

ROY ROCKWOOD

DAVE DASHAWAY THE
YOUNG AVIATOR: OR, IN
THE CLOUDS FOR FAME
AND FORTUNE

Roy Rockwood

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Aviator: or, In the Clouds
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Dave Dashaway the Young Aviator; Or, In the Clouds for Fame and Fortune

CHAPTER I DAVE DASHAWAY'S MODEL

"You don't mean to say that new-fangled air ship of yours will fly, Dave Dashaway?"

"No, it's only a model, as you see."

"Would the real one go up, though?"

"It might. I hope so. But this is a start, anyway."

"Yes, and a fine one," said Ned Towner, enthusiastically. "You're a smart boy, Dave, and everybody says so."

"I wish my dear old father was living," remarked Dave in a tone of sadness and regret. "There wasn't much about sky sailing he didn't know. In these times, when everybody is so interested in airships, he would be bound to make his mark."

The two, manly-appearing youths stood in the loft of the dilapidated old barn of Silas Warner's place in Brookville. It held a work bench and some tools, and on one end of the bench was the model at which they were looking.

It was neat enough and intricate enough, being made by a mere lad, to have attracted the attention of any inventor or workman. An outsider, however, would have been puzzled, for while its shape suggested a bird kite with an umbrella top, it had so many rods, joints and levers that a casual observer would have wondered what they were all there for.

Dave showed a good deal of pride in his model. It had cost him all his loose change to buy the material to construct it, and many a busy hour during the preceding few weeks. He sighed as he turned from it, with the words:

"All I need now is some silk to cover those wings. That finishes it."

"Then what will you do?"

"Well," replied Dave vaguely, "then I hope I can find some practical airship man who will tell me if it's any good."

"Say, it will be a fortune if it works, won't it, Dave?" exclaimed Ned.

"Oh, hardly that. They are getting up so many new kinds all of the time. It would get me into the swim, though. All I want is to have a chance to make the acquaintance of some expert airman. I reckon the flying fever was born in me, Ned."

"Well, that's quite natural," responded Ned. "Your father must have been famous in his line, according to all those scrap-book articles you showed me the other day."

"Anyhow, I'm getting tired of the dull life I'm leading here," went on Dave seriously. "I'd like to do something besides slave for a man who drives me to the limit, and amount to something in the world."

"Good for you!" cried Ned, giving his friend and chum an encouraging slap on the back. "You'll get there – you're the kind of a boy that always does."

"Hey, there! are you ever going to start?" rang out a harsh, complaining voice in the yard outside.

Dave hurriedly threw an old horse blanket over his model and glanced out of the window.

"It's Mr. Warner," he said, while Ned made a wry face. "I'll have to be going."

Old Silas Warner stood switching his cane around and growling out threats, as Dave reached the yard and crossed it to where a thin bony horse and an old rickety wagon stood. The vehicle held a dozen bags filled with potatoes, every one of which Dave had planted and dug as his hardened hands bore proof.

“You’ll quit wasting my time, Dave Dashaway,” carped the mean-faced old man, “or there’s going to be trouble.”

“I was just showing Ned about the loft,” explained Dave.

“Yah! Fine lot of more valuable time you’ve been wasting there, too,” snorted old Warner. “I’ll put a stop to some of it, you mark me. Now then, you get those bags of taters down to Swain’s warehouse and back again afore six o’clock, or you’ll get no supper. There’s a lot more of those taters to dig, but an hour or two this evening will finish them.”

Dave’s face was set and indignant, but he passed no more words with the unreasonable old man who called himself, and was in fact, legally his guardian.

“I’ll keep you company as far as our house,” said Ned, as Dave got up into the wagon seat, and he climbed up beside his friend, heedless of the grumblings of the old man about over loading.

“He’s a pretty mean old fellow,” flared out Ned, as they drove out of the yard and into the country road leading towards the town. “It’s the talk of the neighborhood, the way that old miser makes you work.”

“I wouldn’t mind the work if he would only treat me half human,” replied Dave in a subdued tone.

“It isn’t in him to do it,” scolded Ned. “If I was in your place I’d just cut out, and let him find some other fellow to do his slaving. Why, my folks say your father left enough to take care of you in a good way. And send you to school, and all that. I’d find out my legal rights, if I were you, and I’d fetch that old fellow to time.”

“It would be no use, Ned,” declared Dave. “I tried it once. I went over to Brocton, where the lawyer of my father’s estate lives, and had a talk with him.”

“What did he say?”

“He said that my father had left no property except the old hotel at Brocton. It is old, for a fact, and needs lots of repairs, and the lawyer says that this takes most of the income and makes the rent amount to almost nothing. I found out, though, that the lawyer is a relative of Mr. Warner, and that Warner gives most of the repairing jobs to other relatives of his. I went and saw the court judge, and he told me that Mr. Warner’s report, made each year, showed up clear and straight.”

“Judge another relative of old Warner?” insinuated Ned.

“I shouldn’t wonder.”

“Neither would I. It’s strange to me, though, Dave, that your father ever made such a notorious old skinflint your guardian.”

“He didn’t,” asserted Dave.

“Who did, then?”

“The court, and I had no voice in it. Mr. Warner let me stay at the school I was attending when my father died, for about a year. Then he claimed the estate couldn’t bear the expense, and he has had me home ever since.”

“Why don’t they sell the old hotel, and give you a chance to live like other boys who are heirs?” demanded Ned, in his ardent, innocent way.

“Mr. Warner says the property can’t be sold till I am of age,” explained Dave. “That time I went away and got work in the city, I even sent Mr. Warner half of what I earned, but he sent the sheriff after me, made me come home, and said if I tried it again he would send me to a reformatory till I was twenty-one.”

“Say that’s terrible!” cried Ned, rousing up in his honest wrath. “Oh, say – look there!”

“Whoa!” shouted Dave, but there was no need of the mandate. In sudden excitement and surprise he had pulled old Dobbin up dead short. Then he followed the direction indicated by the pointing finger of his companion. Both sat staring fixedly over their heads. The air was filled with a faint whizzing sound, and the object that made it came within their view for just a minute. Then it passed swiftly beyond their range of vision where the high trees lining the road intervened.

“An airship – a real airship!” cried Ned with bated breath.

“Yes. It must have come from the big aero meet at Fairfield,” said Dave.

“Is there one there?”

“Yes. I read about it in the paper.”

Both Dave and Ned had seen an airship before. Besides two that had passed over the town the day previous, they had once witnessed an ascent at a circus at Brocton.

Every nerve in Dave’s body was thrilling with animation. He had dropped the lines, and Dobbin had wandered to the side of the road seeking for grass, nearly tipping over the load. Dave righted the wagon.

“Say,” spoke Ned, “stop at the house, will you?”

“What for?” inquired Dave.

“I want to ask the folks to let me go to town with you.”

“I’ll be glad to have you, Ned.”

“All right. You know the common is right on top of the hill, and one of the fellows said they could watch the airships yesterday for miles and miles.”

A turn in the highway brought the boys to the Towner place. Ned ran into the house and soon returned all satisfaction and excitement, his pockets filled with cookies and apples.

“Mother says I can go with you, Dave,” he said. “I can help you unload, and we can drive over to the town common and join the crowds.”

Dave’s head was full of airships, and the incident of the hour made him forget his troubles. He and Ned chatted and lunched animatedly all the way to Brookville.

The business part of the little town was located on a hill, as Ned had said, but they did not go there at once. The warehouse where Dave was to deliver his load of potatoes was near the railroad, and there they drove.

They found no one in charge of the office, and had to wait till the proprietor arrived, which was nearly an hour later. It was quite six o’clock before they got the potatoes unloaded. Then Dave drove up the hill.

Quite a crowd was gathered in the public square. The boys hitched old Dobbin near the post office and joined the throng.

Everybody was talking airships. It seemed that half-a-dozen had passed in full sight. Three of them had sailed directly over the town. One of them had dropped about a hundred printed dodgers, telling about the aero meet at Fairfield, and Dave was glad to get hold of one of these.

The excited throng was in great expectation of the appearance of another airship. It was getting on towards meal time, and quite a number had left the common, when a chorus of sound echoed out:

“A – ah!”

“There’s another one.”

“Hurrah – look! look!”

“A – a – ah!”

The last utterance expressed disappointment. A swift sailing aeroplane had come into view, circled, and was lost to sight over the crest of a distant hill.

There was a great attraction for the chums in the crowd and bustle about the common. It was quite dusk before they started away. Dave realized that he would have to account for every minute of his time, and expected a scene when he got back home. He had seen so much, however, and

heard so much talk on his favorite theme, airships, that a glimmering idea came to him that he was soon to know more of them.

Dave kept up his spirits bravely, and he and Ned chatted over dreams and plans to find a chance to get over to Fairfield some day soon, and view all the glories of the great aero meet close at hand.

It had become quite dark by the time they neared the turn in the road leading to the Towner place. Old Dobbin was plodding along the dusty road at his usual leisurely gait, when suddenly Ned stretched out his hand and caught the arm of his comrade in a great state of excitement.

“Whoa!” he cried. “Do you hear that, Dave?”

“Sure enough,” responded Dave, checking the horse, and both of them sat rigid on the wagon seat and stared up into the sky.

“It’s another one of them,” said Ned. “Listen.”

There was a quick snappy sound, like the sharp popping of an exhaust.

There was a flashing streamer of light, outlining a dark object that both the entranced lads knew to be a belated airship making its way homeward.

At that moment something swished through the air. Dave did not see it, he rather felt it. Before his senses had fairly taken it in, however, old Dobbin made a jump.

Ten feet ahead the slow going animal plunged, as Dave had never seen him do before. Then he made an affrighted veer. Over into the ditch went the crazy old vehicle with a crash. Dave, clinging to the seat, was simply flung sideways, but his companion was lifted bodily. Head over heels out of the wagon went Ned, landing sprawling in the mud.

CHAPTER II

FROM THE CLOUDS

“What’s happened?” shouted out Ned Towner, in dismay and confusion.

“Dobbin ran away, that’s all,” replied Dave quickly.

“Why?” asked Ned, righting himself and looking around him in a puzzled way.

“Something struck him.”

Dave made the declaration as he dismounted cautiously from the wagon. Dobbin lay on his side as if perfectly satisfied with a rest in the soft dirt. One wheel of the wagon was splintered to pieces and the wagon box had caved in on one side.

“Hold his head till I slip the traces,” ordered Dave.

They got Dobbin to his feet and managed to pull the wagon up the slight slant.

“Whew!” whistled Ned, “here’s a pretty bad wreck.”

“Yes,” assented Dave soberly. “I don’t know what Mr. Warner will say about it.”

“Let him say!” flared out Ned. “The old thing was ready for the junk pile, long ago.”

“That won’t help much,” said Dave.

As he spoke Dave went over to a stretch of broken fence and dragged a long rail up to the wagon. This he strapped to the hub of the broken wheel.

“I guess the wagon will drag home,” he observed, as he hitched up Dobbin anew, “but we will have to walk.”

“Say,” broke in Ned suddenly, “you think something hit the horse and started him up?”

“I am sure of that,” declared Dave.

“Then I’ll bet it’s one of those Bolgers. See, we’re right at the end of their lot. You know they pelted you once before?”

“I know that,” admitted Dave, “but I don’t see or hear anything of them just now.”

“Oh, they’d lay in ambush in that brush yonder all night to play a trick on either of us,” insisted Ned.

The Bolgers were a family crowd very numerous and troublesome. They had often pestered Dave in the past, and, aroused by the suggestion of his comrade, Dave walked back the road a dozen feet or so, peering sharply into the straggly brush lining it.

“What is it, Dave?” inquired Ned, as his friend uttered a quick cry. He noticed that Dave had come to a short stop and was stooping over in the road.

“My foot kicked something,” explained Dave, groping about. “Why, I wonder what this is?”

“What?” put in Ned curiously.

“It’s a bundle of some kind.”

“Why, yes,” added Ned, peering sharply at the object in Dave’s hand. “It looks like a rolled-up sweater.”

“Some one must have dropped it from a wagon,” said Dave. “There’s something else here than a sweater, though.”

“Let’s have a look at it,” suggested Ned eagerly.

“Hold on,” said Dave, as his comrade reached out to unroll the wadded-up bundle. “It’s too dark to make out anything plain.”

The moon had not yet come up, and on that tree-lined road it was pretty dark. Dave moved up to the wagon. Under the front seat was an oil lantern, and he secured this and lighted it.

“Why, I should say there was something else besides a sweater!” exclaimed Ned excitedly, as Dave unrolled the garment on the seat cushion.

“Yes, there’s a pocket book,” said Dave.

“Open it – let’s see what’s in it,” suggested Ned.

“A watch,” spoke Dave.

“And some money. Why, this is a big find, Dave! Wonder who lost it? And look, there’s a medal – a gold medal.”

Dave took this up and inspected it closely. His fingers trembled with excitement as he did so, for the pretty bauble suggested the theme nearest and dearest to his heart.

The main plate of the medal was chased with the outline of an airship. Pendant from this by two tiny gold chains was a little strip of metal, and on this was inscribed the words: “Presented to Robert A. King by the C. A. A. First Endurance Prize.”

“Why, I know where this came from!” cried Dave suddenly.

“Do you?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“It fell out of that airship that just went over us. It was this bundle that hit the horse and made him run away.”

“Why – why – ” stammered Ned in great excitement. “Do you think so?”

“I am sure of it. That name there, too – ‘King’. I read about him being down at the meet at Fairfield in a paper yesterday, and ‘C. A. A.’ means Central Aero Association.”

“Is there much money, Dave?” questioned Ned.

“About fifty dollars.”

“What are you going to do with it?”

“Return it to the owner.”

“Of course, but how are you going to get it to him?”

“I’ll find a way,” replied Dave thoughtfully. “He will be pretty glad to get back that medal.”

“I should think so, too.”

Dave carefully replaced the pocket book in the sweater, rolled it up, and stowed it in the corner of the seat space. Then he took up the lines and started up Dobbin, both he and Ned walking along beside the wagon.

Ned had been dazzled with the sight of the valuable contents of the sweater bundle, and could talk of nothing else. Dave let him talk, and did not say much. He had the broken wagon and a thought of the way that mishap would stir up his guardian on his mind, and it was not a very pleasant thing to think about. At the same time, Dave had a vague glimmering idea that events were framing up that brought him in closer touch all the time with aeronautics.

“Say, Dave, I’ll go home with you if you like,” suggested Ned, as they neared the Towner place.

“Thank you, Ned, but I don’t think you had better.”

“I could help you put up the horse and all that, you know.”

“No,” responded Dave definitely. “There’s a storm to face, and I might just as well face it alone and have it over with.”

“Tell me what you decide to do about getting that stuff back to the airship man, won’t you?”

“I certainly shall.”

“I wish you could arrange to take it to this Mr. King yourself, Dave,” went on Ned. “He would be sure to appreciate it, and help you get an insight into the doings down at the aero meet in which you are so interested. Well, see you to-morrow! Good night!”

“Good night, Ned,” responded Dave, and started on his lonely way. He wondered how his guardian would take his late coming and the broken wagon. As the rail supporting the broken wheel clattered over the rutty road leading into the yard, Dave drew Dobbin to a halt and stared up wonderingly at the one side window of the barn loft.

There Dave saw a light, or rather the receding radiance of a light, as if some person was just descending the stairs with a lantern. It was a very unusual circumstance for anybody to visit the loft except himself. He had always used it as a work room, the grain and hay being stored in a shed built onto the stable. The next moment Mr. Warner came out from the barn.

He carried a lantern in one hand. In the other was a big sledge hammer. The old man looked ugly, excited and was out of breath. The moment he caught sight of Dave he hurried forward, dropping the hammer.

“Aha! so you’ve got home at last, have you?” he snarled.

“Yes, sir. I’m afraid I am a little late,” said Dave.

“A little late – a little late!” snarled the old man. “You’re two hours behind time. Now then, I want to know what this means?”

“I was delayed in finding Mr. Swain at the warehouse,” explained Dave, “but I don’t make that an excuse. There were some airships going over the town. Everybody was looking at them, and I couldn’t help doing it myself.”

“Airships!” shouted Warner. “Well, there’s one airship, as you call ’em, that won’t fill your head with nonsense any more.”

“What do you mean?” inquired Dave anxiously.

“I mean that I won’t stand you loitering and wasting my time any more,” declared Dave’s guardian. “I mean that I’ve settled one end of your nonsense. I’ve smashed that crazy model of yours, and if I hear any more of this airship rot, I’ll give you the trouncing of your life.”

“You’ve – smashed – my – model!” gasped Dave, in unspeakable amazement and dismay.

“Yes, I have. What about it?” challenged the irate old tyrant.

“You dared to – ” began Dave, his face on fire, and he felt as if he could no longer control himself. Then fortunately at just that moment there was a diversion. His guardian’s eye chanced to fall upon the dismantled wagon with one wheel gone and the box supported by the dragging fence rail.

With a shriek of rage that was almost a bellow he grabbed Dave by the arm and dragged him up to the wrecked vehicle.

“Who did that?” he raged. “Don’t tell me – it’s a piece of spite work! Who did that, I say?”

CHAPTER III

BREAKING AWAY

Dave Dashaway was almost speechless. His tyrant master had struck him in a tender spot, indeed. Not that Dave had ever been foolish enough to build extravagant hopes on his model. It had been all guess work and an experiment. However, his soul had been wrapped up in his labor, he had been proud and pleased with his progress as an inventor, and that mean, vengeful act of the old man roused him up terribly.

“What busted that wagon?” demanded Mr. Warner, grasping Dave’s arm till the pain was unbearable.

Dave jerked loose, and panting and angry-faced confronted his guardian with a look that made the old man hesitate. His lip trembled, but he held his speech as steady as he could, as he replied:

“Dobbin got scared and ran into the ditch.”

“With your star-gazing after those airships I’ll warrant.”

This was so near the truth that Dave did not reply.

“What do you suppose will pay for all that damage to that wagon?” demanded Warner.

“I suppose my hard work will,” bluntly replied Dave.

“Your hard work – bah! It looks as if you was worked hard, fritting half of the afternoon away, spending hours and hours on that worthless piece of trumpery up in the barn loft. I’ve settled for good and all. Now you put up that horse, get your supper, and go to your room. You dare to leave it till I say so, and I’ll just call the sheriff up here again, and see what he says about affairs.”

This was an old-time threat of his guardian. It was worn so threadbare that Dave did not pay much attention to it. He proceeded silently about his task, unhitched Dobbin, led him to his stall, and made him comfortable for the night with feed and bedding.

As Dave came out into the yard again he made a speedy run for the wagon. His guardian had been poking about the vehicle, and had discovered the sweater roll. This he now held, turning it over and over in his hand and viewing it curiously.

“Here!” shouted Dave, “that’s mine.”

“Oh, is it?” snapped the old man, holding the bundle out of Dave’s reach. “What is it? I’m going to see.”

“I don’t mean that it belongs to me,” Dave corrected himself, “but I found it.”

“What is it?”

“It fell out of an airship. It lighted on Dobbin’s back. That’s what made him run away.”

“Fell from an airship?” repeated old Warner with a sniff of disbelief. “Romancing, hey?”

“No, I am not, I am telling you the truth,” persisted Dave.

“Hello! hello! Here, what’s this?”

Mr. Warner had opened the sweater. His miserly old eyes fairly gloated over the pocket book and its contents. His thin cruel lips moved as if he was smacking them over a meal.

“You found this, you say?” he inquired.

“Yes, I did,” responded Dave brusquely, none too well pleased with the way things had turned out.

“Well, finders keepers!” chuckled the old man with a cunning laugh.

“Nobody is going to have that pocket book but the owner,” said Dave staunchly.

“I’ll arrange about that, you young insolent!” retorted Mr. Warner.

“You’ll have to, in the right way, too,” asserted Dave, who was quite nettled.

“Eh – what’s that?” shouted the old man.

“Just what I said. If you will look at that medal in that pocket book, you will find that the owner’s name is on it. It is ‘Robert King’. All you’ve got to do is to send his property back to him. I happen to know that he is at Fairfield now, and a letter directed there would reach him.”

“Say,” blurted out old Warner, “I know what to do, I guess, about my own business.”

“This is my business, too,” insisted Dave. “I found that property, and I’m honest enough to want to get it right back to the man who lost it.”

“You get into that house quick as you can, and mind your own business and keep your mouth shut, or I’ll make it pretty interesting for you,” bawled the old man.

Dave closed his lips tightly. He had gone through a pretty trying ordeal. It had made him almost desperate. It had come so thick and fast, one indignity after another, that Dave had not found time to break down. His just wrath over the destruction of the model was lessened by the appropriation of the sweater bundle.

“There’s something I won’t stand,” declared Dave, as he made his way into the house. “I know who that property belongs to, and if Mr. Warner tries any tricks, I’ll expose him.”

Dave felt sure that his tyrant master would not do the square thing. He might not dare to keep the pocket book and its contents and say nothing about it. Dave felt sure, however, that in any event Mr. Warner would not give it up without a big reward. This humiliated Dave, somehow, on account of his father and his own liking for aeronautics. Dave felt more than kindly to one of that profession, and would have been glad to return the lost pocket book for nothing.

Dave glanced into the kitchen as he passed its open door. The scraps of food on the uncovered deal table did not at all appeal to his appetite. Besides that, he was too stirred up to care to eat. He went up to his little room in the attic and sat down at the open window to think.

Dave felt that a crisis in his affairs had been reached. His mind ran back rapidly over his past life. He could find nothing cheering in it since the time he was removed from a pleasant boarding school upon the death of his father. The latter had been traveling in foreign parts at the time giving lectures on aeronautics, of which science he was an ardent student.

Since then old Silas Warner had led his young ward a very wretched life. Several letters had come addressed to Mr. Dashaway. These Mr. Warner had not shown to Dave, but had told him that they amounted to nothing of importance. Dave had noticed that these, with some other papers, his guardian kept in a strong manilla envelope in his desk.

Dave had known nothing but neglect and hardship with Silas Warner in the past. He saw no prospects now of any betterment of his condition. After what had happened during the day the man would be more unbearable than ever.

“I’ve got to do it,” murmured Dave, after a long period of painful thought. “My life will be spoiled if I stay here. I’ll never learn anything, I’ll never amount to anything. There is only one way out.”

Dave got up and paced the floor of the darkened room in greatly disturbed spirit.

“I’ll do it,” he added a moment later, with firmness and decision. “I’ll be true to my name – it’s a ‘dash away’ for freedom. Yes, I’ve made up my mind. I’m going to run away from home – if this can be called home.”

Old Warner had told Dave to go to his room and remain there until further orders. In his present state of mind, however, Dave cared little for that. He was so excited that the air of the close low-ceilinged roof room seemed stifling to him. The lad got out through the window and clambered down the remains of an old vine trellis without trouble. Too many times at night when he could not sleep had he stolen out thus secretly to work on his pet model in the barn loft, to miss his footing now. Dave reached the ground, went over to the pasture lot and threw himself down upon the grass. His hands under his head, staring up at the stars, he rested and reflected.

The more he thought the more was he resolved to leave Brookville. He would leave it that night, too, he decided. He knew that when his guardian discovered his absence he would raise a great hue and cry and try to find him, just as he had done before.

"I'll move as soon as he goes to bed," planned Dave. "That will give me a safe start away from Brookville."

Dave decided to regain his room by the route he had left it. As he again neared the house, however, he noticed a light in the sitting room which his guardian usually occupied evenings. As Dave made out Silas Warner and observed what he was about, he glided to a thick bush near the open window and peered curiously through its branches.

Dave saw Mr. Warner seated at the big cumbrous desk. He had thrown the sweater on the floor at his side. The pocket book lay open on the desk, and its contents were spread out before their engrossed possessor.

The old man was viewing the collection with gloating eyes. He took up the badge and weighted it in his hands as if thinking of it only as to its value as gold. For nearly ten minutes Dave watched his miserly guardian finger over the various articles. He knew that it was in his mind to keep them if he could.

Finally old Warner restored all the articles to the pocket book. He took a small box from a drawer in the desk. Dave had seen it before. As Warner opened it, Dave again caught sight of the manilla envelope which he knew held papers referring to his dead father.

The old man locked up the desk and carried the box to a corner of the room. Here he leaned over, and Dave saw him lift up a small section of the floor. When it was set back in place the box had disappeared.

A new train of thought came into Dave's mind as he noticed all this. He now knew the secret hiding place of his miserly old guardian. He watched the latter take up the lighted candle and go over to the wing room of the house where he slept. Mr. Warner reached out of its window and pulled in a rope, resting its end on the floor directly beside his bed.

This rope ran out to an old swing frame which held a bell of pretty good size. It had once belonged to a school house, but had got cracked, and Warner had got it for nothing. He had never had occasion to ring it. He had told his neighbors that he had put it up for protection. He was a lonely old man, he had said. Some one might try to rob him. If so, he could alarm his neighbors and call them to the rescue. This had given rise to the rumor that the old man must have some hidden wealth about the place. To a stranger, however, the dilapidated old place would not indicate this.

Dave waited till his guardian had retired, then he got back to his room, moving about cautiously. Dave owned only the rather shabby suit he wore, but he had some handkerchiefs and the like, and these he gathered together and made up into a small parcel. Then he sat down to wait. It was in order for Dave to depart by the window route if he so chose, and no one the wiser. Dave, however, had something further to do before he left the inhospitable roof of his guardian.

It was not until two hours later that Dave ventured to leave his room. He stowed the parcel containing his few small personal effects under his coat and took a piece of unlighted candle in his hand. Then he groped his way cautiously down the rickety stairs.

In a few minutes Dave was in the sitting room. He had listened at the entrance to the wing room in which his guardian slept. He had heard Silas Warner breathing regularly, and was sure that he was asleep. Dave carefully closed the door of the sitting room opening out into the hallway. He went to the corner of the room where he had seen his guardian stow away the little box.

A chair stood over the spot, and this Dave moved out of place. He lit the candle, and by poking with his hand soon located a loose section of the flooring about two feet square.

"I've found it," breathed Dave softly, and he lifted the square from its place.

Below showed the usual space found between beams. Lying across the lower boards was the box he was after. Dave lifted it out. He found that it was secured with a small padlock.

“I don’t like to do it,” mused Dave, “but there is no other way.”

He found little difficulty in wrenching the padlock, hasp and all, out of place, for the fastening was of tin, and flimsy. Then Dave opened the cover of the box.

He took out the pocket book belonging to the aeronaut. Then he lifted out the manilla envelope.

“I don’t suppose there’s anything but old worthless papers in this envelope,” he decided, “but it belongs to me, if anybody. The mischief!”

Dave sprang to his feet in dismay. He had tilted the square of flooring against the chair near by. Some way accidentally his hand had struck it, and it tipped over flat with quite a clang. Trying to stop it, Dave fell against the chair. This went over with an echoing crash.

Dave knew that the windows were double locked. If he had disturbed old Warner, his only route of escape was through the single doorway of the room and down the hallway. So quickly did he run for the door that he had not time to blow out the candle.

Dave opened the door with a violent push. Once out in the hall he glanced anxiously across it.

“Too bad – too late,” he murmured, as his eye fell upon his guardian just coming out of his room. Against the candle light, Silas Warner must have recognized Dave. The latter was just stowing the manilla envelope in his pocket, and the old man must have seen that, too.

“Hi, there! Stop! What are you up to?” bellowed old Warner.

Dave ran down the hall at the top bent of his speed. He knew the kitchen door was bolted, and risked no chance of being stopped by halting to open it. Indeed, he dodged down a step into a store room, the window of which was always open. He was through its sash space with a bolt and a squirm in a jiffy.

Making sure that he had lost nothing in his flight, Dave put across the yard. The last he saw of his alarmed and excited guardian was his frowsled grey head stuck through the buttery window, bawling frantically:

“Stop him! stop thief! stop thief!”

Dave crossed the yard and the meadow in swift bounds. He was sorry that his intended flight had been discovered, and was satisfied that old Warner would proceed to make a great noise about it very promptly. However, now started on his runaway career, Dave resolved that he would not turn back.

“A good swift run, and I’ll get safe and sound out of the neighborhood,” he told himself. “Of course Mr. Warner will start a chase after me, but I’ll get a lead they can’t beat. Hello!”

Dave Dashaway prepared for a new spurt of speed as a wild alarm rang out on the still night air.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

CHAPTER IV

DAVE DASHAWAY'S HIDEOUT

The old cracked school bell back at the Warner place awoke the echoes far and wide as Dave ran on. As he came to the corner of the road leading past the home of his friend, Ned Towner, he paused for a moment to take breath and estimate the situation back of him.

The bell had by this time ceased its loud clangor. Dave saw lights appear beyond the house. He fancied, too, that he heard voices in the distance. It was not yet very late, and he guessed that, if only out of curiosity, some of the neighbors would appear upon the scene.

"There's somebody coming from the other direction." He spoke quickly, jumped the ditch, and plunged in among the clump of underbrush just in time to avoid three running forms hurrying down the road.

"It's the Bolger boys," said Dave, peering forth from his covert.

"Hustle, fellows," the oldest of the trio was urging.

"Yes, there's some kind of a rumpus up at the Warner place," added a second voice.

"Hope it's a fire," piped in a third, reckless voice. "That would make a regular celebration, after the airships."

Dave, from what he overheard, judged that the Bolgers were on their way from the village when attracted by the commotion at the Warner farm. Others might soon appear, Dave mused, and struck out across a meadow. He knew that it would be risky to go into the village or nearer to it. In a very short time, thought Dave, his guardian would have the sheriff and his assistants looking for him.

The lad thought rapidly. He planned that if he could reach the switching yards of the railroad, he might get aboard some freight car and ride safely out of the district. He ran along a wide ditch which lined the Bolger farm, intending to leap it at a narrow part and cut thence across a patch of low land to the railroad tracks.

"O – oh!" suddenly ejaculated Dave, and fell flat, the breath nearly knocked out of his body.

He squirmed about, wincing with a severe pain in one ankle, and wondering what had tripped and still held him a prisoner.

"It's a trap," said Dave, as he got to a sitting position and investigated. "It's a muskrat trap set by the Bolger boys, I guess."

The blunt edges of the trap, which was secured by a chain to a stake driven into the ground, did not hurt him particularly. It was the severe wrench, the sudden stopping, that had caused the trouble. Dave pried the trap loose and got to his feet.

"Hello, this is serious," he spoke, as he found that he could not progress without limping, and then, only very slowly.

Dave looked about him with some concern. The commotion in the direction of the Warner place was increasing. He fancied he heard the hoofs of a horse coming down the road.

"It won't do to linger here," he said. "They would be sure to find me. I don't believe I can get to the railroad with this foot. I have certainly sprained my ankle."

Dave had done nothing of the kind, but he did not know it at the moment. The moon was shining full and high. He looked about him for some hiding place.

He limped along the edge of the ditch, despairing of being able to cross it. Suddenly a suggestive idea came to him as he made out the home of his friend, Ned.

"If I can manage to get to the barn on the Towner place, I know where to hide safe enough," he mused.

His foot hurt him dreadfully, but he kept on, got past the rails of the pasture enclosure, and came up to the barn at the end away from the house and the road. The loft door was open, and cleats ran up on the outside boards. Dave sunk down all in a heap in among the fresh sweet-smelling hay. The pain left him as soon as his weight was removed from his foot, but he was quite exhausted from the efforts he had made.

The boy rubbed his foot ruefully and listened to distant sounds floating on the night air. Finally he crept over to the corner of the barn farthest away from the opening leading to the lower floor. There was no danger of any one coming to that spot. There was a broad crack in the boards there, and Dave could look out towards the road.

Dave caught sight of a horseman dashing along the highway in the direction of the village. Then he made out the three Bolger boys returning to their home. A little later two men appeared. One of them was leading a horse.

"It's Mr. Warner and our nearest neighbor, and they've got old Dobbin with them," said Dave.

He saw his guardian go to the front of the Towner home. A light appeared inside, and in a few minutes Mr. Towner came around the corner of the house with Mr. Warner. The horse was led up to the barn.

"I'm sorry Dave has run away, Mr. Warner," Mr. Towner remarked.

"Oh, we'll catch him," replied Dave's guardian. "A bad boy, sir, a very bad boy."

"Why, I never thought that."

"But he is. He broke into my desk, and has stolen money and other property of mine."

The listening Dave fired up at this bold and false accusation. He was half minded to go down into the yard and face his accuser with the proof of the falsity of his charge.

"If you'll just let me take any old rig to hitch up Dobbin to, it'll be an accommodation," went on Warner. "That runaway rascal maliciously smashed the wheel of my only wagon this evening."

Mr. Towner pulled a light vehicle out of a shed, and Dobbin was hitched up. Silas Warner and his neighbor drove off, and Mr. Towner went back to bed.

Dave was worried and disturbed for a long time, even after things had quieted down. In his present crippled condition he did not dare venture outside. He was snug and safe for the time being at least, and finally he dropped off into a sound sleep.

The youth awoke to find the sun shining through the half-open hay door. He crept over to it as he fancied he heard some one moving about in the yard below. Dave was gratified to find his foot in much improved condition over the night previous. It was still a bit lame and stiff, but he could bear his weight upon it without flinching.

"Glad the ankle isn't sprained or broken," he told himself cheerfully. "I believe I could walk with it, and maybe try a run, if I had to."

He was much refreshed by his sleep, but both hungry and thirsty. His face brightened up considerably as he heard some one clucking in the chicken yard, and glancing down recognized Ned Towner.

Dave did not know who might be in the stable below or in the vicinity. He leaned towards the loft door and gave a low but distinct whistle. It was one he and his chum used often in signalling one another.

"Hello!"

Ned Towner dropped the pan out of which he was throwing corn to the chickens. He looked about him in a startled way. Then he came out of the poultry yard, trying to locate the source of the call.

"It's Dave," the lurker in the hay loft heard him mutter. "No one else – Dave."

"S – st!"

Dave had shown his face and waved his hand from the door aperture.

"Dave!" repeated Ned, in still further wonderment.

“Yes, it’s me,” responded Dave in a hurried, cautious tone of voice. “Anybody else about?”

“Not a soul.”

“All at breakfast?”

“Yes.”

“Come up here, will you?”

“You bet I will, and mighty glad to see you,” cried Ned, with vim and sincerity. “Now then – what?”

Reaching the loft Ned challenged his friend, curious and excited, as if he expected that Dave would have a great story to tell.

“You know what has happened,” said Dave.

“That you ran away last night – yes. They are talking about nothing else in the house yonder. Say, tell me about it, for I know old Warner’s tale is all bosh.”

“The robbery end of it is, you can rely on that,” replied Dave, and he recited briefly his adventures and misadventures since they had last met.

“Say,” cried Ned, when Dave had concluded his story, “you just stick to your plan.”

“I intend to,” answered Dave sturdily.

“If ever you go back, or they get you back, life will just be unbearable to you. Old Warner has branded you as a thief, and he’s mean enough to keep the advantage. Tell me, how can I help you?”

“Well, of course I’m pretty hungry,” said Dave with a laugh.

“I’ll fix that end of it,” promised Ned. “Just wait till father and the hired men get off to work in the field, and I’ll see that you get a first-class breakfast.”

Ned had to leave his friend just then, for some one was calling him from the house. A few minutes later Dave saw Mr. Towner and his hired men come to the stable, hitch up two teams and drive over beyond the trees lining the yard.

In half-an-hour Ned came up through the inside of the barn. He produced a package done up in paper, and then took two bottles from his pockets.

“Hot coffee, cold water, biscuits, some bacon, gingerbread and two hard boiled eggs,” he reported.

“Why, this is just famous,” declared Dave with zest.

“Here’s a book, too. Say, it will just suit your fancy,” added Ned, bringing the volume out from under his coat. “It’s a great story. I got it down at the library yesterday. I thought of you when I picked it out.”

“What is it called?” inquired Dave, his mouth full of good food.

“‘Modern Wonders of the Air’ – up to date, too. It tells all about balloons and early airships. Too scientific for me, but I’ll bet it will be easy as A. B. C. to you.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Dave, “but it will be right welcome. I’m thinking I had better keep hidden away for today, anyhow.”

“I should say you had,” assented Ned forcibly. “Why – but I haven’t had a chance to tell you until now.”

“What about?”

“Two of our hired men saw the sheriff and old Warner early this morning.”

“Are they still looking for me?”

“The officers and your guardian were out till daylight, scurrying around the country in every direction. The sheriff’s men have driven to three or four neighboring towns. They are watching the railroad depot, and there isn’t a soul in town who isn’t on the lookout for you.”

“I suppose that Mr. Warner has made me out to be a regular boy villain,” suggested Dave, looking serious.

“He has, but your friends know better. And soon as you are away safe and sure, I’ll just make it my special business to face old Warner down with the real facts. You’re not thinking of leaving this hide-out in the daytime, Dave?”

“I dare not take the risk of being seen now.”

“Then make yourself comfortable till I come home from school at noon,” said Ned.

Dave felt immensely better after his breakfast. He had a true friend to aid him and keep him posted, a safe hide-out, and an interesting book to read. Dave stole down to the lower floor of the barn after a spell and took a dip in the water trough. Then he resumed his comfortable couch on the sweet-smelling hay, and for two hours was engrossed in reading.

With what he knew, and what he desired, and the way circumstances seemed to be leading him, Dave felt that he was destined to soon know a good deal more than he did about air sailing.

He got to planning his course of flight when he started out again. Then he fell to dreaming, went to sleep, and had the delicious sensation of being aboard of a real airship, himself a full-fledged aviator.

CHAPTER V MAKING OFF

“Now is your chance, Dave.”

“Yes, the coast looks clear.”

“How’s your foot?”

“That horse liniment from the stable has fixed it up all right. I think I could run as good as ever.”

“Which is mighty good – only don’t run into any of the sheriff’s friends.”

“I’ll try not to,” laughed Dave.

He was taking a farewell of his trusty and helpful friend, Ned. Dave had never known a truer one. He had kept under cover in the hayloft all that day. At noon time Ned had brought him a lunch and news. There was not much to report. Mr. Warner had told the officers that his truant ward would make for some “crazy airship place,” first thing. The sheriff, however, refused to go outside the county, unless he was paid for it. Old Warner was too stingy to advance any money. So, it looked as though once beyond the boundaries of the immediate district, Dave would be pretty safe from pursuit.

It was almost dusk now, and the two friends stood just behind the barn, shaking hands goodbye. Dave had eaten a good supper, and besides that Ned had brought a little parcel containing sandwiches, “to spell” him, as he put it, if he got hungry on the all-night tramp he was starting out on.

“I hate to see you start out this way, without a cent of money,” said Ned rather anxiously. “I haven’t got any, and you won’t let me tell mother anything about your being here. I know she would help you, if she could.”

“Thank you, Ned,” replied Dave gratefully, “your mother too. You see, though, I have plenty of money,” and with a smile Dave slapped his coat where the pocket book that had dropped from the airship the evening previous reposed.

“Yes, but that isn’t yours, Dave.”

“I shall never forget that,” replied Dave promptly. “There’s just this, though. If I got in a tight place I wouldn’t hesitate to borrow a dollar or two to help me on my way back to the owner.”

“You’re going to look for Mr. King right off, are you, Dave?”

“Yes, the birdman first and foremost, Ned. I’m counting a good deal on interesting him in giving me advice or help about getting into this airship business.”

“Oh, you’ll land there,” predicted Ned confidently. “You’re too much in earnest not to succeed. Then you’re going to head for Fairfield?”

“Yes, Ned.”

“That’s where the aero meet is?”

“Exactly.”

“Aren’t you afraid from what he guesses and knows, that old Warner will be looking for you, or have some one looking for you right at that place?” inquired Ned.

“I shall guard out for that,” replied Dave. “I’ve thought and planned it all out.”

“How is that?”

“To-morrow is the last day of the meet at Fairfield, so of course after that Mr. King won’t be there. I suppose he follows the circuit, as they call it. So, you see, I won’t be long at Fairfield under any circumstances, and I don’t think my guardian will risk the money chasing me all around the circle.”

“That’s so. I guess you’ve figured it out about right, Dave. Well, good luck, old fellow, and be sure to write to me.”

“I will, Ned. Coast all clear?”

Ned glanced around the corner of the barn towards the house.

“It’s all right, Dave – good-by.”

“Good-by.”

Ned stood watching his friend until he was sure he had got well across a pasture lot and safely out of view from the house or the road. This stretch of the Towner place was very poor land, finally running into a swamp. The moon was just coming up, but on the lowlands the rising mist was a protection to Dave.

He got to the end of the Bolger farm and then lined the drainage ditch extending beyond it. Dave leaped it finally at a narrow place, avoiding a wide morass. A little beyond this the lad came to a rutty road. It ran a mile or more to the railroad, but as he knew was not much used except to drive cattle to be shipped to the stock pens at the freight yards.

Dave had his plans clearly worked out. His present proposed destination was Fairfield. He was in hopes of finding some freight train making up in the yards. His idea was to get into some open or empty car, and secure a free ride most or all of the way to the city where the aero meet was in progress.

“There’s some one coming,” exclaimed Dave.

He had not counted upon meeting any one upon that lonely road at that time of the night. With the words he sprang behind a big tree. Then he peered keenly ahead of him, intending to make for the fence and hide himself in the thick underbrush beyond it.

The air was clearer and the moonlight brighter on the higher land Dave had now gained. Perhaps a quarter of a mile down the road he made out a horse. Chasing it was a man. The animal would browse and wait till its evident pursuer got up close to it. Then with a snort, kicking up its heels madly, it described a series of playful circles, dodged the man, and leaped the fence at the side of the road, a yard-high wire.

Dave watched the man chase it all over a patch of scrubby brush. Finally the animal jumped the fence back into the road. It kept sideways towards its pursuer, nibbling at the grass. It waited till the man was fairly upon it. Then up went its heels, and along the road the animal sped, the man shouting vainly after it.

This time the horse took a longer spurt than before. Dave made out the situation, and debated with himself how he had better act. He could not afford to come up against any person who knew him. In the distance he could not make out the identity of the man. About the horse, however, Dave was surer. The animal Dave had certainly never seen before. No such horse was known about Brookville, and spontaneously Dave uttered the exclamation:

“What a beauty!”

Dave was a lover of animals, and this one carried him to the bounds of admiration. High breeding, grace, elegance and value showed in the splendid animal. As it pranced up the road in the white moonlight, Dave was reminded of pictures he had seen of some magnificent charger.

“He looks like a race horse,” said Dave. “He has run away from that man, who is desperate to catch him. I ought to help him do it. If I can, I might tie the horse to a sapling and get out of sight before the man comes up.”

Dave kept behind the tree, his plan being to dash out when the horse ran by, and attempt to catch the halter rope which was trailing on the ground. As the animal got within ten feet of the tree, however, it let down its speed to a slow walk, and, its pursuer fully a quarter of a mile away, proceeded calmly to nibble at the grass.

Dave kept perfectly still. The animal, all unsuspecting of his being so near, came closer and closer to the tree in its browsing. A toss of its head sent the trailing halter rope whipping the ground not six inches from Dave's foot.

"Got you!" cried Dave in triumph, as he grabbed the rope with one hand, and with the other clung to a knob on the tree to resist the quick jerk the horse gave. "So – o, nice fellow, so – o."

Dave talked soothingly to the animal, that, however, with flashing eyes and bristling mane, backed foot by foot, resenting capture. Dave got a hand-over-hand clutch on the rope and finally a firm grip on the halter bridle itself. He was surer of himself now, for he knew considerable about horses. Still he counted on something of a tussle. To his surprise, however, as he gently stroked the mane of the high mettled steed, the animal moved toward him and nosed down to his side, sniffing inquiringly.

"Why," said Dave with an amused laugh, "the animal scents the lunch Ned gave me."

Dave did not know what was contained in the package in his pocket, but he proceeded to break through its paper covering. His fingers closed on a sugar frosted cookie. As he brought it into sight the horse gave an eager whinny and fairly snatched it from his hand. Then it rubbed its nose caressingly and coaxingly against his shoulder.

"Good friends, eh – as long as the cookies last!" laughed Dave. "All right, here's another."

Dave now had the animal under perfect control. Of a sudden, however, the horse pricked up his ears, glinted its eyes backwards, and began to paw the ground. Dave saw the apparent owner of the horse approaching.

"I'll stand my ground – the man is a stranger," thought Dave rapidly.

The man was puffing, panting and perspiring. He looked exhausted after his vigorous chase, but glad as he saw that Dave had the horse firm and tight.

"Capital!" he cried. "I wouldn't have lost that horse for a fortune, and it means nearly that to get him safe back where he came from. Good for you, young fellow," he added. "I'll make it a lucky catch for you."

"A good beginning in my runaway career," said Dave to himself.

CHAPTER VI

CADMUS

“Look out!” shouted Dave suddenly.

In his eagerness to recover his horse, the man who had just come up to the scene of the capture ran directly up to the animal to promptly retreat in some dismay.

Without trying to break away from Dave the horse began to move rapidly in a half circle, using tail, rear hoofs and body as a menace against the approach of its master. Dave gave the animal another cookie, which quieted it down. However, the horse kept a constant eye on the man, who did not venture to approach any nearer.

“Well, well, well,” laughed the man in a comical way, “this is a new stunt for Cadmus. Why, I thought we were friends, old fellow,” he added, addressing the horse.

“Did he run away from you?” inquired Dave.

“First chance he got – and the only one, so far.”

“How is that?” asked Dave curiously.

“He was raised a pet.”

“Anybody can see that.”

“Never heard of Cadmus?”

“Not until you called him that,” replied Dave.

“Well, Cadmus is a famous racer.”

“He looks it.”

“Oh, he’s made his name. Isn’t that so, beauty?”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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