

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

MARCH

BILL BARNES

Air Adventurer

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**THE WINGS
OF
DEATH**
by
GEORGE L. EATON

The
**BIGGEST
CONTEST
for
MODEL
PLANES**



On Sale Second Wednesday of Each Month

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BILL BARNES

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AIR ADVENTURER

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Wings of Death

BY GEORGE L. EATON

*On they came—
strange birds as
big as airplanes.*





*Bill Barnes goes on a
strange errand in the
skies of Central
America—his Bumble
Bee buzzing*

CONK MY ENGINE!" exploded "Shorty" Hassfurther! "If that ain't the queerest thing I ever heard of!"

They were in Bill Barnes' control room at that Long Island flying field which was becoming so internationally known. "Red" Gleason looked up ironically. They all liked Shorty Hassfurther, but Shorty was given to exploding all over the place on short notice. Now, however, Shorty was intent on a newspaper.

"It's blame' queer," he announced, "but here's the second time something has bombed one of them South America capitals!"

"What is so all-fired queer about that?" drawled Cy Hawkins lazily. "Them theah hot-blooded South Americans is always shooting each othah!"

"Yes, they have a pronounced predilection for explosive activities!" chimed in Beverly Bates, the lank Bostonian.

"Sez which?" inquired Red Gleason solicitously, and then, turning to Shorty: "What's sort of queer about this special bombin'?"

Shorty was frowning as he studied the paper. "It says here that it was a clear afternoon down there in this city of Valverde and their congress was sitting when along something came out of a clear sky and smashed down on them, killing about a dozen of their senators. There wasn't a single plane around. The funny thing is," and here Shorty's voice grew puzzled, "that there wasn't a thing in the sky except one of these here big birds—condors, they call 'em. It was floating around kind of lazylike, when all of a sudden it sails toward the capitol building, and the next thing they know there was a big explosion."

"Just some coincidence," said Beverly Bates.

"Coincidence! Foul my spark plugs, if it ain't a funny coincidence, for the

same thing happened three days ago at another South American capital close by, a place called Sierra Roja, which is the capital of another one of them spigotty republics. This time it was the president's palace that was touched off by a big explosion in the roof. And the same thing happens. There was nothing in sight, no bombing plane or anything, just one of them condors floating around kind of lazylike, when wowie, the big bird flies at the president's palace, and bang! she goes up in smoke! How do you figger that out?"

The other looked at him, mystified. "Scotty" MacCloskey, the dour little Scotchman, scratched his ear, plainly puzzled. With all his knowledge of airplane engines and the mechanics of flying ships, this was beyond him. "I dinna understand the proposeetion," he admitted.

Beverly Bates took the newspaper and read the account.

They were all puzzling over the thing when the door opened, and Bill Barnes' tall, blond figure strode in. There was an air of command about Bill Barnes which marked him above his fellows, but few people seeing him for the first time would realize from his unassuming exterior that the tall, blue-eyed young man was probably the finest aviator in the world, a holder of international records without number, the winner of a round-the-world solo flight that had kept three continents gasping, and a designer of such ability that he was revolutionizing the business of flying.

That big Long Island flying field was his, and these men were his loyal subordinates, ready to go to the ends of the earth for him and to fight at the drop of a hat at his behest. Their early struggles in getting the flying field established had met with success. It was the swift and tumultuous journey to far-away Alaska and their share of the treasure from the ancient volcano which had established this little group

of free-lance fliers and permitted them at last to draw a breath free from the worries of financing.

Inaction, however, was beginning to pall. The routine of daily flying-field work was getting under their skins. They craved some excitement.

Therefore they glanced hopefully at their leader and at the letter he held in his hand.

"We've got an offer of a job here," announced Bill Barnes. They looked interested, and waited. "It's a funny sort of a thing, though," continued Bill Barnes, glancing at the paper in his hand, "something very mysterious about it."

He unfolded the letter and frowned as he read it again.

"Whereat do they want us to go?" asked Cy Hawkins.

"They want us to go to South America to a place called Valverde."

The rest of the group stared at each other. Valverde! That was the place where that queer bombing had taken place. But they waited for Barnes' next words.

"Yes," continued their tall young leader, "this letter is from a banking group which has a lot of investments down in those South American republics. And it seems that those investments are threatened by some danger which they don't explain in the letter. Anyway, they want me to take the whole outfit of you and go down there and fight somebody, I don't know who."

THE GROUP looked interested. Red Gleason stood up as though ready to start. Even the ordinarily slow-moving Cy Hawkins hunched forward in his chair.

"Ah'm foh fighting anybody, any place, any time, jest so long as we all keep movin'," he said lazily.

"Yes; it is getting a little quiet around here," admitted Bill Barnes thoughtfully, and he tapped a pencil against his

teeth. "I was just trying to think if I knew anybody in that neck of the woods."

"Aye, mon, ye do know a laddie doon there," volunteered Scotty MacCloskey. "Dinna ye remember the laddie at Valverde who saw that ye'd lost your land-in' gear and who rose up in the air and circled around you with a sign tellin' ye so?"

"Sure enough!" Bill Barnes' face lighted up. "I'd almost forgotten that barnstorming expedition. What was that young fellow's name? Emelio de la Fuente. He certainly was a decent bird. His father was pretty high in the government down there, as I remember, but that was two or three years ago." Then Bill Barnes' face grew thoughtful again as he glanced at the letter. "I'd like to know what all this is about," he mused.

Then as though suddenly making up his mind, he went to the telephone and put through a call to downtown New York. In a minute the others heard him talking:

"Yes, I've received your letter. . . . I don't quite understand what you expect of us. . . . Oh, I see! South American Developments, Incorporated?" Bill Barnes repeated the name. "I've heard of that company somewhere," he said. "Who is behind it? . . . You say Morgan Catesby is the president? . . . Yes? . . . I'm sorry, but I'm afraid that lets me out." His voice grew cold.

The others in the room pricked up their ears at mention of that name which had meant so much of sinister, double-crossing in the past. Each of them recalled the thin-lipped financier who had unsuccessfully tried to hire Bill Barnes, and, failing in this, had used every unscrupulous measure possible to ruin the young aviator and his struggling business venture. Something like a growl went up from the men in the control room.

" . . . No; that's flat." Bill Barnes' voice was stern. "I'll have nothing to do with any proposition in which Morgan Catesby has the slightest interest. . . . Yes; that is my privilege," he snapped. " . . . No; it's impossible at any price, and under any terms. . . . No; I don't want any of his money, and I'm not afraid of his enmity. Sorry! Good-by!" He came back to the group.

"Well, that kind of lets us out," said Shorty Hassfurther, with a tinge of regret in his voice; "it's too blamed bad, because I think there's something funny stirring down in that jumpin'-off place," and with that he turned over to Bill Barnes the newspaper with its report of the mysterious bombing.

The tall young aviator read the thing thoughtfully. "There is certainly something stirring down there," he commented, half to himself. "I'd like to know what it's all about."

"Why dinna ye sind a word of inquiry to young Emelio de la Fuente?" suggested Scotty MacCloskey.

"That's an idea," agreed Bill Barnes, and he made a note on the edge of the paper he carried.

"I wonder where that son of a Morgan Catesby fits into the picture," mused Red Gleason. "Depend upon it, there's something slimy about it if he's got a finger in the pie!"

Beverly Bates was standing by the chart of the electric ear mechanism. The sensitive needle was moving across its surface. "There's a ship coming overhead," he announced. "It's heading in from the south. Do you know anybody due in at this time?" They all shook their heads. Beverly Bates watched the electric needle. "Looks as if he is in trouble," he added, watching the strange gyrations of the instrument. Bill Barnes peered over his shoulder. "He is in trouble," said their leader. "Let's get out on the field and see if we can do anything."

Without a word they hurried out. The sky was overcast and the ceiling low as they stared up in the dusk. The little group watched and waited for the strange visitor, whoever it was.

"There he comes!" said Red Gleason, pointing up to a dark spot that was eddying down toward them like a falling leaf. "And he's makin' a dead-stick landin'."

They grew silent as they watched the ship descending toward them, for it was plain to be seen that the pilot was in difficulties. It was as though the ship was pilotless, so crazily did it slide down toward them, now canted at this angle, and now at that.

Suddenly it side-slipped, and as they watched with horrified eyes, the ship, an open cockpit monoplane, lurched crazily and crashed halfway down the field.

They ran toward the machine. Mechanics swarmed out of the hangars. The long-legged Beverly Bates was first there. Luckily the engine had been cut off, and there was no vicious tongue of flame to make a raging holocaust of the splintered ship.

Beverly Bates leaned over the stilled figure mixed with the debris of the cockpit. He rose, pale-faced, as the others crowded around him. And for a second there was a shocked and incredulous silence.

For the pilot, slumped forward in his seat, was dead. But as all men could see, he had not died from the effects of the crash.

They stared unbelievably at the silver-handled knife plunged to its hilt behind the man's left shoulder blade.

II.—SENTENCED TO DEATH.

INSTINCTIVELY the men looked in the shattered plane for trace of some other human being, the man who had committed this strange murder in mid-air. Not only was there no trace of an-

other person, but, as they quickly realized, the open cockpit pursuit type plane was only a single seater. There was no room for a passenger. Bill Barnes studied the design and lettering upon the plane's fuselage, his brow wrinkled in thought.

"Isn't that the insignia of the Republic of Rolivia?"

The others stared at the emblem and looked back at him questioningly.

"Rolivia is the republic of which Valverde is the capital!" he exclaimed, but scarcely any one heard him, for they all were intent upon this mystery that had dropped down so suddenly among them. They doubted the evidence of their own senses, for it is not usual for a man to be knifed when alone in a plane in mid-air, and now that they were faced with the actual fact they could find no theory which would explain the case.

"The electric ear only showed the noise made by one plane," reflected Beverly Bates aloud, and they all stared up at the lowering sky as though trying to pierce that heavy ceiling in an effort to discover by what mysterious means this unknown pilot had come to his death above their heads.

It was Scotty MacCloskey who discovered that the body was still warm. Evidently death had taken place only in the last few minutes. It was Scotty MacCloskey also who removed the dead man's goggles and peered at the dark-skinned, black-mustached, and youthful face of the silent occupant of the strange ship.

"Whisht, mon, dinna ye ken the face o' yon pilot?" He plucked Bill Barnes' elbow.

The tall aviator stared more intently. "Good God!" he exclaimed. "It's the man we were talking about not ten minutes ago! It's young Emelio de la Fuente!"

But this, instead of clearing up the mystery, only intensified it. None of

them could figure out what a Rolivian plane was doing thus far north from its tiny South American boundaries, or, least of all, why this young Spanish-American aviator had dropped down dead into the flying field of the North American aviator whom he had once befriended.

A sinister, ominous mystery!

Bill Barnes had already quietly sent word notifying the State police, and they were not long in coming. Aside from taking down such data as they could discover, they were of no help in solving the mystery. The body of the dead pilot was carefully removed from the wrecked ship. His identification papers showed him in truth to have been Emelio de la Fuente, with his next of kin to be notified in case of accident given as Don Felipe de la Fuente, Calle Comercio 14, Valverde, Republica de Rolivia, S. A.

It was Bill Barnes who wrote out a radiogram notifying the father. He was heavy-hearted at the sorrow the message would cause, for he retained a pleasant memory of the courtly and distinguished old Spanish-American.

The plane was badly smashed up, but there was a possibility of rebuilding it, and this task he ordered Scotty MacCloskey to take over.

"I'm tellin' you," announced Shorty Hassfurther, "that we're going to be mixed up in this thing sure as shooting. I got a hunch——"

"Oh, yeah?" Red Gleason was scornful. "You and your hunches! I lost two hundred bucks betting on that last hunch of yours."

"Never mind that; how was I to know they'd pull the horse in the last furlong?" Shorty defended himself. "But what I'm trying to tell you is that this here thing is stacking up so as to get us mixed in it."

"We all could figah that out without the aid of youah massive intellect," commented Cy Hawkins. "Heah's oua's

old friend, Mohgan Catesby itching and fuming to get us into some South American racket, heah's them funny what-do-you-call-'ems?—condohs—flying around and blowing up public buildings promiscuous down in Valverde, wheahevah that is, and heah comes this strangah from Valverde dropping into ouah front yard all knifed as neat as you please. Yeah; it sho' looks like we all is heading into something new! 'Pears like we can't keep out of any trouble that's brewing!" And he stared over at the crowd of people around the control building.

The police had finished their task and the coroner came and took more evidence and the newspaper reporters were not long in following up the matter. Their efforts had the effect of bringing more news from the obscure little Republic of Rolivia, for the morning paper carried further details of the dead pilot's background and the state of affairs in his country. The strange death of the young South American made the queer happenings in Valverde into front-page news.

At Bill Barnes' flying field the group of pilots read next morning that Don Felipe de la Fuente had been the president of the Republic of Rolivia but had been displaced by one Estehan de Morales. The papers hinted that Esteban de Morales was the choice of a powerful banking group in Wall Street, interested in nitrate deposits in the tiny republic. The newspaper accounts also went into speculation on the mysterious bombing of the congressional building in the capital of the republic and remarked again upon that fact that the only thing seen in the sky, preceding the explosion, had been this great, lazily floating condor, a not unusual sight in that section of the Andes.

With their reports the newspapers printed maps of the areas showing the three small republics of Rolivia, Baria, and Solania—three tiny Andean repub-

lics whose borders came together high in the great mountain chain that was the backbone of the South American continent.

There were articles by staff writers familiar with South American conditions and much was printed concerning the status of these small republics and their geography and history. The mystery of the bombing of the presidential palace in Sierra Roja, the capital of Baria, came in for its due meed of conjecture.

All in all, the attention of the North American republic began to be centered on these three little and comparatively unknown countries.

LATE IN THE afternoon of the next day Bill Barnes received a radiogram couched in Spanish which expressed the sorrowful but courteous thanks of the dead pilot's father and requested that the body of his son be shipped to his native land.

The furor in the newspapers, turning, as it did, the spotlight of publicity upon this section of the earth's surface, caused something akin to anger in a certain office high above Wall Street. It was no less a person than Morgan Catesby himself who scanned the headlines and stared in thin-lipped disapproval at these evidences of public interest. His secretary had blue-penciled one or two references to the activities of South American Developments, Inc. One of the more liberal dailies did more than intimate that the activities of this corporation were responsible for most of the troubles that afflicted these small Spanish-American republics.

Morgan Catesby's anger and worry at this was intensified by a radiogram which he received in the course of the afternoon. Its contents caused him to frown more deeply and to call in one of his subordinates, a heavily built, red-faced, self-important-looking young man who showed a vast respect for his chief.

"Barry, I've just received a radiogram from de Morales at Valverde. He tells me that blamed old nuisance of a Felipe de la Fuente is on the war-path again."

"I thought we'd cooked that fellow's goose once!" exclaimed Barry Crushing.

"Evidently not, but that's something I will correct immediately," and Morgan Catesby made a pencil memorandum on the pad beside him, a pencil memorandum simple enough in itself, but ruthless in its final implications, for it carried nothing less than a death sentence for that courtly old Spaniard, Don Felipe de la Fuente.

"What about this young fellow who was found dead at Bill Barnes' flying field?" asked Barry Crushing. "What's behind that?"

"That's what I was coming to," said Morgan Catesby impatiently. "I was certain when I heard of it, and now this radiogram confirms it." Morgan Catesby leaned forward, tensely, "Barry, the trouble makers down there at Valverde, headed by the old man, sent this young fellow Emelio up to ask Bill Barnes' assistance."

"In other words we'll have that trouble maker Bill Barnes to contend with again?"

"Not if I can stop him!" Morgan Catesby's face looked murderous as he drummed on his desk top. "Those nit-wits in Valverde won't stop at trying to enlist Barnes' services. Barry, we've got to keep an eye on that fellow!"

"I'll have a spy put down there at the flying field to see what he's up to," returned Barry Crushing promptly.

"We tried that once before and it failed," snapped Morgan Catesby.

"I know it. This time we'll work it differently. I've got just the person. This time we'll try a woman."

"Who is she?" asked Catesby suspiciously.

"Well, in the first place, she's a consummate actress. In the second place

she has no conscience. And in the third place, she is a South American herself; comes from the Argentine. Why, she could be young de la Fuente's own sister!"

"Has the old man a daughter?" asked Morgan Catesby.

"Yes; I've heard rumors to that effect."

"All right; go ahead. That's not a bad idea, Barry."

And so it was decreed. Thereafter Morgan Catesby swung onto the telephone and called up a certain "Monk" Morton who cherished no feelings of friendship for Bill Barnes. And Morton was perfectly delighted to have a chance to operate against this old enemy of his.

Monk Morton, that discredited airman whose warped and twisted soul could not stand the honors that Bill Barnes had won, slouched into Morgan Catesby's office not half an hour later, a repellent-looking specimen with his long, apelike arms, his bullet head with its overhanging eyebrows and its strangely shaped jaw—a combination which had been the cause of his being nicknamed Monk.

The two men went into earnest conference, adding fresh fuel to their hatred of the young aviator whose straight and honorable dealing had so often messed up their shady schemes.

Meanwhile down at Bill Barnes' flying field the object of all this concern was unaware of the plotting against himself.

The mystery of the dead pilot continued to occupy the thoughts of Bill Barnes and his men at the flying field. Strive as they might, they could find no solution of the strange death of the young aviator. Nor was it even known to them why he had flown that far northward.

Some forty-eight hours later another strange plane circled over the field at dusk and signaled for landing.

THERE WAS something vaguely familiar about the ship, and it did not take the watchers long to realize that it was the same type plane as that which had brought down the murdered body of the young South American. And as the ship landed they saw that it was marked by the same insignia, the insignia of the Republic of Bolivia.

This pilot, however, was undoubtedly alive. As he stepped from the cockpit onto the ground the onlookers received somewhat of a shock, for it was as though the dead man had come to life. It was not long until they realized that the newcomer was slighter of build and younger and that he was a different person, but even then they did not cease to marvel at the strong resemblance. The resemblance was quickly explained when the newcomer introduced himself as Ricardo de la Fuente, the brother of the dead aviator.

While the stranger's plane was being cared for, Bill Barnes led the slender young pilot into his office. The newcomer was fatigued from the long trip and there was a trace of fear in his eyes.

"It was so verree difficult to get away," he said, "and I was fired at and followed."

"But you must be worn out. Won't you take something to eat and drink, and then rest a while?"

"No, no, it ees imposseeble!" The man's dark eyes widened in excitement, and his slender hands were flung up nervously. "My brother who was killed had come to you with a message. He had come to you to ask for help. And he lost his life doing it. And now, Mr. Barnes, I come in his place, to ask you if you will aid us down in my poor unfortunate country."

As he went on in his excitable Latin-American fashion, Bill Barnes' face grew grave and bleak-looking, for it was a terrible story that the young man—he was scarcely more than a boy—unfolded. The hints of the newspapers

were based on fact, for the young man bared the entire stark story of the bitter exploitation of a whole people by a predatory Wall Street gang.

It was all a question of the nitrate. Don Felipe de la Fuente, while president, had sought to conserve the revenue from the nitrate mines for the good of the country. He had refused bribes which would have made him a wealthy man, and he had insisted upon a just and equitable revenue which should aid in building up the schools and roads and the health and happiness of his people.

His reward for this was the entry of strange men into the country who bought up venal politicians and, with their gold, organized a sudden treacherous revolution which deposed the altruistic Don Felipe and elevated in his place a puppet president, Esteban de Morales, who ruled through a creature of the bankers named Toribio Fierro.

True to his type, this Fierro, who was minister of war, was ruthlessly exploiting the country and filling the jails with protesting patriots. Conditions had become so bad that Don Felipe de la Fuente had at last acceded to his son's request that he seek outside aid. The fame of Bill Barnes had penetrated to that country, and they turned hopefully to the man who was renowned not only for his flying skill but for his courage and honesty as well.

They had little to offer except hope of eventual reward when at last they got back into power, but young Emelio de la Fuente had come with this offer only to meet his death in mysterious fashion on the threshold of the flying field. In the meantime, down in Valverde, word of young Emelio de la Fuente's trip had leaked out. Not twenty-four hours later soldiers came for the old man, his father, Don Felipe, and carried him off to jail.

"And there is no time to be lost!" The young Latin-American said this dramatically, for already they had

passed sentence of death upon Don Felipe.

Don Felipe de la Fuente, the sole hope of the country, and the beloved of all the silent poor and forlorn citizens of the little republic, was to be shot at sunrise on Saturday morning, three days hence.

The young Latin-American looked at Bill Barnes' face, trying to find in it some reflection of his feelings. The face before him was grim and bleak. No emotion showed upon it. The shoulders of the young man sagged hopelessly.

"You will not help us, then?" he asked, and there was something akin to a sob in his voice.

"I will help you with every man, every ship, and every dollar that I have!" said Bill Barnes, level-voiced.

III.—THE SHADOW.

THIS UNEXPECTED reply widened the eyes of the young Latin-American for a second, and then his gratitude was almost embarrassing in its expression, for he rose swiftly and flung both arms about Bill Barnes, subsiding just as quickly, however, as the practical North American drew forth pad and pencil and began swiftly to estimate distances and times and routes, his brain working at lightning speed.

"It looks as if we would have to fight the whole force controlled by this fellow de Morales," commented Bill Barnes.

"*Si, si!*" The South American nodded. "There are many of them, and they are well armed. But there is also a force of revolutionists simply waiting for leadership and the *rancheros* and the *Indios* will flock to your aid. It ees only a question of overcoming the—what do you call them?—thugs, who guard the palace of the *presidente*."

"What about this queer bombing—these condors that float around and

blow things up in such terribly mysterious fashion?"

Young Ricardo de la Fuente crossed himself, his face grave, and shook his head. "God alone knows what that ees," he said in a low voice; "the Indians say——" He stopped suddenly.

"What do the Indians say?"

"They say it ees the wrath of the old gods visiting eetself upon the conquerors of the country."

"Well, I hope we don't have the old gods to fight, as well," remarked Bill Barnes absently, as he went on with his figures. Looking up suddenly he asked: "What is the attitude of those Indians down there toward the white people?"

"A leetle sullen, I am afraid," the young man shook his head, "although some of them are very loyal and faithful. But they remember the glories of their ancestors and their former chieftains, the Incas. And now they begin again to talk of the Valley of the Wings of Death."

"The Valley of the Wings of Death!" Bill Barnes repeated. "Sounds gruesome enough. What is it, and where is it?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe?* Who knows? Some say eet ees an actual place. Some say it is only a name. Others say that this valley exists and that descendants of the old Incas live there and guard the treasure of the Incas against the day when the Indians shall once more rise to power."

"The Valley of the Wings of Death!" Bill Barnes repeated the words again, then returned anew to his figures. He shook his head. "I can get my gang down there, equipped and armed and ready for a fight or a frolic," he said, "but I cannot get them ready in time for them to rescue your father from the firing squad."

"Oh, but he must be saved!" Young Ricardo grew white-faced.

"I am going to try to save him," said Bill Barnes simply, "but it means that I will have to send some one down there alone, while I get my men ready here, and follow."

Ricardo looked worried. "There will be many against him," he said, "and one man can do little against many men."

"It's our only chance," replied Bill Barnes. "He will leave in the morning and fly to Valverde. Now tell me where is your father confined, and how is he guarded?" He pressed Ricardo with questions until at last he had the whole layout of the prison of San Juan, that grim and forbidding place with its high walls, its black dungeons, and its courtyard which had resounded to the crash of so many volleys of musketry since the advent of Esteban de Morales and his cruel minister of war, Toribio Fierro.

This information gathered, Bill Barnes became the host once more, and tried to make his guest take some rest and refreshment. It was only after a good deal of urging that Ricardo was prevailed upon to sleep for four hours before starting on his return journey. For, as he said, he must return and be with his father, come what might.

Nothing that Bill Barnes could say would dissuade the young South American and, true to his word, he took off four hours later, circling aloft and leveling out toward the south, where he sped into the night to face the danger that threatened his father and his country.

Bill Barnes wasted no time in informing his men of his plans, and the flying field became a scene of intense activity. Planes were brought out and overhauled, machine guns were mounted upon the famous Barnes Snorters, equipment, supplies, and extra ammunition were loaded into the three great trimotored transport planes.

Meanwhile, Scotty MacCloskey, happy in his element, trundled out Bill Barnes' own ship, that strange bumble-

bee, with its ability to land on snow or water or land, with its retractable autogyro rotors, which could be extended at will to effect a landing in a small space, with its retractable wings which could be drawn in when the rocket apparatus was used for a swift rise into the atmosphere, and with its terrific speed and maneuvering ability which made it the most modern ship in the world in most respects.

Bill Barnes' labors were interrupted by another visitor, a visitor who caused all activities to stop when the men's eyes fell upon her. For she was extravagantly beautiful, star-eyed, and lovely-faced, this girl who came into the control room and begged Bill Barnes with a catch in her voice, to tell her what he knew of her brother's death.

There was a brooding mystery in the alluring dark eyes of the girl, her Latin blood showed in the oval face, the great brown eyes, and delicately modeled lips. She wore something made of clinging velvet, out of which rose satiny shoulders like ivory in their pallor. Her head was coifed with close-cropped black hair which gave her somewhat the look of a boy, but she was exceedingly womanly with it all.

To say that she caused a flutter in Bill Barnes' flying field is no exaggeration. During some time in the course of her conversation with Barnes, each and every one of the flying force, not excepting old Scotty MacCloskey and young "Sandbag" Sanders, Bill Barnes' adoring young protégé and hero worshiper, found some excuse for entering the control room.

Although her grief at the death of her brother was obvious, the girl made no attempt to soften her allure, and her great eyes had that Latin trick of making a man's heart beat in spite of them.

Even Bill Barnes, indifferent as he was to women, had to fight off the strange attraction of this one. Her surprise at the news that her brother Ri-

Helplessly, he was catapulting into
that black, yawning maw!



cardo had been there and had gone was almost startling, and her sorrow at missing him was pathetic. Bill Barnes decided that she was one of the most attractive women he had ever seen and bestirred himself to lessen her anxiety and grief by all means within his power.

She was very charming in accepting his invitation to remain there at the flying field while preparations went forward for the rescue mission which was to save her father's life. Bill Barnes turned over to her his own small bungalow and moved his few effects down to the clubrooms used by the others.

She took immediate advantage of the privacy which had been given her by going to the telephone. In a few minutes she was deep in conversation with Morgan Catesby, telling him of young Ricardo's arrival, of Bill Barnes' plan to send a man down immediately to prevent the execution of Don Felipe, and of Barnes' preparations to follow with his entire force.

MORGAN CATESBY sat silent after he had hung up the telephone, his eyes narrowed and his thin lips pressed into even tighter lines.

And then immediately he began to act. The first person he called up was the apelike Monk Morton.

"Bill Barnes is sending a man to Valverde to-morrow morning," he said crisply over the telephone. "See that the man doesn't leave the United States. . . . Yes; the girl is down at Barnes' field now. . . . She is staying in Barnes' bungalow. . . . Yes; I have her telephone number. Here it is." He gave the number and then listened while Monk Morton talked. "Yes; that's a good plan, but be careful. The girl can find out which particular plane is going. . . . All right; see that you don't fall down on the job!" And he hung up.

Again there came a period of intense thought, at the end of which he drafted

a radiogram in code. It was addressed to Don Esteban de Morales, *Presidente de la Republica de Rolivia*. It was a queer-looking arrangement of words, but the queerness of the jumbled letters did not hide the deadly message from any one knowing the code. For in those queer combinations of letters was a definite order to de Morales to hurry the execution of Don Felipe de la Fuente.

In the message was also warning of the possible arrival of a North American flyer for whom a trap was to be laid and who was to be captured dead or alive, preferably dead.

This radiogram dispatched, Morgan Catesby sat back, rubbing his hands and looking like some evil spider that had successfully spun its web.

His activities bore immediate fruit. A plane winged its way down toward Bill Barnes' headquarters. It came to rest not five miles from the flying field where a closed car awaited it. The closed car sped swiftly to the field, where it was parked off the road in the woods while a silent figure crept into the grounds and made its way stealthily to the little bungalow which had been turned over to the girl, Dolores.

Already warned by telephone, she was not startled when there came a tap at her window. The window was raised. There followed a tense, whispered conversation between the stealthy figure outside and the girl in the darkened room. The stealthy figure carefully handed over a compact, heavy package. The window was closed. The figure made its way back, unseen, in the darkness, to the concealed car.

It was not a difficult matter for a stranger to come and go unseen on the flying field, for every one was intensely busy with preparations for the projected expedition, and for the moment vigilance was relaxed. Bill Barnes was busy supervising these preparations. It was Cy Hawkins whom he had picked

out for the lone trip to Valverde, and Cy was getting ready to fly at daybreak.

Dinner was late that night, and Bill Barnes sent word to the girl Dolores asking her if she would join them at the mess. She followed close on the heels of the messenger, thereby causing Shorty Hassfurth to disappear suddenly into his room, whence he returned shining with soap and water, and with his hair slicked back in startling fashion. Shorty had a reputation to uphold, and he intended to uphold it.

But Shorty had little opportunity to do his stuff.

"Who ees the so brave man who ees going to fly alone to rescue my father?" the girl asked Bill Barnes, who pointed out Cy Hawkins.

"It ees so brave and so lovely of you," trilled the girl, as she bent the battery of her eyes on Cy, "and you will show me the airplane which you are to use?" she cooed.

Immensely flattered, Cy Hawkins was ready to show her the whole works, and he gladly went over to the hangar with her while she admired the trim lines of the Barnes Snorter.

It was an admirable enough job in all truth. The famous Barnes two-place Snorters were destined to be used by the government. Their extremely fast climbing ability, their high speed, and high degree of maneuverability made them superior to any ship then in the government service. It had only been due to the machinations of Morgan Catesby that they had not already been adopted. In any case the ships spoke for themselves, for they were beautifully designed, with all the clean, sweet lines of a thoroughbred. In addition they were the newest type of amphibian, able to land on the ground, on the water, or on snow, being provided with gear for all three types of landings.

Their powerful Hurricane motors gave them a speed of two hundred and ten miles per hour with a landing speed

of ninety miles. They were under gyroscopic control, being equipped with the famous automatic pilot which would keep the ship on a set course and at a predetermined height with uncanny and more-than-human dependability.

Equipped as they were with the latest wireless apparatus, they were the last word in airplane construction.

Whether all this beauty of form and line was lost upon the girl Dolores or not, at any rate she expressed sufficient admiration of both the ship and the pilot to have succeeded in turning a steadier head than Cy Hawkins'.

Cy would have been considerably disillusioned had he seen the girl some three hours later, when all the place was silent, stealing through the darkness to his ship. She came into the gloom of the hangar, carrying a compact but heavy package. She departed from there as silently as she had come.

But she no longer had the package.

It was hidden away in the fuselage of Cy Hawkins' ship. It was an innocent-looking package. Had one put ear closely to it, a faint ticking sound might have been heard, a steady and remorseless ticking that would eventually end in a terrific smash at ten o'clock the next morning, making another mystery of the air and a brief word in the newspapers of the smash-up of another ship and the death of another aviator.

IV.—MARCHING MEN.

IN FAR-AWAY Valverde, nestled in a valley of the Andes, there was considerable activity late that night in the palace of the *presidente*. The excitement attendant upon the bombing of the congressional building had had a little time to die down by now, but it was plain to be seen that Esteban de Morales walked in the shadow of the fear of death.

He was an amiable and weak-enough old fellow, a fat and paunchy little man

of some sixty-odd years, caught in the web of circumstances which were too strong for him to control. The real power behind him was far away in North America, resident in a small group of men headed by Morgan Catesby.

And the real power in Valverde was concentrated not in the *presidente*, but in the swaggering, brutal, figure of the man who was closeted with him. Toribio Fierro was a man to cast fear into the hearts of the righteous. His eyes were surpassingly cold, staring out from his round, fat face, like the eyes of some reptilian animal. His huge frame was clad in the gaudy scarlet and gold uniform of the Rolivian minister of war, but despite the gaudiness of his uniform, Toribio Fierro would have been a sinister-looking figure to have met in a dark alley.

His record of newly made widows and orphans was mounting day by day. Every Rolivian who showed signs of dissent with the program of exploitation of the country found himself eventually looking into the muzzles of a firing squad. There existed some sort of constitution for Rolivia, but its provisions had been violated so often that people scarce referred to its existence.

Toribio Fierro was the law.

He struck heavily on the rosewood desk with his great hand, struck so heavily that the silver inkstand jumped.

"I tell you, Don Esteban, the time for weakness is past!" he growled. "We have our radiogram from Señor Catesby. Our duty is plain. Felipe de la Fuente must be shot at dawn!"

The fat and paunchy little *presidente* fingered the broad silken ribbon that crossed the breast of his evening-dress shirt. He nervously fingered his decorations glittering on his lapel. He sighed. Don Esteban was becoming a little weary of all this killing.

"So be it!" he murmured.

"*Bueno!* I have already made ar-

rangements. Also I have laid plans to trap this North American aviator, should he arrive." He sat back, drumming his desk top reflectively with his thick fingers, a slightly puzzled frown on his brow. "There is only one thing, *por dios*, that I cannot understand."

"And what is that, señor?" Old Don Esteban looked wearily at his huge minister of war.

"I cannot understand what has become of the Señorita Eugenia de la Fuente. She has disappeared completely."

"Your interest in her is purely political, señor?" Don Esteban's tired eyes were almost shrewd for a moment.

"Not altogether!" The huge, round-faced man twisted his catlike mustache with a smirk that told its own story. "I merely reasoned that with father and brother dead, she would need some measure of protection."

"Ah!" said Don Esteban, and somehow he managed to express by that single word his own idea of the quality of protection that would be afforded by his ruthless minister of war.

If Toribio Fierro noted the tone, he paid no heed to it. But he was interrupted by an orderly who entered, an air of suppressed excitement about him.

"She has returned from hiding, señor!" said the man.

Toribio Fierro sat bolt upright.

"Only within the last half hour!" continued the messenger. "As our orders were, we watched Don Felipe de la Fuente's house. It was I, señor, who saw her, entering by the servants' entrance. The Señorita Eugenia de la Fuente is now within her father's house."

"So-o-o!" The minister of war heaved himself up with a clank of his long saber. "So-o-o! I will examine this pretty little suspect, if you will give me your permission to withdraw, *Señor Presidente*," he added dryly.

The permission was given. The fat

and paunchy little *presidente* looked after the disappearing form of his minister of war with an expression that showed very little approval of the contemplated activities of that individual.

THE FOUNTAIN in the patio of Don Felipe's beautiful town house murmured musically in the perfumed softness of the night. It gave forth a lilting, contented sort of melodious note that fell pleasantly upon the ears. But there was neither pleasure nor contentment within the house.

In the low-ceilinged drawing-room, with its old silver and rare paintings and soft-piled rugs, Señorita Eugenia stood, white-faced, her fingers playing idly in the hair of the old serving woman who knelt and sobbed heart-brokenly at her knees.

Like her dead brother Emelio she looked, as like him as a slender rapier can look like a heavier thrusting sword. The same arched eyebrows were accentuated by the pallor of her creamy complexion. Intense she was, and as vibrant as the steel of a good blade. Beautiful she was past all marveling, with a beauty that was as unconscious of its power as that of a child.

She was meant for soft, rose-shaded lights, and the silver sheen of moonlight, and the melody of violins.

And she stood there like a pale statue, well knowing that her elder brother was dead and that her father stood at death's door, incarcerated in that grisly prison of San Juan from which so few returned alive. And outside in the darkness, as she well knew also, lurked enemies who watched steadfastly through the night.

"Do not weep, good Maria." She patted the servant woman, the old Indian nurse who had put her first baby clothes on her. "Do not weep, good Maria; it may be that help will come to us."

The Indian woman swept the tears

from her eyes and her face became livid with helpless anger.

"May the saints destroy them, the cowards," she grated, "and may the old gods of this land rise up and blot them out!" Then she whispered in the old Aymaran dialect: "As they will, as they will!" She broke forth again in Spanish: "Even now their doom is written! Even now death is preparing to descend upon them from the Valley of the Wings of Death!"

"What is this nonsense you are talking, Maria?" asked the girl firmly, but the old woman rose and, throwing her apron over her head, stood muttering to herself.

But her muttering came to an abrupt end. The two women stared at each other, anguish showing suddenly on their faces.

A loud and peremptory knock on the front door was quickly repeated. Its echoes reverberated through the silent house like the crack of doom.

Maria clutched her mistress. "Run and hide, little one!" she pleaded. "He comes for you!"

But even as she spoke the outer door was flung open and heavy footsteps stalked through the hall. Suddenly Toribio Fierro stood in the arched doorway, the gaudiness of his scarlet and gold uniform showing up as in a frame, his great bulk filling the portal, while his cold eyes took in the scene as he twisted his catlike mustache.

For a moment the three stared at each other, the girl outwardly serene, save that a pulse beat in her slender throat. Maria mumbled prayers under her breath. Toribio continued to stare, offensively self-assured and confident.

His voice broke the silence at last. "The pretty little bird has returned to its nest at last, I see."

"Were it really a nest," flung back Eugenia, "it would be out of the reach of prowling jackals!"

Toribio flushed, and his hand trem-

bled a little as he continued to twist his mustache.

"That is a harsh word, señorita," he said steadily enough, "especially to a friend who comes in an effort to aid you in your hour of trouble."

"Friends can come in an hour of trouble," said Eugenia, and her voice was clear, "also slinking dogs may come to thieve when the mastiff can no longer protect!"

Again the bulky Toribio flushed, and this time the veins on his forehead swelled in anger.

"Take care how you flout me," he grated. "I can break you in pieces as easily as I crack my whip!"

Maria slid silently out of the room, unnoticed by the two.

"Ay, the crack of a whip," said the girl, level-voiced, "the crack of a whip is what is needed for night prowlers such as you."

"Enough of this!" The man's face grew livid. He advanced upon her threateningly. She stood like some serene statue, like a thing of steel, vibrant and tense, but showing no fear. He halted before her.

"Why can we not be friends, señorita?" His voice became pleading.

For reply the girl laughed, a low, melodious laugh that yet contained all the sting of sharp steel, all the scorn of the laughter of women for ages.

He flushed with rage. Reaching forward roughly he grabbed her wrist. Like some lithe cat animal she bent swiftly, sinking her teeth into his hand, so that he gave back with a howl of pain.

She rose, tigresslike. "Take care of your manners, señor," she warned. And then pointed behind him where in the doorway Maria had marshaled three of the Indian servants, one armed with an ancient shotgun, another with an antiquated war club, and a third with a rusty cavalry saber.

"So-o-o!" Toribio Fierro laughed.

and his laugh was not a pleasant thing to hear. "You persist in your wish to bring about your father's death! For mark you, señorita, your house is surrounded. My men will pour in here at a single raising of my voice. I go, now, to the prison of San Juan, where I issue the orders for the execution of your father at sunrise. Adios, señorita!" He bowed toward the ground in exaggerated courtesy. Stalking to the door, he brushed the Indian servants aside and turned once more.

"One word more:

"I might state that there is some slight hope for your father if between now and daylight you come to me and try to make such amends as you can for the insults you have poured upon me."

So saying, he was gone.

With his going the girl lost all her courage. She sank white-faced and shaking upon the divan. Maria crept to her, holding the girl's head against her breast and attempting to soothe her as she would a child.

TRUE TO his word, Toribio Fierro mounted his horse in the street and set his direction for the prison of San Juan. He had already given orders for the execution of the girl's father, but Toribio reasoned that it is a wise general who sees personally to the carrying out of his orders.

Respectful guards snapped to present arms as his horse's hoofs awoke the echoes of the ancient drawbridge, and he passed through the great gates into the courtyard.

"You have made arrangements to carry out my orders?" he asked the pock-marked officer who drew up and saluted him.

"*Si, si, mi generale!*" responded the *commandante* whose uniform bulged with good living, and who was far from a martial-looking figure, in spite of his fierce mustachios and his long cavalry saber. "All is prepared, *mi generale*.

The firing squad will be in readiness at half past five."

"*Bueno!*" returned Toribio. "I will be here. Delay the execution until my arrival, should I be detained." And with that Toribio swung his horse about and rode forth once more, passing on his way, the entrance to the cell block which contained Don Felipe de la Fuente.

A barefooted jailer, carrying a pannikin of water and a crust of moldy bread, came padding to the door of the cell which housed the lean, ascetic figure of Don Felipe.

The old man rose from the pallet upon which he had been seated and stood up as his cell door was unlocked and the jailer entered.

He was like some figure out of a romance, was Don Felipe de la Fuente. Age, as it does to good wine, had but added to the qualities of this old cavalier. There was a pride of race in his lean, tall frame, in his serene, well-molded face, and in the erect carriage of his strong but slender body. And there was the courtesy of perfect breeding in his tones as he asked his jailer if there was any news.

"*Lo siento mucho*, Señor Don Felipe. I am very sorry, sir," said the jailer, soft-voiced, "but there is bad news. They will shoot you at daylight."

Don Felipe's face was impassive as he heard this.

"Perhaps you would like me to send the priest to you?" added the man solicitously, but the old man shook his head. He would meet his fate bravely, and alone, and desired only to be left in peace with his thoughts.

The barefoot warden left, the door clanging shut behind him, the lock grating harshly.

The minutes stretched out in unhurried sequence as Don Felipe sat on the edge of his pallet, staring into the darkness. The minutes stretched into hours. The first faint cockcrow heralded the

dawn. Other cockcrows took up the chorus. The stir of life began to make itself felt within the prison. Don Felipe waited calmly for that sound which he knew was inevitable.

At last, afar off, he heard it, the shuffle of bare feet, as men fell into formation, the click and rattle of rifles being loaded, and at last, the tramp of marching men approaching his cell.

V.—CONDOR OF DEATH.

DON FELIPE was close to the shadow of death. And the man who was to rescue him had not even started from that far-distant Long Island flying field. For Cy Hawkins in leisurely fashion was making his last preparations before taxiing out into the field and climbing aloft.

The men were astir early about the flying field, many of them glancing curiously at the little bungalow in which Dolores slept peacefully, as well she might, for she had, by her standards, accomplished a good night's work. The stealthy person who had brought her the time bomb had long since departed, but in departing he had reported the ease with which he had entered the confines of the flying field. And Monk Morton, listening, immediately began to plan other measures to cripple Bill Barnes, the man he hated with such deadly hatred.

With the flying field guarded as carelessly as that, Monk Morton soon made his plans.

"We'll strong-arm that gang!" he grunted and telephoned to New York.

It was Tony Bacciardi to whom he telephoned. And Tony was an expert in this sort of business, with a gang at his command who could be depended upon for a neat job of anything from a kidnaping to a thorough job of murder, with a little hijacking, blackjacking, bombing, and other things on the side, should occasion demand.

It was thus that Tony and his henchmen began to filter into the neighborhood of the flying field, coming in by ones and twos, inconspicuous in small cars. The work they had in mind was not to be done in daylight, and they loafed and smoked and played cards at a tough little speakeasy some three miles away, while they waited for night to come. Had any one noticed them particularly, which no one did, he would have observed that there was one man constantly on guard over the baggage of the sleek-looking group. It was innocent-looking baggage, at that, consisting as it did of two violin cases and four or five suitcases.

But the contents were neither violins nor clothing.

In order to be on the job early, these men had gathered at daylight. Two of them, who studied the flying field from the edge of the woods, saw the preparations made for Cy Hawkins' departure, and noted that Cy Hawkins did not go alone. For at the last moment Bill Barnes had decided to reenforce Cy Hawkins with a capable machine gunner who could also pilot, if need arose. Therefore, Henderson, a stocky little mechanic, who could do things with a machine gun, was told off to accompany the lanky Southerner.

There was no ceremony as they took off. The powerful Hurricane motor rose in a thundering crescendo of power. Cy Hawkins watched his tachometer, and when the engine was warm he moved his ship across the field while Henderson tested his machine guns in the after cockpit, as unconcerned as if he was starting on a picnic, instead of on a mission to a foreign land and against the entire armed forces of a foreign government.

Neither of the two men paid any heed to the small package wrapped in brown paper which was concealed behind the rear cockpit. The steady and remorseless ticking of whatever was in-

side it was drowned out by the roar of the engine.

Glancing over the altimeter and air speed indicator, over compass and climb indicator, Cy Hawkins settled back as his ship rose steadily, until the flying field was a blur below him, lost in the fleecy clouds of early-morning fog. At 5,000 feet he leveled off, and the steady drive of the powerful engines hurled him forward at a smooth hundred and fifty miles an hour which after a few minutes he pushed forward to two hundred miles an hour, so that the Barnes Snorter was speeding through space at nearly its maximum power.

Setting the automatic pilot for a height of 5,000 feet and a compass bearing which should bring him to Miami, Florida, Cy Hawkins relaxed lazily, his eyes glancing from time to time at the instrument board. The engine was turning over smoothly, its powerful roar making a steady and lulling sound in his ears.

The sun dispersed the fog bank. He saw Philadelphia far to the right at about half past five in the morning. At six they were over Baltimore. The steady throb of the engines carried them over Delaware Bay and Cape Hatteras a little after seven o'clock, and they left North Carolina behind them and crossed open water toward Florida. At nine o'clock they were opposite Brunswick, Georgia.

Underneath them was the open sea, its combers flashing white in the sun, and an occasional vessel steaming so slowly below as to seem fixed in place, as they rushed by overhead. The clock on the instrument board showed half past nine as the coast of Florida began to draw outward toward them again.

Neither of the men heard the faint and steady clicking that proceeded from that small package behind the rear cockpit, as its mechanism beat on in unhurried and relentless fashion. Henderson drowsed in the rear, but Cy Haw-

kins, sleepy-looking as he was, kept his eyes fixed alertly on the instrument board in front of him, with an occasional glance at the airways around him, and another occasional glance at sea and shore.

It was a serene and beautiful morning, too serene and too beautiful a morning for death to strike in mid-air and send them hurtling down like wounded birds to sink unnoted in the bosom of the broad Atlantic that stretched its vast length beneath them.

The minute hand of the clock moved inexorably toward nine forty. And still the mechanism^a in that small package clicked away.

Cy Hawkins lazily thought of the mission which lay ahead of him, wondering about this strange country to which he was going, and trying to form a mental picture of the man whose rescue was the task upon which he was engaged.

He did not know that Don Felipe de la Fuente had been hailed forth from his cell some four hours previously.

NO MAN OF any race could have faced his approaching fate with more simple courage than had this courtly old caballero. He rose as the guards unlocked his cell door, and stepped forward, his face serene, his shoulders thrown back, and his head held high. He did not fail to exchange a courteous greeting with the black-robed and sad-eyed priest who accompanied the soldiers.

They closed in before and behind him, those barefoot men, their bayoneted rifles at the carry, and the procession moved toward the courtyard, Don Felipe looming very tall and impassive-faced in the center.

Once arrived in the courtyard, the pock-marked *commandante* himself took charge, fussily pacing off the distance and moving the firing squad into place before escorting the white-haired old

gentleman to his position before the wall.

It was then that he offered Don Felipe a handkerchief to bind his eyes, but the prisoner refused the offer, preferring to meet his death open-eyed.

And then some delay occurred. The *commandante* glanced at his watch from time to time and listened for the echo of the trampling hoofs of the horse which should announce the arrival of Toribio Fierro. The *commandante* was in a quandary—his orders were to execute the prisoner at sunrise, and the sun had already risen and was driving away the morning mists. But Toribio Fierro had ordered the execution delayed until his arrival. The *commandante* shrugged his shoulders, gave his men orders to stand at ease, deciding, wisely enough, that it would be better to obey his chief's orders very strictly.

The *commandante* would have had to resign himself to a much longer period of waiting had he known the whereabouts of his general then. For Toribio Fierro was in his quarters, an ornately furnished apartment which he had taken over from one of his unfortunate enemies. It was half an hour before daylight when there came a soft knocking at his door, and his servant announced that there was a lady to see him. Toribio Fierro paused before his mirror, smirking at the image there displayed, sprayed a little perfume upon his military tunic, twisted his mustache, and swaggered forth to face his visitor.

Señorita Eugenia de la Fuente was even more beautiful there in the light of the dying candles as she stood with her cloak wrapped about her, clutching it at the throat, her eyes tragic.

"So-o-o!" He surveyed her from head to foot, and she flushed under his insolent scrutiny. "The little bird has become reasonable at last."

The girl eyed him steadily, trying hard to keep the contempt and loathing she felt from showing.

"I have come to plead with you for my father's life," she said, low-voiced.

"So easily as all that?" said Toribio ironically. "My dear young lady, those grave matters are not so simple to handle. Matters of state are not so easily disposed of."

The girl stared out of the window through which the first faint light of dawn was beginning to show. She clenched her teeth and turned toward him again.

"Cease this inane talk," she said; "in a few more minutes my father will be no more. Give me but an order signed by you, freeing him from prison, and you may claim what reward you wish."

Toribio Fierro stared at her reflectively. This was going to be easier than he thought. Somehow it was almost too easy. He grew a little suspicious.

"How can I be assured that I will receive my reward?" he asked skeptically.

She drew herself up proudly. "You have the word of a *de la Fuente* that you will receive your reward," she replied and clutched more fiercely the ivory handle of that keen stiletto she carried under her cloak.

For that stiletto was the reward that Eugenia intended for the man before her. She had planned to strike him down as quickly as his name was signed to the release order. To accomplish her purpose, she moved nearer him as he sat at the desk. He drew pen and paper to him and started to write. Fascinated and scarce daring to breathe, she watched as the pen traveled slowly over the paper. He finished his message, reached for the inkwell to freshen his pen preparatory to signing his name. Eugenia shifted and brought the stiletto up within her cloak.

"Señor! Señor!" A wild-eyed servant broke into the room. "The condor! The condor of death! It is overhead!"

"*Madre de Dios!*" swore the general, his face turning pale as he rose, fling-

ing the pen from him, and rushing for the door.

VI.—THE ASSASSIN.

SPEEDING toward Valverde, swept forward by the powerful Hurricane motors, Cy Hawkins lazily examined the instrument board and clock. The hour was nine forty-one a. m. when he raised his head alertly. There was a different tempo to the roar of the engine. It began to cough and sputter. He sat bolt upright. Gasoline gauge was all right. There was enough gas. It was either carburetor or feed line, for the engine was missing badly.

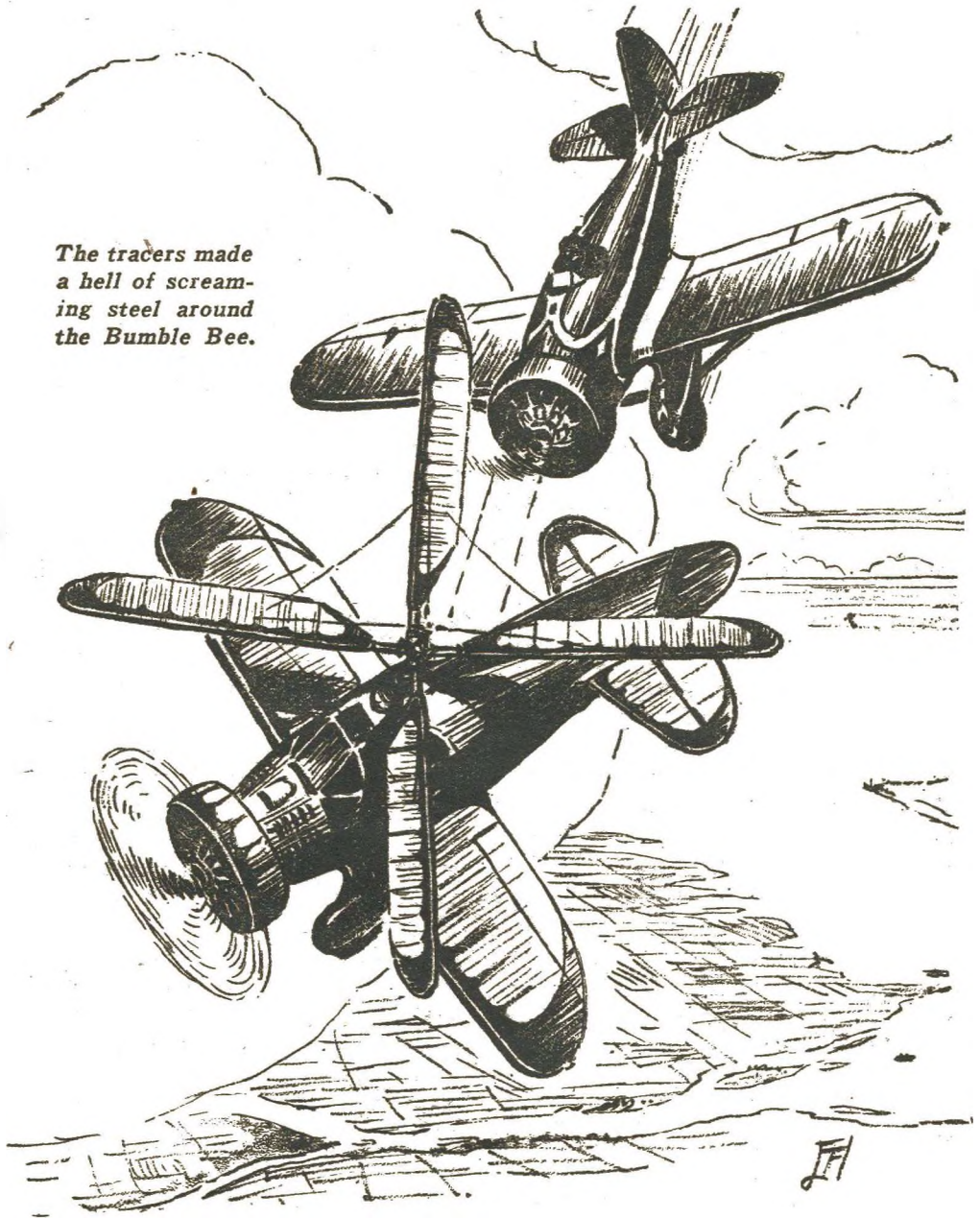
He glanced instantly about him and took a quick look at his map, figuring that the nearest landing field was at Jacksonville. His first move was to disconnect the automatic pilot, his next was to change his course, as he gave his engine the gun. It responded sluggishly. It was only a question of time until it faltered and stopped. He watched his altimeter and saw that he was losing altitude slowly but surely. His plane was headed toward the land far beneath him.

The hands of the clock crept to nine fifty as he sighted Jacksonville. It was when he approached the landing field that the engine gave out altogether, and he descended in a glide. So much altitude had he lost that in another moment his wheels bounced on the smooth landing field, and he applied brakes as the ship went forward, bringing it to a stop.

Two or three men ran up as he started to climb out, followed by Henderson. The hands of the clock pointed to three minutes to ten.

"Well, I'll be dum swizzled if it ain't old Cy Hawkins!" yelled a cheerful voice, as Cy took off his flying goggles, and he turned in time to meet a hearty handclasp from a red-haired, freckle-faced man in mechanic's overalls.

The tracers made a hell of screaming steel around the Bumble Bee.



“By gum, this calls for a drink, Cy! I ain’t seen you in a month of Sundays. Never mind your ship. Come on. We can look that over later. Bring your friend!”

Protesting faintly, Cy and Henderson were led away across the field to where a row of bungalows housed the personnel of the flying group.

Cy turned to have a look at his ship, distant now a hundred yards or so behind him. And as he looked, the Barnes Snorter seemed to open out in a sheet of flame, followed in a fraction of a second by the dull boom of an explosion.

The ship was annihilated. The time bomb had done its work.

IT WAS not until an hour later that Bill Barnes, back at the Long Island flying field, was apprised of the strange accident. He glanced at the telegram thoughtfully.

"What in blazes could have happened?" he asked aloud as he sat at his desk.

"Something, eet has happened?" It was the soft voice of the girl Dolores which fell on his ears. He looked up to see that she had come in unobserved and was standing beside him.

"Yes; one of my ships has blown up!" Bill Barnes did not note the peculiar glint in her eyes as she heard the news.

"Oh, I am so sor-ry!" she breathed. "And that so-nice Meester Hawkins, he ees keeled?"

"Not by a blame sight!" snorted Bill Barnes. "It would take more than a plane explosion to kill Cy Hawkins."

"Oh!" said the girl, non-committally, but Bill Barnes was not listening.

The news was out already, and the others came in to get details of the accident, taking off their caps as they saw Dolores seated in assured fashion near the desk.

Bill Barnes was thoughtful as he chewed reflectively at the stub of a pencil.

"That gives us a blame' short time to get down to that poor devil of a Don Felipe," he said aloud; then with a sudden access of energy he added: "There's only one thing to do! Scotty, is my ship ready?"

"If 'tis that!"

"Good! I'm going to pull out immediately," said the young leader. He turned to Red Gleason. "You're in charge, Red. You take your Snorter. Keep your rear cockpit unoccupied, ready to pick up Henderson. Have Gardiner, your mechanic, fly another Snorter for Cy Hawkins. Otherwise the original orders will stand, except that you will fly by Jacksonville and pick up Cy and Henderson with the

whole circus. Will you be ready to start to-night?"

"We can't get away much before two o'clock in the morning," said Red Gleason.

"All right; head the whole outfit straight for Valverde, and you'd better be ready to fight when you get there, because I don't know what sort of a racket we're going to bump into."

Dolores slid out unobtrusively as the men returned to their tasks and went quickly to the telephone in Bill Barnes' bungalow.

Scarcely five minutes elapsed before the new information was pouring into Morgan Catesby's office.

Catesby was livid with anger at the failure of his scheme, but not too angry to devise another one immediately. He got quickly into communication with Monk Morton.

"Yes, we have to move swiftly. . . . Where is that flying outfit of yours? . . . Down in the Florida keys? Fine! Now listen, you've got to move them out immediately for Valverde. . . . Yes, Barnes and his whole gang are flying down there. Beat them to it and give them a warm reception when they arrive. . . . Tony Bacciardi? He can handle that business down at the field. He's all set? . . . Yes; I know, but I'm not leaving anything to chance. Put him in charge to do his stuff at the flying field. It's too late to stop Bill Barnes himself, but Tony may succeed in crippling the others. In any case, get down to Valverde as quickly as God will let you!"

And Monk Morton, knowing well on which side his bread was buttered, was outside the city at a near-by flying field as quickly as a fast car could take him. With his aide, he was into flying clothes and aloft within half an hour of the message. His ship, a fast two-seater pursuit plane, manufactured by Morgan Catesby's company, was capable of a

good two hundred miles an hour at full throttle. And he put on all speed, for it occurred to him that he might interfere with Bill Barnes' trip with a little bit of luck.

Thus it was that he pointed the nose of his plane down the length of Long Island, hoping to be able to speed on beyond the lone flyer and waylay him somewhere in the clouds.

Before starting, Morton sent a telegram to a certain group of huts and hangars spread out in inconspicuous fashion on one of the more lonely of the Florida keys. It was a rough crew that Monk Morton maintained here, a crew made up of the dregs of the flying game, men who had slipped from the paths of decent conduct and devoted their abilities as airmen to such channels as dope and alien smuggling. As Bill Barnes' crew represented one end of the scale of decent, law-abiding flying men, so did Monk Morton represent the other end. The prison bars yawned for most of Monk Morton's crew, but they always had been successful heretofore in escaping the consequences of their evildoing.

There were seven fast ships on that Florida key, seven ships that were tuned up immediately and put into running order. Within three quarters of an hour those seven ships, silvery-green-hulled, speedy pursuit jobs carrying machine guns fore and aft, had swept into the air and were winging their way southward.

BACK AT Bill Barnes' field on Long Island, the final instructions had been given. In the private hangar that housed the mystery ship there came the bark or two of an engine warming up and then the steady hum of powerful machinery.

In a few seconds the strange small plane taxied out onto the flying field. It seemed to be without wings, this compact-looking machine, and its body was

covered with what seemed to be mica-coated asbestos. Its tail was peculiarly shaped, and its underbody held a strange protuberance.

The mystery ship was Bill Barnes' latest and most striking development. He was seated in the small, cabinlike arrangement braced against the swift upward rush of his ship. There were a series of short, sharp explosions, and the little plane literally skyrocketed into the air. Up and up he rose with a dizzying speed that left the pilot shaken for a minute or two.

He watched his altimeter race through two, four, six, and at last ten thousand feet. Then he moved a lever and a pair of stubby wings poked themselves smoothly out on either side of the plane. He gave it the gun and his engine roared into increased life and the propeller bit into the air as he leveled off. His nose pointed to the southward.

Some distance ahead of him and a thousand feet above him, there lurked a silvery-green ship. Monk Morton was at the stick, and Monk Morton did not miss the swift emergence into the upper strata of that tiny bumblebee plane. The crafty and evil leader of that ruthless crew of broken aviators was quick to set his course in line with the onward rush of Bill Barnes' tiny plane roaring across the sky beneath him.

It was when Bill Barnes with his grayish bumblebee had covered nearly three quarters of the distance between them that Monk Morton depressed the nose of his plane and came hurtling down out of the sky straight at the tiny plane.

Bill Barnes at his controls neither saw nor heard the approach of that would-be assassin of the air until a line of blisters appeared on his left wing tip. Looking up, startled, he saw the silvery-green plane driving down toward him.

To think with Bill Barnes was to act.

Suddenly the tiny plane, like a startled hawk, came out of the horizontal and dived. Monk Morton's onrushing plane, spitting lines of tracer bullets, swept on overhead. Like an enraged hornet Bill Barnes' plane described a great loop. As he came upward from that loop his own guns began to blaze. It was then that Monk Morton fled, diving into a convenient cloud bank to escape that vicious hail of death.

Bill Barnes drove forward and to the right, banking shortly as he sought for his foe. But Monk Morton had disappeared from view. Again Barnes hurled his tiny plane through space in another loop which was as unsuccessful as his first in locating the attacking plane.

Then Barnes banked and returned to his course, his guns still warm and his heart hot with rage at the unprovoked attack upon him.

There was no sign of Monk Morton. Bill Barnes set his automatic pilot and drove on southward, keeping an eye out to front and flanks and rear for the reappearance of the assassin plane.

He put on more speed until his tiny ship was doing two hundred and fifty miles an hour. He did not see, miles in the rear, the silvery-gray shadow of Monk Morton's plane which had reappeared from its hiding and was following doggedly on his trail.

He did not know that a thousand miles ahead of him off the coast of Florida a fleet of silvery-green ships had flung themselves into the air and were speeding southward to Rolivia to dispute his entry into that tiny republic.

BACK IN a certain office high above Wall Street, Morgan Catesby, thin-lipped and vengeful, was deep in telephone conversation with the immigration and customs authorities on the Florida coast.

"Yes," he was saying: "I am reliably

informed that this Barnes fellow is on his way to a destination in South America carrying arms and ammunition and engaged in filibustering activities. Moreover, his men are following him with six or seven planes armed to the teeth, bound for the same destination. As this is clearly in violation of the United States laws relating to American citizens engaging in filibustering expeditions against friendly countries I warn you to take measures to stop them.

. . . Yes; Barnes has already left and will be crossing Florida and the Gulf of Mexico within a few hours.

. . . No; his men do not leave until late to-night or very early in the morning. They intend to stop at Jacksonville, Florida, to pick up two of their companions. I would suggest seizing the entire outfit at that place. . . .

Yes. . . . I will give you any further information that I get hold of. . . . Good-by."

Morgan Catesby sat back looking well pleased with himself. He certainly had taken every precaution to prevent Bill Barnes and his crew from leaving the country.

"If that blankety-blank, interfering, superior-acting son of a so-and-so gets through in spite of all I've done, I'll believe that the age of miracles is still here!" growled Morgan Catesby.

And it certainly looked as if the cards were stacked against that crew of clever and courageous flyers. It began to look as if after all it would take not only one miracle but a series of miracles if they were ever to be permitted to reach Valverde, far down in South America.

VII.—AN INTERRUPTION.

IN VALVERDE itself there was plenty of excitement. The first fingers of dawn were lighting up the valley when Toribio Fierro ran forth to see for himself whether or not a condor was threatening the city again.

It was only too true as he quickly realized when his excited servant pointed out a great, dark shape floating upon outstretched wings above the city. The giant bird drifted quietly downward with all the implacable silence of death itself. As nearly as Toribio Fierro could judge, the huge bird was heading toward the presidential palace.

The morning light grew stronger as the huge bird on its mighty pinions floated silently downward, coming nearer and nearer the unprotected roofs of the public buildings. It now was scarcely a thousand feet up.

So fearful was Fierro that he could do naught but stare breathless as the giant bird sank lower and lower. He scarce noted that Eugenia de la Fuente had followed him, the unsigned paper in her hand, and stood watching with frightened eyes as that dark portent swept on silent wings nearer and nearer the quiet city.

There was no time to give the alarm. Other eyes must have seen the thing, for there came an ineffective crack or two of rifle fire, sounding like popguns in the early dawn. But the huge bird floated nearer undeterred, until at last it was poised above and to the rear of the prison of San Juan.

It seemed to be headed straight for the presidential palace. Toribio Fierro recovered enough of his wits to give a hoarse order to his servant to telephone a warning to the president.

The servant started into the house again to obey, when suddenly he stood rooted in astonishment and dismay.

For the huge condor seemed to pause in mid-air and then, with the speed of a dropping stone, it literally flung itself upon the prison at San Juan. There came a sudden blinding flash followed by a roar. The watchers saw the stone wall of that ancient fortress flung upward and outward as though by some giant hand. Faint screams and yells of pain followed, while a black cloud of

dust and smoke arose from the shattered masonry.

Sirens shrieked, police whistles blew, bugles rang out, and bells began to toll from the churches as Toribio Fierro yelled for his horse and galloped to the scene of the fatality.

To Don Felipe de la Fuente, standing against the wall awaiting his death, it seemed as if the earth and sky had suddenly hurled themselves together. In one second he was standing there, his eyes resting idly on one of the soldiers who was busily scratching himself. In the next second a blinding flash and roar flung the old man breathless against the wall, his head ringing and his mind dazed.

It seemed to him for a moment that he had been shot at last by that waiting group of riflemen and that this was the strange after effect. And then he realized that he was still alive although bruised and bleeding from a cut in the cheek. The courtyard was filled with screams. He could see very little, for an immense cloud of dust and smoke, shot through with flames, obscured his vision.

As the cloud lifted a little he saw the rotund form of the *commandante* not fifteen paces distant clawing at his own throat, his face a bloody mess. Behind the *commandante* lay several still forms in the place where the firing squad had stood. Other forms reeled through the murk.

Had Don Felipe been more practical-minded he would have seized the opportunity to make his way out of that place of death. But the thought never occurred to him. He rose slowly to his feet and staggered forward, some dim idea in his mind of aiding the *commandante*. A fire engine came from somewhere and brass-helmeted firemen began to throw water on some woodwork in the balconies which was blazing. A great hole had been dug into the surface of the courtyard, and the entire section

of wall on the northeast corner had disappeared.

What had happened no one seemed to know, such was the confusion in men's minds. Somehow Toribio Fierro was on the scene and had taken charge of the rescue work. A doctor was working with his instruments. Wounded men were being dragged forth and prisoners herded together under guard. Don Felipe helped to drag one of the severely wounded soldiers up to the doctor.

It was as he deposited his burden that Toribio Fierro's eyes fell upon him. The huge and swarthy minister of war called out an order to a sergeant, and suddenly Don Felipe was a prisoner once more, herded into the group of prisoners and under guard.

He stood there philosophically enough, accepting his fate with stoicism.

The men around him were whispering and glancing fearsomely at the sky.

"*Las ailes de la Meurte!* The Wings of Death!" they whispered, frightened.

It was not long before the fire was put out and the prisoners returned to their cells, Don Felipe among them. Once more he sat alone on his pallet as unperturbed as though nothing had happened, although a jagged wound in his cheek attested to the fact that he had only escaped death by a hair's breadth.

THE WORST of the damage having been temporarily put in order, Toribio Fierro remounted his horse and rode for the palace where he was soon closeted with Don Esteban de Morales, the paunchy little old *presidente*. Don Esteban was in a blue funk; the fat little ruler was quaking like a leaf.

He held two telegrams as Toribio talked with him, telegrams which informed him that Valverde was not alone in its danger. One telegram was from Sierra Roja stating that the capital city of Baria had been visited by one of the death-dealing condors which had wrecked the ministry of war and killed

at least fifteen of the officers of the general staff. The other telegram was from Montalba and stated that the capital of Solania had been visited simultaneously by one of the huge, silent birds and that its chamber of deputies had been smashed utterly into fragments, luckily with small loss of life, for their deputies had not been in session at the early hour.

"*Madre de Dios!* What does it mean, Señor Fierro?" The little *presidente's* ashen cheeks quivered with fright.

Toribio Fierro's face was equally pale and haggard. "*Quièn sabe!* Who knows!" he wiped his forehead with a pink silk handkerchief and stared up at the ceiling as if expecting another deadly visitant at any moment.

"I tell you, Señor Fierro, that some strange and terrible thing is abroad in the land!" The president's voice was half hysterical. "And I tell you, señor, that God Himself is seeking to punish us for our sins!"

"*Señor Presidente*, you are a little shaken!" returned Toribio Fierro, but his own voice was none too firm.

"But what else can it be?" cried the old man wildly.

"If God is punishing us, He is also punishing the republics of Solania and Baria," said Toribio, gripping theommel of his saber as though to gain fresh courage.

The paunchy *presidente* looked around the room, then approached his minister of war, speaking low-voiced and fearfully.

"You know what the Indians say? No?" whispered the old man as Fierro shook his head. "I have heard it rumored that the Indians prophesy an awakening of the old gods! They talk of"—and here the old man lowered his voice to a whisper—"a great danger that shall come from the secret place!"

"The secret place!" Fierro's voice dropped to a lower note. "You mean that—"

"The Valley of the Wings of Death!"

Both men stared at each other, white-faced. Fierro's hand clenched on his sword hilt. They looked about the room tearfully as if suspicious of the walls and hangings.

"And in proof of it," continued the *presidente*, "I have just received a telephone message from our highest Andean province, Santa Clara, that the Indians are on the verge of open revolt and are concentrating in the mountain caves."

"I'll send a regiment and a few machine guns!" snapped Fierro, once more the man of action.

"Whatever you think best," quavered Don Esteban. "Have you—did they—is Don Felipe dead?"

Fierro twisted his mustache thoughtfully. "No," he answered; "his execution was interrupted by the explosion."

Don Esteban glanced uneasily at his desk.

Fierro was quick to follow the direction of his glance. "You have received another radiogram from New York? Yes? Let me see it," and the minister of war read the decoded radiogram slowly and carefully.

"Um-m-m-mm!" he mused thoughtfully. "It looks as if we'd better get that job over with. Shall we say tomorrow morning?"

"Whatever you think best," replied Don Esteban wearily.

"So be it! I will have him shot at daylight," announced Fierro.

VIII.—WHEN DEATH LURKS.

AMONGST Morgan Catesby's many messages the one sent to the customs and immigration authorities resulted in quick action. The word had gone out along the borders of the Gulf of Mexico and the east coast of Florida to be on the lookout for Bill Barnes' ship. Patrol planes were sent aloft and took up their

patrol areas four and five thousand feet above the earth, their pilots scanning the skies for sight of that small mysterious plane, a description of which they had been furnished.

A squad of officers in plain clothes were sent to the flying field at Jacksonville, where they kept out of sight of Cy Hawkins and Henderson, who were trustfully awaiting the arrival of their comrades, unaware of the fact that they were being used as bait to gather in the whole expedition. And Bill Barnes sped on southward, scanning sky and cloud fringe above and below, and watching the surface of the water and the earth passing beneath him.

The normal activities of the flying field back on Long Island were increased tenfold by the anxiety of all the men to be on their way southward where adventure lured. One ship after another was drawn up in line, until six trim, golden Barnes Snorters rested like six golden-plumaged birds on the field, their machine guns mounted fore and aft, their reserve ammunitions stowed away, their instruments tested, and reserve gas and oil tanks installed, doubling the normal flying range.

The activities of the personnel were now directed toward loading the remaining three ships, huge, trimotored transport planes, looking like leviathans beside the smaller pursuit planes. These were being loaded with reserve supplies, spare parts, reserve gas and oil, and, as Bill Barnes had ordered, a full complement of air bombs which could be hurled down in a rain of death in the event of need. There were still many small adjustments to be made and more supplies to be loaded as the afternoon grew into dusk.

With the coming of dusk other and sinister activities began to take place. Tony Bacciardi's gang, like evil denizens of the night, came to life with the fall of darkness. Quietly and unobtrusively they left their Long Island speakeasy

hangout and approached with their cars to within a thousand yards of the flying field. Concealing their cars, they worked their way forward through the woods until at last they reached the fringe of trees that bordered the flying field with its rows of hangars and its neatly aligned fleet of ships.

With them, these sleek-looking and cynical individuals carted their suitcases and violin cases. Out of the violin cases came stubby-looking machine guns, and drums of ammunition were placed in position by each of the two guns. Low-voiced, Tony's gang discussed their plan of attack. It was decided to wait until the scattered men of the hangars began to assemble upon the ships on the principle that less of them would get away.

And thus they sat, a silent, murderous group, hidden in the woods, ready at the drop of a hat to cut loose with a hail of sudden death and destruction.

Their plan of action was devilish enough in its entirety. After the first burst of shots a certain few of them were to hurry forward with bombs and quickly hurl them into hangars and ships.

Out on the flying field the mechanics and pilots hurried busily about their duties, unaware of the doom that hung over them, unaware of the deadly muzzles directed upon them and their ships, and unaware of the band of hired murderers who waited so cynically at the edge of the woods. Least aware of the situation was Dolores, the pseudo-sister of the dead Rolivian aviator, Emelio de la Fuente.

Somehow neither Monk Morton nor Morgan Catesby had warned her of the contemplated attack. It might have been carelessness, and again it might have been a callous desire to get rid of her. But, whatever the cause, she was very much in evidence during the preparations.

Also very much in evidence wherever she appeared was Shorty Hassfurther,

strutting around like a barnyard rooster intent on upholding his reputation for gallantry.

SHORTY, however, did not make much headway. Dolores, who possessed a brain cell or two of her own, quickly discovered that Red Gleason was in charge, and she turned the full battery of her charms on that somewhat crusty individual.

"Meestair Gleason, eet ees so wonderful to see a beeg, strong man like you so quietly and so capably commanding all these men and these great airplanes!"

"Oh, yeah!" Red Gleason cocked a wise eye at her. "You're a fast worker, sister! All the girls need to do is to feed me a little taffy and I fall for 'em like a ton of bricks!" He grinned derisively.

Dolores bit her lip, then smiled a most engaging smile and immediately shifted her attack.

"Eet ees so wonderful to find a man who understands women! So few men have any intelligence where women are concerned," and she smiled at him, her liquid eyes full of soft admiration.

Red Gleason called across to one of the men, giving an order, and then turned back to the girl. "Sister, I ain't so dumb as you are figgering on," he said. "I got a couple of rules of my own when it comes to women. They ain't failed to work so far, and one of my rules is this: When I meet a dumb cluck I tell her how good-lookin' she is, and when I meet a good-lookin' dame, I kid her about being a mental whirlwind. So don't come with any of that stuff on me, sister. I'm a old battle-scarred veteran, and the burnt child dreads the fire!"

It did not take Dolores more than a second or two to realize that she had run up against a hard nut to crack. It was only then that she decided to use woman's last weapon—honesty.

"You are, how you say, hard-boiled, Meestair Gleason, but I tell you I am so worried, for I want to go with you when you fly. May I coom, please?"

Gleason scratched his head in a worried fashion. It was no part of his program to complicate matters by mixing women and airplanes. At the same time, here was the girl alone and unprotected, so far as he knew, with her brother dead and her father in danger of his life in that distant country which was her native land.

"All right, sister, pack up your toothbrush and your vanity bag and find yourself a place in that third transport plane, the one on the left of the line. Only if you get airsick, don't expect a trained nurse to look after you."

"Oh, that ees so loovely of you!" she trilled joyously, and reaching up, she patted him on the cheek, a maneuver which was taken in by Shorty Hassfurther's aghast eyes.

"Never seen such a guy for falling for skirts as what you are, Red," grumbled Shorty belligerently.

Red Gleason grinned amiably. "Kin I help it, if they fall for my fatal beauty!" he complained and went on about his business, leaving the crest-fallen Shorty grumbling to himself.

They were all working away, making a final inspection of their ships as the mechanics finished loading the transport planes. Shorty Hassfurther, Scotty MacCloskey, Gardiner, and Boswell had each been assigned pursuit ships by Red Gleason. Beverly Bates' ship stood in line and his mechanic put the final touches to it.

But Beverly Bates was nowhere in sight. He had been absent for the last hour or two. No one, however, seemed to worry about his absence. The tall, pedantic Bostonian was a dependable bird. With Scotty MacCloskey, young Sandbag Sanders had been detailed to act as eyes for that half-blind old flyer whose skill with machinery and as a

pilot more than made up for his lack of good eyesight. The three transport planes were to be piloted by three of the mechanics who held flying licenses.

It was getting darker. As the sun went down and the shades of night began to descend, the beacon lights of the field and the landing lights were all turned on so that the place was as bright as day.

It made a beautiful target, all this illumination, and the men concealed at the edge of the woods chuckled to themselves as they saw how thoroughly their victims were playing into their hands.

One of them spoke in a low voice to his fellows. "Who's the skirt with them punks?" he asked.

But nobody knew. And no one cared. In the cruel and callous game played by these men a woman's life was of as little moment as a man's.

There was no further conversation among that sinister group. They watched with narrow-lidded eyes as the last few packages of cargo were stored aboard the transport planes, and the hurry and bustle on the field quieted down as the pilots and mechanics assembled around their ships. The motors began to roar. It was Tony Bacciardi who threw away his cigarette and grunted. The men with the machine guns settled themselves in place, their fingers on the triggers as they released the locking levers.

Tony Bacciardi's voice came then like the hiss of a snake. "Give 'em the works!" he ordered.

IX.—THE INDIANS WHISPER.

DOWN IN far-away Valverde, Toribio Fierro, having decided upon the execution of Don Felipe de la Fuente, had secured the assent of the paunchy little *presidente* and was leaving the palace. The disquieting news of the danger that rested over the country was in the back of his mind but uppermost

in his thoughts at the moment was the beauty of Eugenia de la Fuente.

He had last seen her standing beside him as he ran out of his quarters to witness the destruction wrought by the mysterious condor. He remembered that he had not signed that order freeing Don Felipe and that the girl had probably carried it away with her. It occurred to him that she might forge his name and use it in any case. Therefore his first move was to send word

to the prison to disregard any written order of his purporting to free Don Felipe. Next he sought for Eugenia, sending out word to his police to look for the girl and bring her to him.

They reported back that there was no trace of her. She was not at her house nor seemingly was she in the city at all. Fierro did some deep thinking. The girl must have learned that her father had been injured in the explosion at the prison fortress. She would have



With all the courage and stoicism of an aristocrat he faced that line of carbines.

no means of finding out how seriously Don Felipe had been injured. Reasoning thus, Fierro figured out that she would be most likely to appear at the prison to see her father.

Therefore he sent word to the prison authorities ordering them to hold Eugenia de la Fuente and place her in confinement the moment she appeared.

And in so reasoning, Fierro showed that he was not altogether a fool, for Eugenia was planning just that very thing. The police had been unable to find her because she had gone to the little adobe hut which housed the sister and brother-in-law of Maria, her Indian serving woman. The adobe hut was at the end of a narrow alley far back in the native section of town and could only be found by threading a rabbit warren of twisting streets. The morning sun did not penetrate into that small, low-ceilinged room because the windows were tight shut and blanketed.

In the guttering light of a homemade candle Eugenia sat on the low bench by the crude table. The withered old sister of Maria served her with coffee and eggs and fruit which she scarcely tasted. Maria crouched on the floor near her. The ancient and withered old brother-in-law, his skin worn and seamy like old saddle leather, squatted near the tiny fireplace, his Indian *serape* wrapped about him. They were talking in low voices of the partial destruction of the prison.

Maria rocked back and forth, a great fear in her eyes.

"*Ai, ai*, little mistress! More and more of evil is to follow! More and more of the Wings of Death will flutter over this land! This is but the beginning!"

"How do you know that, Maria?" asked the girl quickly.

"We know! We *Indios* who are descended from the Ancient Race! Even now the *Indios* are moving out of the city and back into the mountain caves.

Soon there will be none left in Valverde."

Eugenia's eyes narrowed reflectively. She had seen files of Indians, wrapped in their *serapes* and carrying bundles upon their heads, moving out like ghosts in the early dawn.

"But what does it mean, Maria?" she asked with a worried frown.

"*Ai, ai*, little one! I know not except what I have heard."

"And what is that? What do the *Indios* say?" asked Eugenia.

"They whisper among themselves, little one"—Maria glanced about the room, and her voice dropped—"they whisper among themselves that the anger of the old gods is aroused. They say that the descendants of the Incas, the ancient rulers of the country, have come to life and that they are stirring in anger in the Valley of the Wings of Death."

"Where and what is this Valley of the Wings of Death?" Eugenia asked her.

"Among us it is forbidden even to mention it," whispered Maria, so quietly so that not even her sister nor her brother-in-law could overhear her; "none know of it save the descendants of the ancient priests. We ordinary *Indios* know only that it exists and that it holds all the Incas' wealth in gold, which has been held for hundreds of years against the time when the Incas shall revenge the wrongs done them by the white race and shall win back their country once more."

"And these terrible condors are sent by the Incas' descendants?" asked Eugenia in a whisper.

"*Si!*" The old woman nodded. "And they are only a foretaste of what is coming. It is whispered that first one or two shall come as warning, and then ten will come, and then hundreds, and then thousands, spreading outward through Rolivia, Baria, and Solania into the greater capitals of South America, reaching out to Panama and the great

canal which shall be destroyed, and extending to the farthest borders of the ancient Inca and Aztec empires!"

IT WAS A terrible picture that the young girl saw in her mind's eye, sitting there listening to the whispered words of the old woman by the light of a flickering candle in this adobe hovel. But, womanlike, her first thought was for those who were nearest her, and her mind returned anew to her father and the shadow of death under which he lay. She still had that unsigned note written in Toribio Fierro's handwriting. She glanced at it again, looking anew at her handiwork.

For as Toribio had reasoned, she had copied his flourishing signature, had, in fact, run back into the apartment after he had departed and copied the name from some papers which lay on his desk.

Again the worry came to her over what might have happened to her father in that explosion. Maria had brought word that Don Felipe had been wounded, but how seriously wounded, the old Indian woman could not tell. But, as the girl knew, it would be only a matter of hours before, in spite of his wounds, her father would be placed again before a firing squad. She had only a short time to work. She rose.

"Where do you go, my little one?" asked Maria, frightened.

"I go to the prison of San Juan to see my father and to try to save his life."

"*Ai, ai!*" whimpered Maria, rocking back and forth in sorrow. "They will seize you, my little one; that cruel hawk of a Fierro will hold my little dove in his clutches! *Ai, ai,* if there were only a man who could help you! Is there no white man to whom you can turn?"

Eugenia stood up, preparatory to leaving. For a moment she stared thoughtfully into space, her eyes unseeing. "Yes; there is a man," she said,

half to herself. "God grant that he may come in time!"

"Who is he, little one?" asked Maria hopefully.

"He is a *Yaqui* from the great republic to the north—he is a bird man, a skilled pilot of the ships that fly."

"And his name?" breathed Maria, wide-eyed.

"His name it is Barnes—they call him Bill Barnes." With that she turned, opened the door, and departed, closing the door softly behind her as she entered into the drabness of the dirty little alley.

X.—AT THE FLYING FIELD.

BILL BARNES' name was on many lips that day and its syllables were being crackled forth by wireless stations along the border patrol and from government offices along the Gulf of Mexico and the eastern coast of Florida, messages which were picked up by planes which circled and patrolled the air lanes.

There was not one of those pilots in the government planes who did not respect and admire Bill Barnes and who did not look upon him as the ace of aces in the flying game. What it was all about they did not know, but orders had come to intercept Bill Barnes' plane.

And orders were orders.

Their vigil yielded little result for hours, but the air fairly hummed with the numerous radio messages, as each station reported at ten-minute intervals, and each ship, high above, wirelessly to the ground station and to its sister ships.

It was the station at Jacksonville that sent the first electrifying news, broadcasting the information that Bill Barnes had swooped down there, hovered over the field for a few seconds without landing, and then had gone on south at high speed so quickly that it was impossible to get a ship off the ground to intercept him in time. But his course was broad-

cast to all ships on patrol, and they began to converge at a point close to Florida's tip.

Their vigil was rewarded after what seemed ages of anxious waiting, when suddenly the foremost patrol ship sighted the tiny plane speeding toward them, several miles away and a thousand feet above.

After signaling the other ships, the pilot of the leading patrol ship climbed swiftly aloft until on a level with the oncoming plane, and then banking steeply, made a sharp turn and put on speed so that he should move along and slightly above the onrushing plane.

The other patrol ships came speeding in and followed the example of the leading ship. It seemed but a few seconds until the queerly shaped, small bumblebee plane was level with them, its lone pilot staring about him.

The signals of the massed ships were unmistakable. They ordered him to slow his speed and descend to the nearest landing field.

Obediently, Bill Barnes' plane slowed, and in a few more seconds his nose dipped toward earth and he started downward, seeming like a lone sparrow overshadowed by a covey of hawks as the patrol ships flew downward over his tail.

It began to look as if Morgan Catesby, by using the aid of the government forces, was about to achieve his objective of keeping Bill Barnes from leaving the country.

And worse still, it looked as if Morgan Catesby was to achieve his purpose in keeping Bill Barnes' fleet from leaving the country by means of an entirely different type of forces.

Back at the flying field on Long Island, the crowd of pilots and mechanics, happy that their preparations were at last completed, and unaware of the doom which hung over them, were shouting joyously to each other as engines began to bark and roar.

Dolores was among the first to climb aboard. She was ensconced in a forward seat in the last of the three trimotored planes. From the worshipping Shorty she had borrowed warm flying togs and looked very small and fragile in the oversized garments.

The first few motors roared. Red Gleason was jubilant at having been able to make the start several hours earlier than he expected. Motor after motor took up the song. Such was their roar that they would have drowned out the sound of any machine-gun fire.

And the men behind the guns at the edge of the woods knew this and had deliberately held their fire until the majority of motors had roared into life, drowning out all lesser sounds. Those cold-blooded assassins intended that their bullets should strike in among the crowded ships and men with an uncanny silence. They intended to deal out death that should come whispering out of the darkness and strike men down without giving them any knowledge of how they died.

But now the majority of motors were in full life.

Tony Bacciardi's sibilant voice had hissed out the command: "Give 'em the works!"

The nearest machine gunner pressed his trigger, only to feel a violent jar on the back of his head. His bullets kicked up the dirt not ten yards in front of the muzzle.

"Hands up!" came a sharp and authoritative bark.

The startled gangsters turned to find what seemed an army of State police looming over them and to gaze into the muzzles of sawed-off shotguns.

THERE WAS no time to cry out. They were jerked to their feet, handcuffs were snapped onto their wrists. They were herded into a group. Flashlights were turned upon them.

"That's a pretty neat job," said the

leader of the police, turning to Beverly Bates, who stood there in flying togs; "we've caught Tony Bacciardi and his whole gang red-handed!"

"You ain't got nothin' on me!" growled Tony belligerently, trying to get out a cigarette with his manacled hands.

"No?" returned Beverly Bates mildly. "You may be very much surprised. It was quite interesting, I assure you, to see you walk into our trap."

"Ho, a frame-up, eh?" blazed Tony Bacciardi.

"You might possibly call it by that undignified name," responded Beverly Bates amiably; "only a low order of intelligence such as yours would imagine for a moment that we would leave this field with all its valuable secrets unguarded. Our system extends out to some twelve miles out around the surrounding country; and friends of ours here and there at speakeasies, and other places, tell us of the arrival of strangers. Then we put somebody on to shadow them.

"Gentlemen, if I may dignify you with that title, here is your shadow!" And he pointed to young Sandbag Sanders, the boy whom Bill Barnes had taken under his protection and was educating and training to be a flyer. Young Sanders was immensely pleased with himself and thrilled with the excitement.

"Yep, I followed them thugs all day. I was blackin' their shoes at that there speakeasy and telephoned in every half hour——"

"So you see, gentlemen," interrupted Beverly Bates, "you were very closely watched. As soon as you arrived within a thousand yards of this place, the patrol which we maintain twenty-four hours a day, took charge of you, assisted very ably by our friends, the State police. How you people have managed to keep out of jail with the low order of intelligence you betray is extremely remarkable to me."

"Aw, nerts!" growled Tony Bacciardi, and he flung some obscene remark over his shoulder, as the police herded him and his gang to the waiting police cars down below on the road.

Very well pleased with themselves, Beverly Bates, young Sanders, and the three mechanics who had been their aids, returned to the flying field, reporting to Red Gleason.

"They took a whale of a long time to gather in those babies. Why didn't they arrest them this morning?" growled Red Gleason.

"Well, you see, it's like this," replied Beverly Bates, "they had to catch them *in flagrante delicto* before they could arrest them."

"Catch them in what?" Red asked, puzzled.

"To arrest them while engaged in the act, as it were," explained Beverly Bates.

"You mean to catch 'em with the goods on. You'd save a whale of a lot of time by saying so next time," said Red as he glanced at his watch.

"All right; make it snappy!"

He motioned for every one to take his place.

Beverly Bates hurried to his pursuit plane, already warmed up, its motor roaring, and traded seats with his mechanic. Sandbag Sanders hurried to Scotty MacCloskey's ship, paying no heed to the growls of the old Scotchman as he vaulted into the observer's cockpit.

The three mechanics who had been with the patrol scattered to their respective ships.

Red turned to the five married men who were being left behind as guards and caretakers and was giving them their final instructions when he noted the headlight of a motor cycle entering the grounds.

Something about that steady, suddenly advancing beam of light gave him a feeling of worry, but the motor cycle

drew up before him almost as quickly as it had appeared.

A member of the State police dismounted, an official-looking envelope in his hand.

"Sorry, Mr. Gleason," he said, "but I have an order here requiring us to forbid your flight!"

XI.—FACING DEATH AGAIN.

OUT ON THAT Florida key, miles distant from human habitation, there had been no alert police officers to prevent the get-away of Monk Morton's squadron of silvery-green pursuit planes. They sped steadily to the southward, their tireless propellers beating the air hour after hour, hurrying through space at close to their maximum speed of two hundred miles an hour. Only one halt they made, and that was at Panama to refuel, and they were off again within half an hour.

It was nearly midnight when they arrived above Valverde and dropped down onto the landing field, where Toribio Fierro, decorated with all his medals and full-dress uniform, met and greeted them. It must be admitted that even Fierro raised his eyebrows a little at the tough and swaggering characters who descended from the ships and were escorted in three official cars to the palace of the *presidente*.

They were in charge of a square-jawed, sullen-faced man with a great scar running across his cheek, a scar that might or might not have been won in a German university's dueling matches. Pending the arrival of Monk Morton, his chief, he was in command of the hard-faced group. He introduced himself as Frederick Merner and spoke with a pronounced Teutonic accent, clicking his heels and bowing in approved military fashion.

The *presidente* bade them welcome and led them to the dining hall which glittered with the light from many can-

dles reflected from silver plate and cut glass. Drinks were served, consisting principally of the champagne so beloved by the South American.

It was not until the fourth or fifth round of toasts had been finished that Toribio Fierro got down to the business at hand.

Knowing as he did that these men were actually in the employ of Morgan Catesby and his group, it was Fierro's idea to strengthen their allegiance to the none-too-strong Rolivian government by incorporating them in the army.

So it was that before another half hour had passed the pilots were commissioned in various grades from *coronel* to *capitan*. Toribio Fierro was nothing if not thorough, for he had uniforms and gold braid and insignia of rank ready for them, so that in a thrice they were converted into the legally constituted officers of a regular government.

They had absorbed just about enough champagne to be delighted with their new gold braid.

"And now, gentlemen," said Toribio Fierro, "we must use every ounce of energy, skill, and intelligence that we have to prevent this so terrible man, Bill Barnes, from landing in our country, with his despicable gang of cut-throats and murderers."

The levity of the newly created officers subsided a bit. Some of them had bumped into Bill Barnes and his crew before, and the memory was none too pleasant in retrospect. But there were none of them who did not hate him for the very fact that he was a clean fighter and one of the most capable aviators in the world, in addition to being a man of unstained honor. Probably it was this last that aroused their hatred the most, for there was not one of them who had not been smeared by participation in shady and dubious ventures.

And so they plotted, this group of newly created aviation officers and the

minister of war of this small South American republic.

Had Bill Barnes heard himself being described as "this so terrible man" he would have been angry. And his anger would have risen still more had he heard his loyal group of pilots described as a "despicable gang of cut-throats and murderers."

Bill Barnes, however, had other things to think of. The black shadows of the wings of the patrol ships were above him and he was dropping toward earth in compliance with their orders. His mind was working swiftly. He did not know what was behind this activity of the government agents. He foresaw, however, complication after complication and delay after delay with all the red tape of governmental procedure to be unwound before he would be allowed to take the air again. He foresaw the frustration of his attempt to carry out his mission, and he foresaw most of all the inevitable death of poor old Don Felipe. At that second his earphones intercepted a message containing the name of Morgan Catesby. A lightning flash of comprehension came to him.

What happened, took place so quickly that the startled pilots of the patrol ships scarcely could describe it afterward.

For the tiny plane beneath them suddenly nosed under and came up behind them in a swift and dizzying loop, shooting over their heads. As they watched, astounded, the stubby wings of the small gray plane disappeared before their eyes. There was a flash of light and a cloud of smoke from the underbody of the strange plane, and it literally shot up into space until it became a dim speck, five thousand feet above them, and miles to the southward, where it disappeared from view.

With the patrol ships lost to sight behind him, Bill Barnes again put forth the wings of his plane, leveled off, and sped to the southward.

THUS IT came about that those newly made aviation officers, feasting and drinking in the palace of the president at Valverde, were stilled into a momentary silence when Toribio Fierro received a radiogram from distant Panama, where a Rolivian spy reported the passage of Bill Barnes over that country.

"Wass he alone?" asked Frederick Merner, the newly made *coronel*, resplendent in the gray, scarlet, and silver of the Rolivian flying corps.

"Evidently, yes," answered Toribio Fierro, "for there is no report of his despicable crew."

"In that case," said *el Coronel Merner*, "ve vill, how do you say it, settle hiss hash!"

"*Bueno!*" responded Fierro. Then with a glance at his watch, he added: "It would, I think, be best to set about it, for he may be flying across our borders very soon."

"Dere is time for vun more drink, gentlemen," boomed *Coronel Merner's* authoritative voice, "und I vill propose a toast." He heaved himself up, champagne glass in hand. "Death und destruction to Bill Barnes und all his gang!"

"Death and destruction to Bill Barnes and all his gang!" shouted his followers.

Toribio Fierro beamed approvingly upon them as they filed out, were loaded into the cars, and were driven to the flying field.

There was scarcely one of them who was not affected by the many drinks they had imbibed but they were capable airmen in spite of it, and it was not long before their engines were roaring into life, and one ship after another rose from the ground, the sinister gun muzzles peering from the cockpits as they speeded upward and to the north to waylay Bill Barnes in his lone flight.

As the roar of their motors died away into the distance, Toribio Fierro rubbed

his hands together, well pleased with this strengthening of the defenses of his none-too-secure ruling clique.

He drove slowly back to his quarters where he sought again for news of Señorita Eugenia. Strangely enough, there was still no news of her. She had disappeared completely so far as men's knowledge went. Nor could the authorities at the prison of San Juan throw any light upon her whereabouts.

"No," they said in answer to his telephone call; "she had not called to inquire about her father."

Had any one else called?

"Yes," was the answer; "an Indian boy had arrived, begging to see Don Felipe and had been admitted."

"Fools!" blazed Fierro. "Why did not you examine that boy? That was the Señorita Eugenia herself! Has the Indian boy left, or is there any trace of him?"

No; there was not, and Fierro flung the telephone from him, and rose, pacing the room angrily.

His anger turned then to Don Felipe. He buckled, on belt and sword and hurried to the fortress prison of San Juan. It was fast approaching daylight. Fierro made up his mind that Don Felipe should be shot within the next hour, whatever happened.

Sleepy sentinels and a half-awake officer in charge braced to attention as the storming figure of the huge minister of war came roaring into the silent prison. It lacked yet half an hour of daylight, but Fierro was adamant in his intention. Soldiers were waked rudely from their cots, and shambled forth, putting on cartridge belts, as they huddled into formation. Guards were sent for the doomed man, and he appeared shortly between a file of barefoot soldiers, his face untroubled and serene and with something of contempt in his eyes.

The preliminaries of the procedure were quickly gone through. Again Don Felipe refused the offices of a priest.

Again the old *caballero* refused to have his eyes bandaged in the face of the death which stared at him from the dark muzzles of the guns held by that tattered squad of barefoot soldiery.

And to insure that this time there should be no hitch, Fierro, himself, took charge and drew forth his saber ready to give the signal which should belch death from those guns into the slender form of Don Felipe de la Fuente.

At command the rifles rose in a wavering line.

Fierro raised his sword dramatically. Fingers closed around triggers.

Don Felipe stared calmly at the black muzzles of the rifles.

XII.—MENACE IN THE SKY

THAT STATE police officer whose roaring motor cycle had halted in the Long Island flying field wore no gaudy gold-encrusted uniform, but his authority was as potent. Red Gleason stared miserably at the legal-looking paper which was proffered and scratched his head, looking around at his compact squadron, ready to take off at a word from him. The air was filled with the roar of motors.

It was Shorty Hassfurther who came over to see what the delay was about.

"Hello, Jim!" he greeted the police officer with great delight, slapping him heartily on the shoulder. "How are you, you wobble-winged, loose-strutted old crate! How're you and how's the family!"

"Fine, Shorty, fine!" The police officer beamed.

"You see," explained Shorty, "I'm godfather to Jim's kid."

Red looked at him reflectively, dropped one eyelid, and then discreetly walked away. Shorty got the signal and turned to his friend. The police officer quickly told him the story.

"Now, lookee here, Jim," Shorty put one hand on his shoulder, "if you'd 'a'

come trailing along here in six more minutes, we'd 'a' been up in the air and on our way and everything would 'a' been merry. There ain't nobody that's seen you come in here excepting us. Be a good guy, Jim, and just trundle back along that road, and then come back in six minutes and deliver that paper."

Jim looked dubious, but Shorty pressed him until at last Jim slowly and unwillingly climbed back on his motor cycle and moved off the field, taking his unlucky document with him.

"Shorty, sometimes you show almost human intelligence," complimented Red Gleason, but he wasted no time in signaling a hasty take-off, scrambling into his own cockpit as the motors roared into increased life.

Led by his own ship, one after another the pursuit planes left the ground, followed at last by the lumbering transport planes which waddled up into the air after them like clumsy ducks.

The roar of their motors was diminishing when at last the police officer returned, shook his head, and departed in philosophical fashion.

Red Gleason, turning about, saw the riding lights of the entire squadron gleaming behind him. The sky seemed to be filled with them; there was power and speed and fighting ability in that massed air force. And even Gleason, as practical and unemotional as he was, thrilled to the impressiveness of it as he set his course.

"First stop, Jacksonville, Florida," he said to himself, and set the automatic pilot for that destination.

They held on their course steadily, hour after hour, the slower-moving transport planes being left behind, but they had their instructions and Gleason did not waste thought upon them.

It was well before daylight before they saw the beacon lights of the Jacksonville air field gleaming below them.

Disconnecting the automatic pilot,

Gleason descended toward those distant lights so rapidly that the lights seemed to be coming up to meet him. The other planes followed along in evenly spaced formation as they swooped down toward the field.

Even now the officers of the immigration and customs service were swarming out, ready to seize them and attach their planes as quickly as they landed, but Gleason seemed unaware of this as he dropped lower and lower.

It was when he was about five hundred feet above the field that he suddenly leveled off, and, strangely enough, fired a Very pistol which sent three balls of green light floating through the air.

Almost simultaneously with the appearance of the greenish glow, a plane whose engine was running at the edge of the field roared into new life and began to move.

Gleason and his flight of following ships leveled off and banked, swinging out toward sea again.

The new plane followed closely after.

It was not until they had gone several miles that the new plane hovered over one of the Snorters piloted by Gardiner. The two planes, roaring along at a hundred miles an hour, were scarcely twenty feet apart, the strange plane above. Out of it dropped suddenly a rope ladder.

Climbing over the side came the lank figure of Cy Hawkins and descended rung by rung, swaying perilously as the rush of air from their onward progress and the backwash from the propellers flung him back and forth. Undeterred, he came down, rung by rung, until at last he cast aside the rope ladder and leaped, landing in the rear cockpit, from which he quickly changed places with Gardiner.

This done, the strange plane moved forward taking a like position over the ship piloted by Red Gleason. Again the rope ladder was flung downward and

outward. Again the two ships rushed along, one above the other, and again a figure climbed downward on the perilous rungs until at last Henderson was in the rear cockpit of Red Gleason's plane.

Red waved him a cheerful greeting and waved good-by to the strange plane which waggled its wings in farewell and then turned back to the airport.

BILL BARNES had left little to chance. His meteoric escape from the patrol ships of the government had been swift, but not too swift to permit him to radio instructions to Red Gleason and Cy Hawkins, certain that the authorities would attempt to stop them.

His foresight had been even more exemplary, for they nosed downward after another half hour's flight onto a long stretch of hard, sandy beach where trucks of gas and oil awaited them, and where Scotty examined his charges.

It was Monk Morton turning back from his hopeless following of Bill Barnes, who discovered the hide-away. His silvery-green ship swooped down out of the sky as the refueling was in progress. It quickly swooped back again, and Monk Morton's busy radio broadcast the news to the customs and immigration planes and stations. The air fairly crackled with the news.

Red Gleason, who had seen that swooping silvery-green pursuit ship, shook his head and sped to the other members of the party, telling them to hurry.

"That's bad business," he muttered to himself; "we'll have the whole crew down upon us in no time at all."

Anxiously he scanned the sky as the last two ships were being groomed, and he wasted no time in getting into the air as speedily as possible. The question of the slower transport planes who were following along and would drop down here for refueling worried him, and he radioed back, telling them to use

their reserve gasoline and to come straight through to the next landing point.

He had scarcely risen off the ground, followed by his flight, when far off on the horizon he saw four dim specks rapidly growing larger as the patrol ships sped toward them.

It was then that Red Gleason banked sharply and led his entire flight far out to sea, past the three-mile limit and the twelve-mile limit, setting his course over the Bahamas. All of the Barnes Snorters roared into full power, and it was not long until the slower patrol ships were far outdistanced and dropped back into their own territory again, relinquishing the chase.

There was some doubt in Gleason's mind whether warning might not be sent ahead to their halting place in Jamaica, and he dreaded the necessity of dropping down in that place, fearing that he might be held up by some snarling of international red tape. Believing the Cubans would probably be less officious than the British, he decided to chance a landing at Havana.

But what worried him now was the steady and dogged pursuit of his flight by Monk Morton's silvery-green ship. No matter how fast he flew nor how often he changed his course, far behind them and above them followed that silvery-green plane, like some lone watcher in the skies that made their every move common property to a watching world.

In due course of time they landed at Havana, where they refueled and where Red Gleason radioed instructions to the transport planes, far in the rear, to beware of Monk Morton, and to, in turn, do their refueling at Havana.

It was while they were waiting that Shorty Hassfurth came up to Red. "Have you noticed that coffee-colored spigotty who was hanging around our ships?"

"Yes; I saw him," admitted Red, remembering the man, a tall, thin, hawk-

faced individual whose complexion was fairly light, but still dark enough to stamp him as a South American, and whose glittering black eyes had taken in every detail of ships and personnel. The man had been faultlessly dressed in well-cut tropical linens and wore a graceful panama hat of exceedingly fine texture.

"Well, he snoops around a while," continued Shorty, "and then he climbs into a car and whizzes out of here pretty fast. Sez I, 'this gent ain't up to no good,' so I gets hold of young Sandbag Sanders, borrows a motor cycle, and sends him trailin' along after just to see what the bird is up to. And here comes Sandbag now."

It was true that young Sanders was coming back at full speed, and he drew up with a roar and clatter on the borrowed motor cycle, and jumped off, very importantly.

"I followed that feller down into Havana and he goes straight to a radio station and files a long message. I dun my best to see what he was writing, but I couldn't make out a word of it. Anyways, I grabbed off the sheet of paper underneath the one he was scribbling on, and here it is!" He handed over a radiogram blank faintly indented with the impress of the message written above it.

"That's using your head, kid," complimented Red Gleason, then scratched his own head as he looked at the faint lines. "This is a job for Beverly Bates," he said, and he called the tall Bostonian.

Bates examined the paper, holding it against the light, trying it from every angle.

"I can make out only one word," he said, "and that is *huaman*."

"Which leaves us exactly where we were before," commented Red Gleason.

"Yes, and no," said Beverly Bates thoughtfully; "it just happens that that word is in the ancient Peruvian language—the language used by the Incas.

I studied that, among other things, at college."

"But what does it mean?"

"*Huaman* is the Indian word for falcon. In their mythology the falcon, the lion, and the condor were looked upon as sacred. That's all I know about it."

"The condor, eh?" mused Red Gleason. "And it's these condors that have been raising such merry hell blowing up buikdin's and such like!"

And there the mystery rested. It was time to take off, and they rose into the air and headed for the mainland of South America.

THERE WAS not much shipping on the surface of the Caribbean, but as they approached the mainland, Red Gleason sighted far below him a small gunboat wallowing along in the wash of the waves. Curious, he brought forth his glasses and stared down at the ensign which floated from its stern. It was a peculiarly checkered blue-and-white flag; as he remembered, it was the standard of one of the small South American republics, but which one he could not recall.

Other matters, however, engaged his attention to the exclusion of everything else at that moment. The sky was partly overcast and, happening to glance upward, he saw a black object floating majestically toward him not over a mile distant.

The speed of his ship and the line of flight of the unknown object were bringing them rapidly together, although he could see that the line of flight of the black object was several hundred feet above him.

As it neared, he felt suddenly a strange cold sensation, and his hair rose on the back of his head.

For it was a huge condor, sailing majestically through space on mighty wings.

At almost the same second that he

recognized the bird, it seemingly saw the squadron of planes. Red Gleason's hand froze for a second on the stick.

For the condor had dipped and swerved and was coming straight for him with terrific speed.

XIII.—ENEMIES ARRIVE.

AFTER ELUDING the customs and immigration patrol ships, Bill Barnes had sped like an arrow toward the distant goal marked by the borders of Rolivia. Hour after hour passed and he flew through, hurled forward by the beat of his powerful engine, keeping straight as an arrow on his course, due to the automatic pilot which held him unerringly to his pathway through the heavens.

It was after midnight when he came to the mainland of South America, and he kept on his way with unflagging speed toward the mountainous region in which nestled the small republic of Rolivia.

He was, he estimated, nearing the border of that country, when he suddenly became alert.

Far ahead and above him in the darkness had appeared a faint red glow. Another and another and another until he had counted seven of them altogether.

Instinctively he knew what they were. As their reddish, bluish glow became more distinct, he saw the dim outlines of the planes which had disclosed themselves by their motor exhausts. Whether they were friends or enemies he did not know, but he tried his guns on their mountings and looked to ammunition and firing mechanism.

He was not long left in doubt as to the attitude of these strange ships. For one of them bubbled pinkly in the early-morning gloom, and he saw a hole suddenly appear across his right wing tip.

Such was the noise of his motor and the speed of his flight that he could hear no sound, but those faint, pinkish bub-

bles broke forth from the other strange ships.

The mysterious ships were attacking. Ahead and slightly above him they came roaring at him, their guns spewing forth luminescent fingers of tracer bullets. Bill Barnes threw his ship into a sharp bank, just as the black shadows of the attacking planes roared at him. A quick shove of his palm drove the lever against the peg and his gunned engine screamed out a pæan of power. He leveled off, zoomed, and made a reverse bank.

The swinging threads of light from his tracer bullets sped into the air. His guns chattered like angry typewriters. The golden tracers spat toward the enemy ships. Bullets from his foes pecked at his wings, ripping through strut and wing fabric. But the deadly spitting guns under Bill Barnes' hands forced the enemy ships to veer wide. One of them side-slipped and crashed, flaming scarlet in the darkness.

He leveled off, and at the full speed of which his tiny plane was capable he kept on his course, leaving his enemies to change direction and attempt his pursuit. It was no part of his plan to be held up when every moment counted.

Reflected in his dashboard mirror, Bill Barnes saw the faint glow of their motor exhausts flecking the sky like pinkish flowers behind him. Dimmer and dimmer they grew as his stout bumblebee hurled itself through space.

It seemed a matter of minutes only until what he rightly estimated to be the lights of Valverde gleamed and twinkled below him. His enemies were miles in the rear, as he well knew, for there was no plane existing that he could not outdistance with his bumblebee.

He cut off power when approaching the city and dived downward until he was scarcely a thousand feet above the rooftops. Then he moved the lever that controlled his autogyro mechanism, and the rotors rose up smoothly behind

him as the plain's wings folded into slots in the fuselage. The shining metal column opened out at the top, umbrella-like, into flashing blades that checked his descent and allowed him to settle gracefully earthward.

His eyes scanned the rooftops intently. He was looking for the signal prearranged with the young South American aviator, Ricardo de la Fuente, who had promised to mark his landing place with five lights set in the form of an X, of which the center would be a red light and the outer ones white lights. Seek as he might, he could not find any trace of such a landing guide, although he floated over the landing field of Valverde.

And time was growing short. It would be only a matter of minutes now until those pursuing ships caught up with him. He put on power again and made another circuit of the city. Dawn was paling the east and throwing out in somber relief the heavy and sinister walls of a fortresslike building which reared itself up in forbidding fashion in the southern portion of the city.

His search carried him over this, not two hundred feet above its highest tower.

Glancing down, he caught his breath sharply at what the lights in the courtyard disclosed. It was but a second's work to bank steeply and turn on his course. In another second he had flung a landing flare neatly into the center of the courtyard.

Again he banked and cut off his engine. Far off in the horizon he saw the pinkish glow of the pursuing ships.

DOWN IN the courtyard Toribio Fierro stood with upraised sword. Another fraction of a second would have seen it lowered to the ground, the signal for the line of rifles to belch out their hail of death into the tall figure of Don Felipe de la Fuente.

But the rifles wavered and the sol-

diers glanced upward as the roar of a motor resounded overhead. A black shape whizzed by above them. Toribio Fierro himself looked up startled as the large black shape returned. He leaped aside and the soldiers broke ranks and scrambled wildly out of the way as a small dark object hurtled through the air and dropped in the center of the courtyard, where it broke into a fantastic red glare of light that illuminated the frightened faces of Fierro and the soldiers and showed up every beam and mortar crack and section of solid masonry in the interior of the ancient pile.

In a few seconds more a large grayish object, with whirling blades glinting above it, floated down and came to rest on the pavement of the courtyard.

A tall figure leaped out, pistol in hand and strode to the startled old man standing head high and chin up against the wall.

"Don Felipe?" said Bill Barnes' voice.

The old man bowed in courtly fashion as if he were in his own drawing-room.

"Follow me, quickly!" Bill Barnes led the way, leaped into the compact gray ship, and assisted the old man to stow himself away in a narrow space behind the pilot's seat.

As Barnes reached for the controls there was a roar of powerful motors above and a spraying shower of winged steel zipped and thudded and ricocheted against walls and masonry and wooden balconies.

His pursuers had caught up with him and were lurking overhead like sharks, awaiting his emergence.

XIV.—UNWELCOME GUEST.

THERE ABOVE the sun-washed sea close to the South American continent, Red Gleason felt his heart constrict painfully for a fraction of a second as that giant condor dived toward

him. All that he had heard of these birds of ill omen, every superstitious fancy he had ever had, and all his concentrated fear of the unknown held him in a paralyzing grip.

Then the training of the flyer forced brain, nerve, and muscle to function. His startled comrades, who also had seen the condor, saw Red Gleason's ship dip its nose and hurl itself downward. With the training of long habit they followed his example until the whole squadron, like a covey of frightened quail before a hawk, were dropping downward, the wind screaming through their struts at the terrific speed.

The group passed swiftly onward and under the huge black bird, and Gleason leveled off, followed by his sister ships.

Glancing backward he saw that the condor had continued on its course.

A white puff from the deck of the gunboat beneath and the running of men about its deck quickly showed Gleason at what target the condor actually intended to drive.

And Gleason banked and turned, horrified by the swift tragedy which followed.

For the huge bird, with the swiftness of a falling lead plummet, struck abaft of the smokestacks. In one second the outstretched wings of the great bird hid the after deck. In the next second the stern of the ship seemed to lift itself out of the water. Lurid flames, billowing clouds of foamy steam, and masses of black smoke obscured the rest of the tragedy.

His face set and grim, Gleason spiraled downward as he saw fragments of wreckage floating out underneath the clouds of smoke and vapor. The surface of the sea was smooth and oily. Red was certain that he saw human figures clinging to some of the wreckage. As the sea rose up to meet him, he unlocked and shot down below him his retractable pontoon and in another few seconds was resting on the water.

The blades of his propeller were turning over slowly as he steered for two half-drowned men clinging to a piece of wreckage.

Shorty Hassfurter's ship settled down near by, followed by Beverly Bates'. Scotty MacCloskey circled around in the air to guard them against that lone silvery-green plane in case it should appear.

It was Shorty who threw off his flying togs and plunged into the water half dressed, as one of the survivors began to slip from his precarious hold on the piece of wreckage. The lean fin of a shark showed above the surface of the sea not fifty yards distant; there came the crackle of machine-gun fire from Beverly Bates' after cockpit and the black and sinister-looking fin sheared away through the water and disappeared.

Shorty, with quick, powerful strokes, was soon up with the two men. Cy Hawkins' plane dropped down beside him. One of the survivors, a sallow, slim youth, his face bleeding, was hauled aboard Cy Hawkins' ship, sharing the after cockpit with its occupant. The other, a heavier man, red-faced and harsh-looking, was pulled aboard Beverly Bates' plane.

The sea was filled with wreckage, but although they stood by and searched the face of the waters, there seemed no other survivors. The sharks had gathered, their black fins cutting the surface, as they smelled blood.

After a last look around, Red Gleason signaled to the others and rose from the water's surface, followed at intervals by all the remaining ships, until once more they were in the air with their retractable pontoons withdrawn. Once more they were in flying formation and, after gaining altitude, once more the automatic pilots were set to work, and the formation pursued its flight toward that mysterious land of South America whose wave-washed

shores were even now in sight. The silvery-green plane was nowhere in sight as Monk Morton had decided to precede his foes and be ready for them on their arrival.

After leveling off and setting his course, Red Gleason used his wireless telephone to find out such details as he could of the tragedy. Word came back to him that the destroyed ship was a gunboat of the Solanian navy, in fact was *the* Solanian navy. Some ninety officers and men had gone down with it.

The two men rescued were respectively Diego de Toledo who was the son of the president of Solania, and the other was an American named Barry Crushing, 2nd, who gave his occupation as that of a banker.

This latter name was dimly familiar to Gleason, but he could not recall in what connection. Had he had a business roster of Wall Street he would have quickly discovered that Barry Crushing, 2nd, was an officer of South American Developments, Inc., and therefore an associate of Morgan Catesby. But five thousand feet above the mainland of South America, Red Gleason had no roster of Wall Street, and Barry Crushing, 2nd, being a canny individual with full knowledge of who had rescued him, volunteered no information.

It was not very long afterward that Gleason, by study of map, compass, mileage, and other data, realized that he was close to the borders of Rolivia, with the great Andean peaks rearing themselves above it in snowy grandeur.

Their crossing of the border was attended with no untoward incident, save that some customhouse officials in a red-and-white-striped building ran out and waved at them in excitable fashion.

They were quickly approaching Valverde, itself, but Gleason sheered away before his presence should be discovered and sought a landing field where he could come to earth.

LANDING fields were not so easy to find in this mountainous country, but at last he discovered a valley some twelve miles from the city which, although narrow and lined with precipices, seemed to afford smooth landing.

It was fairly crowded at that, and it took some careful maneuvering to bring all the ships down and provide space for a future take-off.

As quickly as he came to earth, Red tapped out Bill Barnes' call letter on his wireless set, striving to get in touch with his leader. He tapped away for twenty minutes.

There was no response, and Gleason felt a faint twinge of foreboding.

But there were many things demanding his attention. There was the problem of the transport ships. Their last message had shown them to be coming down smoothly enough, churning their way down the coast of North America, far out at sea, where they would not be molested by officious government officials. Gleason figured that it would take them at least another twenty hours and made his plans accordingly.

Some one found a first-aid kit and was dressing the wounds of the young South American, Diego de Toledo. The wounds consisted of only a few lacerations, but the young man was still slightly dazed from the shock of the explosion and the sudden immersion into the sea. But with faultless Latin-American courtesy he rose and thanked his rescuer in courtly fashion as Red Gleason came up.

Whatever good traits the American, Barry Crushing, 2nd, might have possessed, courtesy was not one of them. He approached Red Gleason in very self-assured fashion.

"How d'ye do!" He extended a limp hand, and then abruptly added: "How long do you intend staying in this God-forsaken hole?"

Gleason's eyes narrowed at the tone.



In a flash of steel the sword whipped out—and Bill was grinning!

"That depends," he answered noncommittally.

"Depends on what?" snapped back the banker.

Gleason was quick-tempered, but he had learned the trick of keeping his mouth shut. Without making a reply, he turned on his heel. It was Cy Haw-

kins who filled the breach. The banker decided that he had been a little abrupt. He decided to become genial. As a rule a banker's geniality is only one shade more fearful than his abruptness.

"My friend," he addressed Cy Hawkins, "it's exceedingly important that I get into Valverde quickly and get some

radiograms off. Is it worth a hundred dollars to you to give me a lift in?"

"Ah reckon you are sort of mixed in youh speech, strangah," returned Cy Hawkins mildly.

"What do you mean, mixed in my speech," snapped the young banker.

"It don't do to miscall people, strangah," said Cy Hawkins, in that same amiable tone. "In the fust place, Ah ain't youh friend. And in the second place, Ah'm already hihed and cain't take on no moah contracts. Ah reckon you'll sort of haveta sit around and act a little patientlike. Comfuht yo'self, strangah, yo' are a blame sight neahah Valverde now than you was when yo' was sittin' all wet and bedraggled out in the middle of the ocean."

And with that Cy Hawkins, in turn, walked away.

The impatient young banker fumed. These strangely self-contained men who eyed him so gravely did not seem to be impressed in the slightest degree by his importance. In fact he was sensible of something faintly approaching contempt in their attitude. If he only dared tell them who he was!

But Barry Crushing, 2nd, was no fool. He had been sent down by Morgan Catesby for a very definite purpose, and he knew that these men were enemies of Morgan Catesby.

He reasoned that if he started out on foot he might eventually find a native with a horse or mule that he could hire.

Without a single word of thanks, or a good-by to the men who had saved his life, he strode down the valley to where a trail wound its way toward the city.

Gleason looked after him in puzzled fashion in spite of the fact that he was pleased at the departure of his unwelcome guest. The rest of the men paid no attention, being busy going over their ships and checking their reserve gas tanks. Near by was a mountain brook

in which some of them washed, thereafter eating a bite of lunch.

It was fairly cool up in that high valley with occasional cloud formations obscuring the sun's rays, from time to time. Because of this, Gleason did not notice a darker shadow which traveled across the valley floor toward them. It was young Sandbag Sanders, looking up, who suddenly dropped his sandwich and jumped to his feet, pointing, white-faced, to something that hovered above their heads.

His cry drew every one's attention, and a strange silence descended upon them all.

Strong men and fearless as they were, their faces paled at the sight which greeted their eyes.

For there, sailing majestically over the valley; and seemingly coming for them, were the vast black shapes of some twenty or more giant condors.

XV.—AN ARREST ORDERED.

BILL BARNES, with his hand on the controls of his gray, compact ship, and with Don Felipe crowded in behind his seat, stared reflectively at that cloud of rock chips and wood splinters knocked down by the burst of machine-gun fire from above.

Another long, low shape swooped by overhead and again came the chatter of machine guns, and a hail of bullets struck not ten feet away, ricocheting against the stone pavements and thudding into the walls. The roar of motors overhead waxed and waned. As it lessened for a few seconds, Barnes heard a new sound.

It seemed at first like the tapping of many hammers, but as it grew louder in volume, he recognized it for rifle fire. The tapping sound grew into a steady roar, punctuated by the dull booms of what were undoubtedly field pieces.

There was some fighting going on somewhere. Don Felipe behind him

raised his head sharply like an old war horse scenting the smoke of battle.

Toribio Fierro had dashed headlong for the entrance of the court where he ran into an excited messenger who had galloped up on a lathered horse. And suddenly Toribio Fierro, without a backward glance at the scene in the courtyard, raced out to his waiting motor car and swiftly disappeared, hurrying on toward the palace.

As his machine lunged through the narrow, cobbled streets, the clamor of fighting grew louder, seeming to swell most strongly from the northern suburbs, the native section of the town. Coming out onto the plaza he saw a pall of smoke hanging over those suburbs—smoke shot through with lurid gleams of fire. Mounted police dashed by him, revolvers raised, while a battery of field guns swept into the plaza by one entrance and out by another, their slim mules at a gallop, their drivers lashing them fiercely, while a trumpeter ahead of the lead team of the first section blared noisily on his instrument to clear the road.

The bells began to toll from the cathedral and the lesser churches, adding their fateful sound to the swelling symphony of war.

Arriving at the palace entrance, Fierro found that the scarlet-and-blue-clad battalion of the presidential guard was assembled, bayonets fixed, while its officers conferred in a little knot by the gate. The battalion was brought to attention, and the officers saluted with a graceful sweep of their swords as the minister of war hurried by, his saber clanking and his spurs clinking musically on the stone pavement.

There was a gathering of the chief ministers of the cabinet in the *presidente's* office. The paunchy little *presidente* looked up with something like relief as Fierro strode masterfully into the room.

"What has happened?" barked Fierro.

The *presidente* shook his head. Different voices took up the chorus:

"The *Indios* are in revolt throughout the country. They have attacked the city. The Winged Death has struck down the *presidente* of Solania. Sierra Roja is in ruins. Our border forts are demolished by the condors. The *Indios* warn us that this city will be utterly destroyed if we do not surrender to them within twenty-four hours." The babble of voices pieced together the bits of bad news. Fierro stood twisting his mustache, pale-faced, as he listened. In this silence the roar of rifle fire deepened and intensified, with the steady booming of field pieces providing a sullen overtone.

Back within the courtyard of San Juan prison Bill Barnes listened intently to the diminishing roar of those planes which had circled overhead so relentlessly. It was evident that they had been called to join the battle that was now raging somewhere near. Without wasting any further time in conjecture, Barnes gave the motor full throttle.

The gray plane rose with dizzying speed until Barnes checked its flight, turned off his motor, and shoved out the wings. Leveling off, he made a circuit of the city which was being lighted by the first rays of the morning sun. The airplanes which had pursued him had disappeared somewhere.

A quick glance over the city gave him a complete picture of what was happening. Long lines of green-clad soldiers fired steadily into hordes of Indians who swarmed down upon the city from the upper valley. The Indians were armed for the most part with rifles, but there was an occasional machine gun and even one or two rather out-of-date-looking field pieces. Leading them on, and directing their attack, were tall men, dressed in some strange costume which glittered in the rays of the early-morning sun.

Barnes was hampered by the presence

of his passenger, and he turned to Don Felipe, asking where they might land.

The old man pointed up a valley to their right, and Barnes turned the nose of his ship in that direction. Following the winding course of the valley, he came at last to a place where it opened out into a smooth meadow, flanked on three sides by great cliffs which were pierced with the mouths of huge caves.

The place seemed to be deserted, and he settled down to earth and shut off his motor.

CASTING A keen glance about the valley, Barnes wasted no time in looking over his machine after he had assisted Don Felipe to the ground. The old man watched him with something of admiration in his glance as the slim young aviator tuned and tested his squat and capable-looking plane. Don Felipe was much interested when Barnes unfastened that strange protuberance on the underbody of his ship and set about recharging the rocket apparatus.

Not until this was done and his fuel and oil supplies checked did the North American aviator turn to his companion.

"I delayed expressing my gratitude for your saving my life until your necessary tasks were finished," said Don Felipe in courtly fashion; "it is impossible for me to state how deeply appreciative I am of your interest in me, but I must express my admiration for the gallant manner in which you risked your life to bring me back from the edge of death." The old man spoke English with a cultured accent and with very little trace of foreign intonation.

"The privilege of rendering you some service, Don Felipe, far outweighed any small risk that I might have run," Bill Barnes smiled. To forestall any further protestations of gratitude he added: "Please tell me what has become of your son, Ricardo. I was to meet him at Valverde."

"My son Ricardo?" Don Felipe looked faintly puzzled. "I no longer have a son," he stated with quiet dignity. "There is only left to me one member of my family—my daughter Eugenia."

Bill Barnes looked his astonishment. "But your son Ricardo—the lieutenant, the younger one, who flew up to Long Island and begged me to come down here?"

"My daughter Eugenia is somewhat of a madcap; she is more like your North American girls, for she rides horses and motor cycles, drives an airplane, and handles a sword and pistol as well as any man." The old gentleman spoke with a trace of pride.

A great light dawned on Bill Barnes. "I thought that young 'Ricardo' was the least bit feminine-looking," he said with a grin, "but I must say your daughter fooled me!" Then his face grew grave again. "But where is she now?"

Don Felipe shook his head, his own face serious-looking.

"That I do not know, but I fear that she will fall into the power of that so terrible man, Pierro, who pursues her so relentlessly."

Without a word Barnes turned about and vaulted into his ship.

"You will be safe here until I return?" he asked. "Other Americans will come soon."

"But certainly!" returned Don Felipe, his eyes widening. "If I am not too presumptuous, however, may I ask where you are going?"

"I'm going to try to find your daughter," replied Barnes simply.

The old man drew himself erect and then bowed.

"It is a worthy resolution of the type of man that you have shown yourself to be," he said; "you will recognize her, will you not, if you see her? She is most likely to be found at the house of Juan, the woodcutter, in the little alley off the Plaza of Our Lady of San

Felipe. *Valgame con Dios!* Go with God, señor!" He raised his voice as Bill Barnes gave his engine the gun, and the old man watched as the tiny plane rose with a swift rush to spiral out of the valley and disappear over the rim of the cliffs, headed toward Valverde.

The flight to the city consumed very little time. The morning sun had driven away the mists, but it could not drive away the smoke of burning houses, the white vapor of explosions, and the dull blue fog of combat which hung over the city like a pall.

It had its advantages, that fog of smoke and powder, for it concealed Barnes from too close a scrutiny. He kept a sharp eye out for the ships of Monk Morton's crew, but saw no sign of them, for the very good reason that Fierro had already sent them speeding toward the border to succor one of the few fortresses still holding out against the savage attacks of the Indians.

Nevertheless Barnes shut off his motor and descended silently with no sound to disclose his arrival, save the faint whirring noise of the rotor blades.

The smoke was not so dense that he could not see sufficiently to make a landing, and he headed for a church which flanked the plaza in the native section of the city, hoping that it might be the Plaza of San Felipe.

The place was seemingly deserted as he brought his ship down into the inclosure that flanked the church. There were headstones here and a shed under whose shelter he pushed the light plane, glancing about him to see whether he was observed.

For a second he thought he saw the faint stir of movement at the far end of the shed. Striding rapidly to the point, he saw no one, but found a small door which led into the church itself.

Through this he went. The church seemed deserted save for an old woman in black who prayed on her knees before one of the many candle-lighted

shrines. Bill Barnes tiptoed softly through the silent place, dimly seen in the half light, and drew a breath of relief as he came out in the murky light of early morning into the plaza itself.

So far as he knew the arrival of his ship had been unobserved. He did not know that even now one of Fierro's secret police was racing to find the minister of war to inform him of the arrival of the strange plane.

Barnes found the only alley that seemed to lead out of the plaza and followed its narrow course. He met one or two Indians who gazed at him curiously through the folds of their gay *serapes* and answered his question by pointing farther along the alley until at last he was shown the adobe hut that housed Juan, the woodcutter, the brother-in-law of Maria, the old nurse who had cared for Señorita Eugenia all her life.

But of Juan the woodcutter, of his wife, of Maria, and of Señorita Eugenia, there was no sign. Opening the door, after repeated knockings, Barnes went inside, but the three rooms of the small house were empty.

The adjoining houses seemed to be vacant, as if their inhabitants had deserted them in a hurry, and the occasional Indian he met on the street shook his head when he asked about the occupants of the house.

There was little good to be gained by remaining here, and Barnes bent his steps slowly back toward the plaza.

In the meantime Fierro's spy had found his master and broken the exciting news. The gross-bodied minister of war was busy laying down his orders to a group of officers, but the spy's report was very welcome news to him, and he broke off his conference long enough to direct a squad of cavalry consisting of some seven or eight troopers and a *sargento* to gallop to the church, seize the plane, and arrest the pilot as soon as he returned to his ship.

XVI.—LOCKED OUT.

BACK IN that distant valley which held Gleason and his little group of men and ships; every man was on his feet staring aghast at that black cloud of great, ominous birds which had wheeled over the valley like a well-trained squadron and seemed to be coming straight for the helpless group on the ground.

There seemed to be no power on earth that could save them from the inevitable death and destruction that was due to drop upon them within the course of the next few minutes. There was something majestic and resistless about the serene progress of those huge black birds, flying in serried ranks, and in groups that seemed to be actuated by an almost military control.

They floated resistlessly up the valley, coming nearer and nearer that small group of men and ships on the ground. The men waited with bated breath for the inevitable swift, downward plunge that would bring those terrible creatures among them with sudden death heralding their arrival.

Gleason's mouth was dry; he felt stone cold as he watched. There was no time to dive for shelter because he well knew that the terrific smashing explosion which accompanied the landing of these mysterious birds would tear the valley like an earthquake and send the tottering cliffs caving in upon the hapless men caught in its confines.

But still the condors sailed majestically on. Now they were almost overhead. Another few seconds and they were directly above them. Gleason and the others scarcely dared to breathe.

Would they continue on or would they suddenly swoop downward?

They were sweeping onward.

In another few seconds they had passed, and the vanguard of the strange, huge birds was slipping out of sight over the rim of the valley. The men below watched, fascinated, and scarce

daring to breathe, scarce daring to hope that they had received this miraculous reprieve from death. The last of the huge birds disappeared, and the men still continued to stare at each other, unable to realize that their lives had been spared. It was not until many seconds had passed that the silence was broken. It was Shorty Hassfurth's voice which ended the strain.

"Conk my engines," he exploded, "but I sure thought I was a gone goose then! Yes, sir!"

The tension relaxed gradually. Men said little, but there was an appreciable and a noticeable nervousness about their looks and laughter as they slowly began to resume the activities upon which they had been engaged.

The close call which he and his charges had undergone more than ever convinced Gleason of the necessity of finding Bill Barnes and passing over the heavy responsibility for the safety of his outfit. His mind was made up very quickly.

"You guys stand by here and keep a sharp lookout for trouble," he announced, as he called Gardiner.

"Where you goin', Red?" asked Shorty Hassfurth.

"I'm goin' to find Barnes as quickly as the Lord 'll let me!" he shouted above the preparatory roar of his engine.

In a few seconds Gleason's plane was nosing its way up out of the valley. His first spiral, once above its rim, took him toward the south, but as he swung back to gain altitude, he drew in his breath sharply. For there coming from the north were six silvery-green ships flying low and coming on at full speed. His first impulse was to dive back into the valley, but it was too late for that, now.

Monk Morton's men had seen him.

The leading plane veered sharply in his direction. Red's main thought now was to prevent the discovery of the re-

maining ships of his outfit, helpless on the ground below and to his left.

He gave his ship the gun and climbed with every ounce of power that the smooth Hurricane engine could develop.

Up and up he climbed, his altimeter needle fairly racing around its circle. At the same time Gardiner's guns began to chatter from the rear cockpit, and slim lines of tracer bullets flung themselves toward the onrushing enemy planes.

It was Gardiner who had noted that bullets from the still-distant ships were beginning to splatter the wings of the Barnes Snorter. They pecked at the wings and ripped through the wing fabric. But Gardiner's guns spat back viciously.

THERE WERE two silvery-green ships in the lead of the onrushing combat formation. Common sense would have directed Gleason to bank to the right, but instead of that he swerved and zoomed and drove the ship straight for a point between the two silvery-green ships that were headed for him.

He was some 12,000 feet up by now, nor did he care to lose much altitude, but he drove at his enemies with reckless abandon. The two silvery-green ships hesitated for a moment and then began to separate to keep out of danger.

Suddenly one of them tilted its nose upward and came driving aloft, its guns spitting at Gleason's underbody. The four remaining ships were circling above, striving to get in a position to come down on his tail as he well knew. With the speed of thought Gleason went into a long glide. The other of the two enemy ships swerved instantly to attack him from the rear.

Gleason's response to this was the tightening of his jaws as he sharpened the angle of his descent and flung downward at the silvery-green ship rising toward him like a long-bodied shark. He swung his own guns to bear.

Almost simultaneously the uprushing enemy ship cut loose with a burst of fire. Blue haze vomited from the dark mouths of Gleason's guns. The tracer bullets spat forth like golden beams. And he did not release the trips. The whisper of death sounded all about him, the breath of hurrying messengers of destruction fanned his cheeks, the gray threads of death, sped by the tracer bullets, followed through his wings and curled around struts and cross-wires.

From the rear cockpit came the intermittent, angry chatter of Gardiner's guns. Red's own guns kept up their unflinching defiance.

Despite the fact that he was caught between two fires, Gleason clung grimly to the ship below him, keeping its whirling propeller in his ring sights.

The silvery-green ship nosed into the shower of bullets that Gleason hurled at it. The force of the zoom which had projected the enemy ship so rapidly upward was now dying out. The pilot of the attacking plane was in a dangerous position, for Gleason was hurtling down upon him like a vengeful comet. Desperately the fellow fell away and tried to get out of range.

It was quickly over. Gleason found the range with two sharp, short bursts, corrected, and then tripped his trigger with deadly certitude. And suddenly the enemy ship was spinning helplessly down toward earth.

Gleason had no time to exult. Gardiner's guns were missing fire, the second enemy ship was driving in on his tail, the guns belching death.

Above and behind it, the four other ships were diving down, relentlessly to the kill. Nearer and nearer they were coming. Death was close, and its wings brushed those two men again and again.

Wing fabric ripped and shredded, a slug smashed into the altimeter, struts splintered, flew.

Like a frightened sparrow pursued by a covey of hawks, Gleason dived

and zoomed, banked and twisted, but ever nearer came that sharp hail of death. It was only a matter of seconds, as he well knew, and he tightened his jaws with the certainty of death before him, and with but few seconds in which to prepare for it. Gleason found himself wishing that he could see Bill Barnes before he passed out. .

BILL BARNES had been having his own troubles. Coming out of that narrow alley after his unsuccessful search for Señorita Eugenia, he heard the trample of galloping hoofs growing ever louder in his ears as he hurried across the plaza.

Suddenly a squad of seven or eight cavalrymen broke out into the open. They sighted him in the deserted plaza almost as quickly as he saw them. With a dry steely whir, they drew their sharp cavalry sabers and with a wild yell galloped at him. He was close to the steps of the cathedral when they started their charge, and it was but the work of a second to leap up the five low, broad steps. But there was a long way still to go before he could reach the shelter of the cathedral door and, rather than be caught and cut down on that smooth stone platform, he turned at bay, crouching like a panther as the turmoil of thudding hoofs, flying manes, and glittering steel thundered toward him.

The impetus of its onrush was broken by the five steps and the horses checked slightly at this obstacle, only the horse of the *sargento* scrambling up. The *sargento*, a swarthy, black-haired man in the blue-and-crimson of the president's bodyguard, raised his sword aloft to cut down the lone gringo.

And then a surprising thing occurred.

For it happened that the lone gringo had been raised with horses. Instead of giving back, Barnes leaped forward as the sword descended, and in that swift second he drove his open palm straight into the horse's muzzle. The horse

swerved sharply, so sharply as nearly to unseat his swarthy rider. And in another split second Bill Barnes had completed the downfall of the *sargento*, for he grasped the man's leg and heaved so that the fellow tumbled heavily to the stone step and fell and lay silent. The man's saber clattered to the ground.

Grasping the reins of the startled animal, now riderless, Barnes backed him into the onrush of the other horsemen and, using him as a shield, he reached swiftly downward and grasped the saber.

The other riders had checked their horses and were striving to get at the white man, but so skillfully did Barnes back the kicking brute he held that the other horses forgot everything in dodging the frightened animal's flying hoofs.

With a single vaulting leap, Bill Barnes was in the saddle. The sword became a living thing in his hand. He sent it whirring about his head like a veritable wall of steel. His face convulsed with rage, he cut and slashed at the clumsy soldiers, his blade leaping in and out like a living thing. One tumbled from the saddle, blood welling from a cut in his neck. A second gasped and screamed as the point caught him and thudded home in his chest. A third screamed as the vengeful blade laid open his cheek and blinded him.

The tall *Americano* was like some raging, supernatural creature. Those soldiers read death in the blazing fury of his harsh blue eyes. The three survivors suddenly turned their horses and, belaboring them with spur and the flat of sword, they galloped precipitately from that dangerous locality, riding with their heads low on their horses' necks.

Breathing hard, Barnes looked about, but could see no one. He turned his horse and rode soberly toward the cathedral door. The horse stood blowing and snorting as he slid down to the ground. At that second a rifle spat

from the edge of the plaza. A bullet thudded not four feet from where Barnes stood. Another rifle joined the chorus. In a second, bullets were smacking around him like busy and relentless hornets. He turned to seek shelter within the cathedral. The door was closed, but he tried the great brass handle.

It would not give to his efforts. Again he tried, this time shoving with his shoulder as a bullet whined in dangerous proximity to his head.

He stood back then and gazed toward that corner of the plaza whence the bullets came.

A wild yell greeted him. Men broke into view, running and crouching on foot.

The door was locked behind him.

XVII.—TRAPPED!

IN ANOTHER part of the city about this time a very much disgusted and very angry American dismounted, stiff and sore, from a mule near the palace of the *presidente*. It was Barry Crushing, 2nd, who at last had made his way into the city. His self-important air was impressive enough to engage the attention of Fierro himself, who willingly listened to the red-faced young American's words.

He became much more polite when he found out where Barry Crushing was from, and realized that he was the personal representative of the great American capitalist, Morgan Catesby.

"I've had a hell of a time getting here!" stormed Barry Crushing angrily. "The roads here are absolutely vile, and the natives are the most impertinent I have ever met!"

"From where did you come, señor?" asked Fierro suavely.

Barry Crushing told him, with plenty of detail, so much detail that Fierro was enabled to place the valley exactly in his mind's eye, also to realize that if he

moved quickly enough he might trap the squadron of planes which it concealed. His plan was considerably aided by the fact that a village near the mouth of the valley was the headquarters of a squadron of border cavalry, some three hundred men and horses.

Fierro turned to one of his staff officers, speaking in sibilant Spanish. "Get Colonel Bautista on the telephone immediately, *capitan!*" he ordered. "Tell him to gallop around to the head of that valley, to dismount his men under cover, and creep forward above the gringo planes. Tell him to shoot down every man, but not to damage the planes, if possible. Quickly, *capitan!*"

The glittering young staff officer saluted and hurried away to execute his orders. In another few minutes he was transmitting them to the lean, brown, old *coronel*, whose face was the color of saddle leather. The *coronel*, in view of the troubles during the day, had wisely kept his squadron standing to horse. It took only the sharp notes of a cavalry trumpet to bring his men to attention, and in another minute they had swung into the saddles, formed rank, broken in column, and were pouring around the edge of that valley like a green river of horsemen.

It was only two miles, the latter part of it uphill, but they flung across the broken ground in open order, the nimble-footed native horses cleverly threading their way between loose rocks, outcropping roots, as they swept toward that cliff edge.

FAR BELOW in the valley, unconscious of the wave of mounted riflemen which approached them, Shorty Hass-further, Cy Hawkins, Beverly Bates, and all the rest of them lounged and smoked and talked, while awaiting word of Gleason and of Bill Barnes.

As for Bill Barnes, he wasted little time in vain regrets, once he found that the church door had been locked against

him. The broad porch of the church provided no shelter from those bullets which were smacking and thudding against wall and floor. The horse was dancing in fright as a bullet clipped the tip of one of its ears. It was time to be moving, figured Bill Barnes, and he swung himself up into the saddle once more.

A wilder burst of firing came from the plaza as his move was seen. It seemed as if nothing could live in that hail of bullets, for a wandering platoon of infantry had come to replace the fleeing cavalry men, and it was their rifles which were coming into action as the head of their column arrived at the plaza.

Barnes wasted not a single glance upon them, but speeded his horse into a gallop, thundering along the broad, long, church porch until at last he came to the steps at the end, which his horse took in a single leap, landing on the ground below the wall on the far side of which lay the cemetery and the shed where Barnes had left his ship.

The thirty or forty men in the platoon of infantry were now coming into action. Opening out, they were kneeling to fire, and then rushing forward. The plaza seemed to be full of green-clad soldiers, and the air was certainly filled with bullets, for they smacked and rattled and whined about Barnes' head as he suddenly halted his horse below the wall.

The animal had no intention of staying in that unpleasant neighborhood and reared as Barnes brought him to a halt. Barnes was riding with his feet out of the stirrups, and as the horse reared, he leaped upright in the saddle and flung himself at the edge of the wall above him.

In another second the horse had flung away and was galloping across the plaza, madly shaking its head as if it had been stung by a hornet.

More of those hornets rattled around

Bill Barnes as he clung there, far above the ground. And then he gave a convulsive swing and lift and had one leg over the wall coping. Two bullets thudded against the stone where his form had just rested. Another one brushed his cheek. In a second he was over the wall and had dropped down on the far side, just missing a gravestone as he landed.

His heart sank then.

For there were two men doing something around his beloved ship. One of them was a soldier, armed with a rifle. The other was clad in the gay-colored *serape* of an Indian.

The sight of those two men daring to touch his sacred ship filled him suddenly with anger. Bending low, he raced swiftly and silently toward them.

The firing from the plaza died down suddenly as if by command, but was succeeded by the crash of gun butts against the church door and by excited yells as men formed on the outside under the wall and prepared to scale it.

The men by his plane turned about just as Bill Barnes arrived within five or six yards of them. The startled soldier jerked his gun up and fired from the hip at the tall, vengeful form leaping toward him. The bullet went wild, and in another second Barnes was upon the man, had brushed his rifle aside, and was shaking the fellow as a terrier shakes a rat. The gasping and quaking soldier was flung against a gravestone. The Indian tossed aside his *serape*, drew forth an ugly-looking, razor-bladed *machete*, and leaped toward the white man.

LITHE and quick as a cat, Barnes swooped and rose, the rifle muzzle in his hands. Neatly side-stepping the rush and the vicious stroke of the *machete*, he swung the rifle, following through after the Indian, whose impetuous rush had carried him beyond. The steel-shod rifle butt caught the fellow at

the base of the skull, and he plunged forward, sprawled out on his face. The men outside had evidently organized themselves for a wall scaling, for the topmost wave of them appeared, their heads bobbing as they scrambled over the wall, some ten of them. The first wave leaped to the ground inside and jerked their rifles around to get them into action.

Bill Barnes had flung himself at his ship and shoved it out from under the shed. In a second he was in the cockpit.

And then, more as a warning than anything else, he turned his guns toward that wall over which successive waves of men were rising.

He pressed the trip.

The guns snarled angrily, their bullets kicking up fountains of dust around the feet of the soldiers.

It was plain to be seen that their enthusiasm was considerably dampened, but a few of the more courageous ones began firing at him.

This time he let them have it, firing several good bursts before he turned to his controls.

The result was rather ghastly, for the vengeful hail of bullets thudded and smacked through flesh and bone, and men screamed or toppled silently. A crackle of rifle fire came from the top of the wall, and Barnes swept his gun muzzles along the coping. It was as if a sharp razor had cut through a beard, for in a second every dark figure was neatly shaved off the top of that wall.

The surviving soldiers cowered under the wall, most of them flinging themselves to the earth and feigning death in order to escape another devastating burst from those deadly guns.

It was about this time that Barnes heard a commotion within the church and reasoned, very correctly, that the rest of the soldiers had at last forced an entrance. He was not very long in doubt, for a rifle muzzle poked itself

out of a near-by window and blazed at him, the bullet missing him by inches.

It was time to get out of there. He swung the lever that exploded his rocket mechanism. The nose of the plane fortunately pointed up a slope. No sound came. He tried again and again, but there was no response. Cursing, he started his engine.

Thank God, that roared into life! Another bullet smacked into his wing tip as he turned the plane slowly. The motor coughed once or twice as he gave it more gun. It was a tricky place from which to rise, that narrow churchyard.

Could he clear that high wall? He knew that his life depended upon the answer to that question. He gave the gun to his motor. It roared in a deep and satisfying thunder of sound. He moved out, watching those gravestones. The ship gathered speed. Slowly and cautiously he yanked his stick backward. The wheels were off the ground.

The wall was rushing toward him.

Would he be able to clear it? he asked himself calmly, but he sat hunched like a man expecting a blow as his gray bumblebee leaped at that solid piece of masonry.

XVIII.—A FOOLISH STEP.

AS THE GRAY bumblebee lifted itself into the air, Bill Barnes pulled back the lever which drew in the retractable landing gear. There was only one thing he feared now, that the protruding mechanism of his rocket apparatus would crash into the wall and scatter his valuable plane all over the landscape.

The soldiers were firing wildly at him as the bumblebee breasted the wall like a horse, literally flinging itself upward. For a second that seemed to be an eternity Barnes waited for the rending crash that would tell him the end.

But there was no crash. He felt a



Death and destruction thunderbolted down from the heavens—and the fort split wide in a sheet of flame!

faint jar as if he had scraped the top-most stones of the wall.

And then he was over.

A fierce exultation seized him, and he laughed aloud at the scurrying and frightened figures of the soldiers in the plaza. In pure deviltry he loosed a burst from his machine gun as he rose swiftly and smoothly into the air.

The fighting was still going on in the suburbs. Below him the streets were crowded with infantry and cavalry while out toward the edges of the city the green-clad soldiery were flung in long lines that fired mechanically and impassively at the hordes of Indians. These latter seemed to have lost the first impetus of their attack and were themselves digging in and seeking shelter behind houses and trees.

Again Barnes noticed the men who seemed to be leading them, observing that they were dressed in some peculiar iridescent costume that glittered jewel-like in the morning sun.

No one seemed to pay much attention to him, high in the air, and he looked about, puzzled at the absence of those silvery-green ships which had harassed him when he had landed in the fortress.

As he rose higher he stared about him more intently. His glance went to the northward, and suddenly his face went grim and bleak. He gave his engine full gun, and the tiny plane fairly hurled itself aloft and northward.

For he saw the silvery-green ships at last, saw one of them side-slipping helplessly down to earth, saw five others diving down like hawks as they pursued one of his own Snorters.

The sight of that lone ship battling against heavy odds was like a bugle call to him. Straight as an arrow he hurled himself at their formation, his guns chattering with an angry snarl as he drove toward them.

The long, smoky fingers of his tracer bullets preceded him as he drove full

at the ship that was nearest Red Gleason, for he saw that it was Red Gleason and Gardiner who were battling.

And the sight of Bill Barnes appearing suddenly out of the blue was more than a bugle call to Red Gleason. It was a reprieve from sudden death.

The sudden appearance of Bill Barnes suddenly cooled the ardor of those five pursuing planes, and they banked away from the path of that onrushing, gray comet whose guns snarled such a vindictive hymn of hatred at them.

Suddenly as if at a concerted signal, all five of them dived under the two ships, for by now Red Gleason had returned to the fight.

Before Barnes' two planes could again attack, the five silvery-green ships were speeding like frightened doves toward the Valverde flying field.

All five of them dived downward to the haven of the landing field. As Bill Barnes and Gleason turned back, intending to follow them down and *strafe* them as they landed, the air about the two pursuing planes suddenly blossomed forth with the black flowers of Archie shells. Gleason's plane rocked in the concussion. There were many of the anti-aircraft guns and they seemed exceedingly well served, so that Barnes was convinced that they were under a unified and automatic fire-control system. It would have been certain destruction to have ventured farther into that maelstrom of swift, bursting death, for the discharges were spaced evenly and graduated so as to cover every yard of the line of flight.

Signaling to Gleason, Barnes banked sharply, and the two wheeled away like frustrated hawks from that danger zone.

It was Gleason who took the lead then, and Bill Barnes followed, throttling down his fast ship as Red hurried back to the valley where the remainder of the men and ships were hidden, as they thought, from danger.

It was when he was still a mile or

two from the valley's rim that Bill Barnes' keen eyes noted some movement on the ground, and he sped up, flying alongside Gleason and pointing down to the plateau above the valley.

Red followed the direction of his leader's pointing finger. His reaction was instantaneous. His ship's nose swerved downward, and he dived toward that rim with full power on.

What they both saw was sufficiently alarming.

AT THE NEAR edge of the plateau was huddled a compact group of led horses. Extending across the plateau and advancing to the rim, preparatory to firing down into the valley, was a long, thick line of dismounted cavalry men, rifles at the trail.

Red Gleason straightened out and banked so that his ship was parallel to the line of dismounted soldiers, and then he dived again, dropping down to within fifty feet of them before his guns began to chatter their song of death.

Barnes darted over the rim of the canyon, glanced down long enough to see his ships and men, and then motioned them to rise before swerving back and launching himself at the line of soldiers.

The passage of Red Gleason's plane spitting streams of tracer bullets at them quickly disorganized the formation of dismounted cavalymen. They huddled in groups, firing spasmodically at the spitting sky birds that had descended upon them so suddenly. Barnes' guns swiftly converted their uncertainty into panic, and suddenly, like one man, they turned, streaming back toward the horses.

Relentlessly the two ships swung about and sprayed them again. It was only when the survivors arrived among the horses that Barnes drew up and desisted, having no desire to maim or kill those helpless animals.

They hovered about overhead as the

remnants of the soldiers scrambled onto their horses, and they followed along without firing, as the thoroughly demoralized squadron, its men riding low on their horses' necks, galloped out in every direction away from that fatal plateau until there were none left but the dead and wounded.

The two ships turned back just as the first of the Snorters from the valley came spiraling up over the rim.

It was Shorty Hassfurther who piloted the first ship. He was followed, at intervals, by Cy Hawkins, Beverly Bates, Scotty MacCloskey, and the others, all of them immensely elated at the sight of their leader, and all of them immensely curious as they saw the sprawled bodies on the plateau and realized how near they had been to annihilation.

Bill Barnes at once led them from that place. Climbing aloft he gazed about until he discovered the Valley of the Caves. Once he found it he leveled off, and, followed by his trusty gang of ships and men, he dropped down to a quick, smooth landing on the floor of the valley.

The other ships dropped down, one by one, behind, but as the pilots started to leave their cockpits, Barnes shook his head and pointed to the great caves.

To set the example he taxied his own ship into the nearest one, its high, vaulted ceiling and great entrance providing plenty of clearance.

The others were quick to see the advantage of concealing their grounded ships from aerial observation and like well-trained soldiers, one after another, they taxied their ships into the caves on either side until they were all under cover.

Not until then did they forgather on the ground at the entrance of Bill Barnes' rocky hangar.

There was a swift buzz of question and answer from all except Scotty MacCloskey who, grumbling to himself,

stamped in to where Barnes' bumblebee rested and began to go over it with all the fine attention to detail of which his meticulous soul was capable.

But as Bill Barnes well knew there was little time for talk. Don Felipe appeared and was introduced to the others, bowing gravely as each one was brought up to him. His eyes came to rest questioningly upon Barnes, however.

Barnes shook his head. "Your daughter was not at the place where you advised me to look," he said, and then briefly told of the fight he had had in getting out of there. "But do not worry, Don Felipe, for we will return and find her."

"If I only knew where she is!" said the old man, his eyes tragic.

None of them would have felt any easier in his mind had he known where she was at the moment. Unseen by watching eyes, she had returned to her own home and retrieved the officer's uniform which had been part of her dead brother's equipment. Thus attired, and looking not unlike a young *teniente*, she planned her next step.

Through the Indians she had heard of the arrival of the *Americanos* of Monk Morton's crew. In her mind all *Americanos* were good people.

The most logical thing to her seemed to be to go immediately to them and enlist their aid in taking her to her father who she knew would come to the Valley of the Caves, for it had long been arranged between them that that should be their rendezvous in case of separation.

Elated with this solution of her problem, she made her way unnoticed in the general confusion attendant upon battle, and entered the flying field, a good half hour after Bill Barnes and Gleason had driven Monk Morton's crew to earth.

It struck Eugenia that these *Americanos* were rather a hard-looking crew as compared to the men she had seen

at Bill Barnes' flying field far up in North America.

But this did not worry her. She picked her way across the field to the headquarters and asked for the leader of the *Americanos*.

A heavy-jowled man in the uniform of a Bolivian colonel of the air service received her, his bloodshot eyes contemptuously taking in the slim form of what he thought was an effeminate-looking native officer.

"You would like to see General Morton?" he sneered. "Und vill you please tell me why?"

"Because I am the son of Don Felipe de la Fuente, and I know where he ees, and wish to be taken to him."

XIX.—THE INCAS' SECRET.

THE BULLET-HEADED aviation officer suddenly stared at the young *teniente* before him. Then his eyes grew crafty.

"Ja," he grunted, "dot is verry nice," his voice became suave and friendly, "perhabs Bill Barnes is mit him, is it not so?"

"Veery like," responded the young *teniente* innocently.

"Und joost where is dis place?" asked Merner, trying hard not to betray any eagerness.

"It is called the Valley of the Caves and is due north of the city about ten miles."

She turned to a big wall map, showing the Andean country on a large scale. Her fingers sought for and found the city of Valverde. The huge colonel rose and stood at her side, peering intently at the map as she pointed out the contours that led to the Valley of the Caves.

"Ja, das ist gut!" grunted Merner, trying hard to keep the satisfaction out of his voice. "You vill please vait here while I go und see General Morton." And Merner hurried away, rubbing his hands with satisfaction at the good news.

BACK at the Valley of the Caves, Don Felipe de la Fuente, all unaware that his own daughter was innocently disclosing his hiding place to his enemies, was deep in conversation with Bill Barnes, as they ate some sandwiches and drank from a thermos bottle.

The conversation was deeply interesting to Bill Barnes because he was gaining an inside knowledge of the evil which afflicted this war-riven country.

"I can understand Morgan Catesby and his crowd, and I can understand the rottenness of the politics that his creatures would perpetrate down here," said Barnes, "but I cannot understand this business of the condors and the destruction they create. Who has charge of those beastly things and who is behind these terrible doings?"

Don Felipe looked at him, a sudden, queer oblique glance that was exceedingly appraising. But Bill Barnes' serene, strong profile showed honesty and character in every line. It was a reassuring and confidence-inspiring face, grave-eyed and earnest at the moment. Its obvious sincerity impressed Don Felipe and induced him to talk.

"It is a long story," he said, "going back into the injustice and cruelties of centuries. You, of course, know that the race of Indians who now are little more than slaves in this and the neighboring countries are descendants of subjects of the great Inca empire. And you know the story of the faithlessness and cruelty of the Spaniards who not only wrecked that great empire and killed thousands of its subjects but nearly succeeded in completely blotting out the imperial blood of the Incas.

"They did not quite succeed. There were two branches of the family left alive, one descended from Huascar who was evil and who came to an evil end, himself; but his descendants still live. There is another branch more nearly of the blood royal which has also descended to the present day. Between the de-

scendants of those two branches there is bitter enmity. It is the descendants of Huascar who have taken upon themselves the high priesthood. To-day the descendant of Huascar is the *Uillac Uma* (the Head which Counsels) and, señor, his counsels are evil. His branch of the family has managed to sequester a small part of the great Inca treasure; and with it they have wrought great evil. High in the mountains in a place known to few men he and his followers scheme and plot and work to bring the South American continent once more under the sway of the Inca priesthood."

Don Felipe grew silent and thoughtful.

"And this other branch of the family, the true Inca descendants?" asked Bill Barnes at last.

"Oh, *they!*" responded Don Felipe. "They live and exist as ordinary people, not particularly distinguished or particularly honored except secretly by some of the Indians, at least by those Indians who have not been corrupted by the high priests. But there is one great power the descendants of the true Incas possess, a secret which they have never disclosed in spite of torture and death through the generations, torture and death perpetrated upon the descendants of the true Incas by the descendants of Huascar. And it is this secret that will be their ultimate strength and their salvation!" Don Felipe grew silent again.

"And that is——" pressed Bill Barnes gently.

"The secret of the hiding place of the great Inca treasure!"

Bill Barnes looked up in surprise. "Is there such a treasure in existence?" he asked.

"Most assuredly," responded Don Felipe, "a vast and fabulous treasure, the secret of which is known only to one individual in each generation of the true Inca blood. It consists in the main part of solid gold, gold in quantities beyond the comprehension of the average

man! For know you, señor, that at the time of the Inca empire, gold was used as an ornament for houses and temples, vessels and jewelry. So ideal was the Inca government that there was no need for money. It was the greediness of the Spaniards which ruined that Arcadia."

"Is it true that Pizarro received a ransom of eighteen million dollars in gold for Atahualpa's life?" asked Bill Barnes.

"It is true," responded Don Felipe gravely, "and it is also true that much more gold was on its way, when the Spaniards, unable to restrain their greed and blood lust, killed Atahualpa treacherously and suddenly, thereby stopping the golden flow of ransom which was pouring in from all over the empire. The gold which had arrived was principally in the form of oblong plates, the ornaments from houses and temples. Three times the amount was on its way through mountain and valley when the news of Atahualpa's death came. With the speed of thought, word went forth and that gold was hidden against the day when the Incas could once more make use of it."

"And the secret of this hiding place is possessed by only one man to-day?" asked Bill Barnes, glancing curiously at his friend.

"By only one man, and his life is in hourly and daily danger," replied Don Felipe.

"And you know this man?" asked Bill Barnes.

"I know him," responded Don Felipe simply.

Bill Barnes glanced over to where Scotty MacCloskey was grumbling and fussing around the bumblebee. Barnes' brow was thoughtful.

"Has this high priest who is behind all these terrible bombings and explosions any agents out in foreign countries?" asked Barnes next.

"He has a very efficient and ruthless

organization," Don Felipe replied. "It is headed by a nephew of the present high priest. He is called Pacari Manco—a name which he has no right to bear as it is the name of one of the ancient Inca rulers."

"Pacari Manco!" mused Bill Barnes aloud, and then he added: "It is a complicated line-up, this situation in your country. In other words, Fierro and Don Esteban de Morales are in power, supported by Morgan Catesby and his group, while the high priest and his gang are struggling to gain back all the old Inca empire. Where are the conservative, decent people who want to be let alone and see the country prosper under its own government?" he asked.

"Many are languishing in jail, many have been shot by firing squads, and many, like myself, are hiding out in the caves in the mountains, waiting for a leader to arise to organize them for revolt."

"You are the logical leader of these people, are you not, Don Felipe," asked Bill Barnes.

"I am their acknowledged leader," stated Don Felipe, without any trace of pride.

"Then it seems to me your greatest danger lies in the possibility that the forces of the high priest and the evil gang controlled by Morgan Catesby will get together and combine against you."

"That is the grave danger," admitted Don Felipe.

Whatever else they might have said was interrupted at that moment by the sentinel who was stationed far above the valley on the cliff's edge.

He was signaling the arrival of an airplane coming from the north. Bill Barnes quickly glanced over his force, ordering every one under cover, so that the valley seemed deserted.

He himself took position under a tree, field glasses in hand, his eyes searching the sky for the new arrival.

In the silence he heard the roar of the

engine steadily growing louder, and soon there flashed into view a shining monoplane containing but one occupant. There was no distinguishing sign upon the plane, and it was of a model unknown to Bill Barnes. He put it down as some new, foreign type of ship.

The strange ship sped on its way, its occupant seemingly paying no attention to the valley beneath him.

It disappeared from view almost as quickly as it had come, speeding in the direction of Valverde.

XX.—INCA GOLD!

BILL BARNES returned to the cave mouth where he had left Don Felipe. Barnes was worried by the strange ship which had passed overhead. In some unaccountable fashion he felt that it was a harbinger of ill omen. But he took up the conversation where he had left off.

"Yes, Don Felipe, that is your great danger, the danger that your enemies may combine against you," he said. "As I see it, our strategy should be to concentrate on the gang of this high priest. He seems the most dangerous antagonist at the moment."

Don Felipe nodded.

"But how are we going to tackle him when we don't know where he is?" Barnes continued. "Do you know anything of this Valley of the Wings of Death of which men speak?"

"I am one of the few men living who knows where it is."

"Can we go there by airplane?" asked Barnes.

"I can and will direct you there," said Don Felipe, "we can go by airplane, but it is a hazardous trip, far up in the Andes with treacherous cross winds and terrific storms against which to contend. It will require every ounce of your skill as an aviator."

"But it can be done?" asked Bill Barnes.

Don Felipe nodded.

"Then we will do it!" said Barnes definitely. "But first, there is the question of finding and bringing your daughter out from that den of thugs in Valverde."

"Yes, my heart is troubled," said Don Felipe, "for she knows where I am to be found, here at the Valley of the Caves, and were she able to leave, she would come here like a homing pigeon."

Don Felipe did not know that his daughter, confident that all Americans were as honorable as Bill Barnes and his crew, had just disclosed the hiding place of the little group to no less a person than the apelike Monk Morton himself.

The glory of that gray, scarlet, and silver uniform which he now wore as general and chief of the Rolivian air corps did not suffice to make Morton a more prepossessing-looking person than he was before. Rather it accentuated his bulging forehead, his cruel apelike jaws, his thick chest, and his long gorillalike arms, so that for a moment the girl was frightened.

Colonel Merner had prepared Monk Morton, however, and he was all affability to the slim *teniente* who stood there before him looking extremely trim but somewhat delicate in the breeches and blouse and boots of the Rolivian air corps.

"They tell me that you will be good enough to guide us to where we can aid our noble friend, Don Felipe," said Monk Morton in his high-pitched, raucous voice.

This praise of her father fell gladly on the girl's ears and drove from her any caution she might have felt.

"Yes, sir," she said in a low voice.

"And perhaps you would be good enough to go along with us and show us the exact place—" Monk Morton glanced at the stocky Colonel Merner—"our duties prevent us from going before nightfall," he added.

To this the young *teniente* acceded most willingly. She turned curiously as some rapid footsteps in the corridor heralded the presence of an orderly who came in and announced that a strange ship was circling the field and seeking for a landing.

"See who it is!" growled Monk Morton, jerking his head toward Merner.

Obediently the bull-necked colonel went forth. Monk Morton watched curiously as the silvery ship of foreign design settled on the landing field. Its lone occupant, a tall, thin, hawk-faced man, dark of skin and brilliant of eye was soon escorted into the office.

Every one had seemingly forgotten the young *teniente* who sat down unobtrusively on a corner of the window seat as the stranger was ushered in, carrying a small traveling bag which seemed very heavy.

The man divested himself of his flying togs and then stood in immaculate and well-cut tropical linens, appearing exceedingly neat and dapper. Before saying a word he studied both Merner and Monk Morton. There was something commanding about his appearance. Evidently he was a man accustomed to authority.

"I represent a powerful group," he said at last, "with which your people seem to be working at cross-purposes."

Monk Morton stared at him, waiting.

"Yes," said the man in flawless English; "it is a waste of energy for us to continue to fight each other." He pointed out toward the city limits where the firing could still be heard, although it had lessened in volume.

"Your group is behind this attack by the Indians?" Monk Morton's tone was a little scornful. "Well, we've stood them off pretty well, so far," he added unpleasantly.

"You are perhaps a little premature in taking pride in that," said the stranger composedly. "In handling men of a not very high order of intelligence it is

sometimes useful to give them a practical demonstration of their unfitnes to battle alone."

This statement was received in thoughtful silence.

"In other words you mean that you're letting these Indians take a beating to prove to them that they can't get along without your group?" asked Monk Morton.

"Exactly!" The stranger nodded. "And I might say that you and the group you represent do not appear to us as very serious enemies," said the hawk-faced stranger. "We control powers that can blot you out at any time we wish."

"Sez you!" growled Monk Morton, but his tone did not carry conviction.

"If you have any lingering doubts," said the stranger courteously, "a little demonstration can be arranged for you at any time."

"All right, all right!" returned Monk Morton impatiently. "Say for the sake of argument that you could clean up on us, what's on your mind?"

"It is like this——" said the stranger, but there came an interruption.

A PEREMPTORY knock at the door was followed by the entry of the stocky form and red face of Barry Crushing, 2nd, the young American banker who strode into the room confidently as one having a right to do so. It was plain to be seen that he was the most important man there, for Monk Morton, a little grudgingly, got up and gave him his own seat, explaining in a low voice what had taken place up to the moment of his arrival.

"All right, shoot!" said Barry Crushing brusquely.

The stranger studied him through narrowed eyes. One intensive glance seemed to be enough, for without further word the man reached to the floor, drew up his black bag, opened it, and laid out on the desk a square of some

heavy substance that gleamed dull yellow.

"My God, that's gold!" exclaimed Barry Crushing in an excited voice.

"Yes," said the stranger, "that is gold. A small sample of a huge store. It is some of that gold, in a sum that will stagger your imagination, that will be your reward for cooperating with us."

The room was silent as the three white men feasted their eyes greedily upon that gleaming square plate of pure yellow metal.

"How much?" asked the practical Barry Crushing.

"You mean how much is in the treasure or how much is in it for you?"

"Both!" barked Barry Crushing.

"There's reliably reported to be between fifty and sixty million dollars' worth of gold in the treasury, of which your share shall be five or six millions," said the stranger.

Barry Crushing pulled a cigar from his pocket, bit the end off and lighted it, his hands trembling slightly as he applied the match.

"What do you want us to do?" he asked.

"To cooperate with us in securing this treasure. We know it exists. We know also that only one man in the whole of South America knows where it exists. We want you to blot out the people who are protecting that man and to secure the person of that man and turn him over alive to us."

"Who is this guy?" asked Monk Morton.

"Don Felipe de la Fuente."

The name fell in that room like a bombshell, but unlike a bombshell left every one silent and amazed, nor did any of them note that the young *teniente* was in the window seat, half concealed by the huge, old-fashioned filing cabinet. The young *teniente* grew pale and receded further back on the window seat, trying to conceal himself.

"Now ain't that all nice and conven-

ient!" said Monk Morton. "Because we jest located the place where Don Felipe is hiding out along with that blankety-blank Bill Barnes!" Then Monk Morton suddenly recalled that Don Felipe's son was still in the room with them. He rose and strode to the window seat. Grasping the young *teniente* by the wrist he jerked him out into the room.

"Here is Don Felipe's son spying on us!" growled Monk Morton.

The hawk-faced stranger looked up sharply. "Don Felipe has no son," he whispered softly, but no one heard him, for at that moment the door opened and in stalked Toribio Fierro, his scarlet and gold uniform dusty and stained.

He halted as one astonished, his eyes fastening themselves upon the slim form of the young *teniente* standing there, white-faced, in the center of the group.

"So-o-o!" He twirled his mustache, his eyes fixed gloatingly on the girl's shrinking form. "So-o-o, here you are, my little *teniente*. If you gentlemen have no objection, I'll put this young man back in the arrest from which he escaped."

That seemed a good solution of the difficulty, and before the girl knew exactly how it happened, she was led out, turned over to two brutal-looking guards, shoved into the waiting motor car, and was being sped away to what destination she did not know, for Toribio Fierro whispered his directions to the driver.

Curious as to what this serious conference might portend, Fierro returned to the office. His eyes fell upon the square gold plate on the desk. Stalking up to it he lifted it. "So-o-o!" he said. "Inca gold!"

He was made briefly acquainted with the proposition. Like the others the sight of that gold decided him immediately. Then and there they went into a serious conference on ways and means. It was decided that the fighting would

be stopped immediately. It was further decided that all troops and Indians would be concentrated that night, and that under the cover of darkness the Valley of the Caves would be raided and Don Felipe captured while the men who were protecting him would be slaughtered.

When all was arranged, they rose. Barry Crashing turned to the self-assured, immaculately clad stranger:

"I didn't quite catch your name," he said out of the side of his mouth which did not hold the cigar.

The hawk-faced stranger nodded gruffly. "My name is Pacari Manco!" he announced.

XXI.—THE KNIFE.

THE CONFERENCE once ended, the men departed to their various tasks. Barry Crashing wasted no time in getting to the telegraph office where he sent off a radiogram, in code, to Morgan Catesby in New York, giving him a full report on the entire matter.

The reply came back in the course of several hours. Its brief message was typical of Morgan Catesby and his methods:

PLAY WITH MANCO GANG
UNTIL HIDING PLACE OF TREASURE
IS DISCOVERED STOP
PLAN TO SEIZE ENTIRE TREASURE
STOP AM HIRING SKILLED
PILOTS GUNNERS GUARDS STOP
SENDING IMMEDIATELY SIX
BOMBING PLANES NEWEST
TYPE SIX PURSUIT PLANES
WHICH LEAVE HERE TO-NIGHT

It was signed with the code word for Catesby's name.

The ideas of his chief fell in exactly with those that Barry Crashing had on the subject and he grunted his satisfaction at this complete accord. It was not in his code of ethics to permit what he called a greasy crowd of natives to get away with wealth so great and so

fabulous in extent as this treasure promised to be.

He was slightly disquieted when he received belated reports coming in through the day, reports which told of new forays by huge flights of those terrible death-dealing condors.

Word came from the neighboring country of Baria stating that all its border fortresses had been destroyed, its railroad centers bombed into uselessness and its arsenals crushed to dust.

The same news came in from Solania. Ruin and desolation had followed the path of the terrible condors. Strangely enough they did not appear over Rolivia, a matter which few people understood except that group which had been in conference in the office of the flying field.

Pacari Manco, when informed by Fierro of the news, nodded his head and smiled cynically. "That is only the beginning," he stated. "Much more will follow this."

Fierro gazed at him in vast respect, tempered by something of fear. His mind was torn between the desire to see the slim girl, Eugenia de la Fuente, and the necessity of his dancing attendance upon this strange new power which had appeared in Valverde in the person of Pacari Manco.

As for Eugenia, she had been placed in his apartment, and a guard set outside her room.

Her horror at the startling news she had overheard was only equaled by her helpless inability to take any action that might frustrate the terrible plan which involved her father.

The hours for Eugenia dragged through leaden-footed. A discreet servant brought her some lunch which she scarcely tasted, and the afternoon settled down to a slow and deadly monotony with its moments of keen anguish when she walked the floor, wringing her hands, trying in some way to reason out a workable scheme that

might effect her release and enable her to get word to Don Felipe.

The firing died out in the city and all became quiet except the shuffling of the innumerable feet of barefooted soldiers assembling near by, for what purpose she knew only too well. And then, as darkness came, the barefooted soldiery shuffled off into the night, followed by the clatter of horses' hoofs.

Later she heard the roar of airplane engines rising from the flying field and disappearing into the darkness and what this portended she also knew. The same suave and discreet servant came in and lighted the candle, but Eugenia shrank against their intrusive light as she paced the floor like some caged animal. She felt that she was failing her father in his hour of need and longed bitterly for a man's strength and a man's ability to surmount obstacles as she considered her helpless and hopeless position.

The city had grown silent with the departure of most of the soldiery and the officers. She feared the breaking of that silence. What horror fate had in store for her personally, she did not dare envisage. The candles cast shadows in the high-ceilinged room, a faint breeze stirring their flames so that shadows seemed to troop in and out of the dusk, and queer shapes formed and dissolved on the walls until she was sick at heart with the terror of the unknown.

Her nerves were drawn to such a taut pitch that she heard the first faint creak and scrape of some one climbing the balcony outside her room. She shrank back against the shadows on the wall as some dark shape loomed up in the balcony door. Its outlines obscured the starlight and the lights of the city gleaming behind it, and then in a second it had disappeared, and she knew that some one was in the room. The guttering candles had died down until naught remained except a tiny light cast by one unextinguished candle on the dressing

table. And even that flickered and went out as she crouched back in the darkness.

Somewhere in the room she heard the scrape of fabric against fabric. She was cold with horror and scarce dared to breathe as whoever it was trod cautiously about the place, evidently seeking her.

Suddenly she heard faint breathing near by. Then she nearly screamed aloud as a powerful, thin-fingered hand grasped her wrist.

She felt herself being dragged toward the center of the room. A match was struck. She had scarcely time to see the lean brown hand holding it before she heard a soft curse in the darkness as the match burned itself out and another one took its place.

Then her eyes dilated in horror.

For the flickering rays of the match shielded in some one's hands lighted up for a second and gleamed back upon the shining blade of a curved knife. Even in her terror she remembered having seen such a knife in a museum at Lima, a knife which was pointed out to her as being one of the ancient sacrificial tools of the ancient Inca priesthood.

IT WAS terrifying enough in all truth, but its terror was intensified when a candle was at last lighted and she gazed into the hard, bright eyes of the hawk-faced stranger who had landed at the flying field that day.

It was Pacari Manco who stood before her, Pacari Manco, the man who represented ruin to her and to her house. She did not know that in his eyes her existence represented a real danger to the blood from which he came and to the organization which he represented.

Like all members of that strange priesthood, Pacari Manco's heart and soul had been fortified by severe and arduous training against any evidence of weakness. He had made his escape

Toribio Fierro—master mind of a corrupt, power-crazy horde.



from the onerous company of Fierro, only to achieve one object. He had come there to cut her throat and thus end with one blow the danger which his house feared through this girl who, unknown to herself, represented the last of the true Inca blood.

To Pacari Manco it was simply a mat-

ter of common ordinary business precaution. The safety of his house was endangered so long as any real Inca blood remained abroad in the land. To him it seemed but the logical thing to do, to remove this menace as quickly as possible. Therefore had he climbed the balcony like any common house

thief, and he stood before her now, testing the edge of his knife, ready and more than willing to finish the job up as quickly as might be.

"I am giving you time to make a last prayer," he said in measured tones, "but you must be quick about it, for there are many things which require my attention this night."

Her hand went to her throat instinctively.

"You mean——" she breathed, "you mean that you are going to—to kill me?"

Even then, faced with that implacable man, his curved knife ready for the fatal stroke, the girl could not grasp the truth of the matter.

"I mean just that," stated Pacari Manco, level-voiced, "with you removed, every danger is gone that your foul brood will rise up again to plague me and my house."

The girl shrank back, gazing in horror-stricken fashion at the knife which he balanced in his hand.

"I trust you will meet your fate without any unnecessary outcry, like many of the daughters of your house who have perished under the knife!" he said, and with that he flung his arm free of the cloak that encircled him and advanced upon her as deadly, as efficient, and as remorseless as fate itself.

She screamed as he seized her by the shoulder and drew her forward. And then, mercifully enough, she fainted and knew no more.

THE DAY had dragged itself along slowly in that Valley of the Caves which sheltered Bill Barnes, his ships and his men, and which sheltered, as well, the lean, spare form of Don Felipe who paced his hiding place like some caged leopard.

For it had been agreed between Bill Barnes and himself that the intrepid North American aviator should sally forth at the first fall of darkness and

seek again to find what had become of that daughter of Don Felipe whom Bill Barnes had never seen except dressed as a youth in the uniform of an officer. And Barnes himself was worried, for in their conversation he had alluded briefly to the girl Dolores, she who had posed as Don Felipe's daughter and who proved to have been an imposter.

Don Felipe quickly set him right on the status of the mysterious Dolores, stating very frankly his belief that the unknown Spanish-American girl could have been no other than a spy in the employ of Morgan Catesby and his fell crew.

How much damage the girl Dolores had already accomplished, Barnes was unable to tell, but he had a very lively feeling that she had accompanied the transport planes and was on her way down to this place, strong in her capabilities of doing damage both on the way and after she arrived. His latest word, radioed from the transport planes, showed that they were making good progress, but he had no sort of guarantee that the girl would not, in some manner, interfere with their scheduled arrival.

The sentry upon the cliff above them had reported among other things the strange cessation of the fighting going on in the city. But he had not reported, because he could not see, the quiet mobilization of men and horses and airplanes which was taking place behind the shelter of buildings and trees within the city. Nor could he, after dusk, descry the slow, flowing movement of that great force which was pouring out quietly in the darkness to surround the Valley of the Caves.

With the fall of darkness, Bill Barnes ordered his ship brought forth, and with a farewell nod to Don Felipe, he strode forth, climbed into the cockpit, started his motor, and then rose aloft into the velvety blackness of the night, his goal the city of Valverde and that

strangely mysterious girl, the saving of whom had become a point of honor with him.

XXII.—CLASH OF SWORDS.

SO SWIFTLY did Bill Barnes rise and so high that he failed to perceive, not four miles from the valley's limits, that river of armed men which flowed silently along in the darkness. Nor was he aware of the presence of the airplanes of Monk Morton's force for the reason that they had risen under the cover of darkness and gone far northward with the intention of turning back at the hour set and striking unperceived from an unexpected direction.

The one thing that did puzzle Barnes was the comparative silence and the deserted air of the city when at last he floated over it, motor cut, and nothing but the faint clicking of his autogyro rotors disturbing the stillness of the night in his silent descent.

He had not wasted his time with Don Felipe, but had learned from him that the most logical place to seek for Señorita Eugenia would be Fierro's apartment. And he had learned the exact location of the residence of the minister of war. It was one of several buildings on a wide avenue that led down from the presidential palace and was easily distinguishable in the night by its superior height. And, as he had also learned, Toribio Fierro's apartment was on the northwest corner of the second floor.

There was a broad, parklike esplanade running down the center of the avenue, a space of thick turf and flower beds. It was among these that Bill Barnes landed in his phantomlike gray ship, settling down softly and, as he hoped, unseen in the shelter of the shrubbery.

The broad avenue was seemingly deserted except at the far end at the gates of the presidential palace where lounged a platoon of dismounted cavalry, their

horses tethered near by. Of pedestrians or of vehicles there seemed to be none, which was not strange, considering that the city was under martial law and that any night-farer was subject to instant execution were his credentials not satisfactory.

Giving a last look at his beloved ship, Bill Barnes walked quickly across the avenue, gazing about him alertly for any sign of prying eyes. The entrance of the rather palatial apartment house was guarded by two doormen, ornate as to uniform with the exception of their bare brown feet.

But shoeless or not, they were inquisitive and prying people who could report news of his presence and lead to his undoing, and Barnes avoided them. Moving carefully in the shadow of the building he went toward the corner above which loomed the balcony that he realized must give onto Fierro's apartment.

There were vines hanging from the balcony and an iron-barred window below it, but, at that, the place looked unscalable and unassailable.

He paused, somewhat nonplused, wondering why he had not perfected himself in the skill of the second-story worker. But these vain imaginings were quickly dissipated by a strange sound that broke upon the silence of the night.

It came from above and seemingly from one of the windows which gave upon the balcony.

To Barnes' ears it sounded like a moan of terror followed by a faint scream quickly repressed.

Whatever it was, it had the effect of electrifying him into instant action. Whence his skill came he knew not, but suddenly he found himself scrambling like a monkey up that iron-barred window and, like a monkey, swinging outward from a vine that curled below the balcony. Hand over hand he jerked himself upward until he was level with the balcony rail and over it.

Before him was an open window which gave into a room gloomy in the darkness, but with its darkness faintly relieved by the weak glimmering of a candle. The candle threw wavering shadows upon the wall. One shadow in particular was vast and somber. Its huge shape swayed and twisted against the wall, seeming, in truth, like some huge, cloaked vampire shape that wrought its evil alone in the semidarkness.

It occurred at that moment to Barnes that he had brought no weapon.

It occurred to him even more as he lightly entered the room, saw the gleam of a knife upraised over a recumbent shadow on the floor.

But this did not deter Bill Barnes. It seemed to him that his own voice rang forth without any volition on his part. It rang forth to good purpose, for its tones served to arrest that descending knife blade which gleamed so cruelly steellike in the guttering candlelight.

THE SHADOWY figure, dark and tall, swung about and faced him. For a second Barnes eyed it speculatively. But it was only a second that was allowed him, for the figure swung quickly and rapidly around the corner of the table which separated them. There was no word spoken, but the intention of that sinister figure was unmistakable.

To Barnes it was but the work of a second to pick up the nearest object at hand. In this case it happened to be a Chinese vase half filled with water and some tropical flowers. His actions were almost automatic in their celerity. Instantly the vase left his hands and was flung full and square into the face of the startled figure.

There was a thud as it struck and a crash as it broke into fragments on the marble-topped table. The figure staggered for a moment and placed its hand to its head as if in pain. But the pain

did not seem to be a decisive factor, for the figure came on, looming blackly against the candlelight, a strange curved knife gleaming in its hand.

Bill Barnes had been knifed once before in his hectic career. He did not like the sensation. It became axiomatic with him to meet steel with steel after that one experience. He gave back down the room, his eyes searching for the steel that should meet this oncoming knife. He found it ready to his hand in a pair of swords, bell-handled dueling *epees*, crossed in ornamental fashion against the wall. For all their slenderness they were strong, sharp-pointed blades, their bluish steel surfaces reflecting the light in such places as the rust had not attacked them. They were evidently part of the equipment of this Latin minister of war whose apartment he had invaded.

It was just what he wanted.

Certain that he had to deal with Toribio Fierro himself, Barnes grasped one of the swords and leaped backward just as the tall, shadowy figure sprang at him, knife in hand.

And then, automatically settling into the pose of the trained swordsman, Barnes flung one hand behind him and crouched with bent knees in the position of guard.

Before the menace of that glittering point the stranger recoiled. Then, as if sensing the uselessness of attempting to fight that length of steel with anything shorter, he dropped his knife to the top of the marble table and tore loose from the wall that other bell-hilted dueling sword.

To Bill Barnes it seemed such a scene as one reads about but seldom experiences. Here he was, a normal American citizen, trained, it is true, in the use of the sword, which is unusual, but nevertheless standing at sword's point with some total stranger high in an unknown apartment in a foreign city fighting to the death over the body of some

woman who might be dead for all he knew.

And that it was to be a fight to the death was made certain by the swift, impetuous attack of his unknown antagonist. The two blades rang together with the steely rasp that cried aloud that here were two swordsmen who knew their technique. In swift and brilliant sequence the stranger lunged in *quarte*, recovered before the lightninglike *riposte* of Bill Barnes' blade, and parried as swiftly in *tierce*.

There followed then such a brilliant succession of thrust and parry, lunge and recover, *riposte* and counter *riposte* as probably never had been witnessed in that normally staid city of Valverde.

To the finish!

Each man was not long in doubt that in his opponent he had met a skilled enemy. Again and again the thirsting point of each steel blade searched closely in proximity to some vital point of throat or chest. Again and again the blades slithered along each other only to recoil before a firm defense and a swift counter attack.

Neither man noticed that the silent figure half under the table had risen to its knees and was staring white-faced at the combat. Again the men failed to notice that the slim figure of the *teniente* had risen and had staggered back into the shadows, its dazed eyes beginning to return to normal as it watched the quick interplay of thrust and parry as the two blades rasped and whirred against each other, ringing musically in the silent night.

As they fought, the two antagonists were so nearly equal that a skilled *maitre d'armes* would have found grave difficulty in deciding between them.

It was the treachery of the soft rug on the polished floor that at last proved Bill Barnes' undoing. His left foot slid far behind him as he repulsed an attack, and in a second he was off balance.

In that second his enemy's point flick-

ered like a steel-tongued serpent at his throat.

A faint scream prevented the coupe de grâce. The scream was followed by a thud as one of the silver candlesticks on the table, hurled with the full force of a woman's arm, landed in the back of the enemy's head. He rocked on his feet for a second and the sword dropped from his nerveless fingers.

Barnes, obeying the instincts of a swordsman, which are, after all, the instincts of a gentleman, had made his recovery and stood poised, waiting for his opponent to recover his weapon.

He had not reckoned on the ungentlemanly instincts of women. For while he waited, a second candlestick followed the first. It was too much for the enemy. Bruised and shaken by these successive assaults from the rear, he lunged heavily across the room, lurched out to the balcony, swung himself over the rail, and slid down out of sight by the vines which clung there.

Bill Barnes brushed the perspiration out of his eyes and for the first time saw the slim figure of the individual whom he had known as Ricardo de la Fuente. Now that he saw her with her identity disclosed, he could not reason out why he had been deceived, for it seemed to him that femininity called from every curve of her slim person.

But she gave him little time to speculate on this. Breathless, she dashed toward him, seizing his elbow.

"Come!" she said desperately. "I have unintentionally disclosed my father's hiding place in the Valley of the Caves to Fierro and his men. Even now they march upon it to seize my poor father!"

In a lightning flash Barnes saw more than the seizure of her father. He saw the capture of his ships and the death of his men. Still carrying his sword in hand, he and the girl ran to the door of the apartment, flung it wide, and rushed out into the hallway. The sleepy

soldier on duty was bowled over by a sudden jolt from the hilt of the sword. In a few more seconds they had rushed past the startled doorman and were flinging themselves across the avenue toward the place where he had left his trusty little ship.

XXIII.—THE ATTACK.

IT HAD NOT been a particularly hard day for the men in the Valley of the Caves. They were relaxed now. And they were taking life easy around the fire they had built in the mouth of the cave, vacated by Bill Barnes' absent ship.

If the truth must be told, they were not particularly worried about Bill Barnes' absence, having a serene confidence in their young leader's ability to get himself out of any and all varieties of trouble.

As the night grew darker, the talk ran to this and that of their recent experiences and led to much speculation on the state of affairs in this strange South American country.

"I got a theory——" began Shorty Hassfurther.

"Theah yo' go again," interrupted Cy Hawkins; "blamed if Ah ain't skeered that theah mighty brain of youahs is goin' to blow up, whut with all the theories you cook up!"

"I got a theory," persisted Shorty Hassfurther, stubbornly, "that that Spanish jane that come trailin' in on us back on Long Island wasn't all she should 'a' been!"

"Them's harsh words, strangah," admonished Cy Hawkins.

"That ain't no way to talk about a pretty lady," reproved Red Gleason.

"What have you done with this old-fashioned and knightly chivalry of yours, Shorty?" inquired Beverly Bates.

"Whisht, noo!" Scotty MacCloskey's voice broke into the chorus. "Shorty is by way o' bein' richt. Ah could na'

help but ooverhear a wee scrap o' conversation atwix Barnes and the auld gentlemen, Doon Felipe. And ye have reason to distroost that wee slip o' a lassie who annooned that she was the dochter of the auld gentleman. She was na' more his dochter than is Shorty there!"

"Besides bein' a lot better-lookin' than Shorty," grunted Red Gleason.

"You mean to say she was a spy?" It was young Sandbag Sanders who spoke up. The youngster's eyes were round with astonishment. He had quickly fallen under the spell of the attractive Dolores and worshiped her in his boyish way.

"'Tis a har-r-rsh thing to be sayin' aboot a young gur-r-rl, laddies, but sooch seems to be the case!" stated Scotty MacCloskey in the silence that followed.

Young Sanders sat gazing round-eyed at the fire, his youthful dreams evidently badly shattered. It had the effect of making him unhappy, and, without being noted by any one, he drew back from the cheerful flames of the fire and strode out to the cave mouth.

A dark figure sat there on a stone near the entrance. It was Don Felipe staring out into the night, his eyes somber, as he awaited the return of Bill Barnes. Sandbag Sanders exchanged some greeting with the old man and then stood uncertainly on the turf outside the cave mouth.

It was dark in the valley. From behind him came the glow of the fire and the cheerful hum of voices, but after the news he had just heard he felt in no mood for the gayety of the campfire. At the same time he did not desire utter loneliness.

As he knew, there were two men on guard near the entrance of the valley, Henderson and Gardiner. But these were older men. Above him on the cliff, doing their tour of guard duty,

were the two youngest of the mechanics, Andy McCullough and Sammy Moore. They had but recently joined Bill Barnes' crew, and they listened more or less respectfully to the stories of his adventures that Sanders could embroider at his own free will.

It was a long and arduous climb up the valley and up the cliff by a narrow goat track which led to the top. But it was worth it, for at the end he knew he would find an appreciative audience.

It was certain that both Andy McCullough and Sammy Moore were cheered up at sight of him, for he had been through a variety of experiences with Bill Barnes' crew.

It was a little chill up there in the breeze blowing off the mountains, and Sanders was glad that he had brought his sheep-lined jacket as he sat there in the lee of a rock. Andy McCullough kept a careful watch down the length of the rock-strewn mountainside above the valley, and Sammy Moore, feeling the responsibility that rested upon him, stared ever and anon toward Valverde, the distant lights of which could be seen across the plain.

YOUNG Sanders added his eyes to theirs. It was in the middle of some recital of his prowess that he stopped and stared down toward the plain.

"Ain't that somethin' stirrin' down there?" he asked.

Both of the young mechanics followed the direction in which Sanders pointed. So long had they stared into the darkness and so many false alarms had they reported to each other that their eyes refused to register anything unusual.

"Oh, go on, Sanders, you're always seeing things!" said Sammy Moore.

Andy McCullough stared a little while. He thought he had seen a shadow moving in the velvety blackness of the plain below him, but the more he stared the less he could see, and at last he shook

his head and turned back to his companions.

"Go on, Sandbag, and finish that story about the time you and Bill Barnes were in the cave and about to have your heads cut off."

Such appreciation was indeed a tonic to young Sanders and, nothing loathe, he launched into a tale of his experience on that wild expedition to a strange volcanic crater in Alaska. If his hearers gained the impression that young Sanders had saved the whole situation by his superior wit and courage, it was probably due more to his manner of telling than any desire on his part to embroider what was an already colorful tale.

His voice droned on. Both Sammy Moore and Andy McCullough listened avidly, but their attention was suddenly distracted by a distant sound, and silence fell on the group.

It was a sound with which they were well acquainted—the distant humming of airplane propellers.

"Maybe it's Bill Barnes returning," suggested Sanders, listening.

"Nope!" Andy McCullough shook his head. "I'd know the roar of that bumblebee in a thousand."

"Besides," added Sammy Moore, "that's more than one ship—sounds like half a dozen."

"Blamed ef it don't!" admitted young Sanders, and he rose from his place to listen more intently. "Boy! And ef they ain't comin' this way, I'll eat my hat! I'm goin' to dust down and tell Red Gleason."

With that he plunged toward the cliff edge and slid and scrambled rapidly down the narrow goat track, landing at the bottom, a little bruised and full of gravel, but otherwise none the worse for wear. He streaked it for the cave mouth and broke in upon the group around the fire.

"Red!" he called. "There's a whole fleet of ships sailin' down this way! Do

you s'pose it might be Monk Morton's gang comin' to shoot us up?"

Red Gleason looked up, a worried frown on his face. He had a certain degree of confidence in the youngster who was always prowling around. Without a word he arose from the fire and followed young Sanders. In another moment they were both standing at the cave mouth, listening, their nerves and muscles tense.

The intervening cliff walls kept out the distant throb of the motors. But Red Gleason heard another sound that turned him about to face down the valley.

It was the sound made by some one running rapidly. In another few seconds Gardiner, panting and breathless, came into view.

"That you, Red?" he called in the semilight, and then came to a halt. "Say, there's something funny going on down there at the mouth of the valley. Henderson and me, we've seen what looked like a bunch of men stealing up from the plain. Then we heard a clink of metal like bayonets or something. Henderson is coming back slow, watching them, while I ran up to give you the word."

"All right!" said Gleason. "Hustle into your cave and get your guns off your ship!"

With that Gleason turned and ran back into the cave. "Kick out that fire!" he commanded sharply. "All of you swarm to your ships, dismount your machine guns, and load up and git ready. I think the spigotties are about to gang up on us!"

Swiftly and silently the men about the fire jumped to their feet, stamped out the embers, and sped to their ships. There was a few minutes swift work as they dismounted the machine guns. By that time Henderson had arrived and verified the news.

There was a force stealing up the valley silently and secretly. There were

several hundred men at least, Henderson stated.

"Sandbag," Red Gleason turned to the youngster, "get yourself a couple of landin' flares out of one of the ships, beat it up that trail to the top of the cliff. Run along the cliff till you get about halfway the length of the valley. Then heave one flare down, and let 'er burn out. When she's burned out, heave another one. Make it snappy!"

IMMENSELY thrilled with the responsibility of his job, young Sanders streaked it to the nearest ship, drew forth the landing flares, and hurried to scramble up the cliff, leaving behind him a high degree of swift activity as pilots and mechanics dismounted machine guns and set them up in the cave mouths.

All was silent in the valley, but there was a nervous tension in the air, and one had the feeling that the lower part of the valley was alive with creeping men.

Young Sanders, panting and breathless, reached the cliff top. Both Sammy Moore and Andy McCullough were peering through the darkness, listening to the increasing roar of those airplane engines which were now within a few miles. With scarcely a word to them young Sanders raced down to a point on the cliff some three hundred yards above where the cave mouths yawned below in the valley.

Once there he peered into the velvety darkness of the deep valley yawning beneath him, but could discern nothing, although his excited imagination peopled the depths below him with all sorts of fantastic beings. With fumbling fingers he removed the magnesium flare from its tin container, ignited it, and threw it out as far as he could into the valley.

The magnesium blazed up into a brilliant yellow glow that lighted up every nook and cranny and fold of ground in

the narrow valley. And young Sanders gasped at what he saw.

For the entire lower end of the valley seemed to be filled with creeping figures who rose startled as the light suddenly disclosed them. They were jammed from wall to wall, green-clad soldiers, rifles in hand.

At that second the cave mouths roared into life as the machine guns began to snarl. The hollow of the caves behind them accentuated and deepened the rattling chorus until it seemed that there were hundreds of guns fired instead of the few that were actually there.

The effect was startling. The close-packed soldiery, subjected to that pitiless hail of death, turned backward like a panic-stricken herd, clawing and trampling at their fellows to find safety in the rear. In a few seconds the lower end of the valley was converted into a shambles, with the survivors screaming in terror as they surged in a boiling stream out of the place of death.

The machine guns ceased their clatter, and all became silent except for the cries of the wounded and dying far below. The magnesium flare settled slowly to earth under its parachute, still giving a brilliant light, however, which effectually showed up the destruction that had been caused.

In the comparative silence Sanders heard the ever-deepening roar of those strange airplanes, but with it he heard a new sound, the familiar thunder of an engine that he knew, and he was not surprised when after a moment a trim, small plane darted overhead. He rose on the cliff's edge and waved to Bill Barnes above him, his figure reflected in the light from the magnesium flare below. In another few seconds Bill Barnes had banked and wheeled and was dropping down to a landing.

A slim figure in uniform climbed out of the plane.

"Look after her, Sandbag!" yelled Bill Barnes above the roar of his motor.

The slim figure in uniform came toward the youngster. The small plane roared into increased life and sailed upward into the sky, heading toward the north.

XXIV.—ABOVE THE VALLEY.

YOUNG Sanders forgot his duties and the magnesium flares for the moment as the slim young officer came up to him. He was trying to figure out what Bill Barnes had meant by saying, "Look after her," but the first words of the newcomer explained it.

"I am Señorita Eugenia de la Fuente," she said, putting forth a slim hand. And then she asked in a worried voice: "My father, he ees all right, ees he?"

It took Sanders a moment to realize that it was of Don Felipe whom she spoke.

"Yes, miss," he said; "he was all right ten minutes ago, safe as could be down there in the cave. Say, they certainly tore the stuffing out of the gang down the valley there. Look at 'em!"

He pointed down to where the magnesium flare was beginning to splutter and die out. There seemed to be no movement in the valley, and he decided to withhold his second and only remaining flare until the time was more propitious. The light below spluttered and went out, leaving the valley in darkness, much to Red Gleason's disgust.

He rose from his machine gun and looked about him. The only two men not engaged were Don Felipe and the young Latin-American, Diego de Toledo.

"Listen, Mr. Toledo, would you mind chasing up the cliff with a couple more flares and tellin' young Sanders to keep 'em burnin'?" Red was busy abstracting the necessary flares from the fuselage of his ship in the rear as he talked.

The young Latin-American took them with a bow. "Glad to be of service."

he said and was gone into the darkness, scrambling up that narrow track that brought him up to the cliff top at last.

At the cliff edge he found young Sammy Moore and Andy McCullough who were gazing off into the upper air, trying to pierce that veil of darkness that hid Bill Barnes' movements.

Something was happening up there without a doubt, for the steady drone of the motors had begun to vary and there were faint glows crisscrossing the sky like vague, luminous fingers. Borne faintly down on the breeze came the distant chatter and snarl of machine guns.

"Señor Sanders, he is here?" asked the young Solanian.

The two watchers pointed farther down the cliff.

Young de Toledo had quickly covered the distance, finding not one person, but two there, in the gloom. Puzzled, he called for Sanders and gave him his instructions as he handed over the flares.

"Sure, Mr. Toledo," said Sanders and started to the cliff's edge. Then suddenly remembering the proprieties, he called back over his shoulder: "Meet Mr. de Toledo, Miss de la Fuente!"

Igniting his flare, Sanders hurled it out over the valley where it began gracefully to float to earth, lighting up the far recesses of the cañon. What Sanders saw then sobered him, for he caught the gleam of light on field-gun muzzles and caissons being unlimbered behind a projection of the rocky wall. Deciding that it would be best to report this, he called loudly for Sammy Moore, who came running down from his position above.

"Beat it down, Sammy, and tell Red Gleason that the spiggoties are settin' up some cannon around the turn of the valley!" he called excitedly.

Sammy needed no second telling but was off at a run and was soon scrambling down the valley with his message.

While this was going on, Diego de Toledo had bowed very formally to the

girl in her trim uniform, and the two were quickly deep in conversation in their own language, seeming oblivious of all that went on about them.

In the light from the flare Sanders saw the field guns shoved forward by hand under cover of a rocky ledge that extended far out into the valley. The green-clad gunners heaved and hauled, working feverishly to lay their guns. A cold fear possessed Sanders, for he had sense enough to know that the explosion of those shells could do deadly damage within the confined walls of the cave mouths. He looked along the edge of the cliff. The guns were about a hundred yards farther down the valley. It would be no trick at all to drop a bomb or two among their crowded personnel.

But how to get bombs? He remembered Andy McCullough and yelled to him. In a few more seconds Andy, nodding sagely, was off and down the cliff's side, hurrying at full speed.

Sanders turned his attention back to the guns. Two of them were in place, and the gunners were leveling off their pieces and fixing the spade trails into the soil. Two more guns were being shoved into place. Behind them in the shadows ammunition details were coming forward with shells. A stout officer with field glasses was giving orders.

Sanders craned his neck watching for the return of Andy McCullough. Slow minute dragged after slow minute, and he feared from second to second that the gunners would complete their preparations and unloose a volley of screaming shells. But they continued to adjust their pieces. Now the third gun was in position, and its men stood by while the crew of the fourth gun heaved and shoved and strained at the heavy piece of metal.

Would Andy McCullough ever return! Sanders peered through the darkness, straining his eyes.

Some one came through the dusk.

With a glad shout, Sanders ran forward and took the heavy cylindrical object from Andy's hands. Together the two of them hurried down the cliff to a point just above the battery. The gunners stood by. Their captain was barking out some order. The first salvo was on the point of being unloosed.

IT WAS A heavy thing, that bomb, and could not be thrown very far, but Sanders knew that its fragments striking against the cliff bottom would bound outward and create enough damage.

Exerting every ounce of his strength he reached back and hurled the heavy object out into the valley, nearly losing



There she stood—regal, beautiful daughter of the Dons—Eugenia!

his footing in the attempt. Then jerking Andy McCullough down on the ground beside him, they waited for a second that seemed to take forever.

The ground trembled underneath them. They heard a mighty roar. Fragments of rock and steel spouted up from the depths below. When the rain of debris ceased a little, young Sanders crawled forward and peered over the edge.

The bomb had wreaked fearful havoc. The two nearest guns were overturned, the third gun was jarred from its position. Screams and groans were coming from dark forms on the ground. The men in the rear were scuttling down the valley, gazing upward and backward over their shoulders, fearful of another one of those terrible instruments.

"Go get another bomb, Andy, in case they start somethin' else!" called Sanders, and Andy hurried back the way he had come.

As he disappeared into the darkness, Sanders lifted his head and listened to the faintly borne chatter of machine guns high in the air to the northward. A worried frown creased his forehead as he realized that must be Monk Morton's gang that Bill Barnes was tackling.

After Barnes had dropped off the passenger that had been such an extra weight in his tiny plane, he rose with all the speed of which his ship was capable and darted forward into the night to hold off that formation of ships, the distant glow of whose motor exhausts he had seen in the darkness.

It was a great temptation to Barnes to attack directly the dark cluster of flying shapes marked by pink-and-blue flames stabbing from motor exhausts. But his first concern was that his own men should know of the grim menace of those speeding wings in the blackness. Climbing many thousand feet above them at full throttle, unobserved, he dived low behind the high hills which shielded the Valley of the Caves.

Whipping his Very pistol from its socket he fired a warning signal, but even as the red-and-green balls hung in the air he was banking to give unique battle to the oncoming formation of enemy ships. It was well that he did so, for Bill Barnes could not know that toward every eminence surrounding the valley a thousand rifles and a score of guns were climbing, making ready to loose a hurricane of molten lead and steel in a massacre of his men and the splintering of his planes.

Bill Barnes' warning, bursting as he neared the vague shadows of dark wings, produced the exact effect which his quick mind had anticipated. The formation scattered. This was the kind of fighting Monk Morton's men liked, odds of six to one. Because of the darkness and shadows the silhouettes were not clearly distinguishable—and that was part of Bill Barnes' plan. Under, over, through the center of the sextet of scattered planes Bill Barnes maneuvered at full throttle.

The enemy guns could only grope at the vague, tantalizing shadow as it spun, climbed, and dived among them; their slow burst of fire could not concentrate on this elusive, shadowy will-o'-the-wisp. Suddenly a sky torch blazed red and brilliant like a scarlet sweep of a Titan painter's brush against the black velvet curtain of the night. Bill Barnes chuckled. He had so confused the Morton crew in their crazy dog-fight contortions that he had led one of the enemy planes into a cross fire from two other Morton ships. The effect was demoralizing. At a signal from the enemy leader the five planes spread over the black heavens in retreat. It would take some time for the formation to re-assemble in the inky skies.

There was a reason why Bill Barnes had not used his guns in that marvelous bit of sky strategy. He sensed that he would need every last bullet in the strip threaded through his gun feed and

the reserve strips besides, for, as he had glanced back, in the valley where his Very signal was falling, his quick eye had detected the somber shadows of long columns of men creeping up to the rims which surmounted the Valley of the Caves.

He hoped against hope that young Sanders would have sense enough to lead the girl down into the valley and into the shelter of the caves before they were surrounded and captured. But his work up here in the air was not yet completed. There was danger of Monk Morton's fleet reassembling and returning again to attack his loyal crew.

Again he darted aloft, and again he went through that brilliant series of swift maneuvers so that his swift plane appeared here, there, and everywhere until Monk Morton's crew did not know whether they were being attacked by one or by several enemy ships.

Like a shepherd dog driving his charges before him, Bill Barnes nipped in at one flank and then another of Monk Morton's flight until suddenly the entire half-reassembled formation swerved and put on speed, heading for the safety of the Valverde flying field with its encircling protection of anti-aircraft guns.

Barnes followed for a short distance until he was certain that they were driving blindly for home, and then he banked steeply and turned back, hoping that those toiling columns of dark and somber figures had not yet reached the cliff edge on which he had left Sandbag Sanders and the girl whom he had rescued from Fierro's apartment.

XXV.—PRISONERS.

BACK ON the edge of the cliff, young Sanders awaited the return of Sandy McCullough with that other bomb and meanwhile watched below in the valley for new signs of enemy activity.

BB—6

From behind him in the darkness came the low murmur of voices as Diego de Toledo and Don Felipe's daughter developed a fast-ripening friendship.

All was quiet in the valley so far as Sanders could see. He gazed to the northward where the chatter of machine-gun fire had died down, but as he looked he saw a flaming red streak pass athwart the sky and go hurtling to earth. Fear clutched his heart for a moment that it might be Bill Barnes' ship gone down in flames, but then his dogged and unwavering confidence in his hero returned to give him new courage.

He peered into the dark sky curiously as he heard the throb of many airplane motors passing far to the right. The pink-and-blue flames of their exhausts came swimming into the field of his vision. They seemed to be headed for Valverde, and somehow the sight comforted him as the exhaust glows lessened in the distance.

So intent was he upon the sky that he neglected the territory nearer at hand, and he did not hear the faint scrape of leather and metal against stone to his left.

The low murmur of the voices of the two young Latin-Americans kept up its musical flow. So intent were they in this new-found friendship that they seemingly had eyes and ears for nothing else but each other.

Sanders turned his attention back again to the valley. The flare that he had last thrown in was fast dying out and, true to his orders, he ignited another and hurled it far out, lighting up the valley again with its yellow light.

He was intent upon this, although he might have seen in its rays, before it sank below the crest, that coming toward him on the cliff edge was a group of creeping shadows.

The light dropped below the edge of the cliff, again the plateau was in darkness, and Sanders stared intently at the valley floor looking for new signs of

enemy activity. There seemed to be none. Far up ahead he could see the cave mouths yawning dark and mysterious in the shadow, and he well knew that the muzzles of those trusty machine guns were poked out ready to hurl their rain of death onto any interloping forces below in the valley.

He was startled by a slight scream from behind him. He turned in time to see that the night was alive with dark figures. He was surrounded with a ring of bayonets. Some one jerked him roughly forward and tied his hands. Bewildered and half dazed by the suddenness of it, he was shoved forward to join two other similarly bound figures in the darkness.

They were Diego de Toledo and the girl Eugenia, both of them tense and silent as their enemies hurried them down the plateau toward the foot of the valley. The place seemed to be crowded, and Sanders, in spite of his fright at his sudden capture, cursed himself bitterly that he was unable to send some kind of a warning to the men below, waiting in the caves, unconscious of this new danger.

As the three prisoners were hurried down toward the mouth of the valley, Sanders heard the distant hum of a motor and saw approaching the faint red-and-bluish glow of a motor exhaust. His captors hurried him too rapidly for him to see much more, but he hoped against hope that it was Bill Barnes returning.

And his hope was rapidly being realized, for Barnes had put on full power and his tiny plane was literally hurtling through space as he tried to get back in time to prevent just what had happened.

As his ship darted toward the plateau, he made ready to drop a landing flare, and as he reached the place the flare opened out and sailed outward, casting a yellowish light over the plateau surface.

What Bill Barnes saw in this light was enough to make him bank and swerve sharply and to depress his gun muzzles as he returned at reduced speed. His guns snarled a hymn of hatred, their tracer bullets leaping down into those close-packed clumps of men which swarmed over the rocky ground below him. Back and forth he went, his guns chattering in insensate rage, his speedy plane covering the area as swiftly as a darting hawk, his bullets spurting death and destruction.

Rifles barked at him spasmodically, and from the farther slope of the plateau a machine gun chattered back, its flashes showing red in the darkness. He dived at this, silencing the thing with one well-placed burst.

So swiftly did his death-dealing ship dart back and forth, spitting its leaden stream, that the men upon the plateau became demoralized and fled hither and yon like frightened ants when some one has kicked through the top of the anthill.

Officers shouted out commands in an effort to bring order out of chaos, but every return trip of that terrible, swift little ship brought a new access of terror, until sheer panic gripped the hearts of all of them and they scattered down toward the plain, fleeing for their lives. In a few minutes the place was cleared of the living and unwounded.

It was then that Bill Barnes turned his attention to the opposite side of the valley, darting over there to drop another flare and repeat his maneuver. This place was almost equally crowded, but it took him scarcely ten minutes to create as great havoc on the far side of the valley as he had on the near side. It was then that he had turned his attention down to the mouth of the valley and the black masses which seemed to be concentrated there.

He had now to husband his ammunition, for it was running low, but with his few remaining bursts he plowed into

the closely packed groups of men stretched along the plain with good effect before he swooped back to the Valley of the Caves.

AFTER MAKING a swift, darting flight over the surrounding cliff tops Bill Barnes decided to risk landing below to get once more in touch with his men and to replenish his ammunition. It was a risky undertaking, for once down there, he might find it impossible to rise, and, should the enemy return to hold the surrounding cliff tops, he would be bottled up below with his men and helpless to do anything but wait for death to strike them down.

But it was a risk that must be taken. Casting a last glance around, he dived down into the valley, coming to a landing close to the cave mouths.

His men quickly swarmed out at sight of the familiar ship. His first question was for the girl and Sandbag Sanders. His face grew grim as he heard the news that they had not come down into the valley. He was certain that they must be captured or, even worse, the horrible thought struck him that he might have shot them down in his own attack against those holders of the plateau above the cliffs. But there was little time to spend in idle speculation. Even as he gave orders for ammunition to be brought, a rifle spat from down the valley, its bullet thudding into the cliff above them.

Dark figures showed below them toward the mouth of the valley. It was Cy Hawkins who sent a warning stream of bullets speeding over the valley floor which had the effect of silencing the rifle for the moment, but Bill Barnes glanced apprehensively up at the cliffs above.

"Red," he turned to Gleason, "get Cy Hawkins' plane out immediately, and put Don Felipe in as passenger. I'm going after the headquarters of all this evil, and only he knows where it is.

I can't take you all, for we wouldn't have time to get out of here. Before starting, I'll take a look around for Sanders and the girl and Toledo after I get out of the valley.

"Make it snappy, Cy!" he yelled. "Follow me up, and I'll protect your flight. You'll have to stay here, Red, until I return. I don't think they can get you out of here for the time being, if you keep a sharp lookout. So long!" And he was in his cockpit and spiraling aloft as Cy Hawkins' machine was being pushed out and the motor started.

Bill Barnes' small plane rose like a falcon above the cliffs, and he darted now first on one side and then on the other while Cy Hawkins' engines roared into life below and he and Don Felipe climbed into the ship.

In another minute Hawkins' plane rose over the top of the valley. Barnes darted down near him waving him to follow. A very definite plan was in Bill Barnes' mind. Figuring out the time that had elapsed since he left Eugenia de la Fuente in Sanders' charge to the time he had returned, he reasoned that the prisoners, providing they were still alive, would probably be sent under escort back on the road that led to Valverde.

Flying low, he followed along the winding track of this road, its twisting course showing up faintly white in the darkness of the night. Cy Hawkins followed close at his tail and was quickly apprised by Bill Barnes through Morse code flashes of his riding lights the object of this low, careful flight.

Some two miles from the valley's mouth they came up to a farmhouse on the side of the road around which there seemed to be much activity. Orderlies came and went, and the house was brightly lighted. Barnes reasoned that this must be the headquarters of the attacking force and, swooping low, he circled the place. Several rifles barked at him from a group of soldiers at the

gate, but he was afraid to loose a burst of fire for fear of endangering the lives of the three prisoners.

A careful scrutiny of the place provided by his successive spirals showed no signs of any of the three prisoners, and at last he rose and, followed by Cy Hawkins, set out above the road to Valverde.

Behind him from an upper window of a darkened room in the farmhouse young Sanders waved wildly and hammered with his bound hands on the glass, trying to attract his attention. And Sanders' heart sank as he saw his leader's ship at last give up the search and head off into the darkness. The youngster turned, tears in his eyes, and broke the news to Eugenia and young de Toledo.

XXVI.—IN DEADLY PERIL.

BELOW THEM, in the big kitchen of the farmhouse, the lights had quickly been put out upon the arrival of the strange planes. Toribio Fierro was there and Pacari Manco, the nephew of the Inca high priest. Barry Crushing was back in Valverde, keeping a discreet distance from the scene of fighting, but it was plain to be seen that the actual command was in the hands of Pacari Manco.

Toribio Fierro, the minister of war, was angry and mortified at all the failures that had so far attended his efforts to capture Don Felipe and to slaughter the men who guarded him. Pacari Manco preserved an astute silence, simply shrugging his shoulders at the outburst from his associate.

The arrival of Bill Barnes' questing plane interrupted their conference for the time being, but the mere fact that it had arrived was fuel to Fierro's wrath and even made the tall, hawk-faced Pacari Manco thoughtful as they lighted the lamps once more.

"It is plain to be seen, señor, that

we are getting nowhere!" commented Manco softly.

"*Madre de Dios!* It is devils we are fighting against, not men!" swore the minister of war. "We tried a surprise attack and they killed hundreds of our men. We tried artillery against them, and they wrecked an entire battery. We tried outflanking them from above, and this fiend of a Bill Barnes returns and shoots down our men as one slaughters flies. Where that swine of a Morton is, I don't know, but his airplanes are no good to us. If we could only get Bill Barnes and render him harmless once and for all! We shall never be able to seize Don Felipe as long as that brute hovers around here in the air."

"But he no longer hovers around here in the air," said Manco in the same quiet voice. "He is departed in the direction of Valverde. I have a plan by which we can take instant advantage of his absence."

"And what is that, señor?" Toribio Fierro looked up hopefully.

"It is this. Send immediately a heavy detachment of engineers up onto the cliff edge above the mouths of the caves. If they work quickly they can plant a series of heavy charges of high explosive along and just in the rear of the edge. Let them string the wire and retire before this man Barnes returns. Then let the charges be detonated immediately. The resulting explosion will topple over the upper part of the cliff wall down to where it will completely block the cave mouths and imprison the men who serve those machine guns."

"But we've got to capture Don Felipe alive," interrupted Toribio Fierro; "how'll we get him out?"

"You have not let me finish," explained Manco. "Simultaneously we will send a detachment of men whom I will lead to a point some three miles from here——" Manco came to a pause, studying the map before him.

"And what will you do there, señor, with those men?"

"There is another entrance to those caves, a secret entrance," returned the hawk-faced man, preoccupied with his map.

"So-o-o!" Fierro rose, possessed of new confidence. "We will have them like this!" And he clenched his hand as though squeezing something.

Fierro paced the floor. "But what of the girl upstairs?" he asked at last.

"Oh," returned the hawk-faced man absently, "we will save her for a final argument by which to make Don Felipe do our bidding once we have captured him."

"*Bueno!*" Fierro twisted his mustache and shouted for an orderly. "Now we must move quickly," he said, "so as to accomplish the task of blowing in the cliff top before Barnes returns!"

In the meantime "that terrible Barnes" was pursuing his search right up to the city of Valverde itself, swooping low to investigate every party of people he saw on the road with the aid of a broad-beamed searchlight. It was disappointing, for naturally they found no trace of the prisoners. He even made a circuit of the grim prison walls of San Juan. Don Felipe, sitting in the rear cockpit of Cy Hawkins' following plane, looked down impassively on those grim walls where he had twice stood before a firing squad.

Shaking his head, at last Barnes gave up the search, hoping that nothing would happen to the prisoners while he was attempting to strike at the heart of all this evil and to investigate the mystery of this strange Valley of the Wings of Death.

FLYING low and close to Cy Hawkins' plane, Barnes motioned to him to lead the way. Cy Hawkins turned inquiringly to Don Felipe, who pointed up a mountain pass leading up into the Andes toward the southwest.

Throttling down his plane to conform to Cy's less speedy one, the two ships pursued their course.

As they climbed up the valley their altimeter needles rose steadily. Ahead of them was a high ridge at the top of which they ran into a raging snow-storm, and they flew very low, not fifty feet above the ground in order to be sure of visibility.

Once over the ridge they found themselves still climbing as Don Felipe pointed out the way.

They had proceeded several miles against a terrific head wind so that although their ships registered speed close to two hundred miles an hour, it took them nearly half an hour to make ten miles.

Once or twice particularly violent air shafts dropped them suddenly so that they were hard put to save themselves from crashing. The wings and fuselage seemed literally to groan under the terrible strain of the descending air current.

Luckily they were soon out of the snowstorm, but they struck treacherous cross winds, and twice they found themselves going sideways even faster than they were going ahead.

It grew terribly cold in this high pass, and Barnes was worried, wondering if his nose was freezing. Blank and desolate, the snow-capped mountains stretched away, rising before them until the two planes seemed like tiny insects venturing into the desolation of a burned-out planet. The storm raged around them as they climbed steadily higher toward the top of the pass. They were up now to 24,000 feet.

Barnes himself began to feel noticeable symptoms of a lack of oxygen in the air. Only too well he knew those symptoms, always preceded by a sort of deafness, followed by a multitude of black specks floating before the eyes while the sky began to appear dark and gloomy. If it was allowed to go much

further he knew that unconsciousness would follow.

Luckily Bill Barnes had equipped his planes, with oxygen tanks and the motors were equipped, as well, with superchargers to allow for the rarity of the atmosphere.

As they climbed steadily, Barnes connected his supercharger and then took a good whiff from his oxygen tube which had an immediate effect. His motor, which had seemingly been running silently, suddenly burst into a full-throated roar, the sky turned into a beautiful dark blue, and he could actually feel strength flowing into his arms and legs again.

Ahead of him he saw Cy Hawkins going through the same experience and noted that Don Felipe was being shown the oxygen container and the method of using it.

It was with a breath of relief that they began to descend on the far side of the pass, only to find their troubles beginning afresh.

Don Felipe motioned them up a narrow valley to the right. When Cy Hawkins suggested taking the broader way, the old man shook his head, shouting out something about the "Wings of Death." Cy turned his plane up the narrow valley and began to climb once more. There followed a dizzying nightmare of twisting, climbing, and turning up that cañon.

Cy Hawkins hugged the wall on his right. The cañon opened a little, and he executed a climbing turn with motor full open, Bill Barnes following each move. From the position of the throttle lever, the angle of the plane, and the air speed, Barnes knew they were climbing strongly, but suddenly the altimeter showed a rapid descent.

Cy Hawkins spun his plane to the left and started another climbing turn. They had struck a down current.

Fine snow was blowing off the cliffs and peaks near by, making visibility ex-

tremely poor. Ahead of them was another ridge. Cy Hawkins' plane topped it. And then it suddenly disappeared from view.

Barnes nosed along cautiously until he topped the ridge as well, and suddenly he pulled the throttle shut as some mighty force seemed to seize the plane and hurl it downward.

Below him he saw Cy Hawkins striving to right himself, and to his horror he found that they were descending into a cloud-filled pit. It would have been impossible to have circled in that pit and come back. There was just one narrow channel of clear air and that was next to the steep slope down which they were driving.

Down and down they dropped more than 6,000 feet to the floor of the valley.

FEAR CAME to Barnes that there might not be anything but clouds in the cañon, but he gave a sigh of relief as he found that there was a ceiling of a little over a hundred feet. On each side were the black cañon walls spotted with patches of ice. He knew that those walls extended more than two miles in height and that the clouds were almost solidly packed and undoubtedly extended higher.

There was only one thing to do, and that was to fly down the cañon, trusting that the air was open all the way along the bottom. And this Cy Hawkins was doing. There was only one reassuring thing, and that was the fact that the motors roared along as smoothly as ever. But it struck Bill Barnes that this thing was going to get worse before it got better.

Time seemed to drag slowly, and conditions were still the same. Flying warily, they passed the opening to another cañon, but Barnes observed that ahead of them the clouds dropped completely to the floor of the valley. They were approaching the wall of cloud very rapidly.

Cy Hawkins edged over to the right, and his wing got perilously close to the rocky wall. He gave his engine full throttle. Suddenly he rolled his plane to the right with its wings straight up and pulled the stick hard back into his stomach. Bill Barnes was quick to follow his maneuver and the two planes whirled about in a sickening, shuddering sort of a turn with the opposite cañon wall flashing by not fifteen feet from their landing gears.

Catastrophe hovered close.

The two ships quivered and sank, dropping heavily from loss of flying speed, but both pilots kicked bottom rudder and righted themselves before they struck. They headed up the cañon again, but Don Felipe shook his head and pointed back. Again the two ships made one of those terrible nerve-shattering turns and were on their way back down the cañon again. Twice they had whipped around in a space that could not have been more than four or five times the width of the wings, and each time they had missed the cañon wall by a narrow margin.

By now the cañon had narrowed. Cy Hawkins, throttled down to the lowest speed at which he could maintain his flight, was nosing along ahead. Bill Barnes was following along not more than twenty-five yards in the rear.

Suddenly to Bill Barnes' horror he saw Cy Hawkins' ship literally pulled sideways and disappear from view into what seemed a great void in the cañon wall.

With the speed of thought, Barnes leaped his plane upward, throwing on full power. The tiny ship quivered for a second or two as if it would follow, and then it kicked loose from that force, whatever it was, and shot upward. In a few more seconds Barnes rose out of the fog, the cañon walls widened, and he came to where another valley opened on the left. Horrified over Cy Hawkins' disappearance and hoping to find

him or what remained of him, he swung to the left, following this larger valley as it broadened out.

The valley continued to swing to the left. He looked across and could see the wall of rock into which Cy had been drawn. And then Barnes gasped as he glanced downward and realized what lay below.

He was flying at not more than four or five hundred feet above the floor of the valley when he saw the cave entrance far below him. It was evidently a natural cave, but it had been built up with masonry by the hand of man, and it gave Barnes a queer thrill to see human handiwork in this God-forsaken spot.

He flew lower, peering at what seemed to be flat-roofed buildings on the floor of the valley, when suddenly a string of black blossoms burst into flower to the right of his wing tip, and he heard the unmistakable thudding boom of Archie explosions and felt his plane tremble to the force of their impact.

It occurred to him suddenly that this must be the Valley of the Wings of Death.

He shot upward and put on speed, heading for the narrow exit to the valley at the farther end.

The Archie shells followed him along closely, in well-laid bursts, so that he put on full speed, heading straight for that narrow gate which marked the exit to the valley.

It was probably his terrific speed that saved his life for the moment.

For as he darted with bulletlike speed through that narrow cañon, dark shapes rose up from the floor below and from the walls on either side, hurling themselves at him, their great wings almost brushing his plane as he darted through. There was the crash of a mighty explosion, and he felt his ship hurled out through that rocky gate and falling, falling, falling.

XXVII.—BURIED ALIVE!

BACK AT that little farmhouse near the mouth of the valley which housed Red Gleason and his men, Toribio Fierro did not waste much time in putting into execution the suggestions that the hawk-faced man had given him. A field telephone put him in touch with the forces on the ground, and in five minutes a battalion of engineer troops equipped with tools, high explosives, and detonating apparatus, was toiling up the cliff. Once in position above the caves, the officers marked off the ground within a yard or two of the cliff edge and holes were sunk in a line. In these the charges of high explosive were packed, the wires connected, and the holes re-filled and tamped.

This done, the engineer troops withdrew as silently as they had come, stringing their contact wires after them.

Unconscious of what was taking place above them, Red Gleason and his men were gathered in the largest of the caves, that which housed Red Gleason's ship and the one piloted by Beverly Bates. The valley had been quiet, and while taking the precaution of leaving one man on guard at the cave entrance, the others relaxed their vigilance a little and took advantage of the lull to get a bite to eat and to take a swig of hot coffee from the thermos flasks.

With the exception of Bill Barnes, Sanders, Cy Hawkins, and their two Latin-American guests, they were all there.

"I gotta hunch that things are due to happen," stated Shorty Hassfurter.

"You and your hunches are drivin' me to an early grave," complained Red Gleason.

Scotty MacCloskey cocked a wise eye at him. "Twill do na harrm to leesen to the lad," he expostulated mildly.

"All right, on advice of Scotty, what is your hunch?" asked Red patiently.

"It's my hunch," continued Shorty,

"that all hell's gonna pop loose around here pretty soon. Things have been quiet too long to suit me."

"Maybe you're right at that," said Red Gleason.

He rose slowly, and strode to the cave entrance where Andy McCullough was on duty. "See or hear anything funny, Andy?" he asked.

"I kinda thought I heard somethin' goin' on overhead," said Andy, looking upward.

Without a word, Gleason strode out and looked up at the overhanging cliffs. Stare at them as he did, he could find nothing amiss up there.

"I guess you're just hearing things, Andy," he said, "but at the same time they could lob a bomb down here from the top of that cliff so you'd better stand back a little and drag these machine guns back."

He aided Andy in pulling back the four machine guns whose black muzzles peered down the deserted valley. At the same time he was uneasy. There was some sort of feeling of impending trouble hanging over him. Rather than return to the group around the small fire in the cave, he stood there smoking and staring out into the darkness.

It could not have been five minutes later that he felt a tremor of the earth, followed by the roar of several explosions. He leaped backward, dragging Andy McCullough with him, as the whole top of the outside of the cave began to slide downward. Great rocks and tons of earth dropped with a roar and grinding shock that nearly bowled the two of them over. They clung against the wall as the earth and rocks began to cascade toward them.

Gleason saw that the flow of earth would quickly engulf the machine guns and he leaped out, followed by Andy, and jerked them farther to the rear. As the entrance to the cave sagged and filled with an impenetrable curtain of earth, the others came running and

stood aghast as they saw their way into the outside world cut off.

"What's happened? What's happened?" they shouted.

"Ain't nothin' happened," said Red Gleason, raising his voice above the roar which still came through from outside, "except that it looks like the spiggoties have blown the whole top of the cliff in on top of us!"

The air was filled with dust through which the flashlights of the various members of the party cast beams of light. Earth and rocks still flowed into the cave from that great curtain which had been dropped upon its entrance.

Gleason looked at it speculatively and shook his head. "There's all of ten or fifteen ton of rock and dirt has fallen in front of this here cave," he said; "we got no more chance of getting through that than a snowball has in hell. Looks kinda as though we'd have to find another way out of this joint if we don't want to be buried alive here. Here," as the men turned away and began to retrace their steps, "give me a hand with these guns; we don't want to leave them behind."

The cave did seem to run pretty far back when they started to explore with the aid of flashlights. With them they carried what they could from the two ships in the way of provisions and set themselves doggedly to the task of finding some way out of the serious situation in which they found themselves.

But as they went rather into the earth the roof of the cave began to lower itself in discouraging fashion. So rapidly did it slope downward that they were forced after a minute or two to bend their heads, and soon after to crouch until at last the leading man was down on his hands and knees. But the beam of his flashlight showed that the passage continued on, and he followed doggedly, the others crawling along behind him.

Where they were going they had no

idea, but at any rate there was still hope. And then their courage received a boost as they found the passageway growing larger. It grew wider and higher as they advanced, and they came into a large cave in which their voices echoed and rumbled, and they jubilantly noted that it extended far ahead of them and felt that after all there might be some way out of the place.

THE WINDING course of the cave alternately broadened out and narrowed down, each constriction of its breadth and depth forcing them into a worried silence. Gleason was in the lead. It was during one of these silences that he suddenly halted and warned every one to be still and to turn off his flashlight.

"There's some one coming," he whispered sibilantly, "and a whale of a lot of them, if I'm any judge!"

Listening intently in the darkness, they heard what at first seemed to be a far-off murmur, but soon resolved itself into the sound of the shuffling of many bare feet and the clink of metal against stone. At last a light appeared around a bend far ahead of them.

"We'll duck back to where the cave broadens out," whispered Gleason.

Without a word they turned and retraced their steps some two hundred yards to where the cave grew broader and higher. Gleason warned them all to conceal themselves behind the huge rocks with which the floor was cluttered, and in another moment there was neither sight nor sound of them.

The noise of progress made by the unknown men coming toward them grew louder and louder as they listened and waited until at last lanterns came into view, throwing fantastic shadows on the walls and ceiling. Thrown into sharp relief with the lanterns raised, Red Gleason and his men saw a long file of soldiers advancing toward them, led by a stout, important-

looking Rolivian officer. They came on steadily, the brown-skinned men slogging along in that shuffle peculiar to the Latin-American soldier.

There were all of two hundred men in that column, as Gleason could see. Steadily advancing, it came opposite the watching group, then passed on, heading for the cave which Gleason's men had just vacated. After waiting long enough to make sure that no more men followed, the little group moved out silently and continued on its journey, keeping, this time, a careful lookout to the front and rear.

It was not long before they smelled fresh air and were cheered up in spite of the fact that the cave narrowed down.

It was when Gleason saw the gleam of starlight that he bade them be silent.

"More'n likely they got a guard stationed outside," he warned and crept forward alone to reconnoiter.

His judgment was correct, for he saw the glow of cigarettes and heard low-voiced conversation just outside. Creeping forward a few more inches, he saw that there were seven or eight men lounging about, their rifles placed against rocks or on the ground as they smoked and talked.

"Come on, gang, we'll have to give 'em the bum's rush!" he whispered softly.

The men behind him gathered themselves. There was room for five abreast, and Beverly Bates and Shorty Hassfurth moved up on his left while Sammy Moore and Andy McCullough took position on his right, both of the youngsters grim-faced and breathing hard. Then Red gave the signal, and the first five dived out with the others massed behind them.

A short, swift struggle took place there in the darkness, but those poor natives had never before come in contact with American fists, and they dropped, one after the other, until they were all seemingly accounted for. It

was but the work of a few seconds to bind and gag them, to take rifles and ammunition bandoleers, and to move out into the light of the stars once more.

In their elation they did not notice that one of the soldiers had slipped away in the darkness.

Where they were Gleason had no idea, but he moved forward to a small knoll that screened the cave entrance and surmounted the elevation. From this vantage point he looked about, and it was not long before he located the lights of Valverde gleaming in the distance and saw what seemed to be automobile lamps moving along a road far to their right.

"Well, my idea is," said Gleason, "that here's a bunch of loco pilots without any ships, than which there isn't anything more useless in creation. I move that we mooch along to where there's likely to be some ships—and that's over there in Valverde. Is everybody agreeable?"

They all were and stated so in unmistakable terms.

They struck out briskly, heading for the lights of Valverde, but they had not gone above a thousand yards when Gleason, looking backward, suddenly halted.

"There's some kind of a ruction going on there at that cave mouth!" he said in a low voice, "and by gum it looks like we got to watch our step! Here comes a gang of cavalry looking for us!"

XXVIII.—MAKING A CHOICE.

A YELL of warning went up in front of him. Gleason turned too late to avoid the swing of a gun butt that crashed onto him. As he went down it seemed that the ground had literally sprung into life, but he knew no more for the time being. Men rose from behind rocks and bushes until the little group of Americans was overcome.

They went down, nobly fighting and kicking to the last, but it was not five minutes before they were hauled back on their feet again, bound, and driven ignominiously at bayonet point toward the road. Here they were herded into a big truck. Gleason recovered consciousness as the truck jolted along and looked dazedly around at his crestfallen companions.

It was a very few minutes before they were driven up to the grim and forbidding gates of San Juan prison and herded inside the half-wrecked walls. For some reason they were not put into cells, but were left under guard in the courtyard, and they sat around disconsolate under the watchful eyes of five or six armed sentries.

It was here that they learned some bad news.

Their sentries told them that the three transport planes had come in not two hours previously and had unsuspectingly landed in the air field where they were promptly grabbed by Monk Morton's men. The entire personnel of the three transport planes was cooped up in the guardhouse at the air field. They learned also that Monk Morton had received heavy reinforcements, consisting of some six bombing planes and six pursuit ships.

"It kinda looks as if they're tryin' to stack the deck against us," said Shorty Hassfurth dismally.

The rest of the men nodded in glum agreement.

They were not the only ones who were glum, however. Cy Hawkins, far up in the upper valleys of the Andes, at that moment was a picture of disgust with himself and the world in general. Things had happened in swift sequence since that fatal moment when his plane had been literally jerked into the black void of an opening in the cliff wall. Automatically he fought to right his ship and succeeded in bringing its nose around as the powerful current of air

lifted him forward. Suddenly he cut off his motor as he felt his wheels bumping. It was completely black above him and around him as the current of air lessened in vigor and died gradually down. His ship came to rest.

Suddenly blinding lights flashed on. His eyes closed instinctively against the glare, and when he opened them it was to gaze into the muzzle of a businesslike automatic pistol held in a lean, brown hand. The man who had leaped up on the edge of his cockpit was evidently an Indian, but a finer-looking Indian than any he had ever seen, wearing a sort of cloak that gleamed iridescently with many tiny birds' feathers. A similarly garbed man covered Don Felipe.

The plane had come to rest on the smooth floor of a great hall so high that its ceiling was lost in darkness above. In a quick glance around, Hawkins' eyes fell upon a great bronze machine which reared itself up toward the ceiling, and he saw at once what had created that enormous draft, for the thing was a giant vacuum machine which had literally sucked in his plane as it passed the open entrance. Had he been less skillful he would inevitably have crashed.

There was little time given him to look around, for he was ordered peremptorily out of the cockpit and, with Don Felipe, he climbed down and was searched to detect the presence of weapons. The two of them were then placed between some six guards, all armed with blue steel automatics. Their guards led them across the great hall and into a high, vaulted passageway that seemed to have been bored through the living rock. The warmth of the place was grateful after the chill of the high and rarified Andean atmosphere outside, and Cy Hawkins wondered by what means these strange people heated these great caverns.

Their captors led the two of them nearly a quarter of a mile through the smoothly cut passage until at last they

came to a doorway beyond which came the murmur of many voices. Here the man who seemed to be in charge halted the group and disappeared through the curtains which were woven of some fine material that had the softness of silk and the delicacy of coloring of a Japanese print.

The leader returned quickly and beckoned to them. The little group moved forward.

Cy gazed about him curiously at the richly furnished hall in which he found himself. A peculiarly pleasing rosy light diffused itself over rich hangings, carved furniture, and deep, soft rugs. Inside the door were guards in strangely fashioned helmets and breastplates that gleamed like gold. They carried broad-bladed spears, seemingly more for ornament than for use, for each of them was armed with a modern, high-powered automatic pistol.

There were many richly clad men in that hall, some with feathered head-dresses, glittering with jewels, but the most richly clad of all sat on a great chair at the far end of the hall, a chair behind which was a huge round disk of gold from which shot symbolical rays as of a sun.

The man who sat on that throne-like chair was a stern-faced, tall, lean individual with something hawklike about his nose and chin and something exceedingly arresting about the air of command which rested upon his shoulders like a mantle. Upon his head he wore a glittering, bejeweled tiara with a circular plate of gold on its front. Under his chin he wore a silver ornament shaped like a half moon. The head-dress was adorned with beautiful silky feathers which gleamed iridescently. He wore a tunic without sleeves which reached to the ground. Over it he wore a pelisse of fine white wool, trimmed with scarlet and glittering with precious stones and flakes of gold. Heavy bracelets of gold rested on his arms.

Cy Hawkins heard the murmur of Don Felipe's voice beside him.

"The *Uillac Uma*," whispered Don Felipe; "the high priest of the Inca empire!"

"It 'peaks to me laike something out of a circus," drawled Cy Hawkins, gazing calmly around the glittering hall with its impressive show of wealth and beauty surpassing anything he had ever dreamed of. But their guards were leading them forward.

CY HAWKINS noted the incurious glance of the denizens of that place resting upon him as he strode forward the length of the hall, accompanied by Don Felipe. It struck Cy Hawkins that there was something inhuman and devoid of all pity in those glances, and it had the effect of chilling and depressing him a little.

Their guards brought them at last to the foot of the throne upon which the high priest sat, and here the guards went down on hands and knees and remained there. But Cy Hawkins had no intention of kneeling to any one, and he noted with approval that Don Felipe stood up very proudly as the high priest rested his cold eyes on the old man's face.

At last the high priest spoke, but it was in a tongue that Cy Hawkins had never heard. Don Felipe replied in the same language. The conversation continued in this queer guttural tongue. The high priest flushed angrily, but Don Felipe gave him back glance for glance, seemingly undaunted.

It was then that the high priest raised his jeweled hand. There was a stir in the group of brilliantly clad men who stood in the shadows to the right of the throne. A tall, hawk-faced man stood forth, a man of sallow skin but dressed in the fashion of the white men in well-cut tropical linens. Cy remembered dimly having seen him before and then recalled the stranger who had spied

upon their formation at the Havana flying field.

It was Pacari Manco who stood with bowed head awaiting the commands of the high priest, his uncle.

And then the high priest lifted his jeweled hand again. Two of the guards stepped out of the shadows. Between them Cy Hawkins saw with surprise was the same young officer who had flown to their field at Long Island. He did not know that she was Eugenia de la Fuente, the daughter of the old man at his side.

She stood there slim and pale, still dressed in her uniform.

The sight of her was like a blow to Don Felipe.

The high priest leaned forward, his face cruel and harsh as he spoke in that strange guttural tongue. He pointed from the slim-looking youth to Don Felipe and awaited the old man's answer.

Don Felipe bowed his head and closed his eyes as if in silent prayer.

Cy Hawkins became concerned for him. "Don't let them bluff you, sir," he whispered to Don Felipe.

"I am afraid they are not bluffing," said the old man in a low voice; "it is a question of whether I shall sacrifice my daughter's life or be untrue to a great trust imposed upon me by my ancestors and my people!"

This was a little too complicated for Cy Hawkins, who could not be expected to know that the *Uillac Uma*, the high priest of the Incas, had given Don Felipe the choice of seeing his daughter's heart cut out of her body with the ancient obsidian sacrificial knife before his eyes or of disclosing the secret hiding place of the tremendously valuable Inca treasure.

It was a staggering decision that the old man was forced to make.

What turmoil of mind and soul he went through in that few minutes Cy Hawkins would never know.

But what Cy did see was the fact

that the old man at last bowed and agreed to whatever was proposed to him.

Whatever was said between those two resulted in any case in very quick action, for their guards rose and, plucking Cy and Don Felipe by the sleeves, directed them to follow. The little group was in turn followed by Pacari Manco and Eugenia de la Fuente, two guards still keeping watch on her.

They retraced their steps through the long corridor coming back again into that great hall where Cy's ship still rested. And for the first time Cy Hawkins noted that there was another ship not far from his own Barnes Snorter. It was a two-seater monoplane of trim lines, but obviously of foreign make, for it was of a model he had never seen before. Cy and Don Felipe were led toward the Barnes Snorter.

The guards halted them close to the wheels. The hawk-faced man in the linen suit stepped brusquely over to Cy Hawkins.

"My friend," he said, "you will take your ship out the way you brought it in."

"Cain't be done, strangah," returned Cy Hawkins calmly. "Ah'd crash up, sure as shooting. Ain't no room to tuhn in that theah cañon outside—believe me!"

"You don't have to turn," said Pacari Manco impatiently. "You can gather flying speed in the long corridor, and there is a deep cleft in the cañon wall on the far side, up which you can rise to the top. You can follow me; I will lead you up to a safe altitude. Once we are up there you will follow the directions given you by Don Felipe de la Fuente. And remember, let there be no treachery, for I will be above and behind you every moment and will kill you with as little compunction as I would kill a fly!"

Cy Hawkins gazed, level-eyed, into the cruel and pitiless eyes of the stranger. He said nothing, simply grinned, and without another word

climbed up into his cockpit. Don Felipe was helped up behind him.

The Indians aided in swinging the plane about. The motors of both ships started up with a roar. The long corridor which he had entered was lighted up, and Cy saw that there was plenty of wing clearance.

Pacari Manco's passenger was the young girl, Eugenia. Why he was taking her only Pacari Manco and one other man knew, and that was Fierro, for Toribio Fierro had asked that the girl be brought back to him, and Pacari Manco, not caring much, one way or the other, had so promised, providing it was not necessary to sacrifice the girl's life.

Manco's foreign-looking plane rolled out and gathered speed in the wide, high tunnel. His Hurricane motor roaring into full life as it leaped out into space, Cy Hawkins followed the other ship up a deep, wide cleft on the opposite side which provided an easy ascent toward the sky far above.

In a few seconds they were above the cañon wall. Don Felipe tapped him on the shoulder and pointed down toward a valley on the right. Cy pointed the nose of his plane in that direction. Pacari Manco's ship banked and came up above and behind him. They headed for the distant valley in that formation.

XXIX.—READY TO STRIKE.

HER HANDS bound in front of her, Eugenia de la Fuente sat huddled in the cockpit of Pacari Manco's ship, staring at the back of the man's head, her eyes glittering dangerously.

Her wrists were strongly bound with stout cord, but it occurred to her that her teeth were sharp and strong, and bending her head low as if against the cold breeze, she started to work upon the cords.

Pacari Manco followed above and behind Cy Hawkins' plane, watching for

any sign of treachery. He had not liked Cy Hawkins' good-humored grin, and it only strengthened him in his resolution to kill the two of them after the hiding place of the treasure had been disclosed. It was an easy enough thing from Manco's viewpoint, a simple flick of the wrist and Cy Hawkins was dead, and the ship which he controlled would crash, killing Don Felipe as well. But first he must find the hiding place of this almost mythical Inca treasure of which only one man in the world knew the secret. And that man sat helpless in the rear cockpit of the plane below him flying over the silent, snow-covered Andes. So for the moment, he could only follow.

Under Don Felipe's guidance, Cy Hawkins was dipping the nose of his ship downward toward the broad valley that stretched away in the direction of Peru. They dropped down until they were a thousand feet above the floor of the valley. About two miles ahead of them the cañon wall was marked half-way down its height by a broad ledge that jutted out from the cliff's side like the lower story of a set-back skyscraper. It looked small enough at that distance.

"Can you land there?" shouted Don Felipe.

For answer Cy Hawkins shrugged his shoulders and kept on his course. As he neared the place he pursed his lips in a soundless whistle, for truly it was a narrow platform on which to land a ship. But nevertheless he headed for it, edging to the right until he could see its length stretching before him. And then he cut off his motor and coasted down, landing with a few slight bumps on its surface and checking his ship quickly until it had come to rest. He looked behind him fearful that the hawk-faced stranger might crash into him, but Pacari Manco made a skillful landing, coming to rest not ten feet behind Hawkins' ship.

The three men dismounted stiffly, for

it was cold with the high chill wind that blew in that place.

"This is the first time in all history that this place has ever been approached in such fashion," said Don Felipe, and pointed to the valley below. Peering over the edge, the two men saw that the valley narrowed down to a cañon filled with a turbulent stream from wall to wall.

"Under normal approach," continued Don Felipe, "it is necessary to wade up that stream on foot for three miles before striking the tiny cleft in the cañon wall that leads up into the interior of this cliff."

He turned then and led the way toward the seemingly solid wall which stretched high above them. As he neared the wall he rounded a jutting rock. Concealed behind it was a narrow doorway, its posts of carved stone. There was no door. Don Felipe led into the darkness. Cy Hawkins followed. Behind them came Pacari Manco. They descended some thirty or forty stone steps cut into the living rock and then came out into a sort of a balcony which perched like a swallow's nest above a vast hall, which stretched out below them. It was dimly lighted by some queer refraction from the light on the snow and ice above some opening in the ceiling.

It was Pacari Manco who gasped in awe when he looked down. Cy Hawkins stared, puzzled, until his eyes grew more accustomed to the dim light.

He could not believe his eyes when they informed him what lay below packed in neat order on long tables.

The first thing that struck his gaze was an enormous chain, each of its links as great as a man's shoulder, which was stretched out immediately beneath them and doubled back on itself so that it must have been two hundred yards long, at least.

"That is the golden chain that was being carried to Pizzaro for Atahua'pa's

ransom," said Don Felipe, and for the first time Cy Hawkins saw that the chain was of pure gold.

On other heavy tables stretched at right angles to this great treasure lay ordered rows of golden plates, square and oblong-shaped. Beyond them were a vast number of golden and jeweled ornaments and the round disks made to represent the sun. There was the dull gleam of emeralds among all this, two tables alone being loaded with the precious stones, more valuable than diamonds. The sight of this fabulous wealth struck all three of them into silence.

"You have seen," said Don Felipe, turning to Pacari Manco, "and now you will return my daughter?"

"Yes; I have seen," returned the hawk-faced man, "and I will return your daughter!"

But Cy Hawkins, observing the fellow out of the corners of his eyes, noted a sardonic grin twist the fellow's lips as Don Felipe turned his back and started up the narrow stairs again toward the waiting planes.

The sight of the fellow's face convinced Cy Hawkins that he would just as soon be in the rear in that long ascent, and he politely but firmly fell in behind as they once more climbed upward toward the light of early day.

They were once more on the platform. They returned to their respective ships. Pacari Manco was so bemused by the sight of that great wealth that he scarcely glanced at the shivering girl in the cockpit of his ship.

It was only after the motors sputtered into life, deepened into the roar of power, and Cy Hawkins gathered speed and shot out over the valley that Pacari Manco remembered his program. Reaching inside his coat he drew forth a long, keen-bladed, silver-handled knife, balanced it delicately in his hand, edged his ship forward until it was directly above and behind Cy Hawkins. Cy

Hawkins' broad back was there beneath him. Pacari Manco took careful aim and raised his hand for the lightning-quick flash which should kill two men with one flick of a man's wrist.

XXX.—DANGER AT HAND.

THE GROUP that had come down with the transport planes and had been neatly gathered in by Monk Morton and his crew were a raging mad bunch, imprisoned there in the big room of the Valverde air service guardhouse. They knew nothing of the treachery of Dolores, whom Monk Morton had deliberately left with them in the prison to pick up any information she could from their conversation.

Due to an understanding with the guard, she had leave to go and come, but she elected to spend most of her time with the prisoners.

Impatient of their undersized guards who were weak-looking specimens at the best, the Americans quickly decided upon a plan of escape. The first part of this plan Dolores missed through a temporary absence, but she sat in on the second part, which was to seize the pursuit planes in the hangar nearest the guardhouse.

Strive as she might Dolores could not find the details of their plan to break out of the guardhouse itself. With such information as she had, she slid out to bring her warning to Monk Morton. Unfortunately for her, Monk Morton was absent. The only officer who seemed to be about was the bullet-headed Merner and he was bleary-eyed with drink. Her sole effect upon him was to rouse him into an attempt at an elephantine flirtation with her, while he laughed at her warnings. Search of the place did not disclose any other officers, and when she tried to communicate her information to the soldiers they smiled politely at her with cheerful stupidity.

Dolores was a determined woman and

she made up her mind to take the matter into her own hands. It was the nearest hangar that they were going to seize? Well, she knew how to fix that. She went in alone, found where to turn on the lights, found running water and cans and busied herself in pouring water into each of the gas tanks of the five ships that rested, alone and unwatched, in that hangar. This done, she returned to the guardhouse to use what efforts she could to prevent the initial escape of this determined-looking bunch of men.

About two thousand yards away inside the grim prison walls of San Juan there was another exceedingly dissatisfied group of Americans consisting of Red Gleason and his gang. And their dissatisfaction had reached a point of action.

After the first hour's strict surveillance their guards had grown less strict, principally because the officer of the guard had treated himself to what he considered a well-earned sleep. And the Americans had not failed to note that wrecked corner of the fortress prison which the tremendous condor had smashed.

So it was that four exceedingly amazed sentries found themselves simultaneously knocked in the heads, while a group of determined Americans divested them of rifles, bayonets, and bandoleers, and scrambled enthusiastically over the broken wall where they had to tap a fifth sentry into oblivion before they gained the freedom of the still-sleeping city.

So far their escape had not even been observed. With one accord they swept through the silent streets toward the air field, arriving there at the crack of dawn.

There seemed to be some trouble there, for there was a lot of yelling, thumping, and cursing in the direction of a building with barred windows hard by the main gate of the air field.

The cause of it soon made itself known, for out of that barred building streamed a group of exceedingly angry men, white men, Americans! Their own gang from Long Island!

IT WAS A joyous although somewhat restrained meeting, for a fool sentry had fired his rifle, and there was a stir of men in the barracks on the far side of the field. Just to make a thorough job of it the Americans swarmed through the office building, smacking down in their progress a fat, bull-headed, and very drunken white man. In a small room off the main office they found two old friends,^a one of them being Sandbag Sanders and the other his companion in confinement, young Diego de Toledo. Sandbag shouted with joy when he saw them.

The clamor down toward the barracks was growing. It was quickly decided that the pilots of the group should take the nearest pursuit planes with their regular complement of mechanics, while the group that had come in the transports should start their great motors and follow.

The flying field very quickly became an exceedingly busy place, with the aroused soldiery firing an occasional shot, while the Americans swiftly and skillfully ran out the ships, gunned the motors into life and power, warmed up and rose, one by one, from the field. By now bugles were blowing. The alarm was spread throughout the city. The scattered officers of the Rolivian air force were showing the town to their friends of the newly joined forces sent down by Morgan Catesby. Through various bars and *cantinas* the word spread, and Monk Morton's forces began to mobilize. More motors roared into life, and more ships took the air, following that intrepid group which had looted the Rolivian air force of its property.

Far up in the air, Red Gleason took

command. The first thing he did was to lead the entire fleet over a distant valley where he ordered the slow transport planes to drop down and hide to the best of their ability.

He was still so far ahead of his pursuers that they missed the three ships as Monk Morton's men circled around the airport waiting for the entire force to mobilize.

Red Gleason, haunted by the worry as to what might have happened to Bill Barnes and Cy Hawkins, gazed up toward those mysterious snow-clad peaks of the Andes and flew slowly toward them with some dim hope of coming across the lost members of the party.

Behind him, Monk Morton's forces began to gather strength as ship after ship rose in the air. It would be only a matter of a few minutes until the pursuit would be on.

FAR UP IN that lonely mountain valley of the Andes Pacari Manco had thrown his arm back for the fatal, snakelike flicking motion that would drive that silver-bladed knife with terrific force into Cy Hawkins' broad back spread below him.

But it was the sight of that peculiar motion and of that silver-bladed knife that suddenly made known to Eugenia de la Fuente the identity of the man who had murdered her brother.

Her keen teeth had gnawed the cords that bound her wrists. Her keen brain reacted instantly. As the knife was drawn backward she seized the wrist which held it and snapped the arm back so quickly that the bone cracked from the jerk.

It was the work of the fraction of a second to grasp the knife, and with the memory of her brother's death to lend force to her blow, Eugenia de la Fuente struck, true and straight and unerringly. There, high above the Andean valley, Pacari Manco's soul, if soul he had, was sent to join his ancestors.

And in a moment of scrambling, lifting, and tugging, while she kept a wildly gyrating plane from completely crashing, Pacari Manco's body hurtled downward through the air and dropped to oblivion in the deep waters of a mountain torrent.

Cy Hawkins, looking back, saw the girl seated at the stick and noticed that there was no sign of her companion. He marveled greatly, but kept on his course, waving to her to follow as Don Felipe directed him back toward Valverde where he hoped that he might find Bill Barnes again.

XXXI.—CONDORS AHEAD!

AS FOR Bill Barnes, the shock of that mighty explosion which hurled him through the gates of the Valley of the Wings of Death had sent him hurtling toward the ground. Some automatic reflex action, a prompting of his subconscious self forced his muscles to swing that small lever which controlled the retractable autogyro wings. The steel shaft shot up behind him, the blades opened out like an umbrella, and their broad surfaces jerked the ship from its downward plunge, easing it in such fashion that the small plane descended slowly and gracefully toward earth.

Before it had reached the floor of the valley, Bill Barnes began to recover from the shock and gazed about him with half-dazed eyes. His normal faculties returned to him little by little as he started his motor once more, picked up speed, and drew in the autogyro blades. By now he was angry, as memory of what had happened to him returned.

The cold air restored him to normalcy in short order. He was climbing above a broad valley. Far behind him were the grim gates that guarded the Valley of the Wings of Death. He banked and turned back, approaching to within a few hundred yards of the

place, and then rising above it for a quick look down into the valley.

At something he saw there, a great flash of understanding broke upon him and he turned back, following the downward slope of the valley in the direction of Valverde.

THE EVER-MOUNTING menace of that rapidly mobilizing group of Monk Morton's ships filled Red Gleason with considerable worry. It especially worried him because he was not certain where to seek for the leader on whom he depended.

Glancing backward, he saw that Monk Morton's ships were now all in the air and assembling into formation. His heart sank as he counted twelve of them, including six new-type and very speedy bombing planes almost equally good at pursuit.

They rose into the air in four formations of three ships each and began steadily to overtake Red Gleason's small force.

This was sufficiently disquieting, and he put on full speed ahead to avoid combat with that heavily superior force. It was then that his engine began to act strangely, back firing and spluttering and coughing. Looking behind him he saw that the same thing was happening with the other ships, for the faces of all the pilots looked strained and worried and they began to lose altitude. He tried everything, in the hope that his motor would settle down to the steady drone of efficient service, but his altimeter showed an increasing loss of height and his air-speed indicator showed a steadily diminishing speed. He could do nothing.

It was time to look for a landing, and he knew what sort of remorseless treatment Monk Morton's crew would deal to him, once he was on the ground. The other ships behind him began to settle earthward in the same queer fashion as his own.

Bill came roaring down—a one-man army, unleashing a tornado of bombs and steel!



The water that Dolores had put into the gasoline was doing its work.

Monk Morton's capable-looking fleet roared toward them out of the sky. It would be only a matter of minutes now until the guns would begin to snarl

streams of leaden death on his helpless covey. Red Gleason set his jaws and cursed bitterly at the hopelessness of the situation. He was now gliding downward, the motors having ceased to function entirely. Evidently the same thing

had happened to the others, for they glanced backward, set-faced and pale at that flight roaring toward them so relentlessly.

It was then that Gleason glanced upward to the front and his heart leaped as he saw the familiar lines of one of the Barnes Snorters. It came roaring out of a valley ahead, hurling straight toward that flight of Monk Morton's which was so menacingly near. He knew it must be Cy Hawkins. And his heart warmed to the sight of his friend and comrade. As hard-boiled as he was, Gleason thrilled with the magnificence of that gallant, lone attack in the face of such great odds. Even as he leveled off to land, he glanced upward and heard the chatter of Cy Hawkins' guns with their long streams of tracer bullets pecking at the solid flight formation of Monk Morton's crew.

With such great odds against him, it could be only a matter of minutes. Cy Hawkins' gallant and single-handed gesture could at the best only serve to delay the inevitable for five minutes. Even now Monk Morton's formation was splitting, part of it circling aloft to dive down on the intrepid flyer's tail, while the other part held its fire until he should flash into range. It was like a group of skilled hunters waiting for a stag to dash itself to certain death among them.

Not until then did Red Gleason note that lone silvery plane poised far above and to the rear. It was of a foreign model unfamiliar to him, and his heart sank, for he had for a quick second a faint hope that it might have been Bill Barnes.

He climbed out of his cockpit. Scotty MacCloskey lumbered forward from where he had landed in the rear.

"'Tis noothing wrroong with the engines, lad," he said, "'tis nought but watterr in the gasoline, and may the guid Laird ha' merrcy 'pon the soul of the perrrson who poot it therre!"

Scotty's word was final. They were grounded and there was nothing more to be said.

ALMOST afraid to look, Red Gleason peered aloft once more. Cy Hawkins was still in the air. He had just completed a swift zoom and had his guns bearing down on one of Monk Morton's ships. But there were six of Monk Morton's ships preparing to swoop down upon him. It was only a matter of seconds now.

Red Gleason turned away, sick at heart, fearing to see the inevitable.

He raised his head sharply as a faint cheer came up from the men about him. His own heart gave a great leap.

"Thank God!" he breathed fervently.

For down out of that high valley of the Andes, hurtling like some gray bullet, came Bill Barnes' swift little ship.

The sight of it alone checked the coupe de gr ace that was about to be administered to Cy Hawkins' ship. Monk himself straightened out cautiously. He had met and suffered from that gray demon before.

Like a vengeful bullet, the small plane tore straight toward the heart of Monk Morton's formation. The ships scattered. Bill Barnes' guns snarled venomously. The nearest of Monk Morton's ships teetered crazily, side-slipped, and plunged toward earth. Cy Hawkins banked and zoomed, ready to support his leader. Then Bill Barnes did a surprising thing. Waving to Cy Hawkins to follow he turned and fled up that valley.

It was a strange thing for Bill Barnes to flee from combat. Monk Morton's crew paused for a few seconds, trying to understand it. But there is nothing like the sight of a fleeing thing to arouse the ardor of the chase. Like a pack in full cry, they hurled themselves after that fleeing gray streak, all thought of the grounded ships below driven out of their minds.

Nor did they pay any heed to Cy Hawkins' ship when it returned in a big circle and came up in the rear to prevent any overzealous enemy from tarrying to punish Red Gleason's grounded fleet.

No one noticed the absence of the silvery foreign-model ship which had disappeared in the direction of Valverde. Least of all did Monk Morton's fleet, intent as they were upon the kill, hoping at last to be able to down that hated and feared Bill Barnes who had plagued them so long and defeated them so often.

The rock walls of the Andean valleys roared with the clatter of their engines. The mighty snow-clad peaks threw back the reverberation of their progress as they swept up the valley, following that small gray plane that seemed suddenly so helpless and so frightened.

Ever the small gray plane fled before them and ever they followed, drawing no nearer, but keeping at the same height and maintaining about the same distance.

Far ahead of him Monk Morton saw what looked like a mighty doorway, looming up, black and forbidding. The opening was wide enough to permit the passage of his fleet. Following as closely as his laboring motors would permit, it suddenly occurred to him to connect his supercharger, a thing he had only had time to install in his own ship.

He noted with a start of surprise that Bill Barnes leaped up and over the top of those forbidding gates. Monk Morton was quick to follow, shooting up a thousand feet as quickly as his quarry. But his following ships in that high altitude could not respond so easily. They straightened out and roared through the wide gates themselves.

A thousand feet above them Monk Morton gazed down in horror as he saw great black shapes leap skyward to meet

his onrushing ships. Those huge condors rose with the swiftness of light itself, and the air shook to the smash upon smash of the terrific explosions as his ships hurtled down in scattered fragments and a rain of the black feathers of the strange, huge birds that, in attacking, immolated themselves as well as their enemies.

XXXII.—CLEAR TO ALL.

ONLY THREE ships of Morton's entire fleet managed to survive the terrible attack of those huge birds of ill omen. Those three were bombers. They were the last in that long column of speeding ships. By the time they had arrived the force of the massed condor attack seemed to have been dissipated. Tossed and nearly downed by the terrific force of the explosions they managed somehow to come through.

Shaken with the horror of the sight he had just witnessed, Monk Morton turned about only to receive a fresh access of terror. For Bill Barnes' tiny plane had swiftly returned on its path and its guns were snarling vindictively.

Alone there with Bill Barnes to contend with, Monk Morton cast all pride to the wind and fled over the top of the nearest cliff, disappearing from view.

The three bombing planes staggered along uncertainly. Bill Barnes hurled himself at them. They shifted over to the right above the cliff which housed the great hall of the high priest of the Incas. As quickly as he had darted at them, as quickly did Bill Barnes fling himself upward and backward.

For he saw a new flight of those huge condors poised above the bombing planes. And as he put on full power and increased the distance as swiftly as he could fly, he looked back.

The huge condors swooped downward like falling plummets of lead toward the frightened bombers.

The bombers, in order to gain speed, simultaneously released their loaded racks. Eighteen great bombs sped toward the cliff top.

What happened then was too horrible to analyze. The huge condors struck the bombing planes, and condors and planes seemed to explode in mid-air into an indistinguishable mass of smoke and flame. A second later the great bombs struck and exploded with such terrific force as to tear the face of the cliff outward and cast it hurtling into the valley.

Before Bill Barnes vaulted over those lethal great gates that guarded the valley, he saw a huge hall exposed to the light of day as the cliff crumbled.

And then he sped toward Valverde, shaken in spite of himself by the destruction he had witnessed.

It was the transport planes which at last rose from their hiding place and brought stores of fresh gasoline to the grounded fleet. Bill Barnes, still white and shaken, dropped down to join his force.

The first person to greet him was Don Felipe.

"Don Felipe, if you want to be president of Rolivia, I should say that the time is ripe!" said Bill Barnes.

But his remark was lost in the flood of questions and answers. He was hard put to tell what had happened and refused to answer until he had made his own inquiries. What had become of Dolores, the spy woman, for example?

Oh, Scotty MacCloskey had given her a good shove out of the place and told her to make herself scarce, which she had quickly proceeded to do.

Where was Eugenia de la Fuente? That question quickly answered itself, for a silvery plane of foreign make roared out from the direction of Valverde, and the girl had landed and was in her father's arms even as they watched. And none of them failed to note that young Diego de Toledo was

the second recipient of her greetings, a little more stately, it is true, but none the less joyous.

And what had become of Fierro, that archvillain? It was Eugenia who flung her head up proudly and answered.

"I have killed him," she said simply. "He was my father's enemy and an enemy of my country!"

"And the *presidente*, Don Esteban de Morales, has fled and the whole city is shouting, '*Viva Don Felipe!*' That fat beast of an American banker, he has also fled, being carried away in the ship of General Morton, who also took with him that so terrible a woman, who called herself Dolores. They are gone, and the palace of the *presidente* is open and waiting for you, my father, while the people call upon you to return!"

Don Felipe bowed toward Bill Barnes. "Thanks to these noble young men who have so gallantly come to the rescue of a war-torn and unhappy country," he said, bowing with courtly grace; "any honors that Rolivia or that I can shower upon you will be little in comparison with the great measure of your courage and loyalty. Gentlemen, I ask you to be my guests at the palace for the rest of your lives, if you so desire!"

The words were flowery, but there was that in Don Felipe's tone and gestures that carried sincerity. They made ready to depart to go back to the flying field. It was during the bustle of making ready for departure that Don Felipe drew Cy Hawkins aside.

"My friend," he said, "I know you to be a man of honor. Therefore I ask you to keep silent on what you have seen in that deep cave in the mountains. For so loyally aiding me to preserve it for its great purposes, I ask that you once more take me to that place and that we bring out with us, in perhaps a heavier plane than the one you used, sufficient of that which you saw to reward you and your comrades for their aid."

Don Felipe's idea of reward was somewhat magnificent as the last analysis proved. True to his word, he and Cy Hawkins, flying one of the trimotored transport planes, made a secret trip and returned with a heavy cargo that was banked for Bill Barnes and his loyal gang with deposit slips showing an aggregate of one million dollars in gold.

IT WAS NOT until the big dinner at the palace that night that Bill Barnes could be induced to tell what he saw and what he did in the Valley of the Wings of Death.

"As I have told you," he said, "I went flying out of that place on my ear. When I came to, I put a few things together. You know I had been a little skeptical of those great condors which flew around and exploded in people's faces. Well, I'm flying up there tomorrow to investigate it further, but this is about what I figured out.

"Those things are mechanically constructed. Some keen brain among those Inca descendants has got hold of the secret of radio-controlled aerial torpedoes. Around a core of skillfully made machinery they have built this framework of feathers and suchlike for its superstitious value. In any case, that can be proved to-morrow, but the secret of the gates of the Valley of the Wings of Death was no secret. It's a question of photo-electric cells, selenium, arranged on either side of those gates. When anything passes between the two sides it releases those radio-controlled condors which fly up and strike at a level, predetermined by the level of successive rows of selenium cells along the cliff walls. When I led Monk Morton's gang into that trap, I did so deliberately, figuring out that none of them would have superchargers that could lift them over the top. It turned out that Monk Morton did have, but the rest came to a sad end."

"But how about those condors that flew all over the country knocking down buildings here and there?" asked Beverly Bates curiously.

"If you look back," replied Bill Barnes, "you'll find that those explosions occurred on days when there was a low ceiling. I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts that we find some sort of lighter-than-air ship, helium inflated with a control gondola, which stayed above the clouds, directing those huge birds on their missions of destruction."

One of the first things they found in that no longer deadly valley was the fabric of several huge bags and cleverly designed gondolas. Through the riven cliffs they ventured, not realizing what terrific destruction had been wrought in that great hall. The high priest himself and all of his court had been smashed utterly, dying either by exploding bomb fragments or by the gasses of the terrific cataclysm. The power house and laboratory were less damaged, but they had been put out of commission.

It was clear to all of them that these sinister descendants of Huascar had reached a high plane of mechanical and chemical ability, for the evidences of their handiwork lay all about. Some of the chief evidences were the partly finished examples of those great flying birds, their interior machinery actuated by short-wave radio impulses which carried power to them through the ether and actuated the great wings which gave impulse to the skillfully designed body of the bird, made after the fashion of the most advanced gliding models.

There was not a man there who did not breathe easier that the great force for evil represented by the skill and devilish ingenuity of these people had at last been finished.

Of course they were created officers of the Rolivian Flying Corps and had to attend the wedding of Diego de Toledo and Señorita Eugenia de la Fuente. It must be admitted that young

Diego de Toledo was none too happy when some half dozen strutting Yankees, looking magnificent in the gray, scarlet, and silver uniforms of the Rolvian Flying Corps, insisted on their privilege of kissing the bride.

But as Scotty MacCloskey exclaimed, "The lad should no wor-r-r-y; he's ver-r-r-a lucky to be alive!"

And as they lifted aloft the bubbling glasses of champagne to the toast of the bride, there was not a man of Bill Barnes' crowd who did not echo the sentiment and apply it to himself.

After the mystery and horror which emanated from that Valley of the Wings of Death, there was not one of them who was not lucky to be alive.

Bill Barnes' fame is spreading.

Despite his desire for quiet his airport swarms
with visitors.

Some of them come just to see it, and him,
out of curiosity.

Others come on business.

But Bill wants to work on a new model!
How can he?

Important ventures call to him—and next month
we shall meet him in a spectacular struggle
with forces which have baffled the authorities
of several nations.

Don't miss an issue of "Bill Barnes"
Have you joined the "Flying Falcons"?

DO YOU KNOW THAT—

Lindbergh saw his first airplane in 1912 when he was ten years of age and took his first flight in 1922? _____

Frank Luke was the only American war aviator to win the Congressional medal of Honor (awarded posthumously)? _____

Ferdinand von Zeppelin conceived the idea of a rigid airship while serving as a volunteer German military observer with the Union Army during the Civil War in America? _____

In 1913, at San Diego, California, that old-time dare-devil Lincoln Beachey performed the first airplane loop ever made in the United States? _____

Dick Grace, the movie-stunt flyer who specializes in wrecking planes and walking away from them, is superstitious about the time of day he does the cracking up and does it at 11:45 in the morning? Twice he did it at another time and twice he was badly injured. _____

During the War period approximately 7,600 Fokker planes were built by Anthony Fokker for the German imperial air service and practically all of them were pursuit ships? _____

Over a hundred of the most powerful lights in the world whose rays can be seen a distance of one hundred miles have been ordered for the anti-aircraft defense of the nation? _____

In July, 1908, a Frenchwoman was the first of her sex to take a flight in an airplane? _____

The first nonstop transatlantic flight was made in June, 1919, by Alcock and Brown? _____

The theory has been advanced that a cure-all for the common cold can be effected by the victim's taking a flight to over eight thousand feet above the earth? _____

"Wop" May, the Canadian pilot whom Baron Richtofen was attacking when the German ace met his death, is now a Canadian Airways pilot and figured prominently in the chase and capture of "The Mad Trapper of the Arctic"? _____

An ordinary traffic airplane broke all records for the Holland-Java route on December 22nd, by flying from Amsterdam to Batavia, a distance of nine thousand miles, in 4 days, 4 hours, and 40 minutes? _____

On October 5, 1910, Walter Wellman and a crew of five set out in a nonrigid dirigible from Atlantic City, N. J., in an attempt to fly across the Atlantic—they were rescued three days later 800 miles out at sea? _____

An Organization for the



During our lives we all have seen almost miracles performed in the worlds of science and invention—the mere telling of which would have confounded and stunned our incredulous ancestors. In the realm of transportation, with its locomotives, its automobiles, and its airplanes, immense strides have been made, resulting in greater speed, safety, and comfort. But to the last of the triumvirate goes the palm of miraculous accomplishment.

The machine that gave man the ability to emulate the birds was invented and first flown in our land. It has, through a comparative handful of years, blossomed under careful and skillful nurturing from a fragile bundle of sticks and wire into an invaluable transportation factor and a mighty arm in time of war and peril.

This has not been accomplished by the gentle waving of a wand, embodied with magical powers. Human sweat has dripped down to lubricate the gears. Unlimited sacrifices have been made and are being made. Many have died; others drag maimed and withered bodies wearily through a tortured life. These unsung heroes of the air have done all this for you and for me—to make flying safe.

And the majority of us? We have sat back and rocked and read the papers and done nothing about it. We wait

until the hard work is over and the harvest time drawing nigh. And though, perhaps, all of us cannot take an active part in the great advance, yet every man and every woman, every boy and every girl, who is worthy of being called a real American can help by believing implicitly in the air future of their country. And, when the occasion arises, they should put their shoulders



to the wheel, whenever and however they can. For with every mind in tune with the times, with every eye turned expectantly on the brilliant future that is beginning to tinge the distant horizon—then, and only then, will the sun of full accomplishment climb over the hill to bathe the land in its invigorating rays of well-earned success.

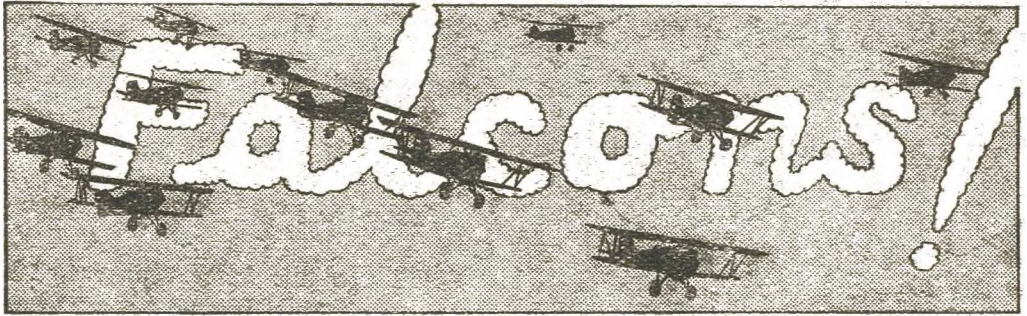
It is well to be prepared for the new air era—for to-morrow is the coming to-day.

The shortsighted citizen who fails to recognize or admit the unmistakable signs of the new age will soon find himself antiquated and left far behind.

It is a new air era—indeed.

In the preceding and initial issue of this magazine there appeared the first announcement of THE FLYING FALCONS. It was a birth notice—the significant springing to life of a nationwide organization of this new age. And on its roster will be inscribed the names

Advancement of American Aviation



of alert, red-blooded Americans who sincerely believe in the air future of this mighty country; who will do all in their power to further the advance of aviation in this land of the free and the brave—truly a noble, mighty company!

The mere fact that you possess and are at this moment reading this magazine indicates that you, yourself, are interested in the shimmering romance of the skies with its accompanying thrill of conquest and heart-quickenning adventures. If you are a wide-awake American you must be aware of the surging developments and changes that are taking place each succeeding day in the air industry of this country. You read about it, you see it on every hand—and you long to live it. A perfect formation of speedy pursuit ships hurtling in a great arc across the giant vault of the heavens perhaps sends a shivery thrill up your spine. There is something deep and unfathomable in your reactions. Perhaps it's the beauty of the pageant, or the thrill of the unknown—or that strange magnetic pull that



for some unexplainable reason makes Americans take naturally to the skies.

The aims and ambitions and plans of THE FLYING FALCONS are as fresh and lofty and scintillating as the streaking, cloud-scraping crafts it fosters. This organization invites you to

become a life member—if you are fully and sincerely in accord with the principles and ideals of this aerial society. The skeptic and the bored, the scoffer and the casual, are *not* wanted. Do those qualifications fit you? Take a look at yourself! And if, in your own true opinion, you rank far and above these undesirables, THE FLYING FALCONS will welcome you into the fold.



I hope you're the sort I think you are, and, if so, I hope you'll join up with us. If you wish to add your name to the muster roll, fill out the coupon and mail it with ten cents to: THE SECRETARY, THE FLYING FALCONS HEADQUARTERS, 79-89 SEVENTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY. A life membership scroll and a handsome FLYING FALCON club insignia will be promptly issued and mailed to your address. The ten cents, incidentally, is to cover the postage costs.

But, remember, if you cannot pass the inspection of your own eyes and self-analysis please *don't* mail in the coupon. Only the hard-hitting, red-blooded Americans are qualified.

The spirit of the air age is caught and maintained by BILL BARNES, the battling air adventurer, whose exploits

and daring are recorded monthly in the pages of this magazine. He is typical of American youth; the sterling type who is devoid of nerves; who has an overabundance of courage to face all perils and obstacles and to overcome them.

How did you like Bill's latest adventure in the air? I wish you would write me a note telling your reactions and criticisms. I will publish as many as possible.

And did you hear about the \$1,000.00 model-making contest that is being conducted by this magazine? It was announced in the February issue. You'll find all the details and particulars on pages 110 and 111. It's a wide-open proposition for any one and every one. It isn't just reserved for members of THE FLYING FALCONS. Every person in every State in the Union is eligible. And every one of you will be more than welcome. A glittering array of prizes in cash and gold and silver and bronze medals are offered. So sharpen your knife and carve yourself a winner. All entries for Contest No. 1 must be in the mail and postmarked not later than

midnight July 4, 1934. It closes promptly at twelve o'clock on the night of Independence Day. A second contest will be coming along soon—but details of that will be announced in this department in some later issue.

I again want to remind you that this department is yours. If you have any suggestions to make or criticisms to offer, drop me a line. I'll appreciate it, fella.

You'll note the letter reproduced in these pages from a foremost speed pilot, Major Alexander de Seversky. It is addressed to THE FLYING FALCONS, and the message is significant. Last October this one-legged ace drove his sleek amphibian plane to a new world speed record. It is an honor to have a man of his caliber interested in our organization.

On the cover of this issue Frank Tinsley, one of America's foremost aviation painters, has depicted a scene from Bill Barnes' adventures where a Curtiss Shrike is attacking a condor. By the way, scale drawings and specifications of the Shrike are included in this month's department.

(MEMBERSHIP COUPON)

I am interested in aviation and its future developments. To the best of my ability I pledge myself to support the principles and ideals of THE FLYING FALCONS and will do all in my power to further the advance of American aviation.

Please enroll me as a member of THE FLYING FALCONS and send me my certificate and badge. I enclose ten cents to cover postage.

Name..... Age.....

Address

Check here if interested in model building.

This is to certify that

is a member in good standing of the

Flying Falcons

for the duration of his or her natural life and has pledged unwavering support to the principles and ideals of the organization and to do all in his or her power to further the advance of American aviation.

By my hand.....

.....

In the event that through premeditated thought and action the above named should hamper or bring disonor upon American aviation, his or her name will be automatically stricken from the roll of the FLYING FALCONS.

This is a copy of the membership certificate issued to each enrolled member of the Flying Falcons.

\$1,000.00 IN PRIZES

LAST month, in our first issue, I told you all about this model-making contest, the rules and the stack of prizes. For the benefit of those who came in late, I'm going to put the needle back on the first groove of the record and start all over again. It'll bear repeating.

But first this: The idea back of this model competition is, fundamentally, to promote interest in aviation and the building of miniature aircraft. That's what the publishers of BILL BARNES MAGAZINE had in mind when they inaugurated this contest. Prizes making a rich total of one thousand dollars in cash and a stack of handsome, especially struck, medals of gold and silver and bronze are the incentive. To win a slice of the booty you have to build a model of a heavier-than-air airplane—and make it better than the next fellow's.

It doesn't mean a thing if you've never made a model airplane before. You've seen airplanes, perhaps you've flown in one—at any rate you've studied pictures of them. And some of you inventive guys undoubtedly have your own very private ideas of how you would construct and build a radically different and new plane if you had the opportunity.

Here it is. Build reality around your dreams. Rule 2 says models of existing or nonexistent planes are eligible. So don't get timid and think that because of lack of experience you won't stand a chance. Every contestant is going to get an even break. Originality and neatness and workmanship will mean a lot. There's no fee; no red tape; no catch. So-oo-oo-oo, let's go!

The rules and prize list are on the opposite page. Let's go over them. Rule 1: The closing date of Contest No. 1. There'll be another following

this. It'll be announced in this department in a later issue. Rule 2: No restrictions there. You can make a model of Lindy's Ryan or a model of a plane that has never existed except in your own mind. Rule 3: Couldn't be clearer. Rule 4: The looks and neatest work will count. If your ship can fly, okay, but it isn't essential. Rule 5: Don't buy a flock of gadgets with the hope that the judges will be dazzled into awarding you the grand prize. It won't work. We don't want you to spend a lot of money. A good sound, well-constructed model will get further than the tricky ones. Rules 6, 7, and 8 speak for themselves. Rule 9: The models that win the prizes will be destined to show off their sleek wings behind glass cases in our permanent exhibit.

It's an honorable fate and an obligation to the public. All the famous air steeds end their days in museums so that the public can see what has been achieved—for example, the Wrights' plane and Lindbergh's.

Rule 10: If you want your model back, send along the necessary postage. But if you want to bring a lot of sunshine and joy into the lives of less fortunate folks and increase their interest in our flying future, send in your model without return postage. Your ship, if it fails to win a prize, will then be sent to some hospital or orphan asylum. You can imagine the thrill a sick person or a motherless and fatherless boy will get out of having and seeing and holding your model airplane. Send your model in to the Contest Editor.

As to the prizes, don't overlook the fact that in addition to the national prize with its gold medal, the best model from each of the forty-eight States will be awarded a silver medal.

FOR MODEL AIRPLANES

CONTEST RULES

1. Model airplane contest (Number 1) closes midnight, July 4th, 1934. Any model shipped or mailed after this date will be ineligible for this contest but will be considered in the next (Number 2) contest.
2. Models of existing or non-existing heavier-than-air craft are eligible.
3. Models must not have a wing spread exceeding three feet—measurement taken from extreme wing tip to wing tip. Any size under this measurement will be eligible.
4. Models may be flying or non-flying. The awards will be made on appearance and not performance. However, the fact that a model is able to actually fly under its own power will not be detrimental.
5. Models showing an outlay of money will not impress the judges. Ingenuity in construction and design will be stressed.
6. Models must be constructed by contestants and not bought.
7. The prizes will be awarded on or before December 1st, 1934.
8. The names of the judges will be announced in this magazine at a later date.
9. The prize-winning models will become the property of BILL BARNES MAGAZINE and will be placed on display in the magazine's permanent exhibit in New York City.
10. Contestants wishing the return of models must enclose return postage. Otherwise, the models will be distributed to hospitals and orphan asylums to increase the interest in the advancement of aviation.
11. Prize-winners, who enclosed return postage, will have postage returned to them.
12. Contestants will address their models to: CONTEST EDITOR, BILL BARNES MAGAZINE, 79-89 SEVENTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY.

PRIZES

1. A total of one thousand dollars in cash will be awarded in prizes.
2. \$200.00 in cash and a gold medal will be awarded to the contestant submitting, in the opinion of the judges, the best model of a heavier-than-air plane.
3. \$100.00 in cash and a silver medal will be awarded to each of the next five contestants submitting, in the opinion of the judges, the next best airplane models.
4. \$50.00 in cash and a silver medal will be awarded to each of the next six contestants submitting, in the opinion of the judges, the next best airplane models.
5. A silver medal, appropriately engraved, will be awarded to contestants submitting the best airplane model from each State in the Union.
6. A bronze medal will be awarded to each contestant submitting a model considered a worthy aid in the advancement of aviation.

*Major
Jimmie Doolittle*



*Record-breaker
Extraordinary*

KNIGHT of the COCKPIT

AT St. Louis, Missouri, on June 3, 1931, a new racing plane was flashing across the skies in a series of severe speed tests. The pilot, crouched down in the cockpit, hoped to whip his delicate and finely tuned craft to such a velocity that the existing world speed record for land planes would be surpassed.

The field ahead was thickly congested with thrilled spectators, their eyes fastened on the oncoming, hurtling plane as it streaked toward them at an altitude of barely one hundred feet. The thunderous, snarling roar of the powerful engine hammered their eardrums.

And then it happened! Without a second of warning, the fabric was torn from the wings of the racing ship by the terrific burst of speed. The pilot caught a fleeting glimpse of the crowd below. His plane was disastrously damaged. If it plunged to the ground not only would he be killed, but sudden death would come swiftly and inevitably to unknown numbers of innocent bystanders.

With lightning rapidity, with rare presence of mind and unlimited courage, the pilot pulled his shuddering craft straight up so that its nose pointed squarely at the heavens above—straight up and away from the people below. His speed was terrific. It carried his crippled plane up, up until it had reached four hundred feet. There, calmly and coolly, he stepped over the side of the cockpit, fell free, pulled the ring of his chute pack and landed safely.

The pilot was Major Jimmie Doolittle. The incident is but one of many similar episodes that have thrill-packed his brilliant aerial career.

James H. Doolittle, of the boyish smile and the impressive air record, was born in Alameda, California, on December 14, 1896. He was educated at Nome, Alaska; Los Angeles, California; the University of California; and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He came away from his schooling days as a Bachelor of Arts, as a Master of Science, and as a Doctor of Science, besides being a Fellow of Aeronautical

Engineering from M. I. T.—which was somewhat of a start in life.

In 1917 he enlisted in the Aviation Section Signal Enlisted Reserve Corps and received early training at Rockwell Field, San Diego. He was commissioned as a first lieutenant on March 9, 1918, and was assigned to flying duty at Camp Dix and later to Love Field, Texas. He became an instructor in pursuit, combat, and aerial gunnery.

From 1919 to 1921 Doolittle served with the Border Patrol on the Mexican border.

In October, 1922, the young pilot gassed up his plane at Jacksonville, Florida, and headed his propeller for the West coast. He flew all night, landed at San Antonio, Texas, at day-break, refueled immediately, and took off again. That same afternoon he set his ship down at San Diego, California, accomplishing the first one-stop flight across the continent. This was also the first time that the American continent had been spanned in less than twenty-four hours.

From 1922 to 1926, Doolittle worked his way from test pilot to chief of flight test research, to chief test pilot and, finally, to chief of the flying section in charge of all army air corps experimental flying at McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio.

He was the first American to capture the international speed trophy, the Schneider Cup Race. At Baltimore, Maryland, in 1925, he flew a seaplane at an average speed of 232 miles an hour. On the following day Doolittle went aloft again to establish a new world high-speed record for aircraft of 245 miles an hour over a three-kilometer course.

He was presented with the Mackay Trophy jointly with Lieutenant Cyrus Bettis for the outstanding military aviation achievement of the year 1925.

In 1926 and 1928 he visited South America for the purpose of demon-

strating American-built airplanes to the South American republics. At Santiago, Chile, Jimmie Doolittle had his army plane all primed for a spectacular demonstration. There was also present a foreign flyer who was representing German interests, and he, too, had his plane ready and waiting. A few days before the demonstrations were to take place Doolittle met with a severe accident. A balcony, upon which he had been standing, collapsed and hurled the American flyer to the ground. Both his ankles were broken. Medical aid was immediately rendered. Doolittle's legs were put in plaster casts, and he was informed that naturally he wouldn't be able to fly again for some time.

The doctors didn't know their patient. When Doolittle heard that the German aviator was preparing for his aerial demonstration, nothing could stop him. The American flew his plane as he had planned—flew it sensationally. P. S. He got the order.

In 1929 Major Doolittle made the first blind flight. The plane was taken off, flown over a specified course, and landed without the pilot having seen outside the cockpit. These fog-flying experiments were made for the Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics. As a reward for his great work, Doolittle was presented with the Harmon Trophy, with the Medaille d'Honneur, and Diplome d'Honneur. And he deserved 'em.

In 1930 he resigned his commission as first lieutenant of the United States Air Corps and joined the Shell Petroleum Corporation as manager of the aviation department. He was appointed a major in the Air Corps Specialists Reserve. During the same year he made a trip to Europe, where he demonstrated American military planes to some twenty European countries.

In 1931 Major Doolittle made a record transcontinental flight from Los

Angeles to New York in 11 hours, 16 minutes, and 10 seconds. This was the first time the North American continent had been crossed in less than half a day. His flight cut one hour and ten minutes from the former record established by Captain Frank Hawks on August 13, 1930. Doolittle made stops at Albuquerque, Wichita, Kansas City, and Cleveland. He made the flight from Burbank, California, to Cleveland in 9 hours and 10 minutes to win the Bendix Derby. America's foremost speed pilots were contestants in this race. Major Doolittle flew a Laird special biplane powered with a Wasp motor.

That year he made also a three-capital flight connecting up the capital cities of the three North American countries. He flew the 2,510 miles in 12 hours and 35 minutes.

At the 1932 National Air Races at Cleveland, Ohio, he shattered the existing speed record for land planes when his eight-hundred-horse-powered Gee Bee Super-Sportster racer tore over the straightaway of three kilometers at an average speed of 294.39 miles an hour. Warrant Officer Bonnet had previously

held the record of 278.48 miles an hour. Another victory came to the daring Major Doolittle when he won the supreme speed classic, the Thompson Trophy Race, at an average speed of 252.686 miles an hour in his red-and-white, Wasp-powered Gee Bee.

His life has been so full of aerial accomplishments and adventures that the limited space necessitates merely touching on the high lights of his career. He is one of the most daring of acrobatic flyers and one of the foremost aeronautical engineers.

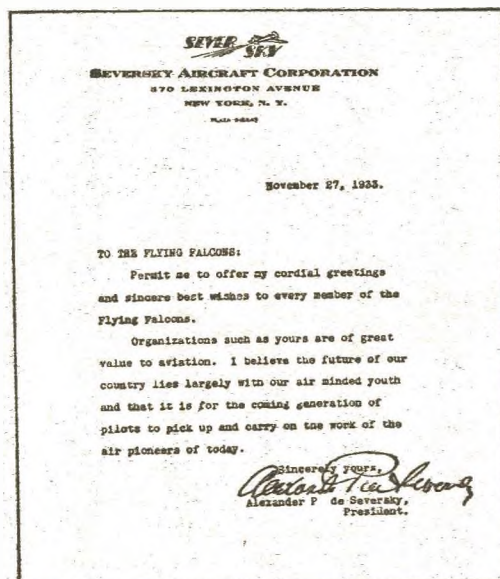
He was the first man to fly a plane in an outside loop.

He was decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross with oak-leaf cluster for work done in testing the strength of airplanes under actual flight conditions, and for the first one-stop transcontinental flight.

He was decorated with the Bolivian Order of the Condor for his Trans-Andean flights.

A natural airman, a pilot among pilots, he is still flying, still doing things, still going places in the new, vast domain of the air—this jovial young Major Jimmie Doolittle.

A Personal Message to the Flying Falcons



From the Holder of the World's Speed Record for Amphibians

THE SHRIKE

A Flying Fortress!

THE Curtiss A-8 Shrike is said to be one of the most efficient offensive weapons developed in aviation history, and, in time of war, would be, indeed, the terror of the skies. The Shrike is fast, heavily armed, and of all-metal construction, even to the wing covering. It flies at approximately two hundred miles an hour and has an absolute ceiling of about twenty-two thousand feet.

This army two-seater, low-wing, all-metal, attack monoplane is powered by a six hundred and fifty horsepower prestone-cooled Curtiss Conqueror engine. The radiator is located directly under the engine, and the two tanks are capable of carrying over one hundred and fifty gallons of gasoline. The main tank is to be found in the fuselage, while an auxiliary, smaller tank is located underneath and may be dropped if necessary. The plane has a cruising range of seven hundred and fifteen miles. The propeller is of metal construction and detachable. A hand inertia starter is provided.

The wing is wire-braced with slots built in the leading edge and flaps on the trailing edge. A relatively low landing speed is thus obtained. The undercarriage is of the divided type with shock absorbers, and the wheels are fitted with brakes and wheel fairings. The tail wheel can be steered.

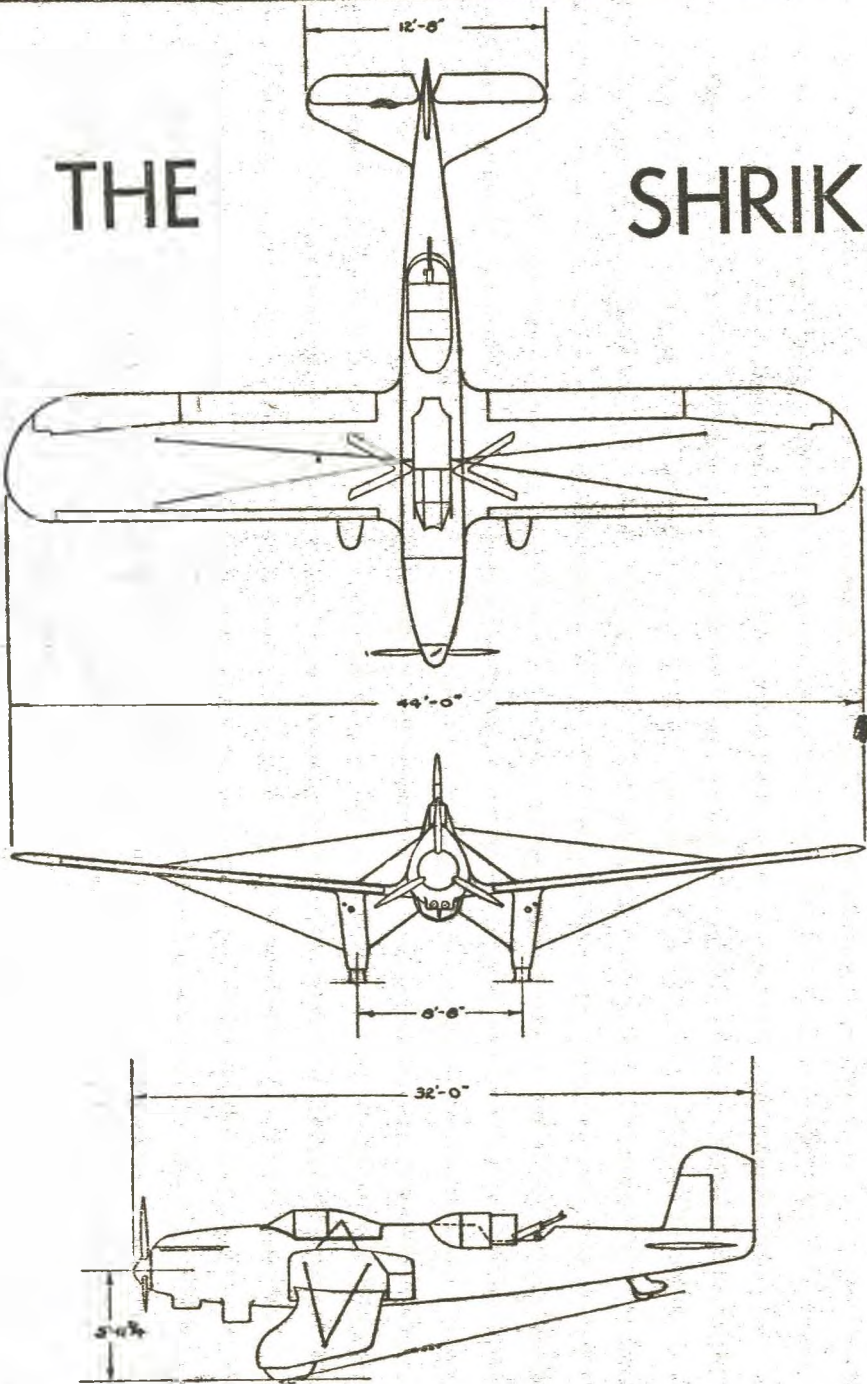
The Shrike is a veritable flying fortification, being equipped with five ma-

chine guns, and bomb racks holding approximately five hundred pounds of bombs. Four Browning machine guns are mounted in the "pants," two on each side of the landing gear. These are controlled and fired by the pilot in the front, cabined cockpit. The gunner's semicabin cockpit is directly behind that of the pilot. It has a flexible mount of twin guns. A two-hundred-pound bomb is carried under the fuselage, and bomb racks inside hold ten thirty-pound bombs. Dual controls are provided.

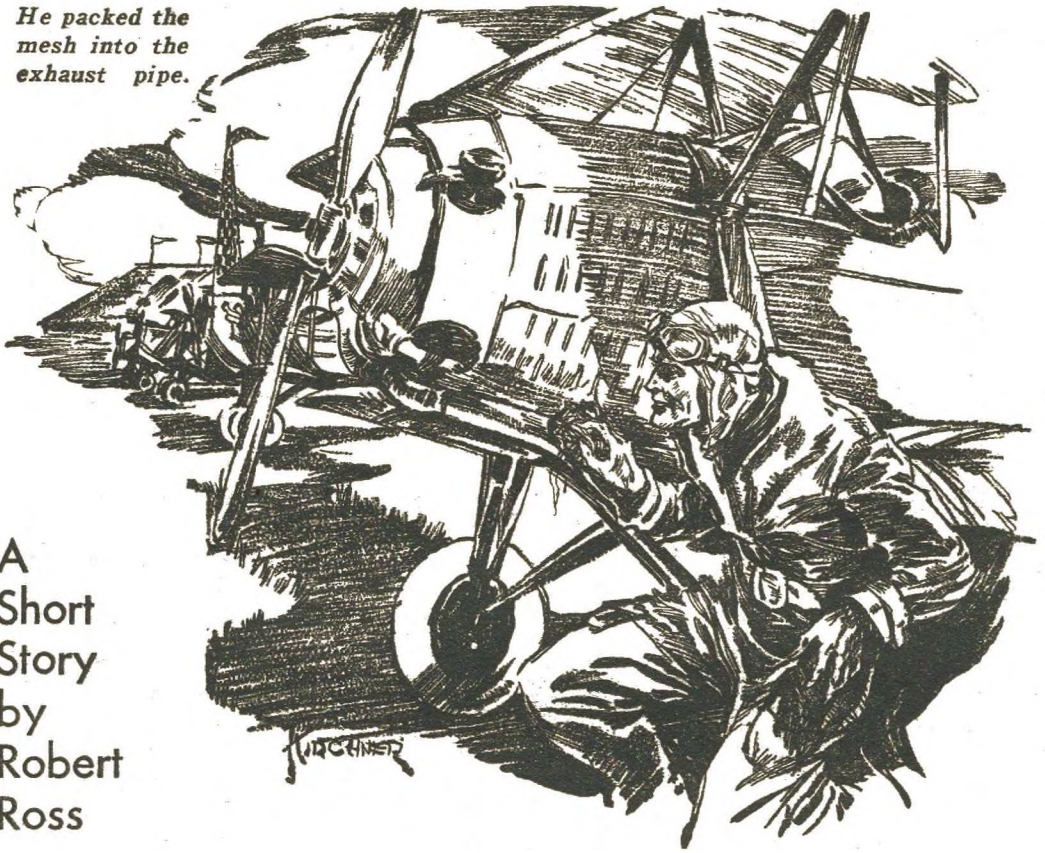
The A-8 Shrike is built by the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company at Buffalo, New York. This firm has been furnishing the United States Army Air Corps with attack planes for many years. In the sleek, powerful, speedy Shrike they have embodied all the features and improvements of the ideal defensive and offensive war plane. One can easily imagine the terrific havoc this mighty weapon of the air, bristling with guns and armaments, loaded with fragmentation bombs, would have wreaked could it have been released on the Western Front back in the 1918 war days. The Curtiss A-8 Shrike is a definite example of just how far aviation and airplanes have progressed in the last fifteen years, and gives a hint, also, of what we may expect in the years to come when our planes will have even greater speed, even greater flying range, and even greater equipment.

THE

SHRIKE



He packed the mesh into the exhaust pipe.



A
Short
Story
by
Robert
Ross

LOCAL INFECTION

*This Hard-boiled Barnstormer
Knew Just How to Win Air Races!*

ROCKY" CALVERT was about ready to step out of character and admit he was wrong. He viewed the procedure with extreme distaste, the streaks of rain, lashing against his face, turned his crouched form into a playground for frisky rivulets.

The weather was much as the forecast back at Coldport had predicted and to which Rocky had taken violent exception. The sky was blackened by a sea of impenetrable tar. Blinding flashes ripped into the horizon. A wind

pounded the frail biplane until his muscles ached.

At last, with reluctant resignation, the flier squinted out along the leading edge of the lower wing. Miles to the west a stunted beacon vainly scratched its finger of light against the low-hanging clouds. Rocky kicked viciously at the rudder, and the craft slued drunkenly about, shuddering in protest.

Not long afterward, the *Gull* dropped down on a sodden landing field. The door to a hangar slid open, and a figure

in a glistening raincoat dashed across the oblong of light toward the traveler.

"Coming in?" the attendant screamed above the roar of the storm.

Ordinarily Rocky would have explained with painstaking detail that he had stopped merely to inquire the way to the nearest Turkish bath, but his temper was short. His disappointment at failing to reach Bridgeton, a sizable city with sizable opportunities for the pursuit of pleasure, was manifest in the manner in which he thundered into the hangar and banged on his brakes.

The raincoated one followed him. "Where from, Jack?" he asked pleasantly.

Rocky cut the motor. "Scandinavia, to you," he growled. "Where am I at?"

The affable person was only slightly taken aback. "Crosser," he said. "In for the circus?"

"I am not," Rocky replied sourly, as he dragged himself, weary and dripping, from the cockpit. "Do I look like a clown?"

He accepted the proffered register and, making the sheet as moist and smudgy as possible, wrote in a virtually illegible hand: "Calvert. *Gull* biplane. Coldport. Bridgeton."

"And keep them touchy guys away from that thing," he said, nodding curtly toward the plane. "Where's the burg?"

"Six miles south. Want a cab?"

Rocky impolitely swung on his heel. His last contact with a taxicab had cost him a hundred and fifty dollars. The thought that anything should cost him, the great Rocky Calvert, anything, was wholly repugnant.

A small group of boys, such as commonly infest airports at all hours of the day and night, was huddled in one corner of the building, each one open-mouthed at the sight of a sky god valiant enough to chance such weather.

Rocky smiled in their direction with considerable difficulty. The effect was

amazing. It gave his lean, leathery countenance an appearance of distinct charm.

"One of you 'pilos' got a car?" he asked.

A sallow, freckled boy of about fifteen flushed and said in a weak voice: "Yes, sir."

"Good!" Rocky threw an arm familiarly over his shoulders. "My name's Rocky Calvert. Heard of me, I 'spect. Here's my bag. Let's go to town."

The boy swallowed. "All right!" he piped.

They found the machine, a battered issue of a cheap make, standing in the driveway.

"Got a cigarette?" Rocky asked as they clattered over the wet highway toward town. By this time he was calling his companion "Ace," although the youth had admitted that his name was Jim.

"I liked you when I first seen you, Ace," said Rocky, lolling back and inhaling deeply. "You got the makings of a great flier. Maybe I'll eat with you. Got any dough?"

Jim had overcome some of his initial embarrassment, but unfortunately he had not yet learned to say no. He agreed he might be able to stand a meal at the Ueata-Here Lunch.

"What do you do for fun?"

Jim said they kind of had fun, sometimes, mostly at the pool hall. His guest was not interested in pool halls.

"Any good-lookers around?"

There were some, it seemed, that were "not such a much," but also some that were better. It was quite apparent that Jim could give nothing official along this line.

They had reached the outskirts when the boy, his assurance warmed by frequent applications of "Ace, old kid," and the flier's expanding friendliness, asked a question:

"In for the circus?"

"Say, that guy at the field asked me

the same thing. What do you mean—circus?”

“We got an air show, kind of, here to-morrow,” Jim explained.

Rocky reflected. He never had much luck at small-town air meets. He was, he told himself, strictly a big-time barn-stormer. Besides, the program would likely consist of yokels gasping at figure eights and the awarding of fifty-cent prizes for five-hundred-dollar thrills.

“No; I don’t think so. We hot ‘pilos’ keep pretty busy on the transcontinental air races, you know.”

“They’s a fellow here clear from Omaha,” Jim blurted out.

Rocky snapped into an upright position. “What’s his name?” he demanded. “Stark.”

The effect was electrifying. Rocky hammered a knotted fist into his open palm as if in anticipation of some long-delayed pleasure. In an angry voice he rent the name of Stark from stem to stern, and he had gone back as far as the great-great-grandfather and grandmother Starks when the car came to a rattling halt in front of a restaurant.

“You don’t like him, huh?” Jim inquired mildly.

His guest growled and pushed open the door.

IN SPITE OF the warning that “Stiff” Stark was in town, Rocky was not at all prepared for what followed. Resting at ease, with both elbows on the zinc table top at the rear of the Ueata-Here, was none other than the one he had so lately maligned.

The sight of Mr. Stark was enough to raise Rocky’s bile to the boiling point, but the sight of Mr. Stark eating a generous dinner without any one near who might be expected to catch the check made the shock more intense. It was not until he glimpsed, over the counter, the bountiful yet well-proportioned figure of a strawberry blonde that he guessed the answer.

Stark’s utensils rattled to the table. “Well, if it isn’t old man taxicab in person!” he called gleefully. “And with his pilot, sure enough.”

With some difficulty Rocky controlled himself. He was engaged in taking in the good points of the strawberry-blond waitress, and this required time.

At last he turned back to Jim. “There’s a rat in here,” he said grimly.

“Well, rats go with cheese,” cheerfully responded Stark.

Rocky felt very old as he seated himself at a table as far removed from the annoyance as possible. Niceties of the situation decreed the curbing of an impulse to fly at the other’s throat. The strawberry blonde came forward.

“Hello, sister!” Rocky said, somewhat mollified by the peach-bloom complexion and large blue eyes. “What do you suggest for a hungry flier?”

“Don’t let him kid you, Violet.” The voice was muffled by a chunk of steak, but nevertheless had good carrying qualities. “He spends all his time riding around in taxicabs.”

Rocky clenched the edge of the table. “Supposing you was leading a guy thirty-five minutes in the Louisville to El Paso air derby,” he said to the girl earnestly. “Supposing at the next-to-the-last stop this guy give a taxi driver ten bucks to take you to the wrong airport, and the time you lost cost you one hundred and fifty smackers in prize money. What would you think of a guy that’d do a trick like that?”

“Personally,” volunteered the irrepressible Stark, “I always ask for a taxi driver’s license to make sure he’s up on his spins.”

“No one would know that guy from his license after I got done with him,” Rocky growled.

Violet snickered and maintained an attitude of strict neutrality. She said “everything here was the best,” a fact that sent chills down the spine of Rocky’s young host as the order

bounced from meat to vegetables to desert and back to meat again. Rocky had not eaten free for four days.

The waitress proved a little trying as the meal progressed. She was too much in awe of these deities of the air to become overfriendly. Another point that developed, to the intense disgust of Rocky, was that Stark monopolized all the available conversational interludes with stories of himself.

"Once," he said in a voice that took the entire neighborhood into his confidence, "I was flying the mail out in Seattle when I ran into the dirtiest weather I ever struck, and I've flown my portion of cyclones.

"This stuff was so changeable. First it would rain, then sleet, and then snowflakes would begin falling as big as lemons and closer together than salted peanuts. The temperature was running up and down like Paderewski practicing scales.

"About thirty miles this side of Tacoma the motor quit. I was up about four thousand feet and, like I always do, I worked with her down to halfway trying to talk her back into it. Wasn't any use, so I got ready to bail. But when I tried to get out of my seat—no go. I was frozen tight.

"There I was, mind"—the strawberry blonde leaned forward across the counter a rapt expression proving that she, too, was up there, struggling to get him out of the seat—"frozen tight, and every split second getting me closer to those peaks and certain death. A lot of fellows would have given up. Not me! What I did was to flood the carburetor, backfire the motor, and set the ship on fire. The heat melted the ice, and I shook out just about two hundred clear."

Rocky Calvert drained his coffee. The waitress, he feared, was fast becoming a subject of the garrulous Stark.

"Ace, did I tell you about that time I almost landed upside down?" he de-

manded in loud tones. "Well, this is over the Appalachians. You thought I was flying some tough stuff to-night. Well, you should have saw this. So dark I can't see my hand. And the wind is bucking my wings like I'm riding a goofus bird.

"Well, now, Ace, some folks say you can tell by your senses whether you're upside down or the other way round. I guess I can as well as anybody, and I'm saying you can't.

"I used to carry a couple of bolts in my pocket tied to a string. When I get uncertain which way I'm flying, I take out the bolts and hold them out in front of me. If they hang down, I'm O. K.; if they hang up, it's time to get going.

"Well, in this particular case, I reach in my pocket and what do you think? I'd forgot to bring along the bolts. You can guess how I feel, Ace, not knowing when I'm going to root my nose in the scenery."

OUT OF THE corner of an eye Rocky noted with satisfaction that Violet had moved to his end of the room. The boy's mouth was slightly ajar.

"Course, Ace," Rocky continued, "I'm used to danger, but you'll be the first to admit that I'm in a ticklish spot. I decide the only thing to do is to hold my hand over my head. If the blood runs out of my fingers, and they go to sleep, I'm right.

"I've been flying that way maybe quarter of an hour when, blup, I get a bad pain in my hand. I jerk in quick, and what do you think? Some needles off the top of one of them mountain pines. Course, it was just the work of an instant to turn over on my right side."

From the rear Stark coughed disparagingly. "Speaking of close shaves," he announced, "I've had plenty of them. One of them was in Colorado. I was in a hurry to get places and figured that

instead of flying over the peaks I'd go through one of those big, wide railroad tunnels they have out there. Save time, you see?" The strawberry blonde nodded her head with splendid understanding.

"I must have been getting close to Utah and priding myself on thinking up a keen stunt, when I heard something that would have scared me if I hadn't been used to flying with death at my elbow, so to speak. Coming through the other end of the tunnel, heading right for me, was a train."

Jim almost fell out of his chair.

"For a minute it didn't look like there was anything to do but sit and take it. Then it flashed on me that the reverser gear I'd invented might work for just such an emergency. I slammed it on and, sure enough, the ship backed clear up to the end of the tunnel. At that, I just beat the train out by seconds."

Rocky snorted. "I hate liars, Ace," he said. "That reverser-gear guff reminds me of a funny time I had once. I'm down in Florida when the gear jams. All of a sudden I find myself backing up. No matter what I do, I can't stop.

"Most fellows, Ace, would have lost their nerve right then and jumped, but not yours truly. It's a pretty good crate, and I don't want to lose it. I get to figuring what to do, and at last I think if I can find something moving to light on, maybe I'll be jake. I go down and look for a train. I follow the tracks for a long time.

"You see I have to have a train going the right speed and the way I'm backing. After a while I locate one. I ease down and land right smack on top of a box car. Folks that seen it said it was the snappiest piece of aviating they ever seen."

Jim was popeyed with admiration. Even Violet was evincing a trace of something more than curiosity.

"You have to know how to handle

reverser gears," said Stark. "Same way with robot controls; you know those things that fly themselves. They never give me any trouble. I had a friend, though, who got tired sitting up front with nothing to do and fell asleep. When he woke up everything was so smooth he thought he was on the ground. He went back to the door and got out."

Stark arose and walked to the counter: "Oh, what happened to him?" asked the much-distressed Violet.

"He's all right," was the bland reply. "You see, he had on his parachute." Stark reached out and grasped a hand that had inadvertently been left near the cash drawer. "Now, girlie, let's get down to the more serious business of living. What are you doing to-night?"

Rocky pulled back his chair and came forward. "That's a good question," he said; "only whatever it is, it's with me."

Violet's peach-bloom flamed. "Oh, I can't, honest!" She dropped her eyes coyly. "I have to go home with my little brother." Then the old fighting spirit of her Norse ancestors rushed bravely to the rescue. "Least I can't to-night. To-morrow night, maybe."

"Yes?" encouraged Stark.

"With me, huh?" Rocky edged to the counter.

For a country girl Violet handled the situation nicely. She giggled. "I got to go, now," she said.

Rocky glared at Stark.

"Too bad you can't stay over for the circus," Stark said easily. "Of course, among the locals you might win a prize or two. Against good competition——" He shrugged and went out of the door.

Rocky bit deep into his chapped lips and turned back to the table.

"What is this circus?" he asked the boy.

"Well, kind of all sorts of things," he explained eagerly. "Balloon busting, parachute jumps, but the big race is from here to Bostwick. You got to

take over a package of E-Z-Scour. We make that here," he added with pardonable pride.

"That all?"

"Well, you ain't supposed to know it till you get there, but you got to bring back a bottle of Supreme Vinegar. They make that there."

Before he retired for the night, Rocky purchased a bottle of Supreme Vinegar.

"That's funny," remarked the storekeeper, rubbing his chin. "There was a browned-up fellow like you in here some mite ago. He said it had to be Supreme, too. I guess I ain't sold none of that for years."

"Why, the dirty crook!" Rocky muttered under his breath.

AS MANY OF the inhabitants felt, the First Annual Crosser Air Circus may have been the most successful of its kind ever held, but to one performer, at least, it was a tremendous pain in the neck. He would have thrown the entire affair over, except for two very good reasons. One was the fair Violet, flushed and starry-eyed under the attentions of the leading contestants; the other, Stiff Stark, whose constant gibes and smirks affected our hero much as applications of salt on an open wound.

The prize list was worse than Rocky had feared. He won a helmet, of which he had nine, for finishing first in the closed-course race; five dollars' worth of trading stamps at a hardware store for taking second to Stark in the balloon-busting contest; a near-silver water pitcher in the deadstick landing; and a pair of corduroy breeches, two sizes too small, as runner-up in stunting.

The local boys, wholly well-intentioned and equally as inadequate, offered no competition to the visiting interlopers. Thus it was, that with only the race to Bostwick left on the program, honors were even. Rocky realized this event probably marked the climax, both

in the competition for Violet and his grudge against Stark. During the intermission he gave the matter serious and concerned study.

His own plane, Rocky knew, was three miles an hour faster than Stark's. Still, if Stark already possessed the bottle of Bostwick vinegar, there was no apparent reason for his making the fifty-four-mile trip. With a flask of the same brand secreted under a seat cushion, Rocky held a similar advantage, but he could not, he told himself, depend on Stiff to play fair. The chances were that his rival would start turning about before he was out of sight.

Rocky stood near the line of ships drawn up for the race and weighed the gravity of the case. In his pocket was a package of E-Z-Scour which was, it developed, a wire mesh used by housewives for cleaning pans. This gave him the brilliant inspiration.

"Ace, old boy," he addressed the youngster who had been dogging his footsteps all day. "Run in and get us some pop. Just what we need on a hot day like this."

Jim arose obediently and moved toward the concession stand. Rocky glanced around him. Most of the crowd, including Stark, had gone into the hangar for the judging. None of the spectators, roped off several yards distant, would suspect anything if he chopped off a wing.

He walked quickly to the side of Stark's red craft and ducked under the motor. Here, swatting on his heels, he packed the E-Z-Scour mesh into the exhaust pipe.

"What you doing, Rocky?"

Rocky started guiltily, then broke into a nervous laugh. "Oh, it's you, Ace. You're back in a hurry."

"Yes, sir," the boy lied. "They didn't have no pop left." The truth was that the manifold wants of his flying friend had completely drained away the boy's resources.

"Well, that's all right. Here, I'll let you in on a little secret," he said confidentially. "It's an old trick with us racing fliers, only it gives us an edge on those who don't know nothing about it.

"See, I choke the exhaust up with this wire. It's solid enough to keep the power from escaping, but don't prevent a little breather."

The boy wrinkled his forehead. "Do you want Stiff to win the race? I thought you didn't like him."

"Who, him?" Rocky asked in an injured tone. "Why, Ace, he's the greatest guy in the world. A little hard-boiled, but a heart of pure gold. I want him to win, see, but I don't want him to know how. He's such a square-shooter, he'd never dream of stealing an edge on nobody else. So don't say nothing about it."

Jim's face lighted with a quickening interest. "Well, I'll be darned!" He whistled.

Rocky idled about the ships to make sure he had not been detected. At last he strolled away to the hangar. He wanted one last check to guarantee that Violet would be there when he came back.

The *Gull* was to be first off on the race to Bostwick. Five others were to follow at three-minute intervals. The lapse in time, the committee of groundlings explained, was arranged to prevent any pilot from escaping the task of navigation by playing follow-the-leader.

Rocky waved gayly to Violet and even ventured a salute to Stark as he rolled off to the starting line. The latter grinned through his whirling propeller, and his lips framed the hated word "taxi." Rocky's expression of benign good-will-to-man did not change. In a few minutes his antagonist's motor, overcome by back pressures, would begin heating, and Stiff would be sorely vexed at its failure to turn up the cus-

tomary power. A frantic effort to adjust this and that might or might not uncover the trouble. In any event, it would be much too late to do anything constructive.

A starting representative approached the *Gull*. "While we appreciate that you can be trusted," he said, "a certain faction is always prone to take unfair advantage of the rules. Therefore, we are going to ask that each of you bring back a bottle of Supremest Vinegar from the Bostwick field to give proof that you have covered the distance. Please do not feel, Mr. Calvert, that this is any reflection on your own honor."

"Oh, not at all!" replied Rocky gravely, feeling behind him to make sure that his vinegar had not been disturbed.

EVEN STARK, with a worried eye cocked on the rising heat indicator, was forced to admit Rocky could handle his plane. The wheels were scarcely off the ground when the *Gull* began a low, graceful arc in which it seemed to pivot on the lowered wing tip. The craft carried barely enough lift to clear the trees bordering the airport where it swiftly disappeared.

Rocky wasted no time on climb. Once out of view of the airport, he abruptly shifted his course. The map placed the Bostwick route as ten degrees north by east. He fixed on twenty. According to his calculations, in fifteen minutes he would be over Hastingsburg. There he would circle and head back to Crosser. Thirty-five minutes for a hundred and eight miles and stop-over allowance might be unusual to an experienced observer. He did not consider the reports of any experienced observer save Stark, who would probably be too upset to talk coherently.

Scenery below him fled past like a parade of convention delegates. The

farms were varied in pattern and color just as delegates wear different badges; but essentially the procession had a monotonous similarity. Rocky settled himself comfortably below the cowl and lighted a cigarette. He held straight on his course. Frequently he glanced at his wrist watch.

At 4:12, to be exact, Rocky reared himself for a look around. Over the nose of the plane he saw only a continuation of the rolling farms. In a few minutes he would be sighting Hastingsburg.

The minutes came and went and still no identifying sign.

Eighteen minutes after he had left Crosser, the lines in Rocky's forehead knotted. Diving into a side pocket, he fished out a battered map. This gave him no help. A river, he noted, was about ten miles out of Hastingsburg. He had crossed nothing that remotely resembled a creek.

After a while, he decided he had not allowed enough drift, something that he would have recognized as improbable by more thorough deliberation. He turned at right angles to his line of flight, flew for several minutes, and then retraced his course for twice the distance. At the end of the period, he was hopelessly lost.

Out to the right Rocky spotted some comparatively level pasture land. More important, a farmer watched his antics from a fence by the side of the road. The flier side-slipped sharply. The pasture was rough, and the rude jostling he received did not improve his disposition.

He pulled near the fence and shouted above the idling motor: "Hey, where am I?"

His audience pondered the question. "At Lem Dickinson's and it's lucky for you, young feller, you didn't land on that wheat yonder."

Rocky restrained himself. Seconds were precious. Already one of the local

pilots was apt to have covered the flight to Bostwick.

"I mean what town's around here?"

"None of 'em close. Flora's about twenty-five mile."

Rocky fumbled with his map. Up near the crease, about fifty miles off his course, he found Flora.

"Which way?"

"Over there." The farmer gestured toward the east.

Rocky fumbled with the map again, then looked sharply at his compass. He rapped on the dash. The suspended disks quivered sluggishly. He felt behind the board and there, stuck with a bit of well-chewed gum, was a small bar of magnetized iron. As he pulled this loose, the compass changed direction eleven degrees.

To his astounded audience Rocky apparently went suddenly mad. All of his previous efforts at rough-and-tumble oath-handling paled in significance. For his mind's eye, as he raved and sketchily worked out a return to Crosser on the map, conjured up a recent and mocking likeness of Stiff Stark chewing gum.

Within a short time after he had taken the air, the controls guided more by instinct than any calm and sane manipulation, Rocky was satisfied he had orientated himself to his surroundings. Check points went by with clockwork regularity. The motor roared at wide-open throttle. A tail wind increased his speed. These favorable circumstances offered no consolation.

Before the Crosser airport took form, Rocky felt he still had an outside chance. His watch read 5:45. It was possible that the Crosser pilots, unused to navigation at top speed, might also have gone astray. The hope exploded as the last row of trees dropped under him. On the airport below was not only Stark's red plane, but the four others as well.

Rocky zoomed high over the finish-

ing line. The humiliation of being beaten by local pilots was consuming, but he still had a score to settle with Stark. There was also Violet—if his right-cross connected.

The *Gull* landed with its usual beautiful precision, and Rocky paused to survey the field. An element he had not previously noticed caught his eye. In his direction charged a nondescript band of citizens, patently angry and gripped by mob hysteria.

As if to erase any doubt as to their intent to do great bodily harm, one of the leaders at that moment shook his fist; another brandished a club. Rocky, accustomed to thinking quickly in emergencies, did not hesitate. He gunned the motor and jerked the *Gull* back into the air.

THREE WEEKS later, the mystery still unsolved, Rocky was stretched out under the wing of his plane in Wichita. The day was stifling, and he had crawled there not only to avoid the sun, but also in the hope of relief from an aching head he had inherited from the night before.

His attempt at slumber was abruptly broken by the voice of the enemy. Stiff Stark had walked up with Dixie Mul-ton, another of the clan of vagabond fliers.

"Say," bellowed Stark, rather too loudly for the comfort of any eardrum

in the vicinity, "whatever became of Rocky Calvert?"

"I don't know. I never see him no more," drawled Dixie, although it was quite evident that Rocky Calvert was no more than an arm's length away.

"Well, I guess the poor guy's about done," continued Stiff. "Last I saw him was in Crosser at a little hick air meet. Guess he figured the small-town-ers had him whipped. He plugged the exhausts of every ship on the field with wire mesh."

Rocky raised himself on one elbow. "That's a damned lie!" he gasped. "If anybody did that, it was the kid who was hanging around me."

"One local burned out a rod," went on Stark, ignoring the interruption. "Another wrecked a good five-cylinder before they got wise. And were they tough! They met him with pitchforks when he came back. He never stopped. I'll bet he's going yet."

Dixie guffawed. Rocky Calvert groaned.

"Say, if you ever meet him, tell him Violet sent her regards. He had her all sewed up for the evening. When he left so sudden, of course I couldn't let her suffer."

Stark kicked dust in the direction of Rocky's trembling, outraged figure.

"I shore will," said Dixie. "He always was a great show for them local gals."



THE FALCONS SPEAK!



O. K., Don!

Don Mathers, New York:

You sure have one swell magazine!

Why doesn't the author use just "Bill" more often instead of "Bill Barnes" in his story. Make us feel more like a pal to him. What do you say, eh?

They're Coming

Vincent J. X. Miezelis, L. I., N. Y.:

I have read your magazine from cover to cover and enjoyed it.

Why not include detailed plans of flying planes for us to make?

How Do You Like 'Em?

Rita Moran, New York City:

Your first issue of Bill Barnes was swell.

I'd like to know anything you can tell me about aviation. Send me my certificate and badge and anything else you have about aviation pronto.

War Planes O. K.

Henry Ruhl, Jr., New Jersey:

Please tell me if war-time planes are all right to enter this contest. I hope I win one of those prizes just to have something to remember my boyhood days.

The model I send in I want given to some youngster in an orphan asylum. I built about five model airplanes, one flying model and four hand models.

You're Received!

George Mabey, Jr., New Jersey:

I am not the kind to write for membership to the Flying Falcons just to get a button to wear and a fancy paper. I have loved aviation and studied and read about it ever since I could read, and hope some day to have my fling at it.

Although I am just a high-school student and couldn't do very much for its advancement now, I would be glad to do anything I could to help.

You have a great magazine and I hope I will be received into its membership.

No Age Limits

Raino Martin, Maryland:

I read every word in your February issue and think Bill Barnes is swell.

What are the age limits for the model airplane contest? I am planning on entering, and am joining your club.

Lay Off With Those Death Rays!

Everett Harris, Connecticut:

The picture on the cover of Bill Barnes is a wow, but why not have the printing on the cover an inch on the bottom and two and a half from the top. Then the picture would be clear so a fellow could cut it out and put it on his bedroom wall.