

# **THE FLYING SQUAD**

**COL. W. A. BISHOP, V.C.  
AND MAJOR R. STUART-WORTLEY**

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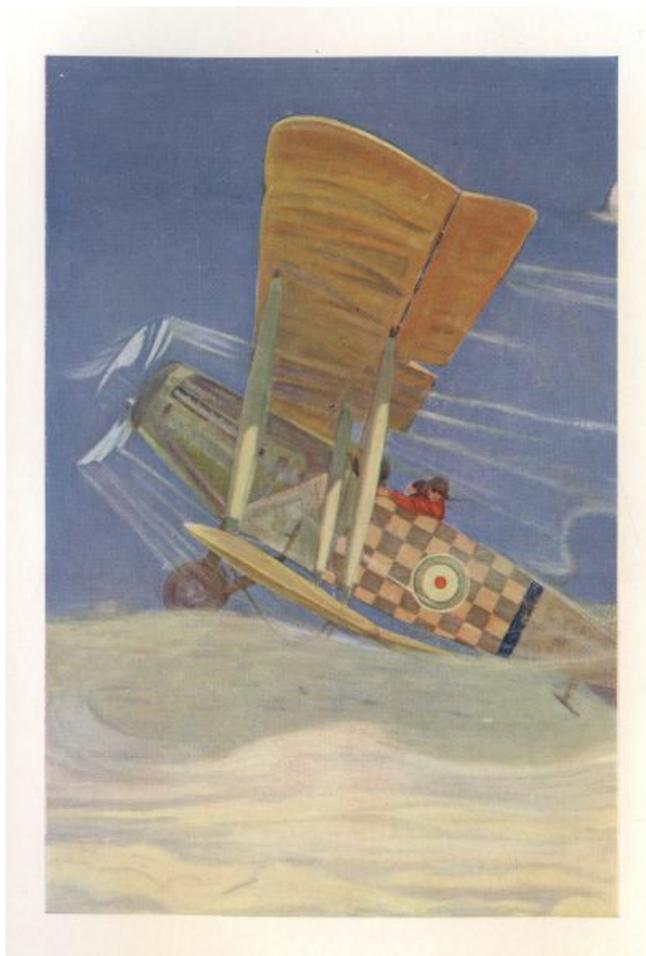
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BY

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AND

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# THE FLYING SQUAD

## CHAPTER I

It was nearing the end of the summer term, the last term that George Renton and Norman Marshall were to spend at Upper Canada College.

Renton was the son of a retired banker who now lived a life of well-earned ease in his native town of Toronto. Marshall was an orphan of American birth, and had, upon the death of his father, been virtually adopted by the latter's devoted friend, George Renton, Senior.

The two boys were of a like age, and they had been sent to college together. There they had pursued their way through the various forms in the ascending scale, until the passage of time brought them near the top. Their upward progress had not been marked by any conspicuous rapidity, but, though they had often caused their pastors and masters to tear their hair in despair at their slackness in their work, they had always managed to "satisfy the examiners" when it came to the point.

It was not that either of them lacked energy or intelligence; but the former they applied to games and athletics, and the latter they reserved for subjects other than appeared in the school curriculum. Both had a particular bent for engineering, while aeronautics was their ruling passion.

It so happened that at this time a new assistant-master joined the staff of the college. John Bell, who had adopted the career of schoolmaster owing to his inherent love for boys, had ideas of his own on the subject of education. In Renton and Marshall he saw two lads certainly no worse, and probably better, than the usual run. With careful handling he thought he could do something with them.

The opportunity presented itself.

During a wearisome recapitulation of a passage of Cicero, almost certain to be set in the forthcoming examinations, Mr Bell noticed that the attention of his two pupils had wandered. They were reading something underneath their desk. At the moment he said nothing, but when the class was over he called them up.

"What was that you were reading just now?" he asked.

Both boys looked uncomfortable; neither spoke.

"Won't you show me?" asked the master quietly.

Out of his pocket Norman produced a copy of the *Aeroplane*.

Bell looked at it and smiled.

"Ah! so you are interested in aeronautics, are you?"

"Ye ... yes, sir," stammered the offender.

"I was in the Royal Flying Corps during the War, you know."

"Oh, were you, sir?" Norman, who had been expecting sound cursing and a few hundred Greek lines to write out as a punishment, could hardly contain his surprise at the master's friendly attitude.

"Yes," continued Bell, "and that is, I suppose, why I am always delighted to find any boy taking an interest in

aeroplanes. Now, a great friend of mine happens to be in charge of the civilian school of flying just outside the town. I'll take you up there on Sunday afternoon, if you like, and show you the machines. What do you say?"

The boys' faces flushed with excitement and gratitude.

"But, look here," went on Bell, "I know that Latin prose is dreary stuff, especially on a hot summer's afternoon, but it's up to me to see that you do your work. I don't want to be let down.... Is that a bargain?"

George and Norman felt that they would willingly learn Cicero and all his works backward for a man like Bell.

They paid two visits to the aerodrome, and were shown over the sheds and the machines. On the second occasion the boys met Captain McIntyre, the manager, and they listened in rapture while he and Bell discussed old times of high adventure....

The examinations came; both boys passed out quite creditably. They went to say good-bye to Mr Bell, and to him they broached the determination which had long been forming in their minds. They wished to learn to fly; to make aviation their profession.

"I cannot take the responsibility of advising you on that point," he said. "It is a matter on which you should consult your people ... or you must make up your minds for yourselves. But if you do decide to go in for flying seriously I will most certainly write to McIntyre and ask him to take you under his wing. Personally, I am a firm believer in the future of the air."

## CHAPTER II

To the expectant pair the journey to the aerodrome seemed never-ending; and to while away the time on the long tram-ride George and Norman occupied themselves by relating to each other the main features of the different types of aeroplanes with which they were familiar, especially those which they hoped to see that day.

At last they reached the flying-ground, a large, open space, bisected by a road, on either side of which, at the southern extremity of the field, stood, closely grouped together, six large hangars, about which in turn were placed the workshops, transport-sheds, wireless-room, and other offices and buildings which usually go to compose an aviation centre. Two of the hangars stood open, the folding doors pushed back, disclosing a number of aeroplanes within. In their anxiety to discover Captain McIntyre the boys passed quickly by without waiting to examine the machines at close range. They knocked at the office door. No sooner had they done so than it opened, and facing them stood a man of about twenty-six years of age. He was dressed in a greasy leather coat. On his head was a tight-fitting leather flying-cap trimmed with fur. In his hand he carried a pair of goggles, also trimmed with fur. On seeing his visitors, his face lit up with a singularly charming smile; and he greeted them.

"Ah! Renton and Marshall, eh? Very glad to see you. Bell sent me word that you were coming. You've been up here with him before, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir, we have," replied George.

"I remember! So you have come on more serious business this time, eh? Bell tells me you are both anxious to learn to fly. Have either of you ever been up in a machine?"

"No, sir," said Norman, "but we have both tried to study aviation, and, if we can, we want to learn to fly."

"Good luck to you then!" laughed McIntyre. "That's the proper spirit! There is nothing in the world like flying. I don't think you will regret it if you do take it up."

McIntyre was favourably impressed with the bearing of the two boys as he stood there talking to them. In their former visits his interest in them had been chiefly that of a sort of elder brother. He was naturally fond of boys, and it pleased him to gratify and even stimulate their curiosity, while he himself was by no means proof against that subtlest form of flattery, the hero-worship of those a little younger than himself. But now he turned to them with a new-born interest. These boys had come to him as pupils to a master; they were to be his to make and mould.

"If you two are seriously determined to take up aviation I shall be only too glad to help you in any way I can," he said. "Let's take a walk round. You ask me any conundrums you like as we go along. But first of all I must tell you that the life of a pilot is an arduous one, and not to be undertaken lightheartedly. Tell me, what put the idea into your heads?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Norman. "We've been thinking about nothing else for the last two years."

"So I gathered from Bell," said McIntyre, and smiled again.

"Oh—er——" began Norman, and felt himself blushing.

McIntyre laughed outright.

"Don't be alarmed!" he cried. "We can't all be bookworms, can we? Bell gave me a pretty good report of you both. Besides, I like your enterprise—so much so that I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll teach you both to fly, and I'll only charge you for actual expenses in petrol, oil, etc. I won't ask you boys a fee. But don't you let on, now, will you? If you do, every one will be expecting me to do the same for them. Is that a bargain? Yes? Well, here's my hand on it."

The boys were left speechless with surprise and gratitude. Both attempted to stammer out some words of thanks, but McIntyre cut them short.

"Don't thank me, thank Bell," he said. "I am doing this partly for his sake. He saved my life over Ypres once, when I was in a tight corner with half a dozen Huns on my tail, and I guess I can pay him back by helping his young friends. Bell was one of the best pilots I ever saw."

"He never will speak about himself," said George. "We have often tried to make him tell us about his adventures in the War, but we can't get anything out of him."

"I can quite imagine it. One day I'll tell you some of his experiences. Now—to our muttons, as they say. Supposing first of all I explain the idea of the aerodrome itself..."

"You can see that it stretches over half a mile in both directions. This area is required to give a machine sufficient room in which to land and to take off. You will also notice that the surrounding country has been cleared of trees and bushes for a radius of about a mile. An aerodrome must be clear of all obstructions, such as buildings, telegraph-wires, high chimneys, etc. You must remember these things, if you ever have to choose a landing-ground. Ample space is necessary, because some types of machines require a long run before they get up enough speed to take them off the ground; others require only a short run, but usually a machine which takes off in a short space requires a long run to land. Ground-speed in landing is, of course, in every case dependent upon the strength of the wind. The stronger the wind, the less ground-space required, and *vice versa*. It stands to reason, doesn't it? If the air-speed of a machine about to land is fifty miles an hour, that machine will, in a flat calm, touch the ground at that same speed; but it will land at half that speed against a twenty-five-mile-per-hour wind—and run only about half the distance. See?"

"Yes," said George, nodding.

"Good! Now, that little machine over there, a French Nieuport, will sometimes take the air after moving only twenty yards, and yet, when landing on a calm day, she will often run over a hundred yards along the ground."

"Why is that?" asked Norman.

The reason is that the machine is very small. It looks just like a bird, doesn't it? The lower wing is only about eighteen inches wide, and the whole area of the wing-surface is very small. Now the force which keeps an aeroplane in

the air is known as 'lift'—that is to say, the lifting-force set up by the reaction of the wind produced by the forward speed of the machine on the wing-surface. Owing to her very small wing-surface, this particular machine requires a very powerful engine giving a high rate of speed to keep it in the air at all. Owing to its great power, the engine attains its maximum speed within a few seconds, and so pulls the machine quickly into the air. But once the engine is shut off there is no longer the power to pull the machine forward and to hold it in horizontal position. You know, of course, that when the engine is cut off the nose, which is the heaviest part of the aeroplane, drops, and the machine takes up its normal gliding angle. The rate of speed at which it will glide depends upon the area of wing-surface on which the wind can react. The greater the surface, the slower and flatter the glide. This Nieuport has but a small surface to sustain it. A high forward speed must therefore be maintained when gliding earthward so as to create a force of wind sufficient to react upon the planes. Without this 'lift' the aeroplane would drop like a stone. The gliding angle in this type of machine is, consequently, particularly steep, and the machine must approach the spot on which it is to land at about sixty miles an hour. When a heavy weight is set rolling on wheels at that pace it will travel some considerable distance before it comes to a stop."

"Why, then, sir," asked George, "do they not fit it out with larger wings?"

"Well, Nieuports were designed for speed, and it has been found that higher rates of speed are obtained with small wings. A small wing-surface means less resistance to the air, and so less work for the engine when pulling the machine through the air. Then, too, the small wing-surface tends to make the machine more easily manoeuvrable, and this quality is one of paramount importance in a fighting scout. Those little Nieuports can turn, as the saying is, in their own length; and it was the excellence of their performance which helped the Allies to establish their supremacy in the air in 1917.

"Now, you must understand," continued Captain McIntyre, "that you should, as a general rule, land a machine directly into the eye of the wind. On all aerodromes you will find some kind of wind-indicator, and, usually, a smudge fire, for smoke is so easily seen from the air. Ours is over there, behind the sheds.

"One can, of course, land across the wind: every pilot should learn to do so. But in actual practice this should be avoided, except in cases of emergency, as, if unskilfully done, the drift of the machine across the ground is apt to carry away the undercarriage. Never land down wind if you can possibly help it. It is a moral certainty that you will overrun the aerodrome and crash into some obstacle, or turn over on your nose!"

Captain McIntyre broke off from his homily with a smile.

"I guess I've stuffed your heads with theory enough for one afternoon," he said. "Anyway, you can read all about the theory of flight in books. I expect you have already done so, and you probably know just as much about it as I do. What you want is a practical demonstration, eh?"

The boys said nothing; the expression on their faces was sufficient answer. If only he would take them up!

McIntyre's grin grew broader. "Come along!" he exclaimed. "We will go and see if there is anything in the sheds fit to take the air. Most of the buses are under overhaul, but there may be an old Bristol available. We'll have a look."

He led the way to one of the open hangars, the boys close at his heels in a fever of expectation.

"Hey! Dick!" called out the captain to one of the mechanics in the back of the shed. "How about the old Bristol? ... C48, I mean. Is she serviceable?"

"She's all O.K., sir!" sang out the mechanic.

"Good. Just get a couple of men and wheel her out on to the tarmac. I've got two young sportsmen here who want to have a sniff at the upper air."

"Very good, sir!"

George and Norman could have fallen on each other's necks for joy. At last their long-felt wish was to be gratified. The great moment had arrived. Their first flight! Each felt a quiver of excitement. After all, there had been crashes;

people had been killed.... What if... But a glance at the calm, matter-of-fact demeanour of their instructor served to allay any budding apprehensions, and, as they watched the sturdy biplane being pushed out of its snug housing-place, the impression of strength and reliability conveyed by the grace of its lines and the perfection of its structure effectually dispelled any remnants of qualms which might have lingered in their minds.

"Now then!" cried McIntyre, as the machine was wheeled into position. "I'll climb into the pilot's seat, which is, as you see, in this type of machine situated immediately behind the engine, so that the pilot gets a clear view between the upper and lower planes. The propeller is in front of the engine—in other words, it is a 'tractor,' as opposed to a 'pusher,' in which the engine and propeller are placed behind the pilot and observer. You get into the observer's seat behind me. If you make yourselves small enough there will be room for the two of you."

The boys did as instructed, and were soon ensconced in the small square space behind their pilot. There was not much room, but there was just sufficient to enable them to squeeze themselves down on to the little seat provided for the passenger.

"Now you watch me, and I'll show you how we start up."

The boys leaned forward over McIntyre's shoulder and found themselves gazing at a bewilderingly numerous collection of dials and gauges fitted to the dashboard, as well as a number of turncocks and levers.

"Let me explain these gadgets," continued McIntyre.

"First of all, there is the control lever, or 'joy-stick,' as it is commonly called." He tapped the handle of a short, straight stick which protruded upward between his legs from the floor of the cockpit. "The stick is attached to a universal joint, and it controls both the longitudinal movements, by means of wires attached to the elevator, as well as the lateral movement, by means of other wires attached to the ailerons. The flying of an aeroplane is really the easiest thing in the world. All you have to do is this. If you want to go upward, you pull the nose of the machine up by pulling the stick back; if you want to go down you push the nose down by pushing the stick forward. What could be simpler? The ailerons are worked in conjunction with the rudder. My feet are on the rudder-bar. See? Right! If I want to turn to the left I push my left foot forward; if I want to turn to the right I push my right foot forward. That's easy, isn't it? But, in turning, I must also push the joy-stick over, at the same time and in the same direction as the rudder. When I do this the whole machine 'banks' over on one side. The object of banking on a turn is to offer the undersurface of the wings as a plane of resistance to the air. Do you get my meaning? If I did not bank the machine over the effect of putting on the rudder alone would be to make the machine slip sideways and outward through the air, and so to reduce its *forward* speed. Do not ever be afraid of banking too much. Insufficient banking means a 'flat turn,' and a flat turn is dangerous, because it inevitably brings about a side-slip; and a bad side-slip will almost always reduce your forward speed to 'stalling-point.' You know what 'stalling' is, don't you? You remember that I told you that an aeroplane must be propelled *forward* at a certain speed in order to allow the wind which it creates in moving forward to react upon the wing-surface and so give the planes the necessary 'lift.' It is this reaction of the wind off the wing-surface—known as lift—which keeps the machine in the air. Directly the forward speed is reduced below stalling-point—generally about forty to fifty miles an hour—the lift becomes insufficient to keep the machine in flight. When stalled, an aeroplane will quiver for a few seconds; then the nose, being the heaviest portion, drops, and the machine goes into a steep nose-dive, in which it continues until it has recovered that amount of speed which will enable the planes to lift once more. When stalling-point is reached the machine no longer answers to its controls. Is that clear?"

"Yes, quite. We understand that much."

Norman spoke for them both.

"All right; so much for the aeroplane. Now for the engine. This is a stationary engine, a 275-horse-power Rolls-Royce in this case. If you want your engine to serve you well—and this is a most important factor, especially in war-time, when your life may depend upon its reliability—you must treat it with respect. You cannot nurse it too carefully. Never be rough with it, and never, unless in the most exceptional circumstances, run it 'all out.' Keep a small reserve of power.

"Here," and he pointed out a dial, "is the revolution-counter. This engine is designed to give nearly two thousand revolutions per minute in the air. You will find that seventeen or eighteen hundred are enough for all practical purposes. When testing it on the ground sixteen hundred are quite sufficient. Here, on my right, is the throttle lever. Here the petrol-and oil-gauges. Here is the 'doper,' which pumps a spray of petrol-gas into the engine to help in starting it up. Here are the petrol-taps connecting the two tanks, and each of the tanks with the feed-pipes leading to the carburettors. What else is there? Oh, yes! This is the ignition control. Keep it advanced when running, but retarded when starting up. And this is the water-temperature indicator. Always keep the water pretty hot. The cold air at high altitudes brings the temperature down. And here you have the radiator-shutter lever, which closes the shutter and so keeps the cold air from cooling the water too quickly. Lastly, there are the switches. These are placed outside the cockpit, so that the mechanics can see for themselves whether they are 'on' or 'off.' You must always be very careful to see that the switches are off before you start to 'suck in' your petrol-gas. There have been many instances of mechanics being killed owing to their swinging the propeller when the switches were on. Often these accidents have been due to carelessness on the part of the pilots. That's all, I think. Shall we start up?"

"Yes! yes!" cried the boys.

Captain McIntyre turned his attention to his engine.

"Ready! Switch off! Suck in!" shouted one of the mechanics.

"Switch off! Suck in!" answered the pilot.

The mechanic grasped the propeller-blade and started to swing it round. As he did so the pilot with a few strokes from the doping-pump sprayed petrol-vapour into the cylinders. Half a dozen turns of the propeller, and the mechanic stood back.

"Contact!" he cried.

"Contact!" replied McIntyre, and pressed down the switches. Then he gave a quick turn to the handle of the starting-magneto in the cockpit. *Kick ... kick ...* went the propeller, and came to a stop.

"We'll pull her over, sir," said the foreman-fitter.

"Right!" answered McIntyre.

Three men joined hands; the foremost caught hold of one of the huge blades of the propeller, the other two standing slightly back and to the right of him, each at arm's length from the other, gripping each other by the wrist and leaning outward.

"Contact!" cried the first man.

"Contact!" echoed McIntyre, and again pressed the switches down. "One, two, three, go!" At the last word the three men pulled together. The pilot gave a quick turn to the magneto-handle.

*Brrrt ... brrrt ... brrrrr ...* went the engine. The men fell away. She had started up. As the propeller sprang into motion the whole machine made as though to bound forward, but the movement was instantly checked by the wooden chocks—triangular pieces of wood—which had been placed in front of the undercarriage wheels.

For a minute or two, until the water had reached its proper temperature and the oil was in full circulation, the engine was allowed to tick over quietly. Then, at a sign from the pilot, the mechanics laid hold of the machine, one of them throwing himself across the tail-end of the fuselage, the other two clinging, one to either outside interplane strut. This they did in order to keep it steady while the engine was being run up to test its revolutions. As the throttle was pushed slowly open the purr of the engine waxed into a deep-throated roar. The rush of the wind created by the whirling propeller-blades increased to the fury of a tornado, and the boys bent their heads behind McIntyre's broad back to escape the blast. The needle of the revolution-counter gradually mounted till it hung upon the 1600 mark. For a few seconds the pilot held it there, listening intently for any indication of a misfire, while the whole machine vibrated like a live thing

under the terrific power against which it was held in leash. But the sound of the engine was sweet and rhythmical. McIntyre shut off the throttle.

"That's all right, I think," he said, as the noise and the wind diminished, and the blades once more swished over gently.

"Now, are we all ready to start out? Are you quite comfortable behind there?"

"Yes, sir!" the boys replied in unison.

"Off we go then!"

McIntyre waved an arm above his head, and the mechanics drew the chocks away.

The pilot pushed the throttle lever slightly forward.

Slowly the great aeroplane moved out toward the centre of the ground, 'taxi-ing' along evenly upon its wheels and tail-skid. Over to the east end of the field they ran, and then turned sharply round so as to face the wind, which was blowing from the west. They stopped. Again the pilot inquired of his passengers if all were well; and, receiving an answer in the affirmative, he once more sent the machine forward. This time he opened the throttle gradually to its full extent. The speed of the machine rapidly increased. Now she was racing over the ground, swaying a little, and bumping over the inequalities of the turf. Then, almost before they realized the fact, they were in the air. The ground fell away beneath them as they soared over the far boundary of the aerodrome.

### CHAPTER III

The machine was now travelling steeply up toward the white fleecy clouds overhead. The air-speed indicator registered a hundred miles per hour, while every minute the needle of the aneroid marked a still greater altitude ... 3000 feet ... 3500 ... 4000....

As they continued to climb upward the boys' attention was riveted upon the scene below them. The earth had taken on the appearance of a great coloured map. The fields showed up in different shades of green and brown according to the nature of their cultivation. Here and there, isolated or in groups, were little rectangular blocks ... houses, sheds, factories, or barns. Almost directly below them was the aerodrome which they had just left, the hangars laid out in two rows. Huge indeed they had seemed when standing beside them, but from this height they looked small and even insignificant. The aerodrome itself, with its large expanse of level turf, had dwindled to the most ordinary proportions, while the other fields became even smaller still. Outside one of the hangars was a small black object, but Norman gazed at it long and hard before he realized that this was an aeroplane. Then he also realized that the tiny specks round it, so small as to be almost impossible to discern, were human beings. Excitedly he pointed them out to George. Seeing them both gazing downward over the side of the fuselage, Captain McIntyre spoke through the telephone.

"I'll bank her over," he said, "so that you can get a better view."

As he spoke, the machine heeled over on one side so steeply that the boys instinctively clutched hold of the wooden side-struts for support, and pressed their bodies upward, momentarily alarmed at the vision of a yawning, empty space stretching for thousands of feet below them. Glancing at the pilot, they saw him sitting at his ease; then his voice came reassuringly.

"Sit quite naturally," he said, and went on to explain. "Centrifugal force is holding you to your seats. You cannot possibly slip out over the side. With the machine on a vertical bank, as she is now, and turning rapidly, the tendency of this force is to push you down on to your seat. Just try it and see whether you can get up."

They tried in vain. It was as if they had been glued down in their places, and, in their efforts to move, they found that it had become difficult to lift even their arms and feet. As yet not wholly at their ease, they looked ahead to find both sky and earth gyrating hectically round them. Well knowing the sensations that they would be undergoing, McIntyre did his best to bring relief.

"Here is a tip worth knowing," he said. "If you begin to feel giddy when the machine is turning fast the thing to do is to look down upon some fixed object on the ground; then you'll soon get over it."

They did as directed. The unpleasant sensation of nausea quickly passed away.

McIntyre was speaking again. "Just try for one moment to look at the upper wing-tip. Directly you feel dizzy look down again at once."

They did as they were bid. The upper wing appeared to be whirling through the sky at a terrific speed. Almost immediately they were overcome by that dizziness which attacks even the most experienced aviators if they look upward on a turn. For a few seconds only could they keep their eyes upon that madly racing wing-tip, then they sought to regain their mental equilibrium by looking down toward the ground.

The pilot straightened out the machine, and once more they were flying on a level keel.

The clouds now hung only a few hundred feet above them, and Captain McIntyre began climbing up toward them, sailing swiftly over the city of Toronto. Immediately below them lay Yonge Street, one of the most important arteries leading through the town. Scurrying along it could be distinguished countless motor-cars, looking like a string of busy ants. On the side of the road, which stretched like a long white ribbon across the map, were the radial-car tracks, and on them several cars very much like super-ants in the midst of the procession. Over to the westward a tiny streak of whiteness floated across the dark background of the earth, and McIntyre, seeing George pointing toward it, called out, "Train!" The white streak was formed by the smoke from the locomotive, and the train itself could be seen crawling along the railway, moving like a caterpillar between two thin strands of silver wire.

Following the line of the railway, they saw it run through a small village; then a few miles to the south it entered the town. They looked down upon the city of Toronto. It lay enveloped in a grey pall of smoke and mist, but dimly through the haze could be seen the groups of buildings intersected by the streets. On the outskirts of the town more houses, newly built, stood scattered farther apart and with more breathing-space round them. Out beyond the town lay Lake Ontario, its clear blue waters stretching away for miles until they merged with the horizon. In the middle distance the northern outline of the shore ran in a long, straight line from east to west. Eastward rose the high bluffs which fringe that portion of the lake; while dimly, forty miles away to the south, Norman was able to descry the frontier of the United States, the land of his birth.

The machine was now rapidly approaching a cloud which hung like a mountainous sea of cotton-wool in front of them. Billow upon billow rose for a thousand feet above them. Captain McIntyre manoeuvred the machine round the white edges, shaving them so closely that sometimes the inner wing-tip would disappear into the white mass, like a knife into soft cream cheese. They flew on into the mouth of a deep cloud-valley. Below them the white floor rolled out spotless as untrodden snow; upon either side the cold, white walls soared upward to the blue ceiling of the sky. Still they flew on, until just when it seemed that the machine would plunge headlong into the towering mass ahead of them, the pilot turned about and flew back again from out the valley mouth.

Ever circling round the great woolly masses, the aeroplane continued on its climb, until eight thousand feet separated it and its crew from Mother Earth. Now they topped the cloud-bank, leaving it hanging a hundred feet below them, drifting lazily across the sky like some titanic snowball. Scattered broadcast throughout the heavens were countless other fleecy balls, all at the same altitude, but varying in size and shape. Above them was the clear blue sky, unflecked by an atom of cloud or mist, extending into limitless space beyond. The earth below became invisible, blotted out by the thick white shroud.

"The clouds are actually forming now," said McIntyre. "New ones being formed and old ones increasing in size. This is happening before our eyes. In half an hour there may be double the number of clouds we now see; and in an

hour's time the western horizon may be visible only in small patches. Or possibly some other atmospheric influence may set in, and they will gradually dissolve. From the ground it generally appears as if the clouds were being blown toward us from the windward horizon, and that they were then blown on over some other portion of the earth. But that is not so really. They actually form and dissolve while one is watching them. Usually, of course, there is a breeze which keeps them on the move, so that the man on the ground is seldom observing the same cloud for very long. It moves past him, and, unconsciously, his attention is attracted to another. If the clouds were to remain absolutely stationary it would be easy to see them form and dissolve themselves again."

While McIntyre had been talking the machine had been racing along over an unbroken mass of cloud. Suddenly a large gap appeared, giving them a vista of the earth. Into the gap the pilot dived—so quickly that the boys, taken unawares, were nearly pitched out of their seats. Down, down through this aerial funnel they hurtled at tremendous speed, the nose of the aeroplane pointing directly to the ground. Then, as the pilot gently pulled the stick back toward him, the nose came up to and past the horizontal. Steeper and steeper they climbed, until at last they were shooting almost vertically upward into the sky. They flattened out, and once more the clouds closed in below them. Again there was nothing but pure white mist beneath, and overhead the clear blue sky.

"That is what we call 'diving' and 'zooming,'" said McIntyre. "Now, if you like, we will go down through the middle of the clouds, and when we come out the other side we will try a few stunts. Will that suit you?"

"We'd love it, sir," answered Norman.

"Right! What about your safety-belts? Are they done up properly?"

The safety-belts adjusted, McIntyre settled himself down in his seat once more. He pulled back the throttle lever, and the roar of the engine sank to an almost inaudible purr. The speed decreased, and the nose of the machine dropped slightly as it took up its normal gliding angle.

After the incessant roar of the engine in the ears the comparative silence was no less striking than agreeable. Only the swish of the propeller and the hum of the wires as they cut through the air could be heard. The air-speed fell from a hundred and twenty miles an hour down to a bare sixty. They seemed hardly to be moving. Nevertheless, the cloud rose rapidly to meet them, and, before them on its surface appeared the complete circle of a rainbow, toward the centre of which McIntyre deliberately drove the machine. Nearer and nearer came the rainbow. Now they were upon it. To the sound of the shrill screaming of the wires they slipped cleanly through the heart of the circle and were engulfed in the cool, damp cloud. The sun vanished, with it the blue sky. Round them was a pall of dirty grey. It hardly seemed possible that this could be the selfsame cloud which from the outside had looked so pure and white. Each second it grew darker. Moisture could be seen forming on the wind-screen, as if it were raining. Little drops of water began to collect on their goggles, and, following Captain McIntyre's advice, the boys pushed them up over their foreheads, after which they found that they could see better. Not that there was much to see! The propeller, six feet ahead of them, was barely visible. Beyond that there was nothing but impenetrable gloom such as in the thickest of pea-green fogs. Steadily they glided on. The seconds passed, seconds which seemed like hours. The boys began to wonder if they would ever re-emerge from this eerie realm of mist. It was comforting to hear McIntyre's matter-of-fact tones coming through the telephone.

"The curious thing about flying in a cloud is that one loses all one's sense of balance. I cannot tell you whether we shall be flying on an even keel or not when we come out below. We may be in a side-slip, or we may be upside down. Anyhow, we shall soon see!"

There came a rift in the thick mist. The boys caught a fleeting glimpse of the ground below; then all closed in again. More rifts ... great rents in the cloud ... a few trailing veils of limpid vapour went skirling by, and at last they were clear of the cloud....

The map of the earth spread out again beneath them, but the blue sky had gone, obscured in its turn by the cloud-bank through which they had descended.

The machine was cruising along at half-speed.

"Now for a stunt or two!" announced McIntyre. "I will do a simple one first, just to see how you like it." So saying,

he opened the throttle, and the aeroplane bounded forward. A few seconds later the nose sprang upward. As it rose the forward speed decreased, in spite of the fact that the engine continued to run at the maximum revolutions. They were now pointing vertically upward.... The aeroplane appeared to hang for a moment on the rapidly revolving blades of the propeller. It felt as though she must inevitably drop tail foremost. But the pilot kicked the rudder over ... the nose fell over to one side and dropped, the tail shot up, and in less time than it takes to tell the machine was shooting sharply downward. For a short distance it continued to dive; then McIntyre, shutting off the throttle, and pulling back the elevator lever, gradually brought it up again to the horizontal, but ... they were travelling in the opposite direction to then: former line of flight, though at exactly the same height at which they had started.

"That was an Immelmann turn!" said McIntyre. "It was invented by one of the best German airmen; and it was a very useful device for shaking off enemy aircraft which had got into position on one's tail. It was generally successful, because of its speed and unexpectedness. Now I will show you a manoeuvre known as the 'half-roll.' I must tell you that these stunts were all constantly used in aerial fighting during the War. I will explain to you what I am doing as I go along...."

"By pulling back the joy-stick and kicking the rudder I am turning the machine completely over on to her back. She is now upside down, with her nose pointing slightly downward. I am now putting the nose a little farther down, so that we are going at a steeper angle toward the ground. Now we are going vertically downward; but the pressure of the air against the wings, which are set at an angle of incidence to the horizontal, is forcing the nose up again. Now we are level and going along at a speed of a hundred and seventy miles an hour, and as I keep pulling the nose up this extra speed brings us back again to the same height from which we started. As in the Immelmann turn, we come out going in the opposite direction. A half-roll is virtually the same as the last half of a loop. You merely start off by putting the machine on its back, and then do the last half of the loop."

In the meantime the machine had answered so quickly to the controls that if Norman and George had not heard McIntyre's voice continually explaining exactly what was taking place they would in all probability have been completely bewildered. As it was, they understood the manoeuvre, a fact which evidently pleased their instructor; the more so as they appeared to be enjoying themselves immensely, and to be quite at home in the air. Speaking through the telephone, McIntyre congratulated them.

"You fellows seem to me to possess a very real air-sense. These stunts are certainly a high trial for novices on their first trip. Most people would have been upset. We'll take it easy for a bit while I show you how the wireless telephone works. We'll call up the aerodrome and talk to them. Now, listen!"

McIntyre inserted a plug, turned a disk on the dashboard, and after a few seconds of discordant buzzing in their ears the boys heard a strange voice speaking as clearly as though its owner was sitting just behind them.

"There is nothing much doing here, Mac. Stay out as long as you like."

Captain McIntyre's voice answered, "All right. What did you think of our stunts?"

"I am sorry to say I did not see them. Do some more, and I will criticize."

"Right you are!" he assented, and, addressing himself to his pupils, he remarked, "The next item on the programme will be a complete roll. Sit tight, you boys!"

The machine went through the same evolutions as it had previously done in the case of the half-roll, except that instead of ending up in a dive it continued to turn after being upside down, and ended up on a level keel, going in the same direction as before, but having lost a few feet in altitude. The whole thing was so quickly done that the boys had had little time in which to follow the movements. The machine with a kind of corkscrew movement had wriggled on to her back and had wriggled back again before either of them had realized in the least what was happening.

"That's a roll. How do you like it?" asked McIntyre.

"I hardly know," answered Norman. "It rather took my breath away."

"It is a difficult stunt, even for experienced pilots. And of course it is all a matter of timing. A great deal depends upon the rigging of the machine. Some machines will not roll at all. But we will now loop the loop. This is really the simplest thing of all. All the pilot has to do is to keep his elevator lever back, and the machine will loop of its own accord, provided that it has sufficient forward speed and that the engine is powerful enough to carry it over the top of the loop. Here goes!"

The aeroplane was doing about a hundred miles an hour, and as the pilot pulled the lever gently backward the nose mounted up to the sky. The horizon fell away, and now in front of them was nothing but blue sky. But oddly enough they experienced no sensation of flying upward or even upside down, and it was with no little surprise that they suddenly caught sight of the earth far above their heads. As a matter of fact, they were at that moment upside down at the very top of the loop. The next moment, however, everything resumed its normal aspect, and they found themselves diving swiftly earthward on the last quarter of the loop. Gradually the nose resumed its level course. The loop had been completed. They were again over the same place and at the same altitude as before.

"What do you think of that?" asked McIntyre.

"Great!" answered both at once.

"Gee!" said Norman. "It's better than any racer on Coney Island that I have ever struck."

"It is not so exciting as it looks from the ground, is it?" laughed McIntyre.

The boys laughed and answered nothing, unwilling to admit how really thrilling they had found it; but later on in the day, when they were discussing it between themselves, George described the sensations as being similar to those which he felt when suddenly plunging into a cold shower-bath.

"Before landing," McIntyre went on, "I will go part of the way down in a spin. Spinning is equivalent to letting the machine fall out of control, but it is really a perfectly safe manoeuvre as long as the pilot keeps his head and does not get flustered. When in a spin the machine is travelling vertically toward the ground, at the same time revolving on its own axis. When seen from the ground the speed at which it rotates appears to be quite slow, but when seated in the machine one gets the sensation of terrific speed. The thing to remember is that, when in a spin, the normal action of the elevator control is reversed. Thus to pull the control-stick back does not, in this case, tend to pull the nose of the machine up, but, on the contrary, keeps it turning or spinning on its axis. Some machines will not spin readily. Their tendency to spin is dependent upon their degree of stability, so in the case of highly stable machines it is necessary, in order to keep them spinning, to hold the stick hard back. Otherwise they will gradually right themselves of their own accord. Others, on the other hand, of the more unstable type, will remain in a spin and even tend to increase their rate of spinning, so that in order to bring them out of a spin the proper action is to push the joy-stick forward—the last thing that one would naturally think of doing. This stops the spinning motion and brings the machine back into an ordinary nose-dive. Then, and then only, by a gentle backward pull on the stick, the nose is raised, and the machine again flies level. Are you ready? Go!"

Up went the nose ... up, up until all flying speed was lost. The whole aeroplane quivered as it stalled. The nose flopped down, and, as it fell the pilot kicked the rudder-bar hard over and pulled back the stick. The next moment they were pointing vertically downward, while the whole earth—fields, fences, buildings, roads, and streams—went racing round their heads.

The spinning motion continued until the boys scarce knew where they were for giddiness. Had the world gone mad? Was this the end of all things? Had the pilot lost control? For the first time they began to feel a real alarm. But McIntyre's voice, in which could be detected a tinge of amusement, rallied them.

"Keep cool!" he admonished. "We're only half-way down as yet! If you feel sick I'll stop. Can you stick it?"

"Yes, sir," gasped Norman, though he would have given anything to have been out of it, and he felt his senses spinning even faster than the machine.

When at last they emerged from the spin and flattened out they were but five hundred feet above the aerodrome.

"Now we'll side-slip down and land into the wind," said McIntyre.

Over went the machine until the inner wing-tip pointed straight toward the ground; down she fell upon her side; and both boys caught their breath as it appeared inevitable that they should hit the earth. But, at the last moment, with only a bare fifty feet to spare, the pilot pushed the lower rudder-bar, and with the stick pulled up the lower wing. The swift swoop of the side-slip was over; and the machine was sailing quietly along at right angles to her former course, and straight into the eye of the wind at about forty miles an hour. With their speed ever decreasing and the engine throttled back, they subsided slowly to the ground. Lightly, with never so much as a bump, the wheels and tail-skid settled on the turf. A few yards' run, and the great machine came to a stop within twenty yards of the hangar door. The mechanics ran out to meet it, and pilot and passengers disembarked.

Their first flight was at an end, but try as they would to overwhelm their instructor with thanks he would have none of it.

"I guess I'm busy now," he said. "I must be off. Come up again to-morrow, if you like, and we'll have another talk. So long!" He disappeared behind the hangar, leaving the boys somewhat dazed with their emotions, but highly delighted with their first day's work.

## CHAPTER IV

The following day George and Norman were once more standing on the tarmac with their new-found friend. Captain McIntyre was in an informative mood, and he had held the boys' attention rapt with stories of the War. Suddenly George interrupted his discourse.

"Isn't that a machine coming in from the east, sir?" he asked, pointing to a black speck in the sky.

McIntyre looked up and scanned the heavens.

"Yes, you are right," he said. "That must be Roberts," he added, after a momentary pause. "He is the only pilot up just now. He went over East Toronto to take some photographs and to test a new machine."

Away to the eastward could be seen a small, dark object moving high up in the air. Then to their ears came the faint beat of a high-powered engine. Nearer and nearer it came. Watching it, they saw the shape grow more distinct, until it clearly resolved itself into the outline of an aeroplane.

Said McIntyre, "Watch how he approaches the field. First of all he will circle overhead, to make sure which way the wind is blowing. Then he will come down and land directly into it."

The machine reached the aerodrome. It was still at an altitude of about one thousand feet. Slowly it began to descend in a graceful spiral. Suddenly it gave a sidelong lurch. One wing-tip dropped; the nose shot down. An exclamation of surprise escaped the lips of Captain McIntyre.

"What on earth is wrong with Roberts?" he muttered half aloud. "He is flying like a fool—must be something wrong—he wouldn't be playing the giddy goat like that on a new machine."

McIntyre's experienced eye had seen something the significance of which had entirely escaped the notice of the two boys. Roberts' descent had, in fact, become startlingly erratic. He appeared to have lost control of his machine. McIntyre went on muttering to himself.

"Gosh!" he cried. "There must be something devilish wrong! Roberts would never take a chance like that."

The machine was now only sixty feet up over the edge of the aerodrome, and McIntyre drew a sigh of relief as the

machine righted itself. The pilot seemed to have regained control. In another three seconds he would have brought it safely to earth. Then again the nose dipped sharply, and, in the twinkling of an eye, the machine had crashed head on into the ground. It seemed impossible that such a disaster could have occurred so quickly and almost without warning. One minute before the aeroplane had been winging its way smoothly through the air with all the grace and majesty of some Titan race of airlings.... Now it lay a ghastly shattered wreck.

George and Norman stood stunned by the rude shock of it all; but the sound of McIntyre's voice, which rang out sharply, shouting orders to a group of stupefied mechanics standing by, brought their faculties back to realities.

"Here, you men! Get some wire-cutters, and an axe and some pyrene! Call for an ambulance and a doctor! Get a move on!"

The next minute the three of them were running at top speed toward the scene of the accident. George and Norman were strong and fleet of foot, but it was all that they could do to keep up with McIntyre, who forged ahead of them in grim silence. Their lungs were near to bursting-point when they reached the tangled mass of wreckage, and terrible was the sight which now encountered their eyes. Norman cast a sidelong glance at George. His friend's face was as white as a sheet. His own head felt oddly light and his legs felt weak. But this was no time to give way to squeamishness.

Torn linen, bent iron, splintered woodwork, and twisted wire—this was all that remained of the beautifully designed machine that was but lately floating proudly through the air. Both boys were conscious of a strong desire to keep their eyes as long as possible averted from the point where they knew that the poor pilot lay; and when at last they forced themselves to look it was to see McIntyre, his face set, frantically pulling at a part of a broken wing. After a few minutes' plying of the axe a large sheet of bloodstained fabric came away in his hand.

The boys needed all their grit to keep their senses from revolt, but they steeled their hearts and clenched their teeth, and they jumped in to help their instructor, as they saw him struggling to reach a grotesquely huddled form beneath the wreckage, an object which they knew to be a human body, if only because of the leather coat in which it was enveloped.

Was he alive or dead?

If they could get him out immediately his life might yet be saved. They tore away at the parts which were pinning him down. Would help never come? Why, why was the ambulance so slow? To their tortured minds the minutes seemed like hours; and an eternity might have passed since they had been standing on the tarmac waiting for Roberts to land. Much indeed had happened in those few moments. George and Norman—two light-hearted, care-free schoolboys when that aeroplane was gliding down—were now experiencing the first great shock of their career. The first test of their worth had come upon them. They had been brought face to face with the sternest thing in life—with death. Were they to falter now? Could they rise to the occasion? They were called upon to do men's work.

A motor-tender with further assistance arrived at last, and the rescuers were able to get to work with wire-cutters and other instruments. Little by little they succeeded in freeing the pilot. His face was visible now, and George saw a deep wound on the forehead, from which the blood was slowly oozing. It was evident that he was either dead or unconscious; and the men redoubled their efforts to relieve the poor broken body from the wreckage which was crushing it down.

It seemed almost certain to the tense group of workers that Roberts must have met with an instantaneous death, but McIntyre's pleading voice stirred them all to do their utmost.

"Poor old devil! We have got to get him out! Dig in and work like blazes! There are too many of you round that fuselage. You are only getting in each other's way. Clear off, some of you! We'll do better in reliefs."

He looked up and saw the white faces of the two boys. George caught his eye.

"Let us carry on, sir. We are smaller than the others and can get at things easier," he pleaded.

"Right you are! Get at it! Hey, you two men!" he cried, turning to a couple of mechanics tugging ineffectively at the edge of the heap. "Stand away, and hand us the tools when we call out for them."

McIntyre was essentially a man of action. Curtly and calmly came his orders; and the fact that his best friend was lying imprisoned beneath the wreckage seemed to steady rather than to impair his nerves. His brain was cool, although his heart was overflowing; and he directed every detail of the operation with the skill and precision of a master mind. He was a man, too, who even in this hour of stress found time to appraise the work of his assistants. Years of service in the Great War had taught him speedily to recognize true grit, and in these two schoolboys working by his side he quickly detected the makings of men who could face danger and disaster with a throbbing heart, perhaps, but with a cool, resourceful brain and a steady eye and nerve. And he was grateful for their help.

After almost superhuman efforts some of the weight had been taken off the body, and McIntyre considered that he could now lift his friend out of the wreck. Very cautiously he put his arm under Roberts' shoulders and pulled. One leg seemed still to be held beneath an engine-bearer, but George, crawling into the mass of tangled wires, was able to release it after some minutes' labour with a pair of wire-cutters.

"Renton, just you hold his feet while I lift him out. I am afraid both his legs are broken," came McIntyre's instructions.

It was true. Both legs were terribly twisted, and it was obvious that the bones must be broken in many places.

George lifted the feet very gently, but as he touched the maimed limbs he was attacked by a feeling of nausea. McIntyre was quick to see it.

"Stick it, son! One more effort! You're a real brick. Now!"

George made a stupendous effort. He must, he would go through with it! His jaw set firm. Together he and McIntyre hoisted the inert form clear and laid it on a stretcher.

The doctor approached.

"Leave him on the ground," he said, "while I see if anything can be done."

Mentally rather than physically exhausted, George flopped down on the ground, his back against the overturned cockpit of the aeroplane. Something was lying beneath the pilot's seat upon the ground.... He looked. It was the pilot's gloves. Automatically he picked them up. There was another object lying close beside them. He picked that up also. It was a writing-pad, smeared and stained with blood and dirt. He rose and walked slowly across to where a group of men were gathered round the stretcher. He had the gloves in his hand, and, though hardly aware of having done so, he had slipped the writing-pad into the pocket of his coat.

Norman was standing somewhat apart from the others, and, going up to him, George put his arm in his. Action suspended, the two boys were beginning to feel the reaction from the shock. McIntyre came up to them.

"Feeling a bit groggy, eh?" he said. They turned and saw the airman's haggard face. "I want to thank you both for all you have done. Your help has been invaluable. I am only too sorry that your introduction to aviation, as it were, should have been so unfortunate. But I hope that you will not let this unlucky accident shake your determination. Remember that I am at your service when you want an instructor. The air must take its toll, you know—sometimes even of the best—" His voice grew hoarse.

"Is he dead, sir?" stammered Norman.

"No, he is just breathing. The doctor says he can't live more than a few minutes. Every bone in his body seems to have been broken, and the base of his skull is fractured. The doctor will not allow him to be moved yet. He told me that if an attempt was made to move him the result would be fatal."

"Captain McIntyre," came a voice from the crowd. "The doctor wants you."

"Right, I'm coming," he answered.

"Oh, I say, sir, what shall I do with these gloves? And I have a writing-pad too," asked George.

"Would you mind leaving the gloves in my office? Throw the pad away, it's no good." McIntyre called the answer over his shoulder as he pushed his way through the crowd.

"Don't throw that pad away, George," whispered Norman in his friend's ear. "I don't know why, but I have a hunch about it——"

"What an extraordinary idea——"

"Stick it in your pocket, George."

"Oh, well——there is no harm in keeping it, I suppose——"

As he spoke a sudden silence fell. One by one the men in front of them bared and bowed their heads. There was no need to ask the reason.

That brave spirit which, a bare fifteen minutes ago, had been pulsing with the glowing health of youth was now for ever still. It seemed so horribly incongruous that on this glorious summer evening such a tragedy could have been enacted. Above, the sky was peaceful and serenely blue. No breath of wind disturbed the air. Lovely was the landscape, green, and slashed with burnished gold and red. In the silence could be heard the crying of the birds and the lowing of the cattle. All nature seemed so gay; all its creatures full of happiness; and here in the midst of them was death. The boys could hardly believe that such a thing could have occurred in so short a space of time. To them it all seemed like a hideous nightmare. And it was only the group of shocked faces gathered round the leather-clad form on the stretcher, and the sight of the all-too realistic heap of scrap-iron lying on the ground, that told them that it was indeed too true.

## CHAPTER V

Late that same night the boys were undressing to go to bed. They were both staying with George's parents at their house in Toronto. It had indeed been the fullest and most eventful day in their youthful lives; and, physically exhausted as they were, their state of mental excitement had not yet been fully abated. As they once again reviewed the events of the past few hours, one seemingly trivial incident recurred to Norman's mind. Suddenly he remembered the pad which he had bidden George put into his pocket for safe-keeping.

"George," he said. "What have you done with the writing-pad which you found under the pilot's seat?"

"It's downstairs in my coat pocket. I'll go and get it. What did you want it for? Do you think there is anything written on it?"

"I don't know, but it did occur to me at the time that there might be. That was why I wanted you to keep it."

George went out of the room. Shortly he returned with the bloodstained object in his hand.

"Ah!" exclaimed Norman. "Now! Let's have a look at it!"

Together they pored over the sodden, torn, and crumpled paper. Round the dark red, almost blackened, stains they were able to detect the faint markings of a pencil.



sheet of note paper

"There you are!" cried Norman. "I knew somehow that we should find something..."

"I wonder if it is anything ... whether it is Roberts' writing ... if it is a message from him..."

George shuddered as he spoke. The pad recalled the tragedy which they had just witnessed only too vividly. It was the life-blood of a man which had dyed the paper which he now held in his hand. But it had not been mere morbid curiosity which had prompted Norman to retrieve that pad; it had been some strange sense of intuition, and it was the same intuitive impulse that was now urging him to decipher the message—for some message he felt convinced there was—left by the dead pilot.

The boys settled themselves down to their task. By dint of careful tracing they managed to identify a certain number of letters. The remainder was largely guess-work; but with these groups of letters as a basis upon which to build they were eventually able to reconstruct the original to their satisfaction.

"I think I see what it is," announced Norman, after a prolonged period of silence, during which he had been hard at work with pencil and paper.

"Roberts was trying to write a message to Captain McIntyre."

"Very possibly. But I don't quite see why he should want to write..."

"He had been wounded, I think ..."

"Wounded?"

"Yes. Shot. He talks of a bullet, see? Then the first two letters of the word in front of 'bullet' are 'gu.' The last letter might be 'n.' If so, that would give us 'gun.' In front of that again we have 'ma,' and the rest of the word obliterated. That might easily be 'machine,' which gives us 'machine-gun bullet.'"

"By Jove!" exclaimed George. "I believe that's right!"

"Well, let's try the first part. 'Otted large fly ... oat ... What can that be? 'Fly' is probably 'flying,' but we want one letter to go in front of 'oat.'..."

"'B' for boat," suggested George promptly.

"Good! Now we've got 'large flying-boat.' What goes in front of 'otted'?"

"Dotted ... rotted ... potted ... How about 'potted'?"

"Why should he pot at it? No, that won't do. He wasn't armed."

"That's true! Try 'spotted.'..."

"That's more like it!" said Norman, committing the words to paper. "Now. Blank ... 'feet' ... blank ... 'la.' What do you make of that?"

"There can't be more than two letters after 'la,' so it might well be 'lake.' He was somewhere over the lake. In which case I should say that there are numerals in front of 'feet' ... '1000' or '2000' feet above the lake. ... That's how I should read it."

"Good man!" cried Norman triumphantly. "On with the business!"

"What comes next?"

"Div.'..."

"Dive."

"Yes. Blankety-blank ... 'spect.' Humph! What can that be?"

"Respect ... suspect ... inspect..."

"Might be either of the last two," said Norman. "Let me think a bit." Then, after a short time, "On the whole I believe it works out this way best ... 'Dived down to inspect.' That's most likely what he did. He spotted something out of the ordinary about that flying-boat, and went down to have a look at her ... and got shot for his trouble."

"Good Lord! D'you really think so?"

"Yes, I do. Look here. This short word beginning with 'hi' must be 'hit.' Then there's 'in thi' blank..."

"Thigh,' according to that," said George.

"Obviously. He was hit in the thigh. What ends in 'st'?"

"Wrist."

"Hit in thigh and wrist.'..."

"You've got it!"

"Feel aint.' Pretty sure to be 'feel faint.' Then 'may not be,' and the message ends abruptly. He probably fainted from the shock of the wound, and that was why he lost control of the machine and crashed."

"Cruel bad luck," murmured George. "A few seconds more and his life would have been saved. Poor blighter!"

"I wonder what this mysterious flying-boat was doing, and why the occupants should fire on Roberts."

"Whoever they were, and whatever they were doing, they evidently had no intention of allowing anyone to interfere with them. But ... fancy shooting at a man like that! It's monstrous!" George found himself glowing with indignation.

"They must have had some pretty good incentive for doing so!"

"Who do you think they were?"

"Dashed if I know." Norman grew thoughtful.

They fell to discussing the problem confronting them.

"Norman, what could Roberts have meant to do? In the first place why should he have dived to inspect that machine he speaks of?"

"I was just puzzling over that myself," replied Norman. "The only thing that I can think of is that he saw a strange aeroplane, of an unfamiliar type, perhaps, and flew toward it. I imagine that he would naturally be curious about any strange machine in this locality. Then, when he approached, he was evidently shot at."

"Yes, but not quite so fast, old man. Now every aeroplane in Canada is marked on the top and bottom wings as well as on the sides of the fuselage with large identification numbers. The Government, I believe, is very strict about these regulations. So that, if Roberts saw the numbers, he could easily have identified the aeroplane. Why then did he 'dive to inspect'? Why, when he did dive, was he shot at? And why did he not write down the number of the machine on the tablet after he had been fired at? Those are our first three questions."

"The aeroplane had no numbers on it!" exclaimed Norman. "I'll bet that's what it was! Roberts saw a machine in the air flying without its proper markings. Thinking this peculiar, he dived to get nearer to it. What do you think of that?"

"Yes, that's quite possible. Go on!"

"On diving, he was fired upon and wounded in the thigh and wrist. He turned for home, but loss of blood began to tell on him.... He grew weaker, and, afraid that he would faint before reaching the aerodrome, began to write a message to McIntyre. How's that for reconstruction?"

"All right as far as it goes," admitted George. "Yes, it *does* work out. The strange aeroplane must have been out on some 'unlawful occasion.' Otherwise the crew would not have opened fire on Roberts. That they had a machine-gun on board at all is suspicious in itself. The ordinary aeroplane on pleasure bent does not carry arms.... And if your theory about the absence of proper marking is correct..."

"They must have been criminals of sorts ... and a pretty desperate lot, too, as far as that goes! What do you think they were? Bootleggers, perhaps?"

"Possibly," returned the cautious George. "We can't be sure as yet."

"I bet they are!" cried Norman, carried away by his own inspirations.

"You've guessed pretty well to date, I'll allow, Norman. But you're apt to go a bit quick. There are a good many other points still to be considered. I vote we go and sleep on them. I'm for bed."

Norman yawned.

"I dare say I could shut an eye," he said.

"Good night," said George. "We'll have a look at the papers to-morrow.... We may see some case in which the criminals have made a get-away with the assistance of an aeroplane."

It was very late before either of the boys got to sleep that night. Their minds were still active with the puzzle which they had set themselves to solve; but nature finally asserted itself, and they fell into a profound sleep.

Nevertheless, George was early awake the next morning, and his thoughts instantly reverted to the discussion of the previous evening and to the events which had given rise to it. He lay in bed, his brain at work in the attempt to penetrate the mystery which encompassed Roberts' last flight. By degrees his methodical mind arrived, by a process of elimination, at the same conclusions at which Norman's acute intuition had jumped the night before. But George's reasoning had supplied some missing links. He rose and went to his friend's bedroom. Norman was still sleeping soundly. George woke him up.

"Norman," he began, "I guess you were not far wrong last night. Roberts, while flying, saw a strange machine in the air. It must have presented an abnormal appearance, such as having no markings. Otherwise he would not have 'dived to inspect' it, as he says he did. Roberts was fired at and wounded for his pains. It follows that the occupant or occupants of this aeroplane were taking no chances. No man commits murder for a joke. Again, we know from Roberts' evidence that the machine in question was a large flying-boat. This, I think, is important. Why a large flying-boat, which is more difficult to manoeuvre and harder to conceal than a small aeroplane?"

"A flying-boat can carry more men and can carry cargo," observed Norman.

"Exactly! All of which points to the fact that we are dealing with a *gang*; and since this gang is so darned secretive about its movements the odds are that its members are employed on some illicit stunt or other. If they hadn't been engaged in some criminal exploit they would not have risked their necks by committing murder. Another reason why I feel that we are dealing with a gang is that a single individual, trying to escape after committing a solitary crime, would hardly be likely to select this sort of machine. He would plump for one of the faster and lighter types, of which there are, incidentally, many more available. No! This flying-boat suggests an organized plot for running contraband between here and the States. Roberts saw the machine over the Lake, which is very near the frontier..."

"Bootleggers!" cried Norman. "Bootleggers, for a thousand bucks! I'll bet you, George! I said so from the first!"

"I'd thought of that," replied George quietly. "They might be smuggling liquor from Canada to the States.... We know from all accounts that these bootleggers will stick at nothing. But there are other things to think of. I remember Father saying to Mr Smith the other day that the increase in the number of bank-robberies was most alarming. War mentality and all that he put it down to. Why, it was only a week ago that one of the National Bank's messengers was shot down in the streets of Toronto and robbed of forty thousand dollars in cash and securities."

"Yes, I remember," said Norman. "Well, these desperadoes may be bandits or bootleggers—it's all the same. They may use their aeroplane for carrying dollar-bills or drink. I don't know! In any case, if we are going to trail them we are up against a pretty stiff proposition, and if we don't want to have a few holes punctured in our skins we've got to go canny. Say, George, we'd better buy a gun apiece and do a bit of practice in our spare time!"

Norman burst out laughing—he was in high spirits that morning. But George looked grave.

"But, seriously," he said, "do you think we can take this job on? Hadn't we better inform Captain McIntyre or the police?"

"No, sir! We'll tackle the blighters ourselves, or have a try, at any rate! Somebody once remarked that one can always try anything—once!" But in spite of his airy manner Norman was conscious of inward misgivings. George, on the other hand, having entered his protest, was secretly glad at his companion's words.

"Well," he said, "what shall we do? How are we to start? How are we to get even with these thugs? How are we to discover their identity and the whereabouts of their base of operations?"

"Base of operations! You've said it!" exclaimed Norman. "Why, George boy, there's one thing that stands out miles!"

"What's that?"

"The air is their element, isn't it? Well, we have to tackle them in their own element. We must take to the air. We've got to learn to fly, and mighty quick, too!"

"Tackle them in the air!" echoed George.

Norman's nights of imagination were certainly staggering at times; but it was rarely that they did not stir some response in his friend's heart.

"You must be crazy!" he protested. "Besides, there isn't time..."

"Captain McIntyre will teach us; he promised us as much. He told us we had a good air-sense. We ought to be going solo in a week."

"Norman, you're the most confounded optimist I've ever come across. What will my good parents say to this?"

"'Where ignorance is bliss...' But seriously, George, much as I dislike the thought of ... er ... hoodwinking the dear, delightful old things ... they wouldn't understand..."

"No, I don't suppose they would," replied George slowly. "Still, how do you propose to get away with it? How can we spend a week on the aerodrome without being asked what we are up to?"

"Huh! Make some excuse."

"For instance?"

"Oh, I don't know. Can't your fertile brain invent something plausible enough?"

## CHAPTER VI

"Come on, George, just get that brain of yours to work."

"We might say we're going to stay with some pal."

"No. That won't do. Sure to be discovered. I've got it. We'll say we want to go out camping in the woods. How's that?"

"That might do." George turned over the suggestion in his mind. "Yes," he went on, "that's not a bad idea at all. We can kill two birds with one stone. We really will camp in the woods, and the particular woods in which we will camp are those east of Toronto. We'll spend our time there when we are not at the aerodrome."

"Oh! Why?" asked Norman, looking at his companion inquiringly.

"Because we shall be near the cliffs," came the slow reply.

"Well, what of that?"

"Roberts could not have been far from the cliffs when he spotted the mysterious aircraft. Don't you remember that Captain McIntyre said he had gone over East Toronto?"

"Yes."

"If ever there was a suitable place for hiding a seaplane it would be in the inlets and coves beneath those cliffs."

"More than likely," conceded Norman.

"Besides," continued George, "I've been looking at that writing-pad again. The bloodstain at the top is growing lighter, and I think I can make out some figures. Here, d'you see? 6.54 ... in the corner?" Norman nodded. George went on to explain his theory. "Soldiers get into the habit of timing all their messages, so that this probably means that Roberts began to write his message at 6.54 P.M. The crash occurred at 7.6 P.M. by my watch. We can only figure it out approximately, but, supposing the machine to be travelling at a mile a minute, and, allowing for a certain amount of time lost in manoeuvring under such difficulties, and again for the watches not being synchronized exactly, we find that twelve minutes elapsed between the beginning of the message and the crashing on the aerodrome. The spot at which Roberts met

the mystery machine was, therefore, within a radius of fifteen to twenty miles of the flying-field. Add the knowledge that he was flying over the Lake, and the area of our search is reduced to a comparatively small one—along the coast-line."

"There's the makings of a Sherlock Holmes in you, George. Your plan sounds good to me. The camp idea will go down well with your people. They are great on the 'open air for boys' stunt. By gum, yes! We'll lie up in the woods and see if we can get a line on our friends of the flying-boat—we may come across their tracks. They must have some line of communication with the city. But the great thing is to be in a position to hoist them with their own petard. In other words, we've got to learn to fly. And when we've done that I'd like to get a Bristol Fighter. It's a two-seater, and the best fighting-machine in the world by all accounts."

"That's just like you, Norman! Wanting to fight before you can fly."

By breakfast-time they had definitely decided to keep their secret to themselves. Later, if it became necessary, they could always take Captain McIntyre into their confidence. Breakfast proved to be a long and tiresome meal as far as George and Norman were concerned. To them it was nothing but a sheer waste of time—precious time that might more profitably have been spent in studying the newspapers in search of clues. Their excitement, however, in no way affected their appetites; and, judging from the robust nature of the latter, George's mother decided that the horrors of the previous day had produced no ill effects upon the boys.

Breakfast over, our amateur detectives stole off to Mr Renton's study, where they knew that they would remain undisturbed for an hour or so, until Mr Renton returned from his morning walk. Dividing the newspapers between them, they began their search, but in spite of a diligent perusal of all the criminal reports nothing transpired of any particular interest.

Norman rose with a yawn and stretched himself.

"Don't see much here," he said. "I guess our friends are bootleggers."

"They might be," agreed George. "There are accounts of a good many crimes, but, by trying to put myself in the place of each criminal in turn, I must say I can't see that any of them would be likely to attempt to get away in an aeroplane. On the whole, I think we can eliminate the idea that this machine was used as a method of escape. Few criminals would go to all the trouble, risk, and expense of getting a machine just to escape in unless after a very big and sensational coup—and I don't see anything of the sort reported. Whereas bootleggers might use an aeroplane for continuous traffic between here and the U.S.A. We had better take it at that to start with, anyway. Our first move should be to prospect for their base of operations."

"And let's lose no time about it!" answered Norman, his eyes glistening with enthusiasm. "We'll start right now. Come on. We'll get into a tram and push out east. When we get on to the ground we'll reconnoitre for a camping-place, and—well, you never know, but we may come across a clue, or get a hunch about it! Anyway, there is no sense in sticking round here. We'll never get the thing settled in this room."

George conceded the force of this argument, and ten minutes later the boys were bumping along toward East Toronto in a tram. The Sunday service, never anything to boast about, seemed to-day intolerably slow, but half an hour's ride brought them to the junction of the tram and radial-car lines. Here they transferred to the radial-car, and travelled five miles out into the country before alighting.

Waiting by the roadside until the car and its passengers had passed out of sight, they turned toward the woods which border the north side of Lake Ontario. At the edge of the wood they stopped and formed a council of war. Ahead of them, leading down in the direction of the Lake, stretched a wide grassy avenue.

"What had we best do?" asked George.

"Go steady," answered Norman. "We don't want to make ourselves too conspicuous, prying about here. If we stick to this ride we may be seen; and if we are seen by any of the gang we're after we may rouse their suspicions and put them on their guard. So I vote we avoid the beaten track and take to the woods."

"H'm," demurred George. "I wonder. First of all, we have not brought a compass, and I dare say we might lose our way in among the trees."

"The sun is up," retorted Norman.

"Maybe ... but it is clouding over now. Besides, we are much more likely to arouse suspicion if found prowling through the woods than if we were walking openly down the rides."

"Perhaps you're right," agreed Norman. "After all, we are out to reconnoitre for a camping-ground. That's the truth: and, supposing we are questioned, we can say so. In fact, we had better do so. We don't want anybody to suspect our real object."

Their course of action settled, the boys set off down the ride. The tall trees stood motionless and majestic upon either side, only their topmost branches nodding gently to each other and reiterating the whisperings of the wind. Apart from the occasional cry of a bird and the whir of their wings as they scuttled away, disturbed by the approach of human beings, no sound could be heard.

For a mile or more they marched on side by side; for the most part silence reigned between them. The solemnity of the great forest was in accord with the gravity of their thoughts, with the difficulties of the adventure so lightheartedly undertaken. Both were feeling somewhat awed at their own presumption in attempting to pit their wits against that which was obviously a band of ruthless and experienced crooks. But not for worlds would either of them have admitted to such sentiments.

On they trudged, calling one another's attention at intervals to commonplace details of the landscape, or of animal life ... more for the sake of appearances than aught else; and the dark forest grew still more inscrutable as they plunged into its depths. If it held a secret it gave no indication of its nature.

At the end of an hour's tramp they came upon a clearing; and at this point the broad avenue came to a stop. In the centre of the clearing could be seen the remnants of some human habitation; but the site had evidently been deserted for many years.

But though there was ample evidence of the work of the woodman's axe there was no sign of man or homestead.

"This must be some old-time shack," said George, after they had made an examination of the ground. "Doesn't look as if anyone has been here recently."

"No," said Norman. "I guess the tenants have moved off from here. All the same, it might suit us as a camping-ground."

"Too near civilization," said George. "Our friends will be farther afield. They won't be courting publicity much, I bet. We must push on. Look! There's a path going off to the left—eastward in fact. Shall we take it? It's sure the right direction."

"Right!" agreed Norman. "We might come across some gipsies. It may be some of them made this trail when they moved on farther into the forest. We might ask them if they have seen an aeroplane."

So saying, he plunged into the track with George at his heels. So narrow was the path that they had to proceed in Indian file. Straight eastward led the trail—tall pines and maples blotting out the sky. For the most part the undergrowth grew thick on either side, limiting the field of vision to a short ten yards. Sometimes, however, the stunted shrubs would cease for a few hundred yards and give place to a vista of the boulder-strewn earth. Twice they crossed the rocky beds of dried-up streams, water-courses that would in winter-time develop into raging torrents. It was past noon when they arrived at a third and larger gully, and halted for a rest—it was George's idea to follow the military maxim of resting for ten minutes in every hour. They pulled out the biscuits and chocolate which they had brought with them in a rucksack and began to consume their midday meal.

"By gum! I'm hungry," exclaimed Norman.

"So am I," nodded George, munching heartily. "We've put in two full hours of walking this morning, so we may be said to have earned our lunch."

"Yep! But we haven't earned much else. I mean we haven't got much forrader as regards our quest."

"Gosh, but you're impatient, Norman!"

"I guess I am. Also I am thirsty. I am going to drink out of that stream. I suppose it is good water."

"All *running* water's good to drink, they say. It is only stagnant water that might be poisonous," said George.

Norman sprang to his feet, and, hopping lightly from rock to rock, dropped down into the riverbed. Lying at full length on his stomach, he put his head under a miniature cascade where the clear, fresh water trickled over the stones, and drank a deep, refreshing draught. His thirst appeased, he sat up. At that moment he became aware that the palm of his right hand felt wet. Absent-mindedly he looked at it; there was a red smear all across it. For a second he gazed at it in surprise; then with his left forefinger he rubbed the skin. There was something wet and sticky on his finger-tip. From his hands his eyes turned slowly to the stone which he had clasped when he bent down to drink. There was a large red smudge on it and the imprint of a hand—his own hand probably. Blood! The idea had already for some seconds past been forming in his mind. It had occurred to him subconsciously; and now the word was on his lips. "Blood!" he whispered to himself; then loudly, without moving, he called to his companion.

"George! Come here!"

"Why? What is it, Norman?" came the answer. The process of digestion made George reluctant to move.

"Come here, quick!" There was something in Norman's voice which brought George to his feet and bounding down into the river-bed. Norman held up both his hands as his companion came to a stand at his side.

"Halloa!" cried George. "Been and cut yourself?"

"Nope," came the curt reply.

"Well, then, what——"

"See that stone? No! That one there——"

George's eyes followed the directing finger. He stepped up to the stone in question and bent over to examine it. Lightly he rubbed it in his turn with his finger. He gazed at his finger-tip intently, then put it to his nose and sniffed at it.

"Blood!" he said. "And fresh blood too!"

"That's how I figured it," said Norman.

"Well, what do you know about that?" exclaimed George, for the lack of any more adequate remark.

"Somebody or something's got hurt—not long since either."

"And where is that somebody or something now?"

"That's what we've got to find out," said Norman.

"Maybe it was somebody out hunting. There would be nothing extraordinary in that."

"Maybe it was or maybe not. We haven't heard a shot fired, and, anyway, anything shot would not bleed like that. Looks more like a knife-wound. Let's look round and see if there are any more stains about, or any footmarks, human or otherwise."

They got up and walked slowly up and down, their eyes glued to the ground. There were small deposits of sand interspersed among the stones, and it was on one of these that George's sharp eyes detected the impress of a footprint. Deep into the sand had sunk a boot, a heavy boot, and, from its size and breadth, obviously that of a big and heavy man.

"The plot thickens!" commented Norman, and moved a few yards downstream. "Here! Here!" he cried. "Here's another drop of blood."

The call brought George to his side, and together, very carefully, the two boys went over the ground to a distance of about a hundred yards below the point where the first footprint had been found. But their search went unrewarded. Of blood or footprints there was no further sign at all.

"Humph! Nothing much doing here," grunted Norman. "Better take a turn upstream, don't you think?"

"Yes," agreed George. "Keep your eyes open on the way back, though."

They turned, but they had not gone far before Norman's inspection of the sand and boulders was interrupted by an exclamation from his friend.

"See here!" George was saying, and he pointed to a patch of rushes which spread right down to the river-bank. "See that?"

"See what?" interrogated Norman, as he joined his friend.

"Why, surely that's where a man has passed."

It was true. The rushes had been beaten down and brushed aside as though some heavy body had moved through them.

George was already making his way up from the bed of the stream toward this broken run. At the edge of it he paused to inspect the place more thoroughly.

"Yes," he said. "And whoever it was he came this way. I mean that he came out of the forest from the east into the river-bed. I can see that from the way the rushes have been bent. They are bending *forward toward* the stream. When he hit this gully he turned upstream. Come on, Norman, we're on his trail. We must follow his spoor up the gully."

They retraced their steps to the original bloodstained boulder. George continued to propound his argument.

"I guess he must have sat here for a while ... probably wanted a drink. It may be somebody has met with an accident. If we trail him up we may overtake him before long. He can't be far ahead, and he may want help. Come on."

On they went. It was fairly good going along the river-bed, which broadened out as they breasted the top of the hill and found a more level tract of country in front of them.

As they pushed forward they picked up the marks of newly made footsteps in the sand-drifts, while here and there a splash of blood served to help them in their quest.

About a quarter of a mile on all traces suddenly ceased. Search as they would, neither of them could find a single indication of the passage of the wounded man.

"We must have overrun the line," said George at last. "Let's go back to the last footprint and examine the banks. He must have left the river somewhere hereabouts."

They returned to the point suggested. Here, on either side of the stream, the scrub and undergrowth grew particularly strong and thick. George was busy hunting for any possible clue, such as trampled grass or broken twigs, when a strange noise caught Norman's ear.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Stand still, George, and listen."

For a few seconds both stood breathless and absolutely still. No sound came to disturb the peace of the afternoon.

"That's funny!" said Norman, as his friend questioned him with his eyes. "I could have sworn that I heard a sort of groan."

"Where?"

"Over there somewhere ... in those bushes." He pointed to a thicket on the river-bank.

"Well, I heard nothing. I guess it was your imagination."

"I don't think so. There! There! There it is again. Didn't you hear it?"

A faint noise had caught George's ear this time.

"It did sound rather like a groan," he admitted, "like some animal in pain might make. A sort of growl...."

"There are no wild animals that I know of in these woods. More like a human animal, I should say! Let's go and see."

Cautiously they made their way into the bushes, stopping at every few yards to listen for a repetition of the strange noise ... all their faculties alert, and their nerves, to tell the truth, tight-strung. What kind of a man or beast was this that they were approaching? If it were a man ... a tramp, maybe, or a criminal eluding justice. If an animal ... a wounded beast escaped from a menagerie.... A nasty thing to tackle. Moreover, they had no weapon of defence. They had only their legs to help them get away in case of trouble.

"*Grr—grr—grr*" ... The sound came distinctly through the thicket from their left. It could not have been more than twenty yards away. The boys' bodies stiffened in expectation. The next moment they almost jumped out of their skins.

*Crack!* came a report like a revolver-shot, followed by the sound of a heavy body falling to the ground. George flung out a hand, caught Norman by the shoulder and dragged him to the ground, and, squatting down beside him, whispered:

"Do you think he fired at us?"

"No! That wasn't a shot—sounded like a bit of wood breaking——" Norman's answer was cut short by a long moan of pain from through the trees.

"He's human, all right, I guess!" said Norman.

"And feeling mighty sick as well," added George.

"Now, what had we better do?" queried Norman, in a whisper. "If we push through the undergrowth and kick up a beastly row he might pull his gun on us. We don't know who he is or anything about him."

"No, we don't," agreed George. Then, after a short pause, "Perhaps we'd better hail him."

"Perhaps it would be best. Go ahead!"

George drew himself erect, hesitated just a second, then shouted out, "Say, mister!"

No answer came.

Norman nudged the other with his elbow.

"Try again!" he urged.

George called again, "Say, stranger..."

A pause, and then a harsh, discordant voice gave answer.

"Who are you?"

"We're just two guys from Toronto..."

"Toronto, eh? Well, I guess you'd better beat it back there. You'll do better playing in the city streets. This ain't no parking-place for piccaninnies.... You clear out from here, and waste no time about it, see?"

But neither George nor Norman felt in the least inclined to profit by the advice of the unseen owner of that gruff voice. They were determined, if they could, to get to the bottom of this affair upon which they had accidentally stumbled. The man who seemed so anxious to get rid of them might be one of the bootleggers. But for the moment they were nonplussed by his peremptory order to depart and get about their business. Besides, their vanity was somewhat piqued by the man's sarcastic reference to their youth and innocence.

"No good trying to be pleasant to an ill-conditioned boob like that!" exclaimed Norman, his temper rising; and, despite George's warning gesture, he shouted, "Ho! All right, Mister Man! Since you seem to enjoy your own company best, we'll vamoose. We happened to spot your blood-trail way down in the gully, and we followed you up to see if we could help you any. But gratitude doesn't appear to figure in your make-up. Maybe you've some good reason for lying up in there. We'll tell the police inspector that we've seen you when we get back to town. He might be interested. Well, so long!" With which he took George by the arm and began to trample his way noisily through the undergrowth.

The man's voice brought them to a standstill.

"Hi! You stop where you are, and be hanged to you for a couple of insolent young pups! Blab to the police, would you? Stop where you are, I say, and don't you move, or I'll puncture a pretty pattern through your lily-white baby skins! I'm a dead shot, d'yuh hear me?"

The boys stopped short, thoroughly taken aback by the man's truculent demeanour. He might well mean what he said. To be shot out of hand by a stranger with whom, so far as they knew, they had no quarrel would be an ignominious ending to their adventure; and that at the very outset.

"Put your hands above your heads and walk this way," commanded the voice. "About thirty paces ahead you'll come to the edge of a clearing. Halt right there, and let's have a look at you. Now! March!"

"Bluffed him that time!" murmured Norman, with a gurgle of satisfaction. "We'll see his ugly mug, anyway!" And both boys prepared to obey orders. Their hands held well above their heads, they advanced slowly through the scrub, guided by the sound of the voice. As predicted by the unseen man, after proceeding some thirty paces they came abruptly upon a small clearing, the whole area of which did not exceed some sixty square yards.

What an admirable hiding-place was the first thought that entered both their minds. To anyone unaware of its existence nothing but the merest chance would have revealed it. In the centre of the clearing stood a low, oblong shack, built of stones, probably gathered from the river-bed, and sods of earth. The roof was made of turf. There were short timbers placed upright at the four corners of the hut, and the ends of the wooden joists which supported the roof could be seen jutting out at intervals from underneath the turf covering. A low door, fixed to another wooden framework, faced them, and in front of the door, perched upon a rough-hewn log, sat a man. Hatless, a mass of unkempt black hair crowned his head. Two small, pig-like eyes, made to appear even smaller by a pair of shaggy eyebrows, a huge protruding nose, and a long black beard, gazed straight in the direction of the boys. The man's huge body was clad only in a khaki-coloured shirt, streaked with dirt and stained with blood. His right arm hung suspended in a neckerchief doing temporary duty as a sling. A pair of baggy trousers, the ends of which were tucked into an enormous pair of top-boots, encased his lower limbs. There was little prepossessing about the man's appearance. In fact, to the boys he was certainly the most villainous creature they had yet clapped eyes on.

Both parties surveyed each other in silence.

## CHAPTER VII

"Listen here, my young sleuths," drawled the man, "your doggone powers of observation, which brought yuh here along on my trail, will also have brought to your notice the fact that my arm is hanging in a sling.... Now, I don't hold with giving anything away gratuitously—such like is against my principles.... But, considering that I'm dealing with the young and inexperienced, I'll hand yuh out another piece of information. My left hand is in my breeches pocket, and I can shoot with my left hand from my trousers pocket just as straight as the road to hell! So, if you don't want to join your ancestors in those parts, just step right up here, and look sharp about it, while I see you ain't got any pop-guns anywhere about. Firearms are mighty dangerous toys."

There was certainly an ominous bulge in the man's pocket, and there was something in his attitude and the tone of his voice which told the boys that this particular citizen was not to be trifled with. For the moment, at any rate, he had the whip-hand.

They approached him as bidden. He rose and ran his injured hand over their clothing, each in turn. Apparently satisfied that they were unarmed, he grunted out some indistinct expression of gratification, and resumed his seat on the stool.

"Now!" he ordered curtly. "Spill it! What's your game? What're yuh after skulking round these parts? It's the truth I want, and don't yuh try to fool me! Savvy?"

"We were looking for a camping-ground. You see, we are on a holiday, and we thought we'd like to spend a week camping in the woods." It was George who spoke.

"Camping, huh! What do yuh want camping hereabouts?" The man was obviously still suspicious.

"Well," chimed in Norman, "the truth is that we came here to find——" He was cut short by a swift kick on his ankle from George, a movement which was luckily unobserved by their interlocutor.

"Ow!" cried Norman.

"Came to find what?" asked the man sharply.

"The fact is that we are rather keen on botany," remarked George complacently, without a trace of a smile on his face. Norman turned to look at his companion, surprise in every line of his expression. He was about to blurt out some remonstrance when an almost imperceptible lowering of George's left eyebrow reduced him to a discreet silence.

"Botany!" exclaimed the man. "Oh! Ha, ha! Botany is it? Well, yuh take my advice and do yuh blinking botany at home. You go back to your schoolmarm. Take my advice and don't you come mucking about here. This ain't no place for kids. Things have happened in these woods that your ma wouldn't like her little boys to hear about. You remember that—and get!—skedaddle!"

"We have got beyond the age when we believe in fables, mister," said Norman rather haughtily. "I guess we can hold our own with anything we meet in this forest!"

"Ho! you can, can you, Master Cocksure? There's more strange beasts in this forest than you're aware of, maybe—some of 'em walks on two legs——"

He broke off suddenly as if he had said too much. George caught Norman's eye, and both smiled. They were getting 'warmer.'

"And what sort of beasts walk on two legs, mister?" inquired Norman, in tones as guileless as he could muster.

"Curiosity killed the cat.' Didn't your school marm teach you that? Say, I've wasted time enough on you already. It isn't often I show such consideration to intruding strangers. Off with you now! And thank your youth and lucky stars that your hides are still whole. Get out o' here!"

While he had been talking the boys noticed that every now and then a twinge of pain had seemed to contract his features, and his voice had been sensibly growing weaker. Scarcely had he finished speaking when he suddenly pitched forward off his stool and lay, an inert and huddled mass, upon the ground.

The boys sprang forward and bent over him; he had fainted dead away. Quickly they stretched him on his back.

"Strip up his shirt," said George, "and let's see where the wound is. I guess he's fainted from loss of blood."

Norman produced a jack-knife from his pocket and proceeded to cut away the flannel from the shoulder. Just under the left collar-bone was a long and ugly cut, from which were oozing a few drops of blood.

"Looks like a dagger of some sort," said George. "And it's gone in pretty deep. Gosh! He must be a tough customer to travel with a wound like that. Wonder how he got it. Norman, you just run down to the river and get some clean water. We'll wash this and bind it up. See a pail about anywhere?"

Norman dived into the hut and re-emerged with a dixie in his hand.

"This'll do," he said, and set off at the double to the river. He was soon back, and together the boys set about cleansing the man's wound.

"No bandages or disinfectant amongst his outfit, I suppose?" inquired George.

Norman again went into the hut, but this time his search was fruitless. "Not a damned thing," he reported.

"I thought as much. I'm afraid we'll have to loan him our own shirt-tails! There's nothing else for it."

"Glad I'm not on my own allowance!" said Norman, ripping up his undergarment. It was a matter of a few minutes only to bind up the wound, which they had successfully staunched; and together, with great care and no small difficulty, they dragged the two hundred pounds of dead weight into the hut and lifted it on to the bed. Settling the man in the most comfortable position possible, and covering him with a rough blanket and a sheepskin which they found in the corner of the room, they placed the dixie full of fresh water beside him and left him to regain consciousness. Before leaving, however, they left a note, written on a page torn out of George's pocket-book to the effect that they would return on the morrow, bringing with them food and drink and the necessary medical comforts.

It was drawing well on toward evening when they reached the big clearing from which they had started at the beginning of the day. Along the narrow woodland track they had kept up a good pace, averaging four miles an hour. They had been travelling in Indian file, a method of marching which renders conversation difficult, but all this time the thoughts of the two boys had been running along the same lines. It was Norman who gave voice to them as soon as they emerged into the ride.

"Do you think that man has anything to do with the gang we are after?"

"Just what I've been wondering," replied George. "It is quite possible that he knows something about them. At any rate, he evidently knows of *some* individual or individuals who frequent this forest, and who do not much welcome the idea of inquisitive strangers. He mentioned 'beasts that walk on two legs.' Do you remember that?"

"I do. Say, George, we must go back and have a look at him to-morrow. We'll try to pump him."

"Yes, but you be careful. Don't forget that we are enthusiastic botanists. You darned near gave the show away just now. You would have, if I hadn't kicked you just in time."

Norman felt that he could not deny the accusation.

"I'll be more careful in future," he said apologetically.

"We don't want anyone to guess our real object, do we? Not yet awhile at least? That man might be in with our friends. He looks rascally enough to belong to any crowd of bootleggers. Hullo! What's this?"

Norman looked up quickly to discover the cause of his friend's exclamation.

There, not twenty yards in front of them, in the middle of the ride, stood two men facing toward them. They had appeared out of the blue.

"Must have been hiding in the trees," whispered George. "Wonder why.... There's no path there, I'm sure. Shall we do a bunk and trust to luck to get away?"

"No!" Norman was decisive. "Let's walk straight on and pass 'em. It will look suspicious if we run."

They walked straight on, without any change of pace or bearing. In the meantime they were taking stock of the two strangers who had so unexpectedly come across their path.

They were an ill-assorted couple. The one, long, spare, and wiry, clad in a navy-blue jersey, reefer-coat, and long boots, the attire usually associated with seafaring men. An old peaked cap crowned a brown, tanned face, clean-shaven, the most prominent feature of which was a great lantern-jaw.

The other was short and stout; his whole countenance proclaimed the Jew. He was clad in a dark grey suit more suitable to the main thoroughfares of a big city than to wandering in the woods. As they drew nearer the boys noticed that the ends of his trousers were torn and mud-stained, and there was a great rent in one of his sleeves.

Abiding by their decision, George and Norman made as though to pass on without so much as giving any sign of being aware of the presence of the two men.

Scarcely had they got abreast of them, when the shorter of the two strangers called out in high, staccato tones.

"Hey! You——"

Norman walked on, head erect, without appearing to have heard. George followed suit. The man's voice was eloquent of suppressed excitement as he yelled again.

"Stop, I say, you two! Can't you hear me? I want to speak to you!"

This time Norman halted and turned in the direction of the speaker. There was a supercilious curl on his lips as he demanded with cold civility.

"Were you by any chance addressing me?"

"And who the devil do you think I was addressing—the trees?"

The man's foreign accent became more apparent as his excitement grew. "Come here at once, I thay. I want to thpeak to you."

Norman stood his ground.

"Ith that tho?" he mimicked, a gibe which exasperated the little man still further.

"Curse your impudence!" he spluttered.

Norman stood unmoved.

"See here, mister," he went on. "Maybe you wish to speak to us. The thing is that we don't wish to speak to you."

Mother always warned me to avoid getting into conversation with suspicious-looking strangers." He turned to George. "George, I don't like this man's face, do you? I guess he isn't nice to know. No! I don't like his figure or his manners. Come on, let's beat it."

They turned to go. The little man was dancing with rage.

"I'll learn you!" he screamed, and, whipping a revolver out of his pocket, "Stand, or I'll shoot!"

The boys stopped. Matters were getting serious. Norman's lighthearted temperament might well have landed them in trouble. The little Jew seemed beside himself, and was brandishing his gun wildly in their direction. But at that moment the tall nautical-looking individual, who had been watching the proceedings with an amused grin on his face, and had so far kept aloof, evidently considered that it was time to take a hand.

A large fist descended from behind the little Jew, seized his wrist, and bent it sharply forward. The revolver dropped to the ground; swift as a hawk, the big man had pounced on it and put it in his pocket.

"Say, son!" he called to Norman, quietly disregarding his companion's shrill expostulations. "Say, son! I guess your mammie gave you good advice. But don't you take no notice of my friend here. He suffers something cruel from dyspepsia, and when his stomach's out of gear it kind o' sours his temper. Fact is that a friend of ours has got lost somewhere in these woods and we are searching for him—'fraid he might 'a' met with some kind of accident. He's a very *dear* friend of ours—that's why my mate here is so upset. Thought you might 'a' seen him in the woods—say, which part have you come from?"

The man spoke softly and easily, his manner was conciliatory. Yet to Norman's quick intelligence there was something—a fleeting expression in the eyes—which put him on his guard. The man's thin lips denoted cruelty and relentlessness of purpose.

"Fact is," he went on, "our friend—the chap I'm speaking of—is not quite right in the head. Goes quite balmy at times—pore fellow—and subject to epileptic fits. That's why me and my mate's so anxious about him. He's very delicate. Which way did you come?"

"Why, just down this ride," answered Norman. He was fighting for time. He did not want to commit himself until he had been able to convey to George that he was not to interfere, and, in doing so, to escape the detection of his questioner, whose keen eye was watching him so closely.

"Did you meet a man at all down there?" the long man asked, jerking his thumb in the direction whence the boys had come.

"What sort of man?" prevaricated Norman. He had made up his mind—again from intuition rather than any logical reasoning—to conceal from the two strangers the condition and the whereabouts of the wounded man and his hut. And—really—George was too dull-witted. Why could he not twig?

"Oh, ho!" cried the long man. "So you *did* see some one, did you?" He took a step forward, his face lit up with eagerness.

"I—I—didn't say——" Norman hesitated, rather taken aback.

"Why, yes, since you ask," came a cool voice beside him—it was George who spoke. Norman was about to chip in and stop him, but it was too late. "Now I come to remember, we *did* catch sight of a guy—dirty-looking greaser too!"

"Yeth! Thath him!" The little Jew was all agog. "Vich vay did he go?"

"He was just coming out of the ride when we got off the radial-car. Guess he will have taken the road to town, or maybe the car."

Norman could have flung his arms round George.

Good old George! He wasn't so slow-witted after all. He had come up to the scratch at the critical moment, and his well-timed lie had been obviously prompted by the same considerations as had occurred to Norman himself.

The two strangers seemed disappointed at the answers to their questions. They withdrew a few yards and entered into a whispered conversation.

Considering it an opportune moment to escape from their rather awkward predicament, and that further questioning might possibly lead them into embarrassing discrepancies, the boys set off up the ride without more ado. Out of sight round a corner they broke into a double. So engrossed were the others in their own affairs that they failed to observe the boys' flight.

"D'you think it vas Black Jude they saw?" asked the little Jew of his companion in a hoarse whisper.

"Dunno," replied the lanky mariner, "maybe it was."

"Vell, if he's got clear to Toronto he'll take the hell of a lot of finding."

"With that knife-wound in his chest he'll have to lie up for a time, and I guess the chief will know where to rout him out."

"Curse you for a double-dyed mutt! Vy couldn't you make a clean job of it?"

"Now, don't you start in calling me names. You keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll give you something to think about—hey, where's them boys?"

They looked round in astonishment. The boys had gone.

"Ahoy, there!" yelled the sailor. Reverberating through the trees, a faint echo reached the fugitives' ears as they reached the edge of the woods—and both boys smiled.

Half an hour later, as they were rolling along in a tramcar toward the city of Toronto, a high-powered car came roaring up behind them. In the driver's seat was a thin, clean-shaven man in a peaked cap.

Beside him, muffled up to his eyes, was a small, squat figure.

"Duck your head!" said Norman. Both boys ducked as the car went flying past.

"See his number?" asked George a minute later.

"No, I didn't."

George pulled out his pocket-book. On a blank page he wrote

N  
-X.10.B.  
Y

Said Norman, "Did you notice the high-pitched note of the engine of that motor-car, George?"

"Can't say I did," said George.

"I guess I'd recognize it anywhere," mused Norman.

## CHAPTER VIII

It was again late that night before the two boys bethought themselves of bed. They had not wasted much time since returning home from the woods east of Toronto.

Realizing the importance of getting to work with the least possible delay if they were to try conclusions with the brigand gang, they had speedily set about making their preparations for the morrow. Mr and Mrs Renton had consented to the proposed plan of a week's camping without demur. They had, indeed, not only expressed approval, but had done all in their power to help. Mrs Renton had none the less expressed surprise when George suggested a raid on the family medicine-chest, and requested the 'loan' of bandages, a bottle of Condyl's fluid, and some aspirin.

"What on earth do you want those for, my dear?" she demanded; adding in tones of maternal anxiety, "You won't be doing anything dangerous, will you? Now, promise me...."

George laughed away her fears.

"It's all right, Mother. Don't you worry. We shan't come to any harm. But, all the same, it's best to have these things in camp in case of accidents ... opening tins and all that, you know!"

More difficult was it to persuade Mr Renton to lend them each one of his revolvers, of which weapons he had amassed quite a collection—it was a hobby of his.

"Oh, rubbish!" he exclaimed. "I can't have you playing about with firearms. The darned things might go off, and I don't want the trouble of a double funeral."

But Mr Renton was admittedly amenable to pleading where his son was concerned, and, in the end, George had his way. A few light blankets, a cooking-pot, a coffee-pot, a tin mug, a knife, a fork and spoon apiece, a change of socks and shirts, together with a few other useful odds and ends, as well as some canned food—the whole packed into two rucksacks—completed their equipment, which soon lay ready in the hall, for they were to start out at 6 A.M. Mr Renton's car was to take them and drop them on the outskirts of the forest.

It was a perfect summer morning when the two boys were ready to set out on their expedition.

Norman sniffed the air and drew a deep breath into his lungs.

"It's good to be alive!" he exclaimed. "Say, George, we should be up there somewhere with McIntyre!" and he pointed to the sky.

"Maybe we shall later on in the day. But we have another job to do just now. We ought to be off."

They clambered into the waiting car, and were soon tearing along through the fresh morning air toward their starting-point. They had a clear run at that hour, for most folks still lay abed, and the road was practically deserted. At the point where the grass ride debouched upon the road the boys got out, and, shouldering their packs, they dismissed the car.

"Say, Murphy," were George's last instructions to his father's chauffeur, "could you slip down to the City Hall some time and find out the name of the owner of a car carrying the number

N  
-X.10.B.?"  
Y

The man promised to do as he was bid, and the boys plunged into the woods.

The grass was still heavy with dew, for the sun had not yet climbed high enough for its rays to dispel the moisture. From the eastward the trees cast long shadows across the path, but wild life had wakened with the dawn, and the birds were already frolicking overhead, rejoicing in the new-born day.

With a full knowledge of their direction the boys were able to cover the distance to the wounded man's hut in a considerably shorter time than they had previously taken; and it was a little before eight o'clock when they arrived outside the sheltering ring of shrubbery which concealed its locality. There they paused and listened, but no sound came to disturb the silence of the woods.

"Guess we had better go straight in to him," whispered George. "He's asleep, maybe ... or——" He did not finish his sentence. The alternative had occurred to both of them at once ... the others might have been beforehand. Norman nodded his understanding, and with a gesture of his hand he motioned the other to follow him through the undergrowth. They arrived at the clearing where they again halted. As yet they had received no challenge. Carefully they scanned the ground for any signs of change or movement. But everything appeared to be in exactly the same state as when they had left it the evening before.

"Seems all right!" said Norman. "I expect the man's inside asleep." They approached the door of the hut, it was still ajar as they had left it. For a moment they stood still and listened. Silence. Grasping the wooden panel with his left hand, George pulled it open gently, so as to avoid making any undue noise, until there was sufficient room for him to put his head round the corner and to peer inside. To his eyes, accustomed to the bright sunlight, the interior of the room seemed so dark that it was a few seconds before he could distinguish even the dim outlines of its contents. Then in the gloom he was able to pick out the bunk. On it lay a huddled mass of blankets. He pulled the door wide open, and the two boys were on the threshold. George stepped right inside. As he did so the blankets gave a sudden heave, and from their midst came a husky voice.

"Stand, or I shoot!"

"It's all right, mister!" replied George calmly.

"It's only us guys from Toronto. We just came to see how you were getting on. We've brought some bandages and some grub——"

The blankets dropped back, and this time they heard a low moan of pain. In a trice George was at the bedside; in another he had the blankets off. Quickly he felt the man's forehead, then his pulse.

"He's in a raging fever, Norman. Get a fire kindled and boil up some coffee. We'll give him a hot drink, and then we'll try and rearrange his bandages."

For an hour or so the boys busied themselves with the sick man. For his part, he allowed them to carry on without protest, his only contribution to the proceedings being an occasional groan or muttered expletive. By the end of this time they had their patient sitting up in bed, his head propped against the sheepskin which served him as a pillow. The wound in his shoulder had been dressed. It looked clean and healthy enough, a fact which paid tribute to the toughness of the man's constitution. A drink of hot coffee had revived him, and a dose of aspirin had relieved the pain. But he was still in a weak condition, and the boys hesitated whether or not to lead him on to talk about the subject which lay nearest to their hearts.

The man seemed grateful for their ministrations, and in his gruff way he blurted out:

"I guess it was kind o' charitable of you two kids to fetch up again here along with these drugs and a bite o' food." Then suspicion re-clouded his mind, and he added roughly, "But, say, what do you want along with me? I don't believe in charity ... seen too much of life, I guess."

"Well, we could hardly leave you to your fate, could we?" put in George.

"Fate! What the blazes do you mean, fate? What do you think you are talking about?"

The man was growing excited for no apparent reason.

"I didn't mean anything in particular, I am sure," protested George, in an effort to calm him down.

"Huh! yuh didn't, didn't yuh?" growled the man, "looseness of speech is a dangerous habit, and more than likely to get yuh into trouble some day." He moved restlessly on his bunk.

"Are you comfortable?" asked Norman.

"Comfortable! As comfortable as any man may be with a great hole in his shoulder, I suppose. But don't yuh worry your heads about me. I'll mend right enough, and quick enough to get even with them swabs, or my name's not Black Jude!"

"Oh, then it wasn't an accident——" began Norman, who had not failed to notice the name which the man had given himself when momentarily off his guard.

"Accident, you say! The only accident about it was that Long Jim's eye was out o' focus. It ain't often that he misses the mark with that knife of his when he means business."

"And who may Long Jim be, mister?" Norman's question was put with a perfect air of innocence.

"That's none of *your* business, my lad, so you'd both better clear off before worse befalls you. You've played the Good Samaritan to me. I'm duly grateful. But you buzz off, I say, afore Long Jim catches sight of you."

"Would that be one of the two gentlemen we met last night, by any chance?" asked Norman, unperturbed by the man's warning.

"*Yuh* met last night, yuh say?"

The man rose up in bed. "Who did yuh meet last night? Come on! Out with it!"

Norman continued to feign indifference, though the man's obvious agitation at the mention of the two strangers whetted his curiosity.

"Oh, just the two thugs who were inquiring after a friend of theirs..."

"For me?"

"Why, yes! The description tallied pretty well. They said it was a great big ugly devil...."

"None o' your lip, young feller! Or it'll be the worse for you."

"Sorry," said Norman. "I was only repeating what *they* said. They were an ugly-looking couple themselves, if it comes to that."

"What did they look like? Tell me, I want to know."

"One long and lanky, a sailor by the looks of him. The other a fat, squat little Jew..."

"Long Jim and Rosenbaum, I'll bet...."

He broke off, dropped back on to his sheepskin pillow, and seemed lost in thought.

"Where were they when you saw them?" he asked at last.

"About five miles from here, I guess. Not far off the main road."

Black Jude gave a sigh of relief. Then he sat up again and pointed his finger threateningly at the boys. "Did you young monkeys blab?" he demanded, in querulous tones.

"What do you mean, blab?" asked Norman. "Who should we blab to, and what about?"

"Yuh know danged well what I mean! Did you tell them guys yuh'd seen me? It's the truth I want, now!"

"We did," said Norman calmly.

"Yuh did ... Yuh did ... Yuh young son of a gun! Yuh did, did yuh...?" The man was almost speechless with agitation. "Why can't yuh mind your own business—who asked you to interfere with me?"

It was George who interrupted.

"It's all right, mister. There's no necessity to go off the deep end. We did tell them that we had seen you ... seen you get on to the road and take the radial-car back to the city of Toronto."

"Ah! Oh! ..."

"Yes! we did you a good turn, that time. Anyway, your friends went back to the town in hot pursuit. They seemed mighty keen on finding you, mister. What's the trouble? There isn't much love lost between you three, judging by appearances."

The man sank back on his pillow, muttering imprecations to himself. His face was blanched. The effort of talking and the shock of the knowledge that the two strangers were on his trail had exhausted his strength. It was unlikely that there was much more information to be gained from him for the present.

## CHAPTER IX

It was about 4 P.M. the same evening when the boys arrived at the aerodrome. Making their way straight to Captain McIntyre's office, they found their indefatigable instructor hard at work with compass and protractor. Scattered round him was a pile of blue prints, diagrams of various aeroplane parts.

"Come right in!" he cried, looking up and seeing the boys. "I've just finished this job. Plans for a little idea of my own. Designs of a slotted wing. I was telling you about it the other day. I'll make my fortune yet! You'll hear of me as a famous inventor soon! That will be fun, won't it? But never mind that just now. I know what you are after. Come on, we'll go down to the sheds. I've got a dual-control bus all ready for you."

"Oh, have you, sir?" exclaimed Norman. "How splendid! Can we start right away?"

"You are in a desperate hurry, Marshall, aren't you?" laughed McIntyre.

"We are, indeed!" agreed Norman, and it was on the tip of his tongue to tell McIntyre the reason. The three of them were now standing on the tarmac, McIntyre gazing alternately upward at the thin wisps of clouds that streaked the blue sky far overhead and at the wind-indicator, the streamer of which stood out almost at right angles from the mast to which it was attached. The boys stood slightly apart from the instructor.

"Shall we take him into our confidence?" whispered George.

"Not yet awhile, I think. We have not got much to go on yet."

"He'd be a pretty useful ally."

"I know. But if we told him our suspicions he might think it his duty to inform the police. I don't think I'd say anything just now. We can always fall back on him in an emergency."

"That's so. All right..."

Their conversation was cut short by McIntyre's voice.

"Bit too much wind as yet," he said, "I don't want you to be put off on your first attempt by being too much bumped about. The wind will have gone down in about an hour's time."

The boys' faces fell.

"Don't look so dreadfully aggrieved," McIntyre went on. "I promise you that you shall have a flight this evening, both of you. In the meantime, let's go back to the office. We'll have a dish of tea, and I will try to make the time pass quickly by giving you a little lecture on flying."

They settled down to tea and scones and maple syrup, while McIntyre held forth.

"First of all," he said, "I want you to get it firmly fixed in your minds that flying in itself is by no means the dangerous pastime that some people would make out, provided, of course, that you stick to the rules, and always remember that you *cannot* afford to take liberties with the air. The air is a hard mistress, and she will probably exact the utmost penalty the first time that you break the rigid code of observance that she has laid down. But so long as you observe those rules there is no reason why you should not aviate with perfect safety until you reach the age of Methuselah.

"The golden rule in flying is this. Never risk stalling your machine near the ground. You must never lose flying speed until you are at a safe height above the ground.... That is at about five hundred feet.

"If your engine cuts out when you are taking off the ground *push the nose down and go straight on*. It does not matter what is in front of you. If you cannot avoid running into a house or a tree on landing it can't be helped. You will break the machine, but the odds are that you will not kill yourself or your passenger. *Never, never* attempt to turn back in order to regain the aerodrome or some other good landing-ground. To do so is to risk stalling, *and if you stall* your machine near the ground you will lose control, get into a spin, and go head first into the ground. In other words, you will kill yourself and any other unfortunate devil you may have with you in the back seat.

"Now, the great majority of aeroplane accidents are due to one and the same cause—disobedience of the rules on the part of the pilot. I can tell you from my personal experience that about eighty per cent. of the crashes at training-stations during the War were due to the selfsame cause. It is always the same story. The pilot takes off. Before he has gone very far his engine splutters, or, maybe, it cuts right out. Then, he either omits to shove the nose down, and he stalls right away, or, more generally, he thinks he has just enough height to allow him to turn and sneak back on to the aerodrome. Almost invariably he finds he is wrong. He tries to pull the nose up and up, and to take a flatter glide which will enable him to cover more ground. Well, the moment comes when he pulls her up a shade too far. He stalls; down goes the nose ... *wump!* he is in a spin and has not got a dog's chance of getting out of it, because the machine has not sufficient space in which to right herself. The next thing is a court of inquiry and a coroner's inquest. No, sir; go straight on and hang the consequences. You break your machine, sure, but you do it just the same the other way—and your neck into the bargain. The temptation is strong, I admit. You *think* it can be done. Take my word for it—it can't. Go straight on; don't think, or it will be the last thought you will have on this earth." He paused and then continued, "I don't want to frighten you. But I must drum this elementary principle into your heads. It is the alpha and omega of flying. The rest is common sense. Now, if you've finished your tea we'll go and get my Avro out of the shed."

The boys jumped up, and all three started for the far end of the hangars.

At a word from McIntyre the mechanics pushed the machine out and started up the engine.

"This is the best training machine in the world," exclaimed McIntyre. "Of course, she is not nearly so powerful as the Bristol in which I took you up the other day, but she is lighter on the controls, and wonderfully easy to handle. She

has an eighty-horse-power Le Rhône engine ... a rotary, of course. You understand the principle, don't you? The cylinders rotate round the crankshaft, which remains fixed ... exactly the opposite to their respective functions in a stationary engine. Rotaries are a little more difficult to handle at first. One is apt to choke them by giving them too much petrol, but you soon get used to them." He paused as the engine-fitter ran the engine up. "She sounds all right. Now, which of you comes first?"

"I won the toss," said Norman, stepping forward.

"Oh! You have arranged it all beforehand, I see. Well, you stick this hat on. Get the ear-pieces in the right position, as I shall be talking to you all the time. Just one thing before we start.... If I hit you on the back take your hands and feet off the control *at once*, and put your hands above your head so that I can see that you have obeyed the signal. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Norman.

"Right! Climb into the front seat, will you? I'll get in behind. Don't touch the controls until I tell you to ... which will be when we get up to about a thousand feet. Meantime you can watch them working. Both sets are connected and move simultaneously. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

The chocks were jerked away. *Prprt ... Prprt ... Prprt ...* went the engine as Captain McIntyre opened up the throttle. *Prprrrrt ...* The little Avro leaped forward along the ground. But the pilot shut off the power by means of the thumb-switch, and she at once slowed down. *Prprt ... Prprt ...* forward again. Now he turned her nose into the wind. *Prprt ... Prprt ... Prprrrrrrr ...* they were off. A few light bounds as they skimmed over the ground, and lightly they rose into the air. Again the actual moment at which they left the ground had been imperceptible to Norman; he only realized the fact of being aloft when they had risen some six feet from the ground. His feet were resting on the rudder-bar, and his right hand on the control lever; but so slight had been the movements of the two controls that Norman had barely felt them move at all. Of only one action had he been distinctly aware ... that McIntyre had pushed the stick right forward when he had started to 'take off,' and this he knew was done to lift the tail-skid off the ground. But the stick seemed to have fallen back to the central position of its own accord, and now he could feel nothing but the faint vibration set up by the engine.

Norman looked round him. The aeroplane was mounting fast into the clear sky, easily and smoothly. The rhythmical roar of the engine sounded sweetly in his ears. More calmly this time he was able to contemplate his surroundings. The first thrill of excitement had passed. He was now seriously at work. He must give his whole attention to the matter in hand....

A wonderful exhilaration permeated his whole being...

A bump on the back shattered his day-dreams. Gosh! What on earth had happened? Had something broken? Had his last moment come...? A voice came down the telephone.

"I told you to put your hands above your head when I tapped you on the back. Wake up!"

Quick as lightning Norman took his feet and hands off the controls and stretched his arms above his head.

"That's better," came the laughing voice. "Now take charge. Don't be frightened. I've got control behind you. You can dip the nose and pull it up again to start with. Leave the engine to me for the time being. I shall switch her on and off, and every time I switch *off* I want you to push the nose down. That is one of the first habits which you must acquire. When I switch the engine on again, let the nose come up. She'll fight to get it up; let her do it of her own accord."

For the next few minutes Norman carried out the instructions which he had just received. As he did so his confidence increased. How beautifully the aeroplane answered to his lightest touch! His tendency to jerk the stick was checked by McIntyre.

"Gently, gently!" he admonished. "Don't be rough with her." Then later, "That's much better. Do you think you've got

the idea now?"

Norman felt he had and said so.

"Right! Then we'll try a few turns. When I give the word 'Left turn,' kick on the left rudder and put the stick over to the left. Try to keep the same height all the time. Now, 'Left turn.'"

Norman pushed out his left foot. The nose of the machine whipped round to the left ... at a terrific speed. Suddenly he felt the stick pushed hard over to the left. Then the right rudder-bar moved forward, and the stick came back hard over to the right. McIntyre had interfered to correct his blunder, and now they were flying level and straight once more.

"No! That won't quite do," came the instructor's words. "You put on too much rudder and too little bank. Consequently you made too flat a turn, and started to slip sideways. I had to help you out. Now, try again this way. Put the nose down a little first; then put on your bank. Lastly kick the rudder on. Above all don't get discouraged. You'll get it all right soon."

They continued to practise until Norman succeeded in negotiating his turning movements to his instructor's satisfaction. The latter continued to explain the theory of the handling of an aeroplane, and at the same time to demonstrate his words in practice. He showed his pupil how in a steep turn the aileron and elevator controls reverse their respective functions.

"When at an angle of over forty-five degrees to the horizontal the rudder takes the place of the elevator. You see why, don't you? The elevator becomes vertical to the ground, and the rudder horizontal, so that their functions are transposed. Therefore, to keep turning you must pull the stick right back against your stomach, as far as it will go. At the same time, in order to keep the nose up you must put on *top* rudder ... the reverse to that with which you started. Look, I'll do it for you."

Over they went sharply to the left. Norman felt the stick pulled back. He was clasping it against his body now. He felt the right-hand rudder-bar pushed slowly forward, and saw the nose rise into the air.

"If I do not push on the top rudder," went on McIntyre, "the nose goes down, the speed increases, and you eventually end up in a roaring nose-dive. Like this.... Watch!"

McIntyre eased off the top rudder. Immediately the nose of the machine sank, and soon they were pointing straight toward the earth, their speed increasing every fraction of a second.

"See what happens?" he shouted. Then gradually he pulled the nose up until the Avro was once more skimming earthward at her natural gliding angle. On she went. The long, homeward glide was doubly enchanting, following as it did upon a period of intense mental activity. They had been hard at work for over an hour; and Norman surrendered to an exquisite feeling of enjoyment and well-being.

"I think you've had about enough for your first effort," remarked McIntyre. "I'll take you back now and give the other fellow a go. You have done very well indeed, only don't make too heavy weather of it." He had noticed in Norman a propensity to 'take it out of himself,' to worry over his mistakes; but at the same time he had convinced himself that his first impression of the boy had been correct. Norman had an exceptionally fine air-sense. He was taking to the air instinctively. Already, at the safe altitude of a thousand feet, a height which left him ample latitude to correct any of his pupil's errors, McIntyre had allowed the boy to take complete control of the machine, though, at the time, he had not told him so. Within a remarkably short period Norman had made amazing progress, some of the turns which he had made in the later stages of his lesson being really well executed.

McIntyre was secretly delighted with his pupil. "The other one will be a bit slower, I'm afraid," he said to himself. "But this boy's a marvel, a real air-baby"; and he tasted the delight of an artist who knows that he has really good material to work upon. He congratulated Norman as they stood together on the tarmac.

"Good man!" he said. "I'm pleased with you. Do you know that for the last twenty minutes or so you were flying that machine all by yourself?"

"No, sir! Was I really?" asked Norman in surprise.

"You were, indeed. Though I did not tell you so. You see how easy it is, don't you? Just like riding a bicycle ... only a matter of balance and self-confidence. Your trouble at present is that you are apt to get flustered and do silly things. Don't *think* too much. You have got the *instinct* there inside you. Follow your instinct, and you will develop into a first-class pilot in no time at all. Do your thinking on the ground! Think over all I have told you while you are sitting here waiting for us. Now, Renton! Your turn, I think. Climb in!"

For the second time that evening the little Avro forged its way into the air and rose and fell and swooped and circled like a white and silver hawk above the sheds. Occasionally McIntyre would switch the engine off, and the monotonous drone would cease ... then, with a puff of white vapour blown from the exhausts as a signal to the watching eye, the engine would pick up again and the machine continue on her peregrinations.

To Norman, seated on the tarmac with his back against the hangar wall, the sensations of half an hour ago came swarming back. He watched George going through the same manoeuvres as he himself had just accomplished. He wondered if George's feelings were the same as his own. The triumphant sense of the thing well done ... the perfect balance of mind, muscles, and machine when a turn was truly executed; and the indefinable feeling of discomfort which he invariably experienced when he had made a blunder ... too much rudder ... too little bank. How was old George getting on up there? He could almost hear McIntyre's voice in his own ears.... "Now, steady ... don't be rough with her" or, "A little more top rudder ... There, that's it" or, "Put the ... nose ... *down*, will you! You'll stall for a certainty!"

What a splendid fellow he was, this Captain McIntyre! "How I wish I could fly like he does! By Jove! he's been a brick to us." Such were Norman's thoughts as he watched the aeroplane's evolutions. Now they were coming in to land. McIntyre was evidently in control; for he came swooping in across the wind, tilted the machine right over on her side so that Norman could see her broadside on as she came flashing down on one wing-top. Just as when on their first flight in the Bristol Fighter it seemed inevitable that the lower wing should hit the ground, so it was again, as Norman, with his heart in his mouth, watched his instructor bring the Avro into land. He had, indeed, half risen to his feet in expectation of a crash when, with a graceful swerve, the machine straightened out and came sailing delicately along toward him a few feet off the ground. Like a feather she alighted and ran on. *Prrrt ... Prrrt ... Prrrt ...* went the engine in answer to the thumb-switch. The machine drew up at the door of the shed.

"There!" cried McIntyre gaily, as he jumped out of the cockpit. "What do you think of that? Were you both quite happy?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the boys together.

"Good! Well, you've both done splendidly ... nothing to choose between you ... so don't get jealous of each other! Now, about to-morrow ... let me see...."

"I guess you had better come along about the same time. You must learn to land. That is the hardest job of all. We want still weather, and it will be less bumpy toward five o'clock. If this weather holds we'll have you both going solo in a week. I must be off. Good-night to you!"

## CHAPTER X

The next two or three days were busy ones for George and Norman. They spent a certain amount of time roaming in the woods, vainly searching for traces of the gang of bootleggers which, they were convinced, had its headquarters hidden away in some portion of the forest. Sometimes they would visit Black Jude in his hut, listening to his rambling talk, and trying to piece together various disjointed fragments of information which fell from his lips.

Black Jude was taking longer to recover from his wound than either he or the boys had anticipated, a fact which did

not tend to sweeten his temper. For the most part he would lie in morose and sullen silence. He was evidently nursing a grievance of some sort, and as time went on it became increasingly obvious that his grudge was directed against the gang which was responsible for Roberts' death. There was yet another thing about Black Jude that was becoming apparent—the man was either out of his mind or was bordering on insanity. His long-lasting moods of blank and utter silence were punctuated with fits of ungovernable fury, during which he raged incoherently against the world in general and its treatment of himself, as well as against certain individuals whose names conveyed little or nothing to the boys. His wrath seemed to be particularly directed against a certain Jew, Rosenbaum by name, whom George and Norman identified in their own minds with the unpleasant little man whom they had encountered in the wooded ride a few days previously.

Occasionally the man's bouts of rage assumed the most violent proportions. It was all that the boys could do to keep him from breaking out of the hut into the woods. More than once it had come to an actual tussle, and it was only the man's weakness from loss of blood which enabled George or Norman to tackle him when left alone with him.

The boys had so arranged with Captain McIntyre that one of them should come to him for tuition in the early morning hours and the other late in the evening. McIntyre, who, as an instructor, showed as much keenness concerning their progress as his pupils themselves, was unwilling to waste any opportunities afforded by the present spell of fine flying weather.

"Besides," he said, "I can give you more of my time in this way, and I can concentrate better on you each individually if I take you at different hours. Instructing is very tiring. My brain gets addled after a couple of hours or so!"

This arrangement suited the boys admirably. It had been a constant anxiety to them to have to leave Black Jude to his own devices. They felt that somewhere in the back of his poor distracted brain lay the key to the secret which they were seeking. They also felt that with patience and perseverance they might eventually prevail upon him to divulge all he knew. But if left alone he might take it into his head to leave the shack, and so disappear from their ken. The gang, of whom he seemed to live in mortal dread, might discover his whereabouts ... and then ... Goodness knows what might happen....

So, from the third day onward, George and Norman took their flying lessons alternately morning and evening, the one leaving the camp for the aerodrome before dawn and returning during the morning, the other going in the afternoon and making his way back after dark. One or the other was always within sight or call of Black Jude.

The latter had begun to regard the boys as a necessary evil. He accepted their ministrations with ill-grace and glowering looks, but he did not seem to resent their presence as he had done at first; and now and then a faint gleam of tentative friendliness would flicker in his eyes.

In the meantime rapid progress was being made by the boys at the aviation fields. Daily they flew and grew in skill. Already, after the second day, they were both able to stunt the Avro without putting an undue strain upon the framework. Landings presented greater difficulties, but they learned to judge their pace and distances with remarkable celerity.

McIntyre was indefatigable. He would make them circle round and round the aerodrome, landing and taking off again, repeating the performance for half an hour on end. All this time he sat behind them, ready to correct with hand and foot any error of judgment on his pupils' part. His voice was ever in their ears. "No, not too fast ... pull her up a bit... Now, start to flatten out ... not so quick ... you are still too high. You must not 'pancake' on to the ground, or you will break the under-carriage struts..." Or, again, "Slower! slower! slower! You are flying straight into the ground." And he would push the throttle open, pull the stick back, and give orders to go round again. "Try to judge it better this time."

Later, when both boys could put the machine down upon the aerodrome with comparative precision, he would give them a certain mark close to which to bring the machine to a standstill ... a circle of white paint, for instance; and he would keep them at it until they succeeded in pulling up within ten yards of their objective.

"You must learn to judge the strength of the wind," he said. "You'll never make a pilot if you can't do that."

On his fourth lesson the crafty George was caught in a well-laid trap. McIntyre noticed that his pupil had been bringing the machine down very well at its normal gliding angle, but that, when about ten feet from the ground, his touch had lost its certainty. The instructor shrewdly guessed the reason why. George's eyes had been glued to the dial of the

air-speed indicator. Instead of flying by the 'feel' of the machine he had been flying by his instruments. George well knew that the Avro's correct gliding speed was in the neighbourhood of fifty miles an hour. He had, therefore, kept the needle of the indicator at that point, moving the elevator control according to its variations. But when quite near the ground, and in the act of landing, he had been forced to take his eyes off the friendly dial and to look ahead of him his judgment had often faltered.

The following morning the budding aviator was taken up to a thousand feet and was then told to glide in and land without making use of his engine. George's eye at once turned to the indicator. To his stupefaction it was not there. A blank hole in the dashboard stared him in the face. The nose of the machine began to wobble up and down. The Avro began cruising through the air after the manner of a porpoise. George felt ill at ease.

"Hello! what is the matter with you, my friend?" came McIntyre's voice through the telephone. "Had a night out, or what?" George did not reply. McIntyre's amusement increased.

"You were able to take her down on a glide very well yesterday. What's the matter now?"

Still no answer.

"It's no good looking for the indicator, you know. I had it taken out on purpose. I saw that it was distracting your attention."

George felt himself redden beneath his flying-helmet and was glad that he did not have to meet his instructor's keen, bright eye.

"Look here, boy," rejoined McIntyre, with a touch of severity, "you have got to learn to fly an aeroplane by *sense of touch*. You have got to get to know the *feel* of your machine. You must not rely upon your instruments to tell you whether you are tearing the guts out of her; whether the strain on the wings is becoming too severe from diving too steeply; or whether you are nearing stalling-point, and all the rest of it. You have got to know to a fraction of a second exactly how quickly she *should* answer to the controls, otherwise, how can you possibly tell if she is properly rigged? You must be able to detect any signs of sluggishness in her manoeuvring. But how do you expect to do that if you can't even tell when you are about to stall on a turn? Can't you feel the whole machine go sloppy when you are nearing stalling-point? Doesn't something in your bones make you push the nose down before you *do* lose flying speed? What the blazes do you think would happen if the diaphragm inside the Pitot drum got stuck at a hundred miles per hour? Would you go on pulling up the nose till you were sitting on your tail? It's the same thing with your spirit-level. I shall have that taken off as well. It does not follow that because I told you that in a perfectly executed turn the bubble will always remain central you should never stop looking at it. No, you must get to know for yourself when you are over- or under-banking. You should *feel* the whole machine slip inward or outward as the case may be. A good pilot will feel the extra pressure of the wind on his face when his machine is slipping. No more instruments for you from now on ... either of you! Try again, and keep your eyes fixed on some object on the ground when you are turning. Don't look up. You'll get giddy if you do ... and cheer up, boy! It's very simple, and you'll get the hang of it in no time."

For the space of half an hour George continued to practise turnings and landings, and at the end of this time he was persuaded that he had been making progress. He had carried out his orders and had kept his eyes fixed religiously upon some point upon the earth below him. The very fact of doing so had diverted a certain degree of his attention from the actual manipulation of the control levers, though he could not completely free his mind of the persistent subconscious thought, "Am I doing this correctly? Did I do that right?"

Suddenly he caught sight of several tiny figures running toward the middle of the aerodrome. The men—for men they were—were assembled in a little group in mid-field.

"Hello! I wonder what those fellows are doing," said McIntyre through the telephone. "Let's stay here and have a look at them."

At that moment they were flying level, straight across the aerodrome; the next minute they were leaving the aerodrome behind.

"Turn, turn!" cried McIntyre. "We shall lose sight of them if you go any farther away."

George turned. They were once more over the centre of the aerodrome.

"Now, put her over on a left bank and keep her turning over this spot, so that we can watch the men below. Look! Do you see what they are doing?"

His interest entirely absorbed by the activities of the men on the ground immediately below him, George had automatically put the Avro on a turn. She was banked over to an angle of about 45 degrees; and there she stayed, circling to the left. Round and round she went, while George sat at his ease, listening to McIntyre's explanation of the operation being carried out by the mechanics on the aerodrome.

"See!" said the latter, "they are practising laying out flares for night-landings. I make them do it every two weeks, so that the electric cables may be tested out. It is most important to keep them in working order in case any machines should come in at night."

The men below were now stringing out in a straight line, coming to a halt at intervals of about fifty yards. Four of them, having reached their proper stations, were dressed by the foreman in charge of the party; the remaining two men taking up their positions at right angles to the line, and from the end and windward file, the six men thus forming the letter L upon the ground.

"The men are now placing the flares," continued McIntyre. "You will observe that the longer arm of the L is placed straight up and down wind. Compare it with the direction of the smoke from the smudge-fire, and you will see...."

At that moment the six flares which had been laid upon the ground blazed into light. The powerful electric-bulbs showed up clearly even in the strong sunlight.

"There you are!" exclaimed McIntyre. "You can imagine how well the lights show up at night. A night-flying pilot can see them very distinctly and from a long distance. The way in which they are laid out gives him the direction of the wind. He must approach the landing-ground from the top end of the L or the end opposite to that from which the shorter arm protrudes, and he must land parallel to and alongside of the longer arm."

During this time—a period of five minutes or more—the Avro had continued to circle over the aerodrome. George, who was in full control, his mind entirely preoccupied with the flare-laying drill and his instructor's running commentary, had, to the latter's secret delight, kept the machine perfectly balanced on a protracted and slightly climbing turn. While George's interest had been absorbed in the doings of the mechanics on the ground McIntyre's had been concentrated on the actions of his pupil. It had, in fact, been for a definite purpose that he had called George's attention to the flares. He wished to distract the boy's mind ... to crowd out from his brain any thoughts of actual flying. His object had been to induce his pupil to pilot his machine by instinct, while his mind was fully occupied with other matters. The ruse had succeeded admirably.

The strength of the wind had been increasing gradually during the last quarter of an hour, and latterly the air had become decidedly 'bumpy.' But the 'bumps,' met with when traversing upward or downward currents of air, which had the effect of unexpectedly pitching the machine several feet skyward, jerking her equally suddenly earthward, or, again, catching her under one wing and tilting her sideways, had passed unnoticed by the young airman, who had instinctively, as opposed to deliberately, counteracted and corrected each successive caprice of the ether and the corresponding cavortings of the Avro.

"Home!" ordered McIntyre, and said no more.

It was only when he and his pupils were standing on the tarmac, after the latter had made an excellent landing, and they were divesting themselves of their flying kit, that the instructor turned to George, and, slipping his arm through that of his pupil, said quietly, but with an unmistakable note of appreciation in his voice, "Well done! You have put in some fine work this morning ... the best by a long chalk that you've done yet. I'm afraid I was a bit terse with you when we started out. Forget it. I had to do it. It was necessary to use shock tactics to get you out of a bad fault. The result is all right. Do you know that while you were watching those men putting out the flares you were piloting that Avro on a

climbing turn through some pretty nasty bumps without so much as turning a hair? You handled her beautifully. Do you know why? Because you weren't *thinking* about what you were doing. You have got the air-sense in you right enough. It only wants developing. I am pleased with you, lad. See here, I'll tell you what I'll do. I've got a new dual-control Bristol Fighter awaiting test. Would you like to come up with me? You can fly her if you like...."

"Oh, do you really mean it...?" stammered George, his face alight with eagerness.

"When I say 'fly' her," warned McIntyre, with a smile, "I mean that you can take over control when we get to a reasonable height. I'll do the taking-off and landing. She's a new bus, and rather precious." He grinned at George, who said nothing, and then added, "It won't be long before I'll let you take her up yourself. Don't worry!"

The new machine was pushed out on to the tarmac. An inspection of the control cables and the flying- and landing-wires having been carried out even more carefully than usual, and the engine having been tested for its revolutions, McIntyre signalled that he was ready to start.

Instead of taxi-ing out toward the leeward end of the aerodrome and turning into the wind in the orthodox way, McIntyre, to George's consternation, at once threw the throttle open to its full extent, pushed the joy-stick forward, and sent the machine hurtling straight away from the hangar door right across the wind. Between twenty and thirty yards from the starting-point the aeroplane left the ground; but, instead of allowing her to rise, the pilot kept her flying horizontally with a bare two feet between the under-carriage wheels and Mother Earth. They swept over the grass at an ever-increasing rate of speed. The Pitot needle showed ninety miles per hour, but George had no eyes for the instruments. He sat aghast, his hands tightly clenched to the struts of the fuselage. Had his instructor taken leave of his senses? Straight in their line of flight, on the far edge of the field, stood two disused sheds—the space between them but slightly broader than the span of the Bristol Fighter's wings. To George it appeared even smaller as they drove directly for the opening. Surely McIntyre was not going to attempt to fly through the narrow gap between those sheds...! A hundred yards ... fifty yards ... twenty yards only separated the propeller from the buildings. A workman who had been standing in the gap turned and bolted for dear life. He, as well as George, evidently thought a crash inevitable.

The joy-stick was pulled sharply back. The nose of the machine canted steeply upward. The under-carriage almost grazed the hangar roof as they roared over it... The right-hand rudder-bar moved forward, the stick came over to the right, the machine flicked round upon her inner wing-tip, and the next moment she was pointing straight toward the heavens. George, recovering his self-possession, and looking back over the tail-plane, saw the earth falling nearly vertically away. McIntyre flattened out.

"Sorry!" he called out. "It was a silly thing to do ... damn silly! But it takes me like that sometimes. I can't help it! Exuberance of spirits, I suppose. I haven't worked it all off yet either. I'm going to stunt this bus a bit, just to try her out, if you don't mind."

Without waiting for a reply, McIntyre proceeded to put the new Bristol Fighter through every conceivable manoeuvre. He rolled, he looped, he spun; he dived at the earth at a terrific speed, pulling out at the very last moment, zooming up and finishing with another loop....

"A trifle left-wing-low, and a bit tail-heavy," was his only comment at the end of ten minutes' continuous stunting, which had brought the whole of the staff of the aerodrome out to watch him; for it was not often that Captain McIntyre treated them to such an exhibition of airmanship as this. "I'll get that altered, but, otherwise, she's all right, I think. You can take her over now."

For the next quarter of an hour George thoroughly enjoyed himself. The superiority in power of the Bristol over an Avro gave him an added sense of pleasure. He found her a little heavier on the controls, and, as his instructor had warned him, he also found it necessary to 'hold her off' the ground much longer than the Avro when coming in to land. But he soon got the knack of it, and was delighted with himself in that he had successfully handled a real, full-blown war-machine.

## CHAPTER XI

Although it was now a week since Black Jude had been wounded he was still suffering from intermittent bouts of fever which he seemed unable to shake off. He was restless and ill at ease, and at times he would relapse into a delirium. George was becoming seriously alarmed at the man's condition, and had suggested to Norman the advisability of fetching a doctor.

"And give the whole show away!" returned the latter. "No! We can't possibly do that."

"What if the blighter goes and dies on us? The responsibility would be ours," protested George.

"Oh, he won't peg out. He's tough enough. This fever can't last much longer. Anyhow, I'll be here to watch him all day. Leave him to me. You'd better push off to the aerodrome or you'll be late. By the way, you might call round this evening on Murphy on your way back and ask him if he has got the name of the owner of that car."

George departed. Norman busied himself about the camp. Toward five o'clock in the afternoon he looked in at the door of the shack. The patient was asleep and breathing stertorously. His self-constituted nurse sat down on the log stool outside the door, and began to peel potatoes for the evening meal. It was, however, not long before he became conscious that Black Jude's rhythmical snoring had died away, and that the man was talking to himself.

"Delirious again!" said Norman half aloud, "Oh, Lord!"

He broke off and listened. A word had caught his ear which brought him to his feet. Swiftly and noiselessly he crept into the shack. Reaching the bunk, he squatted down beside it, his head on a level with Black Jude's.

In his previous ravings Black Jude had blurted out various disjointed remarks which, when considered in relation to each other, had left no doubt in the boys' minds concerning the existence in their near neighbourhood of the headquarters of a certain gang of bandits, but from the fragments of information so far obtained they had been unable either to piece together any connected account, or to form more than a very rough idea of the identity or the activities of the law-breakers. This morning, however, Black Jude was talking more calmly and coherently. Norman listened, all attention. The man was evidently under the delusion that he was in the company of some of his companions in crime; and from the tone of his voice he seemed to be pleading his own case.

"All I'm asking is for a square deal," he grumbled. "Youse guys 'ud never 'a' been lying up in this cave now—snug as bugs in a rug—if it hadn't been for me. Yuh'd never have found the track across Brown Tree Swamp ... if it hadn't been for me.... Yuh couldn't find it now if it weren't for them lights as I rigged up for yer.... I want my money.... I want fair does. A bet's a bet...." The man's voice grew louder. "Yuh're at the bottom of this, curse you for a fat, ugly, miserly Jew! Yuh little town rat...."

A pause.

"Yuh might need my help to get the swag back over Brown Tree Swamp o' a night-time. I'm the only one amongst yuh what can smell out the passage in the dark. Suppose the lights go wrong! ... Suppose the current fails! ... D'yuh hear me? The lights go out, I say.... Ho, ho! Ha, ha! I can see you floundering in the sticky, oozing, belching slime ... being sucked down in the dark ... squealing to the saints for mercy ... sliding down to hell! Ha, ha! Every mother's son o' yuh! ... Slowly suffocating in the mud...."

Black Jude, whose delirious ramblings had been punctuated by short periods of silence and utterances so inarticulate that no sense could be made of them, ceased speaking.

Norman's ears had been strained to catch every word; and each consecutive outburst had been stored in his retentive memory. The wearisome vigil at the sick man's bedside had brought its reward at last, and some definite information was now forthcoming concerning the bandits and Black Jude's relations with them. Anxiously Norman waited for any more disclosures which might escape the fevered brain. The minutes passed ... silence still. Crouching there beside the

bunk, Norman's body was getting uncomfortably cramped; yet he dared not move, lest the slightest noise should wake the man, or divert his thoughts into other channels. After a prolonged period of silence he was just about to abandon hope of gaining any further information, and was on the point of rising in order to relieve his aching limbs, when Black Jude, in a voice which hardly rose above a whisper, began to speak again.

"Just yuh come across with my rightful share o' the dough ... right here and now; and I'll take my oath I'll meet you at the Broken Elm on Saturday. Black Jude's never gone back on his word yet as I knows of. Yuh hand me them thousand yellow-backs and I'm your man.... I'm not one to play at double-crossing...."

There was silence once more, but these last sentences had set Norman's blood racing in his veins. The gang was planning some coup for Saturday night. Here was a heaven-sent chance to get even with the bandits; to put a spoke in their wheel; possibly to round them up. Gosh! how wonderful that would be! Black Jude had betrayed the secret in his sleep. Now they could form a proper plan for the capture of the brigands. He and George would be the heroes of the hour! Norman's imagination conjured up visions of a future triumph. Congratulations ... acclamations from every side!

In the meantime, Black Jude was waking from his dreams. He was moving on his bunk, and his eyes were opening. Norman sprang up and was standing by the bedside as the man peered at him from eyes hollow and bright with fever. For a few seconds he blinked owlishly at the boy bending over him, then recognition dawned upon his face.

"Oh, it's yuh, kid?" he said. "I thought ... I thought ... well, it's none of your darn business what I thought."

Norman smiled. "Are you feeling any better, mister?" he inquired.

"Guess I'm O.K.," came the answer, and the speaker made an effort to sit up in bed. "Holy Moses, but my head's rotating something chronic. Long Jim's knife must have given me a harder knock than I reckoned." He rubbed his shoulder ruefully, at the same time glancing suspiciously at Norman as if afraid of having said too much. But Norman pretended to have missed the significance of this last remark.

"You keep still," he advised. "The fever hasn't left you yet. Stay where you are, and you'll feel better by and by. Here, take some of this." He handed the man a couple of aspirin tablets. "And try to get to sleep."

Black Jude complied without protest. In a few minutes he was sleeping peacefully.

It was with no little impatience that Norman awaited his friend's return from the aerodrome that evening. He was bursting to impart his news to George.

"He's gone into Toronto," he reflected. "He'll be later than ever to-night, curse the luck!"

Norman grew restless as time went on. George was late. Darkness had fallen half an hour ago. If he had been flying up till dusk he could scarcely reach the camp before 9.30, especially as he would have gone to see the chauffeur Murphy. What a bore it was! Norman hated waiting. Should he walk as far as the big grass ride and meet George? There was so much to be discussed, plans to be arranged, details to be thought out; and so little time at their disposal.

The gang were planning their coup for this very night—a few short hours from now. Norman's impatience increased at the thought. He felt himself grow all hot and bothered. Sternly he rebuked himself. "Steady, you fool, keep calm! There's not the slightest use in getting rattled." Nevertheless, he could bear this enforced idleness no longer; the moment came when, throwing discretion to the wind—he knew that he should not leave Black Jude ... but Black Jude was still asleep and showed no signs of life ... he could safely leave him for an hour or so—he allowed his legs to carry him swiftly down the gully-bed.

In a few minutes he had reached the spot where the trail led off to the westward toward the ride.

He was on the point of leaving the river-bed and stepping into the woodland when he stopped dead and his body stiffened into the rigidity of a marble statue. What was that? The sound of a footfall, surely: the sound of metal striking against a stone or rock, followed by a muffled oath ... the voice of a man. Norman stood stock still. His first thought had been that Black Jude was following him, but a fraction of a second later that idea was put clean out of court. The sound

had not come from up the gully, but from straight in front of him. George! Of course it was George. His mind reacted to the new and comforting idea. His body lost its tension. How stupid of him to have been so startled! ... Really, his nerves were beginning to play tricks with him. He must pull himself together. Of course it was George ... he would hail him ... He was about to shout, but the words stuck in his throat. Some instinct stifled them at birth.

From the darkness of the woods, so distinct that it could not have been more than fifty yards distant, came a man's voice.

"Step out, bo, we ain't got too much to spare, if we are to be there ... on time to meet the Chief."

"It's all very fine!" grumbled a second voice. "But trudging for miles round the blinking forest on a wild-goose chase is gingering up that old wound o' mine. Why Long Jim has got it into his head that Black Jude is lying up in these parts I'm danged if I know. He's made a get-away to the City. Sure thing. Curse Long Jim, says I! Why couldn't he make a proper job of it?"

"It's very onusual that he misses with that knife o' his," said the other voice.

"I never known him mess it up before. You can most times safely bet your boots he'll hit the bull's eye plump. Why, I've seen him chuck an apple into the air and slice it clean in half before it hit the ground at ten yards' range.... Just a flick o' the wrist, and the thing's done. Oh, he's pretty nippy with the knife is Long Jim!"

"Aye! It's a dandy weapon rightly used. Deadly as a barker, and no noise to draw attention to yourself. But what do you say to calling a halt for a while? I feel I'd walk all the better for five minutes' rest. This rock sure looks inviting to repose."

For the second time in the course of a few short minutes Norman's heart stood still. The rock upon which the man proposed to sit and rest was the very one behind which he was trying to conceal himself. The moment he had first heard the two strange voices in the wood he had doubled back into the river-bed and dived for shelter behind the big boulder in midstream. Lying prone on his stomach in the darkness, he had been able to overhear the men's conversation as they approached him. The first words which reached his ears quickly convinced him that he had stumbled across two more members of the bandit gang, who had been sent out to scour the country for Black Jude; and, further, that Black Jude's recapture was considered a matter of urgent importance by Long Jim and his companions. Long Jim had meant to kill Black Jude, but the latter had escaped. Moreover, the two newcomers were on their way to a conference summoned by the "Chief."

Providence had been kind to Norman so far this evening. It had put some further items of information in his way. But would Providence continue to be kind? Or would Fortune desert him and reveal his presence behind that all too small boulder? He lay breathless; the least movement on his part might dislodge one of the countless little pebbles which littered the ground around him, and betray him. Should he be discovered, what sort of treatment could he expect from those two ruffians? They would hardly stand aside and let him go his way unquestioned. It was therefore with tremendous relief that he heard the first voice answering, "Cut it out, bo. It'll be time to think of resting when this job's through. You gotta learn something yet ... which is that it don't pay to be behind time or to disobey orders when they are initialled X.10.B. Come on!"

The two men resumed their journey. Norman lay still until the sound of their footsteps had died away. They had taken the eastward trail.

Norman sat up, drew a deep breath, and wiped away the perspiration which was streaming off his forehead and down his neck.

"Phew!" he exclaimed softly. "That was a narrow shave!" He had been within an ace of being caught that time. His thoughts turned to George. Thank the Lord George had gone to Toronto that evening and so was late in returning to the camp. He might easily have bumped into these two men ... and then what would have happened? He shuddered at the thought of his friend falling into the hands of the redoubtable Long Jim.

And Black Jude! Things would have looked ugly for Black Jude had he been trailed up and captured. The gang was

out after his blood. Norman wondered why. Perhaps he knew too much, and was becoming dangerous. The man was probably half-witted, and therefore untrustworthy from his employer's point of view. He had been engaged by the gang because he had been useful to them in that he knew a secret path over a swamp, a swamp which most likely formed a first line of defence to the bandits' base of operations.

The track across the swamp was marked by lights.... If the lights failed only Black Jude could find the track.... Perhaps Black Jude had been trying to make capital out of his exclusive knowledge by demanding more money for his services than Rosenbaum was prepared to give him. Was Rosenbaum cashier to the firm, Norman wondered, and could not help laughing at the fitness of such an arrangement. What was to be done? He and George must do their utmost to induce Black Jude to give them particulars as to the locality of the base, the swamp, and the track that led across it—and to give them the information at once. If he were to decline to divulge the secret of his own free will, or refused to be cajoled by threats to hand him over to the police, they must try to locate these places for themselves. There were certain clues to hand. They must look for a broken elm which lay on the edge of Brown Tree Swamp somewhere to the eastward....

Such were the reflections which passed rapidly through Norman's mind as he leant back against the boulder, the friendly boulder that kept him hidden from the men that passed him in the night. But his reveries were rudely interrupted by yet another sound emerging from the woods to the westward. This time Norman's heart leaped for joy. This was George, for sure. No one but George would be whistling the opening bars of their old college song. Norman sprang forward to welcome his friend.

"Hello!" exclaimed the latter, on catching sight of him. "What are you doing here? Why have you deserted your post? What's happened?"

"What's happened, indeed! The devil of a lot has happened, I can tell you! Quick, George, let's beat it back to the camp, and I'll put you wise. Come along."

Norman caught his companion by the arm and literally dragged him up the gully.

"Hey, steady!" protested George. "You'll have me down in a minute."

They made good pace in the darkness, and soon reached the camp.

## CHAPTER XII

"Now, before you start," said George, "I want to tell you something. I've seen Murphy. He's sore as blazes."

"Sore, why?"

"He very nearly got locked up for trying to kid the municipal authorities...."

"Kidding? How do you mean?"

"It was like this. Murphy went to the City Hall to ask for the name of the gentleman whose motor registration number was

N  
-X.10.B.  
Y

The number couldn't be found. Murphy, I gather, got fresh, and made some caustic remarks about their methods of filing. Finally the head clerk came along and swore that there wasn't any such number in the country, and that he hadn't time to

play around with a fool of an Irishman like Murphy. Murphy flared up and used such frightful language that they near as made no difference clapped him in the cells to cool his head."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed Norman, far more interested in the question of the number-plate than with the adventures of the chauffeur. "No such number in the country ... the car may be owned in the States...."

"No," replied George. "Murphy had them look up that as well. There's no such number in the States."

"That's funny, isn't it? The only alternative seems to be that our friends were carrying a false number-plate."

"Maybe they were," acquiesced the other.

"Number or no number," said Norman thoughtfully, "I'd know the whine of that engine anywhere ... it's fitted with a supercharger."

"What make is it?" asked George.

"Dunno. I didn't recognize the bonnet, as I only caught a glimpse of it when it passed us on the road. But never mind that now. I've got something far more important to tell you. Black Jude has been talking in his sleep."

"Has he, by gad? What has he let out? Anything particular?"

"You bet! George, we may be just in time to forestall a big coup which is to be engineered to-night by friend Long Jim and Co."

"What are they up to to-night?"

"That's just what I don't know. But listen while I tell you what I do know; then we will see what can be done."

George sat in rapt attention while Norman recounted the events of the previous two hours. When it came to the telling of his encounter with the two men in the forest George interrupted.

"Norman, you make me sick! You're too impulsive. You'll buy it one time, if you go on like that! Besides, you never ought to have left Black Jude...."

"Oh, I know..." began Norman rather testily.

"All right, old chap! Get on with your story."

Norman continued his recital to the end. George sat silent for a while. Then he said:

"I'm not at all sure that you oughtn't to have followed those two geezers, Norman. You might have found the Broken Elm. They were surely going that way."

"I thought of that myself. I rather wish I had. But I didn't want to miss you, or leave Black Jude for long. Shall we try to trail them up now?"

"No. It's too late now. Perhaps it's just as well you didn't go. They might have heard you if you'd got too near them, or you might have lost your bearings in the dark, or even bumped into some other members of the party. No! On the whole I'm glad you didn't."

"Yes, but haven't we rather missed the market? How are we going to find this blessed swamp?"

"We must pump Black Jude."

"All right! We can try that on to start with."

On entering the shack the boys found Black Jude awake, and, on the whole, better in health than he had been since he had been laid up in bed. He lay still and proffered no greeting to his visitors. George was the first to speak.

"Say, mister," he began, "we've come to have a little serious talk with you."

Black Jude said nothing, but suspicion again dawned in his eyes.

"Mister, we want your help...."

Black Jude raised himself in bed, leaning his weight upon one elbow. He glowered at George.

"What's your game?" he demanded.

"Black Jude..." began George.

"Who told yuh my name's Black Jude?" snapped the man.

"Never mind," replied George. "Enough that I know it; never mind how or why."

The man mumbled something inarticulate and relapsed into silence.

"You pass for an honest citizen, eh, Black Jude?"

"See here, son, I don't allow any man to cast aspersions on my character...."

"Of course not! But your associations with that gang would require a deal of explanation if it came to the ears of the police!"

"What gang? What are yuh talking about?" blustered Black Jude.

"X.10.B." The words rapped out like pistol-shots. The effect on Black Jude was instantaneous. His face grew even greyer than before. His eyelids narrowed until his eyes were scarcely visible. He set his jaw; but his lips began to twitch.

"I don't know what you mean," he exclaimed petulantly. "I swear I don't. I ... I ... Who are yuh, anyway, and what do yuh want with me?"

"We don't mean you any harm, Black Jude. We only want your help; only just a little information.... If you'll answer a few questions I think we can promise that your own part in the plot hatched by X.10.B. will be condoned by the authorities. Us guys have got some pull with the bigwigs down in the city. Now, tell me...."

"I tell yuh I don't know nothing."

"Think again, Black Jude. What object can there be for you to try to shield the men who first of all tried to bilk you, and then tried to kill you because you knew too much about them? You know what's coming to you if you *do* fall into their hands."

The man winced.

"I don't know nothing," he repeated sullenly.

"Oh, come, be reasonable," urged George, "consider your position. By sticking to this gang you don't stand to gain anything. On the contrary, it seems more than likely that they will do you in sooner or later—that is, when they no longer need your services...." The man was obviously impressed. "Oh, yes!" continued George, enforcing his point. "They won't think twice about sending you to join your ancestors! Then, even if you do contrive to escape your friends, the police will rope you in, and ... well, I leave the rest to your imagination."

George ceased speaking in order to let the effect of his words sink into Black Jude's mind.

"What do you want to know?" muttered the man at last. "And what do I get out of it for spilling it to youse guys?"

"A free trip to some other part of Canada, or, if you prefer it, a passport to the States," declared George, greatly daring.

"I durstn't.... I'd never get away with it.... You don't know X.10.B."

"Who is X.10.B.?" asked Norman.

"Who is X.10.B.?" cried the man, with a hollow laugh. "Who is he, yuh say? I don't know any more than you do, my little innocent! Nobody knows who he is. No one's ever seen him that I knows of. He's the big noise o' the Water-snakes, that's who he is! Don't you cut across his path. That's my advice to yuh; and it's the best yuh ever had for nothing!"

"So that's the name of his gang!" cried George. "Who are they all?"

"Dirty snakes, the lot of them, and that's the truth! I'll get even with 'em yet. By holy smoke, I will!"

"Maybe we'll be able to help you get your own back...." George was only too anxious to stimulate Black Jude's budding scheme of vengeance.

"Aye, I'll pay 'em out. I'll..."

"Look here, Black Jude!" cut in George, with a note of authority in his voice. "There's no use in lying there ranting against Long Jim and Company. Words won't do them any harm. We know that the gang is planning some big job in the city of Toronto ... this very night."

"Oh, yuh know that too, do yuh?"

"Yes, we do. What is this job?"

"Dunno."

"Oh, yes, you do. What is it? Come on, out with it!"

"Dunno, I tell yuh. Honest Injun, I don't know." Was the man lying or was he telling the truth? There was a note of sincerity in his voice.

"The Water-snakes didn't take you into their confidence, I suppose?" suggested Norman.

"You're right, young man, they did not. Ain't exactly my department, anyway."

"Oh, what is your particular department?"

"Oh, you get out!"

"To lead the boys across the swamp to their lair, that's it, isn't it, Black Jude?" asked George quietly.

Again the man looked startled.

"Since you know so much already, what's the use of asking me? My opinion is that you kids know more than's good for you already. Too much knowledge isn't healthy."

The old sullen expression reappeared on Black Jude's face. Norman was quick to appreciate this, and immediately changed the line of attack.

"See here, Black Jude.... We are out against Long Jim and so are you. You've got a score to wipe off against him; so have we. Why not combine forces? It seems the best way, doesn't it?"

Black Jude gazed hard at Norman, but he did not speak. Norman went on.

"We know that there is something doing in Toronto to-night.... We also know that you were given orders to be at the rendezvous by the Broken Elm at midnight...."

Black Jude started up, he was about to speak when Norman cut in.

"Are you going to keep your date?"

Black Jude did not answer immediately. He appeared to be considering the matter. Suddenly his face assumed a horrible leer.

"What if I do?" he growled at last.

"Will you take us along with you? We want to get Long Jim and Rosenbaum. I guess that whatever they are up to they'll try to make a get-away to their hiding-place across their swamp. We might catch them at an awkward moment, red-handed, as it were. You take us to the Broken Elm, and we'll stand by you when it comes to counting up the cost. Is that a bet?"

Black Jude uttered a raucous and unpleasant laugh.

"Ha! ha! And what do youse guys think you can do against them thugs? Ha, ha! D'yuh think they're going to let themselves be held up and come along quietly for a couple o' babes like yuh? Yuh make me smile! Yuh don't know what you're up against ... not by a long chalk."

"We can get help," said George.

"The police, eh?"

George said nothing.

"I won't have no truck with cops," declared Black Jude. "I gotta kind o' prejudice against the breed. I can get back at Rosenbaum without their help or yours."

George and Norman looked at each other. Long Jim had not been far wrong in his estimate of Black Jude; he certainly was 'balmy.'

"And how do you think that you, a wounded man, are going to hold up this lot single-handed, when a few moments ago you told us that it couldn't be done?"

"Cos I know how to do it, and yuh don't."

As he spoke Black Jude's expression changed. If ever murder looked out of a man's eye it stared out now from his. Those eyes betrayed the maniac. The boys felt a horror of the man.

"Yes!" came a hoarse whisper. "I guess I know how to fix them!"

A pause. Black Jude stared fixedly in front of him. His lips moved, but no sound came.

"How? ... What—what do you mean?" began Norman, momentarily at a loss for words.

The man appeared not to have heard the question. He sat up in bed, still muttering to himself. A white foam began to gather at the corners of his mouth.

"Aye! I'll be there at midnight ... by the Broken Elm! Aye, Long Jim! Aye, Rosenbaum! I'll be right there, ye sneaking curs! Yuh've yet to reckon with Black Jude. I'll be there in time to meet the boys! Rob the Bank of Canada! Ha! ha! Maybe you will, but this time you won't get away with it. Yuh tried to cross me, curse the lot of yuh! Now my turn's coming. Ah! I can hear yuh squealing ... screaming for mercy ... I'm coming ... coming now..."

The two boys looked at each other in alarm.

"He's stark staring mad!" whispered George. "What are we going to do?..."

He broke off. Black Jude was getting out of bed. Unsteadily he rose to his feet and stood upright, swaying from side to side. He put out one hand and clutched at the bunk for support, the other he pressed to his forehead.

"It's dark, devilish dark!" he muttered. "The moon'll soon be rising. It'll be lighter then. There's work for Black Jude this night!" He shivered. "Cold, darned cold.... A tot o' rum..."

He stooped and fumbled beneath the blankets. From under them he pulled a keg of rum. George made as though to step forward and grab the man's arm, but Norman drew him back.

"Let him be! Let him alone!" he urged.

George abandoned his intention. Black Jude put the jar to his lips and drank long and deep. He smacked his lips, shook his head, and then replaced the keg beneath the blankets. He seemed quite oblivious of the presence of the two boys, who sat watching him in silence.

"That's the stuff to give the troops!" he murmured, with evident satisfaction, and proceeded to pull on his jacket and his boots. Then, without further ado, he lurched toward the door, pulled it open, and plunged into the outer darkness.

"After him!" cried Norman, starting off in pursuit.

Black Jude was easy to follow as he crashed through the undergrowth and down into the river-bed. The boys kept him at a respectful distance; they were whispering rapidly and earnestly together as they went. The crisis was upon them; it had arrived with unexpected swiftness. The National Bank of Canada was to be robbed that night. It was now 10 P.M. Could anything be done to prevent the robbery? They were discussing what had best be done.

"We'll have to divide forces," said George. "You make for the city and go straight to the police...."

"And you?"

"I'll stick to Black Jude. He may be making for the Broken Elm. I guess he is. He's seeing red just now...."

"I don't like it, George. This lunatic might lead you into an awful mess. You might get shot, or anything ..."

"We'll have to take a chance on that. We don't know where the swamp is, or the way to the bandits' headquarters. Our only chance of finding them is to follow Black Jude now."

By this time they had reached the point where the east and west track crossed the river-bed. Black Jude turned to the left up the eastward path. He was travelling slowly, and his steps were heavy and uncertain; he walked like a drunken man, a fact which allowed the two boys a few minutes' respite in which to confer at the parting of the ways.

"Beat it for Toronto, boy, as hard as you can lick. You may be in time to stop the robbery, or to warn the police in time for them to catch the robbers on the job. You may be too late, in which case ... rush right back here, and bring a police-patrol with you. It'll take the raiders some time to make the Broken Elm. Dollar-bills and bullion is mighty heavy stuff to carry! I don't know what I'll do—it depends what happens. If I can I'll meet you here, if not I'll most likely be at the Broken Elm. So you carry on from here."

"But how? I don't know the way," objected Norman.

"I'm going to lay a trail of pebbles. I'll put three stones in line ... a big one at the head, giving the direction which I have taken. I'll drop them every fifty yards, and you can spot them with your flash-lamp...."

"Good man, good idea...."

"If Black Jude leads me to the Broken Elm I'll stay right there. You come on by the trail. If he doesn't, I'll meet you here, see? We're gambling on Black Jude. It's the only thing to do that I can see. Now I must get after him ... and you must fly. So long, old man."

Norman raced off toward Toronto. George stooped to fill his pockets with white stones from the river-bed, and turned in pursuit of Black Jude.

### CHAPTER XIII

It was close on midnight. Police-Constable Dodd walked slowly up his beat. As he neared the end of King Street he flashed his lantern across the side entrance of the National Bank of Canada. He felt the doors, according to his wont, in order to assure himself that they were safely and securely closed. All seemed as usual to-night.

The constable passed on. He reached the junction of King Street and Yonge Street. Here he paused, looked round about, then turned off to the left, and continued on his way along the main thoroughfare.

No sooner had the sound of his footsteps died away than there emerged from a side-street running into King Street almost opposite the Bank three muffled figures. The trio, their hats drawn over their eyes, scarves protecting the lower portions of their faces, would undoubtedly have excited the interest of Constable Dodd had the latter seen them. But Fate had ordered otherwise, and had lured the worthy constable down Yonge Street, serenely unaware of the proximity of his three fellow-citizens, who had, for some time past, been waiting for him to come and go. Indeed, his disappearance from view seemed to galvanize them into action. Silently, on rubber heels, they moved, as by preconcerted plan, across the street. They made straight for the side entrance of the Bank; all three stepped up beneath the portico and flattened themselves against the door. One of them gave a sharp double tap upon the woodwork. Instantly the door swung back on its hinges, but for a few inches only.

"Names!" came a whisper from inside.

"Jake."

"Pete."

"Larry."

The door opened wider, and all three slipped inside. The door shut.

Had any casual observer been present to note the movements of these three men his curiosity might have been further aroused when, a few seconds later, two more men similarly muffled stepped briskly round the corner from Yonge Street and also came to a halt under the portico of the Bank. Again a double tap could have been heard, and, as before, the quick question and answers were whispered.

"O'Sullivan."

"Darley Dick."

Within the entrance hall stood seven men. Dimly only could they distinguish each other in the obscurity. The sole illumination was furnished by the reflection of a beam of electric light which flowed through the door leading to the main

portion of the building. The five new-comers stood ranged against the wall. Facing them stood two other men, both so heavily masked that it was impossible to recognize their features. One of them spoke. There was in his voice that quality of tone which commands obedience.

"Jake, you will stay here with Hogan"—he indicated his companion—"and guard this door, which will be used as an exit in case of emergency. The burglar alarms are cut, so that you can move freely and without fear. The remainder will follow me. O'Sullivan, there is your apparatus; the others will help you carry it down." He pointed to a large wooden crate standing in a corner of the lobby. Stencilled in black letters across the lid of the crate was the inscription

JOHN BROWN—CATERER  
Toronto and Montreal

"Just open the lid, you men, and you will find a tray containing crockery," continued the masked man, who had introduced himself as No. 7. "Lift the tray out and lay it on the floor."

The innocent-looking case of supposed crockery contained nothing but a shallow tray of china cups and plates. Beneath the tray lay, snugly fitted into wooden slots, a metal instrument of curious and intricate design. Carefully they lifted it out.

"Now, just a word before we start, lads," said No. 7. "I guess you know the dope. You know X.10.B. by now; and you know his methods. The Chief is mighty keen that this job should be put through good and quick. O'Sullivan, you're here to blow out the timing-gear of the safe-deposit lock. This apparatus here is a new kind of toy. It's guaranteed to do the trick. All the Chief wants out of the vault is a certain piece of paper. We've gotta get it for him, see? If we get away with it you boys can help yourselves to all the rest ... as much as you can handle. But ... the instant I find those papers we clear out. Get me? Now, no foolery! If we make a bosh of it, waal, I guess you know what's coming to you all from the Chief himself, if not from the cops. Come on!"

Jake and Hogan took up their positions on either side of the street door. The remaining four men followed their leader across the hall. One by one the black silhouettes slipped across the patch of light, through the open doorway, and vanished into the interior of the bank. Quickly they passed behind the counter. Darley Dick sniffed at the air. A faint but sickly odour attacked the nostrils.

"Chloroform!" he whispered to the man behind him. "Wonder who's been put to sleep? Old Man X.10.B. is sure thorough in his preparations!"

They were passing the paying-teller's cage. A fleeting glimpse into the compartment revealed three bodies lying side by side, bound and motionless.

"Look at here!" ejaculated Darley Dick, jerking his thumb in the direction of the recumbent forms.

"Night-watchman and his mates, I reckon," rejoined the other. "Pore mutts! Gives me the creeps to see 'em. Say, mate, I don't exactly relish this kind of job. Too much darned mystery about these Water-snakes for my liking!"

"The pay's O.K.," put in the other.

"Pay! Give me a straightforward bit of crib-cracking, and I'm with you. But operating for these guys disturbs my peace of mind."

"Quit jabbering, you two," came the leader's sharp order. "Plenty of time for bucking afterwards ... and don't let me hear any more of that line of dope from you, Dick. We've got a special way of dealing with nervous cases. Bring that gadget here."

The men were now in the vault below the main office. They had entered the corridor which surrounded the solid steel walls of the safe.

"Now, O'Sullivan, get to work," ordered No. 7.

The man addressed, with the aid of his mate, set about his preparation with all the deftness of long practice. It was not long before he had made an incision in the steel-plating large enough to take the charge of high explosive which was to wreck the timing-gear that controlled the opening and closing of the bolts which held the vast round door in place.

The charge inserted and tamped down, the man set the fuse and gave the signal. All seven took refuge round the corner of the safe, awaiting the explosion. A dull roar, followed by a violent trembling like an earthquake shock ... a blast of air ... a cloud of dust ... and the men rushed forward to find a gaping hole in the centre of the door. A few seconds later the safe stood open and accessible.

"Good work!" exclaimed No. 7. "O'Sullivan, slip upstairs again with that blower and put it back in its place. It's a neat little toy. We may want it again some day. I'll send for the crate to-morrow. No noise, please."

The two men hastened to obey orders and retired upstairs. No. 7 and his two subordinates entered the safe.

The entire wall-space of the safe-deposit room was occupied with row upon row of small steel boxes about two feet long by one foot high. Each of them was numbered, and each secured by a patent lock.

No. 7 paused for a moment in the centre of the room. From an inner pocket of his coat he produced a notebook.

"It's one of these numbers," he said, "it's the nearest we could get. Mark them as I read them out. Ready? 2011, 1075, 42, 106, 128, 79, 3120, 86, 99, 110. Got them?"

"Aye, aye!" whispered Larry.

"Good." No. 7 produced a bunch of keys from his pocket. "Let's try 42 first. It's ten to one against us!" While he was speaking he applied one of his keys to the lock of the box. The lock turned instantly.

"The Chief made no mistake about the master-key," he murmured, in tones of satisfaction, and proceeded to examine the contents of the box. About a dozen neatly folded bundles of paper confronted him, each bundle held together by an elastic band. A cursory glance showed him that he had drawn a blank. He proceeded to a second box, a third, a fourth, fifth, and sixth, opening them at random. But the documents which he found apparently bore no relation to the object of his mission. Rapidly he continued his search, till eight empty boxes gaped at him, their contents strewed about the floor.

Valuable time was slipping by. The other two men had already filled four sacks with bonds and bills, and stood by waiting for their leader to give the word to leave the vault. They were becoming impatient, and already they had started grumbling to each other.

"Let's get out of this," growled Pete. "We'll spoil a good night's work if we don't beat it quick."

"Aye! We've been here long enough, I guess!"

No. 7, busy at the boxes, was by no means unaware of his subordinates' growing restlessness. He himself was, if the truth were known, beginning to feel the first pangs of uneasiness. The cars would be outside in the street by now; and, in spite of the fact that they were disguised as taxicabs, so as to excite the minimum of attention, it would not do to keep them hanging about too long in the vicinity of the Bank.

It was only when he reached the last box but one that he sprang to his feet with an exclamation of relief ... a large envelope in his hand.

"Here we are! Now, boys, beat it!"

Snatching up the sacks of spoil, they turned toward the door. As they did so there came a soft whistle from the top of the stairs.

The whistle, which was a prearranged signal of danger, brought the raiders to a standstill. For two seconds there was a deadly silence; then orders rapped out from No. 7.

"To the street door ... double up!"

He leaped up the stairs and raced across the main hall to the entrance lobby. The other two followed more slowly after him, hampered with the heavy sacks.

"What's up?" asked the leader, as he joined his companions, waiting anxiously above.

"A police car has pulled up about twenty yards from the main entrance in Yonge Street, and another at the corner of King Street. About half a dozen cops in each..."

No. 7 swore. "Somebody's blabbed. We'll settle that later. We're cornered here, good and proper! We'll have to fight for it. O'Sullivan, Pete, and Larry, you beat it west up King Street. Take a sack each. Fergusson will be on the crossroads two blocks away waiting to pick you up. Hogan will stick as close to me as possible, so as to take over this envelope in case I get laid out. The remainder follow me as well. Bailey will pick us up in Yonge Street. Pull your guns and shoot to kill. We've got to break through the police. Shoot to kill, I say! It's your only chance. We're for it anyway if we get caught. Make for the Broken Elm, all of you. Ready?" He jerked the door open. "Go!"

## CHAPTER XIV

With a parting wave of his hand Norman turned and sped down the path toward the ride. It was pitch-dark beneath the trees, and on several occasions, in his haste, he lost the track, tripping over roots and stones, or running into the stunted shrub which flanked the trail. Once, at a right-angled turn, he missed the pathway altogether, and, plunging into the undergrowth, fell headlong into a bramble-bush. The thorns scored his face and hands and knees as he picked himself up, and tore his clothes as he wrenched himself free.

At last he reached the ride, where the going was easier. Norman had always been a strong runner, but racing against time across country in the dark proved a severe test. His breath was coming in short gasps, and his legs were tiring, so that, when he reached the main road, he was constrained to stop and rest. But not for long. The fear of being too late was growing into a panic. So much depended upon his reaching police headquarters with the least possible delay. He looked up the road in the hopes of seeing some vehicle approaching from which he could obtain a lift into the town. There was nothing in sight. It was after 11 P.M., and there would be little traffic at this time of night. He pelted on, alternately in quick and double time down the hard highroad toward the city. The lights of the town shone out in front of him, but they seemed to remain obstinately distant as a mirage. To his distracted brain they seemed to recoil before him as he approached. Four miles still to go. Would he ever reach the town in time? Mechanically he plodded on. Despair was overtaking him when he became conscious of a noise behind him. He stopped and looked back. Down the centre of the road were advancing the twin headlights of a motor-car. He stepped into the middle of the road and waved his arms above his head.

With a grinding of the brakes the car pulled up beside him.

"What in the name of glory do you think you are doing?" exclaimed an irate voice from the driver's seat. "If you are contemplating suicide I've no wish to act as agent in your case. What's the matter with you anyway?"

Norman walked up to the driver's side.

"Sorry, mister," he began, his words coming between great sobs for breath, "can you give me a lift to Toronto? I've about run myself out."

"Should say you had! What's your hurry? You look as if you've murdered some one ... streaming with blood like

that!"

Norman looked at his hands. They were black with bloodstains. He put his hand to his face and felt the crusted blood upon his cheeks. How could he explain his position to this stranger? An inspiration came to him.

"Had an accident, sir. Burst a tyre, ran off the road, and overturned," he panted. "Friend of mine hurt ... running for a doctor...."

"Oh, I see. Jump in. I'll run you into town in no time. Not badly hurt, your pal, I hope?"

"No, sir, not badly, really. Thank you."

Norman flung himself into the seat next to the driver. The next minute they were tearing down the road toward the city.

"Where do you want to go?" asked the stranger.

"If you'll drop me by the first taxicab we pass I'll be very grateful."

"That's easy! Don't thank me. You'd have done the same for me, I guess."

A taxi which Norman found on the outskirts of the City brought him with all speed to police headquarters. He ran up the stairs into the vestibule, taking three steps at a time. The hall was empty. Norman looked round hurriedly. On the left was a door, inscribed in white paint "Inspector—Private." He battered on the door and waited. No answer came. He knocked again, at the same time glancing round for any other indication as to the whereabouts of the officers on duty. Just then the sound of heavy footsteps from within the Inspector's room could be heard. Slowly they approached the door. The key turned in the lock, and the door stood open. On the threshold appeared a man, huge in stature and in bulk, imposing in his uniform. He stood squarely in the doorway, regarding Norman with an air of mingled indignation and disdain. He hitched his thumbs into the belt of his tunic, inclined his head slightly to one side, and drawled:

"Waal, kid, what's your trouble? Bun away from home? Get a rousing from your dad, or what?"

Norman's bloodstained face and hands and his generally dishevelled appearance certainly afforded some grounds for the police-constable's conjecture. He was a disreputable-looking object. But Norman felt that he had no time to go into explanations, and was quite unconscious of his torn clothing and wild looks.

"Turn out the police!" he burst out. "They are going to rob the Bank. You must give the alarm at once."

"Turn out the police! Give the alarm! Rob the Bank! What Bank? Who's going to rob the Bank?" The stolid constable was not easily to be moved. "What's all this blather about?"

"The National Bank of Canada," cried Norman. "They may be at it now...."

"Who may be at it now?"

"The gang."

"What gang?"

"I don't know...."

"Of course you don't know!" The constable became more ponderous than ever. "See here, my lad, don't think you can come boosting in here with a cock-and-bull story at this time of night and get away with it. I don't know what you think your game is, but you can't put that sort of thing over on me. You ought to be ashamed of yourself at your age. Clear off back to bed, or you'll find yourself in the lock-up. See?"

The majesty of the law was ruffled.

The last thing that Norman had calculated for was that any doubt should be cast upon his good faith. While the constable had been speaking he had been thinking rapidly. It was a waste of time to argue with this man. He changed his tactics and said quietly:

"Listen, officer, will you take me to the Chief Inspector on duty? I can prove everything I say, and there's no time to be lost. Think! If the Bank were robbed and the crime could have been prevented but for your refusal to act upon my information, how would it go with you if it came to an inquiry?"

The policeman remained silent. He frowned and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Then he gave a hitch to his trousers, preparatory to putting his body in motion, slewed round, and retired into the room.

"Come inside," he commanded curtly.

Norman obeyed. The constable stepped across to his desk and established himself upon a high stool in front of it.

"I'll take your name and particulars," he said, gazing long and hard at a collection of *pro formas* standing in a paper-holder on the desk. Deliberately he selected some half-dozen forms, and proceeded leisurely to examine the printed type upon them, licking his finger as he turned them over one by one. "Fill in this form," he said at last.

To Norman, whose patience was now completely exhausted, this was the last straw.

"Oh, Lord!" he exploded. "Can't you cut out red tape just for once? We'll be too late...!"

The constable frowned his disapproval. "The regulations must be adhered to," he announced, with magnificent solemnity.

There was nothing for it but for Norman to fill in the form, and, with the loss of a precious ten minutes, he at last found himself facing the Chief Inspector in his room upstairs.

"All right, constable, you can go," said that functionary to his subordinate, after he had run his eye over the form placed before him, and had given Norman a quick, inquiring glance. "Leave this young fellow to me."

The constable departed with unhurried dignity.

"Now, what's the dope?"

Norman, in as few words as possible, told his story. The Inspector leaned back in his chair, his elbows resting on its arms, and his fingertips joined in front of his face. He watched the boy intently. Norman finished breathlessly:

"Mr Inspector, sir. I swear it is the truth I've told you. You *must* act at once...."

The Inspector did not reply.

"Is there anybody in this town who could identify you?" he asked.

"Yes. Mr Renton. But is there time for that?"

"I know Mr Renton." He picked up the telephone and spoke. "Get me Mr George Renton on the telephone. It's urgent!"

"Mr Renton doesn't know anything about this business," put in Norman nervously, while the Inspector waited for his connexion. "He thinks that George and I are out camping in the woods...."

His words were cut short.

"Is that you, Mr Renton?" asked the Inspector, speaking into the instrument. "Sorry to bother you so late. I just wanted to know whether you have a lad staying with you named Marshall.... You have, thank you ... Oh, no! nothing

wrong ... yes, camping in the woods ... only for purposes of identification. We're looking for a man. Maybe he's lying up somewhere there. Your boys were seen by some of my men. Right! Good night, Mr Renton. Much obliged to you."

He hung up the receiver.

"Marshall, I'm going to take a chance and act on what you say. Sit down and wait."

He again took up the telephone and issued a series of orders.

"Yes, that's right," he concluded, "two police cars to approach the main entrance of the Bank in Yonge Street from the north and south respectively. Four men to each, exclusive of the drivers. How soon can you get there? Twenty minutes. Right! At 12.35 A.M., then. See that you're on time. Sergeant Jones will pick me up here. Good-bye."

He turned to Norman. "You'd better stop right here in my office, young man, and wait my return. Whichever way this night's business turns out I guess I shall want you in the morning."

Norman did not relish this idea at all.

"Can't I come with you, sir?" he pleaded.

"It won't be any kind of a picnic if your story is true."

"I know that, sir," answered the boy, "but let me come all the same. I can use a gun ... and I might be useful in identifying the raiders. I've seen four of them already, and if they get away I could act as guide through the woods."

So well did Norman plead his cause that the Inspector at last consented to allow him to accompany the police patrol. When the car pulled up at the door Norman took his place in the back seat.

At 12.35 A.M. precisely the two police cars pulled up at the point agreed upon. The police officers jumped out on the pavement and stood ready, revolvers in hand, awaiting the orders of the Chief Inspector. The latter cast a quick glance over the exterior of the Bank building. There was nothing to indicate that anything abnormal was afoot. Under the arc lights the vast pile looked sombre and redoubtable. Surely it was madness to attempt to break into this solid mass of masonry, the only possible points of access to which were protected by every device born of modern ingenuity! So thought the Chief Inspector, and silently upbraided himself for having been lured out against his better judgment by this brat of a boy. What a fool he would look in the morning! However, as he was there, he might as well look round. He was about to order an advance on the main entrance when his attention was suddenly distracted by the sound of movement in King Street. Out of the side entrance of the Bank had darted four dark figures. Keeping well under the shadow of the houses, they raced up the pavement to the eastward. The Inspector leaped forward.

"After 'em!" he yelled. "Shoot, men, shoot!"

Followed by his four subordinates, he dashed down the street, firing off his revolver at the backs of the retreating raiders. But the runaways had acquired a good start. The long range and the indifferent light made accurate marksmanship difficult. One man was seen to falter, but he recovered himself, and all four disappeared round the corner of the next block. The police followed, and the sound of a heavy fusillade reached Norman's ears as he crouched in the bottom of the car where he had been ordered to remain.

The above events had taken place in a very short space of time, and it was only as the last policeman was lost to view that the second patrol rounded the corner of King Street, coming up as fast as their legs would carry them to the assistance of their comrades.

Norman waved them forward. "First to the right," he shouted. The men ran on. No sooner had they passed the side door of the Bank than three more figures appeared on the threshold and fired point-blank at the police. *Bang! Bang! Bang!* Three guns spoke. Two policemen fell. The remaining pair turned in their tracks and returned the fire. One bandit dropped and lay writhing in the middle of the road, the others bolted toward Yonge Street. They were making straight for Norman, who sat spellbound in the car.

Now the bandits were but twenty yards away from him. Here was his chance! He must do something to help. He pulled himself together for the effort. Raising himself on one knee, he took deliberate aim at one of the men with his revolver. But in the excitement of the moment his heart was thumping madly and his hand was shaking.... The revolver threw high above the mark. The foremost of the men had seen the tongue of flame. Without pausing in his stride he threw up his arm, and his gun flashed out. Norman had seen the movement. Instinctively he ducked. It was in the nick of time. A bullet crashed through the wind-screen; another tore away a fragment of the woodwork just above his head.

Two more shots rang out ... another two ... then no sound but the pattering of feet.

For the boy to recover himself and to jump out of the car into the road was a matter of a few seconds, but in these few seconds the duel between the police and the criminals had been fought out. Within a few yards of the car lay one of the constables, his limbs sprawling at odd angles, half on, half off the pavement, his head dangling in the gutter. Beside him sat the other officer, squatting cross-legged on the ground, his head bowed upon his chest, and his hands clasped tightly to his stomach.

Norman turned to look the other way. The two surviving bandits had reached the end of King Street. As they did so a taxicab came in sight, advancing slowly along Yonge Street from behind the corner of the Bank building. Quick as lightning the two men sprang on to the running-board, and the prowling cab dashed forward. The taxi-driver was a confederate. The men were making their escape! Up went Norman's gun, there was no time for taking aim. Twice he fired in rapid succession. Came a crash as his first shot smashed the window of the cab, and, as the driver flung in his second gear and the vehicle disappeared from view behind the houses, Norman thought he heard a yell of pain. He dashed to the end of the street. By now the taxi was a hundred yards or so away; but to the boy's ears came that curious whine which was associated in his memory with the engine of the motor-car driven by Long Jim. And ... were his eyes playing tricks with him, or did he distinguish on the number-plate of the swiftly retreating car the magic number X.10.B.?

Two of the bandits had got away. The first police patrol had followed the Inspector in pursuit of the first four men to slip out of the Bank. The second patrol had been put out of action, two of them ambushed, the remainder shot down in a running fight. Norman was left alone in possession of the field. There was no one in sight. He looked up Yonge Street. There, two hundred yards away, stood the second patrol's motor-car. The driver was still at the wheel. Then why ... why had he made no move to help? Was the man blind or deaf?

"Hi! Hi!" shouted Norman, running toward the car. Still the man paid no attention. Boiling with resentment, Norman dashed up to him and seized him by the shoulder, words of expostulation on his lips....

As he tugged at the driver's sleeve the man's body toppled sideways and collapsed in a heap on to the empty seat beside him. From between his shoulder-blades protruded the handle of a knife. Norman felt his blood run cold. The cold, calculating thoroughness with which the gang worked appalled him.

This man had been deliberately murdered. How? By whom?

Norman felt a rising tide of rage flooding through his soul. He would, he *must*, avenge these wanton murders. He and he alone knew where to intercept the fugitives. He must return to the woods forthwith. To wait for assistance ... to explain to the police ... would entail too much delay. He must act at once, and act alone.

His mind made up, he dragged the body of the dead driver from the car and laid it in the road. It would be found later. He jumped into the driver's seat, switched on the engine, and set off at full speed for East Toronto. In the first few hundred yards several policemen, who had been attracted by the noise of the firing, and were running toward the scene of the affray, attempted to stop him, but without success. He crammed down the accelerator, swerved to avoid his would-be obstructors, and was soon tearing up the road down which he had travelled an hour or so previously.

## CHAPTER XV

While Norman was making the best of his way to Toronto George was marching through the forest in the wake of Black Jude. The man's slow, blundering progress allowed the boy ample time in which to lay the trail of white pebbles agreed upon with Norman; nor was his task difficult, as for the most part they followed a clearly defined path, while dry gullies which transected their route enabled him to replenish his stock of stones.

After covering a distance of about two miles they reached a point where the woodland ceased abruptly, and the moon, which had now climbed high above the horizon, provided sufficient light for George to form some idea of the landscape ahead.

At the edge of the wood he found himself almost at the bottom of a slope, down which the path had lately been leading them. To the east and north the ground rose again slightly to where, in the dim distance, he could make out the shadowy outline of further trees. In the foreground the land lay bare and flat; rank grass and rushes seemed the only form of vegetation. Trees and bushes there were none, save for a few isolated clumps of low-growing scrub. The air seemed moist, and through the silence of the night came the soft gurgle of lazy waters.

"The swamp! Brown Tree Swamp!" thought George. "It must be!"

He turned to the left after Black Jude, who, a hundred yards in front of him, had branched off just short of the open marshland, and was now making northward, keeping well inside the fringe of the wood. Black Jude was travelling even more slowly than before. Every now and then he paused as if to listen! George followed suit, halting and moving forward *pari passu* with his unconscious guide. For a quarter of an hour Black Jude pursued his way. Again he halted; for a long time he stood still. George began to grow impatient. What was the matter with the man? Would he never move again? The boy's eyes wandered. While waiting he might as well try to get some idea of his bearings ... pick out some landmarks.... He looked behind him. The ground fell away gradually to the south toward Lake Ontario. From south to east the swamp stretched away into the gloom; likewise from the eastward to the north. But ... what was this? His eyes rested upon an object which stood out conspicuously in the dark. From George's standpoint, slightly detached from the line of the woodland, rose a dark outline, the shape of a headless tree. The stalwart trunk alone remained. About ten feet upward from the root the great stem had been snapped off, perhaps in the fury of some gale. The splintered timbers pointing skyward spoke of the agony of the death-throes in the struggle with the powers of nature.

Was this what they called the Broken Elm George wondered as he gazed at it. If so, he was nearing his objective. Somewhere behind that swamp was to be found the bandits' lair. The path across the swamp started from the Broken Elm. Black Jude had led him to the spot; the gamble had succeeded. He felt a tremor of excitement. What should he do now? Should he overtake Black Jude and present himself in the hope that the man would consent to help him? Or ... he looked toward the place where Black Jude had been standing. Black Jude had disappeared. There was no sign of him at all. George cursed himself roundly. Fool that he had been! He should never have taken his eyes off the man. Where the devil had he got to? But, search as he might through the semi-darkness, he could see nothing, nor strain his ears as he might, could he hear anything to give him the least inkling as to what had happened to Black Jude. The man had vanished into the night.

Sick at heart, and bitterly regretting his own stupidity, George set about to evolve some plan which might retrieve his blunder. There was something to the good at any rate. He had found the Broken Elm, and had laid a trail to that important point which Norman could hardly fail to pick up. In the meantime, the Bank robbery may already have been committed, and the robbers might even now be on their way back toward the forest. He must lie up close by and wait upon events.... Norman would be here shortly with a posse of police. Comforting thought! But ... supposing Norman had failed in his mission ... had met with an accident ... had got into a fight ... had been shot! He shivered. It was lonely and unpleasant here ... eerie...

He shook his shoulders as if to throw off a gathering sense of gloom. "This won't do!" he said to himself. "At least I can reconnoitre the ground..." And, with a supreme effort of will-power, he propelled his body forward. Warily he went, eyes and ears alert for any suspicious sight or sound. By infinitely slow degrees he crept up the covert side until he came opposite the Broken Elm. There, beneath a friendly tree, he dropped on to the ground. Nothing stirred; only the gurgling waters could be heard, and the whisper of the tree-tops in the breeze ... *He must go on! Must reach the Broken Elm!* The words hammered at his brain; he found himself repeating them aloud.

"This is quite absurd!" he told himself. "There's nothing to be frightened of ... yet!"

Nevertheless, the lifeless, stunted tree, silhouetted in the moonlight, appeared strangely forbidding. The long curve looked like tentacles outspread ready to gather in their prey.

Again George set his teeth and urged his reluctant limbs to action. Like a stalker after big game in a barren country, he crawled across the open ground toward the tree. It was a painful method of progression, and he tore his hands and knees on the rough surface; but get up he felt he dare not. He was in enemy territory, and who could tell what potential foes might be lurking in the neighbourhood?

At last he reached the tree-stump. Within a few yards of the great bole he lay flat on his stomach, resting after the labour of crawling. Then he raised his head to look round him. Again he was thinking of Black Jude. Surely he had not abandoned his idea of vengeance? He looked at his watch. The phosphorescent hands showed five minutes to twelve: it was nearly midnight. The bandits would not be long in coming now if their plans had gone aright. Where was Black Jude? Had he crossed the swamp unseen by George himself?

Out of the night, seemingly from across the swamp, came the cry of a bird ... a curlew. George recognized the note. It struck him at once as curious that a curlew should be on the wing just then. Could some one have disturbed it? His speculations were cut short by another cry; the same call of the curlew, but this time the sound seemed to come from somewhere quite near by. George was puzzled. There was something mysterious about this cry and answering call. He gazed upward, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of any flight of birds against the pale glow of the moon. But no curlews could he see.

Was it a bird? Could it be a signal? He had read of people imitating the cries of various animals in order to convey messages to each other. Perhaps some of the bandits were signalling to their friends....

All doubts on the subject were speedily removed from his mind when there suddenly flashed out a few feet above the ground and stretching away across the marshy expanse to the eastward a zigzag line of lights.

In his astonishment George sat bolt upright, transfixed by the dramatic swiftness of the development of the last few moments.

The lights! So these were the lights of which Black Jude had spoken, the lights which showed the track across the swamp.

If the lights had been turned on it followed that some one was about to cross. Who? Whence? Whither?

In any case his present position was most unsuitable to his purposes. There, in the open, without a semblance of cover, and within a few short paces of the terminal point of the track, he was bound to be detected. He must move off, back to the outskirts of the wood, where he could hide among the trees and keep an eye upon events.

He was about to rise and run for it. A sharp click behind him made him turn. He was conscious of something ... some large body towering above him. There was a crash ... his head came into contact with some heavy mass ... he knew no more.

George's senses were beginning to return to him, but some little time elapsed before he was able to recall the sequence of events which had led up to his present situation. First and foremost, he was conscious of a splitting headache; secondly, that his limbs were cramped; and, thirdly, that all was dark around him. He moved his head slightly; there was a sharp stab of pain.... He lay still, racking his befuddled brain to account for those strange phenomena. He tried again to move, more gingerly this time. Again he felt the pain, but less acutely. He tried to put out his hand to feel his head, and found that he could not do so, his hands were tied behind his back. How extraordinary! He tried to move his legs. They too were bound together. Still more extraordinary! Again he fell to puzzling, but the effort of thinking proved altogether too exhausting. He felt overcome with drowsiness ... his head ached far too much to worry about such things. He wanted to sleep ... sleep ... He rolled over on his side.

When George woke up once more his head was still aching furiously, but by now his faculties had more or less

recovered their normal function. He looked about him. He found himself half sitting, half lying, on a wooden floor, with his back against a wall. Within a foot of his shoulder ran another wall at right angles. He was evidently in a corner of a room. Four feet in front of him a wooden partition or screen about ten feet long had been erected, thus shutting off the remainder of the room from sight. Behind the partition a lamp was burning, for a dim light was reflected from the ceiling high above him.

George again searched his memory to account for the predicament in which he found himself. Then the night's adventures came flooding back into his mind.... The journey to the swamp ... the lights ... his resolve to escape from the Broken Elm ... then no more. He must have been caught, hit over the head ... the pain was sufficient evidence of that! Then he had been unconscious. Where was he now? A prisoner, obviously. But where? Who were his captors? His train of thought was interrupted by the sound of voices from beyond the partition.

"How's that kid, Long Jim? Still asleep?"

"I guess so. Micky gave him an almighty clout on the nob."

"Pity he didn't chuck him into the bog and be done with it. Say, where's his other half?"

"Dunno. Micky swears he only saw one of them, this one, squatting right under the elm as Micky came out of the door. Had his back turned to the tree staring at the lights. Guess he hadn't much of a notion about the peculiar properties of that tree!" Long Jim chuckled, then went on, "So Micky caught him unawares, koshed him one, and brought him along here."

"Going to settle that kid's account, Long Jim, before he gives you any further trouble?" asked a voice, of which George had no difficulty in recognizing the owner.

Long Jim made no reply. He pulled a jackknife out of the sheath which hung at his belt, felt its edge, and began to strop it on the palm of his hand.

"Guess it's got to be," he said meditatively.

"Fer an educated man your ideas are crude, Long Jim," remarked Rosenbaum. "You lack imagination. You put that knife back."

"Ho! getting squeamish, are you?"

"Nope. I got a better plan, that's all."

"Oh, have you? And what sort of a funeral has your hundred-per-cent. imagination provided for this sweet che-ild?"

"A drop of a few thousand feet from a sea-plane into Lake Ontario. Simplicity, cleanliness, and no trouble about disposing of the remains. My plan contains all the desired elements. Yours is merely messy, in every sense of the word. See?"

Silence fell between the two men, during which George had ample time to reflect upon the conversation he had overheard. It was at any rate a comfort to hear that the suggestion to cut his throat forthwith had been ruled out. This gave him a certain respite; and in the meantime Norman might come to his rescue with a squad of police. But the hope was a slender one. In the first place, how was Norman to find him? George could only presume that he was now lying in the actual headquarters of the gang, in the hut which had been the object of his own search, and that he had been carried while unconscious across the swamp. How was Norman to find his way to this place? The only chance of his doing so would be that he should meet Black Jude. Again George wondered what had happened to Black Jude. Had he also fallen into the hands of the gang? If so, his own chances of deliverance were poor indeed. Things looked pretty black.

"While there is life there is hope," he quoted, to keep his spirits up. "Something might happen. You never know!"

He began to test the knots which bound his wrists together, but no amount of wriggling or writhing served to loosen

his bonds. He had been tied up by some one who knew his job ... Long Jim himself most probably.

Just then the noise of a chair grating on the floor and the sound of a man rising to his feet came from beyond the partition. George barely had time to let himself fall back again into the posture in which he had found himself on regaining consciousness when the tall figure of a man appeared round the corner of the screen. The man stopped to peer at him.

"Humph!" he said. "Still asleep."

Instinct in the face of imminent danger had prompted the boy to sham continued unconsciousness. He lay absolutely still, hardly daring to move his eyelids. Long Jim took a step toward him, and with the toe of his boot gave him a sharp dig in the ribs. It was all that George could do to suppress a cry of pain, for there was nothing gentle about a caress from Long Jim's foot.

"Yep!" called the latter to Rosenbaum. "He'll stay put for some time yet. Guess there's something to be said for that idea of yours. I'll take and drop him in the boat. No. 7 ought to be fetching up pretty soon now, and he won't want to be kept hanging round. Open that trap, mate. I'll take him down across my shoulder."

So saying, he stooped, caught George round the body with two arms which felt like tempered steel, and threw him across his shoulder as easily as a sack of hay.

George made no movement as he was being carried across the floor. He allowed himself to lie as limply as possible. With his head hanging downward and his face hard against the small of Long Jim's back, it was not easy for him to gather much idea of the aspect of the room. That it was small and rudely furnished was about all that he could see.

A few strides had taken Long Jim to the opposite corner of the room. Here he stopped, and George found himself staring between the man's legs at a square hole in the floor, from which a rope-ladder was suspended, its lower end lost to sight in the depths below. Whither the ladder led he could not tell, but softly to his ears came the sound of lapping water, while a draught of cold damp air suggested that their destination was one of the many caves with which the shores of the Lake abounded.

Long Jim began to lower himself and his burden down the rungs of the ladder. George counted twenty-four steps before his captor's foot touched the hard ground below.

"Better come down, Rosie," shouted Long Jim from the foot of the ladder. "I shall need some help with the engine. You can leave the trap-door open. We shan't be long. Look slippy!"

Rosenbaum launched his awkward person on to the ladder, and began to descend, to the accompaniment of much puffing and blowing and grunting. He was obviously not accustomed to physical exercise.

"Come on! Move your fat carcass!" jeered the sailor; but Mr Rosenbaum was far too busy piloting himself down the swaying ladder to reply.

Long Jim turned and strode across a strip of sand to the water's edge. Here a plank led on to a small wooden deck. This must be the flying-boat, thought George, and a moment later he felt himself jerked from the man's shoulder and flung down alongside a small hatchway. Long Jim jumped down into the hole, hauled his prisoner after him, and pushed him unceremoniously along the wooden floor which extended a short distance beneath the deck.

"That'll do for you, my friend," he said, giving him a final kick, hoisting himself back on deck, and covering the hole with a tarpaulin.

Left to himself in the pitch darkness of a confined space which he took to be the interior of the hull of the aircraft, George's thoughts were anything but cheerful. The prospect of getting out of it alive was dwindling sadly. Already he could hear Long Jim making final preparations for the departure of the flying-boat. The engine had been started up. He could hear the faint drum of the exhausts, and could feel the vibration of the engine through the hull. Long Jim had said that the bandits were due to arrive shortly. Once away, his time on earth was limited—Rosenbaum was not likely to

relent from putting his plan into execution. The boy shuddered at the idea of that long drop into the Lake. Would he be dead before he reached the water?...

## CHAPTER XVI

The police car with Norman at the wheel made short work of the five miles from the middle of the city to the point of entry to the woods, for the boy drove furiously. The bandits had got clear away; if they had made directly for their forest-lair they might be some ten or fifteen minutes ahead of him. Once in the woods he calculated on making better time than they. On the other hand, they might have gone farther up the road and entered the wood at some point nearer to their destination, and so have less far to walk than he. There was, of course, a chance that they might have made a *détour* so as to throw any possible pursuers off the scent. Devoutly Norman hoped that this was so, in which case he would certainly have gained a useful lead. He could not tell. All that he could do was to push on as fast as his legs would carry him, and trust to luck to find George and Black Jude at the Broken Elm.

Arrived at the head of the ride, he turned the car off the road and drove it straight in among the trees. The bandits might come this way, he argued to himself, and there was no object in advertising the fact that some one was before them.

For the second time that night Norman knew the agony of long-distance running with Time as his inexorable competitor. But now he took care not to run himself to a standstill; he must keep a reserve of energy for any contingency which might arise at his journey's end.

He reached the gully where he and George had parted in good time. By his watch it was shortly before 2 A.M. There was no sign of George: he had gone on, obviously. Norman stopped and listened for the sign of any movement before or behind him. Nothing. He pulled out his flash-lamp. Had George laid a trail as he had promised? He took the path to the eastward, walking rapidly, keeping the beam from the torch upon the ground in front of him. About fifty yards from the river-bed, lying in the centre of the track, three white pebbles showed up in the circle of light.

"Good old George!" he cried aloud. "I'm after you!" And he plunged on his way with renewed zest, all sense of physical fatigue vanishing in the face of present and impending action.

Very regularly the little signposts led him on until they brought him to the edge of the swamp where George had seen Black Jude turn to the left. At this point Norman noticed that the pebbles had been laid across the track, the largest one at the northern end.

"Change direction left," said he to himself, reading the sign aright. He turned to his left, and walked on, his eyes searching the ground for the next group of stones. He did not like to use his torch. He too on seeing the bare stretch of flat country which succeeded to the forest had thought to recognize Brown Tree Swamp. He must be more careful now. Many eyes might be watching for the advent of the raiders, who could not be far behind him; and he could not afford to betray his presence.

But in spite of the most minute inspection of all the ground within a hundred yards of the last group of pebbles he could see nothing to give him any further clue to the direction taken by his friend. Had he known the truth, it was that George, preoccupied with the disappearance of Black Jude and with the discovery of the Broken Elm, had completely forgotten to lay down any more of the promised indications, and so, as far as Norman was concerned, the trail came to an abrupt end.

Norman stood on the edge of the wood in almost precisely the same spot as George had done before him, at a loss as to what to do. Then, as he in turn gazed around him in the hope of some inspiration from the landscape, he also caught sight of the gaunt figure of a headless tree-trunk black against the sky.

"The Broken Elm!" He jumped to the conclusion. "George must be here. This is the place!" And, unlike his more cautious friend, he marched boldly forward across the open ground straight toward the tree. Right up to it he walked. Yes, this must be the rendezvous. George should be round here somewhere. Where was he? His eye roamed over the bare, waste land, on which there was nothing visible. A sharp click drew his attention back to the tree beside him.

"Hands up, quick," came a hoarse voice. Norman's hands went up. The movement was subconscious rather than deliberate. Sheer amazement momentarily paralysed his faculties. An oblong panel in the trunk of the tree had slid to one side, disclosing an opening, in which stood a man, down the muzzle of whose revolver Norman was staring.

Before the boy had time to recover from the shock of surprise the man's left hand went out and touched something by his side. Instantly a blaze of light flooded the hollow interior of the bole of the tree.

"Step right in," ordered the man, with a threatening wave of his arm.

Norman, still thoroughly bewildered, prepared to obey. As he did so, two practically simultaneous sounds registered themselves on his brain. A soft thud ... and a long, deep sigh ... his assailant crumpled up and collapsed at his feet. Norman dropped his arms and stepped over the prostrate figure. His first thought was to seize the man's revolver. As yet he was ignorant as to what had happened, as to the reason why the man had collapsed like a shot rabbit.

At that moment he became aware of a footstep in the grass behind him. He sprang to his feet, the revolver at the ready.

"Stow it, kid," said a gruff voice which he knew full well.

"Black Jude!" he gasped.

"Aye! That's me!" answered that worthy. "Put that barker down. It might go off."

Norman lowered his weapon. "Where on earth did you spring from?" asked Norman, somewhat fatuously, and with immense relief. It was good to meet even Black Jude in the circumstances.

"From just near enough to save your meat, young fellow. You can thank your lucky stars for that."

"Did you kill that man?" inquired Norman in awestruck tones, pointing at the motionless figure on the ground beside him.

"Aye! Ha, ha! Not bad for a left-hander in the dark, eh?" Black Jude bent down and examined the body. "Aye! Straight through the heart. Ha, ha! That's Micky Doolan. He's the first ... the others won't be far behind."

Black Jude's ghoulish display of delight sickened Norman; nevertheless, he felt it incumbent upon him to proffer a few words of thanks to the man who had undoubtedly rescued him from a very real danger.

"I want to thank you, Black Jude. I guess you got me out of a tight corner."

"Shucks! Don't yuh flatter yourself, my little innocent. It weren't for love of yuh that I pulled my gun on Micky Doolan. Him and me had to square up some time. Your fool stunt in walking up to this tree gave me my opportunity. I was too far off to get a proper sight on him when he roped in your young pal...."

"What? George? Black Jude, tell me where George is?"

"Long Jim's got him. He's in the hut if he's still alive, that is..." Black Jude chuckled. "Micky carried him across the swamp."

"Carried him?..."

"Oh, yes! Knocked him silly and hiked him off. But I guess I'm kind of obliged to yuh two kids for what yuh've done to-night. Yuh ain't great shakes in the line of amateur detectives, but yuh've helped me some. I was beginning to wonder

how I was going to get at Micky when you come bouncing up and lures him out o' that there pillar-box...."

"Pillar-box!..."

"Aye! The Broken Elm. That ain't no tree. It's made of iron ... what they calls cammyflage...."

"Camouflage!" echoed Norman.

"Yes. Like to see?"

Norman recoiled.

"Oh! you needn't be afeared," continued Black Jude, reading the boy's thoughts. "There's only me here now, and I won't hurt you. I'm after bigger stuff than Toronto college kids ... cuter, too.... Yuh've got a thing or two to learn afore yuh take up man-hunting as a profession. You were nearly for it that time!"

Norman felt that it was useless to resent Black Jude's sarcastic comments on his failure to disguise his movements. He had walked straight into a trap, and but for this man's timely intervention he would most certainly have been put out of action.

Black Jude again motioned him toward the open panel in the tree-trunk. He turned and stepped inside. Black Jude followed and pushed the panel to.

"What's happened to George?" asked Norman once again, more anxious about the fate of his friend than anything else.

"Tell you Long Jim's got him."

"Where is he now?"

"At headquarters, I guess."

"I must go after him."

"Yuh poor fool!" scoffed Black Jude. "Say, are you that tired o' life already?"

"I must go and help George out," repeated Norman obstinately.

"Think Long Jim'll hand him yuh back with a bouquet, eh? Cut it out! Anyhow, you don't know where to look."

"You know where the hut is. Won't you tell me how to get there?"

"Nope, it's no good. Yuh won't find him."

"Do you really think they may have killed him?"

"They ain't got much use for two superfluous mouths in their outfit. And you and your friend have shown yourselves a darned sight too inquisitive. That's where you were wrong. I warned you both."

Norman made no attempt to conceal his distress at his friend's terrible plight. Even Black Jude's grim soul was touched by the boy's passionate pleading to be shown the way to the hut.

"Waal," said the man at last, "your blood's on your own head; if you must put your neck in a noose it's your look-out. Tell yuh what I'll do, I'll take you half-way across the swamp. After that it's easy. The hut's only a hundred yards from the last of the lights ..."

"Last light?"

"Oh, I forgot. You don't know about the flares."

"No, I don't."

"See that box?" Black Jude pointed to a large square box standing on the floor beside him. "That's the contraption that controls the lights that lead across the swamp. Like to see them working?"

"Yes," answered Norman.

Black Jude leaned down and opened the lid of the box. Inside on a tray were set a series of electric switches. He turned them on.

"Come outside," he said.

Norman followed him out through the sliding panels.

"See?" asked Black Jude, pointing to the eastward.

The same sight which had met George's eyes an hour or two before now confronted Norman. A zigzag line of some twenty electric flares wound across the ground, the lights being placed at irregular intervals of between five and twenty yards.

Black Jude was talking rapidly.

"I fixed those lights. I figured out the plan. They bought my secret, the secret I'd got from Gipsy Dix...."

Black Jude was again working himself into a frenzy. Norman turned and looked at him in growing apprehension.

"Yes, I understand," he said. "I suppose that the lights follow the line of the path. To get across safely you must go from one to the other."

"Aye! Turning, always turning, from one to the other, keeping to the firm ground."

"The rest is bog?"

"There's no bottom to the bog. No bottom for their feet to stand on. They'll soon find that out, the swine! They'll all sink..."

That same murderous expression which the boys had seen before when he was lying raving in the shack again appeared in Black Jude's face. His little pig-like eyes glowed like specks of fire in the moonlight. Again Norman felt an invincible horror of the man, but his main preoccupation was to keep Black Jude to his promise to guide him across the swamp. He was desperately anxious to get to the hut, where George might still be held a prisoner. He must somehow contrive to rescue his friend. All other considerations had become secondary to this.

"Take me across, Black Jude," he urged.

The man did not reply at once. He seemed undecided. He muttered something of which Norman could not catch the meaning. Then, putting up one hand, as if to command silence, he put the other to his ear, and stood listening intently.

"Hear that?" he whispered.

Norman heard nothing and said so.

"Here they come!" exclaimed Black Jude. "Here they come! Now! Yuh sons of Satan! Black Jude's waiting for you!"

He seized Norman by the arm.

"Keep close to my heels," he enjoined the boy. "Close as you know how if you don't want to drown. Come on, I say."

The two of them, Black Jude in front, and Norman scarcely a pace behind, advanced rapidly toward the nearest flare. As they left the vicinity of the Broken Elm Norman felt the ground beneath him grow softer. Abreast of the first flare Black Jude altered his course and headed straight toward the second light, a manoeuvre which he repeated after reaching each one in succession, always changing direction according to the position of the flare immediately ahead of him. Once the man stopped dead in his tracks, and Norman, in trying to avoid bumping into him from behind, was thrown off his balance. In his effort to recover himself he put his right foot out to one side. It was as if he had trodden on thin air. His foot sank down; there was nothing underneath it to support his weight. Quick as lightning he threw himself face downward across the track, clutching at the rank grass. He felt the bog quake beneath him as he hauled himself back to safety, felt the suction of the morass as he drew his right leg up toward him, and heard a *plop* like a cork coming out of a bottle as his feet came out of the clinging slime. It had been a nasty moment. He was trembling all over.

Black Jude, who was much too preoccupied with his own designs to have noticed Norman's misadventure, was once more urging him forward.

"Keep down! Keep down!" he ordered. "They'll be coming out of the wood. They mustn't see us."

Their bodies bent double, the two pursued their way, following the guiding flares, until but four more stood between them and the farther side. Here Black Jude stopped, turned, and whispered.

"Hist! If yuh want to find what's left of your pal I guess you'll find him yonder."

"Where?"

"See that bush right there upon the skyline?"

"Yes."

"Follow the flares to the end. The going is sound once you're past the last one. Make for yon bush. Behind it you will come upon a trap-door let into the ground. That's the way into the cave. Get me? Well, git. I'm stopping here."

Without waiting to inquire further into Black Jude's intention, Norman slipped away. He found no difficulty in making his way across the remainder of the swamp; and, with a sigh of relief on feeling his feet once more on *terra firma*, he walked cautiously toward the bush upon the skyline.

Left to his own devices, Black Jude quickly retraced his steps toward the Broken Elm, until he reached a point about midway across the swamp. Here he sat down beside one of the flares. He picked up the cable to which it was attached and removed the bulb. With a small screwdriver he began to loosen the screws which held the wires in place. Then he replaced the bulb. He gave a grunt of satisfaction, and began muttering to himself. Once more he was lashing himself into a state of hysteria. He laughed, cried, and cursed alternately. Abruptly he ceased and laid his ear to the ground as if to listen. Then he sat up again, and stared hard toward the Broken Elm.

"One, two, three, four, five..." counted Black Jude, as the figures of five men appeared beside the tree. By the tree they halted, then in single file they began to move toward the nearest flare.

Black Jude, who just a short time before the arrival of the five men had again removed the bulb from the cable, which he was still clutching in his hand, sat in the darkness, quivering with excitement. He turned his head to gaze at the two lights in front of and behind him. They both shone out, the one twenty yards away at "two o'clock," the other thirty yards away at "four o'clock." Roughly forty yards separated them from each other ... forty yards in a dead straight line. "Forty yards! Forty yards to make a grave for them!" cackled Black Jude. He sat motionless as a mummy, watching the five men as they turned and twisted along the line of lights. Slowly they advanced, getting nearer, nearer yet. Black Jude could see them very distinctly now. Four of them were close together, each carrying some load upon their backs. Ten yards or so behind them came the fifth man, empty-handed.

"Seven," said Black Jude. The procession turned slightly to move on to the next flare.

"Eight," murmured Black Jude, as they came up to it. There was a tremor in his voice.

Again the man turned. The leader came abreast with the ninth flare.

"Now! Ye skunks! March!"

The leader paused as if to get his bearings, stood staring at the next flare, then stepped forward.

A yell rent the air. The leader disappeared from view. Black Jude leaped to his feet. Seizing the electric cable with both hands, just above the point of junction with the flare, and putting his feet upon the adjoining length, he wrenched with all his might. The wires parted; every light went out simultaneously. The men in mid-swamp were left floundering helplessly in the dark. Pandemonium broke out into the night. On the one hand, Black Jude, seeing his murderous plot on the verge of fulfilment, was prancing up and down in an ecstasy of triumph, waving his arms above his head and pouring maledictions upon the heads of those on whom he was wreaking horrid vengeance.

"Drown! Drown! You cursed thieves! Ha, ha! Scream for mercy! God in heaven cannot help you now! No! nor the devil in hell, your master! You're done in, you devil's spawn. Black Jude has got you...."

From a short distance away came mingled howls of execration and heartrending cries for help from the three men who, in their efforts to rescue their companion, and in the panic which had ensued upon the extinguishing of the lights, had lost the track and were being sucked down into the bog. For a few minutes the ghastly din continued. Then a last despairing shriek went up, and silence fell.

Within a few yards of the scene of the disaster stood a solitary figure. Unmoved as he watched his four confederates going to their death, he had not stirred a finger to go to their assistance. He had seen Black Jude immediately the latter had started to his feet, and had recognized him instantly. His quick brain had summed up the situation in a flash. Now, as Black Jude once more took up his mad exultant pæan, the man pulled out his gun. Leisurely he examined it, and deliberately took aim.

Black Jude toppled over in a heap.

"You'd better follow the others, my friend," he said aloud. "You'll keep each other company."

He replaced the weapon in his hip-pocket, bent down, and felt for something with his hands upon the ground. After a little groping about he found what he wanted. Very carefully he moved forward, keeping the electric cable running between his fingers. A few minutes later he was standing on the firm ground on the far side of the swamp.

Two men appeared beside him.

"No. 7!" exclaimed the taller of the two. "What's been happening over there?"

"Tell you later, Long Jim," said the other calmly. "No time just now. I've got the document right here. The police are after us."

"But the others..."

"Dead. All the lot of them. And dead men don't tell tales."

The three men were silent as they walked toward the cave. Even Long Jim and Rosenbaum seemed shocked at the callousness displayed by No. 7.

"And the money..." squeaked the Jew.

"You can go and look for it if you want it, Rosenbaum. It's somewhere in that swamp. Say, is that land-mine ready laid?"

"All ready," said Long Jim.

"Better set the fuse, then. I guess we can't use this happy home again."

## CHAPTER XVII

On reaching the bush Norman discovered that he was standing within a few yards of the cliff overlooking the Lake. Immediately in front of him was the entrance to the bandits' secret lair. The trap-door of which Black Jude had spoken stood open, and through it Norman peered down into a kind of wooden structure some twenty feet below. Pausing to listen for any signs of occupation, and hearing naught, he put his foot on the iron ladder which led to the interior. He was soon standing on the floor of a barely furnished room, the most noticeable feature of which was another square aperture, situated in the far corner, from which there was hanging a rope-ladder, probably leading to a second and more secure retreat. Just as he was about to investigate further he heard the sound of voices from below. He drew back and waited. Then he saw the rope-ladder jerk to and fro; somebody was coming up it. He looked hastily round for some place of concealment. One corner of the room was partitioned off. This was the only chance. It was just possible that he might avoid discovery tucked away in the corner and protected from view by the wooden screen. He stole across the room, squeezed himself against the wall, and covered himself with a tarpaulin which had been left lying on the boards.

A man's head and shoulders emerged from the opening in the floor; and Long Jim swung himself lightly to his feet. Bending over the hole, he rallied his companion, who, to judge from the sounds of distress which accompanied his efforts, was climbing painfully behind.

"Come on, Lightning!" he urged. "No. 7's lot'll be here at any minute now. We gotta be ready for 'em."

Rosenbaum's head appeared in view. Long Jim stooped to help him up. The little fat man stood panting after his exertions. Carefully he brushed his trousers and readjusted his coat and waistcoat.

"Poof!" he grumbled. "What d'you think I am? A tra-peze merchant? I tell you, acrobatics don't figure in my *répertoire*...."

The retort caustic which Long Jim's expression foreshadowed was destined to be lost.

"Hello! What's that?" he exclaimed. The echo of a pistol-shot came faintly reverberating into the subterranean chamber.

"Nothing gone wrong, I hope——" began Rosenbaum nervously. Long Jim did not deign to answer. In two bounds he was across the room and shinning up the ladder to the ground above.

"Follow up, Rosie!" he cried over his shoulder. "Guess there's a hitch somewhere..." The rest of his words were inaudible to Norman crouching in his corner, but he heard Rosenbaum's heavy breathing and shuffling steps as the latter clambered clumsily after his more agile companion.

Waiting till the Jew had disappeared through the uppermost trap-door, Norman left his hiding-place with a devout word of thanks to Providence for the timely diversion which had called the bandits off and afforded him a few minutes' grace in which to pursue his search for George. Where could George be? Obviously he must look for him below. He crossed over to the hole in the floor, and the next moment he was swarming down the rope hand over hand.

When his feet touched the ground he found himself standing on the sandy bottom of a cave upon the water's edge. At the mouth of the cave he saw the vague outline of some dark object floating on the water, and, peering through the gloom, he was able to distinguish the hull and wings of a large flying-boat. He walked toward it. A plank led aboard the boat as she lay alongside a ledge of rock. The fact that he had not been challenged led him to conclude that there was nobody on board....

Where could George be? Had these brutes Long Jim and Rosenbaum murdered him already? If not, where could they possibly have hidden him? In the boat, perhaps. Hardly likely; but he might have a look and see. He boarded the deserted craft. The gang-plank led to the cockpit at the forward end; from thence he made his way back to the pilot's seat. Aft of this point he could see the great wings stretching out upon either side, and, overhead, the engine with the propeller-blades behind it.

The set of the wings, the position of the engine and the air-screw, as well as that of the twin pilots' seats, each fitted with a full complement of control levers, enabled the boy to recognize the type of aircraft. It was a big seaplane known as "H.S.2.L.," with the constructive design of which he was familiar enough, as this craft had been one of the standard types used in the U.S. Naval Air Service during the War. The remaining features of the boat easily recalled themselves to his memory. Behind the engine were placed the gasoline-tanks, and behind them again the after-portion of the hull extended for a considerable distance before joining the tail-plane and the stern structure in general. All these details flashed through his mind as he stood there in the darkness. Then his ears caught the sound of a low whistle from the roof of the cave from which he had just come, and immediately afterward that of a man letting himself down the rope-ladder.

There was no retreat. Nor could he stay where he was in the pilot's cockpit. Quickly he made up his mind as to the only possible course; and, jumping on to the deck amidships, he squeezed his body through the narrow space between the tanks. Behind the tanks a small hole gave access to the bottom of the boat. Into this he dropped. He was just in time, for no sooner had he done so than he felt the boat begin to rock.

He could hear footsteps on the plank ... those of three men in succession. Then their voices reached him. One of them—it was neither Long Jim nor Rosenbaum, whose tones were now familiar to him—appeared to be in a towering rage.

"For heaven's sake, get a move on!" he shouted. "Get that engine started up. The police are after us, I tell you. They may be here at any moment. We hadn't time to cover our tracks. Rosie, go and set the fuse. We'll blow this place to hell!"

Again the boat gave a slight lurch as the Jew stepped ashore to carry out his mission.

"Some one blabbed," the voice went on. "I don't know who.... But whoever it was is for it when I get a hold on him. Maybe it was Black Jude. If so, he's paid out. Say, what about those kids? One of them was down at Yonge Street with the cops. He winged Darley Dick, curse him! Did you say you'd collared the other?"

"Yep," answered Long Jim. "He walked into the parlour like any little fly. Got him trussed up in the locker astern."

"I'll go and take a look at him."

"Oh, leave him be. You can talk to him later when we get over the other side ... that is, if you want to. We thought of dropping him overboard. Less trouble..."

"Hurry up, Rosie," shouted the other. "What are you playing at? We can't wait all night. Start up, Long Jim."

The engine started up with a muffled roar. Slowly the boat moved away from the landing-stage and slid over the smooth water.

Norman, who from his position of comparative security behind the tanks had been drinking in every word of the men's conversation, felt his heart jump for joy. George was here, then, in the boat, somewhere close beside him. He had almost given his friend up for lost, but now he had by a stroke of fortune stumbled right against him. He dived into the interior of the hull and groped about him in the darkness. His hand touched something lying against the side of the boat. It was a human body.... George!

"It's all right, boy," whispered Norman. "It's me. Gosh! but I'm glad!" With his knife he soon cut the ropes which bound George's hands and feet, and in another instant he had the gag out of his friend's mouth.

The boys could talk at their ease. The noise of the engine would prevent them from being overheard by the men in the forward portion of the boat.

"By gad, Norman, you're a trump!" exclaimed George, rubbing his mouth, still sore from the effects of the gag, and stretching his cramped limbs. "I thought my number was up all right. How the blazes did you get in here?"

"Managed to give them the slip," said Norman. "Just luck, you know. It was my own skin that I was trying to save. I'd no idea what had happened to you."

Briefly each recounted his adventures to the other.

"Well, we're in a nice fix now," concluded George. "Cooped up in this confounded hole."

"Oh, we'll get out of it somehow!" cried the ever optimistic Norman. "Cheer up!"

"That's all jolly fine!" grumbled George. "We're prisoners in this boat. I know what they intend to do with me, and I expect they'll do the same to you when they find you. A watery grave for the pair of us. That's what it amounts to!"

"Oh, rot! We must find a way out somehow. There are two of us now. You're no longer tied up, and we're both full of fight."

"But we're unarmed—at least, I am. They took away my gun. Have you got yours?"

"Yes, but only one round of ammunition left."

"Humph! I wonder if there is any sort of weapon lying around here."

"There might be. We'll have a look."

Norman produced his electric torch; but the only potential weapon of defence to be found was a heavy spanner which had been left in an otherwise empty tool-chest.

"Better than nothing," said George, slipping it into his pocket, "and, anyhow, if they do come to chuck us overboard there can only be two of them. One *must* stay forward and pilot the machine. I dare say we can make a fight of it."

Norman did not answer; he was engrossed with his own thoughts.

"I'm just going to have a peep outside," he said at length.

Moving with the utmost caution, he climbed out of the hole and stretched himself at full length on the deck. He looked around him. It was still dark; and, as far as he could judge, the boat was now about a mile from land. She was still taxi-ing slowly toward the open Lake, gliding over the smooth black water as gracefully as a giant swan. Overhead the engine throbbed, but the silencers attached to the exhaust-manifolds effectually reduced its normal roar to a gentle hum.

On the starboard beam lay the lights of Toronto Harbour; a number of other points of light dotted the cliffs on either side.... The boy was beginning to wonder why Long Jim and his companions were loitering about offshore when the voice of the third and unknown member of the party to some extent enlightened him.

"It's just on time now," remarked the voice. "Provided, of course, you set the fuse right. Did you, Rosenbaum?"

"I did, I swear I did," came the whining tones of the Jew.

"Well, we'll give it another two or three minutes, and then we must beat it. How far is it to our little pond, Long Jim?"

"Seventy miles, I reckon."

"How long will it take us?"

"Seventy or eighty minutes. It depends if the wind gets up at dawn. There's no darned hurry; I can't land before there's light enough."

"Oh, shucks! There'll be light enough in half an hour. We've got to get there..." The remainder of the man's words were lost. As he had been speaking the bow of the boat had swung round, so that it was now pointing inshore...

Suddenly a dull red flash of light lit up the foot of the cliff about the spot where the robbers' cave was situated. Immediately following the flash a column of black smoke leaped into the sky, spreading outward as it rose, until it assumed the form of a gigantic toadstool. A fraction of a second later the report of an explosion reached the boat, which shook under the blast of displaced air. Then came the noise of the falling *débris* ... stones, rocks, earth, and even trees, which had been hurled as much as three hundred feet into the air, and which were now descending upon land and water.

There was a grim grandeur in the scene. Little tongues of fire licked the sides of the cliff; then the woodwork of the hut burst into flame.

"Not so bad, Rosenbaum!" came the voice from the bow of the boat. "I guess it'll worry those fly cops to get much information out of that scrapheap. We can push off now, Long Jim."

The throttle was opened out; and the seaplane swung round again, making for the south.

Norman crept back to join his friend.

"George," he said, "we've got to take charge of this darned bus. We've simply got to do it, and that's all there is about it. D'you hear?"

"I hear. But how do you propose to set about it?"

"I've got a plan."

"Let's hear it."

Norman unfolded his scheme.

"Pretty long odds against its coming off," was George's first comment when Norman had finished talking.

"But it is our only chance. We're sure dead as mutton otherwise."

"That's so. Well, I'm with you, boy, though it's a stiff proposition to take on."

"Think of the alternative."

"Not attractive, is it?"

Norman's scheme was nothing if not bold. He proposed to attack the three men in control of the flying-boat by approaching them from behind and holding them up at the point of the revolver. This could only be done once the machine was in the air. So long as they lay on the water an attack would be impossible. The men outnumbered the boys, were fully armed, and had all the necessary freedom of movement. In the air, on the other hand, the balance inclined more in favour of the boys. Long Jim, at least, would be handicapped by the necessity of handling the control. As for the other two, their movements would be cramped by the rush of the wind set up by the forward motion of the machine.

"Now one of them will be sitting beside Long Jim..." said George, always a demon for detail.

"That'll be Rosenbaum," put in Norman.

"Then the other will be farther forward. We can get at the two in the pilots' seats, but what about the other?"

"We'll have to shoot him."

"You've only one round left. They don't know that, of course. But if you miss, and you don't fire again, it will rather give the show away."

"I don't feel like missing ... after what I've seen to-night," said Norman grimly.

"Isn't it rather like shooting a man in cold blood?" demanded George.

"He wouldn't hesitate to do the same to us."

"No, that's true," George sighed.

A pause.

"Suppose we do succeed in getting control of it, do you think we can fly this hulking great machine? It isn't like an Avro, you know...." George seemed still assailed with doubts.

"See here, George! You've flown a Bristol. That's heavier than an Avro. This thing, I guess, is twice as heavy again. That's all there is to it. We know the theory, and we've got to get through with it.... We'll push her down somehow, you bet your life!"

George had made difficulties; it was in accordance with his nature to do so. But, as Norman well knew, there was nobody less likely to be deterred by difficulties than George himself. The more he grumbled, the better Norman liked it. There could be no surer sign that his friend was hardening in his determination to carry out the venture.

The first glimmerings of dawn had touched the sky when the big flying-boat, after a long run, left the water and mounted at a flat angle into the air after the manner of a goose, heavily, clumsily, and with much ado. The 'cut-out' on the exhausts had been opened, and the roar of the engine became almost deafening.

Norman nudged his friend, beckoned him to follow, and pulled himself out on to the deck. Cautiously, in the face of the wind, he made his way forward, until he was crouching under the lee of the starboard gasoline-tank. Here, he waited for George to come into position on his left.

The machine had now risen to a height of about five hundred feet. Below the water was taking on the opalescent hues of the early morning light. Behind them the cliffs stood out—a dark band between the sky and lake, while the white mist hid the trees and blotted out the farther landscape.

At a given signal both boys moved forward. Norman pulled himself on to the tank behind Long Jim. Lying on his stomach, he wriggled to within three feet of the back of the bandit's head, while the unsuspecting trio, gazing straight in front of them, remained oblivious of his approach.

He took careful aim at the man in the forward cockpit. It was no easy shot in the face of a sixty-mile-per-hour wind, with the machine liable to bump at any moment ... and it was his last round. But the boy took no chances. When he pulled the trigger his aim was good and true. The man gave a start, then his body sagged over to one side, and his head dropped on his breast.

Only for an instant did Norman allow his eyes to dwell upon his victim, then he turned to tackle Long Jim. The latter had almost jumped out of his skin at the violence of the report of the revolver, fired a few inches from his ear. He faced about to find himself staring into the smoking muzzle of the gun.

"Don't move your hands, or you are a dead man," yelled Norman, and Long Jim understood well enough to obey.

"Shut off the throttle," ordered the boy, and the roar of the engine died away as the man pulled back the lever.

"Now, turn about...."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" retorted Long Jim, opening up the throttle to its full extent. His quick eye had caught a

movement which Norman failed to observe.... A pistol-shot rang out. Norman's right arm dropped, his revolver fell from his hand and clattered on to the deck behind him. The force of the blow of the bullet all but knocked him off his perch; and it was only due to the fact that he was clinging to a strut with his left hand that he was saved from being pitched overboard.

Rosenbaum, on hearing the first shot, had whipped out his own gun and had fired point-blank at Norman.

George had been slightly behindhand in getting to his place. He had caught his foot in one of the bracing-wires, and this delay had afforded the Jew just that vital space of time in which to act. But his marksmanship had been at fault; and he was given no chance of correcting his mistake. As he was about to fire a second time George's spanner came down with a crash between his eyes. Rosenbaum subsided in his seat like an ox beneath the pole-axe. As luck would have it, his inanimate limbs fell across the control wheel, pushing it right forward. The boat, in consequence, went into a steep nose-dive; and Long Jim, who, quick to take advantage of the turn of events, had in his turn pulled out his revolver and was about to fire at George, was thrown off his balance, forced to drop his weapon, and to concentrate his attention upon righting the machine.

George threw himself forward and snatched the revolver. With an oath Long Jim flung out an arm to recover it, but it was too late. George drew back out of reach, and, pointing the gun at its late owner, "Fly straight on!" he commanded, and again Long Jim was constrained to comply.

George's next care was to ascertain the nature of Norman's injury. The latter's arm lay limply at his side. It was paining him considerably, but he was determined not to let his wound interfere with the plan of campaign.

"It's nothing, only a flesh wound," he declared in answer to George's questioning. He lied. He could feel the grating of the broken bone, and it was agony to move his arm.

George crawled nearer to his friend.

"Say, Norman," he shouted in the other's ear, "we'll have to take over the controls of this machine. This guy," he indicated Long Jim with a nod of his head, "is too desperate a customer to be allowed to remain in charge. He is quite capable of crashing into the lake and killing us and himself into the bargain, rather than chuck up the sponge."

Norman nodded assent; he felt too weak to speak.

"You keep him covered with this gun," went on George, "while I get the other man out of the way. I'll try to drag him out of the cockpit and heave him on to the tank behind."

"Right oh! And then what?" asked Norman dully.

"We'll drop into the pilots' seats."

"What about Long Jim?"

"He can crawl out forward, and lie flat on the deck."

Again Norman nodded agreement. He took the proffered revolver and held it within a foot of Long Jim's neck.

"Now, sir, no monkey tricks!" he warned.

George found it no easy task to shift Rosenbaum's body out of the cockpit and on to the tank behind, but eventually he succeeded. Then he dropped into the pilot's seat beside Long Jim.

"You climb out of there," he addressed the bandit; "get forward and lie out along the deck." An admonitory jab in the back from the muzzle of the revolver induced Long Jim to vacate his place, and with infinite precaution Norman lowered himself into the empty seat.

The boys were now in full control of the machine. They were still proceeding southward at a cruising speed of about sixty miles an hour. During the time which had elapsed since the beginning of the struggle with the bandits they had covered a distance of some fifteen miles, leaving the coast directly behind them.

Not the least alarming part of this adventurous day lay before them. They were aloft in a seaplane, a type of aircraft of the peculiarities of which they had no practical knowledge, the sum total of their experience as pilots being relegated to a few short hours in an Avro and a few short minutes in a Bristol Fighter during the past week.

They were at a height of about fifteen hundred feet above Lake Ontario, fifteen miles from Toronto, with three desperadoes aboard, two of whom were incapacitated and the third a potential danger deterred from hostile action only by the threat of a revolver. Moreover, one of them, Norman, was badly wounded, and, although he refused to admit it, gradually weakening, a fact of which George was well aware. George set his teeth. The rest of it was up to him, more or less.

He seized the control wheel and placed his feet firmly on the rudder-bar.

"Better leave her to me," he shouted to Norman. "Save your arm as much as possible."

How heavy the controls felt! Could he bring the boat down safely into Toronto Harbour? His heart was full of misgivings.

He must turn and head for land. Gently at first he pushed on the right rudder-bar, gently he turned the wheel to the right. The machine made no response. Harder he pushed, and harder. At last she began to answer. The sweat gathered on his brow. The sluggishness of the machine appalled him. So heavy and slow was she that George had begun to wonder whether the controls had been damaged in the fray.

At last he succeeded in edging the nose round. That he had made too flat a turn he knew. He felt the wind on his face as he side-slipped. He was glad that McIntyre's eye was not upon him.

Now they were heading straight for Toronto Harbour. For the moment it was all plain sailing; but how he dreaded the landing that was to come! He put the nose down, and pulled it up again, practising imaginary landings in the air, so as to get a better idea of the feel of the machine.

*Crash!* George felt a bullet whistle past his ear. Both boys turned to look behind them, whence the shot had come. On the top of the tanks knelt Rosenbaum. He had evidently been knocked senseless by the blow which George had dealt him, and had now recovered consciousness. Fortunately he was still half dazed; his eyes were staring wildly. His shot had missed the mark; he was taking aim again. George ducked; a second shot passed just above his head. He seized the monkey-wrench which lay beside him. At that moment Long Jim began to move.

"Keep Long Jim covered," yelled George to Norman, and, rising in his seat, he hurled the heavy iron spanner with all his might at Rosenbaum. It caught the Jew full in the face. He staggered backward, putting out a foot to save himself. His foot just missed the after-edge of the tank. He threw out a hand to clutch a strut, just failed to reach it, fell back, his body missing the whirling blades of the propeller by a fraction of an inch, crashed on to the deck below, rolled over, and dropped, struggling frantically, down toward the waters of the Lake. A piercing scream which trailed away to nothing was the last of Rosenbaum. He had met with the end which he himself had meted out for George. Vile creature that he was, the boys could not help feeling shocked at the horrible fate which had overtaken him.

Norman, whose strength had been well-nigh exhausted by loss of blood and the strain of the previous hours, came very near to fainting. George, ever sympathetic, murmured a few words of encouragement, and braced himself for the final effort.

"It's all right, old boy," he declared, with the emphasis of one trying to convince himself with the sound of brave words. "Our troubles'll soon be over now. I guess I can land this bus safely in the harbour. She's very like a Bristol."

Nevertheless, he by no means felt the confidence which his words expressed. He shut the throttle and gently pushed the nose down. The aneroid showed nine hundred feet, and he calculated that four miles only separated him from the

harbour bar. The next thing to be done was to discover the direction of the wind. Although it was now quite light the land lay wrapped in the early morning haze. He searched up and down the coast for signs of drifting smoke. Only a few tall factory chimneys seemed to be awake, and the smoke from their heads wound round about in lazy, eddying waves, until it became indistinguishable from the mist.

"There can't be much wind," thought George. "I'd better take the longest run."

By this time he was flying at about five hundred feet over the harbour. The longest expanse of water lay to the east and west. Laboriously he pulled the seaplane round and headed westward in order to give himself the utmost latitude. He would fly in under the power of his engine, throttle back at the last possible moment, and drop on to the water.

A mile or so to the westward of the harbour he turned about, and flew, quickly losing height, toward the flat, calm sheet of water protected by the mole.

The hills and houses on his left-hand side grew nearer and larger. A quick side-glance in their direction told him that he was on a level with the roofs of the buildings on the quayside. He must be very near the water, though he had not realized it. Then he remembered that McIntyre had once told him that the refraction of light off the surface made the distance between seaplane and water, especially when within a few feet of the surface, difficult to judge with any precision.

George was much nearer the water than he had thought, both because he had misjudged his distance and because the heavy flying-boat had been sinking through the air more quickly than he knew. He pulled up the nose, but it was too late. The bow of the boat hit the water, rebounded, and pointed at an acute angle into the air. Down went the nose again, plunging a foot or so beneath the water, which swept over the hull in a great wave, drenching all on board. Feeling himself incapable of further controlling the antics of the machine, George sat back, hoping for the best, merely contenting himself with trying to keep the control levers central. The boat continued to 'porpoise' its way up the harbour, gradually losing speed, until it came to a standstill, presenting a sorry appearance as it sat lopsided and askew upon the water. The 'landing' had strained every bracing-wire in the machine and every timber in the hull. She was leaking fast, and nearly waterlogged.

But George was not ill pleased with himself. He was thankful to have got down at all without mishap to himself and his passengers.

"Thank God!" he breathed, and looked at Norman, who just managed to raise a wan smile of appreciation before he fell into a dead faint.

Seeing George completely absorbed in his efforts to restore Norman to consciousness, Long Jim decided to seize the opportunity of making a dash for liberty. Cautiously drawing his body to the side of the boat, he quietly slipped over the side and dived away. The sound of a splash of water attracted George's notice. He looked up to find that Long Jim had disappeared. That the bandit had gone overboard was clear enough, but no sign of him could George discover.

Long Jim could count swimming among his varied catalogue of accomplishments; in this form of exercise he was, indeed, an expert. But even so he did not at once strike out for the shore. The boy in the boat was armed, and he had no wish to get a bullet through the back of his head. Consequently he made his way to the stern end of the boat, out of sight of anyone standing in the pilot's seat. Under the protection of the tail-plane he divested himself of as much of his clothing as he could, dived again, and proceeded to swim under water in a straight line away from the seaplane, so that, when forced to come up for air, he would still be keeping the rear portion of the machine between himself and George.

The ruse very nearly achieved success. It was not until the man had gained a considerable distance that George saw a small black object break the surface and disappear again. The small object was Long Jim's head. When it reappeared George found, as Long Jim had calculated, his line of fire impeded. He fired twice, both shots went wide; but they were not unavailing.

The harbour picket-boat had been manned and launched immediately on the landing of the strange seaplane. The picket-boat had been tearing across the water, and was now quite close. The splash of George's bullets caught the eye of the helmsman, and he too saw the small black object rise above the water. He put the helm hard over, and, a few minutes

later, Long Jim was hauled into the launch.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Captain McIntyre, already astir and on his way to the aerodrome, thinking to give one of his pupils an early morning lesson, had espied the strange seaplane coming in to land, and had dashed down to the quayside in order to discover the identity of this curious and apparently unregistered craft. He had arrived just in time to see the actual landing. "Gosh, but that was a near thing!" he exclaimed, as the nose of the machine struck the water and the bows buried themselves beneath the surface. "She's over! No! by gad, she's not! That guy's in luck.... Never saw a worse display.... Wonder who it can be...."

His curiosity increased when he saw two bullets hit the water, and the picket-boat suddenly alter its course and pick up a man swimming in the harbour; but his amazement knew no bounds when, after having taken three more men off the sinking seaplane, the boat drew alongside the landing-stage, and sitting in the stern sheets he recognized his two young friends.

"Well, I'll be hanged!..." he muttered, and ran to join the procession which was making its way toward the Harbour-master's office. His surprise grew, and still it grew, as he listened to George's narration of the story of his adventures to the astonished officials.

"Well, if that don't beat the band!..." was all the worthy Harbour-master could find to say when George ceased speaking. He had been hastily summoned from his bed to deal with so unusual an occasion, and he could hardly persuade himself that he was not still dreaming. He turned and surveyed Long Jim's eminently substantial person; then, in a voice which almost pleaded for confutation of so fantastic a fairy-tale, he asked, "And what have you to say to all this, my man?"

Long Jim, who, on George's urgent representations, had been arrested and placed under an armed guard, looked up.

"Huh! I guess you've got the dope," he said indifferently, and smiling in the direction of the two boys. "I've got to hand it to you two kids this time. You got me beat ... fair and square. I'm not one to bear a grudge!"

"Who's your friend?" cut in the Harbourmaster. "He's in a pretty bad shape, I hear...."

No. 7, who had not been killed by Norman's bullet, but severely wounded in the chest, had been taken straight off to hospital.

"Find out for yourself," retorted Long Jim. "I'm not one for squealing either."

"The police will attend to that, I reckon."

The necessary formalities concluded, the Harbour-master, fully alive to the condition of the two boys, dispatched them home with the least possible delay. McIntyre accompanied them to Mr Renton's house, where, after Norman's arm had been set, and their physical wants duly attended to, George's even more astounded parents listened open-mouthed to the recitation of events from the beginning to the end.

"But how on earth did you come to discover the existence of this gang of bandits in the first place?" asked McIntyre.

Then came the story of the writing-pad.

The recital finished, McIntyre rose to take his leave. His voice was choked and his eyes suffused with tears.

"It would be superfluous for me to say that you fellows have put up one of the finest shows in the history of aviation

... but apart from that I want to thank you personally. You have avenged the death of my great friend ... Roberts. You cannot realize quite what that means to me...." He made for the door; on reaching it, he turned, and added whimsically, "When you're both fit again you must come up to the aerodrome and do a few more landings. That was very nearly an awful mess you made of it just now."

"Good old Mac!" cried George, as the door closed behind his instructor. "We could never have done anything if it had not been for him."

"Now you simply must get some sleep, you two," declared Mrs Renton, urging the boys to bed. She embraced her son. "George, dear, how could you have done such a thing? Killing a man! Just fancy! Now swear to me that you will never go up in one of those nasty, dangerous aeroplanes again. You'll worry your poor old mother into her grave!"

"Oh, Mother, now, really ... it's quite all right..."

Mr Renton interrupted. "I'm downright proud of you, my boy, and of your friend Norman. But, for heaven's sake, leave this sleuth stuff to the police in future.... Your ... er ... mother wouldn't like it ... she wouldn't, sure...."

The news of the achievement of George Renton and Norman Marshall spread through the town like wildfire; for days it was the sole topic of conversation within and out of doors. When the full details of the story became public property, and it was known that in the persons of Long Jim and No. 7 the police had, through the instrumentality of the boys, laid hands upon two of the cleverest and most elusive characters in the world of crime—leaders, moreover, of that mysterious organization known as the Water-snakes, the objects and ramifications of which were still but dimly apprehended by the authorities—enthusiasm knew no bounds. Following upon an intensive Press campaign, it was decided by the Municipal Council that the two young heroes of the hour should be invited to attend a reception to be held in their honour as an outward expression of thanks for their services to the community at large.

On the date appointed the ceremony took place.

George and Norman, feeling more wretched and uncomfortable under a shower of congratulations from all and sundry than ever they had done in all the course of their adventures with the bandit gang, made themselves as inconspicuous as possible in the body of the hall.

A bell rang. The Mayor rose to his feet. Silence fell.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I think that you will all agree with me that of late years ... not, in fact, since the epic of the Great War ... has anything so stirred our imaginations as this magnificent display of courage and initiative on the part of our two young fellow-citizens. I rise to say—and I am very glad to be in a position to say—that the admiration evoked in a certain quarter by this valorous exploit has taken a ... er ... concrete form. Mr Oscar P. Vandervelde, whose name as a philanthropist is so widely known that he needs no introduction from me, has just instructed me to say that he would deem it an honour if George Renton and Norman Marshall would accept at his hands as a token of his esteem a gift of ten thousand dollars, a sum of money which he ventures to hope may help them in the pursuit of aviation...."

The remainder of the Mayor's words were drowned in an outburst of cheering.

A quarter of an hour later Norman was standing outside the Townhall waiting for Mr Renton's car...

A tall man, broad-shouldered and powerfully built, came down the steps. His head was massive, and covered with thick grey hair. A large pair of blue-tinted, horn-rimmed spectacles concealed his eyes. His thin lips were tightly closed; his jaw was firm and square. For a man of his proportions his movements were extraordinarily lithe and graceful.

Norman wondered vaguely who the man could be....

A large motor-car was standing by the pavement; the chauffeur sprang to open the door; a police-sergeant on duty saluted the man as he stepped in. The door closed, and the car slid away....

Norman gave a bound which brought him into violent contact with the sergeant on the kerbstone. It was the peculiar, high-pitched whine of the engine, which he had learned to know so well, coming from the fast-disappearing car that had electrified the boy.

"Halloa! Where are you coming to?" demanded the surprised police-officer.

"Whose car was that?" asked Norman excitedly.

"What? The gentleman that drove away just then?"

"Yes, yes. Who is he?"

"Why, that was Mr Oscar P. Vandervelde, the American multi-millionaire." The sergeant's tones conveyed respectful awe.

Norman gasped.

"It isn't possible!" he exclaimed aloud. "But ... if it is ... by gad, that fellow's got a queer kind of sense of humour!"

Norman stood absolutely motionless, staring fixedly up the street, with such a curious expression in his eyes that both Mr Renton, who at that moment arrived to carry him off home, and the sergeant of police began to wonder whether the strain which he had undergone had not upset his mental balance.

But Norman, like Æneas of old, was revolving many things in his mind.

[End of *The Flying Squad*, by Colonel W. A. Bishop V.C. and Major R. Stuart-Wortley]