

ACROSS
THE
PACIFIC

ACROSS THE PACIFIC

F. W.
DIXON



Ted Scott
Flying Stories

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

GROSSET
& DUNLAP

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Title: Across the Pacific, or, Ted Scott's Hop to Australia

Date of first publication: 1928

Author: Franklin W. Dixon [Duffield, John W.] (1859-1946)

Date first posted: Feb. 7, 2017

Date last updated: Feb. 7, 2017

Faded Page eBook #20170208

This ebook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>



HE SOUGHT TO TEAR HIS FINGERS LOOSE FROM TED'S THROAT.

Across the Pacific. *Frontispiece.*

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES
ACROSS THE PACIFIC
OR
TED SCOTT'S HOP TO AUSTRALIA

By
FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF
"OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS," "FIRST STOP HONOLULU," "THE HARDY BOYS: THE TOWER
TREASURE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
WALTER S. ROGERS

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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Across the Pacific

Printed in the United States of America

TO THE
HEROES OF THE AIR

WILBUR WRIGHT—ORVILLE WRIGHT
The first men to fly in a heavier-than-air machine

LOUIS BLERIOT
The first to fly the English Channel

CAPTAIN JOHN ALCOCK
The first to fly from Newfoundland to Ireland

COMMANDER RICHARD E. BYRD
In command flying over the North Pole

COLONEL CHARLES A. LINDBERGH
First to fly alone from New York to Paris

CLARENCE D. CHAMBERLIN
First to fly from New York to Germany

LIEUTENANTS LESTER J. MAITLAND—ALBERT F. HEGENBERGER
First to fly from California to Hawaii

CAPTAIN HERMANN KOEHL—COMMANDANT JAMES C.
FITZMAURICE
First to fly Westward across the North Atlantic—Ireland
to Greenely Island

CAPTAIN GEORGE H. WILKINS—CARL B. EIELSON
First to fly over the Polar Sea from Alaska to Spitzbergen

And a host of other gallant airmen of the Past and
Present who, by their daring exploits, have made aviation
the wonderful achievement it is to-day

THIS SERIES OF BOOKS

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

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ACROSS THE PACIFIC

CHAPTER I

A DESPERATE DILEMMA

“Well, here we are safe and sound once more in the United States!” exclaimed Walter Hapworth, as he looked below from the plane in which he was flying and saw the rolling waters of the Rio Grande that marked the borders of the two republics.

“That’s what,” replied Ted Scott, the famous aviator, who was sitting at the controls of the *Silver Streak*, the plane that was so closely associated with his own renown, “and mighty glad I am to be again in our country.”

“You certainly did have a rather lively time while you were down in Mexico,” laughed Hapworth.

“Lively and deadly at the same time,” replied Ted. “It was the first country in which I ever had a rope about my neck. Gee, I can feel the clutch of it yet! I wake up sometimes at night with the sensation of strangling.”

“It sure was a case of touch and go,” rejoined Hapworth. “If that little Conchita hadn’t come along just then, they’d have strung you up. About the closest call you ever had, I guess, and that’s saying a lot. But I just happened to think, Ted, how is it that we’re able to talk together as easily as we’re doing? In all our other trips the engine was roaring so that we had to scribble notes to each other and send them through the tube. What’s the answer? I can hear you now with hardly any trouble at all.”

“I was wondering how long it would be before you tumbled,” smiled Ted. “I’ve added a silencer that does away with most of the noise. As a matter of fact, I had the thing on board before we left Bromville on our trip to Mexico City, but you were in such a hurry to get away that I hadn’t made all the connections. Since I’ve been in Mexico I’ve fixed it up to the queen’s taste, and now it’s working perfectly.”

“It’s an immense improvement,” commented Hapworth. “It used to get my goat to have to write a note when time was pressing and I needed to speak to you at once. What is the contrivance that you’re using?”

“It’s a muffler that moderates the noise from the exhaust,” explained Ted. “It consists of a metal cylinder with the exhaust manifold pipe welded to one side. Inside the cylinder is a tube with the back portion perforated with small holes or gills. The ends are open to the air, so that when the plane is in flight the air passes through the tube creating a negative pressure in the rear walls where the gills are located. This increases the velocity of the exhaust gases inside the device and the gases leave through the small gills and mix with the air that has entered the front end. And you see for yourself how much that reduces the noise from the engine.”

"It sure does," agreed Hapworth, "but doesn't it reduce the speed?"

"Just a trifle," replied Ted. "But the effect on the climb and the speed is almost negligible. Now all that remains is for some one to invent a device that will do away with the noise of the propeller and the valve gears, and then there won't be any sound at all worth speaking of."

"What a boon that would have been on our Pacific trip," observed Hapworth. "By the way, Ted, speaking of the Pacific, did you read, of those fellows that are planning to make a flight from California to Australia?"

"I read something about it," said Ted. "But so many of those schemes go up in smoke that I haven't paid much attention to it. California to Australia! Gee, that will be some hop, especially if they make it a non-stop flight!"

"I don't think they're quite so ambitious as that," said Hapworth. "They'll probably stop at Hawaii and Fiji on the way. But even at that, some of the stretches will be three thousand miles or more."

"I wish them luck," said Ted. "But just now I've got something nearer than Australia to think of. I don't like the looks of that cloud bank," pointing to a black and menacing mass on the horizon. "Looks as though we were in for a spell of weather."

"Any flying field where we could land, if necessary?" asked Hapworth. "I'd hate to be caught in a Texas norther."

"No airport within a couple of hundred miles," replied Ted. "Of course the country is pretty level here and I could probably make a landing, though I'd hate to like the mischief."

Gradually the cloud bank extended until it covered the greater part of the sky. The sun was blotted out and a twilight sombreness enveloped the plane and its occupants. Landmarks were no longer distinguishable and Ted Scott was reduced to depending altogether upon his instruments.

On through the gathering darkness the *Silver Streak* whizzed at the rate of over a hundred miles an hour.

But any hope that Ted might have cherished of outspeeding the storm proved futile. It was gathering now with great rapidity.

From the dense banks of clouds jagged sheets of lightning shot athwart the sky. The crash of thunder became deafening and almost continuous. The rain still held off, but the wind was steadily rising and its ominous growl was like that of a wild beast at its kill.

It came at first in fitful gusts, each one stronger than the last. Then it burst upon the aviators almost with the fury of a hurricane.

It struck the *Silver Streak* on the quarter with a violence that almost made the plane turn turtle. It was all that Ted could do to get her on an even keel. By skilful jockeying he got her in a position where the wind beat directly from the back and then he let her drive.

Had the wind continued in one direction, his task would have been comparatively easy. But every few minutes it veered and at times appeared to be coming from all quarters at once, so that the plane seemed to be in the very vortex of a cyclone.

Ted had been in many storms but none worse than this. The unchained demons of the tempest tugged at the plane as though they would tear it to pieces. Once it turned completely over, so that the occupants were flying with their heads down, and only the straps by which they were held prevented them from being hurled to the earth below.

When, after a struggle, Ted had brought the machine right side up, he pulled the joy stick and began to climb for altitude, hoping to find a quieter stratum of air. He had been flying at an altitude of about five thousand feet. Now he mounted to eight thousand, ten, twelve and fifteen. But the higher he got the fiercer the gale seemed to become, and he again descended to a lower level.

The rain was now falling in torrents, as though all the windows of heaven had been opened. It crashed against the window of the cockpit, obscuring Ted's sight and making it impossible to see twenty feet ahead of him.

Still, as long as he maintained his present altitude, he knew that he could not come into collision with anything, unless indeed some other plane should come zooming through the darkness and strike him head on.

With every moment the storm increased in fury. At times the *Silver Streak* was tossed about like a chip on the surface of a torrent. A lesser pilot would have got rattled by the terrific power of the elements and lost control of the plane. Then would have come an awful downward rush and—death!

Ted jockeyed the plane as a skilful rider manages a spirited steed, yielding here, stiffening there, now rising, now descending, seeking to outwit the wind and ever get the violence of its blow on the quarter of the plane that could stand it best.

A thrill went through him, however, when he found that one of the wings failed to respond as it should to a move of his controls.

"What is it, Ted?" Hapworth shouted in his ear, noting the worried look on his companion's face.

"This right wing," replied Ted. "It isn't working just right. Perhaps it's been strained by the storm or, worse still, it may be cracked."

If the latter were the case, they were indeed in a precarious situation, for the crack would be apt to widen under the beating of the gale, and if the wing once gave way they were done for. No human skill could in that case keep the plane from falling to the earth like a bird with a broken wing.

Now Ted's task was doubled, for he had to manipulate the plane in such a way that most of the strain would come upon the uninjured left wing. He had to summon all his resources to accomplish it in the face of the fury of the elements.

He did it, however, to a great degree in the hour of stress and strain that followed. Every moment he dreaded to hear a snap that would tell him that he and his companion were doomed.

Then at length the storm began to abate. The lightning flashes became less frequent. The rolling of the thunder subsided to a dull muttering and finally ceased. The torrential rain dwindled to a drizzle and above them rifts of light began to appear through the darkness of the clouds.

Ted was drenched with perspiration from his tremendous efforts, and every sinew and muscle felt as though it had been beaten. But a great load had been lifted from his mind now that the wind had died down and he discovered that he could keep the plane on an even keel.

But now a landing had become imperative so that he could repair the injured wing. He could see clearly that it was drooping and at any moment might give way.

He looked downward to see if any suitable spot offered itself. But here he found himself baffled. The hot earth was steaming from the rain that had drenched it and was enveloped in haze. He did not know whether he was over a city or the open plain, woodland or river.

"Doesn't look any too good, eh, Ted?" said Hapworth.

"It sure doesn't," replied Ted. "Do you notice how the plane is wobbling? And this haze is so thick that you could cut it with a knife."

He pushed the joy stick and the plane gradually descended until it was flying at a height of three hundred feet. Ted did not dare to go farther for fear that he might hit a tree or a steeple.

Even at this lower altitude, however, he could not discern the earth, and his anxiety grew with every passing moment.

He thought of climbing out on the wing and attempting to repair it while the plane was in motion. But he could not tell just how far the crack, if any existed, was from the body of the plane, and there was the danger that his added weight might bring on the catastrophe he dreaded.

Just then a shout came from Hapworth.

“I think the haze is scattering, Ted!” he cried. “I caught a glimpse just now of the ground.”

“Good!” exclaimed Ted. “What did it look like? Open and level?”

“Couldn’t say,” replied his companion, “but it must be fairly level, for I thought I caught sight of a railway track. Perhaps I’ll have another chance in a minute.”

But the minute was multiplied by five, by ten, before their eagerly searching eyes were rewarded.

“I see it,” shouted Ted. “A railway track, sure enough. I’m going down. The plane won’t keep afloat ten minutes longer and we’ve got to take a chance.”

The haze was shredding rapidly now, and Ted could plainly see the railway tracks stretching beneath him, although he could not see far in any direction.

On the other side of the tracks was what appeared to be an open field and this Ted chose as his objective.

Laboring painfully now, the plane, which had come down to within a few feet of the ground, was moving slowly toward the tracks when Ted’s ears caught the whistle of a train and a moment later a rush and roar that told him it was near at hand.

His blood froze in his veins. He could not stop at that short notice. He tried to rise, but the plane failed to respond.

He *must* cross the tracks!

CHAPTER II

DEADLY PERIL

As this necessity burst upon him, Ted Scott heard the rumble of another train approaching from a different direction.

The first train he knew from the sound was an express. The second by the same token he sensed to be a freight.

The express would consist of only a few cars and at the rate it was traveling would be past in a flash. The freight was apt to be a long train and would be proceeding slowly. If luck helped him to avoid the first, he would be almost sure to hit the second.

These thoughts passed through his mind like lightning.

Out of the haze burst the express like a snorting monster and disappeared into the mists ahead. That peril at least was averted.

But even as it vanished the locomotive of the freight appeared on the further track not more than thirty feet away and directly in the path of the plane.

“Jump, Walter!” shouted Ted.

Hapworth obeyed instantly and came to the ground ten feet below without injury.

“Jump yourself!” he yelled back, as he scrambled to his feet.

Ted did not answer.

His shout to Hapworth had been prompted by two reasons. The first was to save his comrade’s life, even though he himself should die at his post. The second was to lighten the plane.

He tugged desperately at the joy stick and this time the plane, relieved of Hapworth’s weight, responded. Slowly it mounted, mounted.

Ted’s heart was in his mouth.

Would he clear the freight?

And while his eyes are seeking an answer to this question, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Ted was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Ted Scott could not recall ever having known his parents. As far back as he could remember he had been in the care of James and Miranda Wilson, a worthy couple who had migrated from New England and settled in Bromville, a little town in the Mid-West. They had treated the little waif kindly and sent him to school. But when the lad was about ten years old they had died within a few months of each other and the little fellow was again at the mercy of the world.

His forlorn condition appealed to Eben and Charity Browning, themselves childless, who took the boy into their hearts and home and henceforth regarded him as their own. Ted on his part was as devoted to them as though they had been his own parents.

Eben Browning was a genial, kindly man and owned the Bromville House, which at that time was the only hotel in the little town. Eben's friendliness and Charity's cooking secured for them a large patronage from traveling men and also from fishermen who visited the place in search of sport in the Rappock River that ran through the village. For a long time the hotel was prosperous.

Then, however, came a change in fortune. The Devally-Hipson Corporation established a mammoth Aero plant on the outskirts of Bromville, and the place began to grow with magical rapidity. There was a vast army of workmen and a host of officials to be provided with homes and temporary lodgings, and several new hotels sprang up to meet the need. These were provided with all the new equipment and facilities and the old Bromville House looked shabby by contrast. The fishing contingent clung in large measure to Eben, but the traveling men naturally went to the new hotels for the luxuries they furnished and also to maintain the prestige of their firms.

To cap the climax, the Hotel Excelsior, a mammoth structure, came into being under the ownership of Brewster Gale, a domineering, purse-proud individual, who had accumulated a fortune by means, it was whispered about, that would not stand close inspection. The hotel far outclassed anything in town and would have stood favorable comparison with many in the large cities. An additional drawing card was a superb golf links attached to the hotel that soon became a favorite place for tournaments and drew devotees of the royal game from all parts of the country.

This competition that he could not hope to meet was naturally a sore blow to Eben. But what made it exceptionally exasperating was that Brewster Gale's prosperity was largely based on a fraud he had perpetrated on Eben. The latter had at one time owned all the property on which the Hotel Excelsior and the golf links were located. Gale had come to him and bargained to buy it, and as he offered what Eben regarded as a fair price the latter had agreed to sell.

A few hundred dollars were paid down to bind the bargain. But that was all the money Eben received. By the aid of cunning and unscrupulous lawyers and a lot of legal jugglery—forced sales, reorganizations—Eben found himself frozen out, while Gale had apparently achieved a clear title to the property. It was a swindle, pure and simple, and Eben, bewildered, enraged, but without money to prosecute his case in the courts, where Gale could have dragged the matter along for years, was forced to

submit to fate.

As Ted grew older he did all he could to help the old folks along, running errands, painting, repairing, assisting in the dining room and the kitchen in all the time he had from school hours. Then, when the Aero plant came to Bromville, he secured a job there, turning all his money over to Eben and Charity.

The work was very congenial, for he had a keen interest in the making of airplanes and in all that concerned flying. He rapidly rose from one position to a higher until there was nothing about plane construction that he did not know. More and more he longed to become an airman. But hundreds of dollars would be required to go to a flying school, and the old folks needed every dollar he could earn in order to keep afloat.

One morning Walter Hapworth visited the airplane works. He was in town participating in a golf tournament at the time and wondered whether he could not perhaps get a new thrill out of flying. He was a young and wealthy business man and was anxious to learn at first hand all about airplane construction. Ted was assigned to show him through the works and, mere boy that he was, answered every question that Hapworth put so promptly and intelligently that the latter became interested in the lad. Learning how keen he was about flying, he offered to give Ted money enough to go to a flying school.

Ted was astounded and delighted. He finally accepted the money as a loan and went to the school. Here it became apparent at once that he was a born flyer. His courage, nerve and judgment were of the highest order, and when he left the school he had no difficulty in obtaining a job in the Air Mail Service.

In that work he soon became preëminent among his fellows. He was assigned to a night route between St. Louis and Chicago and it became proverbial that under any conditions of fog and storm Ted Scott would "get there."

About that time a wealthy New York man had offered a prize of twenty-five thousand dollars to the first man who should make a non-stop air flight from New York to Paris. Some of the most famous flyers in the country were preparing to compete. Ted longed to enter the competition, but had no plane and no backing.

Hapworth learned of his ambition and offered to finance the venture. Ted got leave of absence from the Air Service and went to San Francisco to supervise the building of his plane, the *Hapworth*, named after his benefactor. When it was completed Ted jumped in for his hop to New York.

Rumors were abroad that an unknown youngster named Scott was planning to compete with the famous veterans already enlisted. The country shrugged its shoulders and laughed. It seemed to some ludicrous, to others suicidal.

But the nation stopped laughing when Ted flew from San Francisco to St. Louis in a single hop in the fastest time that had ever been made for the distance by a flyer traveling alone. And when, scarcely pausing to take breath, he made one more hop from St. Louis to New York the whole country was agog with interest.

Then one misty morning Ted mounted into the skies and turned the nose of his plane toward Europe. What breathless excitement in America followed his flight—how he battled with storm and fog over the yeasty surges of the Atlantic—the hairbreadth escapes he had from disaster—is told in the first volume of this series entitled: “Over the Ocean to Paris.”

The day after his flight Ted woke to find himself the most famous person in the world. America went mad over him. Scarcely anything else was thought or spoken of. Honors and gifts were showered upon him. Kings and presidents of European countries received him with the honors given to a potentate. His return home was a triumph, and the tremendous ovations accorded him in New York, Washington and other cities had no parallel in American history. But through it all he kept his head, and his lack of egotism and his irresistible smile enshrined him still more deeply in the hearts of his people.

Shortly after his return came the tragedy of the Mississippi flood, and Ted at once enlisted in the aviation corps of the Red Cross and achieved wonders in bringing aid and comfort to the stricken inhabitants of that section. Following this, he reentered the Air Mail Service in the dangerous region of the Rockies and had many stirring adventures. He entered the contest for the flight over the Pacific from San Francisco to Hawaii and again carried off the victory. And in the course of these achievements he was able to bring Gale to book and compel restitution to Eben and also to unravel the mystery that clung about his parentage.

Still later, he made a perilous flight over the West Indies, rescuing a pair of lost airmen and incidentally making the find of a treasure of pearls. On his return he found that Hapworth at Bromville was especially anxious to make a quick trip to Mexico to thwart some rascals who were raiding his oil-well property there and Ted offered to take him in his plane.

How eventful that journey proved—how Ted helped his friend to achieve his object—how he entered upon a perilous mission to a rebel stronghold—his fights with bandits—the conspiracy against his life—his capture and imprisonment—and how he was saved at the last moment when his enemies had planned to hang him—is told in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: “South of the Rio Grande.”

At first Ted had thought to return to the United States alone. But there had been an unexpected delay and after that Walter Hapworth had concluded to go with him.

And now to return to Ted, as his plane drove toward the freight train now only a few yards away.

Could he clear it? If he came in collision with it, the plane would be crushed like an eggshell and he himself would be almost certainly killed.

Slowly, painfully the crippled plane went higher. The wheels struck the top of one of the cars, rebounded, lifting the plane a trifle higher, and the *Silver Streak* passed over the car into the field beyond!

Death had stretched out its skeleton hand, but once more Ted Scott had eluded its clutch!

Ted brought the plane to a landing, unfastened his straps and climbed out. He had been under a fearful strain and it had left him a little shaken.

From the platforms and tops of the train came shouts from the train hands and waving of lanterns. They had seen the impending tragedy and were delighted at the daring airman's escape.

Ted smiled and waved back and then threw himself on the ground. And there he was when Hapworth, after the train had passed, came rushing across the tracks to him.

"Thank fortune!" ejaculated Hapworth fervently. "I thought it was all up with you, Ted, that time."

"Thought so myself," returned Ted, "and it surely would have been for us both, if you hadn't lightened the plane by jumping. As it was, I grazed the top of a car."

They looked about them. They were in a large field many acres in extent. There was no village in sight, but at some distance was a substantial ranch house with a number of out-buildings.

"I guess that's where the owner of this field lives," remarked Ted. "If I find there is a good deal of repairing to do on the plane, we may have to ask shelter there for the night. Let's take a look at that wing and see how badly it is damaged."

They inspected it closely and found that the break was bad and would require a lot of time and work to put it again in condition.

"Look at that," said Ted. "More than half way through! It's almost a miracle that it lasted as long as it did. We were sure at our last gasp when we cleared that freight."

"Can you fix it up so that it will carry us to Bromville?" asked Hapworth with some concern.

"Sure thing," replied Ted, who, from his experience in making planes, was as skilful a mechanic as he was an airman. "But it will take time and we'll have to stay here overnight. I think, though, that we'll be able to get away the first thing tomorrow

morning.”

“Here comes the owner of the place now, I imagine,” said Hapworth, as two figures emerged from the house, “and that’s probably his kid with him.”

A stalwart man, accompanied by a boy of about twelve, came up to them with a genial smile upon his face.

“Hello, strangers,” he hailed them when within speaking distance. “‘Tisn’t often that we see anything of an airplane in these parts. Having trouble?”

“Yes,” replied Ted and went on briefly to relate the events that had compelled him to land. “We’ve got a pretty big job on hand and we may have to ask you to put us up for the night,” he concluded.

“Only too glad to,” said the ranchman heartily. “My name’s Burton.”

“And mine is Scott,” returned Ted, “and this is my friend, Mr. Hapworth.”

The men exchanged hand clasps. The boy tugged eagerly at his father’s coat and whispered something to him.

The ranchman smiled.

“This youngster of mine wants to know if your first name is Ted,” he said. “He’s just crazy over that fellow that flew the Atlantic, and every time he hears the name of Scott he gets het up. He thinks he’s the greatest thing that ever happened. And so do I for that matter.”

“My name happens to be Ted,” was the answer, “but of course there are lots of Ted Scotts in the world.”

“Yes,” agreed Burton, looking at him keenly, “but not so many in the flying line.”

Hapworth interposed.

“My friend here is as modest as he is famous,” he said with a smile. “I’ll tell you now that he is the Ted Scott that all the world knows about, the man who not only flew the Atlantic but the Pacific as well.”

The effect was electric.

“Glory hallelujah!” shouted Burton. “This is my lucky day. I never dreamed that I’d meet Ted Scott in the flesh. And on my own farm too! Won’t Mandy be tickled when she hears of it? Put it there again, Mr. Scott.”

Ted smilingly extended his hand and Burton shook it as though he would wrench the arm from the socket.

The boy was gazing at his idol in rapt adoration. Again he whispered to his father.

“I guess so, Billy,” his father laughed. “My kid wants to know if you will shake hands with him, too. It will give him something to talk about all his life.”

Ted laughingly complied and the boy’s freckled face shone with delight and

gratification.

“Now run up and tell your mother that Ted Scott is going to be with us for supper and to spend the night,” laughed his father. “Gee, but maybe she won’t be flustered! And the meal she’ll fix up for you will make your hair curl.”

The boy, bursting with the news, darted off, and Burton turned to Ted.

“This ranch is yours while you stay here,” he declared. “Just tell me what you want, material or men to help you, and you shall have it on the jump.”

“It’s mighty good of you,” replied Ted. “I’m learning now what Texas hospitality is like. I’ll call on you for anything I need. I’ve got all the tools I need, but I may have to have some boards. As to men, my friend here will be help enough.”

He accompanied Burton to one of the out-buildings where he found the material he required and then went back to the plane, where he and Hapworth worked busily until Billy came down to where they were and summoned them to supper.

Mrs. Burton, a buxom, motherly woman, received them, fluttering with agitation, and gave them the heartiest kind of a welcome. Her husband had made no mistake about that supper, which was fit for a king, and both Ted and Hapworth enjoyed it hugely.

After supper they sat in the homely but comfortable living room and Ted had to answer a host of questions about his Atlantic and Pacific flights. He glossed over his exploits as carelessly as he could and gave full measure of credit for his success to Hapworth, who had accompanied him in his Pacific flight and whose backing had made his Atlantic venture possible.

His hosts listened breathlessly, and Billy, who had been permitted to sit up beyond his usual bedtime on this special occasion, was simply in a trance. It was far and away the greatest day of his life. And the same might almost be said of his hosts and the ranch hands who had been invited to share the party. These were brawny, hardy men who knew courage when they saw it, and their admiration of Ted was as limitless as that of Burton and his wife.

It was late when the aviators retired, and after an early breakfast the next morning Ted excused himself and hurried out to his plane.

Hapworth, who had tarried in conversation with his hosts, came out of the house hurriedly a few minutes later and rushed toward Ted waving a newspaper.

“What is it?” asked Ted, a bit startled by his friend’s excitement.

“Look at this!” cried Hapworth, thrusting the paper in front of Ted’s face.

CHAPTER III

THE AIR MAIL ROBBERY

Wonderingly, Ted Scott dropped his tools and took the paper that Hapworth extended to him.

A screaming headline caught his eye:

“Air Mail Stolen. Pilot Unconscious. Plane Gone. Loss Estimated at Fifty Thousand Dollars. No Clue to the Thieves.”

Ted’s pulse quickened.

“Gee!” he exclaimed. “First time I’ve ever heard of anything like that. How did they ever get away with it?”

He read the story eagerly, but had not reached the end of the first paragraph when he broke out:

“Allenby! Ed Allenby! Good old Ed! He was the pilot of the plane.”

“You know him, then?” queried Hapworth.

“Do I know him?” returned Ted. “Know him from the ground up. A pal of mine in the Rocky Mountain section of the Air Mail Service. One of the best. How on earth did that thing happen to him? I cannot understand, for he is a level-headed pilot.”

“Read the whole story out loud,” said Hapworth. “I only glanced at the headlines and hurried out here with it because I knew it would hit you hard.”

Ted read. The story was necessarily based on what the aviator himself had told the government authorities when they questioned him. He had left the airport at Denver on a trip to Pocatello, Idaho, carrying a load of mail that he was told before he started was very valuable. Everything had gone all right until he was about three hours out. Then he had begun to feel sick. His head was dizzy and his eyesight dimmed. He fought against the growing sickness, but the symptoms grew steadily worse and he feared that his senses were going.

He searched for a suitable landing spot and finally brought the plane to earth. He tried to climb out of it. That was the last he remembered.

When he came to his senses he found himself lying upon the ground. He staggered to his feet and looked around for his plane.

It was gone!

He rubbed his eyes. He thought that he must be the victim of an hallucination, that his sickness had affected his brain. But the fact was there. The plane had vanished!

It could not have gone off by itself. Could he have wandered away from it in

delirium? But there were the marks the plane had made in landing. If there were any other marks made by a subsequent takeoff, they were not discernible. Nor could he note any other footprints in the vicinity than this own.

Bewildered and still faint from his sickness, he had made his way on foot to the nearest town and telephoned his strange story to the Air Mail authorities. By them it was at once relayed to Washington and the Secret Service officials had got busy.

Up to the time the paper had gone to press no clue had been found to the mystery. The authorities were all at sea. The pilot had not been arrested, but he was being kept under strict surveillance. It was evident that strong doubts were entertained as to the truth of his story.

“Surveillance!” snorted Ted indignantly, as he dropped the paper. “Ed Allenby under surveillance! That means that he may be jugged at any moment. Why, Ed’s as honest as the day is long. I’d trust him with a million dollars, if I had it, and never lose a minute’s sleep over it.”

“That may be,” pondered Hapworth, “and probably it is, since you seem to know him so well. But if it were any fellow you didn’t know, you’d be the first to admit that his story sounds fishy. Own up, now, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it does,” admitted Ted reluctantly.

“For what would be simpler,” went on Hapworth, “than for the pilot to be in cahoots with a gang of robbers, bring his plane down at some place previously agreed on where the thieves would be waiting and deliver it with the mail to some one of the gang who knew how to handle the plane and would make off with it. Then the pilot could take an emetic or something that would make him look and act sick for a time and finally come into town with his story. Then, later on, he could get his share of the swag, or perhaps he had been paid in advance. What other theory is more natural?”

“He might have been doped by some of the gang beforehand,” defended Ted.

“Sure,” agreed Hapworth, “but how would the gang know just when and where that dope would take effect and he would have to come down? And if he didn’t come down at the place they guessed, the robbery would have been all off. Allenby is probably as innocent as you think he is, but all the same I’d hate to be in his shoes.”

“So would I,” assented Ted. “Poor old Ed! I know just how he must be feeling. And all he’s got against any accusation is his own unsupported word. I know though that he’s innocent, and just as soon as I get to a telegraph station I’m going to send a wire telling him so.”

“He’s lucky in having so staunch a friend,” replied Hapworth. “But now let’s

hustle and get this job done. It's a beautiful day for flying, and if we have luck we may get to Bromville before nightfall."

In about an hour the last of the repairs had been completed, and Ted and Hapworth went up to the house to bid their kind hosts goodbye.

"I wish I was going with you up in the air," said Billy wistfully.

A final farewell, and Ted and Hapworth took their seats and the *Silver Streak* soared into the ether. As a last treat to his hosts Ted gave a breath-taking exhibition of trick flying, and then pointed the nose of the plane toward Bromville.

They crossed the railroad tracks, and Ted could scarcely repress a shudder as he looked below at the scene of what might so easily have been a tragedy.

His heart was humble and grateful at his narrow escape. Had Charity been praying for him, he wondered?

Dear old Charity! And Eben, who was equally dear! How much he owed to them! What would he have become if they had not taken him under their protecting wings? They had indeed been father and mother to him.

His thoughts reverted to his own father and mother, whom he could not remember ever having seen. Both were now sleeping their last sleep. He rejoiced that he had been able to vindicate his father's memory.

His earlier talk with Hapworth about Australia recurred to him. His pulses quickened at the thought of that distant continent on the other side of the earth. He envied the aviators who were planning to make that tremendous jump. That would be a feat that, if it were successfully accomplished, would set the whole world talking.

While he was immersed in these reflections the *Silver Streak* had been fairly eating up space. Ted had let the gallant plane out to the limit, and she was traveling at the rate of a hundred and twenty miles an hour.

"I guess you made a good job of that wing," said Hapworth. "The plane seems to be as good as ever."

"She's a daisy," affirmed Ted enthusiastically. "She knows that she's on the way home and is eager to get into her hangar. And at this rate she'll get there before sundown."

His prophecy was confirmed, for while the sun was still shining that evening the *Silver Streak* was hovering above the air field at Bromville, preparing to make her landing.

It was quitting time at the Aero plant and the men were pouring out. There were excited gesticulations as they pointed at the *Silver Streak*, for they knew whom it carried.

Ted Scott had come home again!

And that was always an event in the life of the town. For Ted had “put Bromville on the map.” Because of Ted and his wonderful exploits the place was better known and more in the news than any place of equal size in the United States. Ted was far and away the town’s “first citizen.”

So that when the *Silver Streak* came down in long, swooping spirals and came to a stop after a perfect landing, Ted found himself surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd of his townspeople, all anxious to shake his hand and show him how much they thought of him.

“So you’ve been down in Mexico,” exclaimed Mark Lawson, as he clapped Ted on the shoulder. “How many bandits did you kill?”

“None whatever,” grinned Ted, “though some of them came near making an end of me.”

“That was a pretty neat trick you played on us,” put in Breck Lewis. “Making us think you were going North when all the time you were heading for the South!”

They chaffed and jested for a little while and then Ted, after seeing that the *Silver Streak* was safely bestowed in her hangar, hurried off, accompanied by Hapworth, to the Bromville House.

As he came in sight of it he stopped, startled and delighted at the change that had been wrought in the old place.

“Gee!” he exclaimed to Hapworth. “Look at that! Rather swagger, what?”

“The old folks have surely been busy while we were gone,” smiled Hapworth.

A complete new wing had been added to the structure, the veranda had been broadened and ornamented with ferns and flowering plants, the wooden steps had been replaced by handsome ones of white stone and a landscape gardener had worked wonders with the lawns and flower beds, in the center of which had been placed a tinkling fountain. The old place had been entirely rejuvenated.

But Ted was too eager to meet his foster father and mother to spend much time in studying what could be put off till later. He hurried up the path, took the steps three at a time and found himself enfolded in the arms of Eben and Charity, who had been waiting for him, for the news of his landing had spread rapidly through the town.

“My dear, dear boy!” exclaimed Eben as he embraced him.

“Thank the good Lord for bringing you back to us!” quavered Charity, clinging to him as though she would never let him go, while happy tears gathered in her faded eyes.

There was a rapid fire of questions and answers, and Hapworth, too, came in

for a cordial greeting, for he was a prime favorite with the old folks.

“My, how swell we are!” laughed Ted, after the first excitement was over. “I hardly dared to believe my eyes when I caught sight of the old place.”

“Not so bad,” said Eben carelessly, though it could be seen that he was fairly bursting with pride.

“Just wait till you see the inside,” beamed Charity. “We’ve got lots of new furniture, so fine that I declare I’m almost afraid to sit down on it. And lots of new bathrooms an’ everything. I keep tellin’ Pa that we mustn’t get puffed up, ’cause it’s all the Lord’s doin’s, blessed be His name.”

Ted gave the dear old lady an extra hard hug.

“If anyone on earth deserves it, it’s you and Dad,” he said. “And now let’s see all these fine things you’re so stuck up about. I’ll sure have to wipe my shoes on the mat before I come in after this.”

Proudly they led him through the house, and Ted’s sincere and exuberant delight at all he saw put the capsheaf on their pleasure. It had been a hard and weary road that the old folks had climbed, but they had reached the heights at last, and Ted’s happiness was equal to their own.

Charity had prepared a royal supper in honor of Ted’s return and it was served in their own private dining room with Hapworth as a guest. Afterward they sat up till midnight, while Charity listened shudderingly to the thrilling details of Ted’s Mexican trip, wiping her eyes at the story of his near hanging and the narrow escape from collision with the freight train.

It was late the next morning when Ted awoke, and after a leisurely breakfast he went out on the veranda with Hapworth to look over the morning paper.

Something he saw there made him sit up in his chair with a jerk.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

“What’s the matter?” asked Hapworth, as he noticed Ted’s start. “You act as though you’d had an electric shock.”

“Something like that,” admitted Ted. “Here’s another case just like that of Ed Allenby’s.”

“You don’t mean it,” exclaimed Hapworth.

“Sure as shooting,” replied Ted. “The only difference is that this is in the South, while the other was in the West. Fellow down in Texas on the route between San Antonio and Galveston. He had been flying for a while and then began to grow dizzy and had to make a landing. Just managed to do it and tumble out of his plane, and then everything went black. When he came to himself he found that the plane was gone. No sign of it anywhere. And from all account the mail he carried was just about as valuable as Ed’s. Now what do you make of that?”

“There’s only one thing to make of it,” replied Hapworth, greatly stirred up. “There’s an organized gang somewhere that’s discovered a new wrinkle and they’re working it for all it’s worth. The government has got a job on its hands for fair. There was danger enough in flying before, and now a new terror has been added to it.”

“What beats me,” went on Ted, “is how the gang knows just where the airman is going to come down. No doubt the pilot has been doped. But how can they tell just when the dope is going to operate?”

Ted referred again to the newspaper.

“The pilot took sick just about three hours after he had started,” he went on, “and if you’ll remember, Ed was about three hours out when his head began to swim. The gang may have studied the route and knew just where the pilots were apt to be three hours after they had started. And they gave them just enough dope to do its work in that three hours.”

“I don’t think science has got so far as that,” objected Hapworth. “It’s hard to believe that any man living can fix the working of a drug so precisely. Besides it would influence each separate man according to his constitution. It might make one unconscious at the end of two hours. Another man might resist the drug for four hours, even though it were the same dose. And with a plane traveling a mile a minute a difference, say, of twenty minutes would make the landing place twenty miles one side or the other of the place fixed upon. No, take it from me there’s got to be some other explanation than that.”

“I guess you’re right,” admitted Ted. “Besides, that theory would require that the

man be doped just before he steps into his plane. But he may have had the meal that gave the skunks a chance to dope his food or drink an hour or two before he started.”

“Nothing in the man’s story that suggests any other theory?” asked Hapworth.

“No,” said Ted, again glancing at the paper, “he seems to have had just the same experience as Ed. Oh, there is one difference,” he corrected himself. “This fellow, Nasmith is his name, has a dim recollection that just before he passed out he heard something that sounded like the engine of another plane. He couldn’t swear to it, but that’s his impression. By Jove, I’ve hit it!” Ted exclaimed, throwing the paper to the floor and springing to his feet. “That plane that Nasmith thought he heard was following on his trail, keeping out of sight and hearing until the rascals in it saw that Nasmith was wobbling and getting ready to go down. Then, when they saw that he was lying on the ground unconscious, they swooped down, gathered in the mail, and scooted away with it.”

“Sounds very reasonable,” said Hapworth thoughtfully. “But if they had a plane of their own, why didn’t they load it with the mail bags, skip out and leave Nasmith’s plane where it was?”

“Because he might have recovered and chased them,” replied Ted. “They wanted to have plenty of time to make their getaway.”

“That presupposes that the robber plane had an extra pilot or two that knew how to fly a plane,” said Hapworth.

“Sure thing,” assented Ted. “They left one of their fellows to take charge of Nasmith’s plane. But I doubt whether he flew in it very far. The markings on the plane would have given it away. Likely enough he took it to some place near a cliff, got out, pushed the plane over the precipice and let it smash. If I were in the Secret Service I’d search every such place as that within a hundred miles of where the robbery took place.”

“Whatever gang did that had brains behind it,” remarked Hapworth.

“Right you are,” agreed Ted. “But there’s one thing about this latest robbery. It lets Ed out. It shows that he was a victim just like the other fellow.”

“Not necessarily,” objected Hapworth. “It would be easy enough for some of the regular Air Mail pilots to put their heads together and agree on some such scheme as this. There are dishonest men in every profession, you know. They could pretend to have been doped and all the rest of it.”

“Could, but are not likely to,” said Ted. “The Air Mail fellows are a picked bunch and a fine lot. I’ve met hundreds of them and not a crook among them except that fellow, Felwig, that tried to blow up my plane with a bomb when I was flying the

mail over the Rockies. And as for Ed Allenby I'd stake my life on his honesty. No, I think my theory fits the facts. But gee, I'll bet the Air Mail fellows are an anxious lot these days! No one knows when he may be picked out for the next victim of the gang."

For the next two days Ted scanned the papers anxiously to learn everything he could about the mystery and the efforts that were being made to solve it. Although the Air Mail carrying was now in the hands of private concerns, the fact that the mail was involved in the robbery brought the matter into the scope of government action. The Secret Service men had been called into the case and it was promised that no pains would be spared to hunt down the miscreants.

Ted noted too with grief that Allenby had been taken into custody, though he was still vigorously denying that he had anything to do with the robbery. Ted instantly got into touch with him by wire, assuring him of his belief in his innocence and telling him to get the best lawyer he could at Ted's expense.

As Ted was returning from the telegraph office after having dispatched his message he saw approaching him at a little distance Brewster Gale, the proprietor of the Hotel Excelsior.

Now if there was anyone on earth that Gale hated venomously, it was Ted. This was not simply because Ted had exposed his nefarious schemes and compelled him to make restitution to Eben. That was bad enough from Gale's viewpoint, for money was his god.

But there was still a greater reason why he hated Ted.

Gale had two sons, twins, Gregory and Duckworth Gale, Greg and Duck for short. They were somewhat older than Ted and ever since they had reached young manhood had led a fast and dissipated life. They had been envious of Ted because of his popularity in the town and had always done all they could to down him. At first their antagonism had taken the form of petty annoyances, but later on, when Ted's exploits had made him famous throughout the world, they had resorted to more serious efforts to injure him. Once they had cut the struts of the plane in which he was about to give an exhibition, hoping that he would crash. On another occasion they had attempted to run him down with their car after he had thrashed them both for insulting a girl.

The climax came, however, when the two rascals, desperate because their gambling proclivities had involved them deeply in debt, had attempted one night to rob the safe of the Bromville House. They had struck down both Eben and Charity with clubs and narrowly escaped being murderers as well as thieves. Ted had followed up clues that convinced him of their guilt, but before he could have them

arrested they had taken alarm and left town, presumably on their way to South America. Later, when Ted had made his trip over the West Indies, he had come across the scoundrels in Porto Rico and despite their disguises had recognized and captured them and had had them sent back to Bromville for trial. They were convicted and sentenced to prison for a term of years.

Gale hated Ted worse than ever for having brought the thieves to justice. And hate was in his eyes now as they caught sight of Ted coming toward him.

Ted on his part had nothing but contempt for Gale, though he did not dignify the man enough to hate him. He would have passed Gale without a word, but the latter planted himself squarely in the young aviator's path.

"So our fake hero is back again," he sneered, as his malignant eyes fixed themselves on Ted's face.

"Neither fake nor a hero," replied Ted coolly. "Just a citizen of Bromville who's minding his own business and would be obliged if you would do the same."

"Minding his own business," repeated Gale sardonically. "It's seemed to me for a long time that you've made a special effort to attend to mine. I hear you nearly got your neck stretched in Mexico. I wish to heaven they'd made a good job of it!"

Ted's eyes blazed.

CHAPTER V

A CALL FOR HELP

“It’s lucky for you that you’re an old man, Brewster Gale,” exclaimed Ted, “or I’d give you something that you’d remember as long as you lived.”

“You have already,” returned Gale bitterly. “You’ve put my sons in jail.”

“They put themselves there because they were thieves and near murderers,” replied Ted. “They nearly killed my father and mother.”

“Your father and mother,” sneered Gale. “It ill bespeaks you to talk of jail when your real father died there.”

Ted went white, and before the look in his eyes Brewster Gale stepped back hastily.

“Another word like that and I’ll forget all about your age,” Ted gritted through his clenched teeth as he advanced toward the man.

There was such steel-like menace in Ted’s eyes that the old reprobate concluded that discretion was the better part of valor and, growling beneath his breath, passed on, throwing a look at Ted that, if looks could kill, would have annihilated him on the spot.

As Ted ran up the hotel steps a tall, keen-looking man who was sitting on the veranda rose to greet him.

“The famous Ted Scott, I presume,” said the stranger with a smile.

“I don’t know about the famous, but my name is Ted Scott,” replied Ted. “But how did you know?”

“As if there’s anyone in this country that doesn’t know your face!” was the reply. “I suppose you’re the most photographed young man in the world. Besides, I saw you in Washington when you came back from your flight over the Atlantic.”

“Well, since that’s settled, what can I do for you?” asked Ted, as he motioned to the stranger to resume his seat while he himself took another.

“I don’t know as yet,” replied the man, “but as I was passing near here I thought I’d run over and have a little chat with you. My name is Burnaby and I’m in the Secret Service.”

“Ah, yes,” said Ted and waited.

“Of course you’ve heard,” went on Burnaby, sinking his voice to a confidential tone, “of the remarkable happenings recently in the Air Mail Service?”

“You mean the robbery of the planes,” returned Ted. “Yes, I’ve read the stories with the keenest interest. In fact, I’ve hardly thought of anything else for the last few days. You know I’ve been in the Air Mail Service myself and anything of this kind

gets me all stirred up.”

“I don’t wonder,” replied Burnaby. “It’s just because you were in the service that I’ve come to you in the hope you can be of help to me. You see your reputation is such that every flyer who could do so has sought you out in order to know you better. In that way you have gained a vast acquaintanceship—more perhaps than any other man in that line of work.”

“I do know a lot of the boys,” admitted Ted.

“Our theory is,” went on Burnaby, “that this is an inside job. By that I mean that one or more of the scoundrels has been at some time in the Air Mail Service. That seems probable because of the familiarity the robbers have shown regarding the routes and schedules and the habits of the flyers. Some one who knows all the ins and outs is the brains of this gang. He may have been discharged for carelessness or dishonesty or any one of a dozen reasons. Now, do you know of any such cases?”

Ted thought for a minute before he answered.

“There’s just one I can think of,” he replied at last. “It’s a fellow who was in the Rocky Mountain Division at the time I was in that branch. He tried to blow up my plane and came near succeeding. But there’s no use of suspecting him in this case, for he’s in prison serving out his sentence.”

“What was his name?” asked Burnaby.

“Felwig, Sam Felwig,” replied Ted.

Burnaby gave a start.

“The fellow that broke jail,” he muttered.

“What?” asked Ted in astonishment. “Has he escaped? I hadn’t heard of it.”

“Happened about a month ago,” replied Burnaby.

“That explains it,” said Ted. “It must have occurred while I was on my Mexican trip.”

“I suppose so,” returned Burnaby. “I read about it at the time, but I hadn’t thought of it since. Thanks for the tip. It may prove a most valuable one. That fellow must have been a thoroughly bad egg to attempt to kill you.”

“He’s rank poison,” said Ted. “No scruples about anything. He’s got a fox-like cunning, too. This Air Mail robbery would be just the sort of a thing that would appeal to him. Then too, that first affair took place in the Rocky Mountain Division, the one that Felwig knew like a book.”

“We’ll follow up that clue for all it’s worth,” said Burnaby thoughtfully. “Now do you know of anyone else of the same stripe—some former airman?”

“No,” replied Ted, “not one. But I know some one who couldn’t have done it,” he went on, determined to put in a good word for his friend, “and that’s Ed Allenby,

the flyer of the first plane that was robbed. He's as clean as a hound's tooth. Take it from me, you people have made a mistake in having him arrested."

"Your loyalty to your friend does you credit," replied Burnaby, "and there's no one in this country whose opinion would go further with a jury than yours. I sincerely hope that your friend proves worthy of your confidence."

"How about this Nasmith?" asked Ted. "Is he a regular fellow?"

"Not a thing against him, as far as we've been able to find out," replied Burnaby. "His record since he's been in the service has been of the best."

"All of which goes to show that the flyers themselves are innocent," declared Ted. "They're victims instead of being crooks. There's an organized gang of highbinders that have set themselves to raid the Air Mail Service. Gee, how I'd like to get hold of the skunks!"

"Same here," said Burnaby. "They're not only robbers but potential murderers as well. If the airmen got so dizzy that they couldn't make a landing in time, they'd crash and be killed. But I won't take up your time any longer. I'm on my way to Chicago and it's nearly train time. Thanks for your tip on Felwig. The State authorities, no doubt, are trying to recapture him, and I'll see that the Federal officials join in the chase. In the meantime, if you learn anything about the matter, I'd be glad to have you communicate with me at once."

"I surely will," promised Ted, as he bade his visitor farewell.

For the next few days Ted Scott scanned the papers with feverish interest, not knowing every time he opened the sheet in the morning but what some similar outrage would be recorded. But the gang seemed to be lying low for a time, waiting till the excitement caused by their depredations should blow over.

He had received a letter from Allenby thanking him earnestly for his offer of help and assuring Ted of his innocence in the affair. Ted resolved that he would go and see his friend in person, but had to defer his intended trip for a short time, as he was very busy reading proofs on a revised edition of his book to which he had added an account of his Pacific flight.

While he was in the midst of this a telegram came to him which made him knit his brow in perplexity. It read:

"Can you fly over here and see me? Important.

"BRUIN."

CHAPTER VI

ON THE WING

“No bad news, I hope,” remarked Hapworth, who happened to be sitting beside Ted at the time on the veranda of the Bromville House.

“I hardly know how to classify it,” said Ted, tossing the telegram over to his friend. “Read it for yourself.”

“Bruin,” observed Hapworth, as he glanced at the signature. “Don’t know him. Who is he?”

“He’s the man that has the contract for carrying the mail in the Rocky Mountain Division,” explained Ted. “I worked under him for a while. Great big husky fellow with a voice like a foghorn, a mane like a lion’s and a heart just as big as his body.”

“Are you going?”

“I suppose I’ll have to. The old boy’s been mighty good to me, and I’m glad to do anything I can for him. At the same time, I’ve got lots of work on hand that I was figuring on finishing up in the next few days. Still, that can wait, and I guess I’ll do as he asks.”

“I do hope that he ain’t goin’ to ask you to go to furrin parts,” observed Charity, who had come up and caught the last few sentences.

“Nothing like that, Mother,” declared Ted, as he gave her an affectionate hug. “Maybe it’s something about Allenby. Ed was working for Bruin, you know, when this Air Mail robbery took place and I suppose the old man is pretty well stirred up about it. But I’ll know soon enough just what’s in the wind.”

He consulted his watch.

“I think I’ll start this afternoon,” he said, “and with luck I’ll get there tomorrow morning. It looks like a good day for flying and the plane is in good shape. It was only yesterday that I had her filled up with oil and gas.”

Ted wrote a telegram, telling Bruin to expect him on the morrow, and sent it to the telegraph station. Then he devoted himself to getting ready for his trip.

By noon all his preparations were completed, and after a hasty lunch he bade farewell to Eben, Charity and Hapworth and hurried out to the flying field.

The whistle had not yet blown to resume work and a good many of the employees of the Aero plant, which immediately adjoined the field, were loitering about. They saw Ted coming and promptly surrounded him.

“I see you’re going up, Ted,” remarked Breck Lewis, as he noticed that Ted was dressed in his flying togs.

“What new world is our Alexander going to conquer?” chaffed Mark Lawson.

“Probably planning to fly the Indian Ocean this time,” laughed Jack Forrest. “That’s about the only big one left.”

“Quit your kidding, you fellows,” smiled Ted, “and help me to get the plane out of the hangar. I’m not going far this time, just a little trip to Denver and back.”

They fell to heartily and rolled the *Silver Streak* out into the bright sunlight. The gallant plane stood there quivering as though she herself was as eager as her master to stretch her wings and mount into her native element.

Ted went over the machine with the extreme caution that had made his name proverbial and which had brought him through so many tight places to the safety that many of the unthinking had ascribed to his marvelous “luck.” And only when he was sure that everything was in prime condition did he straighten up and adjust his helmet.

“All right. Let’s go,” he said, as he climbed into the cockpit and adjusted his straps.

Mark set the propeller whirring, Jack and Breck knocked away the blocks and the *Silver Streak* roared down the runway. At four hundred yards Ted lifted her into the air, circled once about the field, waving his hand in response to the thunderous chorus of farewells, looped the loop in his exuberance, and then set the nose of the plane toward Denver.

His heart was singing as the *Silver Streak* caught her stride and clove the air like an arrow. Here was where he belonged, in the broad, limitless reaches of the air. He felt akin to the eagle. All care dropped away from him. Earth seemed far away. He was brother to the sun and moon and stars. He was cradled in immensity. The clay of the flesh seemed stripped from him. He felt as though he were a disembodied spirit. He was pervaded with a compassionate pity for the great mass of humanity doomed to walk the earth. They would never know the thrill that ran through all his nerves and made him tingle from head to heels.

This lyrical strain subsided after a while, leaving a more placid happiness in its stead. A glance at his instruments showed him that the plane was making more than a hundred miles an hour. At that rate he would easily arrive in Denver before noon on the following day.

He wondered what it was that Bruin wanted of him. Good old Bruin! Ted’s heart warmed toward the massive kindly behemoth of a man that had been to him more of a friend than an employer.

Ted had met him under peculiar circumstances. The young aviator was serving in the Air Mail of the Rocky Mountain Division when one day at Denver he had been accosted by a surgeon, a very eminent man in his profession, who wanted to engage

the services of an airman to take him over to Lumberport, a town many miles away.

A blizzard was blowing, one of the worst of the season, and it was almost suicidal to take to the air. Ted at first refused, though the man offered him two hundred and later five hundred dollars to make the trip. But what Ted would not do for money he was willing to do for humanity, and when he learned that at Lumberport a young fellow hurt in an auto smash would probably die unless the surgeon could reach him promptly, Ted took the risk. How fearful a risk it was many of our readers will remember. But the fortune that favors the brave was with Ted, and after a terrible experience he landed the surgeon at the home of Frank Bruin, the young man in question. The operation was successful, Frank recovered, and both he and Maxwell Bruin, his father, felt that they owed Ted a debt that they could never repay.

Repay it to some extent Maxwell Bruin did when the government leased to the latter the Air Mail Division in which Ted was employed. The old man stood by Ted loyally against the machinations of Ted's enemies and their friendship was still further cemented. It is doubtful whether for anyone else than Bruin Ted would have undertaken this trip on such hazy information as to what was desired. But he felt that he would go almost to the ends of the earth for Maxwell Bruin.

Ted roused himself from his musings to notice that the sun had gone under a cloud. This, however, he hoped, would be but temporary, for though he could fly by his instruments, if necessary, he would far rather have the aid of his eyes.

But he saw the sun no more that day. The wind did not rise, nor were there any other indications of an approaching storm. But a haze began to gather about the plane. The landmarks below grew more dim and spectral and finally vanished altogether.

The haze grew denser and finally developed into a black fog. It wrapped itself about the plane like a shroud. The moisture dripped on the windows of the cockpit. Ted could not see twenty feet before him. He had to depend for his direction entirely upon the instruments on the board in front of him.

Like all airmen, Ted hated the fog. And he dreaded it all the more just now because he knew that he was approaching a mountainous region. If anything went wrong with the plane, it would be impossible for him to pick out a landing place.

And if worse came to worst and he were compelled to jump with his parachute, instead of coming down on level earth, he might strike some jagged peak that would tear the parachute and send him whirling to death in some rocky gorge.

Over the level plains he had been flying at an altitude of a thousand feet. Now he pulled the joy stick and shot up through the darkness until his altimeter showed him

that he was at an altitude of about twelve thousand.

Above the whirring of the propellers and the creaking of the valve gear his quick ears caught a sound that brought a catch to his throat.

At first it was a distant hum. Then it became a pronounced buzz. Then it deepened into a roar.

Another airplane was winging its way through the darkness of the fog. And it was coming toward him, as the constantly increasing roar attested.

Ted's heart almost skipped a beat.

Death was rushing toward him in the darkness!

Ted pushed the joy stick and the plane descended. But Ted's ears told him that the other pilot had done the same.

Ted swung the plane over to the right. But so did the other. They were like two men in the street trying to pass each other, each stepping to the same side and so finding themselves still face to face.

That dilemma could be resolved by a bow and a smile. But not this.

Death was abroad on the wings of the wind!

CHAPTER VII

A CLOSE SHAVE

Desperately, Ted Scott swerved to left and right, up and down. But by the seeming malignity of fate the efforts of the other pilot seemed to be copied after his own.

Then out of the darkness came a blacker mass, rushing on with the force of a catapult. It was coming directly head on!

Quick as lightning, Ted swerved to the right.

The other plane zoomed by so close that it almost touched. In the wake left by its passage the *Silver Streak* was tossed about like a chip and Ted had all he could do to right it.

Behind him the roar was dying down into a hum. That grim, receding music seemed the sweetest that Ted had ever heard.

By scarcely a hair's breadth he had escaped. Death had reached out its skeleton fingers, but he had evaded their clutch. A few inches nearer and the planes would have crashed, while their pilots would have gone hurtling to the ground far below.

Ted found himself drenched with perspiration from head to foot. The strain had been terrific.

With infinite thankfulness in his heart Ted relaxed in his seat and drove the *Silver Streak* on through the fog. There was no sense in slowing up. Driving was as safe as drifting.

Although the chances were immeasurably against meeting another plane, he kept his ears strained for the slightest sound that might warn of danger.

He realized now that he was hungry, and he ate with relish a couple of sandwiches and washed them down with draughts of hot coffee from his thermos bottle.

For many hours he streaked along through the darkness, hoping with all his heart that the fog would lift.

And along about midnight he had his wish. The fog shredded away and from the firmament above the stars peeped out. He turned his plane's nose upward as though to meet them, his heart jubilant. And as he rose higher and higher the last wisp of haze disappeared. Later on the moon rose and flooded the earth with glory.

The long hours wore on and brought on the miracle of the new day. Over in the east the skies took on the shimmer of pearl. Gradually the rosy fingers of the dawn crept up the heavens and the pearl turned to scarlet. Then the sun rose majestically and the universe seemed to burst into flame.

On and on the *Silver Streak* whizzed until on the far horizon Ted descried the towers and steeples of Denver. A little while later he was hovering over the flying field.

That the plane was recognized was evident from the sudden stir of excitement below. Pilots and mechanics came running from their hangars and the word passed rapidly from mouth to mouth that Ted Scott had come.

So that when Ted brought his plane down to a perfect landing he found himself in the midst of a hilarious, welcoming group of old friends and acquaintances who left no doubt in his mind of how glad they were to see him.

“Home again from a foreign shore!” cried Bill Twombly, as he threw his arm around Ted’s shoulders.

“Gee, but it’s good to see you again!” ejaculated Roy Benedict, almost wrenching Ted’s arm from its socket with the fervor of his handshake. “And now that you’re here we’re not going to let you go again in a hurry.”

Others were equally cordial and it was some time before Bill and Roy could carry their pal off to their quarters for what Bill called an “oldtime chinfest.”

“Now what’s the answer?” asked Bill, when they had settled themselves comfortably. “What good wind blew you down this way?”

“I don’t know myself yet,” laughed Ted. “I got a telegram from Mr. Bruin asking me to come over and I came a-runnin’.”

“From the boss, eh?” ruminated Roy. “The old man has been considerably stirred up for the last few days.”

“What seems to be bothering him?” asked Ted.

“Well, we’re shorthanded for one thing,” replied Roy. “Two of the boys are on the sick list, McCarthy and Brenner. Then of course that mail robbery threw him off balance. I suppose he’s worrying now every time a man goes out that he may be the next victim. That was tough on poor Ed, wasn’t it?”

“Tough is no name for it,” replied Ted. “Bad enough to be doped and robbed without being thrown in jail for it. Haven’t you got any clue yet to the rascals who did it?”

“Not a thing,” replied Bill, “that is, as far as we know. Perhaps the authorities have something up their sleeves but I doubt it. Lot of Secret Service men been around looking wise and mysterious, but they probably don’t know any more than the rest of us. It was a mighty slick job. We ought to get double pay for our work now,” he added with a grin.

“Try to get it,” laughed Ted. “By the way, had you fellows heard that Felwig had escaped from prison?”

They looked at him dumbfounded.

"First I heard of it," exclaimed Roy.

"Don't tell me that snake is on the loose," ejaculated Bill.

"Sure thing," declared Ted. "I had it straight from one of the Secret Service men, a chap named Burnaby. And it set me thinking. You know as well as I do that that scheme couldn't have been carried out without the help of some fellow that knew all about flying. Maybe two or three airmen are in the plot, for they made off with the plane that carried the mail. And one of the boys that were doped seems to remember having heard another plane close by at the time he lost count of things. Now if Felwig is loose—"

"By ginger!" exclaimed Bill, "I shouldn't wonder if you'd hit it."

"That fellow is as cunning as a fox," chimed in Roy. "I wouldn't put anything past him."

"Of course it's only a guess," Ted reminded them, "but I suggested the thing to Burnaby and he thought there might be something in it. He's going to try to get on the track of Felwig, if he can. But now I'd better go and report to Mr. Bruin. See you boys again as soon as I've got through with him."

They let him go reluctantly, and Ted made his way to the quarters of the proprietor of the Rocky Mountain branch of the Air Mail Service.

Maxwell Bruin was seated at his desk engrossed in the study of a sheaf of papers. He looked up as Ted entered, slightly annoyed at being interrupted. But when he saw who it was he shoved the papers aside, jumped to his feet and came toward the young aviator with his hand outstretched.

"By the great horn spoon!" he cried. "I'm glad to see you, Ted. You're as welcome as the flowers in May. I knew I could count on your coming."

"I started on the day I got your telegram," said Ted, as he shook hands warmly, "and all the way over I've been wondering what you wanted of me. You sure didn't waste any words in that message of yours."

Mr. Bruin laughed as he motioned Ted to a chair and himself resumed his place at his desk.

"I played it rather low down on you, I'm afraid," he said, as he bit off the end of a cigar and lighted it. "The fact is that I was afraid you might refuse if I put my proposition up to you in writing and I wanted to talk to you face to face."

"Well, here I am," smiled Ted. "Go to it."

"It's this way," said Bruin, as he leaned back in his chair. "Two of my men are sick and will probably be laid up for a couple of weeks. The Air Mail Service is growing heavier all the time, not only in the amount but in the value of the mail that's

carried. Even with all my force at work I'd have all I could do to cope with it. I don't know what your engagements are, but I'm hoping that I can persuade you to take one of the routes until my men recover. You're so familiar with the work of this division that you won't need any breaking in but can go in on the jump. How about it?"

Ted reflected for a moment.

"I've got a lot of work on hand," he said slowly. "But I realize that this is an emergency and for old times' sake I'm willing to take a hack at it."

"Fine!" exclaimed Bruin delightedly. "That will help me out of a deep hole and I appreciate it. Now there's another thing."

He puffed away at his cigar thoughtfully while Ted waited expectantly.

"You've heard, of course, of the robbery of Ed Allenby's plane?" said Bruin.

"Yes," replied Ted, "and it made me hot."

"A dastardly thing," went on Bruin. "I'd like to have my hands on the throat of the man that planned it. And I think that if anyone can find that out, you can."

"I'm not a detective," laughed Ted. "I'm an airman."

"The best there is," declared Bruin, "but you're more than that. You've got a brain that works like lightning."

"Don't make me blush," grinned Ted.

CHAPTER VIII

TROUBLE BREWING

“Honest Injun!” declared Bruin in answer to Ted’s remark. “I’m not trying to kid you. I’ve heard from Frank of the way you hunted down the rascals who committed that murder that was charged against your father, and it struck me as one of the prettiest bits of detective work I’ve heard of for a long while. You’ve got the faculty of seeing a lot of things that other people would overlook and then of putting those things together so that they form the answer to the puzzle. I’d back you against any of the Secret Service men when it came to downright thinking.”

“I’m afraid you’re putting too big a value on me,” protested Ted. “And then, too, how would I get the time for that and do my flying work as well?”

“Oh, I’m not proposing that you should devote yourself to ferreting out those skunks,” replied Bruin. “I merely want you to keep the thing in mind while you’re going about your work of carrying the mail. The fellows, if they’re still around here, will probably spot the regular detectives and keep out of their way. They won’t be so careful about other people and you may get wise to their plans or their identity. You see this matter of Allenby’s has given a black eye to this division of the service, and I want to remove the stigma of the past as well as guard against any similar plan in the future. So keep your weather eye open for any suspicious signs, won’t you, son?”

“I sure will,” promised Ted. “I’m keen to have those rascals punished, not only because they deserve it, but because if we can fix it on them it will relieve Ed of suspicion. That poor lad is in a terrible fix.”

“He is,” agreed Bruin. “But I want you to know that personally I’m strong for Ed. I’m absolutely sure that he had nothing to do with it. If I could have had my way, he wouldn’t have been arrested at all. But of course that’s in the hands of the government and we simply have to submit. But now let’s get down to brass tacks. When will you be ready to start in?”

“Any time,” replied Ted. “Tonight, if you like.”

“Good!” said Bruin. “I’d like to have you take Brenner’s route, the one from here to Billings, Montana. It’s the toughest route in the whole outfit and that’s the reason I’m giving it to you. I know that you’re not afraid of danger. Draw up your chair and we’ll look over this map, while I tell you something of the route and the schedules.”

Ted did as requested, and for the next hour they discussed details. Ted could see that Bruin was right when he spoke of the danger of the route. It was almost wholly

over the mountains, including some of the highest peaks in the Rockies. But that, instead of intimidating him, made it the more attractive. For to Ted's adventurous spirit danger was the very breath of life.

"I guess that's all," said Bruin at last, pushing back his chair. "You'll use Brenner's plane. It's a fast, strong machine and has been recently overhauled, so that it is in prime condition."

"All right," assented Ted. "I'll take it up for a little trial spin this afternoon to see how it works and get used to its quirks and fancies."

As he went out of the building Ted thought he saw out of the tail of his eye some one scurrying around a corner. He went quickly to the spot but could see no one. Then he made the circuit of the building with similar results. Yet he was sure that his eyes had not deceived him.

Had anyone been listening to his conversation with Bruin! And if so, for what purpose?

He went to the hangars and some of the men helped him to trundle out Brenner's machine. It struck him favorably at first sight. It was capacious, as it needed to be for carrying a heavy load of mail, had a couple of whirlwind motors, well-balanced wings and every appliance for safety as well as speed.

He looked it over carefully and then took it up into the air. There he put it through every stunt he knew, and they were many. The machine responded ably and met every test to which it was subjected.

"What's Brenner's pet name for the plane?" Ted asked of Bill Twombly when he at last brought it to earth.

"He calls it the *Arrow*," replied Bill.

"And a good name it is," said Ted. "Let's hope she lives up to it."

"I guess she will," replied Bill. "She's one of the fastest planes in the whole outfit."

The rest of the day Ted spent in studying his maps and getting familiar with the main features of his route. Then at nightfall he took on board his cargo of mail and sailed up into the north.

On that first trip he was favored with beautiful weather, and the journey was little more than a holiday excursion. By the time he had made his first trip to Billings and returned he had little more to learn either of his route or the special qualities of his plane. The machine seemed to know the famous pilot who was guiding it and was on its best behavior.

A week passed this way without special incident. Storm and fog intervened at times, but all obstacles looked alike to Ted Scott and he maintained the reputation he

had won in the department of being always on time. It was said, more or less jokingly, that the people of the district over which he passed set their clocks by him.

During this time nothing had developed in the case of the mail robbery. Ed was still under arrest, and if the Secret Service men had discovered anything, they kept strictly mum. It looked as though the case was to be added to the long list of unsolved mysteries.

Ted's fame and popularity were such that he had no difficulty in making acquaintances. Everybody was proud to talk to him and shake his hand. He had had so much of this, in fact, that it irked him. Now, however, he encouraged it, for he did not know from what unlikely source he might be able to pick up some clue that would help solve the mystery.

With apparent carelessness he would bring the conversation around to the robbery. But though everybody was keen to talk about it, for it was the sensation of the day, he got nothing but guesses and conjectures that told him nothing.

One day, however, he noted that Thompson, the superintendent of the mail service at Billings, was heated and flustered.

"Something got your goat?" asked Ted with a smile.

"Oh, nothing much," returned Thompson. "Just had a little run-in with a loafer that I ordered off the premises. Been around talking to the men and distracting them from their work. Some fellow, perhaps, trying to organize them into a union. I don't know. Seems to know something about the flying game, judging from his talk. Anyway, I got sick of seeing him around and told him to beat it. And he did in a hurry."

Ted pricked up his ears.

"What kind of looking fellow was he?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know specially," answered Thompson. "He wouldn't take any prize in a beauty show. Sort of stocky build with a thatch of sandy hair."

Ted's interest quickened.

"Notice anything about his arms?" asked Ted.

Thompson looked at him in some surprise.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Tattooed? Had a coat on so I couldn't see. But they were long arms, like a gorilla's. I'll bet he's strong as an ox. And his lips were thick and greasy. Pale eyes that reminded me somehow of a rattlesnake's."

Ted's heart gave a bound.

Stocky form! Arms like a gorilla's! Sandy hair! Greasy lips! Eyes like a rattlesnake's!

Felwig to a dot!

CHAPTER IX

A STARTLING PROPOSAL

“What’s the matter?” asked Thompson, somewhat surprised at Ted’s evident perturbation. “You seem to be all stirred up about that hobo.”

“I have reason to be,” replied Ted. “Listen, Thompson, have you any idea where that fellow hangs out?”

“No, I haven’t,” replied the superintendent. “Never felt interested enough to inquire. Probably at some low lodging house. Possibly some of the pilots or mechanics may know. I’ll ask them, if you would like to have me do so.”

“Do, if you will,” urged Ted.

“But what’s all the shooting about?” queried Thompson, as he rose to go out on the flying field.

“Because I think the fellow’s Felwig,” replied Ted. “You know, that airman that cut the struts of my machine and then was jugged for it.”

“But he’s in prison,” exclaimed Thompson bewilderedly.

“He was, but he isn’t,” explained Ted. “He broke jail more than a month ago. I’ll tell you all about it later. Just now I want to get on the track of the skunk. Let’s go out and ask the men if they know anything about his whereabouts.”

They hurried out and inquired of all the pilots and mechanics they could find. But none of them knew anything about the man’s haunts. Probably he had had good reasons for not letting them know. Most of them had regarded him as a nuisance.

“Tell me straight now, Bixby,” said Thompson, appealing to one of the men who had charge of the hangars. “Was he a delegate trying to organize the men into a union? I know you boys are rather close mouthed about such things, but this is important. Give me the lowdown on it.”

“Nothing like that, boss,” replied Bixby with evident sincerity. “I just sized him up as an old-time airman who had lost his job through booze or something like that. Called himself Smith. I’d have booted him off the lot long ago, only he’d been a flyer and I felt rather sorry for him.”

“What did he find to talk about?” asked Thompson.

“Oh, he chewed the rag about almost everything,” replied Bixby vaguely. “Talked chiefly though about the flying game, routes, schedules, things of that kind.”

“Was he pumping you?” asked Thompson.

“Why I never looked at it that way,” was the reply. “Just chinned along casual like. Don’t remember his asking any special questions right out. Kind of rambling along like.”

“All right,” said Thompson. “Only, if you ever catch sight of him or hear where he is, give me the high sign at once. Remember that now.”

“I sure will, boss,” replied Bixby. “What’s the gink been up to anyway?”

“Never mind,” replied Thompson. “Only remember what I told you.”

Other inquiries were equally fruitless. The man had simply drifted in and out like a shadow, talked with whoever would listen to him and that was all they knew.

Ted hurried down to the police station and was closeted at once with the chief, for Ted’s name was an open sesame that always secured him instant attention.

To the attentive official Ted unfolded his suspicions, and the chief promised to have all quarters of the city searched at once for the man described.

“We’ll go over the place with a fine tooth comb,” he asserted, “and if he’s here, we’ll get him. We’ll arrest him on suspicion of being an escaped convict and hold him until you or somebody else who knows him has a chance to identify him.”

With thanks Ted hurried away to the telephone office and got on the long distance to Washington. He imparted to the Secret Service department what he suspected and the official at the other end of the wire promised that his detectives in the western section would try to get on the trail at once.

By the time he had spent two hectic hours at this work it was nearly time for Ted to leave Billings for his night’s run.

“Learned anything else?” he asked of Thompson as he came into the office.

“Not a thing,” replied that official. “But say, Ted, there’s something more behind this excitement of yours than the mere wish to recapture an escaped convict. Let me in on it.”

“You’re right,” agreed Ted. “I’m not vindictive. Felwig tried to kill me, to be sure, but he’s been punished in part at least for that and personally I wouldn’t lift a finger to jug him again. But I have a hunch—maybe it’s no good, but I have it just the same—that Felwig figured in the robbery of Allenby’s plane.”

Thompson sat up in his chair with a jerk.

“What?” he almost shouted.

“Just that,” replied Ted. “I haven’t got a particle of real evidence. I admit that at the start. But I’m just figuring on certain things. One is that this robbery didn’t take place until after Felwig broke jail. Another is that some of the men in the gang at least are airmen or they couldn’t get away with the plane. And Felwig is an experienced flyer—one of the best. Another is that this first robbery took place on this Rocky Mountain Division in which Felwig was formerly employed and with which he is especially familiar. Still another is that Felwig is as cunning as a fox, as rapacious as a wolf, absolutely without scruples, a criminal at heart and this kind of

thing would be just his meat. And the last is that Felwig—that is, if he’s really the man you’ve seen hanging around here—is in this part of the country where Ed’s plane was brought down.”

“By Jove, you make out a strong case,” exclaimed Thompson, deeply stirred.

“There are five things,” went on Ted, “no one of them conclusive in itself, but seeming to mean a lot when you take them all together.”

Ted went out, climbed into the cockpit of the *Arrow*, which was now fully loaded and ready to start, mounted into the air and turned the nose of his plane toward Denver.

His mind was in a tumult of conflicting emotions as he sped along. First and foremost was a feeling of elation that he had at last struck a trail. True, it might lead to nothing, but there was at least a chance.

But, mingled with this, was a feeling of uneasiness. It was uncomfortable to have Felwig in the same part of the country as himself. He remembered the murderous hate that had gleamed in the prisoner’s eyes when he, Ted, had given testimony at his trial, the curses that he had shouted at him as he passed down the aisle of the courtroom in the custody of the guards. Ted had thought little about this at the time. In a sense he had felt sorry for Felwig, scoundrel as he was. He would have been glad if the judge had imposed a lighter sentence.

But now Felwig was “on the loose” and probably his soul was seething with hate and thirsting for revenge. Twice he had tried to kill Ted and failed—once when he had placed a time bomb in the machine and again when he had weakened the struts of his plane. Perhaps the third time he would succeed. Into Ted’s mind came the adage that there was “luck in odd numbers.”

That talk with the men about routes and schedules! Was there method in that? Was the rascal planning another robbery?

Ted reached Denver without misadventure and at once sought out Mr. Bruin. To him he imparted what he had learned and what he suspected, while the latter listened with absorbed interest, the eyes beneath his jutting eyebrows fixed admiringly on Ted.

“By Jove, my boy!” he said to Ted, when the latter had finished, “I made no mistake when I told you that you had the detective instinct. You’ve taken those scattered bits that most people would have overlooked and woven them into a clear pattern. You’re a wonder.”

“Not so clear as I could have wished,” replied Ted. “There are a good many threads missing and in the end it may prove to be nothing.”

“I don’t think you’re barking up the wrong tree,” declared Bruin. “Your theory

fits the facts as far as we know them. At any rate, we've got something plausible to work on. I'll notify the Denver police at once to be on the lookout for anyone that fits Felwig's description and ask them to telephone it all over the State. I feel more hopeful now than I have at any time since Ed's plane was robbed."

He was as good as his word and pulled strings in all directions, and as he was a power in the State, the authorities put on an extra spurt of activity.

But a week went by and nothing rewarded the intensive search. Felwig seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth. At any rate, he escaped the drag net and it seemed likely that he had become alarmed and fled to some other part of the country.

One of the sick airmen had now returned to duty and Mr. Bruin called Ted into his office.

"As you know, Brenner is back," said Bruin, "and that eases the situation somewhat. I wonder if you'd mind taking a little trip for me to Los Angeles."

"Not at all," replied Ted. "It will be a little change of scene and I'd like it."

"Good," said Bruin, and proceeded to give Ted the details of the business he wanted Ted to attend to for him.

Ted was glad to go on the trip for more reasons than change of scene. He had long been interested in the projected Australian trip of a Captain Henderson and his associates, and was anxious to meet the captain personally and inspect the plane.

So he hopped over the mountains to Los Angeles, the port from which the aviators were to start. But when he arrived there he learned to his great regret that the trip had been abandoned. Captain Henderson had been taken ill and was in the hospital for an indefinite period.

Ted, after transacting Bruin's business, visited him there and offered him his condolences. The captain was very glad to see him and shook his hand warmly.

"It's too bad," said Ted sympathetically. "I was rooting for you to make the trip. It would have been a feather in the cap of any aviator."

"Yes," replied the captain, "it's been a very great disappointment. The plane is practically ready and only needs the finishing touches. But that's the luck of the game. Next year, perhaps, I may be more fortunate."

"I'd like to have a look at the plane," said Ted. "It must be a sockdolager to carry all the gas and oil you'd need."

"She's a big one," agreed the captain proudly. "Carries a thousand gallons of gas and fifty gallons of oil. But I'll have to sell her now, for most of my money is locked up in her and I can't afford to hold her. Besides, if I should go in the years to come, there are so many improvements likely that I might have to build a new one anyway.

If you hear of any likely purchaser, let me know.”

“I sure will,” promised Ted.

It was arranged that he would go to the airplane plant on the following day to take a look at the craft, and after a little further conversation he took his leave.

Ted was in his room at his hotel that night after supper when an unknown visitor was announced.

He told the clerk to send him up and a minute later the visitor was ushered into the room. He was a tall man, powerfully built, in the prime of life with hair that was slightly graying at the temples.

“Good evening, Mr. Scott,” said the man, as Ted rose to receive him. “My name is Rockridge, William Rockridge of Sonora County. You don’t know me, but we have a mutual friend, Dr. Yaley, and it was at his suggestion that I called to see you.”

“I’m glad to know you,” replied Ted shaking hands. “Take a seat. I know Dr. Yaley well, and any friend of his I’m proud to call a friend of mine.”

“It’s good of you to say so,” replied Rockridge, as he took the proffered seat. “Dr. Yaley told me of how he first made your acquaintance—the day, you know, when you carried him over to a patient at the risk of your life in a howling blizzard. He thinks you’re about the pluckiest man that walks the earth—or perhaps it would be better to say sails the skies—and of course the whole world knows that to be true.”

“There are plenty of airmen just as good or better,” replied Ted.

“No one else believes that,” said Rockridge with a smile. “But no doubt you are wondering as to the cause of my call this evening. I’ll tell it in a nutshell. I want to go to Australia.”

He brought out the last sentence with impressive emphasis.

“Well,” smiled Ted, “why don’t you? There are several lines from the coast here to Australia.”

“I know that,” replied Rockridge, “but they don’t meet my needs. They’re not quick enough. I want to go by airplane.”

“It’s never been done,” said Ted, somewhat startled.

“There has to be a first time for everything,” Rockridge replied. “The trip from New York to Paris hadn’t been made until you made it. Why shouldn’t you be the first to hop over the Pacific to Australia?”

“I?” exclaimed Ted. “What have I got to do with it? Where do I come in on this trip of yours?”

“As pilot,” said Rockridge calmly. “I’ll give you twenty thousand dollars to carry me in an airplane to Australia!”

CHAPTER X

TAKING RISKS

The abruptness of Rockridge's extraordinary offer almost took Ted off his feet.

He looked at his visitor in amazement, wondering if by any chance he were unbalanced. But the man seemed to be in full possession of his senses. There was no wildness in his appearance and his eyes looked back at Ted calmly. He appeared to be an excellent specimen of the keen American business type of man.

"I'm good for the money," said Rockridge, mistaking the meaning of Ted's inspection. "You can inquire at my bank or at any of the business agencies. I could give you a million and still I wouldn't be broke."

"Oh, it isn't that," replied Ted, recovering somewhat from his bewilderment. "But your offer strikes me as a most remarkable one. You speak of going to Australia as calmly as you might of a trip to San Francisco. But they're mighty different things. Do you know that you're risking your own life as well as mine by proposing to fly over six thousand miles of sea?"

"I've figured that out," remarked Rockridge calmly. "As for me, my life is my own and I can risk it if I choose. As for you, your life also belongs to you and you have a perfect right to reject my offer if you choose. I hope, however, that you won't, because if you do I won't be able to go at all. There isn't another airman living that I'd trust to take me there in safety."

"You must have very extraordinary reasons for your haste to get to Australia," said Ted slowly. "If it were a business deal, I should think it might be closed by cable, or that at the least you'd be able to defer it until you could get there by ship."

"It isn't business that's taking me there," replied Rockridge with what Ted thought was a shade of embarrassment.

"Of course I don't want to pry into your reasons," put in Ted hastily. "That's really no affair of mine."

Rockridge considered for a moment.

"Yet you do have a right to know, when I'm asking so much of you," he said. "I'll lay all my cards on the table. There's a lady friend of mine at this moment in Sydney, Australia, a Miss Mabel Dickens. I have reason to think that she's being inveigled into a marriage with a man that isn't fit for her. That's putting it mildly. In fact, he's a scoundrel, for he already has a wife living from whom he hasn't been divorced. I want to save her from having her life ruined."

"I don't wonder that you're worked up about it," observed Ted. "But I should think that, if you cabled her the facts and told her that you had written proofs to

back it up, she'd certainly be willing to postpone the marriage until a ship could carry you to Australia."

"She ought to, but she won't," replied Rockridge. "You see"—he hesitated for a moment and then went on—"she and I were engaged at one time, but we had a lovers' quarrel and she broke it off and went back to Sydney, which is her native place. This man I'm talking about has a romantic air about him that appeals to women and she seems to have become infatuated with him. I still have a deep affection for her, and even if I can't get her to marry me, I want to save her from the consequences of her folly. But she interprets my cables as mere jealousy on my part and she simply refuses to believe me. But if I put the papers and affidavits I have actually into her hands, she'll have to believe. Now you know why I've got to get there in a hurry."

"I see," said Ted. "But you know it will take some time to get ready, a week or ten days at the least. This can't be done at the drop of a hat. An ordinary plane couldn't hold fuel enough to carry us there. And it would take many weeks to build one. I think, however, we can get over that difficulty. Just when did you say this marriage was to take place?"

"On the twenty-fourth of this month," replied Rockridge.

"And this is the eighth," mused Ted. "That's a little more than two weeks from today. Say it takes us a week or a couple of days more to get ready. If we have luck, we might make the ocean trip in three or four days. We've got to remember, too, that we lose a day when we cross the line, that is, that when it's the twenty-fourth in Australia it's the twenty-third in the United States."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Rockridge ruefully. "That cuts our time to fifteen days instead of sixteen."

"Even at that I think we can make it," said Ted thoughtfully. "That's assuming that everything goes well with us. If the plane breaks down, it will be all off as far as the trip is concerned—and probably as far as our lives are concerned also."

"You say 'we'," put in Rockridge eagerly. "Does that mean that you accept my offer?"

"Yes," said Ted, "I'll do it. There's a touch of romance about it and it appeals to my sporting blood."

"Bully!" cried Rockridge delightedly. "I had a feeling that the risk of the adventure would appeal to you more strongly than the money. I'll give you the check, however, tomorrow, so that you can bank it before we start. Then if anything happens to us—which God forbid—your estate at least will have the money."

"There's just one thing," Ted reminded him, "on which all our plans depend. That

is the securing of a plane big enough to carry all the fuel we'll need for the journey."

Rockridge's jaw dropped.

"I'd forgotten that for the moment," he said. "Couldn't we build it in a week? They could have shifts working night and day. Money's no object."

Ted shook his head.

"Couldn't be done," he said, "but I think I see a way out of the difficulty. You've read about the Australian trip that Captain Henderson was about to take?"

"Yes," said Rockridge, "though I thought that was slated for some time next month."

"It was," replied Ted. "The captain wanted to wait till then because the weather conditions would probably be better. But it's all off now. The captain is in the hospital and it will be a long time before he's on his feet again. So he's given up the thing altogether. But his plane is practically ready. I saw him today and he wanted me to find a customer, if I could, for the plane."

"By Jove, you've found him!" exclaimed the millionaire, his face lighting up with relief. "I'll take it right off his hands and pay him whatever he asks."

"Good!" said Ted. "We'll go down tomorrow and close the bargain. Now there's another thing. I'll have to have an assistant aviator go along with us to help pilot the plane, for no one man can keep awake three or four days and nights in succession. Apart from that, something might happen to the plane that one man couldn't attend to alone."

"That stands to reason," replied Rockridge. "Have you anyone specially in mind?"

"Not at the moment," said Ted, "but I know a host of good fellows who would be only too glad to take the trip with me."

"I'll leave it wholly to you," said Rockridge. "Get your man and make any terms with him you like. Of course what is paid him will be altogether apart from your twenty thousand."

"I understand," said Ted. "And now as to yourself, Mr. Rockridge. Have you ever been up in a plane?"

"Oh, lots of times," replied Rockridge readily. "Not, of course, on any long trip, but on journeys like those between Los Angeles and San Francisco."

"And you've never suffered any ill effects?" asked Ted.

"None whatever," was the reply.

"That's good," replied Ted. "There are some people, you know, that simply can't stand flying. It makes them sick, sometimes lightheaded, so that they go off the handle. But as long as you've tested yourself, that's all right."

For an hour longer they talked over the details of the trip and then Rockridge rose to go.

“Till tomorrow morning, then,” he said as he held out his hand. “I’ll call for you in my car and we’ll go down together to the hospital and see the owner. I’m more pleased than I can tell that we’ve come to an agreement.”

“Same here,” replied Ted. “I’m already eager to be flying over the Pacific again.”

The next morning they went together to the hospital. Ted introduced Rockridge to Captain Henderson and stated his errand. The price named by the captain was promptly agreed to by Rockridge and the whole deal was consummated in ten minutes. The captain wanted to pay Ted a commission on the sale, but Ted would have none of it.

“It’s mighty good of you, Mr. Scott,” the captain said. “I hate to let the plane go, but as things have turned out it’s a white elephant on my hands and I’m greatly relieved to get my money out of it. I wish you luck on your journey.”

“Thanks,” returned Ted, as he rose and shook hands in farewell, “and I hope that by the time I get back I’ll find you on your feet again.”

Then he and Rockridge went down to look at the latter’s new purchase. Ted was delighted with it on sight. It was a huge machine with three whirlwind motors, the same kind that had proved so dependable in his previous sea flights. It had all the latest improvements, including the silencer from which Ted had derived such comfort since he had installed it in the *Silver Streak*.

It was practically completed as far as the structure went, but there were a number of last-minute things to be added besides the matter of fuel, oil and food supplies that would require fully the week or a couple of days more than Ted had set aside for that purpose.

“Well, are you satisfied with her?” asked Rockridge, when Ted had finished his inspection.

“More than satisfied,” replied Ted. “She’s the last word in airplane construction. She can carry us to Australia, if any plane can.”

“Good!” said Rockridge with great satisfaction. “Now I’m going to leave everything to you.”

“You can,” Ted assured him. “All you’ll have to do is to hop aboard when I give the word.”

Rockridge offered to drop Ted at his hotel, but Ted preferred to walk, and they separated.

The uppermost thought in Ted’s mind as he walked along was that of choosing a companion for his trip. He would have liked to have Tom Ralston, but he happened

to know that at the moment Tom was up in Canada. His thoughts reverted to Bill Twombly and Roy Benedict. Either one of them, Ted felt sure, would jump at the chance. But that would involve taking them away from Bruin, and Ted would not do that.

Immersed in his thoughts, Ted nearly bumped into a man as he was turning a corner. He raised his eyes with a word of apology. Then, with a wild exclamation of delight he grabbed the hand of—Ed Allenby!

“Ed! By all that’s good!” Ted fairly yelled as he shook his friend’s hand as though he would wrench it from its socket. “How in thunder did you get here? I thought you were—”

“In jail,” grinned Ed, finishing the sentence, “where I would be yet, probably, if it hadn’t been for you. I guess that word you put in for me with Burnaby, that Secret Service man, did the trick. At any rate they released me with apologies. You’ve stood by me like a brick, old boy—that money you sent me—”

“Not another word,” commanded Ted. “You’re coming right along with me to the hotel. Gee, I’d rather have met you than found ten thousand dollars!”

Ted had luncheon served in his room, and over the table Ed narrated the details of the robbery, with most of which the reader is familiar.

Ted in turn told of his suspicions of Felwig and the search for the rascal that had so far proved unavailing.

“By Jove, I believe you’re right!” ejaculated Ed, “though I hadn’t thought of it before. It’s just the sort of game that would hit that fellow hard. I wish I could have him in a room alone for ten minutes—just ten minutes. That would be enough.”

“Well, now,” said Ted, when they had discussed this angle a little longer, “how come I find you in Los Angeles?”

“I have relatives here,” explained Ed, “and I wanted to rest here a little while. To get the prison taint out of my system,” he added bitterly.

“How about a sea voyage to take it out?” asked Ted.

“What do you mean?” asked Ed in surprise.

“Just this,” replied Ted. “I’m going to Australia and I want a brother pilot to go with me. And you’re the man.”

“Australia!” Ed’s eyes bulged.

“Yes,” said Ted, and went on to give his friend all the details of the proposed trip, while Ed listened with ever growing excitement.

“There’s big money in it for you, too,” Ted concluded. “Ten thousand at the very least. Will you go?”

“Will I go?” exclaimed Ed. “You bet your life I’ll go!”

“It’s good you agreed,” grinned Ted, “or I’d drag you into the plane by the nape of your neck. Now listen. You’ll start in at once. You know as much about planes as I do. This thing has taken me by surprise, and I’ve got a lot of loose ends to attend to. I’ve got to see Bruin in Denver. Perhaps I’ll have to make one more trip for him. I can’t leave him in the lurch. Perhaps I’ll have to make a swift trip to Bromville. But I’ll be back here as soon as I can. I’m counting on you to do all the things here that I would do myself, if my hands were free. You can get supplies and fuel on board, take the plane up for trial tests, make sure that everything’s ready when I get here. You’ll have to hustle, for a week or nine days is the limit.”

“Count on me,” said Ed. “You know me. All you’ll have to do when you get here is to jump aboard.”

They talked long and eagerly, and when Ted felt that he had provided for all possible contingencies he hopped aboard the *Silver Streak* and set out for Denver.

Arriving there, he went at once to Mr. Bruin and told him of his forthcoming trip.

The latter was, to use his own expression, “knocked all in a heap.”

“Australia!” he cried. “Six or seven thousand miles of sea! Are you crazy?”

CHAPTER XI

THE BLOW FALLS

Ted Scott grinned at his employer's vehemence.

"Not exactly crazy," he replied. "I've been accused of it several times—when I started on my Atlantic and Pacific flights, for instance—but people seemed to agree that I was sane when I got back."

"I know," agreed Bruin. "But this is different, twice or three times as long a flight. And there are limits even to such daring as yours. You know the old saying about the pitcher that goes to the well too often."

"Well, I've given my word now and I can't recede," said Ted. "The question is now about this Air Service work. I don't want to leave you in the lurch, and I'll make another trip if you want me to, so that you'll be able to make other arrangements."

"That's mighty good of you," replied Bruin. "Of course you're doing this whole thing as a favor to me and I haven't the slightest claim on your time or work. But I will be glad if you can make one last trip for me, especially as there's a very valuable load of mail for your route tonight."

"Consider it done," said Ted. "Now one other thing you'll be glad to hear. Ed Allenby has been released with apologies."

"You don't say so!" cried Bruin, enormous relief showing on his face. "That's the best news I've heard in a long time. How do you know?"

"Met up with the old boy in Los Angeles," replied Ted. "Gee, maybe I wasn't glad to see him again! He's agreed to go with me on the trip to Australia."

"You couldn't have made a better choice," said Bruin. "He knows the flying game from start to finish. Remember me to him, will you? And tell him that when he gets back there's always a place for him here if he wants it."

Bill and Roy were quite as excited as Bruin had been when they learned of the proposed air journey and delighted beyond measure at the good news about Allenby.

Ted was mulling over the coming adventure in his mind that evening as he sat at table in a Denver hotel, just before starting out on his night's run.

Three men were seated at a table a little distance from him. They were loudly dressed, had coarse, flushed faces, and were talking boisterously.

Ted noticed them several times casting furtive looks at him, but was so engrossed in his thoughts that he paid no attention to it. He was accustomed to being stared at, for whenever it was known that Ted Scott was in a room he was the

cynosure of all eyes.

“Just like a strange animal in the zoo,” Ted often told himself with an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

“What did you say, sir?” asked the waiter, as he bent over Ted to get his order for dessert.

Ted told him.

“Beg pardon, sir, but I didn’t just catch that,” the waiter said apologetically.

Ted repeated.

“Sorry, sir,” said the waiter. “You see those men are making such a noise that one can hardly hear himself think.”

“I know they are,” said Ted. “Half-tipsy, I shouldn’t wonder.”

“Oh, just high spirits, I guess,” smiled the waiter. “Now what was it you said, sir?”

Again Ted repeated and the waiter hurried off. He came back shortly with a plate of ice-cream and a cup of coffee.

“I didn’t order coffee,” said Ted. “I’ve already had one cup.”

“My mistake, sir,” said the waiter. “It was that noise, I guess, and I’m a bit hard of hearing anyway, sir. Of course I’ll take it back, sir, if you say so.”

“Oh, never mind,” said Ted carelessly. “I’ll keep it since it’s here.”

He finished his meal, tipped the waiter and hurried off, as a glance at his watch told him that he would not have much more than time to reach the flying field.

In the hubbub of preparation for his flight he forgot the depression he had felt as he thought of the ill success of the authorities in finding any trace of Felwig.

His spirits mounted as the *Arrow* climbed up into the skies. Ah, this was the life! Up in the clean air, far above all the petty anxieties, the noisy squabbles of earth. That gang of rioters now in the hotel in their feverish search for pleasure in low dissipations—what did they know of real happiness, the serene happiness that he was enjoying at that moment? They would live and die in complete ignorance of the thrill that surged through his veins, of the heights to which the human spirit could rise.

On and on the *Arrow* winged its way over valleys and mountain tops under the watching eyes of the stars.

One hour—two—three passed. The tranquil scene, the utter hush, broken only by the familiar sounds of the plane, were lulling to the senses and Ted found it rather hard to resist it. Once his eyelids drooped a trifle but he straightened up before they closed.

“None of that, Ted, old boy,” he warned himself. “You’ve had a good sleep today and you’ve no excuse.”

But more and more he felt that soothing influence trying insidiously to master him.

He tried to fix his mind on something different, to keep him awake. He reviewed the recent trip to Mexico. What a thrilling experience that had been! Those Mexicans were not so bad as they had been painted. To be sure, the bandits were tough birds. But then there was that young diplomat whose career he had saved from ruin.

And that little Mexican aviator who had accompanied him in his trip to the rebel stronghold—Ramon—no it wasn't Ramon—what was his name, the queer but plucky little chap with seventeen children—oh, come now, it wasn't as bad as that—fifteen—thirteen—anyway there was plenty of them. He was glad that he and Ralston had picked the chap up from the Pacific—no, it wasn't the Pacific, it was the Gulf of Mexico. And it wasn't Ralston that had been with him—it was Hapworth.

What was the matter with him? He was getting things all mixed up—he whose mind was usually as clear as a bell.

“Snap out of it,” he muttered thickly to himself.

He reached out for the joy stick—and missed it! His hand was wavering, his sight uncertain.

Then an awful conviction stabbed him to the heart.

He had been drugged!

CHAPTER XII

DISASTER

As that terrible conviction forced itself upon him Ted Scott felt the agony of death.

He had faced uncounted perils in his adventurous career. But up to then he had faced them with all his senses clear, with his eyes bright, with his muscles and nerves tensed to meet the shock. They had been more or less tangible things with which he could battle to the utmost limit of his strength.

Now he had to fight not with outside enemies but with himself. His own soul and brain formed the battleground. And this was a case in which he could not win. He could not conquer the poison that was flowing subtly through his veins. Hercules himself would have been powerless in such a case.

By a mighty effort he braced himself, and for a moment his brain kept steady and in that moment he realized the cause of the disaster.

That second cup of coffee that he had not ordered! The obsequious waiter who had pretended not to hear! That tough bunch and their furtive glances!

Bitter with self-reproach as he was, Ted tried desperately to prolong the moment of clarity that had been vouchsafed to him. But it was useless. More and more his mind was becoming confused. The instruments on the board before him were performing a crazy dance.

He must get down—down to earth before his senses left him and the plane crashed. But even if he made a safe descent, what was it that awaited him? Robbers, either on the spot or gathering there shortly afterward like buzzards to a feast.

And a rich feast it would be, he remembered with a pang, for he knew that he was carrying an especially rich cargo of mail that night.

A distant sound penetrated to his dimming senses. It was the far-off humming of a plane. He remembered that Nasmith had heard such a sound just before he lost consciousness.

Black rage possessed him. If he had been able, he would have sought out that enemy plane and crashed into it, regardless of his own fate if he could only bring about the downfall of his enemies. He ground his teeth as he thought of them chuckling and noting his wavering descent. Their prey was in their toils.

But he must get down. Where was he? Over mountain top or valley? He strained his eyes, but they were so dim that he could not see.

Nevertheless, he must get down. He must take his chance. Revenge perhaps might come later. But he must get down.

He pushed the joy stick savagely and the plane descended. Lower and lower he went, wobblingly, uncertainly, far different from the perfect landings that had made him famous.

The roar of the other plane was louder now. There was no longer any reason for secrecy. Perhaps it was just above him, ready to pounce down as soon as the feast was spread.

Down, down went the *Arrow*. By one last exertion Ted brought it out of the nose dive as he dimly perceived that the earth was nearer. He saw that it was comparatively level ground.

Striving frantically to hold out a few seconds Ted felt the wheels touch the earth. The *Arrow* floundered along for a few hundred yards, but Ted did not know when it had stopped. For by that time he was hanging limply in his straps, dead to the world!

How long he remained unconscious Ted Scott never knew.

It was still night, for the stars were looking down on him serenely, utterly unmoved at the dastardly crime that had been committed. They had seen so many of them!

He was lying on his back in a field of alfalfa. That he had been roughly handled was evident from the torn condition of his clothes. His shirt had been ripped open from the neck to the waist, evidently in search of hidden valuables.

For a little while Ted lay there in a daze. He knew that something terrible had happened, but could not figure out what. He tried vaguely to remember.

Then gradually, bit by bit, the events of the last few hours came back to him—the strange mixup in his thoughts that had at first startled him, the conviction that he had been drugged, his frantic efforts to make a landing, the hum of the pursuing plane

—
Plane! Where was his own plane? He raised himself painfully on his elbow and looked about him.

There was no plane!

Gone! And with it that rich cargo of mail, the most valuable that he had yet carried in his short period of service!

Ted staggered to his feet and tried to take account of his injuries. To his joy he found that he could stand, though with an effort. At least neither of his legs was broken.

He took inventory of his arms. They, too, were uninjured. But when he felt of the back of his head he winced. There was a lump there as big as a robin's egg.

His eyes caught sight of a scrap of paper lying on the ground near him. He picked it up mechanically. It contained a picture, though he could not make out

clearly what it was. The piece seemed to have been torn from some illustrated section of a Sunday newspaper.

He thrust it into his pocket, without knowing why, and betook himself to thoughts of what he should do next. It was of the utmost importance that he should get to some place from which he could telephone to the authorities. In a case like this every minute counted. He grudged bitterly the time he must have lost already.

He had not the slightest notion of where he was. But the sight of a rail fence not far away told him that he was on a cultivated farm or ranch of some kind. He must follow that fence and see where it would lead him.

His legs felt like lead. He plodded along as if he were in a nightmare. His head was bursting. It must have been a potent drug that had been administered to him.

That cup of coffee! That bowing waiter!

The stars were paling now and dawn was at hand. Ted, following the fence, came in sight at last of a modest farmhouse. A light was in the kitchen and the family was astir.

Ted directed his lagging steps to the door and knocked. There was a pause in the conversation within. Then the door opened and a man stood framed in the light of the doorway.

He looked suspiciously at Ted in his torn clothes and generally disheveled condition.

“Well, what is it?” he asked brusquely. “If you’re a hobo, you’ve come to the wrong place.”

“I’m not a hobo,” said Ted, summoning up a wry smile. “I’m an aviator in the Air Mail Service. I’ve been drugged and my plane has been robbed.”

“What?” exclaimed the man in astonishment. “Come right in.”

He fairly pulled Ted in to the warm, cozy kitchen, savory with the odors of coffee and bacon.

A pleasant-faced woman came hurrying to greet him.

“My lands!” she exclaimed. “You poor boy! What won’t they do next! Jest sit down at the table and rest yourself while I put on another plate.”

That kitchen was like heaven to Ted, but duty came first.

“Thanks very much,” he said. “It’s awfully good of you. But first I must telephone to the authorities. Have you a ’phone in the house?”

“Sure,” replied the farmer whose name was Jabez Thorn. “Right here in the hall. You go ahead while Mollie here puts the food on your plate.”

Ted called up the nearest town of any size and gave the police chief the details of the outrage, asking him in turn to relay it to the capital and throughout the State.

Then he got on the long distance to Denver and retailed the matter to Bruin, who fairly sputtered with rage at the robbery and with affectionate concern for the condition of Ted. It was arranged that Ted should return by train to Denver as soon as he felt in shape to travel.

Having got this off his mind, Ted returned to the kitchen where the farmer and his wife had been listening, appalled, to the details of the robbery as he had narrated them.

“You poor boy!” exclaimed Mrs. Thorn. “What an awful experience to go through! It’s the mercy of heaven that you wasn’t killed.”

“Well, I’m very much alive,” replied Ted with a smile, “as you’ll agree when you see me put away this breakfast. My, but it looks good!”

“Tain’t so much, but it’s filling,” said the good lady, as she poured the coffee, “and after you’ve finished I’m going to fix that poor head of yours. That’s a terrible lump on it.”

“No fist ever did that,” put in Thorn. “Looks as if it had been done with a hammer or something.”

The hot food brought back the young aviator’s strength and the effects of the drug had almost wholly disappeared. When, after a hearty farewell to his kind hosts, he caught a nearby train for Denver he felt himself again, as far as physical condition was concerned.

The attack had occurred too late in the night to be reported in the morning papers, but when the afternoon papers were brought through the train Ted found that the story was spread all over the front page to the exclusion of almost everything else. It was apparent that the whole country had been stirred to wrath by the assault on the nation’s idol.

And when the train at last reached Denver, Ted found himself besieged by an army of reporters, anxious to get from his own lips the story of the outrage. Bruin was furious and vowing that he would spend every cent of his fortune if necessary to bring the rascals to book. He had been keeping the wires hot in his demands for effective action on the part of the authorities and had posted his own offer of twenty-five thousand dollars reward for the apprehension and conviction of the thieves.

Bruin’s anger was fully shared by Ted’s fellows in the service. They were wild with rage at the robbers, but delighted that Ted had escaped with his life.

As soon as Bruin had received Ted’s ’phone message he had gone in person accompanied by officers to the hotel where Ted had dined just before he had started on his disastrous flight. The hotel officials were as indignant as anyone else at the affair and deeply chagrined at the unwelcome publicity that had been given their

house.

They stated that the suspected waiter had only been engaged by them a few days before. His references had seemed satisfactory and he was an efficient waiter. But he had left without demanding the money due him a few hours after Ted had departed on his trip.

It was very late when Ted, utterly wearied by the ordeal to which he had been subjected, retired to rest. As he was undressing he felt the crackling of paper in one of his pockets, and putting in his hand brought to light the clipping he had picked up in the alfalfa field after he had come to his senses. Up to now he had forgotten all about it.

The thought came to him that possibly it had been dropped by some member of the gang who failed to notice his loss. In the hope that it might contain a clue of some kind he examined it with interest.

There was no handwriting on it, however, no address, and Ted felt a pang of disappointment. It was a picture of three little girls dressed in white. The caption underneath the picture was missing, except a fragment that read:

“PRETTY TRIPLETS: DAUGHTERS OF”

And there the caption ended. It had evidently gone on to mention the name of the father and mother to whom the girls belonged. But the four words already quoted were all that were left.

“No good,” muttered Ted disappointedly, as he made to throw the scrap into the waste basket.

Yet something held his hand. He looked at the picture again. They were charming little creatures, those girls, children of whom any parent might be proud.

“Triplets, eh?” murmured Ted to himself. “Three of them! Three sisters—”

Ted jumped as though from an electric shock.

The Three Sisters!

Simple enough words, but holding a world of meaning for Ted!

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE TRAIL

Ted Scott paced the floor excitedly, his eyes glued on the picture that had stirred him so profoundly.

For the Three Sisters was the name applied to three peaks that rose in the Rockies at a spot about two hundred miles from Denver.

It was a desolate and deserted region of mountain heights and deep gorges, difficult to traverse and seamed with clefts and caves.

An ideal rendezvous for a robber gang!

This was the thought that ran through Ted's brain. Was there a cryptic meaning in that apparently innocent picture? Was it a signal, a direction to some hiding place where the loot was to be taken and where perhaps it was to be divided?

The probabilities seemed against him. Well, let them be. He had at least a possibility of being right and more than once he had seen a possibility develop into a certainty.

He would go to the Three Sisters!

And he would go alone. He would not ask anyone to embark on what would almost certainly appeal to them as a wild goose chase. If he failed, he would devour his chagrin in secret.

He went to sleep with this determination and it was unchanged when he woke. He sought out Mr. Bruin at once.

"My work is calling me, Mr. Bruin," he said, launching at once into his subject, "and while I'd like to stay longer, you know what a lot I have on hand."

"Sure I do," said Mr. Bruin. "I shall miss you awfully, Ted. You're far and away the best aviator in the service. You've helped me out royally and I shan't forget it. I hope you'll have the best of luck on your Australian trip. It's as nervy a project as I've ever heard of, and if anyone else were handling it I wouldn't give a copper for his chances. But you have the habit of success and I count on you to win. I'm sorry you had such a tough time here just at the windup."

"Somebody's going to have a tougher time of it before long, if I'm any prophet," predicted Ted.

The rest of that day Ted spent in refueling the *Silver Streak* and seeing to his supplies. He took along only food enough for a couple of days, for he could not stay longer and keep his promise to Rockbridge. An automatic pistol, a rifle and a knife completed his equipment.

His plan of campaign would be guided by circumstances. He figured on finding a

safe hiding place for his plane in the vicinity of the Three Sisters, and with that as a base scout around for the rendezvous of the thieves. If he found it, well and good. If he did not find it—well, he would at least no longer be haunted by the thought that he had “overlooked a bet.”

He had planned to start at dawn of the following day. By nightfall his plans were all completed, and after bidding farewell to his friends, who assumed that he was going to Los Angeles, he repaired to his room to get a good long night’s sleep for he did not know how long it might be before he slept again.

At the first streak of dawn he was on the field and, after a last careful inspection of the plane, climbed into it, and, with a chorus of farewells from the few workers who were astir, soared upward into the skies.

The weather was all that could be desired, with just a gentle wind in the rear of the plane that served to accelerate its progress. In a little over two hours Ted saw the three peaks of which he was in search.

Grim and majestic, they towered high over the surrounding country. For all sign of human life they might as well have belonged on another planet. Although at a distance they seemed close together, the distance widened as Ted came nearer, until it was seen that they were many miles apart.

To avoid collision with the summits, Ted had to fly at a height of about twelve thousand feet. From that altitude it was difficult to make out the features of the ground beneath, the valleys, gorges and plateaus enclosed between the peaks. But Ted had a pair of powerful field glasses, and with these he scanned what lay below him with the eyes of a hawk, intent on discovering not only the lay of the land but any moving human figure that might break the bleak monotony.

For a long time Ted’s search for a suitable landing place proved fruitless. Then at last he caught sight of a plateau that was reasonably level and big enough to supply space for a landing and also for a subsequent take-off, when that should become necessary. And Ted noted with satisfaction that at one end of the plateau was a thick patch of woodland that would afford, he thought, a safe hiding place for the plane when it was not in use.

But he did not descend. To do that in broad daylight would surely arouse suspicion among those who might be watching the plane. So he simply noted every detail of the place until he could see it with his eyes closed as plainly as though they were open. That done, he sailed serenely on beyond the mountain peaks until they faded into the distance back of him.

When once convinced that he could no longer be seen by anyone in the space enclosed by the three peaks, Ted set about finding a place where he could land at

once and spend the rest of the day.

For what he planned to do was to wait until it was near daybreak on the following morning. Then he would fly back to the plateau he had chosen and get there just as dawn began to glimmer. The chances were all against any of the robbers being astir so early, provided that they really were in that vicinity. He would have hidden his plane and be ready for business before it was fairly light.

It took him some time to find the place he wanted, but it finally presented itself and he came down. Although he was far beyond the ken of anyone in the Three Sisters region, he used the caution that was habitual with him, screening the plane with branches and establishing himself in the shadow of a clump of trees. There he waited with what patience he could summon through the rest of that day and the greater part of the night.

Then, at the time he had planned, he piloted the *Silver Streak* through the morning twilight, reaching his destination when it was barely light enough to see where to land. He trundled his plane into the depths of the woodland patch where the chances were a thousand to one against detection.

His plan of campaign was simple. It consisted chiefly in trying to see the other fellow before the other fellow saw him. And in case no man came in sight, Ted hoped that he might at least discover some camp or cave that might show signs of the presence of the outlaws.

He had brought his field glasses along, and with them he swept the sides of the cliffs and the depths of the gorges. When he saw anything that might serve as a haunt he studied it carefully and, if it looked promising, approached it as nearly as he dared, for fear of being seen, and investigated.

Noon came and passed without the slightest result. And when the sun sank behind the mountains and the shadows of night began to gather he was no further advanced.

"I've scored a goose egg for fair," Ted muttered to himself as, dog weary, he threw himself down by the side of his plane at the end of the day. "Worked like a horse and nothing to show for it but sore feet and an aching body. This chasing something that isn't there isn't what it's cracked up to be. Nothing but cold grub, too, for I don't dare to make coffee. Though for that matter," he added with a wry smile, as he thought of his experience in the hotel, "I ought to be off coffee for the rest of my life."

But a long night's sleep restored him and when he woke the next morning he started with renewed energy on his quest.

Satisfied that he had overlooked nothing of importance on the previous day, he

chose this time a section some distance beyond that he had previously traversed.

Here he had to move with especial caution, for though the woods in some cases afforded him a cover, there were many open spaces where concealment would be difficult if not impossible.

All through the morning he reconnoitred the gorges and mountain slopes. He thought that he had never seen so desolate and deserted a region. Even the birds seemed to have left it. No traces of game of the larger kinds were visible.

The sun was at its zenith when Ted heard what he thought was a footstep at some little distance ahead of him. Instantly he dodged behind a tree and listened.

Some one was making his way through the woods. At times the sound was deadened when the ground was carpeted with moss, at others the footsteps rang out clearly when they fell on stony places. But they were human footsteps Ted knew to a certainty.

There was no attempt to disguise them. The man, whoever he was, doubtless believed himself alone and was proceeding carelessly. Occasionally Ted could hear a clinking sound as though something of metal brushed against a tree trunk.

Ted hastened his steps in order to come in sight of the man he was stalking, exercising at the same time the utmost care to avoid any sound that might arouse suspicion. But it was not till he reached the edge of the patch of woodland that he descried his quarry.

The man had emerged from the fringe of forest and was crossing a bare spot of ground a few rods in extent. The general course had been downward, and they were now near the bottom of a gully. Beyond, the mountain rose at an angle that made it difficult to climb.

Ted was in a quandary. He had to cross that open space that afforded no shelter. If the man chanced to glance behind, he would be seen to a certainty.

His impulse was to drop to the ground and worm his way across, making himself as small as possible. But this would take a long time and the man he was following might so have lengthened the distance that Ted could not have picked up his trail.

He had to chance it. There was no likelihood that the man would turn. And if he did, Ted had his rifle ready, and he concluded that this would reinforce sufficiently his demand to halt.

So, swiftly and silently as a ghost, he crossed the intervening space and, as luck would have it, safely reached the wooded space on the further side.

He could see the man plainly now as he made his way up through the brush and trees that grew on the mountain slope. There was something vaguely familiar about the fellow as seen from the back, but Ted could not place him.

The man carried a tin pail that seemed to be rather heavy. At times when it swayed a little dash of water came over the edge. Ted remembered a little brook that he had come across a few minutes before and conjectured that the man had filled his pail there and was returning to his retreat.

The thought occurred to Ted that he might be wasting his time and labor. The man might be a hermit—some recluse that had taken up his home in the wilds. If that were so, Ted would find it rather embarrassing to explain why he was hunting him with a loaded rifle.

But Ted dismissed this thought at once. No hermit would choose a place so utterly destitute of game.

Just then the man stopped to rest. He put the pail on the ground, wiped his brow with a handkerchief and looked about. Ted had sensed the gesture and dodged behind a tree.

He peered through the low-lying branches and saw the man's face clearly. His heart gave a bound of exultation. He was on the right trail.

For the face was that of the waiter who had served Ted on the night that he had been drugged!

CHAPTER XIV

THE SURPRISE

Jubilation at the discovery was not Ted Scott's only emotion. Rage was there, also, as he saw the obsequious rascal without whose aid the nefarious plans of the gang could not have been carried out.

"So we meet again," Ted muttered through his clenched teeth. "I'd rather see that face of yours than win a fortune."

The man's resting spell was of short duration. He picked up the pail and again began his upward climb.

Ted followed with renewed energy. The sight of his enemy so near at hand had sent a thrill through his veins that made him forget all his weariness.

Five minutes perhaps had passed when Ted tripped over a root and nearly fell. His rifle dropped from his hand, luckily on some yielding stubble that deadened the noise of its fall.

Ted picked it up. He lifted his eyes to where he had last seen his quarry.

He rubbed his eyes and looked again. The man had disappeared!

But Ted's temporary chagrin was quickly replaced by a feeling of satisfaction. If he had vanished, it must have been into his retreat. Ted was near the end of the trail.

Now he moved with exceeding caution, for he did not know how many companions the man might have, if any. For all Ted knew, the whole gang might be assembled there.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, Ted crawled up the slope, keeping his eyes and ears strained to the utmost. He scanned every cleft, every crevice, every seam in the rocks.

Soon he heard a distant murmur that, as he crawled nearer, resolved itself into voices. The "waiter" then was not alone.

The sounds issued from an opening in the rocks that Ted could not at first detect, so completely was it screened by bushes. Guided more by sound than sight, Ted gained the entrance. Then, lying flat on the ground, he peered through an opening in the brush.

He saw a narrow entrance that quickly widened into a fair-sized cave about twenty feet in length by fifteen in width. The farther end seemed to be barred by a solid wall of rock.

There was no light except that which sifted in from the entrance, and at first Ted could barely discern two figures. One was sprawled on his stomach with his head cupped on his hands as he rested on his elbows. The other was sitting with his back

against one of the sides of the cave, smoking a cigarette.

As Ted's eyes became more accustomed to the semi-darkness, he could see that the sitting figure was that of the man with the pail. The face of the man lying prone was directly toward Ted and the latter could see it plainly.

The so-called waiter was talking.

"I'm getting the dirty end of this deal, Jed," he grumbled. "Sweating like a dog carrying water and doing all the work of this camp while the rest of the gang are probably drying up all the speakeasies in Denver."

"Aw, what's eatin' you?" growled the other. "You're havin' it pretty soft, if you ask me. Who robbed the mail and took all the chances of bein' jugged or shot while you just slipped a guy a cup of coffee? You don't know when you're well off, Al."

"All the same, what would you fellows have done if I hadn't slipped the guy that cup of coffee?" retorted Al. "That started things, didn't it?"

"Oh, yes," admitted the other indifferently, "but it didn't take such a lot of nerve. You just had to do what you were told. We're the guys that did the real work. What kick you got anyway? When we divvy up the swag you'll get your share of the coin."

"Yes, I will," said Al sarcastically. "I'll get a little sliver while you fellows hog the big end of it. The big cheese himself will cop most of it."

"Well, why shouldn't he?" asked Jed. "It was his brains, wasn't it, that got the idea and carried it out? You won't deny that, will you?"

"Oh, he's got brains enough under that sandy thatch of his," Al grudgingly admitted, "and he had plenty of time before he broke jail to figure the whole thing out."

"So it is Felwig, after all, that's at the head of this," Ted murmured to himself.

"I'm gettin' leary of this place," went on Al. "How do we know when a posse may come down on us? Why couldn't the chief get here today instead of putting it off till tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow!" thought Ted to himself. He figured things out rapidly. He would have a free hand till tomorrow. He would have time to deal with these fellows and then get back to Denver and bring back help to round up the others.

"Don't you worry about the chief," grunted Jed. "That bozo knows his business. If he says tomorrow instead of today, tomorrow it is and that's all there is about it. He doesn't have to tell you his reasons. All you got to do is to mind and jump when he gives the word."

"That's all right," said Al. "All the same, he can make mistakes like any other man."

“Show me any he’s made,” demanded Jed.

“Well, pickin’ out this guy Scott to dope and rob,” said Al.

“What mistake was there in that?” retorted Jed. “He brought back the bacon, didn’t he?”

“It isn’t that,” replied Al. “Why couldn’t he have chosen some feller that wasn’t so well known? He’d have got just as much loot, wouldn’t he?—an’ the whole country wouldn’t have been so excited about it. It would have been just another aviator robbed, and no one would have paid much attention to it. But when he picks on a feller like this Scott that the people is jest nutty about he sure stirred up a hornets’ nest. Ain’t I right?”

There was a moment of silence while Jed digested this. And when he answered it showed that he had been somewhat impressed.

“There may be somethin’ in that,” he conceded reluctantly. “But I unnerstan’ that the chief had a special bone to pick with this feller Scott. I ain’t got jest the rights of it, but I think it was Scott that had him jugged fur somethin’ he’d done an’ he swore he’d get revenge. So the chief thought he seen his chance when this here Scott got workin’ again on the mail route. He figgered that he could git revenge an’ loot at the same time.”

“Thet may all be,” said Al, who was evidently in a mutinous mood, “but the head of a gang ain’t got no right ter mix up his personal feelin’s with business that concerns the hull crowd. Let him settle with Scott private like, slip a knife inter him or somethin’ of thet kind, but it ain’t right ter get us all in a box jest ter settle his own private grudge. No, siree, it ain’t.”

“Listen, Al,” replied Jed, “it might hev been worse. I hed it straight from Check Dorp that the boss had given orders that Scott should be killed as well as robbed. That’s how come that Check give him that crack on the head with a wrench. He thought that hed done fur him, but the feller’s head must hev been thicker than he thought or else Check must hev give him a glancin’ blow.”

Ted’s blood boiled. So they had planned to murder as well as rob him!

“Pussonally,” went on Jed, “I’m jest as pleased that he didn’t kill him, not thet I care a rap whether the guy lives or dies, but if he had been killed, the detectives would hev hunted us down like rats, no matter how long it took. An’ I ain’t anxious ter have my neck stretched, not nowadays.”

“Me nuther,” agreed Al, feeling tenderly that portion of his anatomy. “It’s the only neck I’ve got an’ I set a heap of store on it. But I sure do wish the boss was comin’ today instead of tomorrow. I’m anxious ter have them bags opened up an’ see how much there is in them.”

He pointed toward the back of the cave as he spoke and Ted, straining his eyes, could barely make out a confused heap of mail bags.

“Don’t you worry,” said Jed gloatingly. “There’ll be enough ter put us all on Easy Street. An’ when I get mine, it’s me for Canada till this thing blows over.”

“Mexico for mine,” said Al. “It ain’t so easy ter get a feller back from there as it is from Canada. An’ it’s a lot more free an’ easy livin’ down there. Perlice ain’t so inquisitive an’ nosey as they is in some other places.”

“Seems ter me I saw in the papers that this here feller Scott was down there some time ago,” yawned Jed.

“He was, but he’s right here now,” came a voice from the entrance to the cave. “Hold up your hands!”

CHAPTER XV

CONSTERNATION

If a bombshell had exploded in the cave, it would not have caused a greater sensation.

The eyes of the rascals bulged as they looked up and saw Ted standing in the entrance covering them with his rifle.

Only for an instant, however, did their paralysis persist. Then they started to spring to their feet, but Ted's voice, cold as steel, checked them.

"One move and I fire," he said. "I've got you covered. Up with your hands! Quick!"

There was no mistaking the deadly determination in his voice and tone, and the rascals obeyed.

"That's better," said Ted. "Now the first move either one of you fellows makes except as I tell him to, I'll bore you through. Understand?"

They nodded, though their eyes glowed with hate.

"You," said Ted, indicating Jed, who had struggled to his knees before Ted had checked him, "are already part way down so it will be easy to do what I tell you. Lie down on the floor flat on your face and stretch your hands out in front of you."

Jed did as ordered.

"You follow suit," Ted directed Al.

There was no help for it, and Al with a snarl assumed the same recumbent position.

"Farther over to this side," ordered Ted, who saw that the two were so close together that they might whisper and concoct some plan for a combined attack.

Al wormed his way farther off until Ted was satisfied and bade him halt.

"Now," said Ted, "if you make the slightest movement, it will be the last you ever make."

He bent over Jed and "frisked" him for weapons. From his holster he took an ugly bulldog revolver and a murderous-looking knife. A thorough search of Al found only a revolver.

Ted slipped the knife into his own belt. Then he broke the revolvers, emptied them of cartridges and threw the temporarily useless weapons in a corner.

He had taken care that the faces of the miscreants should be toward the entrance so that they could not note his doings behind them. Still keeping them covered, he backed toward the rear of the cave where he had noted the presence of the mail bags.

A hasty glance at the markings on them told him that they were the same he had been carrying on the night he had been doped. He counted them. None were missing and his heart swelled with exultation. He was coming into his own with a vengeance.

He had half hoped that he might find some or all of those that had been taken from Allenby. But that special loot had probably been already divided.

“Now listen, you fellows,” he said, “and while I’m talking don’t forget that I have my gun pointed toward you and my finger’s on the trigger. Who’s the boss of your gang?”

A sullen growl came from Jed while Al remained silent.

“You’re not deaf, are you?” asked Ted. “I’m a little peevisish just now and this gun may go off suddenly.”

He emphasized the words with a poke of the muzzle into the small of Jed’s back.

The outlaw winced.

“I heard you the first time,” he snarled. “I don’t know his name.”

“Too bad your memory’s so poor,” said Ted. “I’m going to give you till I count three to remember. One—two—”

“He goes by the moniker of Smith,” growled Jed. “I don’t know whether that’s his right name or not.”

It was a common name and Jed might have been lying, but it was at least a coincidence that the man who answered Felwig’s description had been said by Thompson to call himself Smith.

“What does he look like?” continued Ted.

Jed sullenly gave a description that tallied in the main with Felwig.

“Who stands next to the big boss?” continued Ted, this time addressing himself to Al, who, in his judgment, was the more pliable of the two, as he had gathered from the conversation between the rascals.

“Check Dorp and Red Hogan,” replied Al so promptly that it was evident he sought to curry favor with his captor.

“Shut your mouth, you squealer!” roared Jed furiously.

“Ain’t you been tellin’ him things?” retorted Al.

“Only because he held the gun on me,” replied Jed. “You’re doin’ it because you want to. You’re gettin’ ready to turn State’s evidence, you yellow dog. If I ever get out of this, I’ll cut your heart out.”

“That’s enough of that blah,” said Ted curtly. “One more word out of you and I’ll gag you. Now, go ahead,” he continued, addressing Al. “You give me the straight up and down on this and I’ll see that it counts in your favor when you come up in court.”

Encouraged by this, Al opened up and gave Ted a lot of information that was to prove of great service later. Only one thing he balked at—the headquarters of the gang. But he protested so vehemently that this was a thing known only to the “big boss” and Check Dorp and Red Hogan, his chief lieutenants, that Ted believed he was telling the truth.

“So far so good,” Ted commented when he had pumped Al to his satisfaction. “Now you men have got a job ahead of you. You’ve got to carry these bags to my plane and you’ve got to be quick about it.”

“The boss would kill us if we did that,” growled Jed.

“I’ll kill you if you don’t,” returned Ted, “and as I happen to be on the spot while the boss isn’t you’ll do just as I say or you’ll pass out quick.”

Ted’s eyes glanced about the cave and saw several lengths of rope.

“Get up on your feet,” he ordered, prodding Al. “You stay just where you are,” he directed Jed. “Get up very slowly now,” he warned Al as that worthy started to obey, “or this gun will go off.”

Al did as directed.

“Pick up that piece of rope,” said Ted, indicating one at hand, “and tie that fellow’s feet, not tightly so that he can’t walk, but with about two feet of slack between the legs.”

Jed started to let out a roar but a sharp prod in the back silenced him.

Al bent over and tied the knots tightly, leaving the slack desired.

“Now sit down and do the same to yourself,” commanded Ted, throwing him another piece of rope.

“Aw, boss, that ain’t necessary,” whined Al.

“Do as I tell you,” Ted cut in crisply.

Al did so.

Ted breathed a little more freely. Now he had guarded against a sudden rush on the part of the rascals. A shot might have accounted for one, but the other might have got away.

But hobbled as they were, they would trip themselves up if they should make for him. Yet at the same time they were able to walk within the limits of their tether and carry the burdens that he was about to put upon them.

Ted backed toward the entrance of the cave.

“Now,” he commanded, “get up on your feet and each take one end of a mail bag. Hustle now.”

Al obeyed readily enough, but Jed hesitated, his little eyes glowing with rage as they fixed themselves on his captor.

“At this range I can’t miss,” Ted warned him.

Growling horribly, Jed picked up his end of the bag and with Al at the other end they bore it slowly out of the cave, Ted keeping them carefully covered, the ominous muzzle moving from one to the other.

“Now,” said Ted, as they emerged from the cave, “you go ahead in the direction I give you. And it won’t be healthy for that one that looks behind him.”

It was a toilsome journey with the heavy bag up hill and down, but Ted kept them at it remorselessly, only once in a while permitting them to lay their burden down and rest for a minute. Jed was the stronger and the work told more heavily on Al. But whenever Ted was stirred by an impulse of pity he remembered that treacherous cup of coffee and his lips tightened for how could he have any sympathy for one who had so ill treated him?

They reached the plane and Ted directed them in the storing of the bag. Then he marched them back to the cave, another bag was taken and the journey to the plane repeated.

From time to time Ted cast anxious glances at the sun, which was westering toward the horizon. He was desperately anxious to have the work finished before dark, for on that rocky plateau it would be dangerous to take off in the blackness.

And it was not merely at the sun that his glances were directed. He scanned the skies for the appearance of another plane or planes. For though, according to his captives, the “big boss” and the rest of the gang were not expected till the next day, it was very possible that the plans might have been changed. At any moment the harbingers of evil might appear in sight. And Ted knew that he would have little chance against such odds.

Ted had been cogitating what to do with his captives. He might have forced them into the plane and carried them along with him. But they would be behind him and as he would have to keep his attention on the plane a sudden assault might overpower him.

There would be little danger of this, if the captives knew nothing about flying. They would have to leave Ted alone then or go to death with him. But if one of them could take charge of the plane after overcoming Ted, that would be another story.

He had sounded the rascals on that point and both denied any knowledge of planes. But perhaps they lied. There had been a professional quality in the survey Jed had made of the plane that made Ted suspect he might be an airman.

At any rate the risk would be too great to take. He had at least recovered the stolen mail. He would see that safe in Denver. Then he would get help and return in hope of trapping the gang. If these two lesser tools escaped in the meantime, he

would have to trust to running them down later.

With the last bit of the precious freight bestowed in the plane, the rascals stood regarding him sullenly as that inexorable gun still held them under its muzzle.

Ted indicated a nearby tree.

“Go face that tree,” he commanded Jed, “and put your arms around it.”

The outlaw glared at him but obeyed.

“Now,” said Ted to Al, “take this rope and tie his hands together.”

Al did as ordered.

Ted pointed to another tree of about the same size.

“Hug that tree,” he said, picking up another bit of rope.

“Aw, boss,” Al whined, “you ain’t goin’ to tie me up here to starve to death, are you! Have a heart.”

“Don’t worry,” replied Ted. “You won’t be left there to starve. By this time tomorrow you’ll be in jail with plenty to eat. And the coffee you’ll get won’t be doped, either. Quick now, do as I tell you.”

Al embraced the tree and Ted tied his hands, holding his gun tightly pressed under one arm. Then, having made him temporarily secure, he dropped his gun and perfected the work until it was almost impossible for the men to work themselves free.

Jed fairly frothed at the mouth with rage.

“It’s your turn now!” he shouted. “But wait till the big boss gets hold of you. He’ll skin you alive. He’ll torture you to death. And I hope I’ll be there to see it.”

“Thanks,” grinned Ted. “I’ll see that you and the big boss have a chance to talk it over in prison. Goodby now. Be good boys till papa gets back.”

He started the motor, jumped into the cockpit and was off.

CHAPTER XVI

TRAPPED

It was a bumpy runway down which the *Silver Streak* roared, but Ted Scott negotiated it with less difficulty than he had feared, made a safe take-off, and headed for Denver.

His heart was filled with jubilation, chiefly of course because of the recaptured mail. Ever since Ted had been in the Air Mail Service it had been a matter of pride to him that he had never lost a single piece of mail matter. And his heart had been very sore for the last few days at the marring of his record by the loss of his cargo. His eyes lighted as he cast a glance at the bags reposing snugly behind him. Now the blot had been wiped out.

A secondary cause of satisfaction was that his "hunch" had been justified. Those pretty triplets had meant something after all. He had not gone along on a fool's errand.

Then, too, he rejoiced in the outlook for the capture of the gang. When they were rounded up Allenby would be cleared. The fellow called Al was ready to testify at the drop of a hat to save his own skin or at least moderate his punishment. And the government would breathe a sigh of relief at the capture of a band of robbers that had given them more trouble than it had known for many moons.

As though the gallant plane knew the need for haste, it zipped along like a meteor and in a trifle under two hours Ted saw the beacon lights of the Denver flying field.

He made a perfect landing, to be welcomed by Bill and Roy, who had just completed their day routes and were seeing their planes being stowed away in their hangars.

"How in thunder did you get here?" queried Bill, as he clapped Ted on the shoulder. "Thought you were in Los Angeles."

"Can't keep away from this old place," grinned Roy. "You know a criminal always comes back to the scene of the crime."

"Listen, boys," said Ted. "There's no time for wise cracking. See that mail there? Well, that's the mail of which I was robbed a few nights ago. Yes," he went on, as they stared at him, open-mouthed. "Every piece of it. Tell you all about it later. Where's Bruin? Lost your tongues?"

"He—he's in the office," Roy stammered, still filled with amazement. "He's working late tonight. But what—how—why—"

But Ted had already started running toward the office.

“Get out your planes, fellows,” he shouted back over his shoulder, “and see that they’re all ready to start, you’ll have a lively time tonight.”

He burst into the office like a whirlwind and Bruin looked up, startled at the sudden interruption. But his vexation vanished in a trice as he recognized his visitor.

“Ted!” he exclaimed, jumping to his feet. “What good wind blew you here?”

“A mighty good one, Mr. Bruin,” panted Ted. “I’ve got back the mail I was robbed of. And I know where the robbers are going to meet tomorrow. I want a posse of good men, police, detectives, Secret Service men, I don’t care who, as long as they’re good. But every minute counts.”

Maxwell Bruin was electrified. Amazement and delight shone in his features.

“You mean to say—” he gasped.

“Just what I have said,” broke in Ted and went on a few brief, hurried sentences to explain.

“I’ve tracked them to their cave,” he said. “I’ve got two of them tied to trees. If we hurry, we can get back before daylight and lie in wait for the others. I figure there’ll be six or eight of the robbers, maybe ten. I want two planes besides my own. I thought Twombly and Benedict might each take one of them. Each plane can carry three or four men. If they’re good men, that will be plenty. Now there’s the ’phone. Will you call up the Post Office Department here in Denver and the Chief of Police? Tell them what you want and ask them to send their men and urge them to come a-running. Of course they’ll be well armed.”

“I’ll do it!” cried Bruin, taking down his ’phone, “and, by Jove, I’ll come along myself! Old as I am, I’d be glad to have a tussle with that gang.”

“A little too heavy, I’m afraid,” smiled Ted, as he took in the massive proportions of his friend. “You’d weigh as much as two men in the plane. Besides we need you on this end to take care of things. How about Twombly and Benedict? Shall I tell them you’re willing?”

“Sure thing,” replied Bruin. “You go along and arrange with them while I’m busy on the ’phone.”

He kept the wires hot for a brief space, and within twenty minutes figures were coming to the flying field from various directions.

In the meantime Ted had hurried back to Bill and Roy, who were still dumbfounded by the startling news that Ted had brought them. Now Ted gave them the story in more detail amid a tumult of questions and exclamations.

“Gee, Ted, but you’re a wonder!” gasped Bill. “You’ve done in a couple of days what the whole United States force hasn’t been able to do for weeks. Trailed them to their cave and nabbed two of them all by your lonesome.”

"There's only one Ted Scott," declared Roy. "How I'd have liked to see those rascals puffing and blowing as they carried those bags," he chuckled.

"Luck was with me," said Ted. "But now, fellows, the question is, do you want to come along and help round those fellows up? Of course you don't have to, but the old man says he's willing if you are. How about it?"

"How about it?" roared Bill. "I'd like to see anyone keep me from going."

"Same here!" cried Roy, his eyes sparkling at the thought of battle.

"Bully!" exclaimed Ted. "I knew you would. Now suppose you get your planes refueled and I'll do the same with mine. Officers will be here in a few minutes. I figure we can crowd three into each plane. That with ourselves will make twelve and I guess that will be plenty. Be sure to take your revolvers along."

There was scurrying in hot haste as mechanics were called to help, and in a few minutes all three planes were ready. To no one else than Bruin, Bill and Roy had Ted confided his mission, and the other men on the field were kept in ignorance as to the destination of the trio of planes, not that their loyalty was doubted, but for fear that some unguarded word might put some of the robbers' lookouts on their guard.

Barely were the preparations completed than a dozen picked men from the Secret Service and police force were on hand. The latter were headed by Chief Callahan, while, as the leader of the former, Ted was pleased to see his old acquaintance, Burnaby, who had come to Denver on the hunt for Felwig.

"Well, Ted," said Burnaby, as he shook hands warmly with the young aviator, "what do you mean by stealing our stuff, getting in ahead of the Secret Service men themselves?"

"I simply saw a chance and took it," grinned Ted, "but after all I've simply started things. It still remains to capture the gang and, take it from me, they're tough birds."

"Finding them was the hard thing," returned Burnaby, "and I guess we have force enough with us to master them. If they resist and it comes to killing, they'll have nobody to blame but themselves."

Chief Callahan was also introduced to Ted and looked admiringly at him from beneath his grizzled brows.

"Great work, my boy, from what I've heard," he said. "If you ever get tired of flying, there'll be a place in our detective force for you and don't you forget it."

"I'll remember," smiled Ted. "And now if you gentlemen are ready, suppose you hop in. You, Chief, and Mr. Burnaby are to come in my plane and we can get one more in, if you don't mind a little crowding."

"A little thing like that doesn't bother us," said Callahan as he, Burnaby and a

detective named Moriarty climbed into the fuselage of the *Silver Streak*.

The plan of campaign as suggested by Ted and agreed to by the others was for the *Silver Streak* to lead the van with the two other planes keeping close behind. Once on the scene Ted would indicate the place of landing and the planes would descend in order. Then they would hide the machines as best they could, secrete themselves in the neighborhood of the cave and wait for the coming of the outlaws.

The moon was nearly at its full, and as the weather was clear no trouble was experienced by the voyagers in making the trip. The peaks of the Three Sisters were visible in the moonlight for miles before they reached them, and it was only a little after midnight when the journey was completed.

For fear that the moon might be overcast when they arrived, Ted had provided himself with a powerful searchlight and as he turned this on the rocky plateau every feature of it was clearly visible. Ted descended first and then Bill and Roy made their landings without much difficulty.

The passengers climbed out, a little stiff from their cramped positions, but alert for whatever might come.

Ted led the way to where he had left the outlaw's tied to the trees. To his satisfaction, he saw that they were still there. Al was quiescent enough, but Jed had employed his time in trying to loosen the ropes that bound him and had tugged desperately at them and sawed them against the rough bark of the tree until some of the strands were broken and others considerably frayed.

"Well, I see you're still here," remarked Ted with a smile, as he and his companions approached them.

"Yes, boss," said Al meekly enough.

"I wouldn't have been here by morning though, you young squirt," growled Jed, as he glared at Ted and the group around him.

"Recognize either of these fellows, Chief?" asked Ted of Callahan.

The veteran police chief turned his flashlight on Jed.

"Sure, I know him," replied Callahan after a minute's scrutiny. "It's Jed Brannigan, known as Jed the Yegg. He's been in prison several times, and he's wanted now for a bank job in Pueblo around the first of the year."

"It's a lie!" shouted Jed. "You've got the wrong man."

"That's what they all say," replied the chief calmly. "Untie him, Moriarty," he ordered, turning to his assistant, "and slip the cuffs on him."

Moriarty did as directed.

"As for this one," said Callahan, turning and examining Al, "I don't know him. He's a new one in this part of the country."

“But I know him,” put in Burnaby. “He’s a lookout for the Bailey gang that robbed a number of postoffices in Ohio last year. Guess that part of the country got too hot for him and he’s skipped out here.”

“Never was in Ohio in my life,” denied Al hotly.

“And you won’t be for a number of years, or I miss my guess,” returned Burnaby. “This plane job will likely give you a twenty-year stretch in jail.”

Al was also released and handcuffed and a couple of detectives were detailed to guard him and Jed in a place far from the cave, so that no sign or cry of theirs should give warning to their confederates.

Then the rest of the party, led by Ted, made their way to the cave. They approached it with the greatest caution for there was no certainty but what the gang had come sooner than they were expected.

But everything about the cave was as silent as the grave, and a flashlight thrown suddenly into the cavern revealed that it was empty.

Ted breathed a sigh of relief. He had not returned too late.

“There’s one thing that has been puzzling me, Ted,” said Burnaby. “Those fellows are supposed to come by plane. What’s to hinder them from seeing our planes as they come down to the plateau, taking alarm and scooting off again before we can nab them?”

“That’s all right,” replied Ted. “I wormed it out of that fellow, Al, yesterday that the gang makes its landings in a different place from that I’d chosen. There’s a spur of the mountain between that spot and the other, and the one they use is so much nearer to the cave that they always use it.”

“Good,” said Burnaby. “Of course, as soon as they land they’ll make directly for the cave, because that’s where the loot is. I’ll confer with Callahan and we’ll choose some likely hiding places about the cave and lie in wait for them.”

Such hiding places existed in plenty, clefts in the mountain slope, thickets and brushwood, and the men were stationed there, covering themselves with leaves and branches to make the concealment more complete. In a few minutes the vicinity of the cave seemed absolutely deserted.

Then ensued a long period of waiting. The moon withdrew, the stars paled, the skies grew gray and morning came.

And with the morning came the humming of a plane, growing louder and louder and then subsiding as the power was lessened and the plane spiraled about for a landing. From where the watchers were hiding they could not see it, but their ears took the place of eyes and they knew that it was not far away. The watchers drew their weapons and waited for the signal.

“No shooting, boys,” they had been warned by Burnaby and Callahan, “unless it becomes actually necessary. Give them the butts of your guns. If the shooting comes, shoot to wound and not to kill.”

Twenty minutes more passed and then could be heard the trampling of feet and the sound of voices. There was no pretense of secrecy, so safe did the gang feel in this retreat in the mountain fastnesses.

Soon they came in view of the unseen watchers, scrambling over the rocky slope. Ted counted six of them, tough, hard-bitten men with crime stamped upon their faces. But Felwig was not with them.

Ted felt a qualm of disappointment. Was the leader of the gang to escape the net? Then a sentence from one of the men reassured him.

“I’m in a twenty,” the man in advance said with a chuckle. “I had a bet with Check Dorp that our plane would get here before the one he’s comin’ in with the boss. I’ve won the bet.”

“They’ll be here pretty soon,” replied another, “and what’s a measly twenty when you think of the thousands we’re going to divide today? Oh, boy! Say, it will make me tired tryin’ to think of ways to spend it.”

“That’s the least of my troubles,” put in another. “I’ll have no trouble getting rid of it. Easy come, easy go, is what I say. Why should we care when it’s gone? All we have to do is to pull off another job.”

“As long as the cops lay off us,” said one of the others a trifle doubtfully.

And then Ted’s nerves tingled as he thought that he heard far off the faint hum of another plane. The sound ceased, however, after a minute, and he concluded that he might have been mistaken.

The crowd reached the entrance to the cave and disappeared within.

Instantly Callahan and Burnaby rose to their feet and waved their hands. It was the signal.

Noiselessly the detectives and Secret Service men ranged themselves about their leaders on either side of the cave.

Suddenly there was a hubbub within. A roar of rage echoed through the cave.

“The swag is gone!” thundered a raucous voice. “We’ve been double-crossed!”

CHAPTER XVII

BROUGHT TO BAY

For a moment there was pandemonium inside the cavern, all the outlaws yelling at once.

A hoarse voice commanded silence.

“It’s them double-crossers, Al and Jed,” the owner of the voice declared. “They seen a chance to cop the whole shootin’ match and make off with it. But maybe they haven’t got very far. Let’s scatter and hunt them up.”

There was a yell of assent and the crowd came rushing out of the cave pell-mell.

Came to find themselves in the arms of a cluster of keen-eyed, hard-muscled men who waded into them with the force of a thunderbolt!

There was a yell of surprise and fright and then the fight began in earnest. The thugs were desperate men and they knew what awaited them when captured. Some sought their pistols, others reached for their knives.

A man close to Ted pulled his revolver and leveled it at Callahan. Ted was on him like a tiger, knocked his arm down and gave him a terrific clip in the jaw that staggered him. As he fell back a pistol butt of one of the detectives crashed on his skull and knocked him down and out.

For several minutes there was a terrible mêlée of swinging fists and pistol butts, punctuated by occasional shots and the flash of knives before the ruffians could be disarmed. But the attacking party had the advantage of surprise and of numbers, and the issue was never in doubt. Before long every one of the rascals was decorated with a pair of handcuffs and the fight was over.

The casualties had been few. A bullet had ridged the scalp of Moriarty and one of the detectives had received a knife wound in the shoulder. Others had been badly battered, but nothing to be compared with the prisoners who had taken a terrible beating before they had been subdued.

“Gee, that was some fight,” chuckled Bill, who, with Ted and Roy, had been in the thick of it. “I simply wouldn’t have missed it for a farm.”

“Look!” said Ted suddenly. “That plane up there!”

All eyes were turned upward. There, at a height of about five hundred feet, was a plane that bore no markings. In the excitement of the fight it had come into sight without being noticed.

Even as they watched, the plane shot upward, then came to an even keel and swung around to the north.

“It’s dollars to doughnuts that Felwig is in that plane,” cried Ted. “He’s seen the

fight and knows that the game is up. Bill, Roy, come along with me.”

He started running in the direction of his plane with his comrades close on his heels.

“What’s the game?” panted Bill.

“I’m going up after him,” replied Ted. “You fellows want to string along?”

“Sure thing,” they cried in chorus and then, because breath was precious, said no more until they had reached the plane.

It was the work of a short time for the three to jump into the *Silver Streak* and soar into the skies. But the run to the plane had been a long one, and as they looked around, the fugitive plane had disappeared. Even the field glasses failed to reveal its whereabouts.

Still, Ted started in pursuit in the direction the plane had taken, and the great speed of the *Silver Streak* might have given him a chance, if there had not been a mist hanging in the air that made visibility difficult. But the haze thickened until it had almost the consistency of a fog, and it was a dead certainty that Felwig would have swerved to left or right to throw off any possible pursuer.

To maintain the chase under such conditions would have been sheer folly, and Ted and his companions were forced to give it up and return to their starting point.

It was a great disappointment, not only to Ted, but to Burnaby and Callahan, that the arch-criminal and his chief lieutenant had escaped for the time. Still, they had made a notable bag of prisoners. The gang had been broken up, the notorious Red Hogan was among the captives, the loot had been recovered and the leaders were in headlong flight.

It was a triumphal procession that wended its way back through the air to Denver. The news of their achievement spread like wildfire, was telegraphed all over the United States, and Ted’s name was on every tongue. He was overwhelmed with congratulations from every quarter. His quick wit and unflinching courage had made him more than ever the nation’s idol.

“Though most of the credit should go to three little girls who posed for their picture,” Ted remarked whimsically to Bill.

But time was pressing now, and Ted resolutely thrust from his mind all thoughts of the past and present and devoted himself to the future and the great enterprise he had on hand.

The trip to Bromville had to be given up. Ted did this with the greatest reluctance, for this was the most perilous venture on which he had ever embarked, and he wanted to say goodbye to Eben and Charity in case he should never see them again.

But he had to content himself with a long loving letter in which he sought to quell the fear for his safety that he knew would arise in their hearts. He wrote also to Hapworth expressing his regret that he could not have him as his companion on the journey.

At Denver he found a sheaf of telegrams from Ed assuring him that everything was going along finely, that the plane, in the tests to which he had subjected it, had met all expectation and that all the needed supplies and fuel were on board. Ted blessed his stars that he had found in Ed not only an expert airman but a first-class business man as well.

Thousands of Denver people were on the air field when Ted took off, for the news of his coming venture had spread like wildfire and all were anxious to give him a royal send-off. But the warmest good wishes were those that Ted received from Bruin and his comrades in the Air Mail Service.

“Good luck, Ted, my boy,” said Bruin, his voice husky with emotion, for he loved Ted almost as though he had been his own son. “I tell you straight I won’t have much sleep until I learn that you have landed safely in Australia.”

“Thank you, Mr. Bruin,” said Ted, himself deeply affected. “I shall never forget all you have been to me.”

“Here’s a rabbit’s foot,” said Bill, producing a cherished mascot. “I’m not sure whether it was caught by a cross-eyed negro at midnight in a churchyard, but it’s meant good luck for me and I hope it will be for you.”

“I haven’t any mascot,” said Roy, “but I’ll be rooting for you every minute, and if good wishes count for anything, you’ll get to Australia in record time.”

Ted responded gratefully, climbed into the cockpit, gave the signal for the blocks to be knocked away, and the *Silver Streak* roared down the runway for a few hundred yards and then soared into the air like a bird.

Ted circled the field once, waved his hand to the cheering crowd and headed for Los Angeles.

He reached his destination safely, stowed the *Silver Streak* in a hangar and made his way to San Pedro, the shipping port of Los Angeles, at the head of the Los Angeles River. There he found Ed, who received him literally with open arms.

“Gee, but I’m glad to see you, Ted!” he said. “I thought perhaps it was all off when I heard of how you got mixed up with those mail thieves.”

“We’re brothers in misfortune, sure enough,” laughed Ted. “They got both of us in the same way. But we have the last laugh. Now about the trip. How about Rockridge?”

“He’s a pest,” replied Ed promptly. “Been running around like a chicken with its

head cut off, fuming and fretting and wondering whether you would turn up. I'd get in touch with him right away and quiet him down."

"I'll do it," promised Ted. "I telegraphed him yesterday that I'd be on hand. But now tell me about the plane. How do you like her, now that you've tried her?"

"She's a sweet actor," replied Ed. "Does anything I tell her to and makes no fuss about it. Whoever built her made a good job of it. She's swift and staunch and yields to the slightest touch of the controls."

"Not afraid to trust your life to her, eh?" smiled Ted.

"Not a bit," was the reply. "Come over and take a look at her."

The *Southern Queen*, the name with which Henderson had christened her, stood at the head of the long runway that extended down toward the river bank. Now in the sunlight Ted got a bigger impression of her mammoth size than he had been able to in the plant. She was the greatest and most powerful plane that had yet been constructed and he was proud that he was going to be her pilot on an unexampled flight.

She was equipped with practically every instrument known to air navigation. She had no devices, however, to guard against a long stay on the water, if she were forced down. But as a compensation for that, the big tanks could be emptied in case of emergency, the motors dropped off, and the wings and tanks would suffice to keep them afloat for a week or more on the water.

The food supplies were ample and were already on board. There were several dozens of sandwiches for each man, flasks filled with coffee and hot soup and some bunches of fruit. Besides there were a couple of hampers of chocolate and cans of condensed meat and soups that were regarded as emergency rations, only to be used in case of need.

For drinking water they had several gallons and in addition there was a still with which they could make ocean water drinkable. Precaution had even gone so far as to provide a small mouth-still for each voyager, that they could use in case of being forced down to the water.

For two hours or more Ted went over every strut and bolt and gear and valve of the plane, and when he straightened up he confirmed Ed's opinion that the machine was in perfect shape. To make assurance doubly sure he took it up into the air himself and put it through its paces.

"She works like a dream," pronounced Ted, when he came back to earth. "If we don't make the trip safely, it won't be the fault of the *Southern Queen*."

CHAPTER XVIII

WHIZZING ALONG

His test of the plane completed, Ted Scott hurried to the office of Rockridge where he found that worthy pacing the floor in a state of considerable agitation.

His face lighted up as he saw Ted, and he came forward eagerly to greet him.

“Thank heaven you’re here!” he exclaimed. “I’ve been on tenterhooks for fear you wouldn’t get here.”

“Well, I’ve turned up, you see,” smiled Ted, “and everything is ready to the last notch. I’m figuring on starting at dawn tomorrow.”

“Good!” said Rockridge with great satisfaction. “I’ve fixed my affairs here so that I can start on five minutes’ notice.”

“Any news from Australia?” asked Ted. “I didn’t know but what the lady had relented and so made the trip unnecessary.”

Rockridge shook his head.

“No such luck,” he answered. “I’ve sent several additional messages, but to no effect. I even told her I was coming by plane to try to stop the marriage.”

“And what did she have to say to that?” inquired Ted.

“Told me that I was foolish to take all the trouble,” replied Rockridge, “but if I got there safely, she’d be glad to give me a slice of the wedding cake. Can you beat that? Aren’t women the limit!”

“It’s too bad,” said Ted, trying with difficulty to repress a smile, “but it’s also said that women are changeable and she may give in yet.”

Ted got a good sleep that night, because he did not know how long it would be before he got another one. But long before dawn he rose and hurried to the air field.

Despite the early hour, a great throng had assembled, for the whole country had been profoundly stirred by the news that Ted Scott once more was about to try what had never yet been done by man, and interest in the great adventure was at fever heat.

Ed had slept in the plane that night and Rockridge came on the field almost at the same moment as Ted. He was greatly excited, and Ted did not wonder. For Ted and Ed flying was all in the day’s work and they had become inured to its dangers. But for a novice to attempt a flight like that was a very different thing. Ted realized how deep his affection must be for the headstrong girl when he would risk his life to save her from the consequences of her folly.

With as much unconcern as though he were simply going to fly across the Los Angeles River, Ted adjusted his flying togs and climbed into the plane. Ed took a

seat beside him and Rockridge behind him.

The motors were raced for a few minutes to warm them up and then Ted gave the signal to knock away the blocks. A mighty cheer went up from the crowd as the great plane started down the runway.

But the shout turned into one of consternation when the plane halted abruptly. A bit of Ed's clothing had caught in the switch of one of the motors and the motor stopped. Mechanics hurried up and re-cranked the motor, and then hurriedly got out of the way.

Again the motors buzzed and the plane made its second start.

One hundred, two hundred, three hundred yards, and still the machine showed no signs of leaving the ground.

It carried a heavier load than any plane had ever carried before, and fears began to be expressed by the spectators that she was too burdened to rise.

Ted threw in all the power he had and the speed of the plane increased. But still the wheels hugged the earth. And the end of the runway was coming perilously near.

Twice the wheels left the earth and twice they rebounded. Then, when they had nearly reached the river's edge, they went up for a third time.

But this time they did not come back. Inch by inch, foot by foot, Ted strove desperately for altitude. Now they were over the river itself, and if the plane should come down, the journey would have ended almost before it had begun.

But the *Southern Queen* had found herself and gallantly fought to keep her advantage. Steadily she mounted, and the pull of the motors shot a thrill of relief through Ted's heart.

But the danger was not yet over, for on the further side of the river were houses that had to be surmounted. The plane approached them at an angle that left it doubtful whether she would clear the obstacles.

Ted swerved to the right just far enough to miss a tall building and just managed to pass over a slightly lower one. It was a matter of inches, but it sufficed, and there was an awed gasp from the crowd that had anticipated disaster.

But now the worst was over and the plane, gaining power, soared steadily into the sky until she had reached a height of a thousand feet. Then Ted brought her to an even keel and let her drive.

"Gee, Ted, but that rabbit's foot of Bill's must have been working," murmured Ed in a low tone to his companion.

"Something was," replied Ted. "My heart was in my mouth for a minute."

He glanced behind him at Rockridge, and saw that his passenger was "white about the gills."

“We’re off!” cried Ted gaily, trying to infuse some of his own confidence in the novice.

Rockridge tried to smile, but it was a poor attempt and quickly faded.

“We were in great danger that time, weren’t we?” he asked in a voice not entirely steady.

“We’re always in some danger when we’re in a plane,” responded Ted. “The plane had a fearfully heavy load and it didn’t rise easily. But now we’re on velvet.”

“But if the load’s so heavy, can the plane stay in the air?” queried Rockridge.

“Sure,” declared Ted. “The only difficulty was in getting started. And you must remember as the engine eats up the gas she’s getting lighter every minute. She’s flying now like a bird.”

Rockridge subsided and Ted devoted all his attention to the controls.

“That guy’s getting scared,” murmured Ed to Ted out of the corner of his mouth.

“Natural enough that he should be a little nervous,” Ted replied in an equally low tone. “But that will probably wear off as he gets a little more used to it.”

In a little while the rolling surges of the ocean came in sight. Ted thrilled to it. Once he had conquered it as he had conquered its sister ocean, the Atlantic. Now he was bent on a new conquest, but one that involved far more peril. Would he make it?

His reason told him only that he might. His pride told him that he must. His will assured him that he would.

Soon the land faded from sight. About them was nothing but air, beneath them nothing but sea. They were fairly launched on their great adventure, skimming like a seagull over the waters of the Pacific.

“Goodbye, United States!” exclaimed Ed.

“Hail, Australia!” cried Ted.

CHAPTER XIX

A BREATH-TAKING MOMENT

The hilarity of the two airmen was not shared by Rockridge. He sat glum and silent, biting his nails.

“He needs something to divert his mind,” said Ted to Ed. “Suppose you change places with him for a while, and I’ll try to interest him in the instruments.”

Ed complied and Rockridge plumped down in the seat that the co-pilot had vacated.

“I don’t know how much you’re interested in mechanics, Mr. Rockridge,” said Ted, “but I thought you might like to see how some of these instruments work. They’re not only interesting in themselves but they’re mighty important, because in time of fog or darkness they’re the only things by which we can guide our course. Without them, we’d be wandering around like blind men.”

“You seem to have a lot of them,” remarked Rockridge as he scanned the long array of instruments before him.

“Yet not one too many,” replied Ted. “Look at this earth inductor compass, for instance. I couldn’t have found my way over the Atlantic without that. Much of the time I was in fog or storm, couldn’t see the sun, couldn’t see the stars. Yet by the aid of this contrivance I was able to hit the Irish coast within three miles of the point I aimed at. You see the way it works. I set my course along a certain line. If I go a little too far to the right, this hand swings out this way. If to the left, it swings in the other direction. In either case I just change my course until the marker is again on the correct line.”

“Suppose it gets out of order?” asked Rockridge.

“Then you’re out of luck,” replied Ted. “It does go on the blink sometimes, but not often. But that’s a chance that every aviator has to take. If there weren’t any risks in the game, there wouldn’t be any fun in flying.”

“Let’s hope it won’t go flooey on the present trip,” observed Rockridge.

“You may wonder,” went on Ted, “why we need these three thermometers,” pointing to the objects in question.

“It does seem as though one would be enough,” said Rockridge.

“That’s because we’re equipped with three whirlwind motors,” explained Ted. “Each has to have its own special thermometer. Now here’s a damped liquid inclinometer. That shows the fore and aft altitude. This altimeter shows just the altitude at which we’re flying at any given moment. You notice that at present we’re flying at a height of about a thousand feet. I propose to keep it at that rate during a

good part of the journey.”

“Why?” asked Rockridge.

“To save the gas that would be used in climbing higher,” explained Ted. “You know we’re figuring pretty closely on our fuel supply and we have to conserve it as much as possible. Every time I shoot up about five thousand feet I’ve traveled a mile. But I’ve only gone up and am not a bit farther advanced on the journey.”

“You don’t think there’s any possibility of the gas giving out, do you?” asked Rockridge nervously.

“Oh, no,” Ted assured him. “I think I’ve allowed for a comfortable margin of safety.”

“But suppose it did give out, what then?” persisted Rockridge.

“We won’t contemplate any such possibility,” evaded Ted. “Don’t let’s trouble trouble till trouble troubles us. Now these three things here,” he went on hurriedly to change the trend of the conversation, “are the oil-pressure gauges. That instrument over there is the speed indicator, that the bank and turn indicator, and that the rate of climb indicator.”

He explained the working of each of these devices, spinning out the talk as long as possible, so as to give Rockridge that much less time to indulge in gloomy forebodings. Then, when the conversation had lapsed, he called on his two companions to change seats again.

“You two sure have had a chinfest,” said Ed, as he resumed his seat beside his comrade. “Do you think that you cheered him up a bit? He sure needs a lot of cheering.”

“I’m none too sure,” replied Ted, “but anyway while we’ve been talking we’ve gone another hundred miles toward Australia. And a hundred miles isn’t to be sneezed at.”

“Right enough,” agreed Ed, “but I can see that this isn’t going to be any joy party for his nibs. I bet even now he’s thinking that he’d better have left the girl alone to marry the gink she’s taken a fancy to.”

“Maybe,” laughed Ted. “But then I’m no judge of the feelings of a man in love. I’m glad that so far I haven’t had any other sweetheart than my plane.”

“You’ll fall for a girl sometime, just like the rest of them,” warned Ed.

“Well, if I do, I hope I won’t have to fly overseas to keep her from marrying some other fellow,” grinned Ted.

A brisk wind from the right quarter had sprung up and the *Southern Queen* was just eating up space.

At the start and for some time later, the sea below them had been studded

thickly with vessels in the coastwise and transoceanic trade. The sight of the plane evoked the keenest interest in all of them and everyone who could be on deck was there looking upward with glasses glued to their eyes. Once in a while, as Ted swooped a little lower, he could hear the faint sounds of cheers and see the waving of hands. If the vessel happened to be a liner, there would be blasts from its whistle. The spectators knew what the plane was and whither it was headed and were anxious to wish it bon voyage.

“I’d feel a mighty sight safer, if I were on the deck of one of those vessels,” muttered Rockridge.

“But you wouldn’t be moving so fast,” Ted countered. “They won’t even be at Hawaii by the time we’re in Australia.”

“If we get there,” said Rockridge pessimistically.

“Ain’t he the gloomy one?” murmured Ed disgustedly to Ted. “He’s as cheerful as a crutch.”

Another hour passed and a slight haze was rising from the sea. It was not pronounced enough to cause Ted any special uneasiness as far as the navigating of the plane was concerned, but he regretted its coming, because it deprived them of the cheerful rays of the sun and was apt to accentuate the brooding of their passenger.

It shut out also the sight of the sea below and emphasized the loneliness of the great bird floating through space. To Ted and Allenby that loneliness was soothing and served in no degree to depress their spirits. But it was far otherwise with the novice, who needed everything possible to distract his attention from himself.

“Ought to have brought a nurse along to cheer him up with fairy stories,” muttered Ed.

“S-sh!” warned Ted. “He may hear—Gee, Ed! Stand by!”

The plane was falling!

A shriek of fright came from Rockridge.

Down went the plane like a stone!

CHAPTER XX

WITHIN AN ACE OF DEATH

Ted Scott's face was white and his heart skipped a beat.

He knew instantly what had happened.

He had struck an air pocket, one of those treacherous partial vacuums that are the dread of the air navigator, as dangerous as the concealed rock is to the mariner.

There was no longer any buoyancy in the plane. The sustaining air had disappeared. The law of gravitation had asserted itself and the plane was going down like a plummet.

Instinctively Ted threw in all the power of his engine in the hope that he might get far enough forward to escape the vacuum and find again a cushion of air. But the pocket was still there.

Rockridge screamed again and, bending over, grabbed Ted by the shoulders.

"We're going down!" he yelled. "Down, I tell you! Down into the sea! We'll be drowned, drowned!"

Ed tore the hands of the frantic man from Ted's shoulders.

"Keep still," he snapped. "Leave Ted alone."

Now through the tenuous haze Ted could catch a glimpse of the tossing billows beneath. In another few seconds it seemed certain they would be engulfed.

Then he felt a current of air, a certain billowing beneath him as though a feather mattress had been thrust beneath the plane. There was no longer that horrible suggestion of emptiness. He had reached the bottom of the pocket.

The speed of the plane was checked, but the momentum it had gained was not to be overcome in an instant. But now the power of the motors had something to work on and the plane responded more and more to the controls.

Ted diverted the perpendicular motion to a slanting one and pulled desperately at the joy stick. Even that slant was carrying it downward, however, and it seemed to be headed directly for a giant billow.

It did strike the crest of the wave, but only with the wheels. The spray dashed against the windows of the cockpit. But now Ted had changed the downward slant first to a horizontal one and then to one that pointed slightly upward.

Quivering in every part of its structure, the *Southern Queen* yielded to Ted's craftsmanship and mounted once more into the skies. The danger was over. They had come within an ace of death and lived to tell the story.

Only when they had reached a height of two thousand feet did Ted bring the plane to a level keel and relax. The experience had lasted but little more than a

minute but every one of those sixty seconds had been tense with the apprehension of doom.

He glanced at the seat beside him and found it empty. He looked behind him and saw Rockridge still struggling in the grasp of Ed, who held him with the hug of a grizzly bear.

“Would have thrown himself out of the plane if I hadn’t grabbed him,” explained Ed to his comrade. “Keep still, can’t you?” he said, addressing himself to his captive. “Can’t you see that the danger is over?”

Rockridge subsided and Ed at a motion from Ted released him. The man sank back into his seat, white as a sheet, his brow wet with perspiration.

“Just get a grip on yourself, Mr. Rockridge,” counseled Ted in a soothing tone. “It was a dangerous minute and I don’t wonder that you’re a bit shaken.”

“‘Bit’ is good,” muttered Ed to himself in an undertone.

“I don’t often give way like that,” said the millionaire in a shamefaced way. “I guess I can face dangers on land as well as the next man. But up in the air—well, that’s different. You fellows are used to it.”

“That’s true,” conceded Ted, who wanted to let Rockridge down as easily as he could. “Every man to his calling. That air pocket was bad medicine and enough to make any man shaky.”

“Do you often meet those things—those air pockets, as you call them?” asked Rockridge, wiping his brow.

“Not very often,” returned Ted, “and when they do happen they’re usually not as deep as this one. The chances are a thousand to one that we won’t hit another one this trip. Suppose, Ed, you break out some of that grub,” he continued. “It’s about time for lunch and a sandwich and a cup of coffee wouldn’t go bad.”

He was not especially hungry or thirsty, but he figured that a meal would prove a diversion for his passenger. And it did, for Rockridge cheered up considerably under the influence of the hot coffee and for a time seemed to be normal. And a little later, Ted, glancing back, saw that the man had dropped off into a doze.

For this he was profoundly thankful and Ed shared his feeling to the full.

“Gee, but I had all I could do to keep that fellow from going overboard,” Ed confided to his comrade. “Thought at one time I’d have to give him a clip on the chin and make him dead to the world. Think of knocking out your own boss,” he added with a grin.

“It isn’t a practice to be commended,” smiled Ted, “though he couldn’t fire you now, even if he wanted to.”

“The man’s a rank coward,” commented Ed. “Screaming out like a hysterical

girl!”

“I don’t know that I’d call him a coward,” said Ted thoughtfully. “I heard once of a great general, brave as a lion in battle, that fainted whenever he saw a mouse. That man wasn’t a coward. He was simply of such a nervous organization that he could stand some things and couldn’t face others. Perhaps Rockridge, as he said, would be as good as the next one on land. He’s simply no good when he’s up in the air. Just goes all to pieces.”

“Didn’t he tell you that he’d made a number of flights?” asked Ed.

“Yes,” replied Ted, “but I’m inclined to think that he was stretching things a bit. Probably thought I wouldn’t take him along, if I thought that he’d had no experience. And I wouldn’t, either, for you know and I know that men sometimes go loco in the air. But that’s past praying for now. We’ll have to make the best of it.”

“Cheerful prospect, having a madman in the plane,” muttered Ed.

“Cheer up, old-timer,” grinned Ted. “The worst is yet to come.”

The haze was now rapidly deepening into fog. Soon the sea and sky were blotted out. The wings of the plane looked spectral in the growing darkness.

Rockridge roused from his doze with a start.

“Is it night already?” he asked.

“No,” replied Ted, “it’s only the middle of the afternoon. There’s a fog surrounding us.”

Rockridge shivered.

“It’s wrapping us up in a shroud,” he murmured, shifting uneasily in his seat, “reaching out for us with skeleton fingers.”

Ted and Ed looked at each other.

“The mourners will now pass round the bier,” whispered Ed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ROCKET'S GLARE

Ted Scott was reduced now to flying wholly by his instruments. He made no reply to Ed's remark, for all his attention was fixed on the board in front of him.

"You think you can find your way all right in this fog!" queried Rockridge, a quaver in his voice.

"I think so," replied Ted. "I've done it many a time before. We can't hit anything at the height we're flying. And there's no other plane flying over the ocean that can come in collision with us."

"Nice to have a 'back seat driver' trying to run the plane," muttered Ed, who was getting weary of the passenger's vagaries.

There was silence for a little while. Then it was broken again by Rockridge.

"Seems to me I've heard that in a fog the wings get so wet and heavy that the plane is forced down," he said.

"The wet alone couldn't do that," answered Ted as patiently as possible. "It's only when it freezes into ice that it weights down the plane. That could happen going across the Atlantic, but it couldn't in these latitudes. With every hour that passes we're getting nearer and nearer to the tropics."

On and on the *Southern Queen* winged her way, covering space like a comet. The fog was so thick and black that no one could tell just when day merged into night from ocular evidence, but the clock on the dial told them that the day was over.

Rockridge had subsided for the time, but now a real reason for uneasiness came to Ted.

The central motor was not working as it should. There was a fluttering that Ted did not like. Then it commenced to knock. The musical hum of the motor was interspersed with discordant notes.

The two other motors seemed to be working all right. If they kept on, they might be sufficient to keep the heavily loaded plane in the air. But this was by no means certain to be the case, and in any event the speed of the plane would be crippled.

"Ed," said Ted in a low tone, "take a look at the feed pipe and see whether it's working properly."

Ed did so as unostentatiously as he could, but Rockridge's fears awoke again at the unwonted activity.

"What's the matter?" he asked nervously.

"Just going over things to see that they're all right," said Ed soothingly.

"What's that funny noise I hear?" continued Rockridge.

“Oh, one hears all sorts of queer things at night,” evaded Ed. “It’s all right,” he said to Ted, as he concluded his examination. “Nothing the matter with the feed pipe and everything else seems to be in good order.”

“Good!” said Ted. “The knocks are lessening now. Guess the old girl got just a bit temperamental, like an opera singer.”

In a little while, to his great relief, the knocks again subsided into a flutter and then died away altogether.

Another hour passed and then the two aviators were startled by a shriek from Rockridge.

“Look! Look!” he cried. “A ghost!”

“Ghost your grandmother!” snorted Ed.

“What do you mean?” asked Ted, turning round.

“There! There!” shouted Rockridge, pointing to the right. “Out there on the wing of the plane.”

They strained their eyes, following the direction of his pointing finger, and faintly descried a white object, looming spectrally through the fog.

It was true enough an eerie sight, and despite themselves they felt a chill at the heart. Then Ted burst into laughter.

“It’s a seagull!” he cried. “The poor thing has got tired and thought it would steal a ride.”

“I tell you it’s a ghost,” clamored Rockridge.

“Nonsense!” replied Ted. “See how quickly I’ll lay that ghost.”

He made a sudden shift of the plane and shook the creature off. It flapped its wings and sailed away into the darkness.

“As a ghost-killer, you’re no slouch, Ted,” chuckled Ed.

Rockridge was convinced, but still shaken.

“Haven’t I heard that it was bad luck when a gull lands on a ship?” he quavered.

“No,” replied Ted. “You’re thinking of the albatross and the Ancient Mariner. He had bad luck, not because it landed on his ship but because he killed it.”

Now the fog began to lift, and the spirits of the voyagers lifted with it. Thinner and thinner it grew, and they could catch glimpses of the white crests on the waves far below.

But it was still heavy enough to hide from them the skies above, and Ted began to climb for altitude, as he was anxious to check up on his instruments.

Higher and higher he went, the fog shredding out as he ascended, until he had surmounted the last bank and seemed to emerge into a new world of the air.

The sky was spangled with stars and all space seemed to be flooded with the

glory of the moon. Its rays silvered the plane, which seemed to be a fairy boat floating on a sea of glass. Even Rockridge seemed to yield to its influence and share in the exhilaration that stirred his companions.

“This is the life,” sang Ted jubilantly. “Suppose, Ed, you get out your instruments and take observations. We couldn’t ask for a better chance than this.”

Ed did as directed, and for the next ten minutes was busy observing and transferring the results of his observations to paper.

Then he compared the results with Ted’s calculations and found that they substantially agreed.

“Good!” exulted Ted. “We’re right on our course, going straight as an arrow toward Australia.”

Below them now the last vestige of the fog had disappeared and Ted descended to an altitude of about a thousand feet.

Some miles ahead of them on the ocean’s surface they could make out a series of bright lights.

“It’s a liner,” remarked Ted, as he saw that the lights marked the outline of a vessel.

“And going in our direction,” added Ed. “But gee, it just seems to be crawling! We’re going five miles to its one.”

It was a welcome sight on that lonely ocean and Ted swung a little lower as he neared the vessel.

The strains of a band came thinly through the clear air. The *Southern Queen* itself must have been visible in the bright moonlight, for the music suddenly ceased and the decks became black with people crowding out to see the aerial voyager.

Ted noted a little knot of men in the bow busily engaged with something. Then they scattered and there was a sputtering of sparks.

“Going to salute us,” grinned Ed.

There was a sibilant swish and a rocket shot upward in a train of light.

The exclamation it evoked died on Ted’s lips.

For his hawk’s eyes saw that it was headed straight for the plane!

CHAPTER XXII

A TUSSELE WITH A MADMAN

Like lightning Ted Scott swerved his plane to the right.

There was a whiz, a blinding illumination and the rocket shot past them, narrowly missing one of the wings. It rose still higher and then burst in a resplendent shower of fiery jewels.

It was a magnificent sight, but its beauty was wholly lost on the imperiled voyagers.

“Quick! Quick! Get out of range!” shrieked Rockridge, bouncing up and down on his seat. “The next one will get us.”

Ted pulled the joy stick and the *Southern Queen* shot up, itself like a rocket, into the skies.

Another rocket followed the first, but by this time Ted was where no missile could reach him. He brought the plane to an even keel and resumed his course. In a few minutes the vessel had faded from their sight.

“Gee, but that was close!” muttered Ed, whose habitual poise had not prevented his heart beating faster at the narrow escape. “That was mighty quick thinking on your part, Ted. If that rocket had struck us, it might have crippled us badly.”

“I’m mighty glad it didn’t,” replied Ted. “It was just a case of touch and go. They meant it in all friendliness, to be sure, but this is one of the cases when we can pray to be delivered from our friends.”

“It’s an omen,” muttered Rockridge gloomily, “a warning. It wasn’t for nothing that gull perched on the wing.”

“Listen to that croaker,” murmured Ed. “Talk about a gull! He’s a raven.”

“Why not figure that the gull brought us good luck?” Ted asked Rockridge. “The rocket didn’t hit us, did it?”

“No,” admitted the millionaire grudgingly, “but we’ve had two scares now. The third time and out.”

“Let’s hope there isn’t going to be any third time,” replied Ted, trying hard to control his temper, which was getting frayed from the man’s persistent pessimism. “Look on the bright side. We’ve already covered more than a thousand miles of our journey. That ought to be something to be joyful about, I’ll tell the world.”

Rockridge made no intelligible reply, but subsided into an incoherent mumbling.

“He ought to have been an undertaker,” growled Ed. “He just fits the part. It’s my belief he’ll go cuckoo before the trip’s over. Be nice to have a madman cavorting all over the plane, wouldn’t it!”

“I can think of pleasanter things,” replied Ted. “But I don’t think it will quite come to that.”

In a little while Rockridge sank into a fitful slumber, and the two friends could talk more freely.

“How about the gas? Think we’ve got enough to go on with?” asked Ed.

“I think so,” answered Ted. “I tested the tanks a little while ago, and I was surprised to find how economical we’ve been so far. I think we can hold out till we get to Australia. I’m keen to make this a non-stop flight, if I can. If we do run short, we can still stop at the Samoan or Fiji Islands and replenish our stock.”

Rockridge woke up after a while and the party had supper, a meal which Ted prolonged as much as possible to get his passenger thinking of something else than the dangers of the trip.

“Now, Mr. Rockridge,” said Ted cheerily, after they had finished, “you just make yourself comfortable and stretch out on those cushions for a long night’s sleep. You’ll feel chipper as a lark when you wake up in the morning.”

It was certain that there was nothing suggestive of the rapturous lark on Rockridge’s features at the moment, but he assented mechanically and soon was wrapped in slumber.

The brother aviators breathed a sigh of relief.

“I’d like to give him a dose of sleeping powders that would keep him just as he is now until we sight Sydney,” remarked Ed with just a touch of vindictiveness.

“It would help some,” grinned Ted.

“Let me take the stick now,” said Ed. “You’ve been at it all day and it’s time I did some of the work.”

“All right,” assented Ted, who was indeed very tired. “We’ll spell each other in shifts of four hours each. But no cheating, you old rascal. Don’t let me sleep more than the four hours.”

“I’ll play fair,” promised Ed with a laugh, “Now you go ahead and hit the hay.”

Ted relinquished the joy stick, curled himself up and was asleep in less than two minutes.

Ed called him at the end of four hours.

“How’s she going?” asked Ted, as he rubbed his eyes and resumed his place at the controls.

“Fine and dandy,” replied Ed. “She’s going ahead like a stake horse. And we couldn’t ask for better weather.”

He sought the blankets in his turn and Ted studied his instruments. He figured that he ought to be abreast of the Hawaiian Islands at a little after dawn.

Had the trip been other than it was, Ted would have dearly liked to land on the island paradise, for his memories of it were of the kindest. He remembered how his heart had thrilled when, with Hapworth, he had first seen Diamond Head at the entrance of Honolulu harbor rising out of the waves. He thought of the enthusiastic greeting he had received at the ending of the epoch-making trip. And another potent memory was that it was in Hawaii that he had finally run down the rascal whose crime had caused his, Ted's, father to be accused of murder.

The nervous tension that Rockridge had been under all the day before must have exhausted him, for he slept long and late. Ted's first inkling that he was at last awake was when he heard his voice and felt his hand on his shoulder.

"Sea! Sea! Nothing but sea!" moaned Rockridge. "I want to land. I want to go down."

"We can't very well," answered Ted, moving uncomfortably under the pressure of the man's hand.

"Don't tell me you can't!" cried Rockridge. "I'll make you do it!"

His voice rose to a scream and his hands closed around Ted's throat.

Then Ted knew that he was in the clutch of a maniac!

CHAPTER XXIII

IN TERRIBLE PLIGHT

As the realization of his awful situation burst upon him, Ted Scott's hands left the control and darted at the strangling fingers.

Rockridge was a man of powerful mold and his strength was doubled by his present madness. And he had Ted at a frightful disadvantage. He was standing and behind. Ted was seated and in front. The latter had no purchase, and could simply tear at the hands that were choking the life out of him.

For a few seconds there was an epic struggle. Ted fought with the fury of desperation. He could not call for help. His eyes were bulging. His brain was reeling. His breath was leaving him.

The plane, deprived of control, was gyrating like a crazy thing, getting ready at any moment to fall into the sea.

Then came a diversion. A powerful figure leaped upon Rockridge from behind and sought to tear his fingers loose from Ted's throat. But Rockridge only laughed gleefully and maintained his clutch.

There was only one resource and Ed took it. He drew back and launched a terrific blow at Rockridge's jaw. His fist caught the maniac on the point of the chin and Rockridge passed out immediately.

The fingers about Ted's throat grew limp and Rockridge toppled back in the fuselage, a pile of blankets breaking his fall.

"Guess that will hold him a while," panted Ed and darted for the joy stick.

He caught it just as the plane, bereft of guidance, was heading for the final plunge. Ed fought desperately, however, and got it under control when it was less than a hundred feet from the waves. Then he shot up to a height of two thousand feet and set the plane on her course.

"How are you feeling now, Ted?" he queried.

Ted tried to answer, but could not. He felt as he had sometimes in his childhood when he had fallen flat on his stomach and had had the breath knocked out of him. His lungs were laboring, his face was purple, his eyes were bloodshot and what little breath he had came in short, sobbing gasps.

"Don't try to talk," counseled Ed, as he saw his friend's condition. "I'll tend to everything."

He glanced back at where Rockridge was still lying on his back breathing stertorously.

"That was an awful clout I handed him," he muttered to himself uneasily. "I hope

it hasn't done for him for fair.”

A couple of minutes passed and Ted had so far recovered as to speak.

“You came just in the nick of time, Ed,” he said gratefully. “Gee, but I thought my time had come! My windpipe feels as though it were broken.”

“It was his scream, I guess, that woke me,” replied Ed. “I thought at first some part of the machinery had broken, especially the way the old bus was dancing. Then I saw what was going on and I came pronto. Sorry I had to lam him so hard, though. He sure seems dead to the world.”

“It was the only thing you could do, and it sure saved my life,” returned Ted. “I guess he’s coming to now,” he added, as he saw a twitching of Rockridge’s eyelids.

“Don’t you think we’d better tie his hands?” asked Ed anxiously.

“I hardly like to do that yet,” replied Ted. “It would humiliate him down to the ground and perhaps aggravate his trouble. It may have been just a hysterical spasm that already has passed over. At any rate, that crack you gave him will probably keep him a little subdued. Get a piece of rope ready for emergencies and, of course, if the worse comes to the worst we’ll have to truss him up. But we’ll keep that for a last resort. I’ll step back now and try to revive him.”

He dashed some water on Rockridge’s face and chafed his wrists and under the treatment the man’s eyes opened.

“What’s the matter?” asked the millionaire, struggling to a sitting position. “I’m all wet.”

“You were a little faint and I threw some water on you to bring you to,” evaded Ted, as he helped Rockridge into his seat.

The latter felt gingerly of his chin.

“My jaw feels frightfully sore,” he complained. “How on earth did it get that way? I’m not subject to neuralgia.”

“Don’t you really know what makes it sore?” queried Ted.

“No, why should I?” returned Rockridge wonderingly.

“Don’t you remember anything that’s happened in the last few minutes?” continued Ted.

“I only remember getting up after my night’s sleep,” replied Rockridge. “What are you getting at anyway?” he asked, a trifle impatiently.

“Well, I’ll tell you,” said Ted, who thought that it was better to thresh the whole matter out once for all in the hope that Rockridge, alarmed at his act, would seek to bring himself more under control: “You had a brainstorm and tried to strangle me. Ed came just in time and knocked you out with a blow to the chin.”

Stark horror came into Rockridge’s eyes.

“Impossible!” he exclaimed. “I couldn’t have done a thing like that.”

“You did do it, just the same,” reiterated Ted, softening with pity as he noted the man’s sincere shame and remorse. “Now, Mr. Rockridge, let’s have a little plain talk. You’ve just got to take a grip on yourself. Since we started this voyage you haven’t been yourself. You’ve been nervous and hysterical. I don’t hold it against you, for I know how the air affects some people that are unused to flying. I don’t figure, however, on letting you destroy our lives and your own. You’ve got to hold yourself in check. Here are some books and magazines we’ve brought along. Lose yourself in them. Sleep as much as you can. Trust Ed and me to see that the work is done as it ought to be done. You must keep yourself in control. You notice that word *must*. You *must* do it. If you let yourself go as you did just now—”

He paused significantly.

“What?” asked Rockridge.

“Just this,” said Ted coolly. “I’ll tie you up. I’d hate to do it, but I will. You’re the owner of this ship, but I’m the captain, and for our sake and your own I’m going to be the boss till the journey ends. Understand?”

Before the steely glint in his eyes the eyes of Rockridge fell.

“All right,” he muttered. “I’ve been a fool. I’ll try to do better.”

“Good!” said Ted heartily. “Now we’re all little pals together. Give me the stick, Ed.”

He resumed his place at the controls and left Rockridge to his own reflections.

All that day the *Southern Queen* flew along at a rapid rate. The weather was fine, the breeze a quartering one and not a cloud marred the blue of the sky.

“If it keeps up like this, there’s nothing to it,” exulted Ted. “She’s going like a dream.”

“Can’t go too fast to suit me,” replied Ed. “I’m none too easy in my mind about his nibs. Maybe he won’t get violent again, but there’s a cunning look in his eyes I don’t like. That guy is planning something. Yes, sir, he’s planning something!”

CHAPTER XXIV

LIKE A NIGHTMARE

“Oh, I don’t know,” Ted replied to Ed’s prognostications. “I hope he’s learned a lesson. Anyway we’ve covered more than half of the journey and we’re on the home stretch. I couldn’t ask for better time than we’re making. He won’t have much more time to plot mischief, if that’s what he’s after.”

“A crazy man can do a lot in a few minutes,” suggested Ed.

“Sure,” admitted Ted thoughtfully. “I tell you what we’d better do, Ed. This matter of each of us stretching ourselves out for a four hours’ sleep is all off. We’ll stay right here in our seats till the journey’s over. We can take little catnaps, one of us while the other’s at the stick, but that’s all. There must never be a minute when we’re not in touching distance of each other. That all right with you?”

“Hits me right,” assented Ed. “Better to be safe than sorry. But let me once step out of this plane and I’ll never get into it again with that bozo.”

“Same here,” agreed Ted. “He hasn’t got money enough to tempt me to try it again. I didn’t think it was in the bargain to carry a madman.”

But the “madman” continued quiet enough, although Ted noticed with some apprehension as the day drew to a close that Rockridge had thrown aside the reading matter and was biting his nails to the quick.

The night passed, however, without incident. The aviators had carried out their plan of remaining side by side, catching a few winks of sleep from time to time that served to break the tension, though they were haggard and heavy-eyed when morning broke.

But the renewed day brought with it the exhilaration that always comes with sunlight and Ted felt in fine fettle. A study of his instruments showed that they had covered more than four thousand miles, almost two-thirds of their journey.

They were flying a bit low and suddenly Ed let out an exclamation.

“Look down below us, Ted. Do you see what I see?”

Ted gave a look and then seized the glasses.

“Savages! Genuine South Sea savages!” he murmured.

The plane was coming close to a small tropical island. Several war canoes were drawn up on the shore and a horde of natives were watching the plane in evident alarm. Some of the natives were brandishing their spears menacingly.

“I’ll fly low and give ’em a scare,” said Ted.

He turned the nose of the *Southern Queen* downward and soon saw that the natives were more alarmed than ever.

“Must think this some strange bird,” observed Ed. “Gee, look at that!” he added as several spears were launched into the air at them.

With a roar the airplane swooped over the island. Down fell the natives on their faces—and that was the last the aviators saw of them.

“They’ll have something to talk about now,” said Ted.

“Think our gas will hold out?” asked Ed. “We can still stop at Fiji and fill up the tanks if necessary. But that’s our last chance.”

Ted made careful estimates of the amounts still remaining in the main tanks and the reserve tanks in the wings.

“We can do it,” he said, and added in a lower tone: “You know why I don’t want to stop. He’d never let us go up again. Besides, time is pressing, and we’ll have all we can do to get to Sydney at the appointed time. It would be an awful flivver if we made the trip for nothing. But now let’s have breakfast. You get some water and break out the grub.”

Ed went to the water tank and turned on the spigot. Nothing came. Rockridge was observing him slyly out of the corner of his eye.

“That’s strange,” muttered Ed, shaking the spigot. “Something must have clogged the pipe.”

No water came. He tapped the tank and sprang to his feet.

“The water’s gone!” he shouted. “There isn’t a drop left.”

“What?” exclaimed Ted, dumbfounded.

“Sure as shooting,” exclaimed Ed. “And the floor of the fuselage is soaked. It must have trickled away in the night.”

“Water gone?” ejaculated Rockridge with every appearance of surprise. “That’s too bad. Now, of course, we’ll have to come down somewhere and get more water.”

Ted looked at him steadily. Rockridge stared back at him, but his eyes wavered and fell.

“Come here, Ed, and take the stick a minute,” directed Ted.

Ed complied, and Ted, picking up a piece of rope, which he held in one hand behind him, went back to Rockridge.

“Look here, Mr. Rockridge,” he said curtly. “How did that water get out of the tank?”

“How do I know?” replied Rockridge innocently. “Some one couldn’t have closed the spigot tight last night.”

“I closed it myself and I know it was tight,” replied Ted grimly. “Come. Own up. You turned it on yourself, didn’t you, in the hope it would force us to land?”

“How dare you?” blustered Rockridge. But Ted read guilt in his eyes.

Like a flash Ted threw a coil of the rope about Rockridge’s body, fastening his hands to his sides. The movement was so lightning quick that Rockridge scarcely realized what had happened until Ted had deftly tied the ends in a sailor’s knot.

Then Rockridge roared and strained at the rope, but as Ted had included the seat in the coil and the seat was stationary the captive could not rise.

“I’ll fire you for this!” yelled Rockridge. “You’re fired now.”

Despite his own anger, Ted could not forbear a grin.

“Fire away,” he said, “but I won’t leave the premises just now. I told you what would happen, if there were any more monkey tricks, and I always keep my word. You’ll stay right there till I let you go.”

Having assured himself that the knots were secure, Ted resumed his seat and took the stick.

“I told you the gink was planning something,” snorted Ed. “He’s got us into a pretty kettle of fish. Not a drop of water now for perhaps the next two days and this sun beating down on us like a furnace.”

“We’ll have to make the best of it,” said Ted. “One comfort is that he’ll have to suffer with us. Just the same, I’m not going to land at Fiji or anywhere else. He shan’t have the satisfaction of seeing his trick succeed. If thirst becomes too unbearable we can go down near the surface, scoop up some salt water and distill it. But that will take time and use up gas. We’ll chew on bullets if we have to, and that’ll help keep our mouths moist.”

The weather continued clear for the greater part of the day and they made good time, so good that Ted and Ed were able to endure with some philosophy the torments of thirst, which hourly, however, became more acute.

They had passed the latitude of the Fijis when a storm began to gather. Great banks of black clouds piled up on the horizon.

“Thought the weather was too good to last,” muttered Ted, studying the skies anxiously. “Why couldn’t this storm have held off for twenty-four hours longer?”

“And when a blow comes in these latitudes it’s a blow for fair,” commented Ed.

Which was proved by the tempest that a few minutes later burst upon them. It had almost the violence of a typhoon. The wind struck the plane with tremendous force and tossed it about like a feather. The thunder roared loudly and the lightning was so incessant that the skies seemed one blinding blaze.

“You won’t come down, eh?” yelled Rockridge. “You’ll have to. You may boss me, but you can’t boss the lightning.”

He ended in a cackle of insane laughter that chilled the blood in the veins of his

listeners.

But they paid little attention to him, for the storm engrossed them to the exclusion of everything else. Twice the plane turned turtle, and it was all that Ted could do to right her. But through it all his superb craftsmanship never faltered. His brain was cool, his nerve steady, his will indomitable. Ed, veteran airman as he was, was awed by Ted's miracles of jockeying.

For hours the storm raged, with every moment threatening to be the last for the daring voyagers of the skies.

At its very height there came a shriek from Rockridge. They turned about to see him in the act of throwing himself from the plane!

CHAPTER XXV

VICTORY

With one leap Ed darted from his seat and caught the legs of the demented passenger just as the latter hurled himself over the side.

The weight of his body almost pulled Ed over after him, but he braced himself and held on desperately.

In an instant Ted was at his side, leaving the plane necessarily to its own devices, and together they managed to pull Rockridge back in the fuselage.

The sudden jerk with which Ed had stopped his downward flight had brought Rockridge's head violently against the side of the plane and stunned him. So that there was no resistance on his part when they drew him in.

"You tend to him, Ed," commanded Ted, as he himself hastened back to the controls.

Ed had no difficulty in lugging the unconscious man back to his seat. While the aviators had been engrossed in the storm their captive had managed to work himself loose. Ed fastened him up again and ministered to him until he saw that his senses were coming back.

Most of the time after that he remained on guard against a second outbreak while Ted battled with the storm.

For hours the tempest raged and then gradually subsided. The stout structure had resisted the attempt to tear it apart. But Ted's face was grave as he consulted his instruments and compared the results with those that Ed took of the stars that had now reappeared.

For his calculations showed he had been driven several hundreds of miles out of his course. Not only would he have to make that up, but also, if he could, the time it would take to cover it.

And he was short both of time and gas. His margin of the latter was growing painfully small. And as for time he had still but a day to get to Sydney, if he wanted to arrive there before the fateful twenty-fourth.

Now, even if he wanted to, he could not descend. He had left behind the last island of any size in that whole region of the seas. There were a few coral islands and atolls near which or over which he might possibly pass, but none where he could get gas and none that would afford on its surface a suitable landing place for his plane.

The die was cast. It was now a race against time and a race against the constantly diminishing supply of gas. He might lose the first and only suffer chagrin. But if he lost the second, he might also lose his life and those of his companions.

“Strip the plane,” he commanded Ed. “Throw over everything except absolute necessities. We want to make her as light and buoyant as possible.”

Ed did as directed. There was no more shifting of the stick between him and Ted. Alert as a panther, Ted sat there at the controls hour after hour, refusing even to eat, studying the wind currents, trying out higher and lower altitudes in order to find the stratum where the wind blew most hard and steadily, nursing the engines to get every ounce of power out of them.

Hour after hour passed and still Ted sat like a statue at the controls, watching the instruments that would tell him of his rate of speed. From a hundred miles an hour the speed leaped to a hundred and ten. A little later it was a hundred and twenty. Then it crept up to a hundred and twenty-five. The *Southern Queen* was going through space like a shooting star!

From time to time Ted tapped his gas tanks. The main ones had long been emptied and Ed had pumped all the remaining supplies from the emergency reservoirs in the wings. And now this was going down. The response of the tanks to his tappings became more resonant and hollow. And the instrument on the dial told the same story.

“One more hour,” Ted muttered to himself late in the afternoon. “One more hour! Not a minute longer.”

Ten minutes went by.

“Take the glasses, Ed,” directed Ted hoarsely, “and tell me if you see anything ahead.”

Ed, who himself was pale with anxiety, did as he was told.

“Nothing yet,” he said.

Ted gritted his teeth and hoped that Charity was praying for him.

Five minutes passed. A shout then came from Ed.

“I see something!” he said. “But it may be a ship. I’ll know in a minute.

“Land!” he shouted a minute later. “Do you hear, old boy? Land! A city! You’re lifting it with every minute. Sydney! Sydney!”

He almost dropped the glasses in his excitement. Ted snatched them from him and looked.

“Glory, hallelujah!” he shouted. “You’re right, Ed.”

“Sydney, you say?” called Rockridge excitedly. “It can’t be. You don’t mean it.”

“Look for yourself,” said Ted, handing over the glasses. “We’ll be there in less than half an hour. Ed,” he continued, “slip that rope from around Mr. Rockridge’s waist. We don’t need it any longer. I don’t suppose you’ll try to jump in the water now,” he added to Rockridge with a disarming smile.

The face of the passenger flushed. All the unnatural light had gone out of his eyes. He was the same alert, live figure that he had been when he entered the plane.

“Ted,” he said penitently, “I owe you and Ed the most abject apologies. I’ve acted like a child, a sick girl. I don’t know what got into me. Something seemed to snap when we were a little way out and change me into a different man. I’m heartily and bitterly ashamed of myself. I want to forget the whole thing as a horrible dream.”

“That’s all right,” said Ted heartily and Ed smilingly nodded assent. “You simply weren’t responsible. You aren’t cut out for air journeys.”

“No,” said Rockridge, “and I want to confess while I’m about it that I exaggerated when I said I’d been frequently in the air. I’d only gone up once or twice and then circled a few times about the air field. But I was so anxious to make this trip that—”

“Say no more about it,” interrupted Ted. “Everything’s all right now. And I promise you solemnly that I will never say a word to a living soul about the unfortunate occurrences in the plane. Does that go with you too, Ed?”

“I give my word of honor,” promised Ed emphatically.

“You are too generous,” said Rockridge earnestly. “You’re treating me better than I deserve. I shall never forget it.”

The harbor was plainly in sight now and in a few minutes they were hovering over the city. Ted knew where the air field was located and made directly for it.

The engines were missing now and thumping at a great rate but there was still enough gas left to enable Ted to maneuver the plane to a perfect landing, a task made the more difficult by the great throng of people that had assembled on the field.

“Gee, look at those thousands!” exclaimed Ed. “How did they know we were coming?”

“Some ship has seen us and radioed in,” conjectured Ted. “Looks as if all Sydney were here.”

There was a great rush for the plane as the occupants climbed out, and the police had hard work to keep the newcomers from being swamped. A tremendous chorus of cheers rent the air as the crowd battled to get near enough to touch the voyagers and grasp their hands. The city was wild with delight that it had been the terminus of the greatest overseas flight in the history of air navigation.

By strenuous efforts a hastily assembled committee of prominent citizens got the travelers into a hollow square and, flanked by police and an escort of cavalry, Ted and his companions were taken to a palatial suite of rooms in the leading hotel of the city.

There after a hurried consultation a banquet was arranged for the following night,

and at last the trio were left to themselves to get the bath and shave and relaxation that they so sorely needed.

“Well, we’ve got you here in time,” laughed Ted to Rockridge. “The marriage isn’t due till tomorrow and you have tonight to make your peace with your lady. Good luck to you!”

“Thanks,” returned Rockridge, who was radiant and at the same time anxious, now that the moment had arrived to put his fortune to the test. “I’ll probably need all the good wishes I can get.”

He made a most careful toilet and as soon as he had had dinner departed on his quest.

It was late when he returned and found Ted and Ed alone, after they had just shooed out the host of reporters and dignitaries who had besieged them all the evening.

“No need to ask what luck,” smiled Ted, as he looked at Rockridge, whose face was beaming with happiness.

“The very best!” cried Rockridge. “Congratulate me, boys. I’m the happiest man alive. She’s promised to marry me.”

They shook hands with him warmly with suitable words of felicitation.

“You’re a fast worker,” grinned Ted. “How about the other fellow?”

“Vamoosed! Flew the coop when he knew that I had really started with the papers,” cried Rockridge exultingly. “You see, all along he’d thought I was bluffing. His flight was confession and opened Mabel’s eyes. It had only been a romantic infatuation anyway. Down in her heart she was always really mine. And when she knew I had started, was really risking my life to come to her, all the old affection came back. And then the city going wild over us and all that—well, she’s wearing my ring now.”

“When will the marriage take place?” asked Ted, thinking deep in his heart that the sooner Rockridge had such a changeable lady fast in the bonds of wedlock the better.

“Two days from now,” said Rockridge. “Just a small private affair. And I want you boys there as my most honored guests.”

They cordially accepted, and when they were at last rid of the prospective bridegroom, who would have been glad to talk all night, they sought the rest they needed.

The next morning Ted was fairly swamped with cablegrams from people in the States. America was going wild over his triumph and an enormous ovation awaited him on his return. The President himself sent congratulations. But the most precious

of the cablegrams was that from Eben and Charity thanking God for his safety and urging his quick return.

One cablegram was from Bruin and as he read it he gave vent to a sharp exclamation.

“What’s up?” asked Ed.

“Listen!” replied Ted in great excitement as he read:

“Warmest congratulations. Felwig and Check Dorp reported on steamer *Warrior*, bound for Sydney. Ten thousand dollars reward for their apprehension. Get busy.”

Ted telephoned to the shipping office and learned that the *Warrior* had been sighted a short time before and would soon be in the harbor.

Then Ted called the police headquarters, hurriedly detailed the situation, and was told that a squad of police would be waiting for him on the department boat at the dock.

Ted summoned a taxi and he and Ed were whirled to the dock. They boarded the police boat and chugged down the bay, up which the *Warrior* was leisurely proceeding. The liner was hailed, stopped, and the boys with their police escort clambered up on deck.

A word to the captain and all the passengers were lined up for inspection. Ed and Ted went down the line, but though there were some rough characters from the third cabin and the steerage they failed to find the men they were looking for. Either they were not there or they were disguised sufficiently to escape detection.

“Could Bruin have been mistaken?” Ted muttered to himself.

Again he went down the line. But this time he paid scant attention to the faces. He was looking for a pair of gorilla arms!

And near the end of the line he saw them. He raised his eyes and beyond the skilful makeup saw the pale snaky eyes of Sam Felwig. Close beside him was a powerful man with an evil face.

“Here he is!” shouted Ted, making a grab at Felwig.

At the same time Ed caught Felwig’s companion by the collar.

The police closed in. With a snarl of rage, Felwig drew a revolver from his pocket. But before he could level it, Ted knocked it down with his left hand and sent his right crashing into Felwig’s jaw.

Ed, too, was having a hot battle with his captive, but a few strokes of police clubs took all the fight out of the rascals, and in a moment they were handcuffed and

dropped over into the police boat, that proceeded triumphantly to its dock.

Felwig and Check Dorp, his chief lieutenant, were put into jail to await extradition papers from the United States. These came in due time and the robbers were tried, convicted and sentenced each to twenty years in prison. Later on, Ted received the ten thousand dollars reward, which he divided equally with Ed.

“I suppose I’ll never have such thrills again,” said young Scott.

To this Ed agreed, not knowing that adventure, the spice of life to Ted, was to send the young aviator after some diamond smugglers. Through it he would acquire the nickname “Lone Eagle of the Border.”

The marriage of Rockridge took place as scheduled. Ted acted as best man at a charming home ceremony. The bride was an exceptionally pretty girl and seemed to be profoundly in love with the groom.

The newly wedded pair were chatting with Ted and Ed right after the knot was tied.

“Isn’t he a dear?” the bride asked of Ted, referring to the groom. “Flying over the ocean so bravely, so sternly, so daringly, and all for poor little me! My hero!” and she looked up into her husband’s face adoringly.

Rockridge blushed. Ed was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

But be it said to Ted Scott’s everlasting credit that he never batted an eyelash.

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Across the Pacific, or, Ted Scott's Hop to Australia* by Franklin W. Dixon [Duffield, John W.]]