little anxious, for his habitual cool demeanor had given place to a rather apparent agitation. He continually plowed his hands through his damp hair as he went about giving the machine a final examination.

"Is she all right?" inquired Dunk, when the aviator, seemingly satisfied, straightened up and discontinued his examination.

"As slick as a whistle," returned Hawke cheerily, springing lightly into the plane.

A touch of his hand and the motor was buzzing impatiently.

"Fine day for a try-out," he observed. "Not a breath of wind stirring."

Fred and Dunk were instructed to hold the tail at the start, and Jerry was to turn the screw that

set the machine in motion.

"I'm ready now, any time," said Hawke, with perfect composure.

"Clear away, everybody," commanded Captain Crawford, but it took both him and Mr. Phipps to force the crowd back against the buildings surrounding the parade grounds.

"When I fire, up she goes," laughed Herb, rather nervously, gripping the revolver which he held in his hand. He almost hesitated to fire the shot that should decide the fate of their earnest labors.

Hawke, however, had regained his natural calm, and sat waiting, composed and confident.

"Let 'er go," he commanded, taking hold of the lever with a sure and steady hand.

"One, two, three—bang!"

A puff of smoke—then the whirr of the propellers, creating a sudden wind which blew hats off and left the bystanders breathless—and the man-made bird was running swiftly over the smooth parade grounds like a low-flying bird.

There was a murmur among the crowd, a straining of necks and eyes, and an unconscious leaning forward. Then, as the aeroplane, with an almost imperceptible slant, challenged the air and gradually ascended, a shout of spontaneous admiration arose, gaining in volume and reaching such a thunderous climax that it seemed to call forth an echo from the distant mountains.

Again and again the skillfully guided plane swept gracefully over the group of buildings, its circle constantly widening as it rose, and, finally, shot above the tall flag pole. On and up it went, swift as a hawk, gracefully taking higher and higher altitudes, until the crowd, realizing the height attained, began to gasp almost with fear, their heads strained back painfully, their hands shading their eyes.

At last the plane, with rhythmic undulations, began to descend, its purring music growing louder as, accomplishing slow circles, it came nearer and nearer, until, amidst a hush that was almost deathlike, it skimmed the ground and lit, a few feet from the starting point.

Again there was a mighty yell, and hats went up as Hawke leaped joyously upon the firm ground.

Faces alight, the boys pressed around him, almost speechless with delight. The first joy of real success was upon them all. They had attempted a splendid task, and they had won!

The crowd, refusing to be held back longer, streamed to the center of the grounds, like water surging over a suddenly opened dam.

"Marvelous," exclaimed Mr. Phipps, the first to find his voice.

This single word opened the flood gates, and a babble of voices ensued. The boys shouted excitedly, pranced like long-imprisoned colts enjoying their first freedom, hugged one another, and threw up their hats and handkerchiefs. Soldiers talked excitedly and endeavored to edge nearer to the structure which fascinated and compelled their admiration. In spite of its performance, they still looked upon it in skeptical wonder. The Greasers, with unfeigned admiration, rubbed their dark palms caressingly over the cloth-covered wings. Several Indians, their blank faces for once expressive, stood fearfully on the outskirts of the crowd, and finally slunk away, breaking into a dogtrot as they took the trail to the cliffs.

But it mattered not to the boys what the crowd might think or say—they were elated beyond the influence of the opinions of others. They suddenly felt themselves grown to manhood—for they had done what men were doing—and, without exception, they felt inspired with a dauntless determination to master the thing which they had made, and learn to control it as Hawke had done.

"Take us up! Take us up!" they cried at once, pressing around the aviator, who, though nearly exhausted from the strain under which he had been laboring, and choking for air, in this tight circle of humanity, was smiling happily. He too felt the intoxicating joy of triumph surge through his whole being, and forgot all external conditions.

"You must rest," protested Mr. Phipps.

"Yes, come right over to the house. We'll have something cool to drink, and a light lunch," seconded the captain.

"Guess we'd better not try any more for to-day," said Hawke to the boys. "Just before I landed, one of the guy wires snapped."

"Put her in the hangar then," suggested Herb, willing to sacrifice his desire to the comfort of the aviator.

"Sure, you've done enough to-day," put in Fly, not wishing to be selfish, although he would have given a good deal to take a turn in the machine beside Hawke.

With the aid of the bystanders the plane was put back into the shed. Ike was left to watch it until the crowd should disperse.

"We'll have another demonstration soon," said Hawke, noticing the disappointment depicted on the faces of the onlookers as they divined the intention to discontinue flying for that day.

"The plane has succeeded almost beyond my hopes," Hawke said, as after luncheon he sat with the men and boys at the Crawford residence. "My equalizing device has to be tested, but I'm sure it's going to be entirely adequate to carry at least six passengers at a time."

"Well, you see you have a band of crack workmen," laughed Mr. Crawford, taking the boys in with a gesture.

"That can be said with all seriousness," replied Hawke earnestly.

The week was spent in trying out the machine, Hawke and the boys making several test flights each day. At the end of that time, they knew beyond a doubt that they could trust the *Thunder Bird* to do anything they wished. Hawke and five of the boys had ridden in it with safety for four hours, putting it to the most severe test.

With unflinching patience and ready good will, Hawke took them, by ones, and twos, and often filling the machine to its capacity, explaining to them the principles of successful flight. It was impossible, however, in this short time, for all of the boys to become masters of the machine. Fly, however, showed unusual proficiency, and by Saturday night was enthusiastically begging to be allowed to take the machine up alone, a request which was of course persistently refused by his anxious father and mother.

"I'm astonished, though, at the ability the boy shows," Hawke told Mr. Giles confidentially. "They're all first class, but Fly has the inborn instincts of a successful bird-man. He takes hold instantaneously, thinking, as it were, with his muscles, and handling his levers automatically, with the precision of an expert. All the boys have steady nerves and are going to acquire the poise and control of good fliers, but your son has unusual intuition."

"But you wouldn't let him go up alone yet?" said Mr. Giles, skeptically, though he might have altered his refusal at this assurance from Hawke if Mrs. Giles had not protested anxiously.

"Well, no. Better wait until after the hunt. That'll give them a good working basis," advised Hawke.

"Oh, please, please, please," pleaded Fly, whose anxiety to sail once, only just once, alone and unaided, up into the inviting blue clouds, and feel that he had at last achieved his great ambition, prompted him to repeated entreaty that the privilege might be granted him.

"Time enough, my son," said Mr. Giles indulgently.

But the time came sooner than any of them dreamed.

CHAPTER XVII

IN SIGHT OF THE ENEMY

The following Monday morning, Herb telephoned that the marauder had again appeared at the Phipps ranch, and had killed off three of the fold, carrying one away.

It was decided, therefore, to proceed at once with the hunt, and, when the capture of the thief had been accomplished, to continue the instruction of the boys.

"Dad thinks the best way to begin is to watch around the fold at night till the thing appears," said Herb.

His suggestion was adopted, and that night the Fort Bayard boys and Hawke flew at dusk to the Bread Pudding ranch. It was not their first trip to the B. P. in the new plane; in fact, it had become quite a matter of course to drop in on Mr. Phipps, and, as the latter expressed it, "tie the bird outside."

The full moon had waned and should a chase be necessary they would be obliged to rely entirely on the acetylene lamps which, however, had been well tried out. They were not to be lit, however, until needed, lest the light should frighten away the enemy.

Hawke, Herb, Gray, Fred, Fly and Jerry remained near the plane, which was stationed just inside the wire fence enclosing the sheepfold. Carl and Dunk went to the other side of the pasture, while Mr. Phipps and one of his herders took up their position near the entrance gate. Between them all, they hoped to get a glimpse of the unwelcome visitor. If Hawke or his companions sighted him first they were to give instant chase in the plane, if they could not shoot him, which would be practically impossible in the dark. The others agreed to wave their lanterns if they were the first to come in contact with the mysterious sheep stealer. The plane would then be put into use.

Quietly but anxiously the pursuers watched, until, about nine o'clock, Jerry began to despair.

"Bet now we're ready for him the old guy won't turn up," he said, disappointedly.

"Don't worry," assured Herb. "Like as not he won't come 'round till midnight. That's his usual calling time."

"Regular New York swell," commented Gray.

"Wonder what kind of a thing it is," said Fred.

"I'm beginnin' to think it's a witch—never comes around in daylight, and nobody ever can get a peep at him," responded Jerry.

"We'll soon find out," returned Herb. "Least, I hope so."

"How near's Chance now?" suddenly interrogated Fred.

"He's within a couple day's run of us," responded Hawke. "Ought to pass over here Tuesday or Wednesday."

"Gee, bet it'll take a fall out of him to see another plane bobbin 'round here, won't it?" said Herb.

"We'll surprise him, all right," laughed Hawke. "He'll lose his bearings when he sees us put in our appearance. I'll find out the time he's comin' and run him a race."

"He's clippin' off a good record," commented Fred, who had been reading the papers. "Goin' to make it, I guess."

Talking thus the hours sped by until it was after eleven o'clock. The night descended thicker and blacker as time passed, and in the tense silence, broken now and then by a tuneful bleat, the boys huddled closer together and talked in hushed voices.

"We sure could hear the flutter of a wing," reflected Herb.

The next moment they were on their feet, scarcely suppressing a yell. Something had rushed directly over them, fanning the air like a propeller, but with less noise. Quick as thought they were in the plane, the lamps were flashed on and they had mounted into the air.

A huge flying bulk was just in front of them, and, as it swooped downward toward the sheep, a shout from Fred apparently startled it, for it rose again, and, whirling, circled rapidly above the fold.

"It's some kind of a flying monster all right," whispered Herb excitedly.

Hawke had made a rapid semicircle and was flying swiftly in pursuit, but, as he had lost time in turning, the object had become a part of the darkness and he could only steer in the direction in which it had seemed to be flying.

"Carl's waving his lantern," exclaimed Herb. "Must be over there."

Hawke veered quickly. The lamps, while shedding a bright glow for some distance around the machine, did not throw their light very far ahead.

"There is it, under us," cried Fly. They could see a huge, black, floating mass, just beneath them.

Circling again and again it was with the utmost difficulty that they kept it in sight. At last, however, it struck a straight line for the cliffs.

"We can't get an aim if he keeps on swerving," said Herb.

"Steady, fellows," warned Hawke, for they had moved about, twisting in their seats, to get a sight of the game. The plane was mounting steadily higher, and Hawke had reduced his speed, pursuing the enemy as well as he could, for it had adopted a zigzag course, flying to right and left and dipping up and down.

"I'm going to try a shot anyway," said Herb.

The others unconsciously left the shooting to the southerner, who, it was naturally and rightly supposed, would be glad to bag the animal that had given his father so much trouble.

Young Phipps took aim at the first good opportunity, and shot three times. It seemed to be without result, for the huge shape moved on, though its course became more uncertain than ever, and, although it seemed heading toward the mountain ranges, its flight was uneven and haphazard.

"We must be over the mountains now," said Fly, after a time.

"We're about 1,800 feet above level," responded Hawke.

At that moment the bird resumed its swift circles, flying downward. Pointing the nose of the plane toward the earth, Hawke followed it, making a thrilling spiral descent.

"Why, there's the old tower," cried Fred, when the plane had dropped far enough for its lights to play upon the surface below.

"And he's circling down for it," cried Fly.

"That's his roost, I'll bet," exclaimed Jerry.

"Then it must be the Thunder Bird Carl told about—the one you saw when I tried to take that picture—the one that raised the storm," jabbered Fred disjointedly.

"And the one the old Indian is after," put in Gray.

"Let him roost, and then we'll get him," suggested Herb.

But Hawke had altered his course, and was making swiftly in the direction of home.

"Where you going?" shouted Fly in surprise. It had been necessary for them to raise their voices considerably, for the mountain torrents were distinctly heard below, while the noise of their own machine added made hearing difficult.

"We've got to get right back," responded the aviator, throwing on top speed.

"What—what for?" yelled Gray. "We nearly had him."

"There's a wind rising, and I felt a splash of rain," returned the aviator. "We can't take chances over these peaks in a storm."

As if to corroborate his statement there was a distant rumble.

"Thunder," gasped Jerry breathlessly, for the speed of the machine almost shut off his wind, and like the other boys he was clinging tightly to his seat.

"I felt rain then, too," shouted Herb.

Another rumble, louder than the first, sent thrills down their backs.

"It was the Thunder Bird all right," yelled Fred. "I told you I saw him that day."

"We know where he lives now, though," returned Fly.

But they were dashing through space at such a terrific pace that speech became impossible. Hawke was bending every energy to beat the storm. Already the wind had risen considerably, and he was obliged to concentrate his whole thought on the control of the machine.

"Make for the B. P.," requested Herb. "Dad'll be anxious to know how we come out. We can—"

But the rest of his sentence was lost in a deafening roar, while a flash of lightning split the darkness and revealed, below them, the stretches of pasture belonging to the Bread Pudding ranch.

While they had been obliged to give up when victory was within easy reach, the boys were more pleased than otherwise at the adventurous turn things had taken. The flight by night, so eagerly anticipated, was becoming more exciting than they had expected.

Before they realized it, they had skidded down and stopped in front of the ranch-house. But they could only pause long enough to allow Herb and Gray to dismount, for it was necessary to reach the Fort as quickly as possible and lodge the plane in its shed before the storm, whose threatening voice was growing constantly louder, broke upon them.

The boys had no chance to exchange words with the rancher before, Carl and Dunk having taken the place of Herb and Gray, they were whisked upward again. And, though anxious to learn the result of their companion's flight, the Indian and his friend were obliged to wait until, just in time, they had shoved the plane back into the hangar and rushed to the Crawford residence. They had scarcely reached the veranda when the fury of the tempest was upon them.

"Whew!" ejaculated Hawke, breathing a deep sigh of relief. "That was a record run. If I had made that at an aviation meet I'll bet they'd have awarded me some kind of a medal."

He spoke lightly, and the boys never knew how wonderfully well he had made that flight. Not one aviator in a hundred would have been able to accomplish it with such coolness and accuracy as Hawke had displayed. Perhaps, after they had themselves learned to fly, they realized the precarious condition in which they had been that night and how much they owed their safe return to Hawke.

They were greeted cordially by the captain when they arrived at the Fort, who listened, with unfeigned interest, to their rapid recital of the evening's events.

"But we're goin' back to-morrow," said Fly, "and get him. For we know where he roosts."

"Yes," said Hawke. "We must lose no time. We have the drop on him now, and I'll run you all up there in the morning. You can let Herb and Gray know."

"Telegram for Mr. Hawke," announced Ike, appearing, dripping but smiling, at the screen door.

"Well, what do you think of that!" exclaimed the aviator, his face suddenly growing grave as he read the wire, and handed it to the captain, who was quickly surrounded by the boys.

"'Mexican insurrectos threaten invasion of Texas,'" read Jerry's father. "'Come immediately. Take charge aviation corps. Urgent.'" The message was dated from Juarez, and was signed by General Marley, commander of the border troops.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUCCESS AT LAST

The next day was a blue one for the boys. Apparently all their plans had been knocked sideways. The hunt, for which they had worked and waited all summer, had been nipped in the bud at the moment of success.

"Let's scout it, anyhow," suggested Fred that evening, as the downcast group huddled together on Jerry's veranda.

"What d'ye mean?" asked Dunk, uninterestedly.

"Well, make a trip up into the mountains and see what we can do," continued the easterner.

"How you going to get across that ravine?" disparaged Fly, who had been moping all day. "It's too wide even to throw a rope across."

"I could get across if you could span it with a rope ladder," said Carl.

"Maybe Herb wounded him so badly he's dead up there somewhere," Jerry went on. "You know he told us over the phone that he and Gray found some feathers about where he shot the other night."

"Whether it's a bird or not, it's got wings," said Carl. "But if those feathers are as long as Herb said they were it can't be an eagle."

"Don't care nohow," responded Fly, shoving his hands deep into his pockets with an air of dejection as he rose to his feet. "Hawke maybe can't be back this summer. Didn't even have a chance to say good-bye to the B. P. bunch. And mother just won't let me run the plane alone. Aw, I'm going home," he continued thoroughly disgusted. "Good night."

"Wait a minute—here comes your father," said Fred.

"Just got a letter from Hawke," announced Mr. Giles, walking up to the veranda.

"What does he say?" exclaimed Fred eagerly, the faces of all the boys brightening at once. A faint hope of the aviator's early return sprang into their minds.

"Don't get too excited if I tell you," said Mr. Giles mischievously.

This only served to make the boys more anxious, of course.

"Well, he says he thinks Fly's pretty steady and could handle the machine all right alone. So we've decided to let you continue the hunt. We owe it to Phipps anyhow," he added.

"What!" yelled Fly, scarcely comprehending the good news at first.

"Hurray!" shouted several of the boys.

"Keep cool," laughed Mr. Crawford, but Fly was unable to contain himself for joy, and singing gayly, began hopping around first on one leg and then the other.

"I knew it would come out all right," said Dunk, although his attitude of a half hour before had not betokened very strong optimism.

"We'll go right over to the Phipps ranch in the morning," announced Fly, when he became calmer, "tell Herb and Gray, and start right out. Maybe Herb can go up with me," and he turned another handspring.

"I'd like to see a trial flight first," said the father.

"Just give me the chance," retorted Fly.

The next morning, before a skeptical audience composed of Mr. and Mrs. Giles, Captain Crawford and his wife, Mrs. Windham and Lieutenant Rivers, Fly practically repeated Hawke's performance of the first day.

"My, it's great!" he exclaimed after the flight, his eyes shining and his face flushed. "I could do it with Hawke, and I knew I could do it alone."

The older ones were satisfied, and Fly was permitted to start out for the B. P. to get Herb, if his father would allow him to go. It was planned that the others should ride, and going as far as they could with their horses, climb up to the spot near the tower.

Mr. Phipps was at first reluctant, but a telephone conversation with Mr. Giles and Captain Crawford, strengthened by eager coaxing on the part of his son, finally gained his consent. Gray started off to meet the other boys with his pony.

Fly and Herb remained at the B. P., for a while, to give the plane a thorough inspection, and to make a rope ladder they had previously planned to use if possible.

About midway in their way they experienced some difficulty with the engine, and were obliged to make a landing in a pasture and remedy the difficulty. This took the better part of an hour.

"I feel that we're goin' to get him to-day," said Herb, as Fly once more lifted the plane above the green meadowland. It was one of those rare, quiet, contented summer days, when even the bee's buzzing sounded noisy. The mountains, with all their towering majesty, seemed challenging the young aviators, who, calm and confident, rose steadily upward and forward, the fresh air blowing cool and sweet against their faces. It was a day such as fills the veins with a joyousness of life, a willingness to undertake anything, and a confidence that bespeaks success.

They were soon passing swiftly over the rugged mountain's face, its huge irregular boulders, tufted here and there with stubborn plant life, rapidly receding. The tall majestic firs, which, as the boys looked down from their superior height, dwindled to miniature Christmas trees with the morning dew still upon them glistening like toy candles, and the foaming torrents rushing down the time-scarred and waterworn ravines.

Above all they could see, as they mounted higher, the gloomy old tower lifting its dark head to the sunshine, and rising out of a mass of rock, stone and dense growth.

"Look! Look!" panted Herb when they at last circled above the mysterious dwelling.

Fly looked down through the mica window at his feet and saw, crouching between the four walls of the roof, a monstrous feathered shape, apparently headless, its wings folded. Like some gorged dragon it lay there, contentedly wallowing in a bed of bones, skeletons, sheeps' wool and meat still red, the remains of many an ill-gotten feast.

Startled by the noise of the propellers, it drew out from under its wing its great shining black head, disclosing a vicious hooked beak.

Meanwhile, the rest of the party had arrived on the other side of the ravine. They shouted at the boys in the air, but the tremendous noise caused by the roaring water and the whirring propellers, drowned their voices completely. Herb and Fly had seen them, however.

"Scare him out," suggested Fly. "Then they can all see him and have a shot."

"I hate to shoot an enemy in the back," said Herb. "But he deserves it." And he fired down into the roost. But the plane was going at such a speed that his aim was not true. The bullet struck the side of the structure, throwing up dust and mortar. The creature fluttered and stirred, moving its head about perplexedly, but remained in its nest.

Herb shot a second time, just grazing his mark, picking off some of the feathers on the monster's back. At this time the crouching shape sprang upward with a sharp cry of anger, almost completely hiding the top of the tower from view, so enormous was the spread of its wings.

"There it is! There it is," exclaimed several of the party on the back of the ravine.

"An eagle," gasped Fred.

"The Thunder Bird," panted Carl.

"But what's the matter with him?" cried Dunk. At the same moment, the boys, staring upward with fascinated eyes, gave a cry of alarm.

The great creature seemed flying about wildly, furiously, without sense of, or regard for direction, beating its immense wings against the air, and, instead of attempting to escape, flew straight for the plane, almost colliding with it.

Fly, who had anticipated a chase, now found himself on the defensive, and was obliged to dodge, circle, swoop and whirl in a manner that made his head swim. Although almost near enough to touch the bird at times, the motion of the machine and the strange uncertain course of their antagonist made accurate aim impossible.

Above them it flew, passing like a dark cloud over the machine, then veering down so suddenly that Fly was obliged to concentrate all his energies to get out of its way. It was an equal conflict between nature's great king of the air, and the supreme handicraft of mechanical skill which had been made to conquer it in its own element.

"It must be blind," said Herb, remembering that Carl had told them the Thunder Bird was sightless in the daylight. "If I could only get a line on it!"

The boys below dared not shoot, lest their bullets go astray and strike their friends. The monster seemed possessed by an insane rage, throwing itself about in the air with blind recklessness.

"Now!" exclaimed Fly, as the wily native of the air rushed below them. Herb, with the quickness of an experienced hunter, did not waste his chance. There was a loud report, a shrill blood-curdling cry, such as they had heard on two other occasions, and the creature's inert bulk whirled to the earth, landing heavily almost in front of Jerry.

It was not yet dead however, and the boys made for a safe distance, as the monster, in its death struggle, furiously beat the ground with its powerful wings, springing upward again and again in a desperate effort to recover itself, each time falling back.

"Finish him," implored Fred. "It's a shame to have him suffer."

A second later a shot from Dunk's rifle stilled the great bird's fluttering form forever. Its frightful beak opened and closed, its beastlike talons sought to clutch support, its owl-like eyes became

glazed and fixed. The Thunder Bird had killed his last sheep!

Hushed and silent the boys crowded around the huddled shape. Carl, taking hold of one of its wings, pulled it out to its natural spread.

"About four feet," he said. "Must have a spread of ten. And about five feet from the end of its beak to the tip of its tail."

"Wonder how old he is?" speculated Fred.

Just then something fell in their midst. It was a note from Herb, weighted with a heavy memorandum book.

"We've done the deed. Now for the reward," it read. "We can see something glistening like gold under a shelf in the roof. Ask Carl to get it. We'll drop the ladder."

Carl waved his hat in assent, while Herb swung the rope ladder down, attempting to hitch it at some point on the side of the gorge near the tower. At the third trial, it lodged over a projecting rock, which jutted, hooklike, from the wall of the ravine. Carl caught the other end and fastened it. The crossing did not prove as perilous as it looked, for the rope held firm, and it was an easy trick for an Indian.

After some fumbling among the shrubs, Carl disappeared, and the boys knew he must have found an entrance to the dwelling. They were right, for the Indian, through a low door obscured by shrubs, had crawled into the house of mystery. Though it was dark at first, he soon perceived a thin ray of light percolating through an opening in the roof. He was provided with matches, and lighting a few of these, he scrutinized the walls for some possible handhold by which he could mount. Directly under the aperture through which the feeble light came he struck what seemed to be poles projecting from the sides of the tower.

"A ladder," he thought, and made short work of the climb. With little difficulty he scrambled through the roof-opening to the outside of the tower. A wall about five feet high ran around the edge of the roof, along the four sides of which was a projecting shelf several feet wide. In the center, cluttered with refuse of all kinds, was the abode of the Thunder Bird, to which he would never more return.

Under the shelf in one corner was the shining object the boys had written of. Carl uttered an exclamation of surprise and delight when he found this to be a beautiful bowl, apparently of beaten gold, measuring about fifteen inches in diameter, and set with many semi-precious stones of varied hue.

"The Holy Bowl of the Medicine Men," he said wonderingly, astonished at its seeming newness. Though it must be decades old it appeared to have been recently polished. A vague thought of the mysterious Indian flashed through Carl's mind. He jumped up on the shelf and held up to the admiring gaze of his companions below the brilliant trophy, which glittered with dazzling brightness in the sun.

A shout greeted this sign, and, after looking around without success for further relics, he tucked the bowl under his arm and descended. Again pushing through the thick foliage that had obscured the low entrance, he came out, flushed and excited, holding the prize aloft.

Suddenly the watching boys uttered a warning cry, but before he could comprehend it, Carl was seized around the waist by strong arms and thrown to the ground with violent force. The next moment he found himself grappling with the strange Indian.

CHAPTER XIX

JUMPING A PEAK

Before Carl had an opportunity to recover himself the Indian had seized the golden bowl and was making off with it at top speed. It did not take the lad long to comprehend the situation, however, and springing to his feet, he soon overtook the would-be thief. Wresting the prize from him, and throwing it to one side, Carl met the attack with the strength, ability and skill only found in strong young manhood. But the older Indian was fully a match for him, and the struggle promised to be a long and hard one if Carl were left to fight it alone.



The struggle promised to be a long and hard one if Carl were left to fight it alone. But this the other boys did not propose to allow, and they immediately began to cross on the rope ladder.

This the other boys did not propose should be the case. Forgetting all fear for themselves in the face of Carl's danger, they immediately prepared to utilize the rope ladder, crossing even more quickly than Carl had done and surely with less caution, for their only thought was to come to the rescue of their friend.

Carl's assailant, whose every energy was strained to gain an advantage, did not hear their approach. Before he realized it he found himself helpless in the hands of the strong palefaces, his hands tied behind his back, a threatening Remington, in the hands of Jerry, pointed meaningfully in his direction. He was very much the worse for wear, his face having been severely scratched across the lines of paint, and his clothes considerably disarranged.

"Well, what shall we do with him?" asked Dunk, turning to Carl. "He ought to be pitched over the ravine."

But the Indian boy's face wore a strange expression. His eyes were wide and staring, and he stood, pale and open-mouthed, regarding his helpless enemy.

"What's the matter!" cried Gray, alarmed.

Carl did not reply, but walked up to the captive, and, with a hand that shook slightly, examined something that hung on a string around his neck. Then he pulled out the charm from under his own shirt.

"Look," he said huskily.

The stones were exactly alike.

Although the older Indian betrayed no signs of surprise or emotion he broke into an angry torrent of Apache.

Carl, stepping forward, took out his hunting knife, and cut the other's bonds.

"Now get!" he commanded, allowing himself the pleasure of one strong punch at the back of the conquered redskin, who lost no time in making his get-away.

"That's my uncle," said Carl coolly. "I'm civilized and educated, or I'd kill him. Come on, let's get back."

The others thought it best not to make any further reference to the matter, and silently followed Carl, the bowl again in his possession, across the ladder spanning the cascade. At the same time the boys in the plane, who had watched the conflict with tense anxiety, started back to the Fort.

"Gee, I can't stand much more to-day," ejaculated Fly, as they circled the tower for the last time.

"Strange what a lot can happen to a fellow in a short time," commented Herb, reviewing mentally the many adventures in which they had all been involved that summer.

"But most important of all," continued Fly, "we've laid the Thunder Bird low—we've done something for your father."

"Now the next thing is for you to teach us all to aviate," laughed the southerner. "But I don't believe I can ever handle a machine as you do."

"Sure," exclaimed Fly. "Why you—" but he stopped short with an exclamation of horror that fairly froze his companion's blood. At the same moment, Herb was conscious that something—he knew not what—had happened. The loud insistent voice of the machinery was abruptly stilled.

Looking perplexedly at Fly, he saw great drops of perspiration starting out on the young pilot's forehead. "The motor is dead," he breathed, his throat and lips going dry.

For a moment Herb's heart seemed to stop in sympathy with the mechanism that had failed them.

"Can't you volplane," he said giddily.

"Rocks, peaks, crags," sputtered Fly. Oh, if he were only over the smooth meadow. But to volplane here would mean certain death. As it was, he was sliding along at a perceptibly lessening speed. Any moment the machine might balk and rear, hurling them both to destruction.

But Fly was plucky and after the first shock he recovered his nerve, bending every energy of mind and body to maintain his balance. To keep high enough and steady enough until they left the mountains was his sole endeavor. After that, he felt confident that he could volplane with safety into the meadow. Even now he could see this haven of inviting green tantalizingly near at hand—and yet so far away. Grudgingly he was obliged to slant, else the machine would rear and wrest the control from him. But the slightest incline was too much now, for it meant landing on the rocks.

Though a fever raged in his brain, he was rapidly calculating. Someway he must save Herb. That was his predominant thought.

"I'll do it," he suddenly exclaimed through his shut teeth, at the same moment swooping down with such rapidity that his companion's head was jerked violently back, and he grabbed tight hold of his seat. Confident that the end had come, the southerner resolutely shut his eyes and relaxed.

But he was sitting rigid a moment later, for the aeroplane had shot upward again with a jerk, mounting higher and higher, until it seemed ready to tip backwards and whirl to earth like the mortally wounded Thunder Bird.

"Fly!" he implored, suddenly petrified with the fear that his companion had lost his senses and was deliberately throwing caution to the winds with hopeless recklessness.

The suspense was only for a second, although that seemed to span an eternity. At the last moment, when the plane seemed ready to tilt and somersault backwards, Fly fairly threw it forward with main force, and, as it plunged swiftly downward, he breathed a reassuring sigh. Below them they saw the carpet of the meadow spread out calm and serene, a pale slender stream winding its peaceful course zigzag between flower-decked banks—gently flowing waters that would have reflected their dash to death and destruction as undisturbedly as it mirrored their safe descent.

Dizzy and faint, but almost sick with joy, they landed gently on the bosom of mother earth. Fly had taken a desperate chance to clear the peaks, and had succeeded.

"Safe!" he groaned, too weak to move from the plane. "I'm so glad, old man," he added huskily. "If anything had happened to you—"

"Why, it's a couple of boys," a cheerful voice was saying just behind them.

Herb and Fly turned to see two men approaching the plane, and, at the same moment, their eyes took in another strange sight. A hundred feet or so behind them stood another plane!

"I must believe it, for I have seen it with my own eyes," continued the speaker, a slender young fellow with a spare blond mustache. "You accomplished a feat there, my boy, that I wouldn't attempt for fifty thousand dollars!"

"Who are you?" asked Fly weakly. Surely this was an apparition. The nerve which had upheld him in the face of imminent danger seemed now deserting him. He felt like falling over in a limp heap, abandoning himself to the sick faintness which made his head swim. He saw the stranger as in a haze, and his voice came to him faintly out of the vast distance.

"I'll get him some water," said the other man. "He looks sick."

"No wonder," exclaimed the other. "I never saw such a performance as that in my life."

"Is—is that plane yours?" asked Herb, who, like Fly, did not know whether the two strangers were real beings or ghosts.

"Sure. I just had a silly little breakdown. Stopped to mend it. Then—great Caesar, I saw you fellows up there. How my brain went traveling when I realized the plight you were in. And you came through! A couple of kids! Who is he?" he continued, referring to Fly. "Where did he learn to control like that—at his age!"

The speaker's friend was forcing Fly to drink the water he had brought for him from the stream, and when the boy had moistened his lips, the man bathed his brow and face with the solicitude of a brother.

But Fly's sinking spell was only momentary and he soon recovered his composure.

"Where you going?" demanded their new friend breezily. "I'm going to take charge of you. You're in no condition to fly any more to-day."

But the young aviator was made of stronger stuff.

"Oh, I can handle her all right," he said contemptuously, a little ashamed of the weakness he had shown.

"What!" ejaculated the blond young man, looking at his friend in amazement, as much as to say, "Listen to that, will you!"

"Nothing doing," he added, decidedly. "Barkely, just take care of our baby—follow us up—while I whirl this young dare-devil to—where will it be?"

"Fort Bayard," said Herb, laughing. Certainly, this was an engaging young fellow, and he didn't mind having him along at all.

"Now, young man, I'm going to throw you out of that seat if you don't move over, and let me run this thing!" commanded the stranger. "Hike!"

Fly good-naturedly gave way, for he shared Herb's admiration and was thoroughly pleased with this new acquaintance.

"Who—who are you?" asked Fly again, as the machine ascended.

"That's what I want to know about you," returned the stranger. "I'll tell if you will. My name's Chance."

"Chance!" gasped the boys at once.

"Sure. Ever hear of me?"

"You bet," answered Herb heartily. "You know Hawke, don't you?"

"Hawke the government aviator?" repeated the stranger in surprise.

"Yep."

"Well, he helped us to build this machine, and taught us how to run it," informed Fly.

"Build this machine?" Young Chance scrutinized his informant as he would look upon a strange, supernatural being.

"Say," he said. "We want fellows like you in New York. You wouldn't mind making some good money, would you?"

"I—I—" began Fly, but he could not wield his tongue somehow.

"Got a father around the Fort?" asked the young aviator brusquely.

"Yes—yes," answered Fly. "You must meet him."

That evening, when Herb met the boys returning from their mountain trip, triumphantly bearing the Thunder Bird, which Dunk and Jerry carried with the aid of a stout branch stuck through its bound feet, and happily flashing the golden bowl, he ceremoniously held up his hand for them to halt, demanding silence.

"We formed a Boy Scout patrol," he began strangely. "Didn't we?"

"Why—yes," replied Fred, wonderingly.

"That's nothing." Herb wrinkled his nose contemptuously. "And shot a grizzly?" he interrogated.

"Why yes," answered Gray, regarding him with a puzzled expression.

"That's nothin'," repeated the southerner. "We built an aeroplane," he went on. "That's nothin'. Mere trifle. We shot the Thunder Bird. Nothin', nothin' at all. That bowl's nothin'."

"Say, what you driving at," exclaimed Jerry. "Spit it out quick, or you to the bug house."

"Because something has happened that makes everythin' else look like a thunder clap when it quits."

"What?"

"Fly's goin' to New York to be an aviator with Chance!"

Vacation is over. We are again waiting for the train in the stuffy little depot at Silver City. Gray and Fred are there—they are going back to school. Mr. Phipps is there, smiling happily upon the handsome boy who is returning to college. Captain Crawford and his wife are there, proud of the stalwart young son they are sending to New Jersey, where he will complete his education at Princeton. Lieutenant Rivers and his wife are there, for Dunk is going to an eastern medical school.

And Carl is there, for Carl too is going to college. True, he lost the money he had saved for the purpose, but the golden bowl, which the boys persuaded him was his by right of conquest, proved to be of sufficient value to pay his way through and leave him a generous surplus. Thus, after all, the unselfish Indian realized his dream.

One of the boys is missing—Fly. He left a month ago for New York, where he has already met Mr. Chance, and is showing promise of being one of the most successful bird-men of the day. Before leaving the Fort, he gave all of the boys sufficient instruction to enable them to fly alone, and to qualify for the aviation medal, which, with a number of other awards, for first aid, machinery, marksmanship and stalking, were promptly awarded to the members of the Thunder Bird Patrol, at the recommendation of Hawke, who remembers them now and then with letters from Juarez.

The *Thunder Bird* aeroplane is safely packed away at the Phipps ranch, where it is to remain until next summer, for, if all turns out well, the boys are again to spend their next vacation in New Mexico.

As for the Thunder Bird himself, stuffed and mounted it occupies a prominent place in the Phipps ranch-house. So hideous is its aspect even in this harmless condition, that you would not care to stumble on it unawares in the dark, but it no longer makes nightly visits to the sheepfold for prey.

The treacherous redskin, his idol dead, has disappeared, and, according to Tommy, has gone back to the Mexican gold fields.

The antiquated train finally reaches the old depot, puffing and blowing as though short of breath. Our young friends scramble into the dusty coaches, stumbling over their suit cases, and bumping good-naturedly against one another.

There are reluctant but cheerful good-byes, and the wheels turn slowly, gathering speed as the last coach passes the station. The last we see of it, handkerchiefs are still fluttering and hats waving farewell.

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