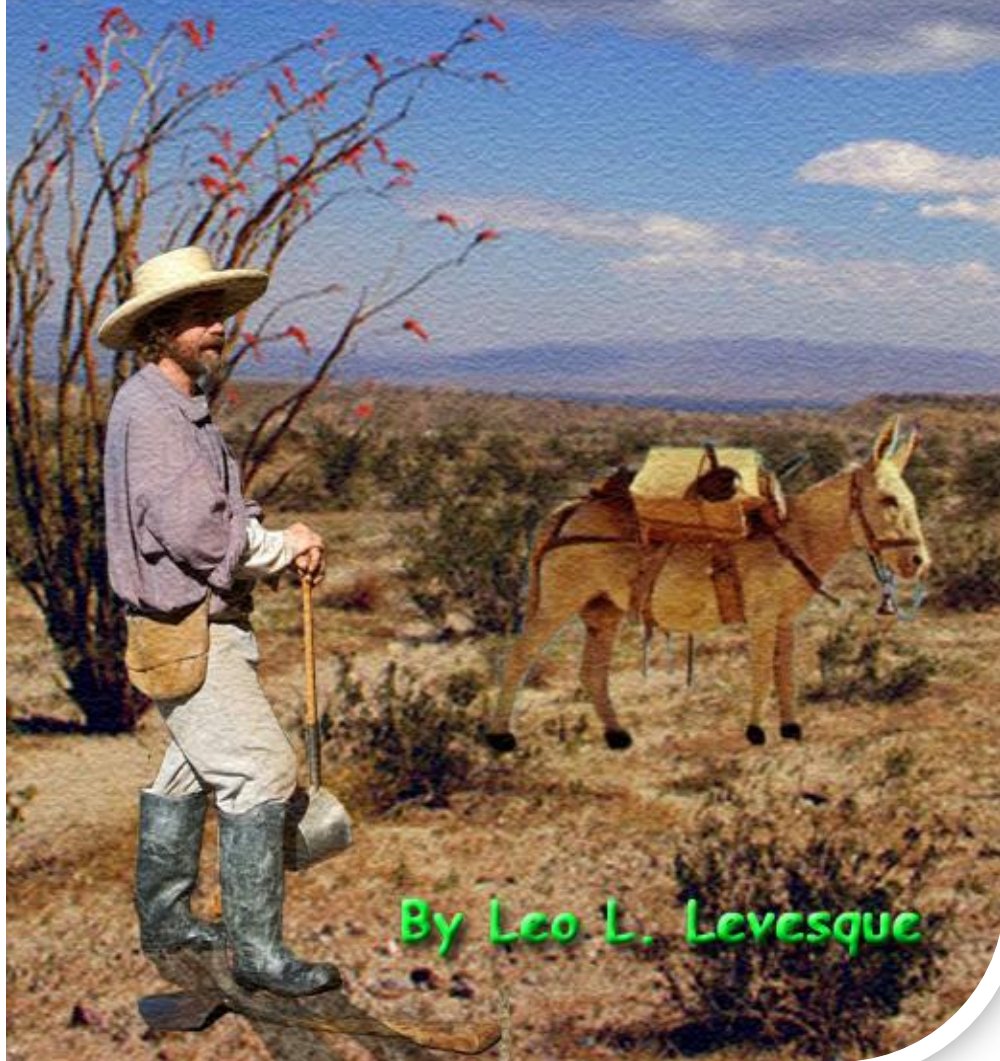


A Special SleuthCon 2012 Tom Swift Short Story

TOM SWIFT *and the* Lost Gold Mine



By Leo L. Levesque

Tom Swift and the Lost Gold Mine

Or

Tom Swift has an Arizona adventure

The two twelve year old boys exploded out of the limousine as soon as it stopped at the Gold Canyon Resort. The driver staggered out and bumped into one of them as they ran around the vehicle whooping and hollering like cowboys and indians.

The driver finally made it to the back passenger car door to let his fare out, as she stepped out of the car he said, “Madam, God bless you if you live through this. Please don’t call me to pick you up.” He slammed the door shut and rushed back to the driver’s seat and hit the gas. The brakes squealed as the car came to an abrupt halt and he hopped out, opened the trunk and threw their luggage to the ground. The grinding of gears could be heard for some time as he sped away.

The two boys stopped their antics as soon as he roared away. They looked at each other and high-fived over their heads. The taller of the two, Tom II, had a crew cut and golden blonde hair. He was tall for his age and as skinny as a rail. He wore a blue and white striped tee shirt and blue jeans.

The other boy, Budworth Jr, was shorter than his friend by a few inches, his hair was black. He already had an athletic build with broad shoulders and a thin waist. He wore a tee with an A-10 Thunderbolt (*warthog*) gun ship printed on it.

“Boys, I do wish you wouldn’t tease people like that. You can both be gentleman now, till I tell you otherwise.” She looked sternly at them. Both boys knew the reins had been pulled in, and behave they must or pay the consequences later.

“Yes, Señora Barclay, your Deluxe Patio Casita is ready. It’s on the hill side overlooking the mountains and it has its own patio with a fireplace and lounging area. It’s very secluded, as you wished. Here are the keys and the itinerary for the *Sleuth Con 2012*, a separate schedule for all the speaker events and discussion panels you need to attend are also there. I’m sorry to see that Miss Applegate won’t be here with us this year, she’s one of my favored authors. I was so looking forward to meeting her. Not that meeting you, Señora Barclay, is not a thrill also.

Oh my, I better shut up!” He looked embarrassed and tried to reclaim his dignity by saying, “There is a meeting at four today for all new speakers. I hope you can attend.” He summoned a bellhop to help deliver the luggage to the Casita.

“Okay boys, you know the rules. Keep your phones and watch-amulets on at all times even when you’re swimming, they’re both water proof. It’s two o’clock now, I have a meeting at four and cocktails and dinner at seven thirty, so be back here no later than six to shower and change. I’ll be waiting for both of you and if you mess this up you’re tied to me the rest of the week, understood, boys?”

They both nodded yes and watched as she inspected them.

“Behave, both of you, get!” She pointed out the door and they disappeared down the path.

The boys ran off looking for adventure in the old west. They didn’t find it at the pool (Splash, someone fell in.), or at the tennis court (“Fowl! Those kids just ran away with the ball!”), or at the golf course (“Fore! Kids, get away from the hole. Damn, you just kicked my ball!”).

At last they found themselves behind an old barn. It was on the other side of the hills where some of the resort staff lived. They could hear the whinnying of horses. Both boy loved riding and had not seen one so far.

“You just can’t go out west without riding a wild horse! This may be our chance to do it,” said Bud to Tom. The back door was partially opened, but they both saw the sign on it: “Keep Out.”

“Do you think they mean us?” asked Bud with a smile. Tom opened the door a little bit more and looked in. He could hear the horses and the air smelt of hay. He stepped in and pulled Bud in with him, who closed the door. They were in an aisle five or six feet across and a room on either side of them. No mysteries there, both were marked; the one on the right was the “tack room”, the other “supply room”. The aisle ran straight to the barn’s front doors. Eight stalls were on the left and five on the right. The last three on the right they couldn’t see because they were standing against the tack room wall.

“Smithy, did you leave that back door open? I thought I heard it close just now,” a gruff, unseen voice said from where the back stalls were. Both boys froze.

“No one’s coming, Jones, relax. Let me see that gold nugget again!” The second voice sounded excited. At hearing that, both boys dropped to the ground and crawled on their bellies to the end of the wall and peeked around it.

The last three stalls was actually a large work area. The enlarged space was set up as a blacksmith shop. A forge and bellows with an anvil were in the middle of the room, a big trough with a hand pump for water was in the far corner and a work bench ran along the next stall railings.

Two men sat smoking in the other corner by the only open window in the barn. They were dressed as cowboys, hats, guns and all.

Tom rolled back against the wall and reached into his pocket. He took out his phone and typed something in and then pushed around a couple of apps. He then took two ear buds out and gave one to Bud and they placed them in their ears, Bud had pulled back as soon as Tom did.

Tom reached around the corner and placed his phone on the bottom rail by the wall. He positioned himself against the wall and listened to the amplified voices of the cowboys. Bud did the same thing.

“That’s gold for sure, if I ever saw it.” said the cowboy named Smithy as he turned it around and around in the sun light. Jones, the other cowboy, grabbed it out of Smithy’s hand and pocketed it.

“Can’t let anyone see that!” he rasped.

“What are we going to do now? Do you really think that Crazy Pete found the mother lode after all these years?”

“That’s a good question! He never had gold before, he has it now. I guess he did find it, or that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. And it doesn’t rain around here often.” Jones had a smug look on his face from his brilliant bit of logic. “And I reckon it’s up to us to get more of it.”

“Another card game?” inquired Smithy. “I still don’t believe how much liquor that guy can hold. I was seeing double by the time he lost that last game and that nugget. I was about to past out. I still got a headache!”

“Nope, that won’t work twice. Let’s go for the whole thing, the mine itself!”

“How, Jones, how?”

“Why, we follow him!”

“Won’t that take a long time, and what about our jobs? He sometime goes out for months at a time and he just came back the other day.”

“You’re right Smithy, I didn’t think of that. I guess we’ll have to snatch him and make him take us there.”

“Jones! Smithy! Where are you? Another bus load of tourist just pulled up. It’s time to get back to work! Jones! Smithy!” and the yelling faded away from the back door.

“Hack, Jones, let’s get out of here before old man Whitaker finds us in here.” They scrambled out the front door. Both boys were still sitting on the floor not having the time to move. But move they did, now!

They made it back in time for their showers. Neither talked about what they heard, knowing somehow Bud’s mother would find out. This was their secret adventure and they had a week to investigate it.

The next morning while Mrs. Barclay was in the shower the boys whispered together on the patio. Bud spoke first being more impetuous.

“What you think, Tom, did those cowboys really get a gold nugget in a card game?”

“No reason for them to lie about it to each other. They may pretend to be cowboys for the resort but they didn’t know we were there. At least I don’t think so.”

“So do we tell anyone? I can’t see anyone believing us.”

“True, Bud they won’t. So let’s take it in three steps.” Tom started to count on his finger.

“First, we have to find out who Crazy Pete is.” He touched another finger.

“Second, after we find him, we must warn him about the cowboys plans,” and up went the third finger.

“Third, we have to help him protect his claim and make him register it.”

“Well, finding him should be easy. How many Crazy Pete’s can there be around here?”

“You’re right, Bud,” said Tom slapping him on the shoulder, “and we can start today while we’re out sightseeing with your mother.”

“Quiet! Ma’s coming.”

“Come on boys, the day’s a wasting and we have lots to do!”

* * *

The next day and a half was a whirlwind of activity and tours, and by Wednesday noontime they still didn’t know who Crazy Pete was.

That afternoon, Bud had to caddie for his mother at the golf tournament and afterwards he found Tom at the pool. He changed quickly into his swim suit and joined him in the pool on a floater.

“I found Crazy Pete!” whispered Bud to Tom as soon as they linked up facing each other. “Or I should say I found someone how knows Crazy Pete. He’s a grounds keeper at the golf course. A very old Mexican but he’s lively enough and knows how to turn a dollar. He wants five Pesos for the information. So, is that a lot of money? Because, Tom, I promised it to him.”

Tom laughed at Bud and said, “I think we can afford it. It’s only about fifty cents.” Bud exhaled out loud.

“For awhile I thought I owed him mucho bucks. I’ve that much in my pocket right now.”

“Well, hang on to it. How are we going to get this information?”

“Oh, I arranged everything already. We’re to meet him at the Pro Shop after tonight’s movie starts. Ma will be at a discussion group by then and we can take off when the lights go out.”

“Good work, pal,” said Tom as he flipped Bud over into the pool.

* * *

“There’s the Pro Shop, Tom,” pointed out Bud as they come over a small hill. It stood out in the moon light. On one side of the shop all the golf carts were lined up, four deep, getting charged up for tomorrow’s runs. A small group of tall bushes were on the other side of the building and two benches, one on each side of the door could be seen.

The boys didn’t see the old Mexican anywhere. They sat on a bench and looked around nervously.

“Psss! Señors, over here!” a heavily accented voice called out of the side of the shop where the bushes were. Tom and Bud looked at each other and shrugged. Just like out of a movie they thought as they got up and went over to him. He grabbed each boy by an arm and pulled them into the dark space between the shop and bushes.

“You got my five Pesos, señors?” Holding out his hand for the money. Bud handed over two quarters. The old man grinned as he picked up one of the quarters and bit it. “Never can tell, señors, now what do you want to know about Señor Petro?”

“Is Mr. Petro the real name of Crazy Pete?” asked Tom.

“Si. Some people call Señor Petro that, but he’s not crazy. He’s a great geologist from America, Grand Duke University. He lives just over that way,” and he pointed over to the far side of the golf course, “in those hills is a box cannon

and he lives there with his mule. “He’s a fine gentleman, always has the time to speak to Miguel. I’m Miguel,” and he pointed to himself. “Always has time for Miguel, he does.”

“Miguel, what does Mr. Petro do out here?” Tom asked trying to get back to the subject.

Miguel scratched his head, looked at the ground and pointed. “Rocks, señor, he looks for different kinds of rocks. He digs sometimes, only small holes looking for rocks. He carries a stick with a magnet on its end and when a rock sticks to it, he’s happy.” He shakes his head and mumbles, “Maybe he is crazy.”

“Does he have a name for these rocks,” asked Tom.

“Si, meteors. ‘Gold from Heaven’ he calls them.” He held out his hand again and nodded his head towards it. Bud got the idea and gave him two more quarters, and before either boys could speak again he nodded his head to them and backed up into the brushes and disappeared into the night.

Tom and Bud burst out laughing at how this meeting ended. It was worth the dollar they paid for the information.

The next morning Bud found Tom out on the patio in a corner behind a potted cactus. He had his mini-tool kit out and was doing some soldering on the inside of his combination watch and emergency amulet. Bud settled down to watch his friend and the door for his mother. He knew better then to disturb him while he was working on something.

“There!” said Tom to himself as he finished and noticed Bud sitting there. “Just give me a minute, pal and I’ll explain what I’m doing.” He put the watch back on and closed up his tool kit. Next Tom took out his phone and searched through his apps until he found the one he wanted. He handed the phone to Bud and told him to watch the meter on the screen. It was a digital arrow that pointed straight up to a positive sign. On the right and left edge of the screen was a negative sign. As Tom walked away to the right, the arrow moved to the right negative sign. When he turned around and came back it centered to the positive sign. It did the same thing when he moved left, the arrow moved to the left negative sign.

Bud turned the phone toward Tom and the arrow centered.

“This is great, Tom, you made a tracking device from your watch and this phone. Only you would come up with that! What’s its range and how long will it last?”

“I limited it to about two miles. It’s hard to tell without testing it, I didn’t want the emergency amulet to reach any of the relay satellites and set off an alarm. I couldn’t change the frequency, only the power output and by changing that it can now run for forty-eight hours. It’s fully charged and I’ve turned it off for now.”

“How will this help us find Crazy Pete?”

“It won’t, but it will let us track the two cowboys.”

“And the two cowboys will lead us to Crazy Pete.” both boys said in unison.

“You’re still ahead of me, Tom. How do we get the device to the cowboys?”

“That easy, I signed us up for a horseback tour with those two cowboys as our guides. I checked their work schedule; didn’t you notice their names on all the activities with horses? They’re the horse wranglers for the resort. Those horses in that barn the other day were theirs. They’re the only ones who ride them. They even truck them out if it’s too far to where they need them.”

“So we’ll plant the homing device in one of their saddle bags. If they go after Crazy Pete it will be by horse, they can take back trails that way and not be seen.”

“Today is their last day to work until Sunday. So tonight, Friday or Saturday is their best time to do something. Sunday they have to be back to see our group off and get ready for the next group on Monday.”

Bud handed the phone back to Tom, took a last look at the door and said, “That’s why you’re the genius and I’m the sidekick. I think ma’s ready for breakfast so let rustle up some grub and go riding.”

They had to take a tour bus out to the old *Ghost Town* first and listen to riding instruction. They both knew how to ride and spent the time in the back of the crowd watching the horses that were lined up for the ride trying to find the two with the most spirit.

“Boys,” called out the gruff voice of Jones, “If you don’t listen I won’t let you go, now hush up!” They both apologized to the crowd and settled down. Soon they were on their way and enjoying the ride. The trails were good with a mixture of easy and hard up a scenic mountain.

By lunchtime they were all glad to stop. It was at an old abandoned mine, all the old machinery and buildings were still there and they were allowed to mine awhile in approved areas.

An old, skinny as a rail, trail cook with a chuck wagon served them lunch of pan baked bread, trail stew and dried beef jerky. Every one tried the jerky but left it unfinished. The bread and stew disappeared.

The boys were never given enough time to get near the cowboy's horses. Bud did get Smithy into a short conversation to try to give Tom time, but it didn't work. In no time they were on their way back. They rode last in line trying to figure out a way to get the tracker planted, when one of the horses became lame.

As the wranglers took a small pebble out of its hoof, Bud managed to be the one holding the reins of their horses. Tom easily slipped the amulet into the saddled bag. He took off the bands to make it as small as possible. The rest of the ride back it settled to the bottom of the bag.

That night and for the next two days they watched the phone meter intently, it always pointed towards the barn. By Sunday night both boys were disappointed that their plan had not worked and that they now must tell the adults about the gold nugget and the cowboys.

Bud was restless and couldn't sleep. Every half hour he checked the phone and it was after midnight when it happened. The needle began to move.

"Tom!" he yelled out loud. "Wake up! They're on the move." Bud was already getting dressed. Tom jumped out of bed and joined his friend putting on his own clothes.

They left a note on Bud's bed telling his Mother not to worry and to call them on their phone for an explanation. This was the last night of the convention and they did not expect her back till morning.

The meter pointed over the hill towards were old Miguel told them Crazy Pete lived.

"Tom, how are we going to follow them? It's too late to get horses."

"Come on, said Tom, I have an idea. Tom led the way in a run to the Pro Shop and stopped before the golf carts.

"Look for one that has a green light on the dash board. It will indicate a full charge on the batteries," said Tom as he searched. Bud found one at the back of the line.

"Don't we need a key or something and won't it be locked?" asked Bud. He always caddied and never drove a cart.

“There’s no needs for locks out here and it only has an On and Off switch to turn them on.” They pushed the cart out of the pack and Tom got into the driver’s seat. Bud still had the phone in his pocket and he took it out and swung it around.

“That away,” he pointed off to the far side of the golf course and over the distant hill. Tom floored the pedal and off they went. The moon was full and the golf course was brightly lit. The going was smooth as they followed a path up the hill. Once over the top Tom stopped the cart and they both looked over the distant flatland that was ahead of them and to their right. Rocky hills were on their left and it grew into a mountain range. They could see no one.

The meter pointed to the end of the mountain range, and at last they saw the two cowboys riding out of the shadows at the end of the range. There were just enough fallen rocks to hide them till they rounded the point. The moon light made everything look flat and the distance was deceiving.

“Let’s go!” yelled Bud, but Tom was already flooring it. It took them ten minutes to get to the mountain edge. As they zipped around the point they could see that it was a box canyon. They spotted the shack and a small corral. A shed was tucked against the left side wall. Tom pulled the cart over to the wall and stopped.

They watched the shack and surrounding area for the cowboys. At last they appeared next to the corral and tied up their horses and walked over and entered the hut. A dim light appeared a minute later.

“Tom, what you think? Is this too easy?” Bud asked in a whisper.

“No, it’s okay. Why would they be expecting trouble? They seemed cautious enough to me. We almost lost them twice and it was only because we were patient that we saw them again. Let’s follow the wall like they did and get as close as we can before we have to lose the cart.”

The going was rough and the cart did not last long. The tires took a beating and one went flat. They walked the rest of the way to the edge of the shed. A mule was in it and stomped its feet for being disturbed for the second time that night, and it didn’t like the presence of the other two horses. The light came from a window in the shack facing the shed. It had a shade covering it but a shadow could be seen every once in awhile.

“Let’s get closer,” suggested Tom, “if you’re up to it.”

“Sure Tom, that noise your hearing is my knees knocking. Their ready to go but in the wrong direction.” He took a deep breath and said, “lead on, MacDuff.”

“Do you hear anything, Tom?” whispered Bud. Tom had his phone against the wall trying to hear something. He shook his head no. A bright Magnalight beam hit them right in the face and they were blinded.

“Well Smithy, look what I caught, just like fish in a barrel. Come to papa, boys.” They turned to run but Smithy was there to stop them. The two cowboys grabbed them by the arms and hauled them into the shack.

“Now boys, it’s way past your bed time so make it easy on yourself and tell us what you’re doing here!” Jones pushed Tom onto a bunk bed that was in the corner of the room. Bud landed right beside him. They were both scared and Bud slowly reached for his watch to turn on the emergency signal. Tom shook his head no and Bud stopped.

“We’re lost, Mister, please help us. I want my mommy!” and Tom whimpered.

“Cut it out, kid.” Jones surly voice shot back. “We recognize you. You’re the two brats from the other day on the trail ride. Now tell us why you’re here or I’ll beat it out of you.” He reached for Bud and clamped his hands onto the boy’s shirt and pulled him closer.

“No, wait!” screamed Tom. “I’ll tell you the truth, just let him go, please!” he pleaded and Jones threw Bud back onto the bed.

“We know about the gold...”

Jones turned on Smithy and demanded, “What did you tell these brats the other day? I saw you talking to that one.” He pointed to Bud.

“Nothing, Jones, We just talked about the horses. He likes horses, that’s all!” and he was shaking all over.

Jones slap Smithy across the face and yelled, “You stupid idiot, you must have said more than that for them to be here! Now we’ll have to get rid of them. No one’s going to get my gold.” He was so angry that he was spitting out the words.

“We can’t get rid of kids, Jones!” and his eyes were wide with fear.

“We can if we have too. Once Crazy Pete tells us where the gold is, he’s done for. Adding two more will make no difference. The gold is just within our reach, I can smell it.” He clasped his hand shut as if grasping it. He clutched Tom’s arm and pulled him up.

“Get the other one, Smithy. We’re going to visit Crazy Pete. I Think I know how to make him talk.” Tom looked at Bud and smiled at hearing this.

The boys were pushed out the back door and toward the canyon back wall. The bottom was littered with falling rocks of all sizes. A house- size rock blocked the path they were on. The cowboys pushed them along it and then to the backside. When that slab of rock fell away from the canyon several years ago it crashed down several feet away from the wall and toppled against it. It formed a tunnel of sorts.

Tom and Bud tried to stop going in by stumbling and falling to the ground to give Bud time to turn on the emergence signal armlet. The cowboys were watching out for some type of ruckus from them and just picked them up and hauled them in without stopping. Once inside Bud knew that the signal would not penetrate the stone. Smithy stopped a few feet in and lit a lantern that was there with a match. The glow was enough to see by. The rock had fallen over a mine shaft entrance.

“Why are you taking us in there?” asked Tom in a frightened voice that he didn’t have to fake.

“You’ll find out soon enough, kid, get going!” barked Jones and he shoved Tom in. After a couple hundred feet the shaft opened up into a large cave. Smithy lit three more lanterns and hung them on spikes driven into the wall.

The area was full of old iron hand carts, picks, shovels, shoring timbers and piles of rock ready to be carted out. There were two other openings leading away from the cavern.

But the most horrible sight was the half naked man chained to the wall. He sat there with his arms stretched over his head, handcuffed to a spike. His head hung to one side and his face was all bruised as well as his chest and sides.

Jones noticed the look on the boy’s faces and laughed.

“If you don’t want to look like that you better help us get what we want from Crazy Pete,” sneered Jones. Smithy was at a lost, not knowing what to do. Jones was off his rocker and out of control. Crazy Pete looked dead.

Jones pushed Tom to Smithy for him to hold as he walked over to Crazy Pete. He picked up a dipper and filled it with water from a bucket that was in front of the prisoner. He threw it into his face. Crazy Pete moaned and slowly opened his eyes.

He looked at Jones and started to shake his arms, rattling his chains.

“Please! No more! I’m telling you the truth; I found that gold nugget out in the dessert! Why won’t you believe me?” He pleaded and sobbed.

Jones kicked him in the leg and screamed at him. “I want the location of that gold mine, damn you!” and he was about to kick him again when Smithy shouted, “Those brats are getting away!”

Jones turned around just in time to see both boys running into a tunnel. Smithy was so spell bound at what Jones was doing to Crazy Pete he forgot he was holding the boys. When Smithy’s hands let them go, they made their move to escape the cave. Smithy was blocking the entry way so they ran into another mine shaft hoping it led to a way out.

Jones started to run after them but Smithy stopped him by reminding him that it was a dead end. Jones growled at Smithy and hit him. Smithy fell to the ground and stayed there watching Jones pace back and forth in front of the tunnel the boys had run into. He was scared of Jones for sure now.

Tom and Bud heard Smithy’s words to Jones about the shaft and stopped running before they hit or fell into something. Bud turned on his phone flashlight. They were far enough in so that they could not see the cavern lights. They felt safe for the moment. They keep walking till the end of the mine. It broadened out into a small cave, rubble was everywhere. They sat behind a small pile of rocks they were thinking of using as weapons and leaned against the wall.

“Tom,” said Bud, “I think we’re in trouble!”

“You think?” laughed Tom and Bud joined him. It felt good and it relieved the tension. Bud, once relaxed, fell asleep, it was three in the morning.

“Bud, wake up! I hear them coming and I found a place to hide.” Bud was instantly awake with no idea how much time had passed.

“Where?” and he was frantically looking about while getting to his feet. Tom aimed his light at the top of the wall across from them. A small ledge and a crack in the wall could be seen.

“I think we can get up there and hide. It’s only about nine feet high. You lean against the wall and cup your hands together. I can climb up using your hands and shoulders. And then I’ll reach down and pull you up. Or I can go to the wall and hoist you up.”

“No Tom, you go up first. I’m stronger then you and can hold your weight on my shoulders.” Within seconds Tom was attempting to reach the ledge. He scurried up and made it on the first try. He repositioned himself and reached down for Bud. But it was too late.

Bud had his arms on the ledge and Tom was reaching over him to pull him up when Jones grabbed Bud by the legs and pulled him back. Tom desperately tried to hang on to his buddy but he kept losing his hold. At last he only had Bud's watch/emergency amulet in his hand. He watched as Smithy took Bud away. Bud was putting up a losing fight but continued to scream and yell all the way down the tunnel.

"When I get my hands on you, kid, you'll regret it!" Jones bellowed at Tom as he swung his flashlight around the area looking for something that could reach Tom. After a quick look around he ran off after Smithy yelling at him to bring back a large barrel to stand on after he tied up Bud.

Tom pressed himself as far against the back wall as possible. He gathered a few loose rocks to throw at Jones when he made his attempt to reach him. After a while he noticed a cool breeze on his back and he looked behind and above him. He spotted another fracture in the wall. When he put his face to it he could see stars. His heart started to pound and adrenaline pumped throughout his body. He reached up and grabbed the rock above him and pulled. It came away! He grabbed and pulled, grabbed and pulled and in no time he had a hole big enough for him to crawl into. It was over a hundred feet to the surface and at a steep angle but there was plenty of hand holds in the loose rock crevice. As he tried to reach up and stand he pushed most of the rocks he had broken loose off the ledge. A sharp yelp of pain was heard below and Tom had to see what had happened.

Jones was picking himself up off the ground and holding his arm against his side. He was cursing a blue streak and kicking at everything on the ground while walking in a circle. Tom could not help but laugh and Jones heard him.

"I'll get you yet!" he screamed and reached into his right pocket with his left hand. It was comical to watch until he pulled out a gun. He stepped to the far wall to get a better aim and started firing. The shots were wild but the ricochets were dangerous.

Tom was slowly making his way up the crack. At times he started to slide back down but always recovered after a few feet. His hands were dripping with blood from countless nicks and cuts. The stars were dimming in the sky but they were also getting closer. At last he rolled over onto his back as he emerged from the earth. The ground and air felt cold but very welcoming.

He held his hands up to his face and could only see caked on mud. They were hurting like mad. He tenderly reached into his pants pocket and pulled out Bud's amulet.

"Thanks, Pal, you're next!" and he turned it on.

* * *

The sky burst with a hard, blinding light that was hurling straight at him.

"Be landing in thirty seconds, son. Just hang on!" a tense voice materialized out of the air around him.

"Dad, we have to save Bud. He may be killed!" shot back Tom knowing they were monitoring him.

"Ames will rescue him." and the giant, three decker plane slammed into the ground. Hatches flew open and men poured out of the plane and immediately set up a perimeter around them.

Tom was just getting on his feet when his father scooped him up into his arms and hugged him. Tears were streaming down his face. A group of men led by Mr. Ames, the Swift security chief, and Bud's father surrounded them.

* * *

Twenty minutes later Tom and Bud were hugging each other in front of the rock slab and laughing. Crazy Pete was carried out on a stretcher by four men and a medic holding an IV. He was still alive. Smithy came next, his hands cuffed behind his back. His face had a blank look and his eyes were bulging out of their sockets. Jones came out last with his hands cuffed behind his back even with a broken arm. He was swearing and yelling for a lawyer and every time he slowed down Mr. Ames nudged his broken arm with his E-Gun.

A helicopter came swooping down just missing the back of the shack. The pilot and passenger jumped out even as it hit the ground.

"Budworth Barclay, come here!" yelled his mother in mock anger as Sandra Barclay ran to him.

"Thomas Alvin Swift, you're in **TROUBLE!**" wept Bashalli Swift in her Pakistani accent. Tears of joy and fear for her son were flowing freely. Both women hugged and kissed their sons repeatedly. The boys' fathers also walked over to them.

"Thomas, you're filthy," his mother chided him, and she started to brush the dirt from his hair. It glinted and sparkled in the morning sunlight as it filled the air around him.

“Bash, please stop,” Tom’s father asked his wife as he recognized the dust.
“It seems that our golden haired boy is more golden than you think!”