

AN AERIAL RUNAWAY

By W. P. and C. P. Chipman.

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CHAPTER XV.

The Midnight Plot.

It had seemed strange to the castaways that Admaxla should be so familiar with the interior arrangements of the temple. Not only did he know the secret and seldom-used way to the top of the dome, and the exact location of the tank in which the high priest Challeu was given his involuntary bath, but there was scarcely a nook or corner of the huge structure, and certainly not a single apartment, of which he did not know the exact location, the way to reach it, and the use to which it was put.

This knowledge of the sacred edifice and its surroundings was explained by the lad himself later on, however, when the visitors had acquired his language. He told them he was the second son of Tupac, an older brother having died about eighteen months before. As the curaca's office always descended to the eldest son, Admaxla, in accordance with another custom of the land, by which the roll of the priesthood was kept full, was, at the age of twelve years, assigned to the temple service.

The rank of the family placed the boy in the white city, under the immediate charge of Challeu, who from the first disliked the youngster. Possibly Admaxla was somewhat to blame for this antipathy of the priest. Naturally overflowing with animal spirits, and keen enough to detect the fraud and hypocrisy in the life of the old ecclesiastic, he soon made it his chief business to dog the man's footsteps, and to play all manner of jokes upon him at every opportunity.

Upon one occasion the high priest had found Admaxla at the foot of the ladder leading up to the dome, and vexed that the lad should have ventured so far on what was forbidden ground to all the members of the priesthood but himself, he had thrown the intruder into the supply tank, which happened at that time to be open.

After swimming about for some time, Admaxla discovered a flight of steps which led out of the water at the opposite end of the reservoir, and so escaped. The memory of the incident never left him; and when an opportunity came to give the high priest a taste of his own medicine, he was only too glad to make use of it.

On the death of his elder brother, Admaxla, to his great relief, had been taken home again, as he was now his father's heir; and the arrival of the strangers found him serving as chasquis, one of the preparatory steps to his ultimate position.

Aware that the lad knew much about him which was not to his credit, and suspecting that he knew more than he really did, Challeu hated Admaxla even worse than he did Tupac and Chasca; and it was extremely galling to him that the youth was destined in time to succeed to the most powerful chieftainship in the state. This animosity had now been fanned into a white heat by the betrothal of Admaxla to Tara, the daughter of Chasca. The ceremony had taken place on the day the aeronauts landed upon the cliffs, and explains why Tupac and his family happened to be in the white city when they arrived there. As Tara was the only child of Chasca, this proposed marriage would eventually unite the two most powerful offices in the land—the Lord of the Treasury and the Lord of the Quipu—in one person; a circumstance that had never before happened in the history of the nation.

The sending of Admaxla to be with the strange guests had only added new fuel to the fire, and his presence in the sacred building was a constant source of irritation to the high priest. While the latter had no suspicion of the part played by Professor Barton and Rod in the disarranging of the lens, he did connect Admaxla with the dousing he had received in the tank. He, in fact, regarded the lad as a spy upon his own movements, and determined in some way to get rid of him. At length he came to a decision, and sent for his nephew, Topar, curaca of Arauco.

On the very evening that Professor Barton announced to his friends that he had solved the problem of their escape from the plateau, if only the high priest would allow them another undisturbed two weeks, that dignitary and Topar were in close consultation in the private apartments of the priest.

"I tell you," the younger man was saying, "it is high time something was done to show Chasca and Tupac that they cannot have their way in everything."

"Exactly," his uncle assented, "and that is just the reason I have called you here. I have a plan which means trouble for Chasca and Tupac, and also for those accursed strangers. The boy Admaxla is in great favor with the strangers and stays with them constantly. Now if we can, on some pretext or other, gain control of the fellow, and confine him in your district, we can charge the visitors with his disappearance, and so bring about a rupture between them and Tupac. Perhaps we can even bring them to trial for the crime. Then after they are out of the way, we can mysteriously produce the lad, claiming the gods have returned him by our intercession, and so greatly enhance our influence among the people. By the same act also we shall have placed both Tupac and Chasca under obligations to us. Do you not think it worth the trial?"

The curaca paced back and forth for a few minutes in silence. Then he said scornfully:

"Admaxla is no fool, and he would know who carried him off, and where he was confined. So the moment he was released he would give the whole thing away, and bring down the soldiers of Chasca and Tupac upon me. We should be plunged into another civil strife, and even if Nasca of Haurina join me, what is the paltry thousand men we are allowed to keep under arms beside the thousands the three curacas can produce; for Haulpa of Chochima will surely join forces with the other two. No; your plan is the height of folly."

Then before his uncle could speak, he went on passionately:

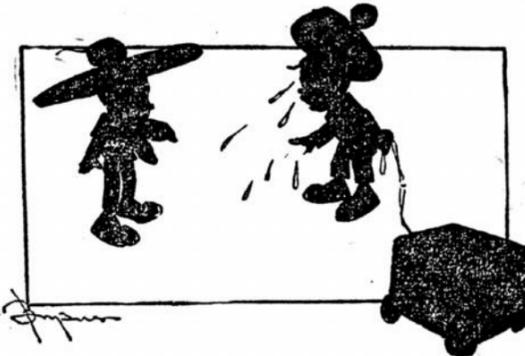
"Oh! I tell you it was a contemptible trick played on our fathers at the close of the old war—when they limited the armies of Haurina and Arauco to five hundred men each, while the other districts were to maintain a thousand apiece. It was a scheme to keep us down forever; but it will not succeed. Nasca and I each have an extra thousand men in secret training, and lances and

bows concealed sufficient to arm them at a moment's notice. A little more time, and then let the proud ones beware, or the shields shall be broken on their palace steps (the native method of declaring war), and we will drive them over the cliffs before they learn we can meet them man to man."

"Tell me how you would manage this affair."

For a moment the curaca hesitated, then speaking slowly he replied: "In this way. We will take the boy prisoner, as you say, but instead of confining him in my district as you suggest, I will deliver him to some trusty men who shall carry him to the edge of the great cliff and throw him down. 'Dead llamas do not bleat.' Then we can accuse the strangers of putting him out of the way, and so bring them to judgment. When they have been disposed of, and the affair has quieted down, I can approach Chasca, asking Tara as wife for my son. With Admaxla no longer living, where is there a more suitable union for his daughter? And I am inclined to think that he will listen to my overtures. If so, the time will come when Arauco and the white city will be joined together instead of the white city and Zoetlan. My son will be the Lord of the Treasury, and so, holding the balance of power, may become the first Inca of Antalca. It is a wider scheme than yours, uncle, and yet it does not involve so much risk. Help me to carry it out, and I promise you that the priesthood shall be so arranged that its chief office shall remain in your family forever."

"It is a bold plan, a daring one," the old man murmured, with sparkling eyes; "it goes farther than I had ever dared to scheme. I had hoped to secure the office of high priest for our family; but the head chieftainship, possibly a throne—that was farther than I saw.



TERRIBLE PUNISHMENT.

"What you crying for?"

"Boo-hoo! Ma says I've got to go to the dentist's."

"Huh! That's nothing. My ma says I've got to go to school for the next ten years!"

And yet, why not? Sit down, nephew, and let us arrange for the carrying out of the first steps in this move as soon as possible."

It was in accordance with the plans thus formed, that at a late hour the following night an under priest rapped at the door of the castaways' apartments. Admaxla, who slept in the outer chamber, drew aside the curtains and admitted the visitor.

He soon made known his errand.

"The high priest has been suddenly taken ill," announced he; "and it is feared that he is dying. It is necessary that some one go as messenger to Zoetlan, to the priest Xauxa, who as you know, is Challeu's successor. He must come in time to learn the secrets and receive the tokens of the high priesthood. There is no other chasquis in the temple. Can you go?"

"Certainly," the lad answered. Then he turned to the four castaways, who, awakened by the voice of the messenger, now emerged from their bedroom. In a few words he explained to them the situation, saying:

"With your permission I will carry the message."

Professor Barton looked doubtfully at him for a moment, but Admaxla nodded reassuringly, so he said:

"Why, of course, if you can be of any service, go; but run no useless risks. How soon will you be back?"

"By an hour after sunrise, unless I am delayed," the boy answered.

"Very well," the aeronaut responded; and the young native followed the waiting attendant out of the room.

After they had disappeared, the professor said to his comrades:

"I cannot help feeling that there is something wrong about this midnight call. Possibly it is a move of the old priest to get Admaxla out of the way, while he wreaks his vengeance on us. Let us dress ourselves, therefore, and be prepared for any emergency. I may be unnecessarily suspicious, but if so, we shall only lose a little sleep, and it is wiser to do that than to run any risk," an opinion the others also held, so they rapidly put on their clothing.

Meanwhile the under priest led Admaxla directly to the rooms of the high priest, where he found Challeu lying upon a couch breathing heavily and groaning from time to time. About the room were several attendants, evidently trying to relieve the sick man's sufferings.

As Admaxla entered the apartment, the old priest roused himself a little, and motioned for the boy to come to the bedside. Raising himself on one hand, the sufferer gestured to the others to leave him alone with the lad. Then he began to give his directions to the listening youth, but his voice was so faint that it was difficult to distinguish his words, and Admaxla bent low over the couch that he might hear him better.

As he did so there came a sudden rush behind him, his feet were seized and dragged from under him, while Challeu's arms were thrown about his neck with a grasp surprisingly strong for one who seemed so near death. Before the astonished lad could cry out, a gag was placed in his mouth, his hands and feet were tied, and he was thrown upon the floor.

He lay there for a moment, while the high priest, now apparently as well as ever, held a hurried consultation with some one. Then two men picked him up, and preceded and followed by a number of soldiers, they bore their unwilling but helpless captive down the stairs and out into the park. When there they broke into a quick the noiseless trot, and turned down one of the silent streets leading to the lake.

(To Be Continued.)

AN EMERGENCY BOY

He Is a Splendid Fellow Who Can Be Called Upon at Any Time and Found Ready.

A water pipe burst one day when some women were alone in the house. They began to sweep it out and mop it up, in the overflowed kitchen, but of course that did little good. "Go call in a man!" cried one. "The only man I can see passing is a boy!" said the one who went to obey. But she called in the boy.

"Which way to the cellar?" he asked at once, and down he sped and turned off the water from the supply pipe. There was an emergency boy for you! Others might have known as well as he that the stop-cock must be there, but this young fellow had his wits with him and used the knowledge he had on the minute.

An emergency, you understand, is a sort of a flood from which it is necessary to emerge, and there is need to be quick about it.

Some boys were out in the woods among the hills in very early spring. Somehow they lost their bearings and then lost themselves in consequence. One boy of them all remembered that the very earliest wild flowers always grow on the north side of a hill, and, as the shy hepaticas were already peeping out, the boys were able, by a little observation and calculation, to recover their lost bearings, and find their way out from the wild woody place where they were. They were happy to have one among them who could use his knowledge in an emergency.

An emergency boy is one who knows what to do, where to take hold, and how to help at once, when there is pressing necessity. Knowing what to do is not enough. A boy must know how to do it and when. If a comrade cuts an artery with a piece of glass by accident, there will be no time then to run home and look in a certain book where one remembers to have seen directions for meeting such emergencies. He must tie a handkerchief at once above the hurt with its spurting blood, and twist it with a stick till he controls the bleeding.

The moment of emergency is not the time to prepare for it. A boy must practice self-control daily, and get the habit of thoughtfulness. He must keep his wits about him, if he is to use them at need.

The emergency boy, who can be called on any time and found ready to take hold or ready to run at need, is a splendid fellow. There cannot be too many of him.

HOW TIME IS SET

Uncle Sam Regulates All of His Clocks by Some of the Steady-Going Stars.

Strange as it may seem, says a writer in St. Nicholas, Uncle Sam does not make use of the sun for reckoning time, but turns his attention to some of the regular, steady going stars, or "fixed stars," as they are called. Every clear night an astronomer with a big telescope looks at certain of these stars, and makes his calculations, from which he can tell just when the sun would cross the seventy-fifth meridian.

One of the great clocks in the observatory is called the transmitter, because it transmits, or sends out, the signal which keeps standard time. This clock is set and regulated by the star time, and then every day at three minutes and fifteen seconds before twelve a switch is turned on, and the beats of the pendulum of this clock are sent by electricity over the wires to the telegraph offices in Washington and New York.

When the telegraph operators hear this sound on their instruments, they know that the noon signal is about to be sent out, and they at once begin to connect the telegraph wires with other towns and cities, until, in a minute or two, the "tick, tick," of the clock at Washington is heard in hundreds of telegraph offices. The beats stop at ten seconds before twelve as a notice that the next "tick" will be the noon signal, and so as to give the operators time to connect their wires with the standard time-balls and clocks.

There are time-balls in a great many cities—usually on top of some prominent building, where they can easily be seen. Well, the moment the sun is supposed to cross the seventy-fifth meridian, the telegraph instruments give a single tick, the time-balls drop, the clocks begin to strike, and everybody in the district knows it is 12 o'clock.

Animals That Fear Fire.

Most animals are afraid of fire and will fly from it in terror. To others there is a fascination about a flame and they will walk into it even though tortured by the heat. Some firemen were talking the other day about the conduct of animals during a fire. A horse in a burning stable, they agreed, was wild with fear, but a dog was as cool in a fire as at any other time. A dog, they said, keeps his nose down to the floor, where the air is purest, and sets himself calmly to finding his way out. Cats in fires howl piteously. They hide their faces from the light and crouch in corners. When their rescuer lifts them they are, as a rule, quite docile and subdued, never biting or scratching. Birds seem to be hypnotized by fire and keep perfectly still; even the loquacious parrot in a fire has nothing to say. Cows, like dogs, do not show alarm. They are easy to lead forth and often find their way out themselves. Rodents seem never to have any difficulty in escaping from fires. The men said that in all their experience they had never come upon the burned skeleton of a rat or mouse.

The Rain Tree of Colombia.

Golden Penny.

A rain tree is the latest novelty reported from across the Atlantic. The consul of the United States of Colombia writes that in the woods adjacent to the city of Moyebamba, exists a tree called by the natives "rain tree," which possesses some remarkable qualities. It is a tree about fifty feet high when at maturity, and about three feet in diameter at the base, and has the property of absorbing an immense quantity of humidity from the atmosphere, which it concentrates and subsequently pours forth from its leaves and branches in a shower, and in such abundance that in many cases the ground of its neighborhood is converted into a perfect bog. It possesses this curious property in its greatest degree in the summer, precisely when the rivers are at their lowest, and water most scarce; and the writer proposes that it should be planted in the more arid regions of Peru for the benefit of agriculturists.