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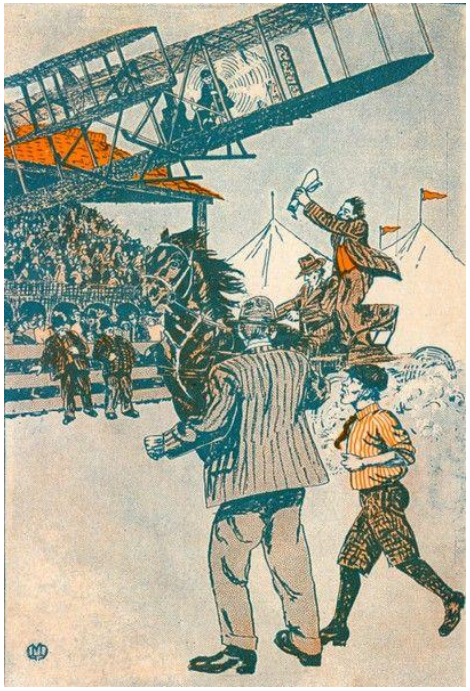

"STOP! IN THE NAME OF THE LAW!"

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ASHTON LAMAR

Illustrated by M. G. Gunn

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"Stop! In the name of the law!"

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The start from the flume.

Mr. Camp drew out an envelope.

The Stolen Aeroplane

OR,

How Bud Wilson Made Good

CHAPTER I
AN IDLE BOY GETS A JOB.

“Here she comes.”

Doug’ Jackson, the driver of the Scottsville House ’bus, rose from the edge of the depot platform, hitched up his trousers, and motioned the usual depot loungers back to safety. All were waiting for passenger train No. 22, west bound, due at 11:15 A. M., and late, as usual.

“She’s made up seven minutes,” Doug’ announced authoritatively after consulting a large silver watch. “She’s fannin’—git back there, you kids.”

No one else yet saw or heard the approaching train, whose proximity was only detected by Doug’s long experience in such matters; but all necks were craned toward the grade east of town and the curve at its far end.

One of these anxious watchers was Mr. Josiah Elder, a man just beyond middle age, who shaved every morning down to a round patch of whiskers on a prolonged chin, and whose white starched shirt and heavy gold watch chain proclaimed him a person of affairs. Just at present, a heavy coat of dust on a new, black, soft hat and on his dark trousers suggested that the morning had been spent out of doors, where the September drought had coated the town and country with suffocating dust.

Mr. Elder was president of the Scottsville First National Bank. He was also president of the Scott County Joint Stock Agricultural and Trotting Association. And this was Wednesday morning of fair week. The president was hot, dusty, and had an anxious look.

“Hello, Mr. Elder,” exclaimed Doug’ hastily, lifting his cap with his badge as “runner” on it, and glancing hastily along the track to be sure that his announcement had not been premature. “Train’ll be here right away.”

“Morning,” replied the anxious fair official, looking toward a dusty, side-bar buggy and a lively looking horse hitched just beyond the ’bus. “Keep your eye on my rig, Doug’.”

Just then a hollow whistle sounded far up the track, and a moment later, beneath a puff of white steam that drifted around the curve, a billow of black smoke told that No. 22 was “fanning” down grade toward the town.

“I’m lookin’ for a man named Dare—T. Glenn Dare. If you see him, he ain’t goin’ to the hotel. He’s goin’ with me.”

“What’s the prospec’s fur fair week?” asked Doug’, indicating that he understood. “I reckon that airship’ll bring out a fine attendance ’bout Thursday.”

“We hope so,” replied Mr. Elder impressively. “It is a novel attraction of great educational value. And it is an expensive feature. The people o’ Scott County should recognize our enterprise and turn out liberally.”

“I reckon it’s goin’ to kind o’ crowd you to git everything in shape on time, ain’t it? All the boxes and the injine is over there in the freight house yit.”

“We are waiting for Mr. Dare. He’s the manufacturer’s agent and operator.”

The oncoming train was already pounding over the switch track frogs at the town limits. Doug’ mustered up his courage, crowded a little closer to the disturbed fair official and exclaimed, nervously:

“All right, Mr. Elder, I’ll keep my eye out fur him. And your rig’ll be all safe. Say, Mr. Elder, you couldn’t spare me a ticket fur the fair, could ye?”

But this appeal was lost. The mogul engine, hissing as if annoyed at its enforced stop in Scottsville, slid to a grinding stop, panted a few times, and then with a sharp clang of its bell and a deep snort, was off again. The crowd, always anxious to see the train come in, edged forward, fell back and grouped itself about a dozen arrivals. Two traveling men, or

“drummers,” Doug’ captured. The others were either not strangers to the depot crowd or easily identified by their luggage and costume as visitors from near by towns. Mr. T. Glenn Dare was not among those who alighted.

Having made sure of this fact, President Elder’s strained look at once turned into one of complete annoyance.

“I reckon yer man didn’t git here,” remarked the talkative ’bus driver. “Maybe he’ll be on seventeen.”

One look at the official’s face convinced Doug’ that it was not the time to renew his request for a free ticket. Mr. Elder hurried into the depot, and with no attempt to restrain his anger, called up the ticket office of the fair association on the telephone.

To some one, he rapidly explained that Mr. T. Glenn Dare, the expert who was to set up and operate the aeroplane for the fair directors had not arrived. The boxed and crated airship had been in the depot freight house for a week. It was now Tuesday of the week of the fair, and a flight had been advertised for Wednesday afternoon at three o’clock. Operator Dare, who was to make this at the rate of fifty dollars a day, had been expected Tuesday morning.

“Yes, I know,” answered the president to the person with whom he had been talking, “we’ve saved one hundred dollars, but that ain’t it. We’ve got to exhibit our aeroplane to-morrow, or let the people know we can’t. We’ve paid one thousand eight hundred dollars in good money for the thing, and it ain’t worth a nickel to us over there in the freight depot.”

There was more talk, and then President Elder ended the conversation by announcing:

“There isn’t any use to haul the boxes out to the ground, if the man don’t come. We’ll wait until the night train. If he ain’t on that, we’ll send out bills callin’ the show off. Then we’ll ship the machine back East and sue the

company for failure to keep its contract. They agreed to have a competent man here, and they've thrown us down."

As the perspiring Mr. Elder came out of the hot ticket-office of the musty-smelling station and paused on the platform to wipe his red face, his eye fell on the freight-house across the tracks from the station. He glanced at his horse to see that it was all right, and then sprang across to the freight-depot. He had not yet seen the valuable crates consigned to him. The freight-agent had already gone to dinner. Entering the long shed, he glanced inquiringly about. It was half dark.

"Lookin' for your aeroplane, Mr. Elder?" exclaimed a pleasant boyish voice from somewhere in the gloom.

The banker and fair president traced the sounds to their source. At the far end of the room and opposite a rear door stood a mound of carefully packed and braced skeleton-like frames. On the edge of a heavy square box bound with steel bands, sat a boy of perhaps seventeen or eighteen. Although it was hot, the lad was wearing a heavy blue flannel shirt, a red neck tie, and a cheap, sailor hat. His low shoes were worn and old, and his socks gave signs of needing a mother's care. He was slowly fanning himself with a big blue handkerchief.

"If you are," added the boy, springing to his feet, "here it is; and it looks like the real thing."

Instead of examining the aeroplane crates, Mr. Elder's eye swept the boy from hat to shoes.

"Aren't you Bud Wilson?" he asked at last.

"Yes, sir. Attorney Cyrus Stockwell is my foster father."

"I thought so," rejoined the banker tartly. "I've heard of you. Lafe Pennington, of our bank, has told me about you."

The boy laughed—he had already taken off his discolored hat.

“Then you didn’t hear much good about me, that’s certain.”

“No,” soberly answered the elder man, “to tell you the truth, I’ve never heard much good about you.”

The boy laughed again, but in an embarrassed way, showed his confusion, and then said:

“Lafe and I never got along. But, he may be right. I’ve got a bad name.”

“What are you doing here? You are old enough to be at work.”

“That’s it,” went on Bud, “I ought to be. I have a job promised me when I want it, out in the country. But I’ve been waitin’ to see this.”

He pointed toward the dismantled airship.

“What do you want to see? You haven’t any business loafing in here. Have you been monkeyin’ with the machinery?”

“Oh! I know ’em around here. And I ain’t hurt nothing. No fear o’ that.”

“Well, what’s your interest?”

“I want to see it. I’ve been waiting every day since it came. I want to be here when you move it. I want to help unpack it.”

“You? What do you know about aeroplanes?”

“Nothing—that is, almost nothing. But I guess I know a little. You know I ran Mr. Greeley’s automobile nearly all summer. I understand motors. And—well, I do know something about aeroplanes. I tried to make one this summer.”

A look of sudden interest showed in the banker’s face.

“Oh, I remember now, you are the youngster that nearly broke his neck trying to fly.”

“I suppose Lafe Pennington told that,” answered Bud, looking up. “Well, I didn’t. I fell, but I lit on my feet, and I didn’t even harm my aeroplane.”

President Elder was looking over the big crates, and peering through the frames. Suddenly, he turned to Bud again.

“What do you mean by *your* aeroplane?”

“It wasn’t really an aeroplane. That is, I didn’t have an engine; but I made the wings; and I flew one hundred and fifty feet in them, too, out at Greeley’s gravel pit.”

“Then you know how an aeroplane is made?”

“I think I do. They are all pretty much alike. When I see this one, I’ll know a lot more.”

An idea was plainly working in President Elder’s brain. He made a searching examination of the lad before him. Then he asked:

“Didn’t you and Lafe Pennington work on this airship idea together?”

Bud laughed outright.

“Hardly,” he answered, “Lafe wouldn’t work with any one. He knows too much. I worked alone.”

President Elder looked at his watch. It was just noon.

“Do you think you could put this airship together?”

“Certainly, I put my own together.”

“Bud, meet me here at one o’clock. I may have a job for you.”

While the banker’s smart rig went clattering up the brick street, Bud started for home on a run.

Long before one o’clock, Bud was at the freight-house again. In a short time, a dray and an express wagon appeared. About the time that a large

farm wagon, drawn by two horses, came in sight, Mr. Elder reappeared. In the buggy with him was the young man referred to several times by Mr. Elder and Bud an hour before—Lafe Pennington. As they sprang from the vehicle, Bud was on the freight-house platform. Lafe passed the boy with a condescending smile; but Mr. Elder stopped.

“Bud,” he began, “I had a kind of a notion that I had a job for you, but I guess that’s all off.”

“I hoped you had. I hurried back.”

“Well, it’s this way. I forgot that our clerk, Mr. Pennington, had some knowledge of aeroplanes. We are in a sort of a box, and after I talked to you, I decided to try to get this machine ready. The man who ought to do it isn’t here. Even if he comes to-night, he won’t have time to set it up. So, while I talked to you, I decided to try to put it together and have it ready when he came. I was going to get you to help.”

“Can’t I?” asked the boy eagerly.

“I don’t think we’ll need you now. I’ve got Mr. Pennington. He says he can do it without any trouble. And you know he’s in the bank, and I know him. He’s one of our clerks.”

“I reckon he can do it, perhaps,” answered Bud in a disappointed tone, “but I’d like to help too. I’d work for nothing.”

“I suggested that, but Mr. Pennington says he’d rather work alone.”

Mr. Elder was about to pass on when Bud touched his sleeve.

“Mr. Elder,” he said, “Lafe said that because he knew I was the only person in Scottsville who could help. I haven’t anything against Lafe, but you ought to know the facts—I know more about aeroplanes than he does. He may be able to do what you want, and he may not. You may think I’m knocking Lafe, but I’m not. I’m just giving you the truth: he thinks he knows more about airships than he really does.”