Airplane Boys at Platinum River

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THE AIRPLANE BOYS SERIES

by

E. J. CRAINE

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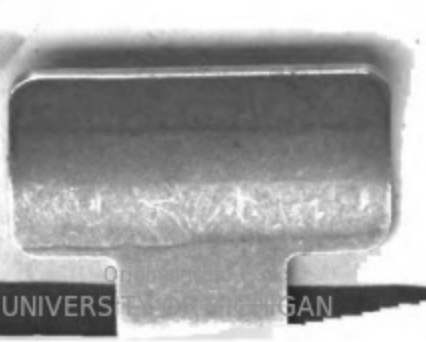

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To Walter Keith

From

Marie & George

Dec 25, 1937

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Airplane Boys At Platinum River

BY

E. J. CRAINE

THE WORLD SYNDICATE PUBLISHING CO.
CLEVELAND, O. NEW YORK, N. Y.

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In this fifth book of the Airplane Boys, Jim and Bob risk their lives to help a worthy family out of their difficulties.

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I

AN OLD ENEMY

"I say, Buddy, my esophagus feels as if my pharynx is severed," Robert Caldwell remarked very soberly to his step-brother, Jim Caldwell, as the pair made their way among the gay crowd attending the Spanish-Peruvian fiesta near Cuzco.

"That's right serious, old man. Think somebody shot an arrow into the air while you were asleep with your mouth open and it dropped in?" the older boy inquired with equal gravity.

"Is that any way to treat a fellow who is empty to his boot tips and just when I am beginning to discard vulgar slang for something real cultured in the way of language?" Bob demanded.

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this reversion to days when knighthood was budding?" He took one of the seats and Caldwell the other.

"I'm letting Spanish manners get under my skin—"

"Looks more like wood-ticks—" Austin interrupted. "They make a horse skid around just that way."

"And I want to impress Mom when we get home, old man. Have you forgotten that we take the air at crack of dawn tomorrow and our bird is to set us down on the K-A ranch before the sun's evening rays can reach the peak of Cap Rock?"

"Sure I know." Jim's eyes glistened. "It'll be great to sail through space like that and so high that no one will see us, but just the same, me Flying Buddy, if you go acting like that around your mother, she'll think that something is the matter with you, and it will be a dose of oil for yours." At that the two laughed heartily, but their merriment was cut short by the appearance of the waiter with huge platters of mighty good-looking food, so they proceeded to do it justice.

"The meals in Peru are almost as good as in Texas," Bob remarked after he had helped himself and made his first attack.

"Right-O, but it will be grand to get home," Jim declared. They did not talk

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yond the dining space. "You had an accident and have been in the hospital."

"Yah. I sent you word from the hospital, didn't I?"

"That is true. It was grievous that your accident should have come at such an inopportune moment; when there was work for you," the other remarked, and there was an odd insinuation in his voice.

"If you, or your boss thinks I cracked up because I wanted to, you have got another think coming—see! I wasn't even piloting the plane when she came down—" There was anger in the tone and Jim saw the man's shoulders straighten and lean forward a trifle.

"Control your temper, my friend. I merely remarked it was too bad for you—"

"Oh, you did—well—maybe you got another guess coming on that too," the other answered. The waiter brought them wine, which they sipped in silence until the man was well out of ear-shot.

"Another guess, you say?"

"That's what I said." Bob, who had been leaning so that he could hear every word easily, glanced questioningly at Jim.

"Know them?" his lips formed, and Jim shook his head that he didn't.

"Do you?" he asked softly.

"One, I think. Listen!" They attended

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me to get work in this new power works down here—"

"It will not be difficult—"

"You haul in your horns. If it's so easy why don't you do it yourself? Now listen, I told you I don't belong to your outfit and I ain't taking orders from your chief—not me. See? I heard on good authority that there are some of the Don's own tribe in that works—and I'm not buttin' in against any of them. That's flat and final," he declared emphatically.

Then, into Jim's mind flashed the recollection of the evening he and Bob had dined with Don Haurea at the Box Z ranch, which adjoined the K-A along Cap Rock in Texas. They were so well entertained by their new friend that they failed to note the passage of the hours and it was quite late when an automobile brought a former housekeeper of the ranch, a lawyer with a brief-case full of legal documents, and a man whom they claimed was a son of Don Haurea's father. The Don had made short work of them, and now, Jim was sure that he recognized the broad back of Ollie, who had posed as the son. Even to the boys the scheme had seemed too stupid for anyone with a grain of sense to take part in or try to put over, but later the Don had explained that it was an attempt

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"That I have heard. I watched the funeral of the pilot and I sent to you flowers and jelly and wine to the hospital," the other man answered casually.

"Yah. Well, I crawled out of the wreck after somebody else had picked up the pilot and took him to the hospital. Then I tried to make a fire to keep warm by and signal, and while I was asleep it burned up what was left of the plane. I had to get a move on or be cooked myself, and I nearly was. I found some berries and roots that I ate and days afterward I managed to drag myself to a trapper's hut, and the man took me to the nearest settlement. Now—when I was crawling from that bon-fire, I found something swell—swell." He straightened his back and cocked back his head. "Waiter," he shouted. "More wine—plenty more."

"You should be moderate with wine after having been ill," the other man reminded him.

"Yah. Maybe I should. Not because I've been ill, but because I might talk too much—"

"You're not exactly tight-mouthed at the moment."

"Think you're funny, don't you? Well, you trot back to your High Chief, or whatever he is, and tell him if he's interested I'll go fifty-

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"Ain't you cute? Why don't you ask if I have it with me?"

"You are too quick, my friend. It is unfair to be so sensitive. As a man of the world you are perfectly aware that no one would consider any proposition unless he knew what he is going after."

"All right, I'll tell you. It's platinum—" Ollie spoke more softly, but Bob understood what he said.

"My friend, there has been no platinum discovered in Peru in hundreds of years. There was, at one time, a small amount of it, but never a very great quantity. Not enough to make it worth thinking about. The world gets it in quantities from Russia, and these Andes have been searched diligently, but there is little here."

"That's where you are wrong."

"How do you know it was platinum?"

"Listen, big boy, during the war we had to have it, and I flew with some other lads into Russia to get it, see? We came out with it—I got more than any other man in the outfit, and I brought it back. I know what I'm talking about."

"That is indeed interesting. I shall present your proposition to the chief and I am sure that he will be most happy to discuss the matter with you." He extended his

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with him." Bob glanced around and then they saw that a man was following Carlos, or rather walking close behind him.

"Senors, I have searched for you," Carlos called, then he stopped as the man came closer.

"Pardon, senor. You picked up a wallet which was dropped by my friend who was taken ill," he said very politely.

"Yes, I did pick up some sort of case, but I don't know about handing it over to a stranger," Carlos answered good-naturedly.

"My friend was taken ill and is now on the way to the hospital," the man urged. "I am distressed and would go to him at once."

"Yes, of course," the young fellow hesitated, then the man stepped close and one hand was pressed against Carlos' side. The Flying Buddies saw the move, and sprang up.

"I say, old thing, what's the idea?" Bob demanded.

"Sure you are not off your wave length?" Jim added. Four fists were clenched hard and two pairs of eyes flashed angrily. "Keep your hand in your pocket, old timer." They shoved in between their pal and the chap who accosted him, but just as they did so, two huge men leaped from the background and one of them caught Carlos on the chin

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the kitchen, down a pair of slippery stairs and into a shallow hole used for slop water. They cursed and sputtered alternately, but the bouncer raised his foot again, so they scrambled away from the vicinity as fast as they could go.

"Your names, young gentlemen," the tall chap said politely.

"I'm Jim Austin," the Flying Buddy began and proceeded to introduce his companions.

"And I am Alonzo de Zimmon. I regret that you should have had such an unpleasant experience in my establishment." He held out his hand to Bob, who promptly accepted it, and his eyes rested on the mate to Caldwell's ring. "It has given me great pleasure to meet you young Americans. And you, also, Senor de Castro. Your father I know well."

"Of course, I've heard him speak of you, Don de Zimmon. We certainly are obligated to you for helping us," Carlos replied. "My father will come and thank you just as soon as I tell him how greatly we are indebted to you."

"It will give me great pleasure to take you home in my car," the Don answered. "I am about to drive your way."

"Thanks a lot," Jim accepted.

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the police as soon as possible. Then I hurried to join our friends, and had just succeeded in finding their table and calling a greeting when a stranger touched my arm from behind and begged that I return the wallet which he was going to take to his sick friend."

"That's when we saw him," Jim put in.

"Ordinarily I should have done so without a question, for the chap was gentlemanly enough, but the look in that man's eyes sort of got me, so I told him I was not sure that I should. Immediately his face got ugly and he poked his fingers into my ribs and demanded that I hand it over at once and from right behind him jumped two huge fellows. One of them landed his fist on my jaw, then I believe the Flying Buddies came on with their engines wide open. I felt one of the men make a dive to my pocket, so I managed to roll over and keep my coat closed tightly. After that I felt as if I'd landed in a hive of mad bees and I couldn't get up until the chief dragged me to my feet. One of the men accused me of stealing the wallet and demanded that I be searched, but the Don stepped in and took command. That's all I know."

"What sort of looking men were they, my son?"

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"No, I have not, but according to this 'Ollie's' statement, he had kept the secret to himself," Pedro de Castro reminded them.

"We all know that the Andes are rich with treasure of one sort or another and many expeditions have been financed to search for the precious metal, but I understand that our geologists agree that while there may be small quantities of it in different sections it is of a poor quality and in places where getting it out would cost more than it is worth," the Don told them.

"That is quite true. I have seen the report. When the Spaniards came to this land there was a good deal, or rather the Indians had quantities of it; they called it 'frog gold' but at that time the white men knew nothing of its value and would not have it. Later a great deal was accumulated and shipped to Spain, then the supply diminished until now it is almost gone. Now it is Russia that is rich with the mineral," Senor de Castro explained.

"Well, I say, Carlos, we can soon settle if the chap was Ollie. Perhaps the name is on his wallet," Jim suggested.

"I never thought of that." Carlos grinned and produced it from his inside pocket. He handed it to his father and the older man turned it over carefully. It was as long as

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make judicious inquiries as to the identity of the owner. If he were really ill, it is more than likely that he is now in the hospital, and he could not be admitted without a name. It was strange indeed that a gang of ruffians should make such an effort to secure it, unless they did not know how barren it was. Now, my good friend, I think it would be well for our young people to—as it is so aptly put in America, scrutinize their step."

"We'll watch our step, and our hop too," Jim laughed.

"Yes. We are off for home in the morning so I guess there are no more Peruvian adventures for us," Bob grinned cheerfully.

"Then, I shall tell you it is with regret that I bid you good evening, and I trust that I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again." The Don extended his hand cordially, and both boys rather wished that they had had a chance to know him better.

"If you ever get to the bottom of this puzzle I hope you will let us know, sir."

"I shall be delighted." The Don took his departure, and when Senor de Castro returned to the portico the boys were still puzzling over the empty wallet.

"You will be careful," he urged.

"Of course. Don de Zimmon seems like a

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"It will give us pleasure to have you remain," Carlos chuckled when the message was read to him and his father.

"It will take perhaps two days to get the report and I believe that Senor Austin's caution is very wise," the older man declared. Although the Flying Buddies were anxious to get home and the message gave them a deep feeling of disappointment, they kept it to themselves, and grinned as if delighted at the postponement.

"Doubtless you will learn more of the mystery of my sick friend, or your Ollie," Carlos suggested.

"It'll be great to know what the answer is," Jim responded cheerfully.

Later that evening when they were in Jim's room, Caldwell lingered at the door. "I say, we were lucky that Don de Zimmon could tell us from the roughnecks." Austin looked at him a moment.

"It was lucky that we were wearing the green emerald rings that Yncicea Haurea gave us that day we rescued him off the Island in Lake Champlain," he replied softly.

"The rings?" Bob glanced at his.

"Sure. The Don saw mine first then had a look at yours when he shook hands with you. Guess he's one of the Ynca descendants."

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and the boys turned away a bit sick at the sight of the bleeding body.

"I got one, sir—" Another servant dragged the man who had jumped from the veranda.

"Lock him securely until morning," Senor de Castro ordered.

"All for an empty purse," Carlos remarked.

"Hey—" There came another shout and a moment later two more men were captured. One had fallen and injured his leg, but the other was unhurt.

"Look after them. Why are you men turning into such devils?"

"To get something you don't know anything about. That wallet you've been trying to kill me for is empty—there isn't a scrap in it," Carlos told them. Those who could, looked at him sullenly, but the one who was hurt snarled furiously,

"Maybe it is empty," he rasped, "and then again, maybe it ain't, see!"

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get above the danger zone several of them had been killed.

"Give a calf enough rope and he'll hang himself," Caldwell remarked as the plane's wheels touched the chosen landing spot and rolled a few feet. "Queer how many of those guys have eliminated themselves in one way or another."

"Yes. I should think they'd begin to tumble to themselves that they are amateurs and quit trying to get the better of the men they are so intent on robbing," Jim answered. The plane rolled beneath the shelter of the fortress wall and when she was in a position where she could not be seen by curious flyers, he brought her to a stop. "I have a hunch that some bright lad in that gang may come flying about to have a look at the remains of the volcano."

"Well, won't he get the jolt of his gay careless youth when he can't find a crater as big as a hole in a tooth?" chuckled Bob. "Any hunches that we'll find a Lab. man around?"

"Thought we might," Jim admitted.

"And presto, I appear!" It was Ynilea, who smiled broadly. "I too am becoming subject to attacks of hunch and when we found that you were not going to go home this morning under central power I observed

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of the great wall, much as Carlos had said he did when he came there as a small boy and thought he saw an opening into a court. They proceeded carefully, keeping out of sight of the approaching airman, until suddenly Ynilea held up his hand. Just ahead of them they saw the Indian woman whose age no one could ever guess, coming very slowly from the opposite direction. She was wearing a robe which hung in folds from her shoulders, a loose hood covered her head, and the material looked so exactly like the stones beside which she walked that if she had not moved she could not have been distinguished from one of them. She seemed to be aware of their presence, for in a moment she stopped, made a slight movement of her head, and Ynilea instantly went to her, the boys close at his heels.

"Come," she said softly.

Her hand, still concealed by the folds of her sleeve, moved over the nearest stone, and after an instant, during which the Flying Buddies almost held their breaths, the great mass moved. It slipped back about three inches, then slid along like a folding door, leaving an opening wide enough for them all to enter. The boys drew quick breaths of astonishment as they found themselves in a good-sized room which was cut out of the

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solid rock of the mountain. The heavy panel returned to its place, and a moment later they stood close together on another rock which dropped with perfect smoothness about ten feet, then admitted them into another small room. This seemed to be in the section near the edge of the cliff. Ynilea moved back a part in one corner, and through a clever screen of foliage they could get a good view of the sky.

"My gosh, Carlos was right, he did see an opening in the wall," Bob said softly, and Ynilea turned a questioning glance toward him.

"He and some boys were here, I mean on top, years ago, and the little fellow declared he saw an opening in the wall. He was separated from his fellows, but when he found them and wanted to show it to them, he couldn't locate it again and they thought he was dreaming, or his imagination working over-time," Jim explained.

"His story was not credited?" Ynilea was adjusting a sort of periscope.

"No. He was such a little fellow they were sure he was mistaken."

"Oh, there she is," the tall Indian announced. He turned a wheel in the instrument and the boys could easily see the plane they had heard circling in a wide loop over

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their heads. As they watched, the man adjusted the glass until it was like a powerful telescope and Jim whistled as the flying machine was brought close enough for them to see the dark face of the pilot who was leaning over the side of his plane. He seemed to be looking for something and scowled when he did not find it.

"Bet the first gold tooth I get against a plugged dime that your hunch was right, Buddy. He is looking for the crater and the evidence of the near-disaster."

"He's coming lower." The plane, which had been almost at the ceiling, began to spiral, and the man in the cock-pit pressed a pair of field glasses to his eyes.

"He might pick us out—"

"The glass is not directed this way. As you say, he is looking for that crater," Ynilea answered.

"Be a nice little treat if you could really shoot off a lid and chase him with a blast of smoke and fire," Jim chuckled.

"It would indeed," Ynilea agreed with a smile.

"Give him something to write home about."

"Looks as if he is planning to land," Jim explained, and the plane was descending closer. Soon it was so near that the pilot

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we'll attach to the 'Lark's' radio. We were going to wait until you landed back in Texas to have it installed, but since you are staying over, we'll fix it in a set and exchange it for you as soon as it's ready. You can pay a visit to the Lab. to learn how it works."

"Oh, that will be great. I say, you'll soon have that plane so we won't need to come to the ground at all," announced Bob.

"Should you like that?"

"And how! But, Buddy we'd better get home or the De Castros will think we're lost—or never coming down," Jim warned.

"Too true," agreed Bob.

Presently the "Lark" was again in the air, but no "pockets or bumps" interfered with her flight when she leveled off, her nose pointed toward the De Castro home, and she rushed swiftly to the music of singing engine and whistling wind. The boys were perfectly satisfied with their morning adventure, but when they lighted on the runway, they saw Carlos waiting for them on the piazza.

"My father was getting distressed," he told them soberly.

"Sorry we over-stayed," Jim apologized.

"You are not so very much behind time, but there is some surprising news. Will you join us as you are? It's quite all right if you care to do so."

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"We'll get there more quickly," Bob answered, so they hurried to the cool breakfast room off the portico, where they found Senor de Castro pacing the floor.

"I beg your pardon, sir—" Jim began.

"That's all right, my boy, breakfast is a movable feast. Did my son tell you the news?"

"No sir."

"Well, the man you call Ollie was found late last night. He had been beaten and his skull crushed to a pulp. He is dead."

"As Hamlet's cat," Carlos added, glancing at Bob. "Padre is a bit anxious about you—and me too—and he wants us to be mighty careful."

"We will, senor," Jim assured him.

"It seems that the police have traced the man's movements, questioned persons who saw him, including the attendants at the fiesta. No one seems to know who was with him when he had refreshments. As I remember that was when you boys overheard his conversation about the platinum."

"That's right," answered Jim.

"In such a case suspicious characters are rounded up and held until their innocence is established. They have several of these men and ask you to come to the detention quarters and see if you can identify any of them."

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"Have you any idea when they picked up those men?" Jim inquired.

"Very early this morning."

"Then they have the wrong fellows."

"How do you know?"

"Because I saw the man in an airplane this morning. He was flying very much higher than we were, and looking over the side. I saw him quite plainly, sir."

"Was that the lad?" demanded Bob.

"I'm sure of it," Jim nodded.

"Could you describe the plane?" Carlos wanted to know.

"I could do that," Jim answered, then he frowned thoughtfully. "If he's a member of the gang we've been having all the fireworks with he or some of his gang may try to waylay us on the way home. Could the information be given to the police confidentially?"

"That shall be attended to, my boy. You early birds do manage to—"

"Gobble the worms," Bob suggested.

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"You will care take, mio," she said softly.

"Yes."

The brothers crawled to a second boulder close by but Jim climbed a bit higher and dropped down between two rocks which formed a barricade about him, yet gave him an excellent view of the dry bed and the vicinity. Although he had said nothing about it, he was mighty anxious about the De Castro's plane and was glad that it was parked some distance away, but he was fully aware that the pilot might very easily note its presence. By that time the airman had evidently selected a landing site, for the motor was shut off and the machine was gliding swiftly to earth. As it dropped, Jim scowled anxiously and thought soberly of the dangerous situation in which he and the Gonzalas were placed. The plane was none other than one of those used by members of the gang who had taken the Flying Buddies and the De Castros to Amy-Ran and endeavored to force from the boys some information regarding the activities of Don Haurea and his colleagues.

"If it's anyone from that gang, and the chances are that it is, I'm in for a hot time. They are sure to start a hunt for whoever came in the plane," the lad told himself soberly.

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VI

CAPTURE

"Any of you other men want what's coming to you?" Gordon snarled as he stood over his victim, a black automatic in each hand. The men who were advancing menacingly on him stopped in their tracks and swore furiously.

"Keep your shirts on, all of you," the leader snapped. "You fellows want to remember that I am running this picnic and you are here to obey orders. Gordon, put up those irons or I'll rake you with the machine gun." As he spoke the one man who had remained in the plane rose in the cock-pit and swung the shiny nose of the weapon on the group.

"He's such a liar," one growled.

"I've told you the truth," Gordon answered and his face was dark, but he slipped the guns in his pockets.

"You can hardly blame the boys for doubting your word."

"I do blame them, Cardow; I've told you the truth."

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the Gonzalas who had come after him. Any member of the gang might have sprung the same story and he would have been taken in just as quickly.

"Reckon I'm not such a Jumbo of intellect," he remarked to himself.

"Oh," the woman clutched his hand, "look!" At that moment the plane was bathed in a flood-light from another machine shooting directly above them. "God have mercy!"

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and he glanced over his shoulder, but the third one was almost on his tail.

"Let him come up," Arto said in his ear, so the Flying Buddy decreased his speed somewhat, glancing back to see just how close the other fellow was coming.

"Crack! crack!" Two shots spat out from the rear cock-pit, and almost immediately two more. Again Jim glanced back and he saw that the nearest machine was still tearing almost upon him. Four more shots rang out from the guns of the Gonzalas', then the nearest plane wobbled as if the pilot had been hit.

"You have a gun," Mrs. Gonzalas shouted. "Give it to me, I can shoot it." He fished it out of his pocket and handed it over, looking first to be sure that it was ready for use.

They tore on and Jim saw the woman holding the weapon efficiently in her hand and was glad to see that she had been taught to handle it. On they went, and then, he saw a machine racing almost beside him. The guns cracked again but as far as the boy could see they did no real damage but it flashed through his mind that the pilots were not alarmed at the firing. They merely kept out of range.

"One is mounting his machine gun—on the right," Arto announced.

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us." Another cup was produced and the three men drank. It revived their spirits greatly, and the hot black mixture warmed them up.

"Thanks a lot," Jim said, then added, "What are you fellows going to do with us? These people have nothing to do with me—"

"Aw, we didn't ask you no questions, did we?"

"We can't tell yet, but we'll know before long," the General added.

"There it goes now—" They listened, then heard a series of distant shots, evidently from a small gun, spelling out some sort of code. It was none Jim recognized, but the men made notes on pieces of paper, and finally, when there was a pause, the general picked up a rifle which was near at hand, and fired three shots. A moment later the sound of the motor, which had been silenced during the exchange, boomed out again, and Austin knew that the machine gunner was on his way.

"Well now, ain't that nice." The men had their heads bowed over what they had written.

"You're wanting to know what we're going to do with you." The General looked at Austin and leered. "Well, Buddy, we're taking you for a ride." Jim caught his breath sharply for he had read that among gang-

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dently meant for baggage and into this the rolls were tossed carelessly.

"Show your tickets," the Admiral invited quite as if he was conducting a party of tourists, instead of taking the group decidedly against their will to parts unknown. Jim thought of inquiring what their destination was to be, but changed his mind because he could hardly expect to be given an honest answer.

The Admiral took the pilot's seat, while the General perched watchfully in the rear so that any move made by one of the prisoners could be instantly observed and stopped. His rifle stood near at hand and a business-like six-gun was in his belt. There was the usual "trying," then the huge plane moved through the darkness, and as soon as its wheel lifted, all but a very small light was switched off in the cabin.

"You been real peaceful up to now," the Admiral reminded them, "En here's hoping your good judgment don't lead you astray while we're flyin'. There ain't no tigers, but the guns is fer use, pronto." He turned his attention to his job, and soon they were roaring through space.

The plane seemed to climb steeply, then curve, and Austin wished that his place was not in the center. If he could get a glimpse

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"Aw, come now, lady, that ain't getting you no place," the General protested.

"Better keep off the water-works," the Admiral advised sharply.

"Be brave, querida mia," Pedro whispered trying to comfort her, but she continued to cry as if she were going to have a spell of hysterics.

"Can that," the General snapped. Pedro urged softly and in a few minutes the sobbing ceased. She dabbed her face with her handkerchief, and straightened her clothes.

"Mother of God," she prayed tearfully.

"Listen, Bo, make her quit that or I'll—give her something to pray over," the General snarled and his fingers clutched his gun aggressively. If he thought to frighten Mrs. Gonzalas into silence he used the wrong tactics, for she shrieked out wildly, crying harder than ever.

"You would—" Arto flared.

"I say," Jim interposed. "What do you want to scare her out of her wits for? No wonder she cried; waking up and seeing you."

"You kin save your compliments—"

"If you want her to stop crying, stop doing things to make her," Jim snapped angrily.

"You're a big coward." He turned to Mrs. Gonzalas. "Don't you be afraid of him, or any of them, don't let them throw a scare

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responsible for their difficulties and his sister-in-law's suffering.

"Last stop," the Admiral bellowed.

"All out."

"Only they ain't leaving without some decorations." He produced clanking handcuffs. One pair he put on Pedro and his wife, and with the other he secured Jim and Arto together.

"Now you look more 'folksy'. Get a move on."

The manacles hampered them and as no more lights were turned on the four stumbled along the cabin to the low door. Jim lead the way, and had to stand on a brace while Arto came after him. Then the two jumped together, landing on something rather slippery, which Austin thought might be mossy stones. Pedro appeared almost immediately, for the Admiral was urging speed, so the two on the ground braced themselves to help. At last they were all out, and Jim glanced about him curiously. One thing he noticed, nothing seemed wet, so he decided that the storm had been a local and not a general one.

"You guys stay where you are," the Admiral snapped authoritatively.

"I got a gun on 'em."

They stood perfectly still a short distance from the plane, and Jim took a look at her.

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X

SHIVERING ROCKS

"Hey you, come on en watch your step," the Admiral ordered abruptly although the little band of prisoners had seen or heard nothing which announced that the next move was to be made.

"Right-O, don't rush the mourners," Jim answered, then he turned to his bracelet-mate and grinned broadly. "After you, my dear Gonzalas."

"Pray, I beg of you go first," Arto responded equally cheerful.

"Now, none of your funny business," the General snapped suspiciously.

"Maybe you won't find things to laugh at—"

"We will as long as you're around, old comic strip," Jim told him, but he proceeded at the head of the awkward squad.

They seemed, as far as the boy could make out in the darkness, to be on a plateau, and he guessed it was somewhere in the coast range of the Andes. The spot on which they

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and promptly dropped to the ground, or rather the stones. "Whew, that feels better." He noticed some of the men glance indifferently in his direction, but the four of them made themselves as comfortable as possible while the Admiral and his companion stood over them, guns in hand.

Several minutes passed during which time no one spoke and as Austin leaned back to rest he looked up toward the sky, which was a clear cold blue with stars that seemed to have retreated to their greatest distance from the globe as if they rather disapproved of the actions of men. "Queer how different they look when we are flying near to them," he thought. "As if they are interested and want to be encouraging." He reasoned that the place they were in was probably near the coast and considerably north of Cuzco where the range of the mountains was broader, with wide stretches of uninhabited territory. The Flying Buddy felt sure that only in such a place would the great Boss have a stronghold such as this, and it was evident that the men were familiar with the section; enough so that they had a landing site as well as the corner with its overhanging ledge.

"Suppose it's the Boss they are waiting for," the lad whispered to Arto who was seated beside him.

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light. Their backs were to the prisoners, and after a few words were exchanged in undertones which could not be understood by the captives, two of the men turned slightly, and then Jim almost jumped out of his skin.

"It is Cardow," Arto whispered, scarcely above his breath.

"And the fellow Gordon," Jim added. His mind was busy, and then he recalled that the gang lieutenant had said that he expected to go to Amy-Ran fastness by midnight. Surely it was long past that, but Jim's wrist watch was under his shirt cuff where he kept it while he was flying because there was a clock among the instruments of the dial-board.

"Bad men! I regret for my brother—"

"Yes. Any idea what time it is?" Jim asked.

"Nearly two o'clock when we arrive. Perhaps a little after now, ten or fifteen minutes. The night is very long," he sighed.

In that case, Jim calculated, they couldn't be near the fastness unless something had gone wrong; there had been delay in setting off the dynamite. Perhaps Cardow and Gordon had just returned from the blowing-up of the enormous rocks intending to report their success to the Boss. He glanced toward the two faces but there certainly was no trace

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"That's all I want to know." He turned to Arto. "Who are you?"

"I am Arto Carlos de Gonzalas; this *gentleman* is my brother Pedro, and his wife," Arto presented his family as ceremoniously as his hand-cuffed wrist permitted.

"Which of you conceived the idea of going to that dry fork of the river to-day?" Cardow demanded.

"I—"

"The project was mine, senor," Pedro spoke up quickly.

"What were you doing there?"

"We did nothing, senor," Pedro answered simply.

"You didn't just happen there!" Cardow snarled. "What did you go for? I haven't a lot of time to waste, darn it, and if you don't tell the truth, I'll have the boys stick your wife's feet in the fire—"

"Oh—" Mrs. Gonzalas started to scream, but a hand was put quickly over her mouth.

"Hush, mio," her husband begged earnestly, then turning to the Admiral who had silenced her, he snapped furiously, "You keep your hands to yourself, senor—"

"Let her alone," Cardow ordered, then he added to Pedro, "No one is going to hurt her if you tell the truth."

"I searched for platinum," Pedro told

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XI

TREASURE

"That's a good job done," Gordon declared viciously.

"How do you get that way?" Cardow snapped furiously. Then he turned to the messenger. "You were told that the boy was to be brought in, weren't you?"

"Yes we were, Cardow, but we couldn't make it, I tell you."

"What the blazes happened?"

"We picked him up in the middle of the afternoon as he was headin' for the De Castro's. He didn't pay much attention to us, waggled his wings a couple o' times, and played around like he was feelin' good. That plane of his is the fastest thing in the air, I'm tellin' you, and we had a hard time to catch up with him; only did it when he slackened in the fog; then we got on all sides of him and when he came out we were ready. Gave him the lead as fast as we could pour it out. The machine blazed up like a paper lantern and turned into a tail spin."

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prised that the sounds were not greater and that he felt not the slightest quiver of the earth. This made him believe that they must be some distance from the Amy-Ran fastness.

"Come along. I ain't waitin' here," the Admiral urged, and the General acquiesced without hesitation.

"We can bring 'em with us and see what's doing. They can't get away no matter where we are," he argued. "March, you, en fast."

They started at once and this time had a fairly good light so they could easily see where they were going. Presently they were hurrying through the hallway, but they turned off before they were half way to the entrance near the plane. Five minutes they scrambled and then the route widened out and descended steeply by way of a gully that was paved with small stones which had probably been washed there during flood seasons and heavy rains. This brought them onto a sort of ledge where they stood suddenly in a good light that reflected a lower ledge about five rods away. Jim could see men hurriedly crowding on this other bit of table and then he was sure that it was the spot where he and the De Castros had been held prisoner.

"Come on, they've got something. I'm going over."

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ship the Sun as their ancestors had done for hundreds of years. In the middle of the furthest wall was a great sun of hammered gold and about its rim a wide band of precious stones so brilliant that they sparkled and flashed in the glare of the lights that Cardow and his men carried. In front of the sun was a high platform, and beneath that were wide seats made of stone. There were tall jars of pottery made in beautiful designs, inlaid with gold and emeralds.

Brick shinned up one of the large ones, stared into its wide mouth, then dipped in his hands. He brought them up dripping with jeweled ornaments of exquisite workmanship and brilliancy, then began to fill his pockets, but in his eagerness he failed to hang on, and came sliding swiftly to the stone floor, which was laid in colored squares with patterns that looked like historical pictures of long ago conquests. For a few minutes the men acted as if they thought they were asleep, but with Brick's find, they all fell upon the nearest object with guns and knives and began to hack off the treasure. Then suddenly a noise from outside startled them, and for an instant they paused, but when they soon saw that it was a deluge of rain coming down amid the crash of thunder they continued in their mad rush to get the treasure.

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mers, were turned on the lieutenant, but he did not flinch.

"Listen, if you don't obey orders, how would you like to tackle the forests with your pockets full of gold and not a drop of water? You can't get out of this place without a plane."

"Aw, well, what do you want?"

"Just straighten this place up so the Boss can see it as it is, or was, see? He'll be madder than blazes if it's wrecked before he gets here," Cardow told them.

"All right. How long will it take him to come?" one demanded.

"Not more than half an hour, probably not that long. I'll send for him."

"That suits me."

"I'll go for him," Gordon volunteered. He was standing beside the huge stone that had been blown out of its place, and as he spoke, Jim noticed that the Texan seemed intensely interested in what he saw.

"Hurry along. Tell him what a find it is and that the men want to get to work cleaning it up as quickly as possible."

"I'll tell him."

"And tell him what a splendid piece of blasting it is. You might take some of these jewels." Cardow picked up a brimming

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"I'm wonderin' if he'll queer the works—"

"Yer nuts. What kin he do? Look what we got—"

"I know, but I'm doin' some thinkin' by myself. Maybe he ain't bringing the Boss back at all, and we'll sit here waitin—"

"And not get nothin'?" snapped Joe.

"Might be sumpin like that—"

"Listen, Joe—if Gordon and the Boss are not here in half an hour, we'll divide this stuff up among ourselves and leave him what we can't carry away. I know he'll come and there's no funny business about it. You agree to that—"

"A lot kin happen in half an hour," Joe answered.

"Say, whose turning off the lights?" one of the men further back in the temple room demanded sharply.

"Nobody's turning em off."

"Reckon my battery's on the fritz." One chap examined his flash, then exclaimed in disgust, "Yes, the bloomin' blighter has gone dead on me."

For several minutes no one spoke and the four captives, who had been shoved into a corner, out of which they could not get without being seen, were listening and watching

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reptitiously slipping small jeweled ornaments into their pockets. Five minutes more passed, and then one of the men started toward the opening, and in a moment he whirled sharply.

"Where's that door?" he yelled.

"The door?"

"Yeh, the way we got in," he snarled. As one man they rushed to his side and their jaws dropped.

"I knew it was some trick." Joe sprang at Cardow with a savage snarl and would have caught him by the throat if a gun had not been poked into his face.

"That will do!" He made his way toward the entrance. "What's the matter with the door?"

"It's closed," one shrieked with terror. "Closed tighter'n a tomb."

"Hey, listen men, you needn't be so frightened. Don't jam the thing and just as soon as Gordon gets back they'll open it easily from the outside; but be careful you don't fix it so they can't," Cardow urged, and a few of the men got somewhat over the panic.

"Ain't it most half an hour?" one asked anxiously.

"Twenty minutes. Ten minutes more and we'll be out. Now, don't lose your heads and queer the whole works." He spoke so coolly

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washed. Can you guess what we did when it was discovered?"

"Let me see—did you get it away, or cover it over?"

"Bet I can guess," Bob chuckled. "You made a dry fork out of a wet one by switching the streams about. Don't you remember, old man, the irrigating system, and all that, you know, these fellows were masters of water supply when Moses took to the bull-rushes."

"Great guns," Jim laughed. "Of course, well—"

"We will now join Mr. Austin in the chorus of the national anthem of Siam," Bob shouted.

THE END

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