

Ralphson George Harvey

**Boy Scouts in the Canal Zone:
or, The Plot Against Uncle Sam**



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G. Harvey Ralphson

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CHAPTER I

THE PLOT AGAINST THE GATUN DAM

“Five Black Bears, two Wolves, and a Panther. That would be a choice collection of wild animals to take to the Canal Zone.”

The remark was greeted with shouts of laughter, and then the boys in the handsome clubroom of the Black Bear Patrol, in the city of New York, settled down to a serious discussion of the topic of the evening. There were seven present, Ned Nestor and Jimmie McGraw, of the Wolf Patrol; George Tolford, Harry Stevens, Glen Howard, and Jack Bosworth, of the famous Black Bear Patrol; and Peter Fenton, of the Panther Patrol. They ranged in age from thirteen to seventeen, Jimmie being the youngest and Ned Nestor the oldest of the group.

They were all enthusiastic Boy Scouts, and their clubrooms were well supplied with boxing gloves, foils, and footballs, as well as weapons and articles necessary on camping expeditions. The clubroom in which the boys were assembled on this gusty night in early April was situated in the upper part of the fine residence of Jack’s father, on Fifth avenue. The Black Bear Patrol was composed almost entirely of the sons of very wealthy parents, and the boys were off to the woods and waters whenever opportunity offered.

In company with Lieutenant Gordon, of the United States Secret Service, and Frank Shaw, a member of the Black Bear Patrol, whose arrival was momentarily expected, the boys present had, on the previous day, returned from a series of unusual and exciting experiences in Mexico, and now they were discussing a proposed plan for an excursion to the Canal Zone. Of course they could make the trip if they desired, but what they wanted was to go in the company of Lieutenant Gordon, sent there on a secret mission by the Secretary of War.

“Aw, come on, Ned, an’ be a good feller,” Jimmie McGraw urged, as Nestor expressed a doubt as to the advisability of taking the boys on the Canal Zone trip, to which he had been invited by the lieutenant, both as assistant and companion. “Let us go! We’ll talk the lieutenant into letting us go along if you’ll say a good word for us.”

During the trip to Mexico to which reference has been made, Ned Nestor had succeeded in averting serious complications between the government of that rebellious republic and the government of the United States. Through his efforts a threatened raid across the Rio Grande from the Mexican side had been checked on the very border, and the secret service men associated with him did not hesitate to declare that his tact and activity had done much to prevent a war between the two countries.

Before leaving the scene of their operations in Mexico, Lieutenant Gordon had been ordered to New York on important official business. Only an inkling of what that official business was contained in his letter of instructions. Only the bare fact that complications in the Canal Zone were placing the Panama Canal in danger was conveyed to him. Later, after his arrival in New York, he had learned that the government suspected plots to destroy the great Gatun dam by the use of explosives.

Only a hint of the threatened danger had been conveyed to the War department, but that was enough to set on foot the investigation of which Lieutenant Gordon was to be the head. One of the lieutenant’s first acts after receiving his instructions was to secure the services of Ned Nestor, being guided in this by the wonderful success of the boy’s efforts in Mexico.

Thus it chanced that on this night every boy who had had the good fortune to share in the Mexican adventures was importuning Nestor to use his influence with the lieutenant in order that they might all be taken into the party. They had already gained the consent of their parents, Nestor, individually, was willing, and it only remained to convince Lieutenant Gordon that they could be of use to him and the government on the Canal Zone.

“If you don’t loosen up and take us with you,” Harry Stevens declared, with a grin in the direction of his companions, “we’ll give you a chase to the equator. You know how you found Jimmie in George’s bed? Well, if you don’t take us along with you, you’ll find us all in your bed before you get to Panama.”

“It seems a pity to unload such a mess of wild animals on the people of the Zone,” laughed Nestor, “but we’ll leave it all to Lieutenant Gordon. Lavish your honeyed words and smiles on him!”

“What’s it all about, anyway?” demanded Jimmie. “It’s something concerning the big canal, I know, for I heard you two talking of explosives at the Gatun dam.”

“We all heard that,” cried Jack Bosworth. “You can’t keep secrets from us. What is it all about? Is some one trying to blow up the big dam?”

Nestor looked into the faces of the boys with serious eyes. He had not suspected that they knew anything definite regarding the secret mission, and was annoyed to think that he in part might be to blame for the leak which had been discovered.

“Is that what you’re going for?” asked Harry Stevens. “Are you going to mix with governmental affairs again? Because we’ve got to go if you are. Honest, now, we won’t say a word if you tell us.”

“Do you all promise that?” asked Nestor.

“Sure we do,” came in chorus.

“Well, then,” Nestor went on, “we don’t know much about the matter, except that there are hostile influences at work down there, directed against the canal. We do not know the proposed point of attack, but presume that the big dam is in the greatest danger. We do not even know where to look for the plotters, or whether they are Americans or of foreign birth. The motive for the contemplated destruction of the great waterway is not even surmised. In fact, for all we know, this may be a scare, but the thing is serious enough to call for rigid investigation, so down there we go.”

“Sure you can’t get along without us!” cried Jimmie. “If you want to know who is at the bottom of it all, just ask me. It’s the railroads. I’ve heard men say the canal would have been finished years ago only for the determined opposition of the transcontinental lines.”

“Much you know about it!” cried Harry Stevens. “If anybody should ask you where to look for the trouble, put your finger on the map of Japan. The little brown men are digging under the Gatun dam if any one is.”

“It does not seem possible that either the Japanese government or the railroad interests would descend to such despicable work,” Nestor said. “I won’t believe it of either of them until I have absolute proof.”

“It would be going some to blow up the Gatun dam,” Peter Fenton cut in. “Why, when finished, that dam will be more than a hundred feet high, and will cover one hundred and sixty-four square miles with water. Its purpose is to huddle the highland streams into a lake which will become a part of the canal. This lake will cover plantations, small farms, villages, and even the present right of way of the Panama railroad.”

“If they succeed in blowing up the Gatun dam,” Jack said, “there will be no Canal Completion Exposition in San Francisco in four years. That would be a shame, for we were all going.”

“Think of all that land being put down in the bed of a lake!” Harry Stevens exclaimed. “We ought to have taken a tip when the canal was first talked about and bought up that property. Uncle Sam would have bought it of us at a fancy price. Just think of a sure-thing speculation like that.”

Peter Fenton, known as the Encyclopedia, sat back in his chair and laughed until his face was as red as the painted snout of the black bear which looked down from a shield on the wall. The boys shook him up until he regained the power of speech.

“If you boys had been one year old when the Panama Canal was first mentioned,” he managed to say, choking back his laughter, “you would now stand at the venerable age of four hundred and sixteen years.”

“I guess you get your history in the dream book,” Jimmie cried.

“Nixy dream book,” declared Peter, with the dignity which comes of much knowledge. “The Spaniards who lived in the Province of New Granada, on the Isthmus of Darien, as it was then called, planned a ship canal across the neck in the year 1518, and there has been talk of the big ditch ever since.”

“Then it takes a long time to get at the job,” suggested Jimmie. “The trench could have been scooped out with a teaspoon in less than four hundred years.”

“Wait until you get down there! You’ll see what impression your teaspoon would make. I’ve been reading up since I’ve returned to New York, and know something about the size of the job. The canal will cost millions more than Congress figured on, and the job is going ahead without graft, at that.”

“Still,” Harry Stevens interrupted, “it would have been a wise move to have annexed a lot of that land.”

“If your speculation had developed when the first talk of the canal was heard,” Peter went on, “you would have had to do business with King Ferdinand, of Spain. He would have put the soil on the bargain counter for you one day and shot you up the next. That wouldn’t have been so cheerful.”

“Nice party to do business with,” laughed Harry.

“He was next to his king job, all right,” Peter continued. “He was there with the gunpowder when any subject stood to put anything over on him. He caused Columbus to be returned to Spain in chains, and permitted one of his officials to shoot up the first white man who ever looked out on the Pacific from the divide of the Isthmus. He carried things by a large majority, did Ferdinand.”

“It was his queen who put her jewels in soak to buy a ship for Columbus,” commented Jack Bosworth. “I read about it when I was laid up with my broken arm. You remember the time the horse climbed into my motor car?”

“The police say you never stopped running until you bumped against one of the White Mountains,” laughed Harry. “Who was this white man who first climbed the divide?” he asked; “as I’m going down there, I want to know. I may set up a monument to his memory.”

“Don’t be too sure about going,” warned Glen Howard. “Lieutenant Gordon may kick on the whole bunch of us.”

“Then we’ll all go down in my motor boat,” replied Harry. “You can’t keep me out of the Canal Zone when there’s things doing.”

“The man’s name was Balboa,” said Peter, in answer to the question, as he smiled at this tardy recognition of the services of the explorer. “He went broke at St. Domingo, one day in the year 1510, and hired a fellow to head him up in a wine cask and put the cask on board a ship bound for Darien. He made the trip, all right, and landed broke, but in three years he was captain of the precinct, as they say in Manhattan, and on his way to the Pacific. He looked out on the big ocean for the first time on the 26th of September, 1513. Some say it was the 25th. I don’t know which is right.”

The door of the clubroom now opened and Lieutenant Gordon entered. He was a man of not more than thirty, with a stern though not forbidding face and an alert military figure. His brown eyes lighted up with sudden humor as he dodged the clamorous boys, and dropped into a chair.

“What about it?” asked Jimmie, who seemed to be a favorite with the officer. “Do we go with you, or do we trail along in the motor boat?”

“The man higher up,” began the lieutenant, “says you may go with me if you will try to –”

There was no necessity for the lieutenant going on with the sentence. He had warned the boys so many times as to their conduct on the Isthmus, if permitted to go with the secret service men, that they now knew in advance what he was going to say, and they repeated his former admonitions with shouts of laughter.

“All right,” said the lieutenant, trying to look dignified, “if you won’t listen you can’t go.”

“Go on an’ talk your chin off,” shouted Jimmie. “We’ll listen to every word until our arms drop to the floor.”

“Never mind that now,” laughed the officer. “I’m too busy at present to speak the advice you’ll all forget before I’m out of the room. Where is Frank Shaw? I came here to see him.”

“He was coming down to-night,” George Tolford replied, “but it is so late now that he may not be here. Anything special?”

“Why, yes,” was the reply. “I want to know what he has been saying to his father about the difficulty in the Canal Zone.”

“Why, he doesn’t know anything to tell,” said Nestor, “not even as much as the boys here now know, for I have talked the situation over with them but not with him.”

“What do they know regarding the situation?” asked the lieutenant, apprehensively.

“Nothing except that the Panama canal is threatened by some unknown influence.”

“Well,” said the lieutenant, thoughtfully, “some one has been leaking, and it seems as if our first move in the game must be made right here in New York.”

“It wasn’t Frank that leaked,” Jimmie asserted, in defense of his friend. “He wouldn’t do such a thing, and he couldn’t tell what he didn’t know, anyway,” with which logical conclusion the boy turned his back to the group.

“There is something wrong somewhere,” Lieutenant Gordon said. “Wait until I tell you what took place this afternoon and you will agree with me.”

CHAPTER II.

THEFT OF THE EMERALD NECKLACE

“Early this afternoon,” the lieutenant went on as the boys gathered about him, “I was interviewed by a reporter for the *Daily Planet*.”

“Frank’s father owns that newspaper,” Jimmie suggested.

“Yes,” said the officer, “and that is why I thought Frank might know something of the origin of the inquiry. The reporter was not slow in getting at the point he was in my rooms to discuss. Almost the first question he asked me was this: ‘Is it true that the government has ordered you to the Canal Zone to investigate an alleged plot to blow up the Gatun dam?’ Coming from a reporter, as it did, the question knocked me all in a heap.”

Ned Nestor leaned forward with a new interest showing in his face.

“I should think so,” he said. “What did you tell him?”

“I tried to bluff him out at first, but soon learned that he knew more about the Zone situation than I did. He didn’t get much information from me, but I learned from him that the *Daily Planet* is wise to the whole situation, as the boys say. Now, the question is this: ‘Where did the editor secure his information?’ I asked him in so many words, but he only laughed at me.”

“The place to go for that information,” Nestor suggested, “is to the editor himself. Mr. Shaw would, of course, know all about it.”

“That is exactly what I thought,” said the lieutenant, “so I lost no time in getting to the editorial rooms. Mr. Shaw was there, and treated me very courteously, but the only satisfaction I could get from him was the information that he knew something of what was going on, and was doing his best to secure enough facts regarding the matter for a news story.”

“I may be able to get more than that out of him,” George ventured.

“I doubt it,” the lieutenant said, “for he is afraid some rival newspaper will get an inkling of the matter and beat him out on the sensation he is preparing. It seems that his men have discovered documentary evidence of some sort, papers which might be of great value in the hands of the government.”

“Wouldn’t he give you a hint as to the contents of the papers?” asked Ned.

“No; he wouldn’t even give me an idea as to the parties he suspects. I think he might have done that, in the interest of good government. Well, of course his information is his own, but he might have trusted me not to betray his confidence to his rivals. I must confess that I don’t like his attitude in the matter.”

“The papers may contain nothing the government could use,” Ned observed, “although their value to the newspaper may be great.”

“I would like to get a look at them, all the same,” said Gordon.

“I wish he would call off his reporters,” Ned went on. “If they go about the city asking the questions they asked of you, the plotters will soon know that they are being watched, and that will make their capture more difficult.”

“That is the idea,” exclaimed the lieutenant. “Perhaps we can get him to let the case alone for a few days.”

“That is doubtful,” Ned said, “but there is one ray of light in the situation. If the plotters find out that the editor of the *Daily Planet* has documentary evidence against them, they may try to steal the papers, and so disclose their identity.”

“I would steal them myself if I got a chance,” laughed Gordon. “The government needs every pointer it can get.”

“Better let the others try first,” advised Nestor, with a smile. “It really does begin to look as if the first move in this Panama game might be made right here in New York.”

“I’d like to know where Shaw got the pointer,” Gordon said, in a moment. “I thought at first that Frank might have let out something in asking permission to go to the Zone.”

“He doesn’t know a thing about it,” Jimmie put in, warm in the defense of his friend. “How could he drop a hint, then?”

“There was something said about the situation in Panama before we left the Sierra del Fierro mountains in Mexico,” said Nestor, “but I can’t for the life of me tell just what it was.”

“It was nothing definite,” said Harry Stevens, “for I had forgotten all about it. There was some talk about our going to the Canal Zone, but nothing was decided on, and the plot against the government wasn’t mentioned. At least that is my best recollection of the talk there.”

“There was something more than that said,” the lieutenant observed, “but that is unimportant now. The thing to do, if we can, is to stop this investigation by the *Daily Planet*. The reporters will let the cat out of the bag and the interests back of the plot will either act immediately, before we can check them, or delay the matter until everything in connection with it is forgotten.”

“If the papers collected by the *Daily Planet* people give any inkling of the motive which is leading the plotters on,” Nestor said, “we really ought to get hold of them.”

“I believe you are as bad as the lieutenant, and would steal them yourself if you got a chance,” grinned Jimmie.

“I would at least try to get a look at them,” was the reply.

“Look here, fellows!” George Tolford cried, excitedly, “I think I know where Mr. Shaw got his pointer. It is this way: Mr. Shaw is interested in Zone property, and owns a large block of stock in an emerald mine. He spent most of the past winter on the Isthmus, and there is where he unearthed the story. You take it from me that this is right.”

“That view of the case makes it all the more imperative that we learn the contents of the papers Mr. Shaw has,” said the lieutenant, rising and pacing the room excitedly. “If he got his information on the Isthmus, it is more than likely that it points out not only the motive but also the interest which is planning the outrage. I must send some high official to talk with Mr. Shaw. He is interested in an emerald mine, you say?” he asked.

“Sure he is,” replied George Tolford. “Frank told me all about it not long ago, at the time he showed me an emerald necklace his father gave him.”

“An emerald necklace,” repeated Jimmie. “What you gettin’ at? Boys don’t wear necklaces.”

“This emerald necklace,” George went on, “is as old as the hills. Frank says the stones were taken out of a mine in a valley in the interior of Colombia four hundred years ago. There are twenty-five stones, each weighing over six carats. Taken separately, the stones are worth a thousand each, and together their price is fabulous. Frank says the necklace formerly belonged to some secret order of natives, and that \$100,000 has been offered for it because of the perfectly matched stones, and because of its wonderful history. It is a peach, I can tell you that, and Frank will never go broke as long as he sticks to it.”

“I didn’t know that there were any emeralds down that way,” Glen Howard said. “We will bring a couple of carloads back with us.”

“Emeralds down that way!” repeated Peter Fenton. “Why, the best emeralds in the world are found in South America. The very best are found in veins traversing clay-slate, hornblende slate, and granite, in a little valley not far from Bogota, the capital of the United States of Colombia. Inferior stones are found imbedded in mica slate in Europe. You see I’ve been reading up on South America.”

“It looks that way,” laughed Lieutenant Gordon. “I must get a look at Frank’s emerald necklace before I leave New York.”

“We may find one like it in the ruins of Spanish Panama,” said Peter.

“Guess there ain’t many ruins around Panama,” declared Jimmie. “Not many ruins anywhere Uncle Sam’s soldiers are.”

“Just the same,” persisted Peter, “the Panama built by the Spaniards in the year 1518 is now in ruins, unless it has been restored since the Americans took possession of the Canal Zone. It lies six miles to the northeast of the present city of that name.”

“I wish Frank would drop in to-night,” the lieutenant said, after a pause. “I have an idea that he might suggest something of value just now, some way in which his father may be reached. We are leaving for the Zone on Thursday morning, so have only one more day in the city, consequently there is no time to lose.”

The boys fairly shrieked their appreciation of the information that they were to depart for the Isthmus so soon, and gathered about Lieutenant Gordon with extended hands.

“But you must understand this,” the lieutenant said, returning the greetings heartily, “you are not supposed to be in my company at all. I may need to talk with some of you, but if I do it will be in a casual manner, just as one tourist might address another. I am traveling alone, understand. I shall stop at the Tivoli, at Ancon, a short distance from Panama, and you will have a cottage in the jungle, near Gatun.”

“And we are to ramble about wherever we like?” asked Harry.

“Wherever you like,” was the reply, “only you must not look me up unless in case of serious trouble. I’ll communicate with you when necessary.”

The boys all agreed to the conditions readily enough; they would have consented to almost any arrangement in order to be taken on the trip. After the details were disposed of, Ned called the lieutenant aside and asked him a most surprising question:

“Are you really thinking of trying to steal those papers?”

“I’ve a great mind to make the attempt,” was the smiling reply. “We need them in our business, and, besides, the government has plenty of men here who may as well be working on this case as any other.”

“This is on the theory that the papers may reveal to you the nature of the plot and the names of the plotters?”

“That is the idea, exactly. I have no doubt now that Mr. Shaw secured his pointers while on the Isthmus, and the papers doubtless contain information which it might take us months to procure. Yes, I think I shall set men at work on the case to-morrow. Besides getting the papers, we will rob Shaw of his sensation. A publication of the situation just now would be a calamity.”

“I think,” Nestor said, modestly, “that I see a way to accomplish the ends you seek without resorting to larceny. Will you promise me that you will do nothing further in the matter of the documents until I have talked with you again on the subject?”

“But it is imperative that we act quickly,” protested the lieutenant.

“I understand that,” Nestor replied, “but, all the same, I think I see a way to gain our ends by keeping out of the way at present. Will you promise?”

“Oh, yes! Have your own way about it. I can set the men at work just before we leave New York, and the information contained in the papers can be sent to me by code. Have your own way, my boy.”

“Thank you,” Nestor said, and the two returned to the main room. The ’phone in a closet near the door was ringing sharply, and Harry Stevens entered the closet and shut the door. In a moment exclamations of dismay and surprise were heard issuing from the other side of the closed door, and then Harry bounced back into the room, his face white, his eyes shining with excitement.

“What is it?” asked half a dozen voices.

“Lieutenant Gordon and Ned are wanted at Shaw’s house at once,” the boy said. “Go on the run, boys, for there is something stirring there. Mr. Shaw has been chloroformed, the servants knocked about like tenpins, and Frank’s emerald necklace has been stolen. We’ll wait here for news.”

“And so,” the lieutenant said, looking Nestor in the eyes, “you were waiting for the interests back of this thing to show their hand by trying to get the papers.”

“Yes,” replied Nestor, “I had an idea the interests would try to do a little stealing on their own hook.”

“But if they have secured the papers – ”

The lieutenant hesitated, and Nestor went on:

“If they have secured the papers, they know no more now than they did before. They are not out after information concerning their own plots. They are trying to reduce the outside supply of knowledge about their movements.”

“There was nothing said about papers being stolen, was there?” asked the lieutenant. “Perhaps the necklace really was the point of attack.”

Nestor turned to George Tolford.

“Do you know where Frank kept his necklace?” he asked.

“Sure I do,” was the quick reply. “He kept it in a hinky-dinky little safe up in his room. I told him he was foolish to take such a risk with it.”

“Did he keep the safe locked?”

“Locked! Not half the time. He would rush in there, open it up, and then run all over the house, leaving the door swinging.”

Nestor and the lieutenant now left the room, after asking the boys to wait there for a short time. Once out on the street, the lieutenant remarked:

“If the necklace was kept in Frank’s room, why did the thief take the pains to chloroform Mr. Shaw, who must have been in his own room?”

Nestor shrugged his shoulders for reply. That was a point he had already considered. Again the lieutenant asked a question:

“If the papers had been taken, wouldn’t that have been mentioned the very first thing? Wouldn’t Mr. Shaw think first of recovering them?”

“I don’t know,” replied Nestor. “The thing for us to do now is to find out who it was that entered the Shaw house to-night, and what was taken besides the necklace.”

CHAPTER III. HOW THE TRICK WAS TURNED

Leaving the boys in the luxurious clubroom of the Black Bear Patrol, and promising to keep them posted as to the situation by 'phone, Lieutenant Gordon and Ned Nestor hastened in the direction of the Shaw residence, only three blocks away. A surprise awaited them at the Shaw door.

When they mounted the marble steps to the front portal they were astonished to see Jimmie McGraw standing in the shadow of a column, waiting for them with a grin on his face. He pushed the electric button for admittance as soon as they reached his side.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the lieutenant, trying hard to appear angry with the boy.

"Why, I just come over to tell Frank –"

"Never mind that now," said the lieutenant, interrupting. "If this is the way you obey orders you can't go to the Canal Zone with me."

"Well, you see," Jimmie began, in a contrite tone, "I thought of something, after you left, that I wanted to say to Frank, and I knew he'd have asked for me if he'd 'a' thought of it, so I just run over."

"What was it you wanted to say to Frank?" asked the lieutenant, with a smile in Ned's direction. The persistence of the boy pleased him, to say the least.

Just then the door was opened, saving Jimmie the exertion of manufacturing a smooth tale to tell the lieutenant, and the three entered the great hall of the fine residence, where they found Frank awaiting them.

"I was afraid you'd both left the clubroom and couldn't be found," he cried, as he took his friends by the hand. "Come right up to my room, and I'll show you just how the thieves got the emerald necklace."

"Perhaps we ought to see your father first," Lieutenant Gordon suggested, thinking of something much more important, to him at least, than the bauble.

"Father is with Doctor Benson just now," was the reply.

"Was he seriously injured?" asked Nestor, anxiously.

"Not a bit of it," was the reply. "They just sneaked up behind him and stuffed a big handkerchief soaked with chloroform into his face. The drug knocked him out for a short time, but he is all right now. He told me to show you my room as soon as you came, and then to take you to him."

"Who else is in the house?" asked Nestor.

"No one but Doctor Benson and the servants," was the reply.

"Then the police have not been called?"

"No, indeed. I asked father to wait until you two came. I don't take much stock in the cheap plain clothes men they send about on robbery cases. But come on up to my room, and I'll show you what a sucker I am."

"If I had said that," Jimmie put in, "you'd 'a' handed me one."

"So Jimmie is on the case too," laughed Frank. "Well, son, there's money in it for the man who restores my emerald necklace, which I'm sure to get back, in the end. Why, that necklace has been stolen about a thousand times, and has always been restored to the rightful owner. Once it was found in the heart of Africa, in the kinky hair of a native. There's blood on it, too, for men have been killed trying to steal it, and trying to prevent its being stolen. It's the most valuable necklace in the world."

The boy mounted the staircase as he spoke, leading the others to his room, which was at the front of the house on the second floor, directly over the apartment used by his father as a library, or study. The suite occupied by the boy was elegantly furnished, the only thing which marred the tasty arrangement of the place being a steel safe which stood between the two front windows of the sitting room.

“There,” said Frank, closing the door of the room behind the little party, “they got the necklace out of that safe.”

“How did they open it?” asked the lieutenant, and Jimmie laughed.

“Frank never closed a door in his life,” the boy said.

“Was the safe open?” asked Lieutenant Gordon.

“Yes,” was the reply, “it was open. I had just been there to get some money when I heard a scrap going on in the corridor and rushed out, leaving the door open, like a sucker. The necklace was taken while I was gone.”

“Anything else taken?” asked Ned.

“Not a thing. Oh, I guess the thief got a couple of dollars there was in the cash drawer, but nothing else was disturbed.”

“How long was he in the room?” asked the lieutenant.

“Oh, perhaps fifteen minutes. What I mean is that it must have been about that length of time before I came back here. You see, when I got out into the hall, Pedro, that’s one of Dad’s pet servants, was scrapping with two pirate-looking fellows at the head of the stairs. One of them had him by the throat when I came up.”

“And they both got away?” asked the lieutenant.

“Yes, they both got away. They turned and ran down stairs when I came up and bolted out of the front door, just as if some one stood there holding it open for them.”

“Was the night-lock on?”

“Certainly; it always is at night.”

“Couldn’t anybody open it from the inside, whether familiar with the house or not?” asked Ned.

“No; for the night-bolt is controlled by an electric button, which you have to push before it can be moved from the inside, so no one not familiar with the house could have opened it.”

Nestor glanced at the lieutenant with a question in his eyes, and the officer nodded. There was little doubt in the mind of either that the crime had been planned by some one thoroughly conversant with the premises. It was at least certain that exit had been made easy for the thieves.

“You spent this fifteen minutes, after the flight of the thieves by way of the front door, in your father’s room, I take it?” asked Ned.

“Yes; when the thieves ducked out of the front door I found a maid fainting in the corridor running along back of the parlor to Dad’s room, the place where he does his work while in the house. She flopped over when I spoke to her and pointed to Dad’s room. There I found him lying on the couch, drugged with chloroform.”

“They placed him on the couch, did they?”

“Oh, no, sir, the thieves didn’t take that trouble. Pedro was there before I entered the room, and it was he that did that. He had ’phoned for the doctor, too, before I got into the room.”

“He was chasing the thieves?” asked Ned.

“Why, yes. He was just ahead of me at the front door.”

“Then how did he get back and do so much before you reached the study?”

“I opened the front door and looked out for a couple of minutes,” was the reply. “I was rattled, of course, and don’t know how long I stood there, but I remember seeing two men running down the street. If I had known then that they had my emerald necklace, I’d have chased them and roared until the police came up and stopped them.”

“Then you came right in?”

“Yes; right to the corridor where I found the maid lying on the floor.”

“And you remained with your father until the doctor came, and then went back to your room? It was then that you discovered the loss of the emerald necklace?”

“Yes, I missed it when I came back.”

“You saw only two intruders?” asked Ned.

“There were only two.”

“And these two ran down the staircase just ahead of you?”

“Yes; they went down in about one leap.”

“Now, was the necklace in the safe when you went to it?”

“I am certain that it was.”

“You saw it there?”

“I saw the case in which it was enclosed.”

“And the case was gone when you returned?”

“Yes; oh, the necklace was taken from the safe during my absence, all right.”

“Yet the two men were ahead of you, and went out of the street door before you reached the lower landing?”

Frank’s face showed that the idea presented by Nestor was new to him. He had never considered that feature of the case. In fact, he had been so excited that he had not thought logically of the circumstances surrounding the theft.

“Well,” he said, “I reckon I need a hired man to do my thinking for me. Why didn’t that idea get into my thick head before?”

“Are you still certain that the necklace was in the safe when you left the room?” asked Ned, with a smile.

“Yes; I am dead sure of that. Why,” he added, “there must have been a man that I did not see. Wonder why he didn’t give me a clip on the head.”

“Someone will come here an’ steal you, some day,” grinned Jimmie.

“I don’t doubt it,” replied Frank. “Now, where do you think the other man was?” he asked, turning to Ned.

Ned arose and went into the sleeping room, from which opened a bathroom and a large closet. There was a door opening into the sleeping room from the corridor, the apartment being of the same length, east and west, as the sitting room. The closet opened from the sleeping room, and also from the bathroom.

“What do you find here?” asked Frank, following him into the closet and through into the bathroom.

“The third man might have been hiding in here,” Ned replied. “When were you in this bathroom last?” he added, looking carefully about the place.

“Not since early in the afternoon.”

“The suite was unoccupied all the afternoon?”

“Yes; I am rarely here in the afternoon.”

“What time did you come up here after dinner?”

“It was probably eight o’clock, for Dad was telling a rather interesting story at table, and we sat a long time. Mother is away on a visit to the Pacific coast.”

“And your father went to his room then?”

“Yes; he said he had some work to do.”

“His room, also, was unoccupied all the afternoon?”

“Yes; it must have been.”

“Who is usually about the lower part of the house during the afternoon?”

“No one when mother is away.”

“Do you know whether anything was taken from your father’s room?”

“Why, I haven’t heard that feature of the case discussed. We can soon find out by asking him.”

“Gee!” cried Jimmie. “What would they want to go an’ dope him for if there wasn’t something in his room they wanted?”

“That is a very pertinent question,” Lieutenant Gordon remarked. “It certainly seems that the thieves came here for something besides the emerald necklace.”

“Meaning the papers?” asked Ned, with a laugh.

“Meaning the papers, of course,” was the reply. “I am still of the opinion that the theft of the necklace was only incidental.”

“It begins to look that way to me,” observed Frank. “As Jimmie says, what would they attack father for unless they wanted to search his room?”

“You know about the papers?” asked the lieutenant.

“Yes, indeed. They constituted the subject of the interesting story Dad was telling me at table to-night.”

“Did he tell you what they contained?” asked Ned.

“He did not. He told me only what they dealt with.”

“He believes there is a plot against the completion of the Panama canal?”

“Oh, yes; he is quite certain of it.”

“Did he mention the parties he suspected?”

“He refused to do so. I can’t understand why he should refuse. Can you?”

“I think I can appreciate his position,” replied Ned.

“Great Scott!” cried Frank. “Do you think the agents of the men we are to grapple with in the Canal Zone have been in this house to-night? If so, it looks like they were looking us up, instead of our being after them.”

“Where is this man Pedro?” asked Ned, not answering the question.

“He was in the study when I left, a few moments ago.”

“Then we will go down there. I want to ask him a few questions.”

At the foot of the staircase, they heard the telephone ringing, and Frank went into the closet. When he came out again he seemed excited and unnerved.

“I guess there’s something more than the necklace at stake to-night,” he said, “for Dad’s rooms in the newspaper building have been ransacked. I guess we won’t have to go down to Gatun to lock horns with the men who are in this plot against Uncle Sam. If the Gatun dam was in New York, they might have blown it up to-night, for all that has been done to thwart them.”

“Well, we’ve just got to work on the case,” grinned Jimmie.

CHAPTER IV. THE MAN IN THE CLOSET

“If you take my advice,” Ned said to Frank, as they reached the study door, “you won’t say anything to your father about the trouble at the office until we have talked with him concerning the raid on the house. He might rush off to the newspaper building immediately, without answering our questions about the visit to his room.”

“That is just what he would do,” Frank replied.

When the boys entered the study, closely followed by Lieutenant Gordon and Jimmie, they found three men in the room. One was Mr. Shaw, lying on a couch at the front of the apartment. One was Dr. Benson, who sat in an easy chair at his side. The third was Pedro, the servant mentioned by Frank as one of his father’s favored attendants. He stood by the couch as the boys stepped into the room, his bold black eyes studying their faces impertinently as they entered.

The man was not far from forty, tall, slender, dusky of face – plainly in intellectual capacity and breeding far above the menial position he occupied in the house. Standing in repose, his figure was erect and well balanced, like that of a man trained to military service.

But even as he stood subserviently by the couch of his employer, his slender hands at his sides, there seemed to be something of the alertness of a wild beast in his physical attitude of suppression. Somehow, he gave Ned the impression of one about to spring forth upon an enemy.

After the presentations were made, it was with the greatest difficulty that Lieutenant Gordon restrained himself from at once taking up the topic he had discussed with Mr. Shaw so unsatisfactorily that afternoon – the subject of the plot against the Gatun dam. What did the editor know? What did he suspect concerning the raid on his home? Did he believe that the plotters had opened their defense right there in the city of New York?

However, he curbed his hasty impulse, knowing that the information he sought was not to be obtained in that way. Mr. Shaw was looking upon the matter entirely from the standpoint of an enterprising journalist, and would be cautious about giving out his own discoveries and impressions.

“Are you still suffering from the effects of the chloroform?” asked the lieutenant, anxiously.

“I’m still a little weak,” was the reply, “and still a little tippy at the stomach, but Benson tells me that I shall be well again in an hour.”

“You were of course attacked without warning,” the lieutenant continued, half hoping that the editor would enter into a full and frank discussion of the event.

“Entirely so,” was the reply. “I was sitting at my desk when the door was opened and some one entered. I thought it was Pedro, for I had just rung for him, and did not look around. Then I was seized from behind and a handkerchief soaked with chloroform thrust into my face.”

“You did not see your assailant?” asked Ned.

“Now for the cross-examination,” laughed the editor. “I have heard something of Mr. Nestor’s work in the secret service,” he added, “and shall be glad to answer any of his questions. Go ahead, my boy. No, to answer your first question, I did not see my assailant, and do not know whether there were two or only one.”

“Did you notice the time?” asked Ned, modestly.

“Yes, it was nine o’clock. The next I knew, Pedro was lifting me onto the couch, and a maid was lifting her voice to high heaven out in the corridor. That, I have since learned, was at ten o’clock, so, you see, the ruffians had an hour to work in.”

“They must have mussed the room up quite a lot in that time,” said the lieutenant, hoping to bring the editor to the point in which he was interested.

Mr. Shaw made no reply, but turned to Ned with a smile.

“Go ahead, Ned,” Frank cried. “We all want to know what ideas are brooding in that clever brain of yours.”

“I would like to ask,” Ned began, modestly, “if you can assign a reason for the attack upon you.”

“Why, they came into the house after the emerald necklace,” was the reply. “They looked here for it first. That is all.”

“But it appears that they knew the necklace to be in Frank’s safe,” urged Ned. “At least it did not take them long to find it there after the safe was unlocked and he was brought from his room.”

“Oh, well, they probably looked here first,” insisted the editor. “The manner in which they rummaged the place while I was unconscious shows that they searched for it here. The necklace was the thing sought, of course.”

“Did they take anything from the room?” asked Ned, and Lieutenant Gordon leaned forward, anxiously awaiting the answer.

“Not a thing,” was the quiet reply. “At least, I have missed nothing.”

“Perhaps the thing they sought was not found,” suggested Gordon, no longer able to keep the plot subject out of the conversation.

“I know what you mean, Lieutenant,” the other replied, “and I may as well tell you now that the papers to which you refer are not in the house – were not here and never have been here. They are perfectly safe, and we will drop them from the case, if you please.”

“I am naturally anxious about them,” said Gordon, “in the interest of the government, of course, for I believe they hold the key to a mystery I am asked to solve.”

“You may be mistaken as to the contents of the papers,” laughed Mr. Shaw. “Well,” he added, “we will eliminate them from the matter in hand. What next, Mr. Nestor? I have great hope of your success in unraveling this mystery of the necklace.”

“With your permission,” Ned replied, “and in your presence, I would like to ask your man a few questions.”

Pedro turned a pair of venomous eyes toward the speaker for just an instant. Then he stood respectfully looking at his master again. Ned saw the movement, the quick hostility of the glance, and felt surer of his ground than before.

“He will, I am sure, be happy to answer any questions you may ask,” said Mr. Shaw.

Pedro nodded, half defiantly, as though he felt humiliated by being placed at the service, even a verbal one, of a boy, and Ned asked:

“When you saw the men at the head of the staircase, what did you say to them?”

The answer came in perfect English, yet there was a something in the voice which told as plainly as words could have done that English was not the native tongue of the speaker.

“I ordered them from the house,” he said.

“And then they attacked you?”

“The mark of a hand is on my throat, sir.”

“How many men were there?”

“Two, sir, and they both piled on top of me.”

“There was no one else in the corridor?”

“No one.”

“They were armed, I presume?”

“I saw no weapons in their hands.”

“They might have killed you?”

“Only for the arrival of Master Shaw they might have done so.”

“Can you describe these men?” asked Ned.

“I don’t think I can, sir. I was too busy to notice their faces or their clothes during the short time I was with them.”

“Can you say whether one of them was tall and slender, with very black hair, turning gray in places?” asked Ned, fixing his eyes on those of the servant.

Pedro looked back at his questioner for an instant, and then his gaze fell to the floor.

“I can’t say,” he replied, slowly, while the others, amazed at the character of the question, turned to Ned for explanation.

“If the description I have given is recognized by you as that of one of the men you met in the corridor,” Ned went on, “can you tell me whether his clothing was wet or dry?”

There was dead silence in the room. There had been nothing thus far in the case leading up to this description, and those present looked at Ned with wonder in their faces. To say the least, the questions seemed irrelevant.

Pedro stood for a moment touching his dry lips with the tip of his tongue, his fingers clasping and unclasping, then his shoulders straightened into firmer lines and he faced his questioner with a smile of complacency.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said.

“Perhaps I should have said damp clothing,” Ned replied. “The man I have in mind – the man who might have been one of your assailants – entered the house just after the rainstorm, which came on close after six o’clock. His clothing was soaking wet when he came in, but would not remain so for four hours.”

Pedro grasped the back of a chair which stood near him and looked out of the window to the lighted street in front of the house. While he stood silent Mr. Shaw arose to a sitting position on the couch and asked:

“Why the description, Mr. Nestor? Why the positive statement about the time at least one of the men entered the house?”

Every eye in the room was now fixed on Nestor’s face. Even Lieutenant Gordon seemed inclined to think that some huge joke was being pulled off.

“The man who came in at six,” Ned replied, “came in out of the rain, and left marks showing the height and breadth of his shoulders on a wall against which he leaned. These marks show a man tall and slender. He entered the house dripping with water, moving about like a street sprinkler and leaving signs of his presence in the places he visited. He seems to be a person of rather refined tastes, inclined to be neat in personal appearance, for he went to Frank’s bathroom to clean up. There he used the washbowl and the toilet articles, leaving black hair turning gray in the comb.”

“This is uncanny,” shouted Frank. “You couldn’t have observed all this during the minute you were in the bathroom,” he added.

Mr. Shaw considered the question gravely, his eyes fixed on those of the boy.

“He sprinkled the closet floor, did he?” he asked, presently.

“Yes, sir; and stood back against the closet wall, and used Frank’s comb and brush.”

“Did he come to this room, also?”

“Yes, sir; the little round spots on the delicate covering of this little table were made by dripping water. You see, sir, he was in here before the water dripped off his clothes in the closet, probably soon after he entered the house.”

“But how did he get into the house? How did he get into this locked room?”

“I should say that he was assisted by some one belonging in the house,” was the quiet reply. “After he left this room he mounted the staircase and hid in Frank’s closet, evidently waiting for you to return home, or for Frank to come. Perhaps he hoped that one of you might bring home the thing, or the things, he had been unable to find in your rooms.”

“The papers concerning the Gatun plot, for instance,” said the lieutenant.

The editor glanced at the officer with a slight frown on his brow, but made no reply to the remark. It was plain that he was unwilling to take up that phase of the case.

“It is a wonder the fellow didn’t jimmy Frank’s safe and get the emerald necklace, without waiting so long for the safe to be opened,” he said, in a moment.

Thus insisting on his previously expressed opinion that the sole purpose of the thieves had been to secure the emerald necklace, further disclaiming any belief that the alleged plot against the government had figured in the matter at all, the editor smiled provokingly at the officer.

Nestor looked from the lieutenant to the newspaper owner and smiled quietly.

“I wish I knew,” he said, “whether the papers we hear so much about really reveal the details of an alleged plot against the government.”

Mr. Shaw did not reply.

“If they do not,” continued the boy, “do they connect some man, or some group of men, with a plot which may be forming?”

The editor glanced approvingly at Ned, as if rather pleased with his cleverness, but did not speak.

“I have known newspaper men,” Ned went on, “to make mistakes in such matters. However, I have no doubt that you have good reasons for the course you are taking,” he continued, “and therefore I have no fault to find with you.”

“You’re a fine fellow, Mr. Nestor,” the editor exclaimed. “Some day, when you see the matter in the right light, I’ll tell you all about it. I can’t do so now, for no end of trouble might come from it.”

“Very well,” replied Ned. “There is one more question I want to ask you. Will you answer it?”

“If I can consistently do so, yes.”

“If the men who searched this house to-night were after the necklace, and that alone, why should they extend their operations to your offices in the newspaper building?”

“Did they do that?” asked the editor calmly. “Then I shall have to go down there and look things over. Will you kindly accompany me?”

But the search at the offices was barren of clues.

CHAPTER V. AT THE GREAT GATUN DAM

“Over there is the oldest country on this side of the world,” said Peter Fenton, pointing over the rail of the vessel and across the smooth waters of the Caribbean sea. “We are now on the famous Spanish Main,” he continued, “where adventurers from the Windward Islands laid in wait for the galleons of Spain. Just ahead, rising out of the sea, is the Isthmus of Panama. Down there to the left is the continent of South America, where there were cathedrals and palaces when Manhattan Island was still populated by native Indians.”

The minds of the Boy Scouts were filled with splendid dreams as they followed with their eyes the directions indicated by the pointing hand. It was all a fairyland to them. Peter talked for some time on the causes which had brought the scum of the seven seas to the Isthmus, and then Ned Nestor interrupted the talk by inviting them all to the stateroom he occupied in common with Frank Shaw.

When all were seated on chairs and bunks Ned opened the door and looked out on the passage which ran along in front of the apartment. When he turned back into the room there was a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

“His Nobbs is in sight,” he said.

“The same party?” asked Frank.

“The same dusky gentleman who has followed us since the night of the theft of the emerald necklace,” Ned replied.

“He ought to receive a Carnegie medal for always being on the spot,” Frank said.

“We ought to turn the hose on him,” Jimmie corrected.

“We should feel lost without him,” laughed George Tolford. “When I first saw him in the newspaper building, while you were investigating the chaos of papers in Mr. Shaw’s rooms,” he went on, “I had a hunch that we shouldn’t be able to lose him.”

“Well, we haven’t been able to lose him,” Peter Fenton said. “He reminds me, the way he floats about, of the ghost of some pirate who sailed about the Spanish Main four hundred years ago in a long, low, rakish craft adorned with a black flag.”

“I saw him in the newspaper building that night,” Jimmie said, “an’ he looked glad because we got no clues there.”

“Why didn’t Ned have him arrested in New York?” asked Jack Bosworth.

“What for?” demanded Jimmie.

“For making a nuisance of himself. Then he couldn’t have followed us on board the ship. Also, he might have been able to get a little sleep nights.”

“I reckon we have kept him going,” Frank observed, with a laugh.

Ever since the night of the robbery the man called “His Nobbs” for want of a better name had kept Ned Nestor in sight most of the time. He had followed him home after the profitless visit to the newspaper office on the night of the theft, had chased about after him while the details of the trip to Panama were arranged the next day, and had turned up on the ship after she was under way.

The fellow did not seem to be overly anxious to keep his watchfulness a secret. He acted like any first cabin passenger on the ship. But, somehow, he managed to keep Ned in view most of the time. Now and then he was caught watching the door of Ned’s stateroom. He never spoke to the boy, and never even looked at him when the two passed one another.

Taking advantage of this preference for Ned’s company, the boys had put up all sorts of jobs on the fellow, and some of their pranks had kept him watching Ned’s odd moves all night. It was a new and strange experience to Ned, this being spied upon so openly, and he was at a loss to account for the mental processes which inspired the strange surveillance.

“Well,” said Ned presently, “let him watch outside if he wants to. We came in here to talk about something else. I have just been talking with Lieutenant Gordon, and he says we are to go into camp in the jungle not far from the Gatun dam. He will stop at the Tivoli, at Ancon, adjoining Panama. When we have anything to communicate to him, one of us can go down to Panama after supplies and leave word at an office where one of the lieutenant’s associates in the case will always be in waiting. We are not to know the lieutenant if we meet him in our soup.”

“We’ll be eaten alive out there in the jungle,” protested Jimmie.

“Besides, it would be more natural for us to go to Gatun for our supplies,” Peter Fenton said.

“There are reasons why he wants us to remain in the jungle near Gatun for a time,” Ned replied, and the boys separated, Jimmie strolling off in the wake of “His Nobbs,” “just to see if he couldn’t make him cough up something,” as he expressed it.

The mystery of the theft of the emerald necklace was still unsolved, the man whose picture Ned carried in his brain had not been found, Pedro had been among the missing ever since he had walked out of the Shaw residence on the morning after the robbery. When the boys landed at Colon the next morning the case upon which they were engaged was still new ground before them.

Frank Shaw continued to take the loss of his emeralds very seriously, and at no time during the trip to Colon had he failed to keep an eye out for Pedro, whom he suspected of having admitted the thief to the house.

“His name isn’t Pedro at all,” he said, as the train sped out of the network of tracks behind Colon, “but Pedrarias. That was the name of the robber who succeeded Balboa as governor of New Granada, the pirate who stood Balboa up against a wall and shot him. Pedro, as I call him for short, declares that he is a direct descendant of that old stiff. He says the Spanish blood in his veins is pure. Great Scott! if I had such a pirate for an ancestor, I’d keep mighty still about it.”

Peter Fenton was in his element now. As the train moved away from Colon he pointed out various points of interest, and supplied such information about them as he had gleaned from the maps and books he had consulted. The ruins of the old French workings were soon in sight, the locality where millions had been squandered in graft. And there was Mount Hope Cemetery, where thousands who had perished from fever had been buried.

“The doctors have cleaned out the fever now,” he said, “by cleaning out the mosquitoes – the poison kind with the long name,” he added. “The Canal Zone is about as healthy now as the city of New York.”

Then came thickets where the trees were tied together with vines and creepers, all in gorgeous bloom. The great trees lifting their heads out of the jungle reminded the boys of the electric towers of New York, the twists of vines resembling the mighty cables which convey light, heat and power to the inhabitants of Manhattan.

As if in rivalry of the wealth of blossoms, bright-plumaged birds darted about like butterflies of unnatural growth. Now and then they saw evil looking lizards, some of them a yard in length, scuttling off through the marshes or looking down from high limbs. There was a swampy atmosphere over all the landscape.

Then, as the Boy Scouts looked, thinking of the glory of a camp in the thicket – of a retired nook on some dry knoll – the jungle disappeared as if by magic, and the train was winding up grassy hills. Beyond, higher up, the scattered houses of a city of fair size came into view.

“That’s Gatun,” cried Fenton. “I’ve read half a dozen descriptions of it lately. Great town, that.”

“The houses look like boxes from here,” Jimmie observed.

“Of course,” Peter replied, “they are all two-story houses, square, with double balconies all screened in. Might be Philadelphia, eh?”

There were smooth roads in front of the houses, and there were yards where flowers were growing, and where neatly dressed children were playing. Jimmie turned from the homelike scene to Frank.

“I thought there would be something new down here,” he complained. “This is just like a town up the Hudson.”

“Jimmie expected to find people living in tents made out of animal skins,” laughed George. “He thinks the natives eat folks alive.”

“You wait until you get out of the country,” Frank said, “before you talk of cottages up the Hudson. There will be something stirring before we get off the Isthmus.”

“I hope so,” Jimmie replied. “There surely will be if we camp back there in the jungle, among the snakes and lizards.”

“Why not camp on the hills back there?” asked Jack.

“We may soon camp anywhere we like,” said Ned. “The Zone government understands that we are a lot of kids out after specimens.”

“Specimens of what?” asked Jimmie.

“Tall, slender men with black hair turning gray,” replied Frank.

“Quit your kiddin’,” grinned Jimmie.

The boys left the train at a modern depot, passed through the train-shed, crossed a level sward, and looked down into a mighty chasm.

“Great Scott!” cried Frank. “Is that the bottom of the world?”

He pointed below as he spoke.

“There seems to be a thin crust of rock between the bottom and the other side of the world,” laughed George. “See! There are tunnels and pits down there. The men are still digging. Look like ants, don’t they?”

It was a wonderful sight, and the Boy Scouts gazed long at the scene of activity before turning away toward the Gatun dam itself. This, Peter Fenton explained, was one of the big cuts of the canal, and ran from the marshy valley above down through the rocky ridge which held the rains in check and made a swamp of the upland.

Along the margins of the excavation ran shining steel rails upon which were mounted tapering structures of steel, from which cables crossed the gorge, carrying great buckets of concrete for the work below. Heavy walls were growing out of the depths.

“The ships will come up out of the sea through this cut,” Peter explained.

“Then they’ll climb the hill,” scorned Jimmie.

“They will stop down there,” said Peter, “and the lock gates will be closed, and the water will lift them to the level of the lake.”

“I don’t see no lake,” observed the skeptical Jimmie.

“The lake will lie where the low land is, over there,” replied Peter, pointing. “The Gatun dam will block the water and make a lake 85 feet above sea level, covering one hundred and sixty-four square miles of earth.”

“So the most of the canal will be lake?” asked the boy.

“Quite a lot of it,” was the reply.

“And if any one should blow up the dam, after it gets on its job, the ships would have to climb a ladder if they got over to Panama,” he exclaimed.

“Something like that,” Peter said.

“Where is the Gatun dam?” asked Jack.

“It is going up over there,” Peter replied, pointing out a low, broad ridge which appeared to link two hills together. “That is what will make the inland sea, and that is the lump of earth we came here to look after.”

“It is a busy place night and day,” Ned said. “See the electric towers and wires? Work never stops.”

“Something like His Nobbs,” grinned Jimmie. “I wonder if he has had any sleep since he struck our trail?”

“I haven’t seen him since we left the train,” Jack said. “Perhaps he has delivered us over to the Panama division of the Anti-Canal Benevolent Society. In that case, we shall see no more of him.”

After a time the boys strolled over to a neat little hotel on the principal street of the town, and there saw Lieutenant Gordon, who strolled up to Ned, just as any two Americans meeting there might have affiliated.

“Your camp in the jungle is ready for you,” the officer said, as the two walked about the lobby of the hotel. “You will find a movable cottage there, all furnished, and a good cook. Until further orders you are all to remain there.”

“Pretty quick work,” said Ned.

“The orders for the cottage camp were sent over by wire before we left New York,” the lieutenant replied. “You are at liberty to roam about the works at will, only you ought to leave some one at the cottage always.”

“As I understand it, we are boys looking for adventure?” asked Ned.

“Exactly.”

“And an emerald necklace,” added the boy with a laugh.

“I have a notion that if you find Pedro you will find the necklace, unless you find him too late – after he has disposed of it.”

“That may be,” Ned replied, doubtingly, “but we are not likely to run across Pedro over here. Neither shall we see His Nobbs. They have played their roles, and we shall have new ones to contend with now.”

That night the boys took possession of the cottage in the jungle, dancing and prancing about it like wild Indians. It all seemed to them to be too good to be true. Here they were, at last, on the Canal Zone, and, in a way, in the secret service of the government. It was late when they retired, and no guard was set.

This Ned regretted, after the others were asleep, and so lay awake a long time, watching. Then, about midnight, he saw some one looking in at the porch door.

CHAPTER VI.

A BOMB AND A RUINED TEMPLE

Ned lay perfectly still and the door was closed again, with the figure still on the outside. There were no lights inside the cottage, and it was a fairly clear night, so the boy could see the man standing on the porch, the wire screen in the door robbing his figure of sharp outline.

The intruder appeared to be listening for some sound within. Now and then he bent his head forward toward the door, and once, when Jimmie snorted out in his sleep, he darted a hand toward his hip, as if reaching for a weapon.

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