

THE BOY SCOUTS AT THE PANAMA CANAL

By LIEUT. HOWARD PAYSON

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A. L. BURT COMPANY Publishers New York Printed in U. S. A.

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The Boy Scouts at the Panama Canal

CHAPTER I. BOY SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE.

Farmer Hiram Applegate had just finished breakfast. For this reason, perhaps, he felt exceptionally good-humored. Even the news he had read in his morning paper (of the day before) to the effect that his pet abomination and aversion, The Boy Scouts, had held a successful and popular review in New York and received personal commendation from the President failed to shake his equanimity.

Outside the farmhouse the spring sun shone bright and warm. The air was crisp, and odorous with the scent of apple blossoms. Robins twittered cheerily, hens clucked and now and then a blue bird flashed among the orchard trees.

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As Hiram stepped out on his “vendetta,” as he called his verandah—or, to use the old-fashioned word and the better one, “porch”—he was joined by a rather heavy-set youth with small,

shifty eyes and a sallow skin which gave the impression of languishing for soap and water. A suit of loud pattern, new yellow boots with “nobby” toes, and a gaudy necktie did not add to young Jared Applegate’s general appearance.

“Pop,” he began, after a glance at the old man’s crabbed and wrinkled features, just then aglow with self-satisfaction, “Pop, how about that money I spoke about?”

Old Applegate stared at his offspring from under his heavy, iron-gray brows.

“A fine time to be askin’ fer money!” he snorted indignantly, “you just back from Panamy—under a cloud, too, and yet you start a pesterin’ me fer money as ef it grew on trees.”

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“What d’ye want it fer, hey?” he went on after a pause. “More Bye Scut nonsense?”

Jared shook his head as if denying some discreditable imputation.

“I’ve had nothing to do with the Boy Scouts since the day I was kicked out of—that is, since I left the Black Wolf troop in New York.”

“Dum glad of it, though you never tole me what you quit for,” muttered the old man.

“But to get back to that money,” said Jared; “as I told you when I got back from the Isthmus, I need it. Need it bad, too, or I wouldn’t ask you.”

“Makes no diff’rence. What d’ye want it fer,—hey?” he repeated, coming back to his original question.

Jared decided that there was nothing for it but to tell the truth.

“To go over what I told you the other night once more, I’m in debt. Debts I ran up on the Isthmus,” was the rejoinder. “A chap can’t live down there for nothing you know, and—”

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“By heck! You got a dern good salary as Mr. Mainwaring’s sec’ty, didn’t yer, an’ a chance ter learn engin-e-ring thrun in. You git fired fer misbehavin’ yerself an’ then yer come down on the old man fer money. I ain’t goin’ ter stand it, I ain’t, and that’s flat!”

The old man knocked the ashes out of his half-smoked pipe with unnecessary violence. Jared, eying him askance, saw that his father was working himself up into what Jared termed “a tantrum.” Taking another tack, he resumed.

“Sho, pop! It ain’t as if you weren’t going to get it back. And there’ll be interest at six per cent., too.”

This was touching old Applegate on a tender point. If rumor in and about Hampton spoke correctly, the old man had made most of his large fortune, not so much by farming, but by running, at ruinous rates, a sort of private bank.

“Wa’al,” he said, his hard, rugged old face softening the least bit, “uv course you’ve tole me all that; but what you h’aint tole me is, how yer a goin’ ter git ther money back,—an’ the interest.”

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He looked cunningly at his son as he spoke. Jared hesitated an instant before he replied. Then he said boldly enough:—

“I can’t tell you just what the business enterprise is that I expect to go into shortly. I’m—I’m under a sort of promise not to, you see. But if everything goes right, I’ll be worth a good round sum before

long.”

“Promises ain’t security,” retorted the old man warily. “I—Gee Whitakers! Thar’s that spotted hawg out agin!”

Across the dusty road the animal in question was passing as the farmer’s eyes fell on it. In the center of the track it paused and began rooting about, grunting contentedly at its liberty.

At the same moment a humming sound, almost like the drone of a big bumble bee, came out of the distance. As he heard the peculiar drone, a quick glance of recognition flashed across old Applegate’s face.

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“It’s that pesky Mainwaring gal an’ her ’lectric auto!” he exploded vehemently. “That makes the third time in ther last two weeks that Jake’s bin out when she come along. Ther fust time she knocked him over, ther second time she knocked him over, an’ now—”

A smart-looking little electric runabout, driven by a pretty young girl in motoring costume, whizzed round the corner. The ill-fated Jake looked up from his rooting as the car came dashing on. Possibly the recollection of those other two narrow escapes was upon him. At any rate, with a scared grunt and an angry squeal, he whisked his stump of a curly tail in the air and dashed for the picket fence in front of the Applegate place.

But either Jake was too slow, or the electric was too fast. Just as the girl gave the steering wheel of the auto a quick twist to avoid the pig, one of the forewheels struck the luckless Jake “astern,” as sailors would say.

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With an agonized wail Jake sailed through the air a few feet and then, alighting on his feet, galloped off unhurt but squealing as if

he had been mortally injured.

“Goodness,” exclaimed the girl alarmedly, and then, “gracious!”

The quick twist of the wheel had caused the car to give a jump and a skid and land in the ditch, where it came to a standstill. Farmer Applegate, rage tinting his face the color of a boiled beet, came storming down the path.

“This is the time I got yer, hey?” he shouted at the alarmed occupant of the auto. “That makes three times you run over Jake. You got away them other times, but I got yer nailed now. Kaint git yer car out uv ther ditch, hey? Wa’al, it’ll stay thar till yer pay up.”

“I’m—I’m dreadfully sorry,” stammered the girl, “really I had no intention of hurting—er—Jake. In fact, he doesn’t seem to be hurt at all.”

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There appeared to be good reason for such a supposition. Jake, at the moment, was engaged in combat over a pile of corn fodder with several of his fellows.

“Humph! Prob’ly hurt internal,” grunted the farmer. “Anyhow, it’s time you bubblists was taught a lesson.”

“Oh, of course I’m willing to pay,” cried the girl, and out came a dainty hand-bag. “Er—how much will satisfy Jake’s—I mean your—feelings?”

The old farmer was quick to catch the note of amusement in the girl’s voice.

“You won’t mend matters by bein’ sassy,” he growled; “besides, your pop fired my boy down on the Isthmus an’ I ain’t feelin’ none too good toward yer.”

“I have nothing to do with my father’s affairs,” said the girl coldly, noting out of the corner of her eye Jared’s figure slinking around the side of the porch; “how much do you want to help me get my car out of the ditch, for that’s really what it amounts to, you know?”

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Ignoring the quiet sarcasm in her voice, old Applegate’s face took on its crafty expression.

“Wa’al, it’s three times now you’ve run over Jake. Say five dollars each time,—that ud be yer fine for overspeedin’, anyhow,—that makes it fifteen dollars.”

“Fifteen dollars!” The girl’s voice showed her amazement at such a figure.

“It ort’er be twenty,” snorted old Applegate; “thar’s ther injury to Jake’s feelin’s. You bang over him at sixty mile an hour an’ scare him out’n all his fat an’ six months’ growth. Fifteen dollars is cheap, an’—you don’t go till yer pay up, neither.”

“Why, it’s simply extortion. I’ll pay no such sum. Send your bill to my father. He’ll settle it. And now help me out of this ditch, if you please.”

“Now, don’t you git het up, miss. Thar’s a speed law on Long Island, an’ by heck, you pay er I’ll hev yer up afore the justice. Lucindy!” he raised his voice in a call for his wife; Jared had vanished. A slovenly-looking woman, wiping her hands on a gingham apron, appeared on the porch.

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“Lucindy, how many miles an hour? Jake’s bin run over agin,” he added suggestively.

“Wa’al,” said Lucindy judicially, “it looked like sixty; but I reckon h’it warn’t more’n twenty-five.”

“Humph!” snorted Applegate triumphantly, “an’ ther speed limit’s fifteen.”

“Why, I wasn’t going more than ten miles!” cried the girl, flushing with indignation.

“Huh! Tell that to ther justice. I’ll git my son to push yer machine out’n ther ditch an’ then I’ll hop in aside yer an’ we’ll drive into town.”

“You’ll do no such thing! Why, the idea! Take your hand off my car at once, or—oh, dear! What shall I do?” she broke off despairingly.

“You’ll drive me inter town or pay fifteen dollars, that’s what you’ll do,” declared Farmer Applegate stubbornly; “now then—hullo, what in ther name uv early pertaties is this a-comin’?”

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Around the same corner from which the auto had appeared with such embarrassing results to its pretty young driver came three well-built lads. One of them was rather fat and his round, good-natured face was streaming with perspiration from the long “hike” on which they had been. But his companions looked trained to the minute, brown-faced, lithe-limbed, radiating health and strength from their khaki-clad forms. All three wore the same kind of uniform, gaiters, knickerbockers, coats of military cut and broad-brimmed campaign hats. In addition, each carried a staff.

“Hullo, what’s all this, Rob?” cried one of them as they came into full view of the strange scene,—the ditched auto, the flushed, embarrassed yet indignant girl, and the truculent farmer.

“Consarn it all, it’s them pesky Boy Scouts from Hampton,” exclaimed Farmer Applegate disgustedly, as, in answer to the girl’s appealing look, the three youths stepped up, their hands lifted in the scout salute and their hats raised.

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CHAPTER II. AN ANGRY FARMER.

“Can we be of any assistance?” asked Rob Blake of the girl, whose alarmed looks made it evident that she was in an unpleasant situation. He ignored the red-faced, angry farmer, but took note out of the corner of his eye of Jared, who was peeping out at them from behind a shed. Apparently he had no wish to appear on the scene while his late employer’s daughter was there. To himself he muttered:—

“It’s that stuck-up Rob Blake, that butter-firkin, Tubby Hopkins and that sissy, Merritt Crawford. They’re always butting in when they’re not wanted.”

The girl turned gratefully to the newcomers. Rob’s firm voice and capable appearance made her feel, as did no less her scrutiny of his companions, that here were friends in need.

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“Oh, thank you so much!” she cried. “I am Lucy Mainwaring, and you, I’m sure, are Rob Blake, leader of the Eagle Patrol. I’ve heard lots about you from my brother Fred, who is leader of the Black Wolf Patrol, First New York Troop.”

“Yes, I’m Rob Blake, this is Merritt Crawford, my second in command, and this is Tub—I mean Robert Hopkins.”

“I know all on yer,” growled out old Applegate, “an’ I tell yer to

keep out of this. Just 'cause yer a banker's son, young Blake, don't give you no right ter come interferin' where yer not wanted."

"Oh, but they *are* wanted!" cried the girl, before Rob could say a word. "This man says that I ran over one of his pigs. Why, it's absurd. I only just bumped the animal, and there he is over there now fighting for his breakfast."

Her eyes fairly bubbled merriment as Jake's raucous squeals rose belligerently from the neighborhood of the hog pens. Tubby spoke up.

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"If he can eat, he's all right," announced the stout youth with his customary solemnity.

"But I've grazed the wretched pig twice before," cried the girl, "and Mr. Applegate wants fifteen dollars or he won't help me out of this ditch."

"That's right," confirmed the farmer, "fifteen dollars er she goes afore the justice fer—fer running over Jake."

"But she didn't run over him," retorted Rob, "and anyhow, fifteen dollars is an outrageous price to ask for your real or fancied injuries."

"The hog's injuries," corrected the farmer.

"Same thing almost," whispered Merritt to Tubby with a chuckle.

"Come on, boys," said Rob, "let's help this young lady out of the ditch."

The girl turned on the power and the three Boy Scouts shoved with all their might at the rear of the machine. It quivered, started,

stopped, and then fairly dashed up on to the road. So quickly had it all been done that before the farmer could make a move the runabout was on the thoroughfare.

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“Lucindy! Lucindy, let Towser loose!” yelled the old man as soon as he had recovered his senses.

The woman ran off the porch and in a few seconds a big, savage-looking bull dog came bounding out, showing his red fangs and white teeth.

The girl gave a little scream as the dog looked up at his master, apparently waiting an order to rush at the boys.

“Go on!” Rob said to the girl in a quick, low whisper, “we’ll be all right.”

“Oh, but I can’t! You’ve helped me——”

“That was our duty as Scouts. Now turn on your power and get away. We’ll find a way to deal with the old man, never fear.”

Seeing that it was useless to remain, the girl applied the power once more and the machine shot out of sight.

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“Consarn you pesky brats,” roared old Applegate, fairly beside himself.

“Sic ’em, Towse!” he shouted the next instant.

Rob had been prepared for some such move as this. As the dog, with a savage growl, sprang forward, he brought his staff into play. There was a flash of the implement, a quick twist, and the astonished Towser found himself spinning backward in the

direction from which he had advanced.

“Don’t set that dog on us again,” cried Rob, in a clear, commanding voice, “if you do, he’ll get hurt.”

“Consarn you!” bellowed the farmer again, “air you aidin’ and abettin’ lawless acts?”

“As far as that goes, your hog had no business in the middle of the road,” was the quiet rejoinder.

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“I’ll go to law about this,” shouted the farmer furiously, brandishing his knotted fist. But he made no attempt to “sic” Towser on the boys again. As for that redoubtable animal, he stood by his master, his tail between his legs. To use the vernacular, he appeared to be wondering “what had struck him.”

As there was nothing to be gained by remaining, the three Boy Scouts started off anew on the last stage of their “hike,” which had been one of twenty-four miles started the day before to visit a patrol in a distant town on the island. They struck off briskly, as boys will when home is almost in sight and appetites are keen. The farmer, seeing that nothing was to be gained by abusing them any further, contented himself by calling them “young varmints” and turned back toward his house.

The boys had not proceeded many paces when they heard behind them the quick “chug-chug” of a motor cycle. Turning, they saw coming toward them a youth of about Rob’s age, mounted on a red motor cycle which, from the noise it made, appeared to be of high power. As he drew alongside them they noticed that he, too, was in Scout uniform, and that from the handle bars on his machine fluttered a flag with a black wolf’s head on it. The newcomer stopped his machine, nimbly alighted and gave the Scout salute, which the boys returned.

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“My name is Fred Mainwaring of the Black Wolf Patrol of the First New York Troop,” he announced, “have you seen anything of a young lady driving an electric runabout?”

The boys exchanged amused glances. Then Rob recounted the scene in front of the farmhouse. He also introduced himself and his patrol mates. Fred Mainwaring, a fine-looking, curly-haired lad, appeared much diverted.

“That’s just like sis,” he exclaimed, “she’s always getting in trouble with that auto of hers; doing things she aut-n’t to, so to speak. Excuse the pun. It’s a bad habit of mine. She went for a spin this morning and wouldn’t wait for me, so now behold me in chase of her.”

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After some more chat, during which Fred Mainwaring received a hearty invitation to visit the quarters of the Eagle Patrol in Hampton, the boys parted, very well pleased with each other. The young scouts of the Eagle Patrol already knew much about the Mainwaring family, Mr. Mainwaring having recently purchased an estate just out of Hampton. The newcomer to the community was preceded by an almost world-wide reputation as a skillful engineer. Many of the great problems in connection with Uncle Sam’s “Big Ditch” had been successfully solved by him, and, although just now he was at home on a “furlough,” he was shortly to leave once more for the Zone.

During the course of their brief chat Fred had informed the boys that he and his sister were to accompany their father on the return voyage, Fred taking the position of secretary.

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“He had another chap before he came up from the tropics,” he informed the boys. “I guess he lives somewhere round here. Jared

Applegate his name was. Had to fire him, though, for some sort of crooked work. I don't know just what it was; but it must have been something pretty bad, for dad got mighty angry when he told about it. You see, in a way I feel responsible. Jared, who was working as a stenographer and typewriter in New York, belonged to my troop. I liked him after a fashion, and got dad to make him his secretary. It wasn't till after he'd left for Panama that I accidentally found out that Jared, who had been treasurer of the troop, had been stealing small sums from time to time.

"I didn't notify dad for fear of worrying him; but of course Jared was dropped from the troop. When dad got back from the Isthmus this time I asked about Jared and found out that he had been discharged. Just what for, I don't know. Dad wouldn't tell me."

"We know something of Jared's reputation about here," rejoined Rob. "It's none too good. By the way, that's his father's place back there where your sister had all the trouble."

"I knew that his home was somewhere near Hampton," was the rejoinder.

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This conversation took place on the roadside not more than a few feet from a stone wall which bounded the outlying fields of the Applegate property. Behind this wall, if the four lads had known it, was concealed a listener to whom all their conversation was perfectly plain. Jared had watched the boys meeting from the dooryard and had crept cautiously along behind the stone wall till he arrived at a spot opposite that at which the group was chatting. "Listeners never hear good of themselves," says the old saw. Jared assuredly proved its truth that fine spring morning.

An evil look passed over his countenance as he crouched behind the wall. His sallow face grew a pasty yellow, with anger. His shifty eyes glittered furiously as he heard his record discussed.

“So that’s the game, is it?” he muttered to himself, as the boys parted company, Fred Mainwaring shooting off like a red streak on his machine. “Well, I guess that before long I’ll have my innings, and when I do I’ll make it hot for all of you, especially old man Mainwaring. I’ll get even with him if it takes me a year; but I don’t think it’ll be that long.”

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He drew a letter from his pocket and glanced over it in the manner of one already familiar with a missive’s contents, but who wishes, by a fresh perusal, to satisfy himself once more. This is what he read from the much-creased document:

“If you have what you claim we will talk business with you. It will be made worth your while.”

The letter bore no signature nor address. It referred to a subject with which the writer, for an excellent reason, would not have cared to have his name linked. The “big ditch” project, the greatest of the age, perhaps of all time, had, inconceivable as it may seem, bitter and unscrupulous enemies. The person who had written that note to poor, sneaking Jared Applegate was one of these.

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CHAPTER III. ON A MISSION.

While the three Boy Scouts are trudging back toward Hampton, we will take the opportunity to introduce them more fully to our readers who may not have met them before. Rob Blake, the son of the local banker in the seashore village of Hampton, Long Island, had, some time before the present story opens, founded the Eagle Patrol. The early days of its existence formed the basis of the first book of the series, for the lads flocked eagerly to its standard, and the Patrol was soon in a flourishing condition, with a well-

equipped room above the local bank building, a fine, up-to-date structure. The adventures of the Patrol in camp and Scout life in general were various and exciting. The boys made some enemies, as was natural, for many boys wished to belong to their Patrol who could not be admitted; but in the end, thanks mainly to their Scout training, all things came out well for the Eagles.

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In the second volume we found “The Boy Scouts on the Range.” In this book full details of Scout principles as put into practice in a wild and lawless country were related. The pursuit of Silver Tip, the giant grizzly, popularly supposed to bear a charmed life, was an interesting feature of their experience in the West. Indians and cattle rustlers made trouble for the boys and their friends, but, although the boys were several times placed in jeopardy and danger, they emerged with credit from all their dilemmas.

Still following the lads’ fortunes, we found them in the third volume of the series, “The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship,” deeply interested in the subject of aerial navigation. They managed to give material aid in certain experiments that the government carried on at a lonely house on the sea coast near Hampton, and became involved in some thrilling incidents which still further put to the test their ability and cleverness.

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In “The Boy Scouts’ Mountain Camp,” the scene shifted to the Adirondacks, whither the boys went, primarily on a quiet camping trip. But they became involved in an exciting search for a long missing treasure, immured in an ancient and almost inaccessible cave in the heart of a wild region. How they won out against apparently insurmountable obstacles makes exciting and instructive reading.

“The Boy Scouts for Uncle Sam,” the fifth volume, related some surprising events that occurred when the boys’ aid was called into

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