

Foster James H.

Lost in the Wilds of Brazil



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CHAPTER I

A Startling Discovery

“**LOOK** here, Joe. There’s something stirring. I know the signs. Our dads wouldn’t keep together constantly, studying maps and reading books and making frequent trips to the museum, for nothing. It – ”

“You’re right, Bob. They certainly must have something important in mind. And I have an idea as to what it is.”

“Another expedition into the unknown,” cut in Bob Holton, in tones that implied certainty.

“But where, do you suppose?” asked Joe Lewis, his brown eyes sparkling with interest.

“More than I know,” the other youth replied. “Could be any place. But wherever it is, I’ll bet they’ve been there before. They just travel from one end of this little old world to another in search of birds and reptiles and animals, and they always find them.”

“And always will,” added Joe with strong conviction. “Why,” he went on, becoming even more absorbed, “do you remember the time they went to Africa in search of a white rhinoceros?”

“Yes. Looked high and low for several months, and finally got one after all hopes had been abandoned. Oh, it takes them to do it. Just let the curator mention the things wanted, and if it’s at all possible, our dads will get them. All specimens are alike to – ”

He was interrupted by the sound of footsteps from the side of the house and turned to see who the person might be. While he is looking expectantly, it might be well to tell who the boys were, and what had been their experiences up to the time this story opens.

Bob was a big fellow, strong and muscular, and endowed with the ability to do the right thing at the right time. He was one of the star players on the high school football team. Everyone liked him – he was so straightforward and sympathizing and trustworthy.

Joe was of medium size, with almost black eyes and a naturally dark complexion. He was lighter and less robust than his friend, but was possessed of fierce courage and bravery. He never started a thing without finishing it.

Mr. Holton and Mr. Lewis, fathers of the youths, were noted naturalists and collectors of specimens for museums and zoos. They had been nearly everywhere and always welcomed any hint that might start them on a new trip into the unknown. The two men had met several years before at a convention of scientists, and took a great liking to each other. As they both lived in Washington, D. C., they agreed to work together in behalf of a large museum, and Mr. Lewis made an attempt to purchase the residence next to that of his friend. He was at last successful in acquiring it, and then began the warm friendship between the two youths, Bob and Joe.

The boys were together much of their time and got along excellently, following in their fathers’ footsteps as much as possible by taking hikes into the woods to study nature. Fresh with the vigor of youth, they were having a grand time together, but would have had a still greater one had they been permitted to accompany the men on the various scientific expeditions.

“You’re only freshmen,” Mr. Holton had told them, about three years before. “Wait till you’re juniors or seniors, and then perhaps we will consider taking you along.”

Now the boys were in their senior year, or would be when school opened the coming fall, and were eagerly anticipating the future.

“If they’d only make a trip this summer,” said Joe, shortly after school had closed. “Then we might –”

Let us return to the boys, as they cast glances at the side of the house. The sound of footsteps grew louder, and the next moment Bob’s father came into view.

“Hello, Dad.”

“Hello, Mr. Holton.”

The naturalist returned the greetings and then made his way to a porch seat. Several moments he spent in lighting a cigar. Then he turned to the youths.

“What’s all this praise you’ve been giving Mr. Lewis and me for our scientific work?” he asked, trying hard to suppress a smile.

The young men grinned. They had not suspected this.

“You got it right,” returned Joe. “You two have done as much for the museum as anyone else in this old U. S. And that’s as straight as a lion’s tail when he’s about to charge.”

Mr. Holton laughed unbelievably.

“I know your game,” he chuckled. “You’re paving the way to accompany us on that Brazilian trip we’re about to take. Right?”

Bob and Joe jumped to their feet in wild excitement. A trip to Brazil! Think of that! Then their supposition was correct. Something was stirring after all.

Mr. Holton guessed their thoughts and broke the short period of suspense.

“It’s an expedition to the jungles of the Amazon,” he explained, as the boys seated themselves and listened with breathless interest. “Going to get specimens of fauna for the museum. In addition, we wish to make a study of several wild Indian tribes there. It’s a trip I’ve always wished to take, but, strange to say, I’ve never had the opportunity. You boys probably know that this region is one of the least-known on the face of the globe. It has the world’s heaviest forests, some of the most savage of people, and a wide variety of birds and beasts.”

“Great!” blurted out Joe in a strange, animated tone. “How wonderful it would be! Away out in the wildest of Brazilian wilds, seeing strange and astonishing things – things that only a very few have the opportunity of seeing.”

“It’s my idea of adventure,” declared Bob, taking up where his friend had left off. “Why can’t you arrange to take us with you?”

The scientist eyed the young men intently with an expression of sympathy.

“Then you want to go that badly?” he asked, and then his eyes fell. He had been young himself once. How often had he visualized this very mission! How many times had he tramped through the heavy Western woods, imagining himself in a great tropical forest, with its mysteries, thrills, and tragedies! If those longings could only have been satisfied when they were strongest!

For over a minute Mr. Holton stared thoughtfully at the floor. Then, with twinkling eyes, he glanced up at the boys.

“What would you give to go with us?” he asked, his face brightening.

“What!” cried Bob, with a look that combined delight with bewilderment. “You mean that we can go?”

“Not exactly,” was the reply. “I just asked you what you’d give to go.”

“Everything!” blurted out Joe. “Everything we’ve got – and then some. Oh, do take us, Mr. Holton,” he went on more pleadingly. “We’re old enough by now to take care of ourselves.”

“I’d like to have you,” the naturalist said. “And so would your father. But your mothers –” Here he stopped. It was unnecessary to continue. The youths understood.

“But I’m sure they’ll consent,” Bob said, with a certainty that he was far from feeling. “Especially if they know you are willing to have us.”

“Of course there’s a possibility,” the man assured them. “But I wouldn’t be too sure of it. You know how they are. Unwilling to have their sons take any unnecessary risks. Well, perhaps they’re

right,” he went on, tapping the chair thoughtfully. “Perhaps it isn’t best to tax good fortune too much. You boys are young and have a great future before you. What if anything should happen – ”

“But, Dad,” Bob pleaded, “nothing will happen. We’d be with you and Mr. Lewis – and anyone else who would be along. Nothing has happened to you so far. You’ve always come back O.K.”

“We’ve had some narrow escapes, though,” with a shaking of the head. “Fever, wild beasts, savages, hurricanes – there’s no limit to the number of tragedies that may befall an expedition into the unknown. But then,” his tones became more lively, “you boys want to go with us regardless of these dangers, and if I must say so, I believe you’d make a good showing. I’ll talk the matter over with Mr. Lewis and your mothers and let you know later how things look.”

“Fine!” cried Bob, overwhelmed with joy. “Now tell us some more about this mission. What section of Amazonia do you intend to explore?”

“The lower middle,” was the response. “We intend to follow the Amazon to the Purús River, where we’ll branch off and travel by native canoes for approximately five hundred miles.”

Joe gave a long whistle.

“Five hundred miles by canoe!” he gasped, almost unbelievably. “Seems almost impossible. How can you take food enough along?”

“Does seem sort of absurd. But we’ll manage it. And we expect to live on game and fish to a certain extent. Everything will have to be timed to a dot. We won’t dare stay any longer than our food supply lasts. When that begins to get low, back to civilization we’ll go.”

“How long do you expect to be gone?” Bob asked.

“We – ll, perhaps three or four months. We want to get as much done as possible. You see,” he explained, “as I said before, our stay is limited to the supply of provisions we have with us. If it were possible to carry enough, I would like to spend at least six months there. What a wonderful opportunity to study primitive man in his everyday life.”

“Should think it would be rather dangerous,” remarked Joe. “He might object and study you instead. Headhunters, I mean.”

“It’s a chance we have to take,” was the reply. “But after all, if we treat them kindly there is little danger. Human nature is much the same all over the globe.”

“I’ll trust you to come out all right,” Bob said.

“We hope to,” the scientist returned. “And we also hope to add greatly to the world’s knowledge of Brazil and its animal inhabitants.”

“At present that isn’t very much, is it?” Joe asked.

“You can’t exactly say that,” Mr. Holton answered, “for a large amount is known about different sections that have been more or less frequented by civilized man. But when you refer to the deeper, more inaccessible regions, then it’s different. Of course there have been numerous expeditions sent out to explore these unknown sections, but even now there is a large and interesting field open to the scientist.”

“Well,” said Bob, after a short silence, “I only hope that Joe and I may go with you.”

“We’ll see about it,” his father replied. “But I can assure you that consent from your mothers will not come without considerable – Well! Look who’s here. Come on the porch and sit down, Ben.” He referred to Joe’s father, Mr. Lewis, who, as usual, was to be his intimate companion during their stay in Brazil.

Mr. Lewis was a man of medium height, with sparkling blue eyes and a complexion that was extremely bronzed.

“Hello, friends,” he greeted, seating himself and wiping the perspiration from his brow. “I suppose,” he said to Mr. Holton, “you’ve been telling the boys about our coming expedition to South America. Right?”

“Right!” echoed Bob. “And not only that, but Joe and I are going with you.”

“What’s that!” Mr. Lewis cried in surprise.

“Yes,” Bob’s father returned, “they’ve put in their request to be a part of the expedition. What do you think of it?”

“Well – a – I hardly know. How do you think their mothers will look at it?”

Mr. Holton shook his head.

“Impossible to say,” he answered. “But we can all guess. Still, if we see fit to take the boys along, we can put the matter before them. They may consent after considerable pleading.”

“Hurrah!” cried Joe, in tones of gratitude. “And I’m sure – ”

He stopped suddenly and sniffed the air sharply.

“There’s something burning,” he said quietly, and then moved around the house.

The next instant he was back, pale-faced and panic-stricken.

“Our garage is on fire!” he cried. “It’s all ablaze!”

CHAPTER II

Firebugs at Work!

AT Joe's ominous words, Mr. Lewis leaped to his feet.

"Come on," he said in wild excitement. "We can't get there any too quickly, for not only are the cars in danger but a satchel of valuable papers as well."

"Something in connection with our expedition to Brazil?" asked Bob's father, as he took second place in the race to the garage.

"Yes. They're very important. I should have taken them in the house at once."

As they turned to look at the scene, a feeling of helplessness crept over them, for already the blaze had leaped high in the air, and the crackling sound told that the fire had made considerable headway.

Bob rushed into the house and telephoned the fire department. Then, with Mrs. Lewis and Joe's sister, he moved back outside, to see that the structure was blazing even higher.

Meanwhile the others had unlocked the doors and were inside, doing their best to roll out the cars. But the smoke was so thick that they were making little headway.

"Quick!" cried Mr. Holton. "Where are the keys, Ben?"

"I don't know. I – I can't seem to find them. Should be in my pocket. No, guess I left them in the house."

The next instant he was gone, leaving his friends to survey the situation more carefully.

"It strikes me," remarked Bob thoughtfully, "that if we wait for him to return with the keys it will be too late."

"But what – how –" Mr. Holton stammered, but was interrupted by his son.

"The only way that I can see is to break the glass in one of the doors. Then we can get inside to release the emergency brake. How about it?"

"I'd hate to do that, my boy. Yet there seems to be no other way out."

As Bob had stated, it was evident that if they were to wait for the keys the cars would be badly burned. There was a possibility that the gasoline tanks might even explode, for at intervals particles of ignited timber fell from the blazing roof and missed them only a few inches. Rapidly the flames crept downward. Already they were halfway down the wall and moving like lightning. There was no time to lose. Something must be done!

"Come on," Bob urged, entering the garage once more. "We must get those cars out at any cost."

He looked about for some object with which he could break a glass, but could see nothing.

"If there was only a board, or even –"

"Here," came from his father, moving on up with a sharp piece of metal, "let me do it."

There was a crash, a splintering of glass, and the next moment Mr. Holton was inside. It took but a second to release the parking brake, and then the car rolled easily out of danger.

"There," panted the naturalist, rubbing his hand over his forehead. "Now to get to the coupé."

Just then there came the sound of fire bells, and before they had attended to the other car, several fire trucks pulled up in front of the house. Their occupants were easily attracted to the scene of the fire, and they lost no time in hurrying back.

"Quick!" yelled Joe, almost panic-stricken. "Let's get Dad's private car out. The enamel is already off the left front fender."

Again Mr. Holton made use of the iron pipe, and the remaining automobile was pushed out just in time to avoid a large section of the roof that suddenly caved in.

“A narrow escape!” breathed Bob, stopping only for a moment to examine the finish that had been slightly scorched.

“A very narrow one,” returned Joe, as he thought of what would have happened had the roof fallen on the top.

By now two lines of hose had been attached, and firemen were working unflinchingly to check the cruel flames which, owing to a strong north wind, were protruding several yards beyond the roof. Occasionally a spark would fly over to the house, and this did not in the least simplify the efforts of the fire fighters.

A large crowd had gathered to view the spectacle and included several of Bob’s and Joe’s friends who lived near by.

“Some blaze, eh, fellows?” was the comment made by John Peterman, a classmate in school.

“The biggest I’ve seen for an age,” put in Tom Rogers, another friend.

“How’d it start?” asked another.

“Beyond us,” answered Bob. “Do you have any idea, Joe?”

“No. I’m sure Dad wouldn’t have left a cigar stub – ”

“Impossible,” his chum broke in, “for that blaze started on or near the roof.”

Mr. Lewis had now joined the others, and his delight was beyond words when he saw that the cars had been removed in time to avert disaster.

“I kept thinking that I could find the key,” he said. “I finally did, but not in time to save them.”

Gradually the flames were diminishing, and if the firemen kept up the good work it promised to be over in a short time.

“Good thing that your garage is quite a distance over,” remarked Joe to his friend. “One is bad enough without having two on fire.”

Finally the last blaze was extinguished amid a rousing cheer from the crowd, and, after closer examination inside, the firemen left the scene, and the crowd gradually thinned until no one was left but Bob, Joe, their fathers, and a few neighbors.

“Covered by insurance, isn’t it?” inquired Bob of Mr. Lewis, as they cast a resentful look at the charred beams of the structure that had once been a fine garage.

“Yes, but this may delay our expedition to Brazil for a week or two until I can look after the reconstruction of it. That is” – he glanced at Mr. Holton – “unless your father objects.”

“Not in the least,” came from that individual. “In fact,” he went on, “that is about the only way out.”

Bob and Joe walked into the burned building. All about were ashes – ashes that had once been the roof of the structure. The charcoal smell was strong about them.

“Don’t know where we’ll keep the cars tonight,” said Joe, glancing up through the hole in the roof.

“Guess we can find room in our garage,” his friend replied. “We only have the one car, and it doesn’t take up all the room by any means.”

“Awfully good of you.”

Suddenly Bob uttered an exclamation that brought his friend hurrying to his side.

“What is it?” Joe asked.

For answer the other youth pointed to a small tin box that was black from being in the fire. It had hung on the wall behind an old radiator hood, which had a moment before fallen to the floor.

“What could that be?” Bob Holton asked. “Does it belong to your dad?”

Joe reached up and took it down from its hanger.

“Has a hole in the top. And what’s that thing protruding from the side?”

“Beyond me. Could be a – Great Scott! Come on. We must get it to your father at once.”

Bewildered, Joe followed his friend to the back door, where the two men were still conversing.

“What does this mean?” asked Bob coolly, handing the box to Mr. Lewis.

The latter examined it closely for a moment. Then, suddenly grasping the meaning, he stared at the others.

“Firebugs at work!” he exclaimed, fumbling the box nervously. “Someone *set* the garage on fire!”

CHAPTER III

Valuable Information

AT the remark Mr. Holton gasped in astonishment.

“Who would it be?” he asked. “Has anyone got anything against you?”

“Not that I know of,” Joe’s father replied. “Let me think.”

He assumed a mood of thoughtful anxiety, and Mr. Holton took the small box for a closer examination. It was about eight inches square, with a hole in the top out of which protruded a short iron stem. Inside, an alarm clock was still ticking.

“Hmm! That fire was probably set for ten o’clock,” Mr. Holton murmured, as he noticed that it was now nearly eleven.

“How long ago do you suppose it was set?” inquired Bob.

“Impossible to say,” the response came. “It couldn’t have been more than twelve hours ago, however.”

Mr. Lewis looked up.

“I can think of several people who could be bad enough to do this,” he said thoughtfully. “But I cannot say which one it would be.

“First I might mention a man who wanted to buy some specimens from me, but I declined to sell them. He had a sour disposition, and his temper was thoroughly aroused when, after he had offered large sums of money, I refused him. Said he’d get even some time.”

“What’d he want with them?” Joe asked.

“Wanted to sell them to a well-known museum. You see they were very rare birds that I got in New Zealand, and he’d have been offered a large sum for them.”

“Could be the very man!” Mr. Holton said. “Who else might have done it?”

“A rival naturalist,” the other returned. “Name is Davis – Thomas T. Davis. Perhaps you remember, Howard. The fellow with the gold eyeglasses and scarred face. Said he got it when a tiger sprang at him. Always – ”

“Yes,” Mr. Holton interrupted, his eyes bright with sudden recollection. “The museum employed him awhile, didn’t it?”

Joe’s father nodded.

“He always had a dislike for me,” he went on. “Didn’t like it at all when I headed that expedition to central Asia.”

There was a short silence. Then Mr. Lewis made a resolution.

“I’m going to put this matter in the hands of detectives,” he said. “They may be able to figure it out.”

“That’s the thing to do,” Bob agreed. “Seems to me, though, that this first man you mentioned is responsible. The one who wanted to buy the specimens from you.”

“Could be. But I am very much in doubt as to whether he would do such a thing.”

“Are you certain that there is no one else that has anything against you?” Mr. Holton questioned.

“No. Not certain. But fairly sure.”

Suddenly Bob’s face lightened, and he turned to Mr. Lewis.

“Do you know where this man lives? The one who wanted to buy the specimens from you, I mean.”

“Why – yes,” Mr. Lewis faltered. “That is, I have it in my memorandum. What do you want with it?”

“Don’t know that it’ll be any good at all. But we could inquire of his neighbors what kind of man he is.”

“Good idea. Better let me go, though.”

Bob shook his head.

“Joe and I haven’t anything else to do,” he argued, “and we’ll be glad to do it.”

“All right. Come in the house and I’ll put his name and address on paper.”

In a short time Mr. Lewis was back with a folded paper, which he handed to Bob.

“Now use tact in getting your information,” he said. “Remember, don’t let the people you inquire of in on the secret.”

“We won’t,” came the response, and after securing permission to use Mr. Holton’s sedan, they left for the man’s address.

What would they find? Would the people living near know anything about this person? Would the youths find that he had moved and, owing to his criminal record, had told no one of his new location? These questions were in the minds of Bob and Joe as they went farther toward their destination.

After a twenty-minute ride they pulled up on a poor cross street near the city limits and gazed to their left at a small house set back from the sidewalk. Directly beside it was another house of slightly better appearance.

“That’s the place,” pronounced Bob. “Doesn’t look like anyone’s at home.”

“Let’s go to the house next to it,” suggested Joe, getting out of the car. “We’ll trust to luck that the occupants are not related to the man we’re after.”

The boys made their way to the door and knocked. For over a minute they waited in silence. Then, as it was evident that there was no one at home, they turned to leave. But at that moment a small car moved up to the curb and stopped. Two men got out and started toward the house where the alleged crook lived. But the second they caught sight of Bob and Joe they turned back to their car.

“Come on,” whispered Bob. “Let’s follow them. I have a notion that one of those fellows is the man we’re after.”

Joe nodded in agreement.

“Did you notice how strange they acted when they saw us?” he asked. “Perhaps they thought we were officers that had come to arrest them.”

The youths made their way to their automobile and had the motor started just as the other car whizzed away.

For over ten minutes they followed cautiously, and they were satisfied that the men had not noticed them. Then at last they turned up a dilapidated street and stopped in front of a small, weather-beaten house. Here they left the car and went inside, while Bob and Joe stopped a square away.

“Let’s go up and look around,” suggested Joe.

As quietly as possible, the boys walked up to the house.

“Come around to the back,” beckoned Joe. “There might be a window.”

His supposition proved correct, for they found one before they reached the back porch. The glass was out and the opening was boarded up fairly tight, but there were several large cracks.

Cautiously Bob leaned up close and peeped inside. Then he turned to Joe.

“Four men inside,” he whispered. “Two of them are the ones we followed. Wait! Let’s hear what they’re saying.”

Again he leaned over to the window, this time to listen. Joe squeezed up close that he might hear also.

“Where do you suppose he is?” one man was saying in a gruff voice.

“Left town, mebbe,” another answered. “Just plain slipped out on us, an’ him owin’ us a lot of dough.”

“The dirty tramp!” a third said with an oath. “We’ll get him, don’t you worry. No guy can put anything over on us!”

“He’s afraid of the cops, no doubt,” the first said. “Maybe – But say! Speakin’ of cops, we saw a couple of guys at the house next door to him, and nobody lives there. Haven’t for two months. They might have been detectives.”

“He means us,” whispered Joe. “We scared them off, I guess.”

The man who had been silent now spoke.

“You may be right,” he said. “It don’t take them detectives long to get on a guy’s trail. If you stick around where you been keepin’ yourself they’ll get you sure. That’s prob’ly the reason why this guy ain’t home. Give him time. He’ll settle with us.”

But the first man was impatient.

“We want our dough now!” he bawled. “We was supposed to have it at noon an’ he didn’t come. He owes us a good many bucks, and for the spark machine too. He was supposed to pay for that, you know.”

Bob and Joe looked at each other. The spark machine!

“That proves it!” Bob whispered, gritting his teeth. “They’re the fellows that set your dad’s garage on fire, all right! We’ll make them – ”

“Shhh!”

“But listen, Tim,” one of the men was saying, “there ain’t any use to get hot-headed yet. I know this guy pretty well. I’ve done a lot for him and he’s done a lot for me. He’s never backed out on me yet. He’s got plenty of money, even if he is tryin’ hard to get more.

“Here’s what let’s do. Let’s give him till tomorrow night, and then if he don’t pay us we can go after him.”

“All right.” And the agreement was made.

Bob and Joe looked at each other. What were they to do now? They had secured evidence that these men were the guilty ones. Now would it be best to report the matter to the police at once, or had they better wait longer for any further information that the crooks might unknowingly give them?

“Let’s wait a few more minutes,” suggested Joe. “They might leave the house just as we made for our car, and then it would be too bad.”

Bob thought this good advice, and he leaned against the house to wait. Joe remained at the window.

For a minute there was silence inside. Then the man called Tim got up from his chair and started for the door.

“Where you goin’?” he was asked.

“Over to see if I can’t collect that dough,” he growled. “Anybody want ter go with me?”

“What’s the use?” one fellow asked. “We was there not more than an hour ago.”

“All right. Leave it to me.”

He walked on toward the door.

“Come on,” muttered Joe. “Let’s get to our car before he gets away.”

As hastily, yet as quietly, as possible the youths ran around the back of the house and through the alley for a distance of about a square. Then they turned out to the street and to their car.

Joe had the motor started just as the crook left the curb.

“Let’s head him off,” suggested Bob. “We can easily get there before he does if we cut across and not take the through street.”

“Good idea,” and the car was turned up a narrow cross street.

Before long the boys were in the neighborhood of the house occupied by that man who had indirectly set Mr. Lewis's garage on fire by hiring criminals experienced in that line to do it.

"Be careful and don't get too close," warned Joe, as they neared the structure.

"O. K. Let's go around the alley. We can park there for a few minutes and nobody will know anything about it."

The car was turned into the alley and parked almost directly behind the house. Then the youths got out to stretch their legs and decide on a plan of action.

"How will we work it?" asked Joe, glancing around to see if anyone happened to be watching them.

For a moment there was no answer. Then Bob had an idea.

"Let's walk up to the back door," he said. "There are a lot of trees and shrubbery close and we can hide behind them until we are sure that everything is all right."

Joe agreed, and they made their way as quietly as possible.

When close enough, they saw that the door was shut and the blinds were drawn. It was evident that no one was at home.

Suddenly there came a noise from the front of the house and both boys concealed themselves behind a large clump of bushes.

"Someone's coming around to the back door," breathed Bob.

"Probably that's Tim who came back here to collect the money owed him. The fellow we headed off, I mean. Yes, it's he," Joe observed, peeking down the side of the house.

The sound of footsteps grew louder, and the next minute the man stepped around the corner, fists clinched and face scowling.

"Come on," said Bob, and leaving his place of hiding he launched himself with full force on the back of the crook.

CHAPTER IV

The Treacherous Crook

WITH an oath the man shook Bob off and turned to deal with him.

“You?” he growled in surprise. “You, little more than a kid, would dare to fight Tim Donnanhan? Why, I’ll – ”

The sentence remained unfinished, for at that moment Bob’s fist shot out with lightning rapidity and caught the man squarely between the eyes. Without an outcry he went sprawling to the ground and rolled over.

For a second he remained dazed. Then he recovered himself and regained his feet.

Summoning all his power he lunged forward, mouth foaming and eyes glaring with rage.

It was easy to see that Bob was dealing with no weakling. His heaving chest was in itself a symbol of strength, as were also the powerful arms and heavy body. But then neither was Bob a weakling, as he had displayed so many times before. True he did not delight in fighting, but when called upon he was able to give a good account of himself. If the truth be known, he had not only won cups and letters in high school football and basketball, but in boxing as well. Joe was lighter and less robust, although by no means easy to knock out.

Now, as the young men faced this crook, there was a strong desire to win in their minds. Here was a chance – perhaps the only one they would have – to bring these men to justice for their cruel, underhanded way of getting even with Mr. Lewis for a trivial matter.

They possessed two fears. What if this fellow had a gun with him and thought nothing of using it? And what if the arch-crook would emerge from the house?

“If he only stays away,” thought Bob, as he cleverly ducked the large fist that came with all force.

For nearly five minutes the fight kept up, neither of the participants gaining anything.

Then suddenly the man swung around in an unguarded moment and sent his fist crashing into Bob’s jaw. Taken unawares, the youth went to the ground, almost unconscious.

Grinning in triumph, the crook was reaching for a revolver when Joe leaped forward and threw him on his side. The impact hurled the gun several feet away, and both made for it.

But Bob was there first! He had struggled to his senses while Joe did his part to prevent calamity.

“Get back!” Bob commanded, flashing the automatic in the man’s face. “It’s all over now!”

For a moment the fellow could not believe that the tide had turned. He stared first at Bob and then at Joe, muttering to himself. Once he started forward, but, as the gun was pressed in his face, he shrank back, apparently giving himself over to any fate.

“Get goin’,” Joe commanded, advancing a step or two.

The order was obeyed, and they marched out to the alley, where Mr. Holton’s car remained, unmolested.

“Now,” said Bob, handing the key to Joe, “I’ll get in the back seat and guard this man, and you get in front and drive us to the police station.”

No conversation was carried on during the trip, for the boys resolved to take no chances.

“At any minute he might attempt a get-away,” thought Joe, as he increased the speed as much as was consistent with safety.

Through streets and side streets they went, until at last they found themselves near the city’s business district. It was thought best not to travel on the busy thoroughfares for fear of attracting attention.

After rounding a sharp corner, Joe found it necessary to stop quickly at a traffic signal.

Directly to the right was a horde of people, gathered to witness a ceremony of the Salvation Army. There were fully thirty in the crowd, and shrill notes of a trumpet attracted more spectators constantly.

Suddenly Bob and Joe were taken in total surprise. Their captive leaned out of the car window and, hailing the crowd of people, cried, "Help! A hold-up! Help!"

Immediately the people's attention was attracted, and with wonder and curiosity they rushed toward the screaming man.

The two youths, because of the suddenness of the unexpected happening, could not immediately master the situation.

The crowd enfolded the car and rushed toward Bob and Joe, against whom the criminal had directed them.

"Well, of all the rotten experiences!" muttered Bob Holton, as a tall man grasped him by the arm none too gently. And upon glancing behind he saw that Joe, too, had been taken a mistaken prisoner.

So their captive had won out after all! Thus it seemed to the boys, but they clinched their fists, and Bob especially was determined not to be beaten so easily.

True they might wait and explain matters to the police, and if they did not believe, perhaps the judge would. But there was too much chance of losing, even though there was a possibility of winning.

The next instant they saw that it would be impossible to settle later, for the crook, deciding it best to take advantage of the situation, opened the door of the car, and with the words, "Arrest these fellows," he ran down the street, leaving the crowd to stare in surprise and wonder.

Thinking it useless to explain to the people in time to recapture the man, Bob suddenly sent his fist crashing into the man who still had hold of his arm with such force that he went down in a dazed condition.

For a second the youth was free and, gathering courage, he broke through the mass of people and dashed down the street in pursuit of the escaped criminal, who could be seen some two blocks ahead.

"I ought to catch him after awhile," the youth thought, as he noted that the man was rapidly losing ground.

Several more minutes brought pursuer and pursued to the Potomac River, and Bob feared that the man might attempt to swim across but was mistaken.

The youth was now close upon him, and when they came to a small clump of shrubbery, Bob resolved to end the chase.

"Here goes," he thought, and, exerting himself to the utmost, he caught up and aimed his foot in the man's path.

With an exclamation of rage the fellow went down head first in a clump of bushes.

Immediately he was up, and with a hoarse bellow he aimed a blow at his young enemy's chin. But Bob dodged and with expert quickness sent his fist smashing into the man's nose.

Stunned, dazed, bewildered at this youth's daring, he again took flight, Bob at his heels.

Had the revolver not been taken from him by the crowd of people, Bob would have been tempted to open fire.

Suddenly a man appeared not far away, and Bob called to him for assistance. The stranger finally grasped the meaning, and not questioning the cause of the chase, started after the criminal from another direction.

"We've got him," panted Bob, as he came within an arm's reach. "It's all over now."

And so it was. With a terrific crack to the chin the youth sent his enemy to the ground unconscious.

"But what does this all mean?" demanded the stranger who had helped in the capture.

“He’s a criminal,” Bob answered. “Set a garage on fire. Tell you later if you’ll give me your name and address. Mine’s Bob Holton. I live at – Wait, here’s one of Dad’s cards.”

The stranger accepted the card and in turn gave his name and address, but it was evident that he was very much puzzled about the whole affair.

The criminal’s eyes were opening, and he squirmed about uneasily. At last he seemed fully revived and sat up.

“Where’s an officer?” Bob asked, looking about.

“Here,” came a shout, and the next moment a policeman stepped up, looked at the downed captive and then at Bob.

“Take this man to the police station,” the youth directed.

“You’re certain you’ve got the goods on him?”

“Yes. I’ll come along with you.”

Tim Donnanhan slowly responded to the officer’s command to “rise an’ get goin’,” and they started to a police telephone, where a call for a patrol wagon was to be made.

Meanwhile Joe, who was left behind in the car when Bob made his escape, had resolved to free himself if it were at all possible. He saw that it would be impossible to break away as his friend had done, for the crowd was all the more determined to bring him to justice as a “hold-up man,” which they didn’t doubt that he was. So the only thing left was to do his best to make them believe what he told them.

“I tell you it’s a mistake,” he pleaded. “This first fellow that got away is the guilty person. We caught him after he had set fire to my father’s garage. We were taking him to the police station when he pulled his gag about being held up. You noticed he lost no time in getting away, didn’t you? Would a man who wasn’t guilty have done such a thing?”

His tones were so much in earnest that many of the people were inclined to believe him.

“He’s telling the truth, all right,” declared one man, nodding.

Several policemen now came up on motorcycles, and Joe again told his story.

“My friend is still after the crook down the street,” he said, as finishing words.

“All right,” one of the officers replied, as if he believed. “Suppose we go down the street and investigate. I’ll get in the car with you.”

Joe, glad of the chance to prove that he had told the truth, did as directed.

A little farther down they pulled up beside the crowd that had gathered at the spot where Bob had caught the criminal.

“There they are,” pointed out Joe, as he saw his friend, a policeman, and Tim Donnanhan making their way to a telephone.

“Bob did get him,” observed Joe, overwhelmed with joy.

The car was stopped beside them, and a short discussion was held.

Bob was asked to tell his story, and the policemen noted that it exactly coincided with that told by the other boy.

“Looks like a clear case on you,” one of the officers said to Tim Donnanhan, but the man remained silent.

“I’ll go with you fellows to the garage that burned,” the other officer said to Bob and Joe. “And meanwhile,” he went on, “we’ll send police out to get those other crooks you were talking about.”

Bob took the wheel, and in less than fifteen minutes they pulled up in front of Joe’s house and got out.

Mr. Lewis and Mr. Holton came out to meet them.

“What’s it all about?” the latter asked, as he noted the policeman.

“We’ve caught the fellows that set fire to Dad’s garage,” Joe answered, and then proceeded to tell of their experiences.

When he had finished, the men looked at their sons with intense admiration and praise. It was evident that the youths had gone beyond their expectations.

“It was a brave deed!” commended Joe’s father, patting them on the back.

But Bob protested.

“We didn’t do much. Catching that fellow wasn’t so hard.”

“You got the whole gang indirectly,” corrected Mr. Lewis. “Now,” he continued, “you fellows are entitled to a reward. What would you like to have?”

“Nothing,” returned Bob. “It wasn’t worth much. We came out all right and had a lot of fun at that.”

“I won’t have it that way,” rejected Mr. Lewis. “You boys must have a reward for your services, and I’m going to see that you get it. What would you like?”

There was a short silence. Then Joe’s eyes twinkled, and he resolved to venture a bold question.

“Let us go with you on that trip you’re about to take to the wilds of Brazil,” he said quietly.

CHAPTER V

A Worth-while Offer

BOTH Mr. Lewis and Mr. Holton smiled. It was evident that they had not expected this.

“That’s the only thing that’ll satisfy you?” the former asked, his mind working rapidly.

The young men nodded.

“We’ll be careful and do all we can for the good of the expedition,” said Bob anxiously. “Please arrange to take us along.”

There was a period of suspense. Then the men looked at each other.

“What will we say?” Joe’s father asked, totally undecided.

Mr. Holton had been mentally debating the subject. Now he was ready for an answer.

“Let’s let them go,” he said. “They’re as big and strong as we and are usually equal to any crisis. You see what they did to this gang of men. Shows they are resourceful, and that’s what you have to be in a strange land where danger lurks at every step. In my opinion they’d be a valuable asset to the expedition.”

The youths looked at Mr. Holton gratefully. They felt that the battle was nearly half won.

For nearly a minute Mr. Lewis was silent. Then he spoke with decision.

“I think you’re right, Howard,” he said. “We’ll have a talk with their mothers this afternoon, and I am of the opinion that they’ll give their consent if we go at them right.”

“Fine!” cried Bob joyously. “Do your best to win them over. I think they’ll agree to let us go, especially since they have so much faith in you. But say! You haven’t told us who all intend to make up the expedition. There isn’t to be a large number, is there?”

“No,” Mr. Holton answered. “We only intended to have three, Mr. Lewis, an anthropologist, and myself, but if you boys accompany us the number will, of course, be raised to five. And perhaps,” he went on, “that would be better than to have so few. You see it isn’t like an expedition into Africa, where there are plenty of native carriers to bear your provisions. We’ll have to rely more on our own resources and be extremely careful that we don’t get lost. Several million square miles of jungle is a wide area to cut into, especially when so much of it is unexplored.”

“Should think it would be great fun,” commented Joe, mentally picturing the many thrills that promised to make the trip interesting.

“It will be,” Mr. Holton returned. “But it will also have its dangers. These are mainly of human character. Why, it is said that there are tribes of Indians so uncivilized that they think nothing of – ”

“Ahem!” Mr. Lewis cut in purposefully.

“What were you going to say?” Joe asked.

“Perhaps I’ll tell you some other time,” came the reply. “Right now I think I’ll have a look at my firearms. In all probability they need oiling.”

He left for the house, and the others remained for several minutes longer. Then Mr. Lewis departed also, leaving the youths to themselves.

“What do you suppose Dad was going to say – about the savages, I mean?” Bob asked, glancing around to make sure that the men were gone.

“Something that shouldn’t go into our young ears,” smiled Joe and then turned to the house.

As he did so he happened to glance out at the street, to see that two men were making their way up to the house. Each carried a small hand satchel. That they were strangers Joe guessed at once, although they might not be to his father and Mr. Holton.

Joe waited until the men were close and then turned to meet them.

“Naturalists by the names of Lewis and Holton,” one man said. “Can we find them here?”

“Yes,” Joe replied, wondering what was meant. “Come in the house and I’ll call them.”

The strangers did as directed, and Joe went around to find his father and Mr. Holton.

Bob took a chair on the porch.

Joe found the men cleaning their rifles. Neither could explain who the strangers were.

“Perhaps they’re from the museum,” said Bob’s father, as he and Mr. Lewis left for the living room of the Lewis home.

During the discussion Bob and Joe remained on the porch, not wishing to intrude on the naturalists’ private affairs. They were not there long, however, till Mr. Holton called them in with the others.

“Boys, this is Mr. Weslowe, and this, Mr. Duncan, both of the Neuman Film Corporation. The young man on my left is Joe Lewis; on my right, Bob Holton, my son.”

After a few casual remarks, Mr. Holton proceeded to tell why the representatives from the film corporation were there.

“You see, they learned of our proposed expedition into the wilds of Brazil,” he explained, “and they have come to make a business proposition. Suppose one of you continues,” he ended, looking at the men, “for if these young men are to be a part of the expedition they should know about this.”

“As you know, we are with the Neuman Film Corporation,” Mr. Weslowe explained. “Now this house is always on the lookout for an opportunity to take motion pictures of little-known places, and here is certainly an opportunity. Unexplored Brazil! Ah! What a chance!

“The minute Neuman learned of this expedition they lost no time in sending us out here to make an offer – one that we sincerely trust you will take up.”

He stopped to open his satchel and get out a folded paper. Then he continued:

“We want you to take motion pictures of Brazil for our company. Will you do it?”

For a few seconds no one answered. Then Mr. Lewis leaned forward.

“Won’t it be difficult?” he asked.

“On the contrary,” Mr. Duncan returned. “Very simple. Hardly anything to it. We’ll give you complete instructions and will not hold you strictly responsible for any lost film. In fact it nearly always happens that at least several score feet of film are lost on such an expedition, where wet and damp have so much to do with the success of the pictures taken.”

“Of course,” said Mr. Weslowe, “we realize that yours will be an expedition for the good of science, not to take moving pictures. It is for this reason that we will willingly place the responsibility, which isn’t very much, in the hands of these young men here – your sons.

“Now this will not mean,” he assured them, “that they must put in all their time for this cause. We only wish several scenes along the journey. For instance, you might start by taking a movie of Pará, or whatever other city you first reach. Then several hundred feet may be used along the mainstream of the Amazon, showing the gradual progress of the expedition. When you turn onto a less-known river, that’s when we want the real show to start. The country you’ll pass through will be wilder, and the pictures will be more interesting. But once again let me assure you that the apparatus we’ll furnish will be of the simplest design, and you need not worry about not meeting with success as far as that goes. And we’ll pay you well for your trouble. Here’s the contract. Read it over. See what you think of it.”

He passed the paper to Mr. Holton, who shared the reading with Bob, Joe, and Mr. Lewis.

CHAPTER VI

Off for the Wilds of Brazil

“WELL?”

It was Mr. Weslowe’s voice after the scientists and their sons had finished reading the contract.

Mr. Holton nodded.

“It’s all right,” he declared. “Contains nothing whatever that would be objectionable.”

Mr. Lewis agreed.

“We’ll leave the matter to the boys,” he said. “They’ll be the ones who will have charge of taking the pictures. And let me say that you can rely on them.”

“You haven’t said that we can go yet,” remarked Bob. “How about our mothers? Will they consent?”

“Yes,” Mr. Lewis answered. “They finally agreed. We were planning to make it a surprise later.”

“What!” cried Bob, while Joe gasped in astonishment.

“Fine!” blurted out Joe, after he had regained his breath. “We don’t know how to thank you enough. And I’ll be more than glad to accept this offer to take the movies. Bob will, too, I’m sure.”

“All right,” Mr. Weslowe said. “Here’s a pen. You men, as the ones in charge of the expedition, must sign here.”

They did as directed, and then the representatives prepared to depart.

“The film, machine, and other equipment will be here inside of a week,” Mr. Duncan said. “And you’ll find it as simple as we explained.”

Then they took their leave.

“A chance to make some money,” said Mr. Lewis to the youths, as they seated themselves on the porch awaiting the evening meal.

“Yes,” said Bob. “And I know we’ll find it interesting.”

“What kind of a camera do you suppose they’ll furnish?” Joe asked.

“Probably the small, simple kind that requires no tripod. All you do is press a button and the film is automatically exposed. But you’ll have to follow the instructions closely or the whole thing will be a total failure. And to a certain extent, Mr. Holton and I will be held responsible.”

Practically all of the next day was spent in the business district purchasing various articles to be used on the coming great adventure. In the evening when they returned home they were satisfied with everything they had bought. Bob and Joe were especially delighted with the new rifles that their fathers presented them, for they were of the very latest design.

“I suppose they’ll bring down anything,” said Bob, in reference to the guns.

“Anything but elephants, rhinos, and the like that have extremely tough hides,” his father answered. “You needn’t fear them, though, for we won’t come across them in South America.”

“What is considered the most dangerous game of that continent?” asked Joe.

“The jaguar, generally,” was the response. “He sometimes attains a length of nearly six feet and is extremely powerful. He has been known to attack a mustang, swim with it across a river, and place it in the thick bushes. Again he has been seen to open fish and heavy turtles with his powerful claws.”

“Poisonous snakes are also dangerous,” said Mr. Lewis, “although they seldom attack a man without first being disturbed.”

“There’s a remedy for every such bite, isn’t there?” inquired Joe.

“Yes. That is, for nearly every one. The strange part of it is that one antidote may be totally ineffective against one kind of poison, while it has effect on another. You see there are several types or classes of venomous reptiles, and each has a different type of poison. Hence several antidotes have to be carried so as to take no chances.”

“Anacondas are not poisonous, are they?” asked Joe.

“No,” replied Mr. Holton. “They are constrictors, that kill their victims by crushing them to death. Another name for them is ‘water boa,’ because they are found near a stream or mud hole. You boys probably know that they are among the world’s largest snakes, often being thirty feet in length and thicker than a man’s leg. They are capable of crushing an ox to death, and often tear up small trees by the roots.”

Joe shuddered.

“I don’t think I’d care to meet one of them,” he said. “Especially since I’m not an excellent shot like you and Dad.”

“And Bob,” added Mr. Lewis. Really Bob was not far behind the naturalists in marksmanship.

After the preparations for the trip were fully completed, the youths and their fathers rested, for the coming venture was to be a tiresome one, and it was wholly unwise to use too much of their energy that was to be so much needed later.

Meanwhile reconstruction work was being done on Mr. Lewis’s garage, and the workmen promised to have the task completed in three days.

“Won’t have to worry about that,” Bob assured his chum’s father. “You can just take it easy until the time comes to leave for Brazil.”

Mr. Lewis nodded but found out later, as did Mr. Holton, that to rest was impossible, much as they would have liked to. Frequent trips to the museum had to be made, visits to various libraries were necessary, and they found at last that a journey to Baltimore was inevitable. As might be expected, they were greatly fatigued when, although every matter was settled, only two days remained before the long mission into the unknown.

That afternoon Professor Bigelow, a noted anthropologist who was to be a part of the expedition, arrived at Mr. Holton’s home, where he was to remain until the expedition would leave. He was a rather small man, with heavy gray hair and a swarthy complexion that the boys rightly guessed was due to his many missions into strange lands to study primitive people. He at once took a great liking to the youths, and together they discussed many strange happenings, which the professor related in breath-taking tales. He told of adventures in darkest Africa, where many little-known clans of natives were studied. He thrilled his listeners with stories of narrow escapes from the Dyaks of Borneo, of journeys into Ecuador to investigate the savage head-shrinkers, into India, Mongolia, Venezuela, islands of the South Seas, and many other strange places. Yes, it was a great life – that pursued by an anthropologist.

“Two more things I’d like to know,” said Bob, the next afternoon. “First, what food will we take along?”

“That is all arranged,” his father replied. “A company in New York packed our provisions in light tin containers that are airtight and will float on water. You don’t need to worry about our having enough, for we took into consideration the possibility of a long, unexpected delay. What’s your other question?”

“This: Where do we sail from, New York? And on what ship?”

Mr. Holton gasped in astonishment.

“What!” he cried. “You don’t know that yet? I thought we discussed that matter several days ago.”

“If you did, I wasn’t there,” Bob returned, grinning. “We’ve been so busy with preparations that I haven’t given it a thought.”

“All right, I’ll tell you. We sail from New York on the steamer *Empire*, a vessel of ten thousand tons. It is scheduled to arrive in Macapá, which is several miles inland on the Amazon, in twelve days. Fairly good time, considering a stop at the West Indies.”

At frequent intervals Mrs. Holton and Mrs. Lewis expressed the desire for their sons to give up the thought of accompanying the expedition, but the boys did their best to convince their mothers that, while there were dangers attached, they were not as numerous as one might think.

“Come to think of it, you can’t blame them, though,” said Joe. “We’re rather inexperienced in the art of exploring.”

“We’ll come through all right,” Bob assured him. “Oh! How I wish the time would pass quicker!”

Despite Bob’s desire, the great day of leaving took its time in coming. But when it did arrive, everyone was in readiness.

“Weather’s cool and the sky’s clear,” observed Joe, as he and Bob lugged their belongings out to the front porch of Bob’s home, where the members of both households were to gather before the party would leave.

“Just the right temperature,” declared Mr. Holton, who had moved up in time to hear his son’s chum.

The train was to leave for New York at ten o’clock and the party barely had time to get breakfast and prepare themselves and their possessions, which, by the way, included the motion-picture cameras and several thousand feet of film, sent ahead by the Neuman Film Corporation.

Bob and Joe – and the others to a less degree – had studied the instructions on how to take motion pictures and felt that it would be an easy matter to carry them out.

Shortly after breakfast Mrs. Holton and Mrs. Lewis drove the family cars out in front, and the others carried out their belongings and got inside.

“The last we’ll see of good old Washington for several months to come,” sighed Joe, as he cast a final look at the homes they were leaving behind.

There were tears in the eyes of Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Holton as they gave the youths and their fathers a warm farewell. Professor Bigelow also took part in the leave-taking, for he was well liked by all. Bob’s smaller brother and Joe’s sister gave tender good-byes, and with one last adieu the adventurers made their way down the platform and to the New York Limited.

CHAPTER VII

New York – And On

THE trip to New York, while interesting, was without incident, and they were glad to stretch their legs in the Pennsylvania Terminal, where hundreds of people from all parts of the country were assembled.

“Now what?” asked Joe, after a bountiful lunch.

“Better get to a hotel,” replied Mr. Holton, picking up his bags.

The party walked outside and hailed a taxi, the driver of which agreed to take them to a comfortable hotel near the waterfront.

“An outside room,” observed Bob, as he glanced at his ticket and followed the others to an elevator.

Their sleeping quarters were on the seventeenth floor, where a wonderful view of lower Manhattan and the waterfront could be had.

“Fairly high, but could be a lot higher,” observed Joe, as he gazed out at the scores of other tall buildings that were grouped about them.

“The trend is upward,” remarked Mr. Lewis. “Imagine how old New York will look fifty years from now, when there may be buildings two hundred stories high!”

“Suppose we go down and see how things look from the street,” suggested Mr. Holton. “Been a long time since we’ve been here.”

The remainder of that day was spent exploring Manhattan Island. They turned in early in the evening, for they were very tired.

“Tomorrow,” said Bob, as he threw himself on the bed, “we’ll see sights for sore eyes.”

And they did. The scene at the dock was one of absorbing interest to all, even as much as the men had witnessed it. Ships from all countries were anchored in dense rows, their crewmen busy loading and unloading cargoes. Boxes and bales were being piled in great stacks, awaiting transfer by motor truck. Passengers and spectators crowded closely around the sections where passenger liners were anchored.

“Here we are,” said Mr. Holton, pointing to a medium-sized ship between two other smaller boats. “The *Empire*. Looks staunch enough.”

The others agreed and then made their way up the gangplank. A white-clad officer came out to meet them and upon receipt of their tickets directed them to their staterooms.

“Large and comfortable,” commented Bob, as he set down his baggage and looked about.

“All you could ask for,” said Joe, who was to share the room with his chum.

The youths spent several more minutes in examining the articles furnished them for the voyage. Then Bob turned toward the door.

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