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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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# OLD CITY OF JADE

By THOMAS H. KNIGHT

*The story of a strange city in the South American jungles, whose inhabitants were immersed in a weird sleep*

WE WERE in a beastly tight corner, a hopeless half-dozen of us flat on our faces in a shellhole, cut off, barraged, cold meat, about at the end of things, when I first met Cedric Lawrence Baxter.

I call it a shellhole, though really it was a crater into which a truck could duck and hide; but at that, not so deep that at any moment it could not be plowed and spattered a little deeper by one of the mortar bombs the Germans were so generously tossing at us.

I was a First Looney in those piping days of hate, and had been ordered out with a double handful of men to see what could be done about a few vicious machine-gun nests which were holding up, it seemed, the entire Allied armies. My men had dropped before those devilish guns like a pitiful swath of unripe grain tossed into the flicking knives of a giant reaper. Checked and beaten from our purpose, only six of us reached the doubtful haven of that shellhole. Every German gun in the country began potting us, which was the only objection we had to our habitating the crater.

It was a rather strategic position. From its vantage point we were able—when we could get in a shot—to tumble a gunner across his hot-barreled gun in nice fashion, and that was the very thing for which we had been ordered out.

Then some of the more ambitious Heinies climbed trees to get the odds of altitude against our sharpshooting, but that did not last long. At sniping, two—in fact six of us—could play, and we did. We dumped them out of their branches like lead-stuffed crows.

But it couldn't last long. All they had to do was to land one cannon-cracker in among us and—yes, we had reason to believe we were at the end of things all right.

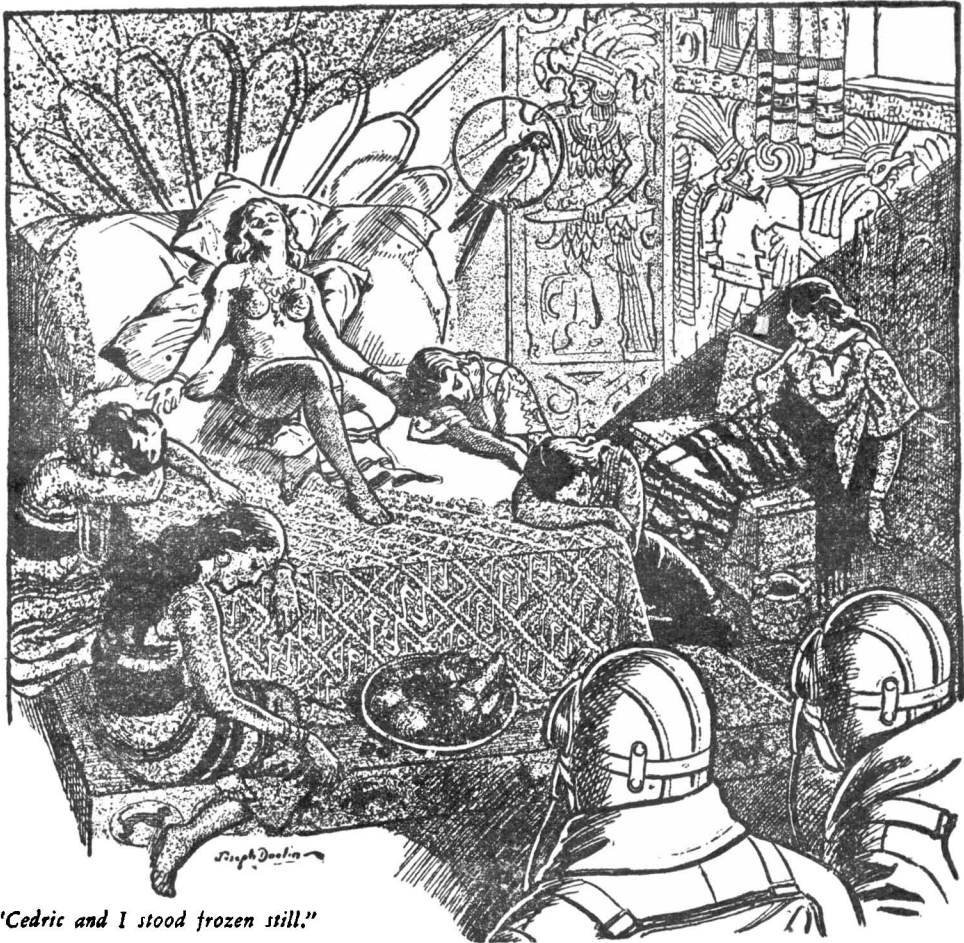
"You guys can stay here an' wait to get all scattered around if you want to!" shouted Runt Ford with a blistering oath. "I'm goin'!" And before we could stop him he had gone over the rim of the crater in a last mad run. Not away from the enemy though! With fixed bayonet, a fixed expression on his face, a fixed purpose in his heart, he went at them!

Runt took perhaps three steps. A hail of metal twanged the air above our ears, over our crater; then the heavy whine of it stopped, waiting for the next enmaddened one of us to make the break.

But before any more of us decided upon a last rush across the machine-gun punctured spaces, our side reached up its sleeve and played an unexpected ace in the shape of a begoggled laddie flying a reckless Spad.

That chap showed the German marksmen to just what an art machine-gunnery could be developed. His Spad roared and plunged and twisted and dove and came and went, its twin guns all the while spurting a spray of death. By the time he had played his hand and had shot the obstinate nests empty of active members, we—the five of the shellhole—had taken advantage of the interruption and had tumbled into our own trenches.

But the lad of the flaming Vickers paid for his timely temerity. Some of those flying bullets had clipped him. He came down on edge; landed on his nose. We, staring wide-eyed, saw the dark smudge



"Cedric and I stood frozen still."

of smoke puff from the wreck; saw the merciless lick of the flame; saw his body dangling from the cockpit. Helpless and trapped, he and his wreck at once became the target of various scattered weapons.

So the five of the shellhole, backed by the full rifle-power of the whole trench, sallied forth again. We jerked him out of his sizzling coffin, and while the lead whistled its song about our ears and flaked up little puffs of dust at our feet, he came in to safety on my back.

Then we went out in force and took the trench the Spad had cleared of guns for us; and kept going, taking more trenches and more ground until our little

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sortie became a successful, big onward "push." And it all started with the reckless devil from the skies who popped in just in time to root out the nests and make the sacrifice play that allowed five desperate runners to make home.

**T**HUS I met Cedric—a name that does not altogether typify a hombre who can shoot the eyelashes off an enemy while dropping out of the skies on the end of a wing—and we became fast friends. But we actually saw little of each other until we were home again.

And then, because I had a deep feeling for the long, unhandsome flyer who

had saved me from playing a harp before I was ready, and because, I suppose, he had a soft spot for the soldier on whose back he had traversed a certain wicked stretch of France, we kept in touch with each other. But little did I guess that some day he would lead me into as eery an experience, as strange, as almost unbelievable an adventure as any man ever experienced.

After the war I followed Cedric's peacetime flying triumphs with a great deal of pleasure. Often he would drop in to explain some new gadget to make his plane do this or that, or to talk over his next cross-country flight. When he flew across the top of South America, the first to do it, in splendid time, I was particularly proud.

"Cede, old boy," I congratulated him when next he popped in, "you've got Lindy spliced to the mast now, haven't you? Sure was a dandy flight. Thrown away your old hats?"

"Not from what you mean, Soldier," he answered, addressing me as he always did. "But my head's swelled all right from plans I have in it. And you, my boy, are in on 'em. Put your feet up on the table and I'll tell you about it."

"All right, shoot!" I agreed. And I heard about it; and in the hearing of it let myself in for the experience I consider the queerest, the most fantastic a man ever went into.

"When I left Quito, Ecuador, to fly over that South American wilderness," explained Cedric, his pipe going like a blast furnace, "I came, after about six hours, to the Orinoco. That shining river was a fine guide over the thick sea of waving trees and jungle, and for a while I followed it. Then I left it to cut across lots, and after a bit—I know I can find it again—I saw something I'm willing to bet eyes haven't looked on for—well,

however long it is since that pre-historic civilization faded away."

"What was it?" I asked, at once interested.

"I passed over a deep, wide gully," went on Cedric, "and about the middle of it, on the top of a cone-like hill, I saw a shining greenish square of something. I couldn't tell what it was. It seemed to be of about three or four acres.

"I circled over it and saw then that in the bottom of that valley was a town laid out in regular squares about the size of our city blocks, but I couldn't determine anything further. I couldn't get close enough. I couldn't, Soldier, get into the valley.

"All the air around there was clear, but the air in that valley was transparent to the point that the little town looked as though it were set in a spotless block of clear, clear crystal. And when I gave it another look I decided, Soldier me boy, that the green square on the top of the hill was a water-tank or reservoir."

"Why couldn't you find out?" I broke in. "What do you mean—you couldn't get into the valley?"

"Just exactly that. There's no air in that hollow. Or perhaps I should say the air's not right. The moment I dropped in below the level of the sides of the valley, it became hard breathing. The deeper I went the harder it got. I had to get out. It was just the same as trying for altitude without oxygen."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" I asked.

"A-h-h!" smiled Cedric, puffing great clouds from his pipe. "A timely question, my sharpshooter. I'm going to look into that valley. Pop in and pay that town a call. There's not supposed to be such high-grade civilization as that down there, but any village that sports a reservoir or a swimming-tank like that should

be worth looking into. And, Soldier, you shall go with me."

"Oh, I shall, shall I? Suppose I——"

"Listen. I have new style oxygen masks I was about ready to offer the government. We'll try 'em out. A mask a lot like the old army style with a small, easily carried tank of concentrated breath to go on your back. We'll drop into that valley and——"

"But—but—are there places to land? Isn't it all jungle?" I stalled.

"All around, yes. But in the valley there are fields."

"But why pick on me? You need another pilot. Or a navigator. I don't know a propeller from a tail spin. Get yourself an archeologist, a scientific dude——"

"Listen, Soldier. The malamute who goes with me slings a gat on each hip, a machine-gun on his back, and he knows how to use 'em. You're elected. I'll take one of your learned bozos next time, after you and I've shot up the town if that seems the right and proper thing to do. Who knows what we'll run into? I want some one along who can put a bullet twixt the peepers of those saber-toothed tigers we might find."

So about three weeks later I was seeing the top of South America from the enclosed cockpit of a fleet, sturdy plane, looking down upon those oceans and oceans of heavy jungle, and deciding that a forced landing would carry all the earmarks of being "just too bad." I was somewhat relieved to remember I had left my affairs at home in good shape.

Nor had Cedric forgotten the machine-gun he had threatened would be on my back. I chaffed him quite a bit about that unnecessary weight sticking out on the bow of our ship, but, like a schoolboy with a tin sword at his side hoping to find Indians or pirates or something up the next alley, the long awkward sky-

bird only smiled and said it was there if we needed it, which we might. Before many hours would pass I was to be glad my staunch friend had played the boy and brought it along

WE REACHED the Orinoco toward the end of that first day out from Quito, and as the shades of night came upon us rested on its broad surface at the foot of a high tapering cliff that pierced into the heavens like a great finger. Among other things Cedric's plane was shod with a wheel-pontoon landing combination that here proved his ingenuity along these lines.

"Here's where we leave the river in the morning," Cedric had said as he sweetly put her down, "and cut due east for about two hundred miles. Then we'll keep our eyes peeled."

It was after about two hours flying next morning that, following Cedric's pointing finger, I looked down to see a great deep valley, in the center of which gleamed the greenish square of the reservoir. My heart was pumping hard within me as I made out down beyond the shining surface of the water a little symmetrical town. When Cedric pointed the nose of our brave ship, *The Hummingbird*, down into that valley of mystery, every fiber of my being responded to the excitement of the moment.

I felt a tickling in my throat, a shortness of breath, but I was too excited to give much thought to it until Cedric pointed to the masks hanging in readiness before us. Then I knew that he, too, was feeling the rarity of the atmosphere.

I opened the little cabin door and leaned out to watch that square come glimmering up to us, and almost watched too long. For, as I then hurriedly donned my mask, I was gasping for breath, almost suffocated. As Cedric had said, there *was* no air in that valley. Not

breathable air, at least. I turned the oxygen into my mask through the tap on my shoulder and drank deeply of it.

My pilot companion skimmed the top of the green surface. Then he shouted, his words echoing my decision: "It's not water. Solid. Looks like ice. A transparent rock. Or marble."

"Can you land on it?" I wanted to know, shouting back. "Only looks like about a hundred feet across. Look, Cede!" I cried, excitement taking me as we swept on and over the town. "It's made of the same stuff. See how it sparkles. Cede! We're unearthing something, all right! This place is inhabited. It's in up-to-the-minute preservation. Can you put her down on that small surface?"

I could see that Cedric shared my excitement. His hands gripped the wheel of the plane until the knuckles of his hands stood out in tight whiteness. Then my eyes turned again to the snug little town, a town of almost fairy beauty. The buildings, or homes, or whatever they were, appeared to be of only one story, low and squat, but the town was laid out in squares very much the size of our city blocks; the streets were clean.

"Must be sleeping or hiding," I shouted to Cedric as he swung again toward the square hill-top. "Think you can land?"

He paid no attention to me; so I took the hint and sat silent while my comrade, who certainly knew his joy-sticks, put our big crate safely down on that tricky landing-place. Almost stalling, almost pancaking, he managed to maintain just enough glide to put his wheels down on the near edge of the surface we had once believed was green water. We rolled along. The other edge and the immediate drop beyond came toward us quickly. Cedric ruddered his plane into a half-circle, thus gaining distance in

which to stop, and on the opposite edge, the very edge, we came to rest.

"Whew!" our expressions through the glass of our masks said to each other. "Gosh! Close enough!"

He stopped his engine, and the sudden quieting of humming motor and singing wires and struts in the strange peace of that weird valley seemed doubly quiet. Then we turned our ship to be in readiness for a possible hurried take-off, and set our faces toward the long flight of green steps that led to the hushed city below. Silently we gazed into the valley; then, our hands instinctively settling upon the pistols at our hips, we faced each other.

It was mighty queer. Mighty queer. Why did we see no sign of life? No movement? Why hadn't some one heard us? Why weren't the streets already crowded with curious, staring natives of some race or another, instead of this strange, empty stillness?

"Soldier, my son," said Cedric, talking plainly but quietly through his mask, "something wrong here. Have they all fled? Did we scare 'em that much? Are they hiding from us—or for us? What do you say?"

"I say let's find out," I replied. "Pump a shell into your chambers, Cede, and let's go. I wouldn't miss the rest of this for anything on earth or anywhere else."

Without a word, Cedric started to descend the steps. I followed, my holster flaps open, my fingers ready to find my pistol butts.

**I**T WAS a long way down, but after a while, treading cautiously we were upon their streets, my own heart the noisiest thing I could hear. At once we could see that everything was in splendid preservation, seeming to be neither very old nor weather-worn. And yet there was still no sign of life.

But what a veritable fairy town we were in! Marble I had at first believed it all to be, but now I decided it was jade, all of that same greenish hue. The little houses — huts almost — all a-glitter beneath the sun. Then we turned the first corner into another street—and stopped dead in our tracks!

For there upon that street was life! There, before us, to be faced, to be dealt with, were natives. Either friend or foe they were, the important thing we must at once, and perhaps all too soon, find out.

Down the street a little, in the shade of the houses on our side, lay a native, a golden-bronzed Indian, fast asleep, a gaudy blanket across his chest. Half-way down the block, flat on his side enjoying the sun, lay a dog. On the opposite side, his head deep in the great basket of fruit against which he lolled as he sat, slept another native. Above and behind him, perched on a ledge over a door, I saw a great gorgeous parrot.

"Sleepy lot," muttered Cedric. "Must be siesta-ing. The watchdogs down here don't watch, do they? But we gotta wake 'em. Gotta find out things."

So like a pair of schoolboys out on a prank, we crowded behind the corner of a house as Cedric uttered a medium-sized "Hey!" Then another, a little larger "Hey!"

But neither dog nor parrot nor man ruffled a hair, waved a feather or flicked an eye. Cedric and I looked at each other. Through the mask I could see his wondering face. Mine, I know, was questioning, wondering. It felt white and bloodless. We were anxious, eager, excited. And in addition, some other feeling was beginning to grip us.

We shouted together then, each ready to bolt furiously if our voices brought too abrupt a response, but the sleepers slept on. We made ourselves conspicuous on

the street then, our pistols in our hands. Cedric raised his weapon, and though I feared the sound of its fierce crash in that death-like quiet, I feared the sticky silence about me more.

The pistol roared, the echoes pounded back and forth across the street, but the four before us refused to hear.

"They're dead," I whispered, a light sweat on my brow. "They're dead. This is a city of the dead! Something's happened!"

"You're darn tootin', somethin's happened," laughed Cedric somewhat strangely. "However did you figure that out?" Then, quickly overcoming our little case of nerves, we started toward the man nearest us.

Cautiously we went, suspecting trickery, our pistols in readiness. As Cedric at last went down on a knee beside the native, I, remembering what I'd heard of these fellows and watching for a sudden jerking-forth of a short spear or a poison blow-pipe, stood close guard, my pistol ready to beat him to the kill.

"Dead!" said Cedric, straightening up. "Dead?"

"Yes. Dead. Don't you see, Soldier? No oxygen in the valley; all wiped out. It's only our masks that let us live."

"Yes," I agreed, "but it couldn't have happened more than a few days ago." Then with a new, important thought striking me, "Cede, how long will our tanks last?"

"Hours. Come on. Let's see it all."

**C**EDRIC started on, but I, curious, perhaps morbid, knelt by the sleeper. I put my hand on his bronzed arm and jumped hastily back.

"Cede! Look here! Feel!" I commanded through the glass of my mask. I placed Cedric's fingers upon the silent one's arm, and saw him try to indent the flesh. I saw his fingers—as I had felt

mine—fruitlessly endeavor to make a depression in the iron-like flesh.

"Cede, we're dreaming. We're both crazy," I said excitedly, "or else nicely fooled. This isn't a man. This is an image. A painted iron or stone image."

"Not on your life! This is deeper than you and I imagine," argued Cedric. "He's real, but this atmosphere has done something to him. Preserved him wonderfully. When we go we'll take him along. Some one who understands these things ought to look into——"

"Cede!" I gasped. "Perhaps — perhaps—why of course, he's been that way a long time. Years! Hundreds!"

"Yes, by gum! Thousands! Heck, man! This sorta gets under your hide. Come on."

We paused as we passed those little houses to gaze inside, but we saw nothing more startling than a few lolling figures until we were half-way down the street.

And then in a dwelling different from the others in that it was built of a blue stone instead of the green, we saw a sight—a tableau of beauty too splendid for words.

The sun streamed in through a substance something like glass in an opening in the wall, to throw its crimson rays, as though it were a spotlight upon a Belasco stage, onto a couch. A couch draped in royal, colorful draperies. A couch around which sat and lay and lolled five or six beautiful handmaidens. A couch upon which lay the most exquisitely beautiful creature I have ever seen.

Cedric and I stood frozen still. My heart pounded. My eyes stared till they hurt. A thousand, perhaps ten thousand years may have elapsed since that vacuum-like valley full of death had descended upon these sleepers to slowly, gently suffocate them, and then to preserve them so mysteriously. And now,

after all those long years, a gangling, homely aviator had brought an ignorant soldier to look upon them. Two unscientific idiots who now cursed their ignorance and their inability to appreciate properly the treasures of antiquity upon which they gazed.

Cedric and I slowly, reverently, stepped into the room. We were passing among royalty, we knew. Admiringly we gazed upon the splendid golden forms of the beautiful, lightly clad maidens. I stood by the royal bed and gazed deeply upon its mistress.

Not of Maya, not of Toltec blood was she. There was none of the heavy Aztec features or Indian aquilinity. This girl was ancient and of gilded flesh, but if it were not for her color would have passed as a present-day type of American womanhood—a thousand-year-dead golden Ayesha beyond even Rider Haggard's wildest dreams.

I felt Cedric's hand upon my arm. I followed him out, my knees unsteady, a great covering of perspiration all about me and beneath my mask. I saw Cedric lean against a house-front, saw him operate the tap of his oxygen tank. I regulated mine, and after I had cut off my supply a little, I felt somewhat better.

We crossed to the dog in the street, so life-like and sleepy-like in his death that I found myself lightly wondering if the fleas upon him were hard and flint-like, also. The flesh of the man with his head in the fruit was like that of his brother across the street. The fruit was more wonderful than I've ever seen, but like the flesh of the natives—hard as iron. The parrot above his head had one eye open. He looked without seeing at the two strange men from some other world, demons whose masked faces were not like his old master's.

I turned my oxygen off a bit more as we passed up that street, not especially,



interested now in the open doors and the few lolling figures. A queer feeling had me by the throat; my head was swimming. I wanted to sit down to rest, to sleep—to sleep. But by that time we knew it was the death, the slow, gentle death of the valley, reaching out for us.

"Soldier," said Cedric wearily, "come on. Don't quit. Let's—let's get out. It—it's gettin' to us."

But we couldn't get out. Up on the corner he was the first to stagger and fall. I fell beside him. But what did it matter? Had we not found something of which the rest of the world could not even dream? Why not sink gently down and sleep peacefully in the heart of our find? Sleep is the tonic, the medicine for the weary, and I was weary.

Just before I dozed into deep oblivion I turned off my oxygen completely, too senseless to wonder if good old Cedric had done the same or why we were doing it. An old wizened bronzed man in a near doorway was the last thing I saw. An old fellow stretched out flat in his peaceful death—stretched out flat—flat—

I DON'T know how long I slept. The sun looked at about midday when next I awoke. I sat up straight to find I had thrown my mask partly off sometime during my heavy slumber. Cedric was lying flat on his back, still as death, his mask lifted from his nostrils. I reached out, found his pulse; then again my eyes sleepily rested on the old man before me.

Dreamily, still not caring to move, I watched that old man, absently pondering the fact that we were breathing and living without our masks, pondering whether to wake Cedric and move on or rest a little longer; wondering, too, about the feeling of heaviness in my lungs, the ache and prickle in my bones and very sinews.

My eyes must be bothering me, also, I decided, for they made me believe I had seen a shudder pass over the frame of the old man before me. All part of my lethargy, of course, I realized. And then—I saw his finger twitch!

I shook Cedric roughly. I was frightened. He awoke like a man doped. But I shook him fiercely, seeing as I shook a jerking of the fingers of the old man who had been asleep a thousand, or perhaps ten thousand, years.

"Cede!" I gasped, pointing, "he's awake. He's coming alive!"

"Who? What did you—you're crazy," murmured Cedric, sleepily. "Just plain drunk or——" Then he stopped, his words, or his oath of surprize, frozen on his lips.

Cedric rose to his knees, seeing with staring eyes the old man roll over on his side. Then we helped each other to our feet and went staggering along to make our escape. Up on top of the hill over that long flight of steps our great friendly plane was waiting. We hurried to get to it, eager to hear the roar of its motor again.

But we were too late. As we turned into that street again from which the long green steps led to the top of the hill and the *Humming-bird*, we ran into six or eight tall, splendid men of bronze and gold. They stood transfixed, their surprize even greater than ours. But only for a moment did their surprize stay them. Those almost naked fellows uttered one combined yell and showed us their heels. Then we hurried on, more strongly now, for the long stairway.

But, with courage returning, they waylaid us. Out from another street they poured to overwhelm us, to pinion my arms behind me, to make my still sleepy brain believe from their ferocity that it was "finis" for us.

A few high shouts. A lot of flourish-

ing of hands and arms, and then I saw that fast, desperate punishment was to be mine. My guards dropped away, leaving only two to hold me, a matter those two golden giants found a very simple task. Between them, at the length of their arms, I stood as helpless as a rabbit tacked on a door, facing a third man—the executioner.

That devil held a short spear in his hand. He measured the distance between us, drew his weapon back once, twice, as he gaged and sighted for my heart. Then for the third time he drew back his arm, the muscles rippling and tautening for the thrust. Foolishly, in my helplessness, I realized he'd hurl it right through me. I saw the muscles knot, closed my eyes.

Then I heard a scuffle, a gasp for breath, the crack of a heavy, friendly automatic. The fellow before me pitched flat on his face at my feet. Good old Cedric! Once an ace, always an ace. Again he had played a high card!

I fought then, but I might have saved my efforts. Awed as my guards certainly were by the magic of the thunder and the sudden death, yet they bravely held me tight. And next moment Cedric was again overpowered.

But his shot had for some reason or other changed their tactics. In their midst we were hurried back over the street to the blue house of the Princess. The man we had first found was gone now. The dog came to snap at our heels; the parrot was flapping his wings.

Then we were again in the presence of the beautiful girl and her attendants. Her warriors jabbered out their story, explaining to that gorgeous, now living Ayesha the facts concerning us as though they had merely napped for a minute or two to awaken and find us there; not as though they had slept a death sleep for years upon years, centuries upon centuries.

**T**HE Princess did not like us. That was easy to see. Her expression was one of fear and distrust. Any mercy we may have expected from her womanly heart became quickly a hope lost.

She looked closely at Cedric, staring at his mask. Then one of the men stepped up and gingerly examined it.

"Take it off, Chingascook," cried Cedric. "I almost forgot the blasted thing was still there." He bent his head and shook it, and the native, seeing it fall away from the face behind it, jerked it off.

I watched the Princess. Watched her for the least sign of pleasure or kindness. A smile from her would be an eagerly clutched-at straw, for we knew that the next executioner who stepped up to heave a javelin would not have Cedric's pistol to contend with. They had us too securely now for that. But the face of the Princess showed no emotion. Her eyes were not kindly toward Cedric.

Then they jerked off my mask. And this time, after a long, long look—and I can say it with modesty for Cedric was, despite everything else about him, a very homely owl—the eyes of the Princess grew soft, her lovely mouth lost its harshness.

"Well, for the love of old razor blades!" approved Cedric heartily, "if you're not making a hit, Soldier my boy, you sheik!" But his slight hilarity was soon checked. These people had evidently been a race of fast thinkers. And now they carried this characteristic on, their little nap not changing them a trifle.

The Princess pointed to Cedric and gave a command. We were taken out on the street. They held poor old Cedric tight while I stared at it all, horror-eyed. Then another executioner stood before him, a spear in his hand, his muscles tensed.

"Don't! Stop!" I yelled, coming to my

senses at last. I struggled free, fighting mad. But before I could take a step, before I could draw a gun, they had me again. The devils! If I could only have got my gun in my hand! Two shots and Cedric would have been released. Then with his guns blazing, too, we could have——

Just a dream. We were helpless. I was jerked back. The executioner spread his feet wide again, balanced himself for the thrust. I closed my eyes. I couldn't watch it. Not watch poor old Cedric go out like——

Then another sudden shout. A multitude of shouts. Down the street came a running figure, pointing back over his shoulder as he came to the crest of the hill behind the town. At once all eyes turned to where, like a great winged insect, stood our plane.

The Princess and her wise men stood and stared. Then we started off toward it, Cedric being marshaled along in front while I walked, still held, by the side of the litter upon which the Princess was carried. Her eyes were upon me all the time, and after a little the man on my right released me and then I felt, in place of his, the soft, warm hand of the Princess snuggle into mine!

"Soldier, dear heart," sang out Cedric over his shoulder to me, still able to meet things with a laugh though we knew not what we went to next moment. "Soldier, this looks a little better. They're taking us up to find out what the old *Humming-bird* can be. If we get half a break, make it a whole one. If you get a hand loose, pull some of your old army stuff and put a bullet into each of my cops, won't you? If I can get my mitts on my gats I'll do the same for you, eh, what?"

"Nothing else, Cede," I called back, the Princess looking up with an amused smile. "If only we can get to our guns!"

After a while we stood by the great

plane, our brains full of a single thought. If we could man the splendid craft and roll her over the edge she would float us to safety. All we needed was a half-minute of swift, free action. If I could keep them off for that little time, Cedric would have the engine roaring. I'd do it if I could! "Give me half a break," I muttered and prayed twixt clenched teeth, "and I'll——"

"Well, if the Queenie ain't taken to little Soldier like he wuz her long-lost soulmate," I heard Cedric say in laughing sarcasm, though it struck me queer again that a man with the sense Cedric had could see anything funny at such a time. "Soldier, is your brain working? Do you know you hold a cute li'l hand like a yap when a pistol butt cries out to you? Snap out of it!"

But I was not so completely asleep as it had looked to Cedric. I knew what I could do with an automatic, but I wanted no false starts. I was waiting for that moment when clean, fast action could turn any slight chance offered into a successful get-away. But I had action thrust upon me.

The Princess' litter had been carried near one of the *Humming-bird's* smooth wings. I stood beside her and watched a fellow come through the crowd to her carrying a large, heavy blade. A type of machete for jungle work. A knife, the keen edge of which was of copper, nicely tempered, a "lost" art in keeping with the "lost" tribe we had found.

He walked to the wing and without any more ado swung his arm for a blow. Cedric yelled and struggled to be free. I dropped my lady's lovely hand, took two fast steps toward the chopper, and swung my fist as heavily and straightly as I could. The blade went one way, the would-be finder-out of what a wing was made of the other.

Confusion, shouting, milling, a clos-

ing-in on us then, with knives and spears a-sparkle in the sun. I jerked my automatic and did to Cedric's guards what he said he'd do for me. And because I was busy about that business and was overlooking the guard who still held my left wrist, Cedric saved my life from the fellow's knife-thrust by living up to his promise.

Then Cedric, with a great bound or two, had gone—had ducked into the cabin of the plane and with all speed had set his spark and throttle and gadgets ready for motion. I heard his starter grinding the motor over as I raced for the plane. Then there came a sharp stinging in the back of my head, then—darkness.

I MUST have been unconscious for perhaps only a minute. I came back to my senses to see, first of all, that Cedric had gone. Gone! All I had to do to see what had become of him was to follow the eyes of the excited natives. The *Humming-bird* was off in the valley, a little above our level, headed for home.

There was silence on that square as they watched, fascinated, the great bird that had gone, taking one of their visitors with it. Then they saw me there sitting up, and some of them rushed to me. My hand still held my pistol, while beside me lay the spear that luckily must have hit me broadside on.

I sprang to my feet, drawing my other gun, and backing away. They'd never take me now if I could help it! A spear came hurtling. I ducked. Over my shoulder I heard the whiz of it. Then I plunked out a shot, and the javelin-hurler, tasting my lead, fell on his face. Another arm in that crowd now closely ringing me in and forcing me backward ever closer and closer to the edge, drew back for a throw. But I tossed first and

the knees of another sagged and let him down.

"Devils!" I told them. "I'll teach you back numbers a thing or two 'fore you get me. You'll not take me!" Cedric was gone! Hard to believe—that! That Cedric would—desert! Out of the corner of my eye I saw the glister of the sun on the wings of the speeding *Humming-bird*. "Crack!" spoke my Colt again. I took another pace back.

I was on the edge then, a smoking pistol in each hand. I'd stay there till the last shot. Then, when they rushed me, I'd go on over. A nice finish to my little archeological venture! A nice way out with a guy—Crack!—you'd called buddy—Crack!—off in the heavens headed for—Crack!—home!

I turned and glanced down into the depth of the valley. Ugh! Below me I saw a pile of white, gleaming bones. Circling over them I saw great birds. Some of the scavengers were down on the pile fighting, tearing. The latest victim, of course. And I—I would be the next. A white man, perhaps their first, to go their sacrificial way. To go plunging toward the hideous birds that, with these other brutes, had slept a long, long sleep to wake again to their beastly—

Then they came at me. I ducked and dodged and flung out my hot metal, kneeling on the edge of the bright surface, one foot over, ready to go.

Then a devilish roar behind me, a thunder of a million guns in the air, and the mass of humanity pushing me over the edge wilted and crumbled. Machine-gun fire!

I had forgotten the gun that Cedric, in what I had called foolishness, had mounted on the nose of the plane; had, in fact, in the hot moments and my desperate plight and determination to make every shot count, forgotten Cedric.

But now, as he swept over, I threw

out the empty clips from my pistols, inserted full ones, a fresh hope in my heart. Cedric roared on, swung around, came back. Slowly, once again, that big ship flopped in onto the small square and rolled to me. I raced toward it. Cedric appeared at the cabin door, guns in hands to cover my flight. Then, before I could prevent it, it had happened!

One of the Indians, anything but a coward—to give the devil his due in the face of mysterious happenings that must have been magic to him—came creeping under the fuselage and thrust his spear into Cedric's breast. Cedric fell back in the cabin and I made one more shot count on that prehistoric, thousand-year-old, dead-for-centuries murderer.

Then I sprang into the ship, dragged Cedric's body clear of the controls, took my place in the pilot's seat. I had watched Cedric operate the ship, of course; knew what this and that was for, but as for flying—a kite had always buffaloed me.

But now I gave that ship the gun, tore that valley loose with the roar of our exhausts, dropped that big, powerful ship off the edge of the hill-top. I lifted her, swung around, headed for where I believed the Orinoco to lie. With one hand on the wheel, I ripped open Cedric's tunic with the other. He was bleeding profusely. Was I to lose him now after all we'd gone through? But what could I do? Jungle beneath me! Good old Cedric, staunch companion, bleeding to death at my feet.

I held my handkerchief tightly against his wound, staunched it, steadied my great quivering bird as she hurled forward, and for the first time really realized what I had done. There I sat in behind the controls of the powerful plane, driving her, keeping her on even keel, feeling her answer the pressure of my finger tips, yet really knowing no more about

flying than did the men of bronze back there on the hill-top. It frightened me. If she stalled, if we hit a pocket, if—if—oh, a thousand and one if's!—what should I do? And Cedric at my feet perhaps dying, perhaps—dead!

Then the silver of the great river catching the last flashes of the evening sun; and soon at full throttle I was over it. I eased down slowly, feeling my way, teaching myself the way down in a long glide. The river came up. Up! Up! Could I make it? I'd have to, or else—well, just as well a crash and the crocodiles as the spear through the body.

But I made it! A smooth one! And without waiting to anchor I turned to Cedric, then the medicine case, and in a little while I felt better about things; felt proud as punch about my air ability, thankful about Cedric.

We spent the night there. Next morning, with Cedric holding his own, I took off in a fashion I wished Cedric could have seen. Luck stayed with me. All day I—green—never with a wheel or joy-stick in my hand before, kept her going, and at the close of day again brought her in over Quito.

Tickled? Boy, that's not the word! I'd show 'em. "When they came out to greet us and found me operating that crate, wouldn't they shout?" I asked myself in my glee. Up came the field. Down we went. Easily. Nicely. A sweet glide. Man, I had it! What it took to run a plane I—

"Wham!" Something didn't work right. A "stall," I believe they call it. Not enough gliding angle. We went down flat, stood up on our nose, hung a while end on end, turned over.

**I** WAS in one bed, Cedric in the next some time after that, both decidedly the worse for rough treatment.

"Sorry I busted her up, Cede," I said for not the first time.

"Sorry nothing, idiot! Lots more where she came from. Soldier, you did yourself proud, but I'll have to teach you a bit before our next trip."

"Next! Next?"

"That's what I said. But say, Soldier, why did they, after all those years, come to life just when we sent in our card to 'em? Why did that suffocating something, that lack of proper air in that valley, lift away just when the butler announced us?"

"I've been thinking of that," I answered. "And it was because we *did* drop in, Cede. We stirred up the air.

Our big old crate—gosh! I'm sorry she cracked up. I mean I'm sorry I cracked her up. Anyway, our crate opened up a current, started good air flowing in as we circled around. A breeze coming in did the rest."

"Right you are. That's my solution, too. No, I don't suppose we'll go back. I don't care for their funny little ways. But don't forget, Soldier, that you and I know; that you and I've seen; that you and I've been entertained by, in fact, down there somewhere east of the Orinoco, a tribe that slept for a thousand years or more. A race of handsome, splendid men, and beautiful, beautiful—my gosh! Soldier, wasn't your sweetie a gorgeous 1000 B. C. flapper?"