

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

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THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

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OR

The Wonderful Cruise of the Electric Monarch

BY ROY ROCKWOOD

AUTHOR OF "THE RIVAL OCEAN DIVERS," "A SCHOOLBOY'S PLUCK," ETC.

1906

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

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CHAPTER I

DRIVEN FROM TOWN

"Come now, you boys git out of here! No tramps allowed in Freeport while Ezra Jenkins is constable! Move along, now, or I'll arrest ye! Here's my badge of authority!" And a crabbed old man, wearing a faded blue suit, with a big shining star of metal on his coat, tapped the emblem with his club.

Two boys, who had just joined each other, after having called at houses on the main street of the little New York village, where Constable Jenkins held sway as the entire police force, started at the sound of the harsh voice.

"Come; are ye goin' to move?" snapped the constable.

"I suppose we'll have to," answered the larger and stouter of the two lads, "but we haven't done anything."

"Ye're tramps, ain't ye?" inquired the constable. "Course ye are! Been beggin', ain't ye? Course ye have! I kin see the victuals stickin' out of yer pockets now! Move on an' git out of Freeport! We don't want any tramps here!"

"Come on, Mark," said the heavier of the two boys; "if our room is better than our company, they can have the room. I hope you'll get richer boarders than we are," the youth went on, turning to the constable. "We are going to shake the dust of Freeport from our feet. I think they ought to call this town Closedport instead of Freeport!"

"None of yer sass, now!" warned the constable, tapping his badge again. "Jest you move on out of town!"

"I think we had better go," murmured the other boy, who was thin and small. "Don't make any trouble, Jack."

"All right," assented the other. "Ta-ta, Mr. Chief of Police! See you later!"

"Here, you young rascals!" cried the constable. "Come back here an' I'll lock ye up!"

But the boys started to run, and, as Mr. Jenkins was no longer young, and as his legs were rather stiff, he went only a little way before he had to stop. He shook his fist after the two lads.

"Do you suppose he would have locked us up?" asked the small boy, whom his companion addressed as Mark. His full name was Mark Sampson, but he was very unlike his strong ancestor who pulled over the pillars of the temple.

"He acted mean enough to do anything," replied Jack Darrow, who was quite a contrast in point of size and fleshiness to his companion.

"What shall we do now?" asked Mark.

"Keep on moving, I guess," was the reply, "At least until we get outside of Freeport."

"Well, I'm glad I've got company now. It was lonesome before I met you."

"Same here. We'll travel a way together, eh?"

The two boys had met under rather strange circumstances. Early that morning Jack Darrow, the stout one, had awakened from his sleep in a pile of hay in a farmer's field. Close to him was another youth, whose name he had inquired as soon as the owner of it awoke.

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Then the two boys discovered that their conditions in life were very similar. Both were orphans, about the same age, Jack being sixteen and Mark fifteen years, and neither had a place he could call home.

"My folks have been dead for some years," said Jack, in telling his story to his companion. "I was hired out to a farmer in the upper part of New York, but he worked me so hard and treated me so mean that I ran away. I've been tramping ever since; don't my clothes show it? You see I was forced to go without taking my many trunks along," and he laughed, for he was of a jolly disposition.

"My people are dead also," said Mark. "I had a job with a man going around the country with a traction engine, threshing wheat and oats at different farms. But he used to beat me, so, one night, I ran away."

"And didn't bring any extra clothes with you, either," put in Jack.

"I never owned any to bring. I only had the one suit I wore."

And after that the boys had told something of their experiences and become very friendly.

The two boys walked on for a while in silence, kicking up the dust of the country road. Then Jack came to a halt, clapped his hand on his pocket, and said:

"I nearly forgot I had something to eat! Just think of it! And I haven't dined since yesterday! I wonder what the lady gave me. She looked good natured."

He sat down on a grassy bank along the highway, pulled the package of food out, and began to eat with every indication of satisfaction.

"Bread, meat, piece of pie and a piece of cake!" he announced, looking over his lunch. "What did you get, Mark?"

"I got the same as you, except I didn't get any pie or cake."

"I guess your lady hadn't baked this week. Never mind, you can have half my pie and half my cake."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged," said the thin youth.

"You needn't be," broke in Jack. "That's the law of the road. When two--well, I suppose I might as well say tramps, for that's what we are--when two tramps go off together, they whack up. And that's what we're going to do!"

It did not take long for the boys to finish their simple meal. Jack, true to his promise, shared his dessert with his companion.

"Well, I feel like going on now, and looking for a job," remarked the heavier weighted lad. "What do you say, Mark?"

"I guess we might as well get out of this town. They don't seem to care for us. But I wish I had a drink of water."

"Nothing easier," replied Jack. "There you are," and he pointed a short distance ahead, where a brook ran along the road. The boys got down on their faces near a little pool, the bottom of which was covered with white pebbles, and drank heartily. Then, refreshed by the water, their hunger appeased, and rested, they started on the tramp again.

"Any particular place you want to go to?" asked Mark.

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"No, I'm not particular. East or west, the north pole or the south pole. I haven't any one to worry about me, no matter which way I go. I'd a little rather go north, though, as it is mighty warm to-day," and Jack laughed carelessly.

Little did he guess how soon his wish was to be gratified.

"Then we may as well keep on until we get to the next town," said Mark.

They walked on for some distance, their thoughts busy with their recent experiences, when they suddenly heard a noise at a distance.

"Sounds like a freight train," said Mark.

"So it is! Come on! Let's get aboard! Riding is easier than walking any day! Hurry up!"

And then the two boys broke into a run toward a slow moving freight on a track that crossed the country road a short distance away from them.

"Look out that you don't get under the wheels!" cautioned Jack to his companion.

"Oh, I'm used to jumping the cars," replied Mark, as he ran quickly up beside the rails.

The two boys reached the track along which the freight train was bumping and clicking. It was a long outfit, with many box, flat and gondola cars.

"Try for a gondola!" suggested Jack, indicating the cars with sides about five feet high, and open at the top.

The next instant he had swung up on a car, thrusting his foot in the iron step, and grasping the handle in a firm grip. Jack grabbed the next car, and landed safely aboard. Then, running forward, and clambering over to where his companion was, Jack pulled Mark down on the bottom of the gondola.

"No use letting a brakeman see you if you can help it," he explained.

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CHAPTER II

THE RUNAWAY TRAIN

On went the train, carrying the boys to a destination unknown to them. All they cared for was that they were going away from Freeport and its vindictive constable.

"How long have your folks been dead?" asked Jack, after he had settled himself comfortably in a corner.

"About five years," was the answer. "Father and mother went about the same time. They were poor, and I had no brothers or sisters. When I was all alone," the boy's voice trembled a bit, "I didn't know what to do. They wanted to send me to the poor-house, but I ran away. Then, after knocking about a bit, I got the job with the traction engine man, until he used me so I couldn't stand it."

"That's about my case," said Jack. "I had a brother, and he ran away before my folks died. I guess they felt bad about him. Anyhow, mother used to cry an awful lot. When I was left all alone I was taken care of by some poor folks, who kept me as long as they could. Then I had to shift for myself. I had a good many jobs, and then I thought I'd like to be a farmer. I was sent to a place but the man wasn't very kind. He whipped me because I made a mistake and pulled up an onion instead of a weed. Then he beat me because I gave the horse too many oats. He never told me how much to give. So I ran away, and I'm glad of it. I've been cold and hungry lots of times since, but I haven't been whipped."

"I guess that old constable would have licked us if he had the chance," put in Mark.

"No use worrying over that. He's a good many miles away now."

"Here! What are you boys doing there?" cried a voice.

Jack and Mark looked up, to see a brakeman gazing down at them from the top of a box car.

"We're taking a ride," answered Jack coolly.

"So I see," replied the brakeman. "Well, I guess it will come to an end right now. Hop off!"

"Are you the conductor?" asked Jack.

"No, of course not," said the wheel-twister.

"Then don't try to put us off," went on the boy, with an assumed haughty air. "Just send the conductor here to punch our tickets. We're traveling first class, and don't want to be disturbed any more than is necessary."

"Well, I like your nerve!" exclaimed the brakeman, climbing down. "Who are you, anyhow?"

The railroad man laughed. Then Jack smiled, for he knew he and his companion were safe. In a few words he told their stories, and the brakeman promised they might go as far as the train went.

"You boys are all right," said the brakeman. "I have two youngsters of my own at home, and I hope, if ever they get in a tight place, some one will help them. Can I do anything to fix you up?"

"Not unless you can lend us about one thousand dollars each," laughed Jack, and the brakeman joined in with him.

"Or tell us where we can get work," put in Mark, who seemed quite worried.

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"I can't say for sure where you can get jobs," the brakeman said, "but if I was in your place I'd get off at the next town. The name of it is Millville, and there are lots of factories there. Maybe you can strike something. I'll speak to the conductor and have him ask the engineer to slow up so you can jump off."

"We'd be obliged if you would," Jack said. "We may be tramps for a while, but we're both anxious to get work, and maybe Millville will be just the place for us."

"We're coming into it now," the brakeman went on. "It's about a mile from here. I'll go back, and when you hear five whistles from the engine you'll know it's slowing up and you are to jump off. I know the conductor will do that if I ask him."

The brakeman climbed up the ladder on the end of the box car next to the gondola where the boys were, until he reached the run-boards on top. Then he hurried along to the caboose, where the conductor was.

"We must listen for the five whistles," said Jack. "Get ready to jump, Mark. Don't forget your baggage."

"No danger of that," chimed in the other, falling into the joyful mood of his companion, who never seemed to be cast down for long, no matter what happened.

The train was going down grade now, and the speed was much increased. Telegraph poles whizzed past at a rapid rate and the wheels sung a livelier tune as they clipped over the rail joints.

"It's a good thing the engineer is going to slow down for us," said Jack. "We'd never be able to jump off at the rate we're going."

"Hark!" exclaimed Mark. "There goes the whistle!"

The boys listened. A long, shrill blast cut the summer air, and vibrated back to them over the tops of the cars.

"That isn't five whistles; it's one!" cried Jack. "It's the call for brakes! I wonder if anything has happened to the train!"

There was a pause. Then came another single shriek from the engine's whistle. It sounded appealingly, as if the steam monster was in distress.

"Look! Look!" shouted Mark. "We are going much faster than we were!"

At the same instant there was a crash and a jolting sound. The train seemed to break in two parts at about the centre. The forward section, drawn by the engine, went one way, and the other part, with the gondola containing the boys, in the lead, took another track. An insecurely fastened switch was responsible for the accident. The locomotive and nearly half the cars of the train took the main track, while the remainder of the outfit swung on to a siding.

The section of the train with the boys aboard had become a runaway freight!

"What has happened?" cried Mark.

"The train's broken in two!" shouted Jack. "Come on! Help twist the brakes!"

Both boys sprang to the wheel of the gondola. It was all they could do to give it a few turns, but they managed to make the brake-shoes grip the wheels to some degree, as was evidenced by the shrill shrieking.

"Can you climb up to the top of the box car?" asked Jack.

"Sure!" shouted Mark. "Go ahead!"

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Though Mark was thin, he had a nervous strength almost equal to that of his stouter companion.

"We must set all the brakes we can!" Jack cried. "That's the only way to stop the runaway train!"

With their small arms they twisted the wheel on the box car. They got it as tight as they could, then ran along the top of the vehicle to the next one. About ten cars down they saw their friendly brakeman.

"That's the stuff, boys!" he shouted. "There'll be a smash-up if we don't stop the cars!"

He was twisting wheels with all his might. As fast as they could the two boys went from car to car, setting the brakes.

But in spite of their efforts, and the efforts of another brakeman besides the one they had spoken to, the speed of the runaway freight train increased. The grade was a steep one, and down the hill the uncontrolled cars rushed.

"I don't believe we're going to stop," said Jack.

"Shall we jump?" asked Mark.

"Not if you want to get a job in the mill or factory," replied Jack. "I reckon if you or I jumped that would be the last of us."

With a rush and a roar the train continued to speed along. The trees and telegraph poles whizzed past so quickly as to be almost invisible.

"I guess this is Millville," said Mark, as the runaway train passed a station, on several sides of which there were large buildings to be seen.

So fast was the runaway train going now that the boys had to lie down on their faces and cling to the run-boards on top of the box car to avoid being jolted off. The wind fairly whistled in their ears. Through the town they rushed, observing, as by a flash, the white, frightened face of the station agent as he watched them go past.

"Do you think there'll be a smash-up?" asked Mark.

"I don't see how it can be avoided," replied Jack. "This track has to come to an end somewhere. When it does, look out, that's all!"

On and on rushed the train! Its speed was now fearful, for the down grade had increased. It was of no avail to twist the brakes, for no strength would avail to slacken the awful speed. The boys, in common with the brakemen, could only cling and wait in terror for what was to come.

The cars swayed as they went around a curve. Jack lifted his head and peered forward.

"Hold fast!" he shouted. "We're going to strike something in a minute!"

He had looked up in time to see that the track siding came to an abrupt end about a quarter of a mile further on, the rails stopping in a sand bank.

Hardly had the boys time to take a tighter grip with their fingers on the boards to which they were clinging, when the whole string of freight cars seemed to crumple up like a collection of paper vehicles.

There was a grinding, sickening crash, a succession of heavy jolts, a piling up of one car on top of another, a splintering of wood, a rending of iron and steel, and then with one terrible smash, with one final roar, the

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runaway freight piled itself up in a mass of shattered cars against the sand hill, at the base of which the rails came to an end. It was a fearful wreck.

"Hold fast!" were the last words Jack cried to his companion. His voice sounded faint above the din.

"Where are you, Jack?" he heard Mark shout in reply.

Then all became dark, and the boys lost their senses as they were hurled into the splintered mass of wreckage.

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CHAPTER III

A STRANGE RESCUER

"For de land sakes, Perfessor, hurry up! Heah's de stupenduousness conglomeration dat eber transcribed dis terresterial hemisphere!" exclaimed a stout, jolly looking colored man a few seconds after the crash of the wreck had ceased echoing.

"What is it, Washington?" asked a mild mannered elderly gentleman, with long flowing hair and beard, who, with the negro, had been walking in a field close to the railroad.

"I doan perzackly know, Perfessor, but it seems like there was a discontinuation ob de transportation facilities, when some sudden construction on de elongated tempestuousness attached to de railroad made de cars go bump! bump! Bang! Smack! Crash!"

"Washington! Washington! When will you stop using words that don't mean anything!" cried the old man, hurrying forward. "I presume you mean there has been a railroad wreck?"

"That's it, Perfessor. De extenuatin' circumstances ob transmigration--"

"That will do, Washington!" said the aged man, somewhat sternly. "You must stop talking, and act. This is no time for foolishness. There may be people hurt. Come along and let us see what we can do."

"Yes, sah!" replied the negro, calming down.

Then the two hurried down along the track, piled high with the debris of the runaway freight train.

"My! My! This is a terrible wreck!" cried the old man, as the two climbed over the mass of wreckage.

"Hi, Perfessor!" called the colored man, suddenly. "I've found something!"

"What is it, Washington?"

"It's a boy, an' he dead!"

"Oh, that's too bad!"

"An' heah's another, an' he's dead! Dis catafterme is de most--"

"Now, Washington, remember what I told you. No big words wanted at the present time. Where are the boys?"

"Here, Perfessor," and the negro showed the old man where Mark and Jack were lying, close together on a pile of sand. The professor bent over them. He felt of their hearts and listened to their breathing.

"Here!" he cried, suddenly. "They're not dead! They're only stunned! Maybe we can save them! Hurry, Washington, and carry them to my cabin. You take one and I will bring the other!"

"You don't need to carry any ob 'em," answered the colored man. "Dis chile is strong 'nuff, I reckon, to tote dem two boys," and, suiting the action to the words, he stooped down, put an arm around each of the prostrate forms and lifted one on each shoulder. "'Bout face! Forward march!" he cried.

With the old man following, the negro made his way along a path that led over the fields, until he came to a long and rather narrow shed built on the edge of the woods.

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"Be sure no one is in sight before you go in!" cautioned the old man, as he opened the door, which was fastened with several padlocks. "It would never do to have my secret discovered now."

"Nobody in sight, master!" exclaimed the colored man, as he turned, with the two unconscious boys on his shoulders, and gazed about "De coast am clear."

"Then hurry inside and we will see what we can do for the poor lads. I fear they are seriously hurt."

The negro slipped in as the old man held the door open, hurriedly closing it afterward, and bolting it on the inside.

"Put them on my bed," went on the gray-haired man. "Then hurry back to the wreck! There may be more people hurt, whom you can aid. Don't stop to talk, but hurry back. I will see to the boys."

Not very willingly the negro left the shed. When he was gone, and the door was securely fastened after him, the old man went over to where Mark and Jack lay, both still unconscious.

"Poor lads!" sighed the old man. "I hope I can save them."

He went rapidly to work. Loosening the clothing of the boys he soon found that no bones were broken. Then from a medicine chest he took several bottles. In a tall glass, such as druggists use for mixing prescriptions, he put several liquids, and stirred the whole together. Then he moistened a little cotton in the preparation, and placed the white stuff under the noses of the lads, holding it in place with cloths. He had about completed this when a knock was heard at the door.

"Who is there?" he cried, starting up in alarm.

"Mr. Washington Jackson Alexander White," was the answer.

"Give the countersign!" demanded the old man, sternly, making no move to undo the bolts that held the door tight.

"De North Pole, an' long may it stand!" was the rather odd reply.

"Right! Enter!" said the professor, opening the door to give admittance to the colored man.

"Did you find any more victims of the wreck?" asked the old man.

"No, sah; Mr. Perfessor Amos Henderson, I did not," answered Washington.

"Just plain Professor will do," said Amos Henderson, quietly. "You needn't give my full name every time."

"All right, Perfessor," went on the colored man. "I didn't find no mo' pussons entangled in the distribution of debris. Dere was a lot ob railroad men dere, but dey wasn't hurted. Dey was lookin' fer two boys what was ridin' on de train when it went kersmash."

"I hope you didn't say anything about these lads, Washington."

"Not one single disjointed word, Perfessor. Dis chile knows when to persecute de essence ob quietude an' silence."

"There you go again! How many times have I told you not to try and use big words, Washington? Use simple language. I take it you mean there were no others injured in the wreck?"

"Perzackly."

"It is a miracle how these boys escaped instant death," the old man went on.

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"I reckon as how it were owin' to de fack dat dey struck in a bank ob soft sand dat concussioned de fall," explained Washington.

"You mean the soft sand saved them?"

"Dat's de correctness ob it."

"I think you are right," the old man continued, as he fastened the door securely. "The shock of the sudden stopping of the runaway train, as it reached the end of the siding and crashed into the bank, probably threw the lads up in the air, and they came down in the sliding sand where we found them. Otherwise they would surely have been killed. As it is they have had severe shocks."

"Are dey goin' to die, Perfessor?"

"I hope not, Washington, but I must see to them."

Amos Henderson went over to the bed on which the two boys were stretched out, each with the piece of cotton soaked in the preparation over his mouth and nose.

"I am using a very powerful remedy," the old man muttered. "If they are not too badly hurt they will recover. Ah, yes, there is a little color in their pale cheeks."

He bent over the boys. As he had said, Jack's face was tinged with a light pink, and Mark's eye-lids were moving slightly.

"They are coming around all right," exclaimed the aged professor. "Hurry, Washington, and get some hot beef broth ready. Put the kettle on to boil and make some strong tea. They will want something to eat shortly after they recover their senses."

The colored man, humming softly to himself, began moving about the shed. It was a rough looking place from the outside, but, within, was fitted with many comforts. There was a gasoline stove, a table, several chairs, a bed, and a large case full of books. But the queerest sights of all were on the walls.

They were literally covered with cog wheels, levers, handles, springs, pieces of machinery, patterns, models, and strange devices. The room had two doors. One was that by which the old man and the negro had entered. The other was behind the bed, and was clamped and fastened with so many bolts and bars, with locks similar to those on big safes, that it would seem a rare treasure was concealed behind the portal.

The old man gave no heed to the wonders that surrounded him. Instead he gave all his attention to the boys. He sat down beside the bed and watched them as their breathing became stronger. From time to time he felt of their pulses, and nodded his head as if satisfied.

"Is the beef tea ready?" asked the old man, after a half hour had passed.

"It am, Perfessor."

"Then turn down the flame a bit so it will keep the stuff warm, and come back into the work shop with me. I want to get that last bolt in the engine."

"Are dem young gen'men all hunky-dory?"

"They are coming on nicely," was the old man's reply. "They will recover consciousness in half an hour and we can feed them, and give them some medicine. Come along, Washington."

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The two passed out through the much-locked door behind the bed, the undoing of the fastenings taking some time. As the portal swung open it disclosed a long shed which seemed to be occupied with a big, strange object.

The old professor and the negro had not been gone more than five minutes before Jack opened his eyes. He turned over on one side. As he did so Mark slowly lifted his head.

"Hello!" cried Jack, faintly.

"What's the matter?" asked Mark.

"Matter? What? Where?" inquired Mark, sitting up.

"Here! Everywhere!" replied Jack, raising himself slowly on his elbow. "All I remember is a terrible crash. Now look at all those wheels. Wheels! Wheels! Wheels! I wonder if they can be in my head?" and he tried to smile.

"No, they are real wheels, and they are on the walls," announced Mark.

"Then where in the world are we?" went on Jack. "In a machine shop or a railroad wreck?"

"Looks like--" began Mark, when he was interrupted by a voice calling:

"Hurry up, Perfessor! De boys has awakened from de unconsciousability!"

And, to the astonishment of Jack and Mark, the old man and his negro helper hurried from the inner room and stood in front of the bed.

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CHAPTER IV

THE AIRSHIP

"Do you feel better?" asked the professor, anxiously, as he came forward and felt of the boys' pulses.

"A great deal," answered Jack. "But what has happened? Where are we? What are all these wheels for?"

"Slowly, slowly," said the old man with a pleasant laugh. "One question at a time. For the first: what happened was a railroad wreck."

"I remember now," said Jack, slowly. "We tried to stop the cars."

"And you didn't succeed very well," went on the old man. "However, the sand bank did it for you, and stopped you two at the same time. As for your second question, you are here in my shop. As to the third, those wheels are parts of my great invention. But I will tell you about that after a while. I must give you some medicine now, and something to eat. Here, Washington!"

"Comin', Perfessor!"

Jack and Mark were more surprised than before when they saw a big colored man, seemingly as strong as an ox, coming toward them with two steaming bowls of beef broth. Washington was grinning with delight.

"Dis am de best beef stew dat eber transpositioned itself into yo' vicinity!" he exclaimed, setting the bowls down on a table near the bed.

"Now, Washington," cautioned the old man. "No big words, remember."

"All right, Perfessor," was the answer.

"Do you boys feel like eating?" asked the aged inventor.

"I do," replied Jack. "There was a time, though, when I thought I'd never get a chance to eat again. That was just before the crash."

"You were both knocked unconscious," the professor went on. "Washington and I happened to be near by and brought you here. Fortunately I am something of a doctor as well as an inventor, and I used a strong medicine I have."

"I'm sure we're much obliged to you," answered Mark.

"Let me see how much improved you are by eating," suggested the old man. "I can trust Washington to cook good meals, even if he does use big words."

Then, while the colored man grinned cheerfully at them, Jack and Mark, sitting up on the bed, for they were still weak and sore, ate the broth. After that both boys said they felt better.

"See if you can walk," suggested the inventor.

Mark and Jack stepped on the floor. They both uttered cries of pain. They were stiff and lame from the shaking they had received.

"A day in bed will do you no harm," said their strange rescuer. "I have some liniment that will soon take the soreness out of every one of your muscles."

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Though the boys protested at being made to remain in bed, the old man insisted. He made them take off most of their clothes, and then brought out some liniment. Under his direction Jack and Mark rubbed themselves well, and experienced almost immediate relief. It was now getting dusk, and Washington lighted a big lamp that hung in the centre of the room, first taking care that the shutters were tightly fastened.

The colored man prepared a simple supper for Mr. Henderson, and afterward got himself a meal. When the dishes were cleared away the old man, who had noted with smiles the anxious glances Jack and Mark were casting about the strange room, said:

"I suppose you boys would like to ask lots of questions."

"I'd like to know what all this machinery is for," spoke Jack.

"And what is behind that door," Mark went on, indicating the much-locked portal.

"I knew it!" exclaimed the old man. "I knew it! Now if I tell you will you promise to keep it a secret until I give you leave to speak?"

Of course the boys promised eagerly.

"Do you think you have rested enough now to take a look inside?" the inventor asked, nodding toward the locked door.

"Sure!" exclaimed Jack.

"Then put on your coats and trousers and I'll introduce you to my pet."

Wonderingly, the boys followed him. It took nearly a minute to unfasten the various bolts and bars, but at last the portal swung open. The place was dimly lighted by a single big lamp, but in the glare of it the boys caught sight of a strange, weird object. It looked like an immense cigar, and swayed slowly back and forward. It seemed to be covered with a net-work of cords. On the ground beneath it was what seemed to be a good-sized boat, with a large cabin amidships.

"What in the world is it?" cried Jack.

"It's my airship!" exclaimed Professor Henderson. "The only successful airship ever invented. It is the electric _Monarch_!"

"What is it for?" asked Mark.

"To navigate the realm of the stars and moon!" cried the old man. "With that I will rival the eagles in their flight!"

The boys were a little alarmed. The professor was strangely excited. His eyes sparkled in the reflected light of the lamp. Jack and Mark thought they might have been brought to the abode of a madman. They shrank back a little. But they were reassured a moment later when, with a pleasant laugh, the old man said:

"Don't be frightened, boys. I know what I am talking about. Here, Washington, more light! We will show them what we have done, hidden away from the sight of the curious, unbelieving world. Let them see my _Monarch_!"

"We'll illuminationness dis abode like it was de orb ob day shinin' heah!" exclaimed the negro, as he started several more lamps aglow.

"Are the shutters closed?" asked Mr. Henderson, anxiously.

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"Tight as a drum-head," was the reply.

"Now look!" exclaimed the inventor, turning to the boys.

They were more than astonished at what they saw. They had no idea that the rough shed held such a perfect piece of machinery.

Up near the roof of the place, which was quite high, there swayed an immense bag of oiled silk. It was shaped like a cigar, big in the middle and tapering at both ends. The bag was enclosed in a net of ropes which extended down to the lower part of the airship.

This lower part, as the boys could see, was just like a steam launch in shape, only much lighter in weight. It had a sharp bow, and a blunt stern. From the stern there extended a large propeller, the blades being made from sheets of aluminum.

The main part of the ship proper, or the part suspended from the gas bag, was covered by a closed and roofed cabin about forty feet long, ten feet wide, and extending five feet above the gunwale of the ship. The cabin had four windows on each side, a companionway fore and aft, and a sort of look-out or conning tower forward, which, the professor explained, was the place for the steersman.

"Because this ship can be steered wherever you want to go," he said, pointing to the big rudder that was hung aft, an opening in it allowing the screw or propeller to revolve.

The boys were lost in admiration of the wonderful airship. They were consumed with curiosity as to how the machinery worked, and they thought no more of their knocks and bruises than as if a mosquito had bitten them. The professor watched their faces with delight. He loved boys and mechanical apparatus.

"Now we will enter the _Monarch_," he said. "Turn on the lights, Washington."

There was a click, and the cabin of the airship was flooded with a soft glow of incandescent lamps.

"Come on!" called Mr. Henderson, leading the way. The boys followed, marveling at the wonders on every side.

They found the cabin of the strange craft divided into three parts. First came a sort of parlor, with a table and seats arranged on the sides. In the front part of this was a passage leading to the conning tower, or the place for the steersman. Behind the parlor came the sleeping quarters and dining room combined. The bunks were arranged to fold against the wall, and a table in the centre could be shut up when not in use and hoisted to the ceiling, giving plenty of space.

Next came the engine room, and as they entered it the boys could hardly restrain from giving cheers of delight. It was almost filled with machinery, and occupied a little more than half of the whole boat, being twenty-two by ten feet in size.

The two boys did not know the use of one quarter of the machinery and apparatus they gazed on. There were electric motors, storage batteries, two gasoline engines similar to those used in automobiles, pumps, large and small tanks, instruments for measuring the electric current, for telling the temperature, the amount of moisture in the air, the speed of the wind, the speed of the ship, the height to which it went, besides compasses, barometers, telescopes, and other instruments.

There were levers and wheels on every side, switches, valves, electric plugs and handles. Lockers arranged close to the wall and along the floor held supplies and materials. Everything was new and shining, and the professor smiled with pride as he touched piece after piece of machinery, and looked at the different instruments.

"Now we'll go out on the stern," he said.

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The boys followed as he ascended the companion steps and emerged on a small platform at the rear end of the cabin.

"Do you know what this is?" asked the professor, touching a long, thin, round object.

"Looks like a gun," replied Mark.

"That's just what it is. It's a machine gun that will fire one hundred shots a minute, and it can be turned in any direction, as it works on a swivel. I don't know that we'll have any use for it, but I thought I'd take it along."

Then the professor pointed out where the propeller shaft ran from the engine room out through the stern, and showed how the rudder was worked by wire ropes extending from it to the conning tower.

"In short we have everything necessary to successfully navigate the air," he went on. "Not a thing has been overlooked. All I have to do is to fill the big bag of oiled silk with a new gas I have discovered and up we go. This is really the most important part of the invention. Without this powerful gas the airship would not rise above the earth.

"But I have found this gas, which can be made in unlimited quantities from simple materials that we can carry with us. The gas has enormous lifting power, and if it was not for that I would not dare make such a large and comfortable airship. As it is, we can sail through the air as easily as if we were on an ocean liner on the sea and much more quickly.

"I generate the gas in the engine room as I need it," the professor went on. "It goes to the oiled silk bag through two tubes. When we have arisen to a sufficient height I start the electric engine, the propeller whirls around, and the ship moves forward, just as a steamboat does when the screw is set in motion. Then all I have to do is to steer."

"It's great!" cried Jack with sparkling eyes.

"It certainly is," agreed Mark.

From the stern the professor took the boys to the conning tower, where there were several wheels and levers, that placed most of the important machines and engines in the boat under the direct control of the steersman. A lever turned one way would send the ship ahead. Turned in the opposite direction it would reverse the course. A wheel like that on an automobile served to direct the rudder and so guided the Monarch's course. Other levers controlled the speed of the engines, and the supply of gas that filled the silk bag.

"Here is where we shall carry our supplies of condensed food," the professor went on, leading the way back into the middle room. "We will take along capsules that will supply us in a small space with meat, vegetables, soups, tea and coffee, besides milk.

"The water we will get as we speed along, dropping down to earth whenever it is necessary. As for clothing, I have an abundant supply."

He opened a locker and disclosed a pile of fur garments. There were big coats, caps and boots, everything made with a furry surface within as well as without.

"Any one would think you were going into some cold country, professor," said Jack, looking at the warm garments.

"So we are! We are going to find the north pole!" exclaimed the old inventor.

"The north pole?" cried Mark.

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"That's what I said. Do you boys want to go along in the _Monarch_ to a place where never mortal man has been?"

At that instant there came a loud knock at the door.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER V

A PLAN TO SEEK THE NORTH POLE

"Hark! What was that?" exclaimed Professor Henderson in a hoarse whisper.

"Sounded like some one at the door," replied Mark.

"Quick, Washington! Put out the lights! You boys creep back and hide under the bed. My secret must not be discovered now when everything is ready for the trial!"

The boys started back toward the living room, Washington began putting out the lights and then, with the professor, joined the boys. The shed containing the airship was in total darkness, and the negro, turning down the lamp in the cabin, shrouded that in gloom also.

Once more the knock was repeated. It was a peculiar one; first two raps, then a silence, then three blows, followed at intervals by six single raps.

"Who is there?" asked the professor, going close to the door.

"A friend," was the reply.

"Give the countersign."

"The North Pole, and long may it stand!" was the queer answer. It was the same the colored man had given when he sought admission after his second trip to the wreck that afternoon.

Slowly the inventor unfastened the door. As he cautiously opened it a roughly dressed man slipped in.

"What's the need of all this foolishness?" he demanded. "Why have you made it so dark? It's like a pocket. Is any one here?"

The two boys had crawled under the bed before the door was opened, in accordance with the instructions from the old man. The inventor and Washington were the only ones visible in the cabin.

"Why don't you turn up the light?" went on the visitor in fretful tones. "Are you sure no one is here to learn our secret?"

"Do you see any one?" asked the professor, not wishing to disclose the boys' presence. "Do you think I am so foolish as to waste the labor and toil of years?"

"I didn't think so," said the man, "but as I came along I thought I saw lights in the balloon shed."

"Very likely," admitted Mr. Henderson coolly. "Washington and I were out there doing some work."

"All right," was the rather ungracious answer. "I have those chemicals you wanted."

"Give them to me!" implored the old man in an anxious tone. "I thought you would never bring them."

"Oh, I don't forget so easily. Here you are," and the newcomer passed over a package. "Now when are you going to sail?"

"In about a week," answered the inventor.

"Then I guess I'll stay until you go," spoke the stranger. "I don't want to be left behind."

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At this the old professor seemed strangely excited. His hands trembled as he placed the chemicals on a shelf.

"You don't like it, I see," observed the stranger with a sort of snarl. "But I know you too well, Professor Henderson. You would be only too glad to go and leave me behind after all I have done for you."

"My only desire, and you know it, James Taggart," broke in the old man, "is to preserve my secret from the world until I see whether I can succeed or not. I do not want to be laughed at if I fail. I admit you have been of service to me, but, rather than risk failure, rather than run the chance of having my plans made known before I am ready to have them, I would do anything. I know you too well to imagine that you have aided me from pure love."

"Well, go on," snarled the man, as the professor paused.

"You have some object back of it all," continued the professor. "I do not know what your motive is, but I say, rather than have my plans spoiled, I will make you a prisoner and keep you here until after I have sailed. I am all ready to start,--tonight, if need be!"

"So that's your game, is it?" cried Taggart. He turned toward the old man with an ugly look.

"Washington!" cried the professor. "Bind him! Put him in the little room and see that he does not escape!"

The next instant the big negro had folded his arms around Taggart. The white man struggled, but he was like a baby in the grasp of a giant, for Washington was very powerful. He procured a strong cord, and, before Taggart could resist had him firmly bound. Then, picking the man up in his arms, Washington carried him back into the balloon shed.

"Help! Help!" cried Taggart, and then his cries were smothered.

"Don't hurt him!" cautioned the professor, calling into the darkness to Washington.

"I only giv him a soft piece ob wood to bite on," replied the negro. "He mustn't expostulate sounds too freely 'cause it might keep us awake."

In a few minutes Washington returned.

"I made him as comfortable as de existin' circumstanceableness would permit ob," he announced.

"That's right. I did not want to do this, but I was forced to," the inventor said. "I will release him as soon as we are ready to sail. But I am forgetting the boys. Come out," he called, and Jack and Mark, much mystified and somewhat frightened by what had taken place, crawled from under the bed.

"I am sorry you witnessed what you did," the professor said to them. "But I could not have this man spoil my plans. Some time ago he discovered my secret, and to keep him from publishing it broadcast I was forced to take him into my confidence. He has given me some aid in getting rare chemicals, but he wants a heavy price. He demands a half interest in the _Monarch_, and to be taken to the north pole."

"Then you are really going to search for the pole?" asked Jack.

"I am, my boy, and, what is more, I am going to find it. Why, it is simple with the wonderful gas I have discovered. That is the whole secret of what will be my success. It is easy enough to make an airship that will move, but the trouble is no one has yet been able to make a gas strong enough to lift the heavy weight of the ship high into the air. That is where I have the advantage."

"I wish I could see your ship sail," said Jack.

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"You may if you like," exclaimed the old man. "Do you remember what I asked you when the knock interrupted us? I asked you if you wanted to go to the north pole. Now I have taken a great liking to both you boys. I haven't even asked your names yet, but I like you. I need some help in running the ship, also in making my explorations in the frozen north. Would you like to go along?"

For a few seconds the boys did not know what to say. It was a strange and sudden proposition. They had been through so many adventures in the last few hours that their brains were fairly bewildered. But to both of them there came a great desire to make this wonderful trip through the air. Before they could make a reply Professor Henderson spoke again:

"Perhaps you had better think it over a bit," he said. "I realize that it comes rather suddenly. Supposing you go to bed, and we'll talk more in the morning. Come, Washington, make up a couple of bunks for the boys in this room. You can sleep in the balloon shed as usual."

In a few minutes the colored man had made rude but comfortable beds on two bunks, like shelves that folded against the wall. Then, with an armful of bed clothes, he retired to the big shed.

"Better use a little more liniment," advised the old man. "I don't want you sore and stiff if you go with me."

Accordingly Jack and Mark rubbed their arms and legs well. Something in the stuff must have been very soothing for they soon fell asleep.

It was broad day when the boys awoke. At first they could not realize where they were. They saw a colored man moving about and cooking something on the gasolene stove.

"Did yo' gen'men obtain a sufficient percentage of restful slumberation?" he asked with a broad grin.

"We slept fine," said Mark.

"Washington, is breakfast ready?" asked Mr. Henderson, coming in from the balloon shed.

"It am prepared," was the reply.

"Hello, boys! How did you sleep?" asked the inventor, observing that Mark and Jack were awake.

"Fine!" they said in a chorus and with a smile.

"Well, wash up and we'll have something to eat. You'll find soap, water and towels out in the shed," and he pointed to where he had just come from.

The boys found two big tubs full of cool water. In an instant they had stripped and were splashing around like ducks. It was a treat to get a good bath. They came back into the cabin glowing. Not even a reminder of the soreness and stiffness of the railroad accident remained. They did full justice to the meal of coffee and ham and eggs Washington had prepared.

"Now, Washington, you had better take the prisoner something, and get your own breakfast," the professor said. "I want to have a talk with the boys."

Whistling a merry tune, the colored man took out a tray of food to Taggart, who was still bound so he could not escape.

"Now I'd like to hear your names, and all about you," the old man said.

The lads told their simple stories from the time each of them had started to shift for himself until they had accidentally met, and been hurled from the train.

"And have you thought over what I asked you last night?" asked the professor, when they had finished.

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"I have," said Jack, "and I'd like to go along."

"Good! You shall go!" exclaimed the inventor. "How about you, Mark?"

"I'll go, too."

"All right. Now we have plenty to do," the old professor went on. "The actions of this man Taggart will hasten my plans. There are a few finishing touches to put on the ship. Come out into the shed."

Delighted at the chance of helping about the mysterious Monarch, the boys followed the professor. They found the shed lighted by windows in the roof, from which the curtains had been rolled back. The windows on the side were not opened.

By daylight the airship looked larger than before. It was a wonderful machine. The professor and his colored helper busied themselves in the engine room. Now and then the two boys were allowed to aid.

As he hurried about from one part of the ship to the other the professor told them how he had come to build the Monarch. He said he was an old bachelor and alone in the world, and had long desired to sail to the north pole. The failure of many land expeditions had convinced him that an airship was the only feasible method. Accordingly he had come to this rather deserted part of the country, built his cabin and shed, and then had begun the putting together of his airship.

The engine parts, the various pieces of apparatus, and the machinery, he bought from many different sources, so as not to excite suspicion. At last after much labor the great undertaking was done.

"The Monarch has never been tested," said the professor, "but I know it will sail. I have made many small models and they worked perfectly."

Several busy hours were spent. Much more machinery was put in the ship, the food lockers were stored with supplies, the gasoline tanks filled, and the supply of fur clothing increased.

"There!" exclaimed the professor at length. "We are about ready to sail. I could start in an hour if necessary. All I have to do is to fill the silk bag with my wonderful gas, which is all ready to generate."

"Den you'd better start to generationess it right off quicker than sooner!" shouted Washington, running from the rear of the shed. "Hurry up, Perfessor!"

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Henderson anxiously.

"Dat prisoner man has escaped!" cried Washington. "He's clean gone! Flown away! Jumped his bail!"

"That's bad!" exclaimed the professor. "He'll work some mischief now! I guess we'll have to start on our trip at once!"

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER VI

AWAY IN THE AIRSHIP

"Quick, Washington!" cried the professor. "Jump in the engine room and start the gas generator. Mark, you bring in from the cabin all those wheels and things on the walls! Jack, load those packages there into the locker in the after part of the _Monarch_! But handle them carefully! They contain explosives and ammunition for the machine gun!"

If there had been hurry and bustle before, there was ten times as much now. The professor gave one look at the place where Taggart had been concealed. The man had worked off his bonds and escaped while his captors were in the airship's cabin.

Soon there was a queer hissing noise from the engine room of the _Monarch_. The gas bag began to distend.

"She's fillin', Perfessor!" cried Washington.

"We must tie her down," muttered the old man. "Otherwise she will rise and take the shed with her. I say, Washington!"

"Yes, Perfessor."

"We must get some one to help us open the shed roof to let the ship rise out. We can't do it alone."

"Guess it's a extraunordinary contract," agreed the negro.

"Then you go out and see if any one is in sight. Try to hire them for the work, but don't tell them about the ship. They can work up on the roof. I will see to the gas machine while you are away. Hurry now!"

The colored man went out. In the meanwhile the professor and the two boys continued to load up the _Monarch_. They had nearly everything that the inventor intended to take along piled in its proper place, when footsteps were heard outside. Then the noise of some persons on the roof was audible. In a few minutes Washington came in.

"I found three men," explained the negro. "One is dat old hunter as helped us before, Andy Sudds. He was goin' huntin' but he said he'd help take the roof off fer a dollar. De oder two is does farm hands, Tom Smith an' Bill Jones. Dey was goin' down to do post-office, but dey said dey'd help fer fifty cents apiece. All three is up on de roof now."

"Good!" exclaimed the professor. "It's lucky I had the roof made in sections when I built this shed. Now it can be taken off in a hurry. Come on, boys! There are some more things that must go in the ship!"

Thus urged, Mark and Jack worked with a will. Washington helped, and then went up on the roof to aid the three emergency toilers. By this time several sections of the covering to the shed had been taken off and the place was quite light.

All the while the gas machine in the ship continued to generate the vapor. It flowed into the cigar-shaped bag through two rubber tubes. As the bag distended more and more, the _Monarch_ tugged and pulled at the anchoring ropes on the floor of the shed, as if anxious to be away.

The boys worked with a will. The last articles were placed in the various rooms of the airship's cabin, until the balloon shed was stripped quite bare. The professor was busy in the engine room. The noise of the gas generating machine increased.

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Then came a series of sharp explosions as one of the gasoline engines was started. This was followed by the hum of an electric dynamo, and the whizz and purring of a big motor.

The inventor was testing the many machines to see that all worked right. Suddenly he switched on the incandescent lights in the ship's cabin. Next he turned on the powerful searchlight in the bow, and the shed was illuminated by a glare that rivaled the sun. The professor then revolved the big propeller slowly and tested the rudder.

"Everything is in good shape!" he cried. "We will start in five minutes if they get the roof off so we can rise. Those anchor ropes will not hold much longer!"

Up on the roof, however, the men were working with a will. Board after board was torn away and the different sections moved to one side. At last the whole top of the shed was off. All that remained was to let the Monarch out.

Suddenly from where the three emergency helpers were working there came a cry of astonishment, mingled with fear. For the first time Andy Sudds, Tom Smith and Bill Jones, characters well known to Amos Henderson, had looked down into the shed, and caught sight of the tugging, swaying airship. The interior had been quite dark up to this point, which accounted for them not having noticed the ship before. But when they saw the strange affair so close beneath them they were startled.

"Jumpin' rattlesnakes!" cried Andy Sudds. "What have I struck?"

"It's a yellow elephant!" exclaimed Tom Jones.

"A sea serpent!" ejaculated Bill Smith.

They leaned over from the edge of the roof eaves to which they were clinging and peered down into the big balloon shed. Certainly the airship presented a queer sight to the three men.

"Is everything ready?" asked the professor of Washington.

"Eberyting am circumulated to completeness," replied the negro.

"Jump in, boys! Untie the ropes, Washington. We'll start!"

"Hurry! Hurry! Perfessor!" cried Washington, as he looked out of a side window. "Here comes dat man we tied up in de shed! He's got anoder man wid him, an' dey got guns!"

"It's Taggert! He is after me!" exclaimed the inventor. "He must not be allowed to get on the ship! Come on, Mark and Jack! Never mine unknotting the ropes! Cut 'em! We have no time to lose! Jump in, Washington!"

The boys clambered over the sides of the airship. Washington followed their example. The anchor ropes were cut.

"Hi, there! Stop!" cried a voice from outside. "Don't you dare start that ship!"

"Here we go!" shouted Professor Henderson in a joyful tone. "Now to see if the Monarch fulfills her promise!"

He hurried into the engine room. The noise of the gas generating machine increased. The gasoline engine went faster, and the motors and dynamos added to the noise. There was a loud hissing sound. The professor had opened a valve admitting the full force of gas into the oiled silk bag. Then came a snapping sound as several anchoring ropes that had not been cut, broke.

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Up rose the Monarch like some immense bird, through the opened shed roof. Out into the air went the big yellow bag. And then a strange thing happened.

Andy Sudds, the hunter, and Bill Jones and Tom Smith, the two farm hands, who had been peering over the edge of the shed down at the airship, leaned over too far in their anxiety to observe everything. As the gas bag brushed past them they were startled. They lost their balances and the next instant all three toppled right into the bow of the Monarch as she arose, and were lifted up into the air with her.

"Hold on, there! Stop!" cried Taggart, who by this time had come close to the shed.

"It's too late!" shouted back the professor, poking his head from a window in the engine room.

"Hey, there! You're carrying me off in your ship!" yelled Andy Sudds as he scrambled to his feet after his tumble into the bow of the Monarch.

"And me!" ejaculated Bill Jones.

"And me!" exclaimed Tom Smith. "I didn't figure on coming with you."

"It's too late!" the old inventor cried. He turned some wheels and levers and the airship arose faster. Then he switched on the electric machinery. The big propeller began to revolve. Swifter and swifter it went. The Monarch, which had risen several hundred feet, started forward at a swift pace. "We are off for the north pole!" shouted the inventor. "Hurrah! The ship works! I knew it would!"

"Here!" roared Andy Sudds. "I don't want to go to the north pole. I want to hunt muskrats down by the creek."

"You can hunt seals and whales up north," the professor called to him.

"But I've lost my gun!" the hunter exclaimed, soberly, yet a little appeased at the prospect of big game.

"I'll give you a better one," promised Mr. Henderson. "You shall have all the hunting you want."

"I can't go to the north pole," fairly yelled Bill Jones, starting back toward the engine room. "I had a job plowing on a farm. If I don't go back I'll lose my place."

"You can hire out to me," suggested the professor. "I need a crew, and I didn't have time to ship one."

"What about me?" asked Tom Smith. "I was working on a farm like Bill."

"I'll hire you also," spoke the inventor of the Monarch.

"Hi, Perfessor! Shall I shut off de gas?" Washington suddenly cried.

"For a while," was the inventor's reply. "We are high enough now. Then oil up the engines and dynamos, they need it. You boys can help," he said to Mark and Jack. "I must see to my instruments and find whether everything is working right."

The two boys were delighted to have a chance in the engine room. Under Washington's direction, the colored man showing quite a knowledge of the apparatus, they oiled the various bearings until everything was running smoothly.

Until now they had no time to realize what an experience they were going through. Things had happened so quickly that it was hard to realize they were sailing through the air in a wonderful ship, probably the most successful navigator of the upper regions ever invented.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

It was not until Jack looked over the edge of the airship from the engine room window that he felt what a trip up among the clouds meant. Below the earth was spread out like a good-sized map, with little threads of silver for rivers, patches of green for big fields, and narrow gray ribbons where there were roads.

"It's wonderful!" he cried to Mark.

"And to think we were chased out of town yesterday by a constable," spoke his companion. "This is a great change. I'd like to see him catch us now."

"Dis prolonguated elevation into de airy space ob de zeneth am extremely discommodatiousness to a pusson what ain't used to it," remarked Washington with a broad grin as he oiled a whirring motor.

"Yes--er--I guess it is," admitted Mark.

"Are your teeth all fast after that effort?" asked Jack with a laugh.

"Neber yo' mind my teeth," said Washington. "Golly! What's de matter now?"

The Monarch was darting from side to side like a kite that has lost its tail in a high wind.

"It's only the professor trying the steering apparatus," said Jack, looking forward toward the conning tower. This proved to be true, for, in a moment, the airship resumed a straight path, and the professor, coming back to the engine room, cried:

"She answers her helm perfectly. It certainly is a success in every way! But now, since the machinery is working well, and I have the Monarch headed due north, in which direction she will sail alone for a while, I want you boys to come into the dining room, while we talk over matters with our unexpected visitors. We must lay plans and divide up the work of running the ship."

Jack and Mark went with the old man into the middle room of the craft. There they found the old hunter and the two farm hands. None of the three had quite gotten over his fright at being suddenly carried off through the air.

"Everything has turned out for the best," the inventor began. "I feared my forced start would spoil my plans, but you see I got a crew almost at the last moment. Now we will--"

He was interrupted by a sudden cry from the engine room.

"Help! Help!" rang out the voice of the colored man. "Hurry up an' help, Perfessor. I'm caught in some cantankerous conglomeration an' I'm bein' killed! Help! Help!"

Followed by the boys and the three men the old inventor hastened aft, alarm showing on his face.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER VII

HELD BY ELECTRICITY

As they reached the engine room they saw a queer sight. Washington was close to the buzzing dynamo which he had started to oil. His hands grasped two large copper switches used to turn the current on and off.

"Let go and come away from there!" cried Mr. Henderson.

"I can't! I'se stuck fast!" yelled the negro, writhing in pain.

Andy Sudds started on the jump to assist the unfortunate man.

"Don't touch him!" exclaimed Mr. Henderson. "He's held fast by electricity! If you attempt to pull him away with your bare hands you'll be caught just as he is! Wait a minute!"

The inventor rapidly opened a locker. From it he took out a pair of rubber gloves. Putting these on he hurried to where the negro was still squirming in pain and terror.

"Help! Help!" Washington yelled. "I'm burning up!"

"Wait a moment! I'll save you!" shouted the captain of the Monarch. The next instant he reached up, and turned off the electric current. Washington fell in a limp heap on the floor of the engine room. He was freed from the grip of the electricity that had held him as in a vise. The professor ran to a medicine closet and got a remedy which he administered to the unfortunate one.

In a little while the colored man was better. He sat up, opened his eyes, which had been closed, and remarked:

"Dat was a mighty close call fer dis chicken!"

"What made you go near the switch?" asked Mr. Henderson. "I have warned you several times never to put both hands on a copper switch at the same time. One hand does not matter, but two make the connection."

"I knows it now, Perfessor," said Washington humbly.

"Then I hope you'll remember it. That applies to all of you," he went on. "If ever you have occasion to touch any electrical machinery, don't do it with both hands at the same time, if there is danger of forming a connection. Always use rubber gloves, and you'll be in no danger. Rubber is a non-conductor. Remember, Washington."

"I'll recollection it on de next obstreperous occasion," promised the negro.

"You must feel better when you can use your big words," said Mr. Henderson with a laugh. "Now," he continued, "I was about to give a few general instructions about the airship, when Washington interrupted us.

"You men who are here against your will I am sorry about. I could not stop and let you off a while ago, because there was a man at the shed whom I did not want to meet. But if you want to go back to your homes I will let the airship down to the earth and you can go. I would like to have you stay with me. I can promise you all good wages, since I am well off as regards money.

"To you, Mr. Sudds, I can promise such game hunting as you never had before. And to you two farm hands I can promise such sights as you never saw before. Do you want to continue with me, now that you have had a chance to think the thing over?"

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All three said they did.

"Then I'll divide our forces," went on the captain and owner of the Monarch. "I will be in general charge of the ship, just as if I was a commander of an ocean steamer. I expect to be obeyed in every particular. Washington will be the engineer, with the two boys to help him. Tom Smith and Bill Jones will be in charge of the kitchen, and I will show them how to prepare the condensed foods. Andy Sudds will be a sort of look-out and the hunter of the expedition. I will steer the ship and keep watch of the different instruments.

"In order that you may know a little bit about the Monarch I will tell you how she is run. In the first place, she is lifted above the earth by the power of a very strong gas I discovered. It is much lighter than hydrogen, or the gas ordinary airships are filled with, and has a greater lifting power than the hot air used in the old balloons.

"By putting more gas into the silk bag above us I can rise higher. The less gas I use the lower we go. The gas is let into or out of the bag by means of valves which are operated from the engine room or the steering tower. The forward motion of the ship is brought about by means of the propeller at the stern. This propeller works by electricity. The electricity comes from storage batteries which are kept charged from the dynamo run by one of the gasolene engines. I also have an electric motor that is run by either a gasolene engine or the storage battery. If one breaks down I can use the other. The motor alone will run the propeller if the storage batteries fail, and I have to run the electric machine directly from the gasolene engine.

"That apparatus there," and he pointed to a complicated machine, "is where the lifting gas is generated. A gasolene engine runs it. Those tubes carry the gas from the machine to the bag above."

Then the professor pointed out the levers that started and stopped The Monarch, those that sent it higher into the air or toward the earth, the wheel for steering, and told the boys and men how to read the instrument that gave the heights, the force of the wind, the temperature, and much other information. He showed them how the entire control of the ship could be accomplished from the conning or steering tower by the turning of one wheel or another.

"Rattlesnakes an' mud turtles, but she sure is a bang-up affair," observed Andy Sudds. "But about that gun--"

"That's so. I promised you a gun in exchange for the one you lost," said Mr. Henderson. "Wait a moment."

He was gone a little while. Presently he returned with a fine rifle, at the sight of which the old hunter's eyes sparkled.

"That's a beauty!" he exclaimed. "It beats mine."

"It is a magazine gun," explained the professor. "It fires sixteen shots with one loading," he explained.

"And I can kill sixteen white bears, sixteen seals or sixteen whales!" exclaimed Andy with delight. "Well, I certainly am glad I come along, Professor."

"I have a gun for each of us," Mr. Henderson went on, "in case we should meet with enemies. But we may not need them. There is also the machine gun at the stern."

Then the professor initiated his crew into the mysteries of the kitchen and dining room. Nearly all the foods carried on the Monarch were of the condensed type. A small capsule made a plate of soup. There were other pills or capsules that held meat extracts, condensed cereals, tea, milk, coffee, sugar, salt, pepper and everything needed in the general eating line. All the cooking was done by electricity.

As has been said, there was plenty of clothing to withstand the rigors of the arctic regions. There was an abundance of gasolene for the engines and for heating the ship. In short, Professor Henderson seemed to have forgotten nothing that would make his trip to the north pole a success.

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After he had explained all he thought necessary, he told the two farm hands to see what they could do in the way of preparing a meal, as it was nearly noon, and everyone was hungry. Rather awkwardly at first, Bill and Tom started in. They soon got the knack of things, however, and once they had found out how to run the electric stove they were right at home making soups and other dishes from the condensed foods. The first meal on the _Monarch_ was voted a success.

Meanwhile the airship was sailing on. It was not moving very rapidly, for the professor wanted to give the machinery a chance to warm up. After the meal the inventor took the two boys into the steering tower with him, telling Washington to speed up the engines.

In a few minutes the boys were aware that they were moving forward at a faster pace. The air, as it came in the opened window of the conning tower, rushed past with great force.

"I think we'll go a little higher," said Mr. Henderson.

He turned a small lever. All at once the boys experienced a sensation as if they were in a rapidly ascending elevator. Up and up they went, for the professor had admitted more gas to the big silk bag above them.

Suddenly the earth which the boys had dimly perceived below them as if it was a small map in a big geography, faded out of sight. At the same instant there was a sudden moisture and chilliness to the air. Then a dense white mist enveloped the _Monarch_.

"Oh!" cried Mark. "What has happened?"

"We are going through a cloud!" called the professor. So dense was the vapor that the boys, though within five feet of the captain, could not see him. His voice sounded far off.

Then came a sudden rush of light. The mist cleared away. The boys could see clearly, but as they glanced down they noticed rolling masses of white below them.

"We are above the clouds!" said the professor. "Be careful not to exert yourselves, as it is hard to breathe in this rarefied or thin atmosphere."

The boys experienced some difficulty, but by avoiding any exertion were not much bothered.

"Now we'll go down a bit," said the inventor, after the ship had whizzed along for several miles above the masses of vapor. "I want to get an idea where I am."

He turned some more wheels and levers. In a few minutes the ship was again surrounded with a white cloud. Then it passed away, and the earth came into view.

Suddenly the professor looked forward. He seemed to be gazing intently at something.

"I wonder what that is?" he muttered. He took down a telescope and adjusted it, peering forward with strained eyes.

"Can it be possible!" he exclaimed. Then he dropped the glass and frantically signaled to the engine room.

"We must look out for ourselves!" he cried, "Come here, Andy Sudds!"

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CHAPTER VIII

SURROUNDED BY EAGLES

There was a sudden tremor all over the airship as Washington, in the engine room, in obedience to the signals, turned off the power. Then sounded a hiss as the captain let some gas from the bag. The ship began to sink toward the earth.

The black cloud that the professor had been gazing at came nearer. It grew larger and seemed to be made up of a number of small moving objects.

"Quick, Andy!" cried the old inventor. "We shall need your services now!"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed the old hunter, as he hurried forward with his gun in readiness.

"Eagles!" cried Amos Henderson.

"Eagles?"

"Yes! A whole flock of them. Just ahead! See that dark cloud! They are coming this way! They think the ship is a rival bird and they will attack it. Strong as the Monarch is, the silk in the gas bag is frail. If the birds tear that we will fall to the earth and be killed! Use your gun! See if you can drive them off!"

Andy knelt down on the forward part of the ship. He aimed at the black mass, in which scores and scores of birds could now be seen. Then his gun sent out fire and lead.

Bang! Bang! it spoke, and two birds dropped toward the earth. Again the gun belched forth, and more of the eagles were killed. As fast as Andy could pull the trigger he fired.

"We must all get guns!" cried the professor. "It is the only way to save the ship! Come on, boys! You'll find weapons in the dining-room lockers!"

Mark and Jack hurried after the rifles. The professor was greatly excited. Bill and Tom came running forward. The inventor rapidly handed out the guns.

In the meanwhile the ship was slowly settling toward the ground. The captain hoped to get low enough to escape the onward rush of the big birds, but he had counted without the anger of the eagles. They thought the airship was a rival in the realms of space and were determined to destroy it.

On and on they came in spite of the number among them that were killed. Every one on the ship, except Washington, who had to attend to the engines, was firing. The birds never stopped or swerved from their course.

Then with a rush and roar, a flapping of wings that sounded like thunder, and shrill cries and screams that almost drowned the noise of the guns, the eagles surrounded the Monarch. They struck at it with their talons. They opened wide their sharp beaks and snapped at the wood and iron.

Some of the fierce birds even attacked the men, and boys, and were beaten off with the butts of the rifles. Others of the eagles rose higher in the air and struck at the oiled silk bag. At first the yielding surface offered no resistance and was not damaged. Then one fierce bird, with wide-opened beak, struck at the thin cloth and tore a hole in it as large as a man's hand.

The sudden settling of the airship told that something was wrong. Then the professor, glancing aloft, saw what had happened, and hastened to his helper.

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"Quick, Washington!" he shouted. "Start the gas generator at full speed! We must pump lots of the gas in to keep us afloat! We are in great danger!"

"Why not try the machine gun on the eagles?" shouted Jack.

"Good idea!" exclaimed the inventor. "You two boys work it!"

At last the eagles, alarmed by the number killed, and frightened by the noise of the guns and the shots, halted in their rushes at the airship. Some of the wounded ones wheeled away. Then others followed until, finally, the whole colony of birds sailed off.

"There they go!" cried Jack.

"Yes, but I fear too late to do us any good," spoke the professor. "The airship is slowly settling."

"Can't it be fixed?" asked Mark.

"I suppose I could let it down to earth and patch up the hole, but I fear to do so," answered the inventor. "The Monarch is not under control, and if I attempt to make a landing I may smash her all to pieces. She may settle down until within a few hundred feet of the earth and then plunge like a meteor. We would all be killed then."

"Is there no other way?" asked Jack.

"None, unless we could patch up the hole in the gas bag while we are up aloft. I can hold the ship there for a while yet. Another reason why I do not want to land is that we are over a thickly settled portion of the state now, and if I go down to earth we will be surrounded by a curious crowd that will delay us." "Is that netting strong?" asked Mark, suddenly, pointing to the cords that confined the gas bag.

"Two strands would support a man's weight," said Mr. Henderson.

"And have you anything to mend the silk bag with?" went on the boy.

"Yes, but why do you ask?"

"Because," answered Mark, "if you'll let me I'll climb up and mend the hole the eagle made."

"Dare you do it?" cried the old professor, hope shining in his face.

"Try me and see."

The professor quickly prepared a piece of silk, kept on hand to repair breaks in the bag. It was coated with a very strong and fresh cement. The silk was to be inserted in the tear made by the eagles, when it would at once harden and prevent the further escape of gas.

Mark made ready for the perilous ascent. He took off his coat, and removed his shoes so his feet could better cling to the frail-looking though strong cords.

"Slow down the ship!" commanded the captain. "Now, Mark, try! I hope you succeed! Move cautiously. You don't want to lose your life!"

Mark said nothing. He grasped the piece of oiled silk, coated with the cement, in his teeth, clinching it by a strip that was free from the sticky substance. Then he stood on the rail of the Monarch and began his climb aloft. Surely few ascents were made under such fearful conditions. The airship was now more than a mile above the earth. One false step and the boy would plunge into eternity. Nothing could save him.

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Up and up he went, testing every cord and mesh before he trusted his weight to it. On and on he advanced. The frail gas bag swayed in the wind that was springing up. It seemed like a thing alive.

"Careful! Careful!" cautioned the professor in strained tones. Everyone on the ship held his breath. Up and up Mark went. At last he reached the place where the eagle's beak had torn the bag.

He braced himself in the meshes of the net. Then, leaning forward, he fixed the patch under the rent, and pressed it into place. The cement did not take hold at first. Mark pressed harder. Would the leak be stopped?

"Will he make it?" asked one.

"I don't think so."

"He must make it!"

"If not we are lost!"

"You are right!"

For a moment there was a doubt. Then the sticky stuff adhered to the silk bag, and the patch was made fast. A shout from Washington in the engine room told that the gas had ceased to rush out. Mark had succeeded.

Washington hastened to turn the gas generator to half speed. Before he could do so, however, there had been a great increase in the volume of vapor in the bag, caused by the sudden stopping off of the vent. Up shot the airship, the accumulation of gas lifting it higher from the earth. So suddenly did it shoot up, from having been almost at rest, that there was a tremor through the whole craft.

"Look out, Mark!" cried Jack. He looked up to where his comrade clung to the netting.

"Hold fast! We'll stop the ship in a second," exclaimed the captain.

But it was too late. The sudden rising of the craft had shaken Mark's hold, which was not of the best at any time, since the gas bag was a yielding surface to lean against.

The next instant the boy, vainly clutching the air for some sort of grip for his hands, toppled over backward. His feet slid from the meshes of the net, and he plunged downward toward the earth, more than a mile below!

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CHAPTER IX

THE FROZEN NORTH REACHED

"He'll be killed!" shouted Jack.

"He's a goner!" yelled Washington, looking up from the engine room window.

The old professor groaned and shut his eyes. He did not want to see the boy fall.

Bill and Tom, with old Andy Sudds, had been watching Mark at his perilous task, standing directly beneath him. Andy was the closer. He leaned quickly backward when he saw what had happened.

Mark's body, turning over in its descent, was at the ship's side. Out shot the hands of the old hunter. His fingers were curved like the talons of an eagle. The long arms seemed to reach a great distance, and then, just as it seemed that Mark would plunge downward to his death, Andy grasped and held him.

"There!" exclaimed the hunter. "That was a close call, my boy!"

Mark did not answer. The fearful danger he had been saved from had so frightened him that he became partially unconscious.

"Is he dead?" faltered Jack.

"He has only fainted," answered Amos Henderson. "I'll soon bring him around."

The inventor hurried into the cabin and came out with some liquid in a glass. This he placed to Mark's lips and soon the color came back into the pale cheeks.

"What happened? Where am I?" asked the boy, sitting up and looking around.

"You're all right," answered Andy. "It was a close call though. I reckon you won't want to mend any more airships right away."

"I remember now," went on Mark, who had been dazed by the suddenness of it all. "I fell, didn't I?"

"Yes, and Andy caught you," put in Jack. "He was just in time."

Mark said nothing, but the fervor with which he shook the old hunter by the hand showed how deep his feeling was.

In a little while the fright and excitement caused by the accident had passed over. The ship now rode evenly and neither rose nor fell, in consequence of the gas supply in the bag remaining the same, there being no leak. The patch Mark had put on fitted so closely that there was not the least escape of gas now.

"Well, we might as well start ahead," said Amos Henderson, at length. "We have had excitement enough in this neighborhood, and maybe we'll be better off if we go forward."

Accordingly he went to the conning tower, set the propeller in motion, and soon the Monarch was moving northward at great speed. With his eyes on the compass in front of him the captain held the ship on her course.

They were about half a mile above the ground now, the captain having allowed the Monarch to settle. They could see that they were passing over a populated part of the country.

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"Come up here!" yelled Captain Henderson to the boys from the steering tower. "I'll explain a few things to you."

Willingly enough the boys joined him. He was busy making a calculation of figures on a piece of paper. The steering wheel was lashed and the compass pointed to indicate that the ship was rushing due north.

"We're making satisfying progress," said the professor. "At this rate we will not be long on the journey."

"How fast are we moving?" asked Jack.

"About fifty miles an hour," replied the inventor. "That is 1,200 miles a day, counting that we run day and night at this speed. But we will hardly do that, not that we could not, for there will be no dangers of collisions up here. I think we have the air all to ourselves.

"But there will be contrary winds, and we may be blown off our course. That is the only disadvantage an airship is under. It can't sail against the wind like a ship on the water. Still, we have many advantages. Now I figure that we can count on an average of at least twenty-five miles an hour all day long and part of the night.

"We started from about the middle of New York state, and to the north pole would be about 3,000 miles. We ought to make the distance in about five days, or say a week, to be on the safe side. We will move as fast as we can, from now on, though, especially during the daylight."

The professor turned some wheels and levers and the speed of the airship increased a little. It was kept at about the same height.

The sun was beginning to descend in the west, for it was getting late in the afternoon. Down below, on the earth, the landscape had changed from that of cities and towns to a stretch of dense woods.

"Must be near supper time," observed Mark.

"Your fright didn't deprive you of your appetite, then?" asked Amos Henderson.

"Not a bit," replied the boy.

In a few minutes Tom and Bill were preparing a meal of the condensed foods, cooked on the electric stove. Everyone voted the victuals excellent. Then, as night settled down, the bunks were made up and the boys, together with the two farm hands, were glad to seek some rest, for the day had been an exciting one. Washington and the professor agreed to divide the night into two watches, as they were not familiar enough with the workings of the ship to dare to leave it unguarded. The machinery might need attention any moment.

The boys and their companions were soon asleep, and no thoughts of their strange position, that of slumbering on an airship high in the atmosphere, disturbed their dreams.

The last thing Jack wondered was whether the passing of the Monarch would not be taken by people on the earth for the flight of some giant comet, as it sailed aloft, all lighted up. But he was too tired to pursue this speculation long.

Morning dawned without anything unusual having occurred. The ship had been kept going at a slow speed all night, and no accidents happened. Breakfast was served, and then each of the crew took up his duties.

The professor, having made a careful examination of the ship to see that everything was in order, showed Jack and Mark how to steer the craft, and how to start, stop, raise and lower it from the conning tower or the engine room.

Then he let them practice a bit, and two more delighted boys there never was, as they sent the craft ahead up or down, starting and stopping her with a few turns of a wheel or lever.

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"You may want to know how to run her some day in an emergency," said Amos Henderson. "No telling what will happen."

"We hope nothing will," spoke Jack.

"There's no telling," prophesied the inventor.

For several days the ship moved ahead at moderate speed. The machinery, excepting for some minor accidents, worked smoothly. The gas bag did not leak, which was the accident most dreaded, and it was not necessary to run the gas generator, which proved a saving of the valuable chemical from which the lifting-vapor was produced.

Now and then, when in need of water, the craft was lowered to the earth in a secluded spot near a stream or lake, and the tanks were filled for drinking and washing purposes. But so far, from the time of the hasty flight, no one on the earth had spoken to the voyagers. Nor, so far as was known, had their presence been noted, though the black speck in the sky might have furnished plenty of talk all over the country for those who observed it. The weather was pleasant, but it was noticed that it was constantly growing colder.

One morning Jack, who was the first up, stuck his head out of the cabin door before he had finished dressing. He quickly popped back again.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "Colder than Greenland!"

"What's that about Greenland?" asked the professor, who had just awakened.

"It's awful cold outside," said Jack, shivering from the remembrance.

Without a word the professor, wrapping a dressing-gown about him, hurried to the engine room, where several thermometers were kept. One was outside, and could be read through a glass side.

"No wonder you felt cold," he said to Jack, when he returned. "It's ten degrees below zero!"

The boys hurried to complete their dressing. The professor did likewise, as he was anxious to take some observations.

"Get out the fur garments," he said. "We must take no more chances now. It will become colder rapidly, and ordinary clothes will be of no protection."

The boys and the professor donned heavy fur coats, with immense gloves and caps that covered all of their faces but the eyes. Then they went outside. Jack was the first to look over the side of the ship. As he did so he uttered a cry of astonishment.

Down below, about three-quarters of a mile, was a great white, snowy waste. Giant mountains of ice were heaped on every side. It was a cold, frosty silent world that the Monarch was flying over. They had reached the frozen north! They were at the beginning of the entrance to the land of the Pole!

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CHAPTER X

LOST IN AN ICE CAVE

"I'm not surprised that the thermometer is down below zero," remarked Jack. "There's enough ice under us to supply the whole United States."

"It is getting colder!" exclaimed the inventor as he glanced at an instrument near him. "It is fifteen below zero now!"

In truth the Monarch was far to the north. She had gone faster than the inventor calculated. A glance downward showed that all traces of civilization had been left behind.

There was nothing to be seen but snow and ice, ice and snow, piled in fantastic heaps,--mountains, ridges, hills and valleys.

The professor hastily made a few calculations.

"I believe we are somewhere over Greenland or Baffin Bay, but whether we are over the land or sea I cannot tell. At any rate we are still going north," and he glanced at the compass.

They were about to retrace their steps to the dining cabin, when there was a sudden settling of the Monarch. It seemed to be plunging downward.

"What's the matter?" cried Jack.

The inventor hurried to the engine room. A glance at the registering needle of the instrument for telling the height attained, showed that the ship was sinking fifty feet a minute.

"Some conglomerous contraption has disproportionated herself," cried Washington. "What shall I do, Perfessor?"

"Start the gas generator at full speed!" cried the inventor. "Heat the vapor before it goes to the bag! The cold has contracted the gas in the holder above so that it will no longer support us! Work quick, Washington!"

Washington sprang to set the gas machine in operation. He seemed to be having trouble with it.

"She won't work!" he called. "She's busted!"

Faster and faster the airship continued to sink. The inventor hurried to Washington's help, but it seemed that nothing could be done. On board the Monarch there was deadly fear in every heart.

"I can't keep her afloat!" the professor groaned.

Down and down went the craft. The inventor and Washington were working furiously. The boys, old Andy and Tom and Bill hurried to the engine room.

Then came a sudden jolt. The airship had struck the ice!

"Shut off the engines!" cried the professor. "Stop everything or we'll go to smash! We must set to work to repair the gas machine and raise the ship."

The Monarch had settled down on a vast ice plane. So gently had the ship sunk through the air that she had suffered no injury. She rested on an even keel and there was still enough lifting power in the gas

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contained in the bag to keep that afloat, so that the vapor holder tugged gently at the confining meshes of the net.

"Ma goodness sakes alive!" cried Washington as soon as he had poked his head out of the warm engine room. "De atmospheric conditions am such dat dey is conducive to de utmost congestion of mah circulatory systemation!"

"I suppose you mean it is too cold for your blood," spoke the inventor, with a smile.

"Yo' has conducted mah meanin' to de utmost circumspection, Perfessor," was the answer.

"You'd better get out a suit of furs," suggested the captain, for Washington had not yet donned these garments. The colored man ran back into the cabin, got out the heaviest set he could find, and put it on.

The professor and the boys, together with the two helpers, were clothed to withstand the rigors of the arctic regions. In a little while Washington was warmly dressed. Then the professor led the way over the rail and down on the ice.

"Are we on land or sea?" asked Jack.

"It's hard to say, but I think we are on land," replied Amos Henderson. "However, it doesn't make much difference. We are pretty far north. The thing to do is to get the airship in shape as quickly as possible."

"Can we help?" asked Mark.

"I hardly think so," answered the old inventor. "Washington and I understand every piece of machinery. If we need any help we will call on you. In the meanwhile you may take a look around if you wish."

"I'd like to stretch my legs a bit," spoke up old Andy. "I ain't used to stayin' cramped up in a ship like I have been. I'd like to see some of that big game you talked about, Professor."

"Take your gun along, and you may spot a polar bear or a walrus," suggested Mr. Henderson. "Some fresh bear steak would not go badly at all."

Delighted at the prospect at getting a shot Andy hastened after his gun. Then after a hasty breakfast, with the two boys and the two helpers as companions, all warmly wrapped in furs, the hunter set forth across the fields of ice and snow.

It was a strange experience for all of them. There was not a sign of life to be seen. On every side there was nothing but the cold whiteness--a coldness and a whiteness that was like death itself. They walked on for more than a mile, and saw nothing but the desolate waste.

"There's something!" called Jack in a hoarse whisper, coming to a halt and pointing to a small hill of ice in the distance.

"It's a polar bear!" yelled Mark. "He's right behind the ice!"

"There are two of 'em!" cried Bill. "This is no place for me! Come on, Tom!"

"Hold still! Let me get a shot!" pleaded the old hunter.

He could see the two animals plainly, now that his eyes had become used to the difference between their shaggy coats and the surrounding snow and ice. Andy kneeled down and took careful aim. A shot rang out, and one of the bears toppled over.

"Good shot!" cried Jack.

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Once more the hunter pulled the trigger. A dull click was the only response. Andy quickly cocked the gun again, thinking it had missed fire. Again the hammer fell with only a click. The hunter quickly threw open the magazine.

"The chamber is empty!" he cried. "I have fired my last shot!"

"And there comes the bear!" yelled Mark. "He's in a fit of rage!"

The fierce beast, in anger at the sight of his enemies, was coming toward the men and boys at top speed. On the first alarm Bill and Tom had turned to flee. Andy, swinging his gun by the muzzle, and loosening a long hunting knife in his belt, awaited the bear's onslaught. Mark and Jack were too surprised to run, and stood their ground, not knowing what to do.

"Run away!" shouted Andy. "I'll tackle the beast! I'm not afraid!"

"We're not going to leave you!" yelled Jack. "I have a revolver!"

Quickly he drew out the small weapon, a present from the inventor. Taking hasty aim he fired several shots, but his aim was poor. One bullet struck the bear on the nose, and, instead of stopping the beast, only made him the more angry.

The brute was now but fifty feet away and coming on at a rapid pace over the uneven lumps of ice and snow.

"Run, I tell you!" called Andy. "Do you boys want to be killed?"

He aimed a furious stroke at the bear, but as he did so his foot slipped and he came down heavily on the ice. Mark and Jack uttered cries of terror and fright.

With blood dripping from his wounds, foam falling from his red jaws, and with every appearance of rage, the maddened beast rushed on the old hunter.

"He'll be killed!" yelled Mark.

"If I only had a gun!" groaned Jack.

Andy rolled to one side. As he did so he uttered a loud cry, and then, to the astonishment of the boys, he disappeared from sight as if the frozen earth had opened and swallowed him up. At the same time the bear, that was just about to cast himself down on the fallen hunter, seemed to drop down through some hole into the earth.

For an instant Jack and Mark looked at each other with fear in their eyes.

"What has happened?" inquired Mark, in an awestruck voice.

"I don't know," answered Jack. "But look! there are spots of blood over there. That is where the bear was!"

The boys ran forward. As they did so their feet seemed to slip from under them. Down and down they felt themselves going. Faster and faster they slipped. They gazed with frightened eyes about them and saw they were on some giant slide of ice, that led into unknown regions.

"Where are we going?" gasped Mark.

"I don't know!" yelled back Jack. "At any rate we're getting a good coast!" He could joke even in the face of danger.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

With a jolt the two boys came to the end of their sudden journey. For a moment they were so startled and shaken up that they could hardly see. Then, as their senses came back, they gazed around.

There were white glistening walls of ice on every side. Above glittered a tiny patch of light, showing where the blue sky was.

"Where are we?" asked Mark.

"You're with me an' the bear!" exclaimed a voice.

The boys started. They saw, lying near them, old Andy. At his feet was the polar bear, dead, with the hunter's knife sticking in his heart.

"And what place is this?" asked Jack.

"It appears to me like a big ice cave," answered the hunter.

"Yes, and we're lost in it," spoke up Jack, and gave something of a shudder.

"That's right, my boy," answered Andy Sudds.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER XI

ATTACKED BY SEA LIONS

Frightened and alarmed at the unusual sight of an enraged polar bear rushing in their direction, Bill and Tom had turned and fled at the first appearance of danger. They were not cowards, and would probably have faced a mad bull, but that was something they were used to, while a bear was something new.

So they raced back over the ice toward the place where the disabled airship rested.

"Quick!" yelled Bill.

"They'll all be killed!" cried Tom.

"Who?" asked the professor, dropping his tools.

Rapidly the two helpers told what had occurred, and how they had left Andy and the boys as the bear was rushing at them, the hunter having no more cartridges in his gun.

"Take two rifles from the chest!" exclaimed the inventor. "Washington and I will follow as soon as we get our furs on! Hurry now!"

Tom and Bill needed no second bidding. Seeing that the magazines of the rifles they took were filled, they hastened again over the ice and snow in the direction of Sudds and the boys. As they hustled along, the sun, which had been hidden by clouds, emerged and shone with dazzling splendor on the ice fields. It almost blinded the men.

As they ran on they heard a shout behind them. Turning, they saw Washington and the professor, each with a gun, following. They waited for the pair to come up.

"How far away is the place?" asked Mr. Henderson.

"We must be close to it now," said Bill. "Yes, there is the bear Andy killed," pointing to where the dead animal was stretched on the ice. "But where are the boys?"

"And where is Andy?" asked Amos Henderson.

Not knowing what had become of the hunter and the boys, the rescue party was puzzled. They looked on every side but saw no traces. The ground was so uneven that the professor suggested the hunter and boys might be lying wounded in a hollow, and screened from sight.

"We must scatter and look for them," he said.

Meanwhile the three in the ice cave had been looking about them. They saw what had brought them into the place. It was a big cavern hollowed out by nature in the frozen crystals, and leading to it was a smooth inclined plane of ice. "How are we going to get out?" asked Jack, after all three had taken a survey of the cavern.

"Can't we walk up the place where we slid down?" asked Mark.

Jack was already busy trying to climb up the slippery place. It was much harder than it seemed. The incline was a glare of ice, and Jack's first attempt sent him sliding back with considerable force to the cavern floor.

"There's only one way to do it," said Andy. "You must take my hunting knife and cut steps in the slide. Then you will have some support for your feet."

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

The boys saw this was good advice and followed it. But the ice was frozen almost as hard as stone, and after chipping and cutting away for half an hour they only had three niches.

"At this rate we will have to stay here several days," said the old hunter, and there came an anxious note in his voice. "I wish we could send word to some of the others."

"Hark! What was that?" asked Jack suddenly.

All listened. There came a faint report, like that of a gun.

"It's the professor, Washington, and the two farmers searching for us!" exclaimed Mark. "They are firing their rifles."

"That's it! They can't find us because we are down in this hole," said Andy. "If I only had a cartridge now I could give an answer."

There came another report. This time there was no doubt that signal guns were being fired, for the shot sounded quite close.

Jack put his hand in his pocket. His fingers touched something.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "I have my revolver and there are four shots left!"

He passed it over to Andy, who shot twice at intervals of about a quarter of a minute.

"Where are you?" they heard a faint voice calling from somewhere above their heads.

In reply Andy fired the last shot. It was responded to, and then, a few seconds later, a dark object loomed up at the opening at the top of the inclined plane. The prisoners, looking up, recognized the professor.

"Hello, down there!" he shouted.

"Hello, up there!" answered Andy.

"We'll get you out!" called down the inventor. "How did you get there? What do you need in order to come up here?"

"We slid down," said the hunter in reply, "and we didn't do it for fun either. If you're going to get us out you'll need a long rope."

The professor, sizing up the situation, sent Bill Jones back to the ship on the run to bring a long stout cable. While this was coming there were questions and answers sent up and down the inclined shaft that told each of the two parties what had happened. In a short time the rope was brought, and one end fastened to an iron bar thrust into the ice, while the other was thrown down to the prisoners. With this as an aid and guide they were able to walk up the incline and soon were on the surface again.

"There, I forgot something!" exclaimed the old hunter as he emerged from the mouth of the shaft.

"What?" asked the professor.

"The polar bear," was the answer. "I think I'll go back after him. The skin may be valuable."

"There are plenty more," said the inventor. "We have no time to go back after this one. I must hurry to the ship."

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

Pulling up the rope, and strapping their rifles on their backs, the party of rescued ones and rescuers began their march to the airship. They decided to leave the bear Andy had first shot on the ice, and come back later for some steaks.

It was a bright day, and though it was very cold, being about twenty degrees below zero, there was no wind, which was a great relief. The party marched on, with Andy in the lead. He had reloaded his rifle with some ammunition the helpers had brought from the ship, and he was almost wishing he would meet another bear or two, now that he was ready for them.

Just as the adventurers turned around the side of a large ice hill, which hid the airship from their sight, they heard a queer noise.

"What's that?" asked the professor.

"Sounded like some beast roaring," answered Jack.

"Look out!" shouted Andy, springing back, and bringing his gun to bear. "We're in for it now!"

"Sea lions, by their looks!" exclaimed the inventor. "A whole crowd of them and they are right between us and the ship!"

The next instant the party came into full view of the beasts. There were about two hundred of them, great big brutes, with sharp tusks. At the sight of the men and boys the animals set up a chorus of roars that sounded as if several score of real African jungle lions had broken loose. At the same time the beasts, with curious hitchings of their unwieldy bodies, advanced on the adventurers! "Get your guns ready," cried Andy. "These fellows mean business! Make every shot tell!"

He had already begun firing and two of the sea lions toppled over in quick succession, testifying to his good aim. Then the boys, the two helpers, the professor and Washington began a fusillade that made the icy regions echo and re-echo as though a battle was in progress.

But the number killed among them, and the sound of the guns, did not halt the progress of the beasts. On and on they came, their roars increasing in fierceness.

The continuous firing could not be kept up long. Already the old hunter's gun was empty, and there was no spare ammunition now. One after another the rifles of the others were emptied of their cartridges. Still the beasts came on.

"We must retreat!" shouted Andy. "Back to the ice cave! They can not get us there!"

"But what about the airship! We must regain that at any cost!" called the professor.

"Wait until these beasts go away!" yelled Andy. "If they get us down it's only a matter of seconds before they'll kill us with those tusks! Run back!"

All turned to execute this command. There was only a narrow opening in the slowly encircling ring of sea lions, and this the adventurers made for, running toward the ice cave. They had passed beyond the mass of the beasts, when a loud cry from Jack startled them. At the same time he pointed ahead.

There, coming on at full speed was a pack of polar bears! The adventurers were between the two forces of enraged animals!

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER XII

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE

"It's all up with us now!" shouted Andy. "I wish I had never come to the north pole!"

"How shall we escape?" yelled the professor.

Not knowing what to do, the whole party stood still. Behind them were the sea lions, roaring and snorting. In front of them, a hundred feet away were the bears, growling and howling.

"Turn to the right!" cried Jack. "There is a big hill of ice we can climb!"

The adventurers turned. As they did so Mark glanced back at the sea lions, and uttered a cry of surprise.

"The lions are running away!" he shouted.

Sure enough, the seals, though their progress could not be called "running" were retreating with their hitching, lumbering gait, away from the adventurers.

"But the bears are coming!" called Andy.

"They aren't after us! It's the sea lions they want!" exclaimed Jack. "I don't believe they will pay any attention to us!"

"The boy is right!" came from Andy. "The bears want fresh meat and are going to tackle the lions. We're safe, but we'd better not stay around here long!"

Jack's surmise was correct. The white bears did not follow the adventurers when the latter had run to the right. Instead, increasing their pace, the polar bears sprang into the midst of the sea lions and soon there was a fierce battle between the two animal forces.

It was a fearful sight and the adventurers gazed at it in wonder, mingled with terror. The bears would seek to enfold the lions in their strong fore-paws, while the lions would try to sink their long tusks into the vitals of the enemy.

Nearly a dozen had been killed on either side, but still the battle raged fiercely. The men and boys were so fascinated by the sight that they did not move, but stood staring from a small hummock of ice they had mounted.

"I think we had better go!" called Professor Henderson. "No telling when they will get tired of fighting each other and turn on us. Besides I am anxious about the ship." And off they started.

The ship rested in the same position it had settled in when the gas contracted. No harm had come to it as the fall had been so gradual.

"I'll have the gas machine in operation in about an hour," Professor Henderson said. "Meanwhile, Bill, you and Tom had better get some dinner for us. I'm hungry and I dare say the others are. Have some hot coffee, for it is growing colder."

"I was thinking I didn't feel quite so warm," observed Andy. "While there was a lot of excitement I didn't notice it, but now I am chilled through."

"No wonder," remarked the inventor. "It's forty degrees below zero!"

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

All were glad to go inside the ship which was warmed with gasolene stoves. Bill and Tom took off their heavy furs and began preparing a meal, which was soon smoking on the table. Everyone had a good appetite, and, just as the boys, with Andy and the two farmers were about to sit down, the professor came into the dining room.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed. "Washington and I have the machine fixed. The gas is generating and we will be able to rise and continue our journey in about an hour."

This was good news, and, during the dinner the adventures of the morning were talked over in detail.

"We certainly had excitement enough for one day," observed Jack.

Rising from the table and donning their furs Jack and Mark went out on the deck. They glanced up at the gas bag, and found it was filling out from the pressure of the vapor being pumped into it from the machine.

"I wonder if we'd have time to walk out on the ice a little?" asked Mark. "I haven't had a chance to look around, we've been so busy since we landed."

"We'll ask the captain," spoke Jack. "I'd like a little stroll myself."

The inventor had no objections.

"Don't go far away," he cautioned. "We'll start very soon now, and don't go near those animals."

The boys promised, and then, climbing over the rail, and down the ice hummocks they walked along a broad level expanse that stretched out for about a mile.

They had not gone far before Jack, who was in the lead, came to a halt.

"Look here!" he called to Mark, who came hurrying up.

"What is it?"

"There's a pile of bones frozen into the ice! Looks as if there had been a fight here between bears and sea lions, and this is all that was left. They ate each other up, all but the bones, which became covered with ice."

"Those aren't animal bones, Jack!"

"Why not?"

"See, there is the skull of a man! And another! There are a dozen skulls!" and Mark pointed to where they showed from underneath the crystal ice.

"You're right!" Jack shouted. "And see! Here is something that looks like a copper cylinder! Maybe it has something inside! We must tell Professor Henderson!"

Full of the importance of their discovery, the boys hastened back to the airship. The old inventor was much interested. Directing Washington to keep a careful eye on the gas machine, and taking an axe with him, the captain returned with the boys to where the bones were.

"They are certainly the remains of human beings," was the professor's opinion. "I don't know that it would be any service to dig them out, but that copper cylinder may be of value."

A few blows with the axe served to chop out the object. It was about two feet long and nearly three inches in diameter, and seemed to be securely sealed.

"We'll take it back to the ship and open it," said the inventor. "It is too cold to do it here."

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

Back to the Monarch they hurried. Then, with a file, the professor removed one end of the copper case. From within he drew out a roll of paper, a watch, a knife and a few trinkets such as a man would carry about him.

"Some white man did this!" exclaimed the old inventor, his hands trembling with eagerness as he unrolled the paper. "Let us see if he has left any word behind to tell of his death."

All crowded around while Amos Henderson glanced at the mysterious message that had so curiously come to them. Some of the writing was very faint, but by the aid of a magnifying glass it was deciphered. Then, amid a deep silence the professor read the paper.

"Whoever may find this, take warning and do not seek to find the north pole. Danger lurks there. My name is Andre Christiansen, and I am a Dane, educated in America, who set out to find the pole. I discovered it but was taken into captivity by the fierce people who dwell around it. They determined to get rid of me. With a party I was sent away. I was to be killed and buried in the ice. Before they could kill me we were all attacked by polar bears. All the other men were killed and I was wounded. As I write this I am dying. I write it with my blood and a piece of bone. Send word to Denmark of my death, kind friend whoever you may be that finds this. If you reach this far in your search for the pole, be warned and go no farther. This is all I can write. I am nearly dead. I put the message in this copper cylinder which I brought along. I hope it will be found. Good-bye."

For a few moments after the professor ceased reading the strange message no one spoke. They were all thinking of the terrible fate that had befallen Andre Christiansen; to die all alone in that icy land, yet who, in the agony of death had thought to warn some explorer who might come after him.

"Poor fellow," murmured Amos Henderson. "He must have died soon after putting the message in the cylinder."

"And then the bears finished up their work by eating him and the men who wanted to kill him," said Andy. "They left only the bones."

"How long ago do you suppose that was written?" asked Jack.

"There is no telling," replied the professor. "But it must have been several years. I have read of all recent polar expeditions, and within the last twenty years there has been no one of this name to venture toward the pole. Besides the copper cap on the cylinder has become rusted on, and that would indicate the passage of considerable time."

"I wonder if there are people at the pole?" came from Mark.

"We'll go and see!" exclaimed the professor.

"You don't mean to say you are going further north after what that message says?" asked Andy Sudds.

"Certainly; why not?"

"We may all be killed."

"We'll try not to have that happen," said the professor. "I am glad you boys found this. It is a valuable relic," and Amos Henderson put the message, the trinkets and the cylinder carefully away.

"I--I guess I won't go--" began Andy.

At that instant the airship gave a sudden tremble. Then the whole craft shivered. Next it began to rise in the air.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

"Here we go!" cried the professor.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER XIII

FORWARD ONCE MORE

The airship rose rapidly. Washington had continued to operate the gas machine until there was a sufficient quantity of vapor to overcome the contracting influence of the cold atmosphere.

"Forward once more!" cried the professor, hurrying to the engine room. "This time we may reach the north pole!"

He and Washington soon started the motors, the dynamos and engines. The propeller revolved rapidly. The adventurers were under way again.

"Jack and Mark, go into the conning tower and steer!" called Mr. Henderson from the engine room. "Take her up about half a mile, and send her straight north by the compass. I have to adjust some of the machinery."

Delighted at the prospect of running the airship, the two boys hurried forward. Mark went to the steering wheel, which was similar to the kind used on automobiles. The Monarch was heading to the west, having no one to guide her, but Mark soon brought her around until her bow was poked directly for the north.

Under the guidance of the two boys, the airship rushed forward. They had become somewhat used to the queer feeling of being high up in the air, and now it did not seem wonderful to be sailing among the clouds, though two weeks before they would have laughed at the idea of such a thing. Andy and the two farmers had, likewise, become a little indifferent to the strange sensations, and, aside from being careful not to go too near the rail of the ship when it was sailing aloft, they took no more precautions than as if they were on the deck of a steamboat.

For several hours the ship was kept on her course. The boys remained in the conning tower, gazing ahead. Not a single thing could be observed but a monotonous expanse of whiteness. Now and then they would run into a bank of clouds which obscured their vision as if there was a heavy fog.

"Look at the clock!" exclaimed Mark suddenly, pointing to the time-piece.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Jack.

"Can it be right?" went on Mark. "Surely it isn't nine o'clock, and the sun shining as brightly as if it was noon."

"It's nine o'clock at night!" exclaimed the professor, entering the steering tower in time to hear Mark's words.

"But it can't be," argued the boy. "Look how the sun is shining."

"You must realize where you are," was the reply. "We are so far north, my boy, that we are in the land of the midnight sun. From now on we will have daylight all the while. We are nearing the pole, where it is light six months of the year, and dark the other six. We are having summer here, now."

"I guess it don't feel much like summer outside," said Mark. "The thermometer indicates fifty below zero!"

"So it does," said Amos Henderson, glancing at the instrument which, though it was outside, could be read through the glass in the tower. "Well, we may have struck a cold wave. Ordinarily we will not have much more than twenty below zero when the sun shines."

"That's cold enough for me," said Mark.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

The professor announced that the airship's machinery was now in good shape. He said he expected to come to the end of the journey in about three days more, provided no accidents occurred, and there were no storms to delay the Monarch.

"I think we will divide the night into four watches," he said. "Washington, Jack, Mark and I will take them in turn. During the day we will all be on duty, but from six in the morning to six at night we will stand watch and watch."

It was arranged that Jack should take the first period, the professor the second, Mark the third and Washington the fourth. As the first watch had passed Jack was excused and the inventor said he would take charge of the ship. Then, as every one was tired from the happenings of the day, they all went to bed, excepting Amos Henderson, who entered the tower to steer the ship.

The engines, dynamos and motors ran without much attention save such as the pilot might give them occasionally, for he could leave the ship with the steering wheel fastened, a few minutes at a time, as there was no danger of collisions. So the Monarch continued to race toward the north.

It was almost time for Mark's tour of duty to begin. The two boys, who were sleeping together, were in a deep slumber, when Washington ran in and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Wake up everybody! De peffessor is killed dead!"

Andy, Mark, Jack and the two helpers sat up in their bunks, rubbing their sleepy eyes and wondering what had happened.

"What's the matter?" asked Jack.

"Mr. Henderson is dead! He's in the engine room!"

"What killed him?" inquired Andy.

"He must hab got a shock from de dynamo!"

Andy jumped from his bunk and hurried to the engine room. There, as the negro had described, Professor Henderson was lying white and senseless on the floor.

The old hunter stooped over the inventor and felt of his heart.

"He is alive!" he exclaimed. "His heart beats! We must carry him to a bunk!"

Aided by Washington, Andy carried the professor to the sleeping room, where he was made comfortable in one of the beds. The captain was so near death that he could not be seen to breathe, and only the faint flutter of his heart told that life existed.

"We're lost!" cried Washington. "If he dies we'll never get back home again. He is de only one dat knows how to mix de chemicals for de gas!"

This was alarming news. Without the mysterious vapor the ship would not keep afloat long, nor could it be worked back from the desolate land of ice and snow. How much of the gas was left no one knew.

"Did he ever get a shock like this before?" asked the hunter of Washington.

"Once, but not so strong."

"What did you do for him? What medicine did he take?"

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

"Glory! Glory!" shouted the negro, jumping up and down in his excitement. "I remembers it now. Wait a second!"

He hurried to the engine room, and came back in a little while with a small bottle.

"Perfessor done say," he began, "dat if eber I seed him senselike, when he done gone and got a shock from de 'lectrisititeness, I was to gib him two spoons full ob dis."

Andy took the bottle, which contained a red liquid. Bill got a spoon from the locker where the dishes were kept. With hands that trembled the old hunter poured out some of the fluid. Then, with Jack's help he forced open the inventor's mouth and put the medicine in.

"I hope it works!" murmured Andy.

He poured out a second spoonful. This was administered to the unconscious man. In a few seconds his face that had been pale showed a little color. His chest expanded as he drew a long breath. Then the old inventor opened his eyes and asked faintly:

"What happened? Where am I?"

"You are all right now," spoke Andy in a gentle voice. "You are out of danger I hope, and safe on the _Monarch_."

"Is the airship all right?" asked the captain eagerly.

"Yes, and sailing along like a bird," was the answer. In fact every one had forgotten that the craft was forging ahead, and that all the machinery was working.

A look of relief crossed Professor Henderson's face, and he sat up.

"I remember now," he said. "I was adjusting the dynamo, and I touched a live wire. The current was very strong. It is a wonder I was not killed. But how did you bring me around again?"

"Washington happened to remember some medicine you had told him to use in emergencies."

"Oh, yes: I'm glad I had some on board. It is a remedy for those shocked with electricity. But I must see to the machinery."

"No, you must not," said Andy firmly. "You are too weak to get up yet, and you have a bad burn on your hand."

"All right," agreed Amos Henderson, for he felt weak and sick from the shock. "Some one had better see to the steering now," he added, and then he leaned back in the bunk and closed his eyes.

Jack ran to the conning tower. He found that the ship, under the influence of a strong wind, was going due west, instead of to the north. He shifted the steering wheel and brought the _Monarch_ on her course again, pointing to the north pole. Then he called for Mark, and the two boys arranged that between them they would run the ship until Professor Henderson recovered.

Andy and Washington, who were watching beside the professor's bunk, where he reclined, seemingly in a deep slumber, were startled as he suddenly sat upright.

"Hark!" the old man exclaimed. "Listen! Do you hear it?"

"Hear what?" asked the hunter, in a soothing tone, wishing to humor the sick man.

"Do you not hear a terrible rushing, roaring wind? The ship! The ship is in danger!"

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

The thrilling words sent a chill to the hearts of the watchers. There was no sign of a storm. In fact it was strangely quiet outside, the only noise heard being that of the engines of the ship.

"His mind wanders," said Andy.

He had no sooner spoken than a cry from Jack, who with Mark was in the steering tower, startled them. His voice ran out through the cabins as he cried:

"A whirlwind! A whirlwind! We are running straight into a whirlwind!"

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER XIV

TOSSED BY A TORNADO

"Shut down de engines!" cried Washington.

"Lower the ship!" exclaimed Mark, who had run back from the tower. "Close to the earth we may escape the wind!"

"Is it headed toward us?" asked Andy.

"Straight," answered Mark. Jack tried to steer to one side, but the currents of air sucked the ship right back into the path again!

"The captain knew more than we gave him credit for," muttered the hunter. "He heard the storm coming."

The air, that had been so strangely quiet, now vibrated with a curious humming. It seemed to make the whole ship tremble. Then, just as the craft began to settle down, the upward pulling force of the gas being lessened under Washington's manipulations, there came a terrible roaring. The wind howled like a thousand demons seeking to tear the _Monarch_ to pieces.

"It's a regular tornado!" cried Andy.

Then the storm picked the downward-falling ship up as if it had been a feather and tossed the craft into the air. The adventurers were in a sad plight.

There was nothing to be done. The forces of nature were ten times stronger than those of man. To start the engines and try to run the ship out of the grasp of the wind would only mean to strain the craft to a dangerous point. There was but one thing to do, to run before the tornado, as ships on the sea scud before the gale. In this way the airship might be saved, if it was not dashed down to earth.

As soon as this plan manifested itself to be the best one, Washington stopped drawing gas from the bag. He wanted to keep the ship as high as he could. Jack still held his place in the conning tower, but he could do nothing to guide the craft, and it would have been folly to attempt it, so fearful was the force of the wind.

"Which way are we headed?" asked Mark, making his way back to the tower where Jack was.

"Almost due west," was the reply. "About two points to the south, too."

"Then we are being driven away from the north pole," said Mark. "We're as helpless as kittens tied up in a sack," said Andy. "If only I could do something I'd feel better. But I've got to sit here and take what comes."

The sick man stirred uneasily. Then he muttered in his delirium something about the tornado that was tossing him from side to side of the bunk.

Strangely enough there was nothing to the storm but wind. There was no rain or snow, and the air was remarkably clear, excepting for the darkness of the clouds. Aside from the way in which the ship was blown along there was nothing to indicate that the breeze was rushing along at tempest speed. There were no trees bent to the earth, and no clouds of dust. The sky clouds kept pace with the airship.

"I wonder where we are?" asked Jack, who with Mark had come back from the tower.

"We'll have to guess at it," replied Andy. "It would be as much as a man's life is worth to go outside and take an observation."

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

"Don't hab to do dat," broke in Washington. "See here!"

He stooped over and pulled on an iron ring that was fastened in the floor of the dining-room cabin. A section of a board came up.

"Look!" exclaimed the negro pointing down. All leaned forward and saw that a heavy plate glass had been set over a hole cut through the floor of the ship. By means of this strange window one could look directly down toward the earth. Jack kneeled and peered through the glass. He rose to his feet with a cry of fear.

"What's the matter?" asked Andy.

"We are right over the ocean!" exclaimed the boy. "I can see immense waves not three hundred feet below! The airship must be falling and we'll be dashed into the sea!"

At these words Washington ran to the engine room. He looked at the height indicator.

"We's four hundred feet in de air, an' a--we's agoin' down!" he muttered.

Jack, who had followed him, saw by the instrument what the dreadful truth was. Blown from her course, the Monarch was now over an open polar sea, into which she might be dashed at any moment. The tornado still howled and roared outside, making it impossible to inflate the gas bag, so strong was the pressure of wind on it. And without a fresh supply of gas, the ship must fall.

There was no abatement to the tornado. The ship was tossed more violently than ever. Jack peered through the floor-window again.

"We are nearer the water!" he exclaimed as he arose. "The sea is covered with icebergs. They are crashing together in the big waves. If we fall the ship will be ground to pieces in the floes!"

"Try the gas machine again!" urged Andy. "Maybe the wind has lessened."

Washington started the machine. He kept one eye on the needle of the indicator that told the gas pressure in the bag, and the other on the height register. The black pointer of the latter went lower and lower. It was now at one hundred, and kept on going down slowly, until it stood at seventy-five. Soon only sixty-five feet stood between the airship and her passengers, and the angry, swirling water beneath, where the icebergs crashed and ground together.

Then Washington, who was ready to faint with fear and despair, gave a cry of joy. He had noticed that the height indicator stopped. At the same time the gas register showed that the vapor from the machine was entering the bag.

"Glory! Glory!" cried the negro. "We's saved now. De ship is goin' up, and the gas is workin' in. De wind must be goin' down!"

Then, while all save Professor Henderson, who was still unconscious, crowded into the engine room, they saw that what Washington said was true. The pressure of the wind had lessened, permitting the bag to fill with the gas. This served to lift the ship, and the pointer on the height indicator began to move upward. Higher and higher went the craft, until in a few minutes the register showed six hundred feet. They had been saved from death in the sea.

"Hurrah!" cried Jack. "I believe the tornado has left us!"

Indeed the roaring of the wind was less now. The ship was no longer violently tossed. In a few minutes the wind died away almost completely, and, aside from the rising motion, and a slight swaying, the Monarch rode on an even keel. The danger was over.

"Is the ship safe?" called Professor Henderson from his bunk.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

"All safe!" exclaimed the hunter cheerfully. "We had a little blow, but it is all over, and the Monarch behaved like the King she is--or, perhaps I ought to say Queen, seeing that all ships are ladies. But how do you feel, professor?"

"I am much better," was the answer, showing that the medicine had done its work. "I feel hungry," he went on. "What time is it?"

"Six o'clock," answered Jack, looking at the dial.

"Night or morning?"

"Morning, I guess."

"Then we'll have breakfast," said the professor with a smile.

He stepped from the bunk. As he did so there was a sudden lurch to the ship. Then it began to sink suddenly.

"We are going down!" cried the captain. "What has happened?"

"The gas bag is leaking again!" shouted Washington from the engine room.

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CHAPTER XV

PRISONERS OF THE ESQUIMAUX

The hearts of all were filled with new terror. They had just come safely through one danger only to fall into another.

The professor limped to the engine room. A glance confirmed his fears. The gas was escaping from the bag in large quantities.

"I am afraid the patch we put on has come loose," he said. "The tornado must have unfastened it. Are we over land or sea?" he asked anxiously.

Jack hurried to where the sheet of thick glass was set into the floor of the cabin. He peered down toward the ground.

"We are over land, or, at least, a big ice field," he said, looking up. "We must have crossed some arm of the sea, or, perhaps, a bay." Then, as he looked down through the window again, he gave a frightened start. "There are people below us!" he cried. "I can see hundreds of them! They are waiting for us to land!"

The ship was fast settling, and, because of that fact, and for the reason that the propeller was sending it ahead, the Monarch was approaching the ice at a sharp angle.

"Stop the engines!" commanded the professor. "Our only hope is in coming down easily. If we strike the ice hard we are lost!"

Lower and lower sank the Monarch, like a bird with a broken wing. In a few minutes there came a sudden jar that told the ship had struck the ice. Then, with a swish and rustle the silk bag, emptied of gas fell on the roof of the cabins. The Monarch had come down between two big hummocks of ice, and rested almost in a level position.

The adventurers peered from the windows. At first they could see nothing but a vast expanse of frozen whiteness. Then the ship, in an instant, seemed to be surrounded by men, women and children, all dressed in furs, only their faces showing.

"Here they come!" cried Andy.

The Esquimaux showed no fear of the airship nor the strange beings that inhabited it. They advanced boldly, many of them bearing rude weapons, spears, stone axes, and bows and arrows of bone. They were a fierce looking crowd.

"I can't have them come inside the ship," spoke the professor, "they will tear the machinery apart."

"Shall I fire on them?" asked Andy, getting his rifle ready.

"Not for the world!" cried the captain. "They are ten to our one, and probably this is but a small part of the tribe. Our only safety lies in peaceful means. Come, we must put on our fur garments and go outside. That may induce them to let the ship alone."

"They may take us prisoners," objected Jack.

"Better be prisoners with the airship safe than with it all broken so we can never use it," said the old inventor. "If we lose the ship then we are lost indeed. If we go out to them, they may be afraid to venture in alone. Come, we must hurry!"

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Obedying the captain's advice, they all donned their fur garments, and each took a revolver and several rounds of ammunition. These small weapons could be concealed about them without much trouble.

Then the whole party emerged from the cabins out on the forward deck of the Monarch. It was high time, for several of the Esquimaux, with their big stone axes, were advancing to batter in the doors. At the sight of the adventurers, who had only been dimly observed through the windows, there arose a great shout among the savages.

Rapidly the air-travelers climbed over the ship's rail, down on to the ice, and walked boldly among the Esquimaux.

"Show a brave front!" exclaimed the captain, in a low voice. "Perhaps they mean no harm after all."

But this idea was soon dismissed. With a shout the foremost of the natives rushed on the party of whites, surrounded them, and, before any one had a chance to draw his revolver, had he desired to do so, each member of the Monarch's crew was seized and bound with strong thongs of walrus hide.

"Well, they've got us," groaned old Andy. "I wish I'd taken a few shots at them first!"

The old inventor watched narrowly every move the Esquimaux made. At first several of the natives showed a desire to penetrate the interior of the Monarch. But the commands of one big man, evidently the chief, who was clad entirely in white furs, deterred them. Scores crawled up the ice hummock and looked the strange craft over with wondering eyes, but none molested it.

Suddenly the man in the white furs uttered a loud cry. It was answered from a dozen throats, and then great activity was manifested. Big sledges, made of bone for a framework, with laced thongs for a body, were brought up, and dogs were harnessed to the vehicles. While some natives were attending to this, others scattered in different directions, returning presently with large supplies of dead fish, seals, and a large polar bear.

"This is evidently a hunting party," said Mr. Henderson. "They have been away from their main town or camp for several days, and were on their way back when they saw our airship. I wonder what they will do with us."

He was not long left in doubt. The chief of the Esquimaux approached the adventurers, who, bound with thongs, were sitting on the ice. He addressed Washington in a strange language, but Washington, with a motion of his head nodded toward Captain Henderson, to indicate that he was the commander of the party. To the old inventor, therefore, did the native in the white furs speak next.

He made a motion of a person reclining on a sledge and indicated that the captives were to be taken away in that fashion. Then the chief motioned to his mouth and pretended to chew.

"He seems to want us to take a sleigh ride and get something to eat," said Mr. Henderson. "I suppose we might as well go along."

He nodded an assent to the Esquimaux chief, thinking the sign for that would be understood. It was, evidently, for the chief nodded back and smiled.

The rude sleds were brought close to the party from the Monarch. Then the captives were bundled on the vehicles like so many logs of wood, and bound to the runners with hide thongs. Next a fur robe was thrown over each one, a hole being left for them to breathe, and a dog driver took his position at the front of each sled.

With cracks of the whips and wild shouts the natives started off at a rapid speed. Then it was the prisoners appreciated the extra fur coverings, for when the vehicles were in motion the keen wind cut like a knife on the little portion of the face left exposed.

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A sharp pang of regret struck the professor's heart as he realized that he was being carried away from his beloved airship, which was left in the hands of the enemy. They might wreck it he realized, to get the valuable wood and metal in the different parts. If they did, it would mean that the adventurers would be doomed to remain in the land of perpetual ice and snow forever.

For several hours the journey was continued. The dogs drawing the sleds never seemed to slacken their speed, but, urged by voice and whip, sped on over ice and snow.

Suddenly a loud cry sounded. The sleds, as if in obedience to a command, came to a halt. The captives raised their heads and saw that the whole party had come to a stop. Several of the Esquimaux began opening bundles and took out pieces of frozen fat meat. With this they went from team to team among the dogs, and fed the brutes that seemed ravenous from hunger.

The animals provided with a meal, the Esquimaux fed themselves. It was a primitive feast. The men simply bit off chunks of fat and blubber and swallowed them almost whole.

"I'm pretty hungry, but I don't believe I could eat that," observed Jack.

"Wait until you get a chance," advised Mark. "Maybe they are not going to offer us any. As for me, I am starved enough to tackle most anything."

Presently the Esquimaux chief approached the captives, who had been drawn close together on their sleds. The leader of the natives had in his hands some queer looking stuff. At a sign from him several of the other Esquimaux loosened the bonds that bound the prisoners.

"Um!" grunted the chief. "Um! Um!" At least his words sounded like that.

"I guess he wants us to eat," said the professor.

He took some of the food the Esquimaux chief held out. The stuff did not look very inviting, about as much like cold fat as anything. The professor bit into it.

"It's good!" he exclaimed. "It's chopped up meat and suet, and it's cooked! Eat it!"

They all did, for they were very hungry and cold. Then the captives were bound again, the dogs were harnessed, and the journey was resumed. The sun still shone, though it was getting late, but the prisoners were all sleepy, for, by the run of hours, it was now night.

On and on went the sleds. Jack had dozed off, when he was aroused by a shout. He raised his head to look about him, and was filled with terror at what he saw.

The sled he was on, as well as all the others, was coasting down a great hill of ice at fearful speed! The dogs were gone, and the fleet of sleighs, under their own weight, were dashing down the Mountainous side of a great glacier!

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CHAPTER XVI

THE STRANGE WOMAN AIDS

"Professor! Professor!" cried Jack. He saw the sled on which the old inventor was lashed close to him.

"Eh! Yes! What is it?" asked the old man, sticking his head out from under the fur robe.

"They have set us adrift down the mountain and we'll be killed!"

The boy struggled to free himself from his bonds. The professor, raising his head and realizing the danger, did likewise.

But the tough walrus hide was too tightly drawn. The captives, if they went to their deaths, would go bound and unable to help themselves. In terror Jack glanced on either side of him. To his surprise he noticed that not only were the sleds of himself and his comrades going down the hill, but the vehicles of all the Esquimaux as well.

"Can an accident have happened?" he asked himself. "Or have they all gone crazy? This beats me."

Faster and faster went the sleighs. Showers of ice splinters flew up on either side of the bone runners. The wind whistled past Jack's face. Then, as a sled of one of the natives shot near to Jack's, the boy noticed that the Esquimaux's face was calm, and he was smiling a bit.

"This doesn't look as if he was going to be killed," reasoned the boy. But the speed of the sleds never slackened and Jack was much afraid, as were the other prisoners.

But at length, with a swish and a whizz, the sleighs shot around a curve, and slid out on a broad expanse of smooth ice. Off jumped the natives, laughing and chatting. Then Jack realized the truth.

The Esquimaux, instead of trusting to their dogs to draw them down the steep hill, had simply coasted, just as Jack had done many a time at home.

In a little while the dogs, that had been led by a number of the natives down an easier path than that which the steep hill offered, came up, barking and yelping. They were again harnessed to the sledges, and the journey commenced once more.

This time it did not last more than an hour. It was along a level stretch of ice, and soon they were in the midst of an Esquimaux village.

Huts of ice, with rounded tops, were on every side, with here and there a tent made of seal skins stretched over poles. There were several hundred inhabitants, who mingled with the members of the hunting party, that included men, women and children, for, when the Esquimaux go for a several days' stay after fish they take their families along.

"We seem to have struck camp at last," remarked the professor to Andy. "I wonder what they are going to do with us now."

"The least they could do would be to untie us and give us a good meal," growled the old hunter, who was stiff from being bound so long on the sled.

"Who said dinner?" broke in Washington from his sled. "I jest wish I had a chicken pot-pie!"

"I'd willingly go without a meal if I was sure the airship was safe," sighed the professor.

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At this mention of their craft all the adventurers became silent and a feeling of sadness came over them. But they had little time to indulge in gloomy thoughts.

As soon as the inhabitants of the camp had greeted the fishing party the captives were surrounded by a group of curious ones, who followed the chief, in his white furs, to where the prisoners' sleds had been drawn up. The white men, who must have seemed strange beings to the Esquimaux, were still fastened to the vehicles. At a word from the leader the bonds were cut.

"I guess they want us to get up," said Jack.

He rose from his sleigh, and his example was followed by the others. The Esquimaux closed around them. Then, before any of the prisoners could raise a hand in their defense, they were seized by a score of the dark natives and hurried off across the snow.

"Draw your revolvers and shoot!" cried Andy. "They are going to kill us!"

"No! No!" shouted the old inventor. "To resist now would be folly. Have patience a little longer!"

His voice was so earnest that all obeyed him. So, unresisting, the captives were borne away. Then a strange thing happened.

The sun, which had been shining in the sky from which it would not disappear for six months, suddenly seemed to darken. The captives started in surprise.

"What's the matter?" asked the old inventor, struggling to escape from the arms which held him. "Is it night?"

"I guess dey done gone and blindfolded us!" exclaimed Washington.

Indeed it was as black as if the prisoners had been plunged into a gloomy pit. Then, as they looked up while being half led, half dragged along they saw that they had left the outer air and were being conducted into some sort of a cave.

"It's an ice-cavern!" groaned the old hunter, "They are going to torture us as the Indians do!"

"Hush!" cautioned the inventor. "Do not think of such things. All is not yet lost!"

In a little while the darkness, caused by the captives being suddenly taken from the bright sunlight into the cave, was somewhat dispelled. It grew gradually brighter, thought they were conducted farther and farther into the recesses of the cavern. Then, as they were led around the turn of a passage, they saw what made the light.

Scores of rude lamps, made from hollowed out stones, with twisted moss for wicks, and burning seal oil, gave a smoky illumination, that lit up the cave with a red glare. The lamps were set in niches in the icy walls of the cavern, while some were placed upon the floor and others seemed to be arranged about a sort of altar at the farther end of the big ice chamber.

From the icy crystal walls the glare of the moss wicks was reflected back in a thousand points of light, and amid the glow the captives beheld a score or more of old men seated in a circle about a big centre lamp, that shone with a flame five times as bright as any of the others.

"It looks as if we were being brought before the head men of the tribe," muttered the old hunter.

A short distance away from the circle of old men, the native in the white furs, who seemed to have lost some of his authority on entering the ice chamber, motioned the captives to be seated. They sat down, crossed legs, and waited.

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They were aware that the interior of the cave was much warmer than the air outside, and soon were forced to lay aside some of their heavy garments. In a little while several women approached bearing huge platters on which rested smoked chunks of hot meat.

It did not look very inviting. There were no knives, no forks, no napkins and no plates. None of the somewhat limited comforts of the airship were to be had. But the captives were too hungry to mind such things. Using their fingers, they ate ravenously, and found the meat very good, though they did not know what it was.

"I feel much better," said Jack. "If I only had some place to wash my hands now, I'd be quite satisfied."

"You ought to be thankful you got something to eat," returned Mark. "I was almost starved."

"Dat was as good as roast beef, chicken, pork-chops, cranberry sauce, celery an' potatoes," observed Washington with a sigh of satisfaction.

Since the native women had brought them food no one in the cave had taken the slightest notice of the prisoners. The men in the centre about the big stone lamp sat like so many dark and graven images, saying not a word.

"I wonder what is next on the program?" asked Andy.

In a few minutes an old woman, bearing a stone basin full of some liquid, and a horn cup, approached them, and, filling the smaller vessel, offered the old professor something to drink. As she neared him she caught sight of his white face and long whitish beard and hair, and gave such a start that she nearly dropped the basin she was carrying. She peered down into the old man's face and muttered something that sounded like:

"Ingliss!"

"What has she got and what is she saying?" asked the hunter.

"I don't know what she said," replied Amos Henderson, "but she has given me some good milk."

Then, going from one to the other, the old woman, who seemed strangely agitated as she saw so many white faces, poured out the reindeers' milk, which made a welcome drink.

"They are treating us better than I thought they would," remarked Andy. "Maybe we will not be so badly off as I feared."

Suddenly, from the midst of the circle of natives, a voice arose. The captives glanced quickly over in the direction, and saw that the man in the white furs, who had superintended their capture, was addressing the council.

His words were strange to the prisoners, but they could tell by his gestures he was describing how he had found the white men, who had come in the wonderful airship. At times the narrator would point in the direction of the captives. Again he would show by gestures how the airship had settled down on the ice. He was interrupted by many questions and, at the end of his tale, a silence fell over the crowd of natives.

Then, as if by some signal, all the lights save the large central lamp were extinguished. By the glow from that the prisoners could see their captors, one by one, filing from the cave.

"They are leaving us all alone," said the inventor. "At any rate they have done us no harm, and perhaps may not. If we could only get back to the ship; that would be all I'd ask," and he sighed as he thought of his beloved craft.

For a long while the captives sat in silence, brooding over their fate. Worn out by the trials of the day, the two farmers at last fell asleep. Washington, too, was soon snoring, and the two boys felt drowsy. The regular breathing of the professor told that he, also, had forgotten his troubles in dreamland, and Andy was about to

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drop off nodding, when he was startled by a soft foot-fall. He sat up on the icy floor of the cave where he had stretched himself out.

"Who's there?" he asked sharply.

"Sh! Ingliss!" exclaimed a soft voice. "No spik! Me like Ingliss! Me Dirola!"

"Who are you?" asked the old hunter again, but in a whisper.

"Me like Ingliss!" was the reply. "They kill! Me save! You come! All Ingliss!"

Then, into the glare of the big lamp, glided the strange woman who had brought the milk.

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CHAPTER XVII

FIGHTING FOR THE SHIP

"Professor Henderson! Wake up!" called Andy. "Hey, boys, Bill, Tom, Washington! This may mean something!"

In an instant the prisoners were sitting up, and blinking in the direction of the big lamp.

"What is it all about?" asked Amos Henderson.

"As near as I can make out this lady is going to save us," replied the hunter. "She says the natives want to kill us, and that she likes the English, though how she can talk United States is more than I can understand."

Dirola, as the Esquimaux woman had called herself, approached the old inventor, and, kneeling down in front of him, spoke rapidly in her broken tongue.

"Me save you!" she repeated. "Me Dirola! Me from way, way off," and she pointed to the north. "Me been prisoner here long time. Me see white Ingliss man once. He come my country. He go way. My people want kill him, no like. He be take away. His name Andre!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the professor. "I believe this woman was acquainted with the poor fellow whose bones we found! Can it be possible!"

"You come; me save!" went on the strange woman. "Me no like it here; want go to my people. Me learn spik Ingliss from Andre. Me young girl then!"

"Well, of all the strange happenings!" exclaimed the inventor. "I believe she is telling the truth. Probably poor Andre Christiansen got among her people and she learned a little English from him."

"You come?" questioned Dirola. "Me show you where ship hid."

"I wonder if it's safe to trust her," said the old hunter. "According to the message we found, the people Andre fell among were not very kind."

The woman seemed to understand that some objection was being raised. She spoke rapidly and earnestly.

"My people no harm," she said. "Me tell 'um you save me, they no kill you. You come. Much hurry now. You be killed here!"

"I think we might as well chance it," was Professor Henderson's opinion. "Perhaps she does know where the ship is from hearing talk among members of the fishing party that captured us. What do you say? Shall we go?"

Every one agreed that it would be better than to stay in the cave and face an unknown danger. So, wrapping their furs closely about them, the captives rose silently and prepared to follow the woman, who seemed pleased that they were going. She did not lead them out the way they had been brought in, but by a smaller entrance.

"Go easy!" she cautioned. "No want bad mans to hear! They kill Dirola!"

Walking like cats in their soft boots of fur, the prisoners followed the strange woman who had so opportunely come to their rescue. Though they were very apprehensive, they met with no one. Leaving the glare of the big lamp behind, they were soon in semi-darkness, but in a little while they emerged into the bright sunlight.

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"They all sleep!" muttered Dirola, motioning toward the camp of Esquimaux which she indicated was behind the ice cavern they had just left. "We walk; den we git dogs an' sleds. Den we ride so no can catch!"

At a sign from Dirola the seven prisoners stepped out briskly. It seemed queer to see the sun shining after having been in the dark cave, where it looked like night, and to get used to the appearance of Old Sol shining steadily all night long, was something the adventurers had not quite accomplished. They walked perhaps a mile before they came to where the dog teams were, behind a hill of ice.

There were two big sleds, with room enough for all, and ten dogs to each vehicle. The animals, which were securely tied to pinnacles of ice, were snapping and snarling among themselves.

"Quick, git on!" commanded Dirola. "Maybe they chase us!"

The captives needed no second bidding. They piled on the sledges, the professor, Andy and Washington on one and the two boys and the two helpers on the other. Dirola took her seat in front of Professor Henderson.

"Who's going to drive our dogs?" asked Jack.

"No drive. They follow me," said the woman, and then Jack saw that the foremost animal of his team was tied by a long thong to the rear of the first sleigh.

The Esquimaux woman snapped her whip, having first untied the dogs, and away the teams went over the snow at a great pace.

The spirits of all arose as they went on, making mile after mile on their journey, away from the ice cave and back to the Monarch. Dirola seemed to know just where she was going, and never hesitated. With voice and whip she guided the dog teams on, urging them to top speed, for she was escaping as well as the adventurers.

For several hours the captives rode, becoming thoroughly chilled, for a cold, cutting wind sprang up and blew in their faces.

"We most there," said the woman at length.

"I'm glad to hear it," remarked Andy. "I will be glad to get back to a civilized place, even if it is an airship."

Suddenly Dirola turned her head and glanced behind. As she did so she uttered an exclamation and called shrilly to the dogs, at the same time snapping her long whip viciously.

"What's the matter?" asked Andy.

"They come after us."

Looking back, Andy was startled to see, about a mile in the rear, more than a score of sleds, laden with furred Esquimaux, in full pursuit.

"Now we're in for it!" he cried. "It will be a race to see who gets to the ship first! Get out your revolvers! I'm not going to be captured again!"

Each one of the adventurers brought out his weapon. The pursuing Esquimaux seemed aware that their former captives had observed them, and urged their dog teams to greater speed. It was indeed a race.

Dirola's animals had been urged almost to their limit, and were now lagging. Voice and whip no longer served to send them forward. Several of the beasts were limping.

"There ship!" cried the woman suddenly. The crew and owner of the Monarch glanced ahead. They saw, about a quarter of a mile in advance, their airship, resting on an icy ledge.

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"If we can only get there first!" cried the professor.

"You forget the leak in the gas bag," spoke up Andy. "That will have to be mended before we can escape."

"With quick work we can do it!" exclaimed the inventor. "Hurry on, Dirola!"

Dirola needed no urging. With fierce words she hurried on the dogs, her whip sounding like a revolver as it snapped and cracked.

But fast as the escaping ones went, the pursuers seemed to come faster. Now they were so close that they could be seen brandishing their spears, bows and arrows. Their shouts, too, were borne forward on the cold wind.

At last the adventurers were at the side of the airship. Hastily they dismounted from their sleds turning the dogs loose. The Esquimaux in pursuit were about half a mile to the rear and would soon be upon them.

"Quick, Dirola! Into the ship with you!" called Andy. "We'll take you with us if we go at all!"

"We must mend the tear first!" exclaimed the professor, scrambling up the icy slope toward the cabin of the Monarch in a fashion that would have done credit to a much younger man. "Andy, you and the boys, with Tom and Bill, hold the enemy at bay until Washington and I get the ship in readiness for a start!"

"All right!" cried Andy, now in his element. "I'll make those Esquimaux wish they had let us alone!"

Dirola had disappeared inside the cabin. In a few minutes the professor and Washington were hard at work setting the machinery in motion.

First, after having seen that none of the apparatus was disarranged, Amos Henderson started the gas generating machine. Next, leaving Washington in charge of this and the engine room, the inventor prepared a big patch with some cement on it. This he gave to Mark, who quickly found the place where the old patch had come off the silk bag, and covered the opening. Already the bag was beginning to swell with the gas.

But now with loud yells the Esquimaux came rushing up. Leaping off their sleds, they began throwing their spears and shooting their arrows.

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CHAPTER XVIII

NORTHWARD ONCE MORE

"Repel boarders!" sung out Andy. "Where are the guns?"

"Here!" shouted Tom, handing out the rifles fully loaded.

The old hunter seized a weapon, as did Bill, Jack, and Mark. Tom also leveled his gun at the savages.

Bang! Crack! Bang! went the guns. It was like a skirmish in battle. As Andy directed, each one fired low.

So heavy a fusillade as the adventurers were able to fire had its effect. Many of the Esquimaux fell, none badly hurt, but disabled so they could not attack. Still the main body advanced up the slope with angry cries, determined to capture the airship and regain their captives.

The ship now began to quiver through its whole length. Larger and larger distended the gas bag. Then, with a motion as of a great bird arising from where it had been fastened to the earth, the Monarch arose slowly in the air. A cry of astonishment burst from the Esquimaux. Some who had hold of the rail retained their grip until they felt themselves lifted up. Then they let go suddenly and dropped to the ice.

"We're off!" cried Andy. He aimed a blow at a native who was still clinging to the ship and endeavoring to spear the old hunter. Andy missed his blow, just as the native let fly his spear, which pierced the hunter in the arm.

With a yell of rage, the native let go and fell. Andy sank back on the deck of the ship sorely wounded. The ship soared aloft. The next instant the propeller started revolving and the Monarch passed off over the heads of the savages.

"Is any one hurt?" asked the professor, coming from the engine room.

"Andy was struck by a spear!" exclaimed Jack.

At the inventor's suggestion they carried the old hunter into the cabin, and laid him on one of the bunks.

"You take the steering wheel," said Amos Henderson to Jack. "Washington will run the engines for a while and Mark and I will see to Andy. Bill and Tom, you can get something to eat; and turn on the heating stoves; it is cold here."

Soon everyone on board was busily engaged. The professor bandaged Andy's arm, which contained a severe though not fatal wound. In a little while the hunter awoke from the stupor into which the pain had thrown him.

"Fire!" he cried.

"There is no need," said the professor soothingly. "We are safe now."

Then Andy grew quiet. In the meanwhile Bill and Tom had started the gasolene and electric stoves, and a meal, made from the capsule food, was soon ready. That it tasted good goes without saying.

On and on rushed the ship, for Washington had speeded up all the engines in order to sooner escape from the natives who had held him and his friends captives.

As soon as the professor could leave Andy in charge of Mark, he went to the engine room. There he found everything in good shape. Next he went to the conning tower, where Jack was steering.

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"How is she heading?" asked the old man.

"Straight for the north!" replied the boy.

"Good! Keep her so. Let me see; we are about a mile high now. I guess that will do," and he turned off the gas generator. "Moving about twenty miles an hour," he added. "That is fast enough. I wonder how cold it is?"

He consulted the dial that was connected to a thermometer outside.

"Whew!" he whistled. "Fifty below! I'm glad we are here!"

Jack was too. The old inventor glanced at the direction compass and then at the deflecting one that indicated how near the north pole they were. As he did so he uttered a cry.

"What is it?" cried the boy.

For answer Mr. Henderson pointed to the needle. It was almost straight up and down.

"Well?" asked Jack, who did not understand much about scientific things.

"That means we are almost at the north pole!" cried the professor. "At the exact north the needle points straight down, because the pole is a magnet, and being directly underneath pulls the end of the needle down. See, it is almost down now. I believe we shall really get to the pole, and my ambition will be realized."

Aside from the wound Andy had received, none of the party was any the worse for their adventures as prisoners. Now that they were safe back on the ship they were inclined to laugh at the fears they had felt.

For several hours the Monarch was held to her course at a fairly good speed. Then, at the professor's order, the engines were turned on at full power, since the air was still, and there was no sign of a storm. Straight to the north the craft shot, every one on board now anxious, as they became aware that they were near to their destination.

The former life was resumed, and the hours of watch were marked out as they had been. The sun still shone, never setting, but by this time the adventurers were used to perpetual day. Dirola kept to herself, not saying a word to anybody.

"I think I'll drop the ship down a bit and see what sort of a country is beneath us," announced Mr. Henderson about four o'clock, though whether it was four o'clock in the morning or the afternoon, no one knew. However, it did not matter much. "If there is an open sea around the north pole, as some believe," he went on, "we ought to see some signs of it now."

He let some gas out of the bag, and the Monarch slowly settled toward the earth. The inventor opened the trap door that covered the plate glass in the floor of the cabin, and peered down. When within five hundred feet of the ground he signaled to stop the descent of the ship.

"Nothing but ice, ice, ice!" he announced. "Big hills and mountains of it. There is no sign of open water. Well, we are not quite at the pole yet."

Jack's turn at the wheel came to a close, and Mark relieved him. Washington, who had been on duty pretty steadily in the engine room, gave his place up to the inventor, and stretched out to sleep. Bill and Tom were snoring in their bunks, and Andy was resting easily, the pain from his wound being relieved by some ointment the professor put on.

The boy in the conning tower kept his eye on the two compasses, the one telling the direction, the other the nearness to the north pole. The latter gradually kept inclining more and more toward the earth.

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"If we can only make it," thought Mark. "It will be something no one has ever done before. My! What a story the papers would make of it if they knew!"

"How is she running?" asked the captain, coming into the tower.

"Very well, indeed, sir."

"You might send her up a little," suggested the professor. "Keep her about half a mile high, and I'll be with you again before long."

The professor went to his bunk, and Mark was pleased enough to be left alone in charge of the ship. He held the wheel firmly, and did not deviate half a point from the northern course.

He had been steering for half an hour when he was suddenly aware of a dense gloom that settled down all about him. Then there came a great roaring sound. The air craft rocked violently. The wind whistled shrilly through the cordage and careened the Monarch to one side.

Then the whole atmosphere grew from a dense black to a strange opaque whiteness: a whiteness that shut out the view from every side, and enveloped the ship as if it had fallen into a feather bed. Mark started back in fright and let go his hold on the steering wheel.

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CHAPTER XIX

A BLINDING SNOWSTORM

"Quick! Professor!" cried Mark. "Jack, Washington, everybody! Hurry up!"

"What's the matter?" asked the inventor, running to the conning tower.

In answer Mark pointed outside.

"A snow storm!" exclaimed the captain. "We must expect them up north. But this is worse than I thought!"

He glanced ahead. Nothing could be seen but a wall of white. The wind increased until it blew with almost the force of a cyclone, and the ship swayed fearfully.

"Stop the engines!" cried the professor. "We had better drift than run the chances of hitting an iceberg if we should suddenly take a drop down to the ground."

Washington, awakened from his sleep, turned off the power. Then began a fight between the ship and the elements; a battle between the Monarch and the wind and snow. Which was to win?

The airship was, apparently, in the heart of the storm. It was tossed this way and that, now up and now down, though because of the quantity of gas in the bag the craft was buoyed up. The gas generating machine had not been stopped, only the machinery that moved the propeller.

How the wind howled! How the snow blew! It was a blinding storm, for from the windows of the conning tower and from those on either side of the cabin nothing could be discerned five feet away. Through the window in the bottom of the ship nothing showed but a sea of white flakes.

The cold was intense, seventy degrees below zero being marked on the thermometer. Even with the gasoline stoves going it was chilling inside the airship, for the cutting, biting wind found many cracks through which to enter.

But, if the propeller no longer urged the ship on, the force of the wind sent it ahead at a fearful pace. The gale careened the Monarch from side to side. Now the bow would be elevated, and, again, the stern. It was like a ship on a rough sea, and the occupants of the craft were tossed from side to side, receiving many bruises.

Old Andy was tied into his bunk, or he never could have stayed there, so violent was the motion.

"Where is Dirola?" asked Mr. Henderson suddenly.

"She was out on the stern a while ago," answered Bill. "She was saying something about it being too hot for her inside. That was before the storm came up."

"We must see to her," said the captain. "She must come inside. The motion of the ship may toss her off!"

Bill volunteered to go out and bring the Esquimaux woman in. It was all he could do to open the door, so strong was the pressure of wind on it.

When he did swing it back such a cloud of snow entered that it seemed as if some one had emptied a feather bed in the cabin.

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"She don't want to come in," Bill reported when, after much exertion, he had made his way back again. "She is laughing at this storm, and says it's like what they have where she came from. She is braced against the cabin, and is wrapped up in furs. I guess she is all right."

"I suppose we must let her have her way," remarked Amos Henderson. "After all she may be used to it."

In anxiousness and apprehension the voyagers waited for the storm to cease. But it showed no signs of abating. More and more violently rocked the Monarch.

"We must shut off the gasolene stoves!" exclaimed the inventor after a particularly heavy pitching and tossing motion, when the craft nearly turned over. "If we upset, the fluid will run from the tanks, come in contact with the flames, and we will burn in mid-air!"

Washington set to work turning off all the gasolene, and the larger tanks were lashed fast and securely stopped up.

"Better put our furs on," suggested the inventor. "It will be very cold in here soon."

The lack of heat quickly made itself felt, the ship becoming like an ice-box. Old Andy was warmly covered, for he was asleep in his bunk, having fallen into a slumber after being lashed in. The noise of the storm did not awaken him, since he was somewhat stupid from a fever into which his wound had thrown him.

All that could be done was to wait and hope. No human force could prevail over the storm. Bracing themselves against whatever offered, and clinging by their hands to projections, the adventurers in the cabin expected every moment to be their last. Washington, who had gone out to the engine room, came hurrying back.

"Look, here, Perfessor," he said, sticking his head in the dining cabin door, "de gas machine hab stopped circulatin'."

"Did you shut off the power?"

"No, sah! I ain't done gone and shut off no power!"

Making his way as best he could while the ship pitched and tossed, Amos Henderson reached the engine room. He looked at the gas generator. The power was turned on full, but the apparatus was not working.

"That is strange," he remarked. "I wonder--"

Then he hurried forward to the conning tower. As he did so the ship was whirled quickly around several times, and the sudden motion threw the old man down, his head striking on the edge of one of the bunks. He lay white and still.

"He's killed!" cried Washington.

"We are in a whirlwind!" yelled Bill at the same instant. "We'll be sucked up to the sky!"

The airship was swinging around and around as if in the grasp of some giant. The craft was really caught in the centre of a whirlwind, which spun it around like a top. Every one felt sick and dizzy from the queer motion.

"We must see to the professor!" said Jack. "Washington, get some of the remedy you used before. I think he has only fainted."

At this moment the old inventor opened his eyes.

"What happened?" he asked feebly. "Please give me some water. I am all right."

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They brought him a drink, and he managed to sip a little of it. Then he attempted to sit up. But the effort was too much for him.

"What--what is the matter?" he asked. "I feel so strange. I am dizzy. Has anything happened?"

"Somebody am a-playin' 'Ring around de Rosy' wid dis airship!" exclaimed Washington, "My head am a-swimmin' so I can't stand."

"I must get to the conning tower!" muttered the old inventor. "I must get there."

"Let me go, you can never make it," said Jack. "What is it you want to see?"

"Look at the deflecting needle!" was the answer. "See how the needle points and come back and tell me! It may be we are at the north pole!"

Jack started forward, crawling on his hands and knees. Indeed, this was the only way he could advance. The professor watched him with anxious eyes. The ship spun around even faster. Old Andy had awakened and was gazing around with fear-stricken eyes.

Then, just as Jack reached the door of the conning tower, and started inside, the Monarch gave a violent motion. She seemed to stop for a moment, and then, with a great lurch, turned completely over, throwing the occupants to the ceiling. Then she plunged straight down to the earth, through the centre of the whirlwind, like an arrow falling!

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CHAPTER XX

AT THE NORTH POLE?

For an instant the utmost confusion reigned. The adventurers fell in a heap on the ceiling that, for the time being, became the floor. Then, as the ship righted herself, they fell back again to the floor. The cords that bound Andy to his bunk broke, and he toppled with the rest.

"Repel the enemy!" yelled the old hunter, thinking in his delirium that the ship was again attacked.

"We are lost!" cried the professor, as he felt the Monarch plunging down.

For a hundred feet or more the ship shot earthward bow first, so that the adventurers all slid down to that end. It was well that everything, including the gasolene tanks, had been lashed fast, or there would have been a great jumble inside the craft.

Then, almost as suddenly as the ship had started to fall, it ceased, and rode on an even keel, righting and floating easily in the air. The wind no longer blew with the circular motion, the whirling having come to an end. But the blinding snow continued.

Jack staggered from the conning tower, where he had gone to look at the deflecting compass.

"What has happened?" he cried.

"No one knows," answered Professor Henderson. "We are in dire straits. Did you look at the needle, Jack?"

"I did."

"What did it show?"

"The needle was straight up and down!"

"I knew it!" cried the old inventor. "I said we would reach the pole, and we have!"

"It ain't goin' to do us a heab sight ob good," said Washington. "I'd rather hab a good barber pole any day! No north poles fo' me!"

"Hush, Washington!" exclaimed Mr. Henderson. "This is no time to joke. You are sure you made no mistake, Jack?"

"I am sure, sir."

"I thought we were at the pole when I saw that the gas engine had stopped," went on the professor. "The attraction of the earth-magnets at the pole exerted such a strong influence on the iron and steel that the gas machine could not work. At last I have reached the goal of my ambitions!"

The ship remained stationary for several minutes. Those aboard began to have hopes. The snow storm was still as fierce as ever, but that was all the manifestation of the elements.

"I want to take a look at the needle," said the professor. "I feel all right now; I was only a little faint from my fall. How are you, Andy?"

"I feel much better," replied the hunter, whose delirium had somewhat left him. "My arm is sore, that's all. But why have you all got your furs on?"

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"We had to turn off the stoves," explained Amos Henderson. "You had better put your's on, too, Andy. You'll need them. We could only cover you over when you were in the bunk."

The hunter soon began to realize that it was chilly in the ship, and he donned his heavy garments. The professor started for the conning tower. He gave one glance at the needle of the deflecting compass, and a look of disappointment came over his face.

"It is not pointing down," he said to Jack, who had followed him.

"But I am sure it did when I noticed it," replied the boy.

"Then we have come past the pole," was Amos Henderson's opinion. "There is only a small spot that is exactly north, and we have passed over it during the storm. We must return. I want to descend exactly there and make some experiments. Tell Washington to start the engines. We will turn the ship around and go back!"

"We may run into the whirlwind again," objected Jack.

"That is so, I did not think of that. However, tell Washington to get everything in readiness."

It was no small task to get the engine room into shape after the upsetting it had been subjected to, but with the help of the boys and the two men Washington succeeded. In about an hour the Monarch was ready to be sent up or down, forward or back. Since she had ceased falling she had remain at a stationary height, about half a mile above the earth.

Meanwhile Professor Henderson was trying to make up his mind what to do. He wanted very much to get to the exact north pole, or the spot where the imaginary pole was supposed to be. But he hesitated about taking the airship back over the course, and run the chance of again encountering the whirlwind.

"The more I think of it," he said to Jack and Mark, who had joined him, "the more I think that the whirlwind is always there. It did not come to us, we ran into it. It may be caused by the magnetic currents at the pole eternally revolving. I am afraid to go back within their influence, for it might mean death."

"I have a plan," said Jack modestly.

"Let us hear it," came from the professor. "I am at a loss what to do."

"Supposing we let the ship down now," Jack continued, "and walk back until we come to the north pole, since it must be near here. We can take along the deflecting needle to tell when we reach it, and the whirlwind will not do much harm if we are on the ground and afoot."

"Good idea!" exclaimed the professor. "We'll do it. Washington, let the gas out and we'll descend!"

In a few minutes a hissing told that the gas was being let out of the silk bag. Soon the ship began to sink gently toward the earth, through the clouds of snow.

"Let us go outside," suggested Jack. "The wind doesn't blow now, and the snow will not hurt us. We will be warm enough in our furs."

Mark voted the suggestion a good one, and the two boys went out on the deck. Washington was busy in the engine room, and the professor was in the conning tower, so they did not go, but Tom and Bill said they would like to get a little fresh air, even if the temperature was far below zero, and they joined the lads.

The four stood and gazed in wonder at the strange scene. At first the terrible cold cut them as if it was a keen knife. But they soon grew used to it, and enjoyed what little of it reached them through the opening in their fur caps. The snowflakes covered everything and the airship looked more like a craft bedecked from

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stem to stern with cotton batting than anything else. Jack and Mark walked around to the stern. Suddenly Mark stumbled over something.

"What's this?" he cried.

Jack hurried to his side. As he did so the bundle gave a heave, and, breaking through the snow blanket, there was displayed the calm features of Dirola.

"Me sleep!" she announced with a smile.

And that was what she had been doing while the airship was being whirled around by the strange force! She had braced herself in a corner, pulled her furs about her face, and slumbered, even when the ship turned over. So well braced was she that she did not tumble off.

"Well! She's a cool one!" exclaimed Mark.

"I guess you'd be too, if you slept out of doors with the temperature about seventy below zero," remarked Jack. "But let's go in and tell the professor Dirola is here. He may be worried about her."

The boys started for the cabin. They had not taken five steps before, with a sudden lurch, the airship dived like a kite without its tail. Then the craft turned completely over!

Jack and Mark with the two helpers and Dirola were thrown from the deck, head first, toward the earth! Down and down they fell, uttering despairing cries!

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER XXI

LOST IN THE SNOW

Once more the wind blew with hurricane force. On board the Monarch Washington and Professor Henderson were tossed to the ceiling again. Then the ship righted herself.

"De boys! De boys!" cried Washington, suddenly thinking of them. "Dey hab falled off!"

"Great Scott! So they have!" exclaimed the inventor. "That is, unless they grabbed something as we went over!"

"An de Sesquiomexico woman, too!" cried the colored man, meaning Dirola.

"I guess she went with the others," said the professor. "We must take a look as soon as it is safe."

Then came a strong gust of wind that hurled the ship forward. When it had subsided Washington and the old inventor ventured outside. The boys were nowhere to be seen.

"They are lost!" cried Andy, who had crawled to the bow of the ship after the captain and Washington.

For a little while longer the airship sailed along easily, the wind no more rushing with such force. Then, all at once the craft settled down until, with a jerk, it came to rest on a big snow bank.

"We's landed!" exclaimed Washington. "We's hit de ole north pole at last. Now I'll see what sort ob a stick it is!"

"We've landed sure enough," remarked the professor, "but I'm afraid we are not at the north pole. However, in view of all that has happened, I suppose we had better stop here for a while. Some of the machinery is wrecked by the overturning of the ship, but I guess we can fix it. I only wish I knew where the boys and the two men were."

"Don't forget Dirola," spoke up Andy. "We owe a good deal to her."

It stopped snowing about half an hour after the Monarch had found lodgement on the edge of a bank of ice. From the deck and windows of the craft nothing could be seen but a big expanse of white. It was a cold, lifeless world to which the ship had brought what remained of her crew and owner.

The engine room of the Monarch was once more a sorry sight, and Washington and the inventor worked like a dozen men in restoring order. They soon had things in ship-shape, but one of the motors would require considerable repairing before it would run again. However, it was not the most important one, and the craft could run without it, though only at half speed.

Suddenly, there came from without a chorus of shouts.

"What's that?" cried the professor.

"Sounded like some one calling," ventured Andy.

"It am de boys and Tom and Bill come back to overjoy us," said Washington.

The shouts grew louder. Andy glanced from a cabin window.

"The Esquimaux! The Esquimaux!" he exclaimed. "Here they are after us again! They'll carry us back to the ice cave and eat us alive this time!"

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"These are not the same ones!" cried the professor. "We are hundreds of miles from the ice cave."

"Then these are the ones the mysterious message was about," said Andy, "and we had better be on our guard!"

"Perhaps these are Dirola's friends," ventured Amos Henderson. "If they are I wish we had her here to intercede for us."

There came a rattling against the sides of the airship. It sounded like a storm of hail.

"They are firing arrows at us!" yelled Andy. "That doesn't look very friendly."

"Wait until I go out and speak to them," suggested the professor. "They will respect my gray hairs."

He went outside. The ship was surrounded by hundreds of little men, all dressed in thick furs. At the sight of the ship's commander they gave a loud yell.

"I wisht I'd neber done come to de north pole!" groaned Washington. He grabbed up a rifle and followed Andy outside. At the sight of them the Esquimaux set up louder yells, and shot another shower of arrows. Fortunately none of the missiles struck the white men.

"Stop firing!" said the professor, raising his hand. "We mean you no harm!"

His answer was a wilder burst of yells.

"Fire over their heads! Maybe that will teach them a little respect," spoke Andy.

He and Washington discharged their guns several times in rapid succession. With frightened yells the men in furs fell flat on their faces.

"We've scared them!" cried Andy.

But he reckoned without his host, for in an instant the Esquimaux had leaped to their feet and were rushing toward the ship.

"Here they come!" shouted the hunter. "Shoot to kill, Washington! Look out for yourself, Professor!"

"Don't kill them!" yelled Amos Henderson. "They are too many for us, and our only hope is to try peaceful means!"

But Washington aimed his rifle straight in the faces of the advancing men of the snow country and pulled the trigger rapidly. Half a dozen sharp reports rang out, and several Esquimaux fell on the ice, which became red with their blood. However, the negro's aim was not good, and the wounds were only in arms or legs of the natives.

This served to check their ardor for a while, and the advance was halted while the wounded were carried back. But the Esquimaux were only made more angry by the resistance. They came on again with wild cries and, though Andy, Washington and the professor fought with all their strength, clubbing their guns and cracking several of the savages over the head, they were finally overpowered. From one who seemed to be a leader of the natives several sharp orders came. The others listened and then, lifting the three prisoners, who had been securely bound, they hurried with them from the deck of the ship.

"We's ketched agin!" cried Washington. "They'll eat us shuah dis time! Land ob Goshen! How I does wish I'd neber come heah!"

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There was little time for protest, reflection or anything else. Once the Esquimaux had secured their prisoners they lost no time in hastening away. The airship did not seem to interest them. Hoisting the three men on shoulders, the natives fairly ran along over the ice.

"I wish they'd bring up a sled," said Andy. "It would be easier than this style. The breath is 'most jolted out of me."

As if in answer to his desire, the party of Esquimaux soon came upon a little camp. There were several ice huts, and a number of sleds, while the yelping of scores of dogs could be heard on every side. In a few minutes, after a short talk among the natives, the captives were tossed, none too gently, all on one big sled, a dog team was hitched fast, and a driver started them off across the field of ice.

"Good-bye to de ole _Monarch_!" cried Washington. "No mo' good meals in yo'! Landy! Landy! I wisht I had some dynamite to blow dese heathen up!"

"Hush!" cried Andy. "I've got three revolvers in my pockets. I'll slip you one if I can get my arms free, but don't fire until I give the word. We'll have to save our shots."

"We seem to be having nothing but bad luck," said Professor Henderson. "I am afraid it is all up with us this time. Those poor boys, and Bill and Tom! I wish I knew what had become of them!"

"Same here!" remarked Andy.

Then the captives became silent, filled with their sad thoughts and worry over their predicament. On and on went the sledge over the ice, into the unknown. Mile after mile was covered. Then the driver of the prisoners, as well as the one in charge of three sleds that followed, halted the dogs. All the natives talked rapidly together, pointing this way and that.

"They've missed the path!" exclaimed Andy. "We are lost in this land of snow!"

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CHAPTER XXII

MAGNETIC FIRE WORSHIPERS

Jack's only thought, when he felt himself falling from the deck of the airship to the earth, was that he would strike on a pinnacle of ice and be killed. Much the same were the feelings of the others, as they admitted later. Jack was half senseless from fright when, seemingly half an hour after he tumbled, though in reality it was but a few seconds, he stuck head first into a big drift of soft snow.

His mouth, ears, eyes and nose were filled with the fluffy flakes, and he nearly choked before he could struggle to an upright position and clear a breathing space.

To his astonishment he saw similar struggles going on in several places in the snow. First Mark stuck his head out of the drift. Then Bill's face appeared, to be followed by Tom's, and next Dirola bobbed up, smiling as though it was the biggest joke in the world, and as if falling from an airship was an every-day occurrence with her.

"Well, we're alive," remarked Jack, after getting his breath.

"We couldn't have fallen so very far after all," said Mark.

"It seemed like a mighty long ways when I was a-comin'," came from Bill.

"We went fast, an' we stopped pretty suddint!" was Tom's opinion. "Lucky we had a sort of feather bed under us. I'd hate to fall right on the ice."

"Come down soon!" exclaimed Dirola with a laugh, in which all joined, in spite of their sorry plight. It was still snowing and terribly cold. They pulled the hoods of their fur coats close about their faces and scrambled out on the ice.

"I guess the ship was closer to the earth when we fell than we thought," said Mark. "I suppose we had better hunt around for the Monarch," observed Jack. "It can't be a great way off, for Professor Henderson was bringing it down and the propeller was not moving."

"Let's start right away," said Mark. "I'm hungry, and the sooner we find the ship the better off we'll be. But this snow is every bit as bad as a fog."

It was, indeed, and the boys and men could not distinguish each other ten feet distant. In spite of this, however, Jack started off in the direction he thought the ship might be.

"No go! No go!" called Dirola. "Git lost! Fall in hole! Die! Better stay here! Snow stop! Me show you!"

"She means we'll get lost if we wander off," said Jack. "I guess we'd better do as she says."

Dirola seemed in good spirits and not a bit discouraged by the storm. She walked slowly about, as if looking for something. Then, with a cry, she began digging at a certain spot.

"What in the world is she doing?" asked Mark.

"I don't know," said Jack.

"Maybe she's after a rabbit," observed Bill. "I'd like a good hot rabbit stew myself."

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Dirola's hands, encased in heavy fur gloves, made the snow fly. In a little while she held up a, dark mass of what looked like seaweed.

"Eat! Um good!" she exclaimed.

"I guess it's some kind of moss that the people up north eat," remarked Tom. "I remember reading something about it once. I suppose we'd better tackle it, for we may not get a meal in some time."

Jack, who had been fumbling in the big pocket of his fur coat, gave a sudden cry.

"What's the matter; somethin' bit ye?" asked Bill.

"Look here!" cried the boy, and he held up a large tin can.

"What is it; soup?" inquired Mark.

"It's some of those capsule foods from the ship," said Jack, reading the label. "I remember I put it in my pocket when I thought the ship was going to be wrecked. I felt I might need it. Now it will come in handy."

"But what is it?" insisted Mark.

"It's a combination of chocolate, wheat, malt and preserved milk," replied Jack, looking at the label again, "and it says that one capsule, if chewed and swallowed, is as much as an ordinary meal. There are two hundred capsules in here, and that will last us for a few days at least."

"Not very hearty eatin', 'cordin' to my way of thinkin'," said Bill; "but I guess with that and the moss Dirola can dig up we'll get along."

The Esquimaux woman had finished her simple meal. She dug up quite a quantity of the moss and laid it on top of a big pile of ice, where she could find it again.

"Must build house now," she announced. "Make place for sleep. I show you!"

In a little while a large space was scooped out of the snow drift. Many hands soon enlarged the cave until it was large enough for all to move about inside with comfort.

"Now for dinner!" exclaimed Jack, as he opened the tin.

The meal, though simple, was satisfying, and soon the lost ones felt more comfortable.

"It's stopped snowing!" announced Mark, going to the entrance of the cave, "and it's much colder. I guess we'll stay here a while."

He returned to his companions. They all went as far to the rear of the cave as they could, for the wind came in the wide entrance.

"We must make a winding passage, and then the breeze can't find it's way in," suggested Jack. "I think--"

But what he thought he never told, for at that instant the floor of the snow cave gave way right under where they were all standing, and the whole five of them went slipping, sliding and tumbling down, they knew not to where.

For an instant all were so surprised and frightened that they could not even cry out. They were plunged into dense blackness.

"What has happened?" Jack cried.

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Before any one could answer him, the blackness gave way to a glare of light, and the two boys, with Dirola and the men, brought up suddenly with a jolt on the floor of a big ice cavern.

It was several hundred feet long, and as many wide, with a roof fifty feet above their heads.

The sides were of pure ice, but, strangest of all, was the rosy, golden glow that filled the whole place. With wonder in their eyes the adventurers gazed at the source of the illumination.

At one end of the cavern was a rude altar. Behind it, and on both sides, there arose great streamers of fire, tongues of flame, red, green, blue, purple, yellow and glaring white.

Yet the fire did not burn, for there was ice on every side, and the ice did not melt. In wonder the crew of the Monarch gazed.

Presently from the other end of the cave there sounded a wild, weird song. It was like a chant. Then, before the adventurers could get to their feet, there filed into the cavern two score of men, all dressed in white fur. At the head of the procession marched two men who were veritable giants, compared to those about them. They bore between them, on a rude litter, a man, wearing only a fur cloth about his middle.

"What is it?" whispered Jack in awed accents.

"They are fire-worshippers!" exclaimed Mark. "If they see us they'll kill us!"

"They must be going to sacrifice that poor man on the altar," spoke Jack. "Come, let's see if we can't crawl out of the way."

The head of the procession was now close to the altar, and had passed the adventurers, who were off to one side, in about the middle of the cavern. Up some ice steps the two giants in white went, bearing their victim. The poor fellow gave one loud shriek as he was brought nearer to the colored flames.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" screamed Dirola, sinking down on the floor of the cavern.

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CHAPTER XXIII

A STRANGE SACRIFICE

The natives who had made Professor Henderson, Andy, and Washington prisoners seemed at a loss for some little time as to which direction to take. They talked among themselves, while the prisoners were much alarmed, for if the Esquimaux were lost, and without food, it would mean the death of all.

At last, however, the native in charge of the main sled prevailed on the others, and they proceeded, turning off to the left.

The sleds, including that on which the prisoners were, bumped along over the ice, the dogs pulling the rude vehicles along swiftly. It was about an hour later that another halt was made. This time it did not seem to be because the way was lost, for the natives showed no signs of alarm. Instead, they were laughing and talking. In a little while the small advance party was joined by a larger body of Esquimaux, who had been at the attack on the airship, but who had taken a different route.

Then the whole crowd started forward again. Half an hour's travel brought another halt, this time a final one, for when the professor and his companions glanced around them they found they were in the midst of a native village of ice huts.

"Golly! We's somewhere, anyhow," spoke Washington; "but I can't say I thinks much ob dis place. It's too lonesome."

"Better be here than out on the ice field," spoke up the professor. "The Esquimaux have little stone stoves in which they burn oil, and their huts are quite warm inside."

In a few minutes the captives had a chance to test this statement. They were unbound and carried from the sled to one of the larger huts. As is usual in the far northern regions, each hut was made of blocks of ice laid one on the other, forming a semicircular house, with a round dome.

The door or entrance was so small that the only way to get in was to crawl. There was no door to keep the cold out, but the passage was made a winding one, or there were two huts, one built over the other, so that the openings did not come opposite, and this served to keep out the wind.

Arriving at the doorway, the Esquimaux set their prisoners down in front of the house, and signed to them to crawl in. The professor went first, followed by Andy and Washington. Inside they found the place to be warm from the flame of a crude stove. This consisted of a hollowed out stone, filled with seal oil, the wick being made of moss. The stove, or lamp, for it served both purposes, smoked very much.

There were several natives squatting down inside the hut, but they did not seem surprised when the three prisoners entered. Others of the Esquimaux crowded into the ice house, until it was uncomfortably filled. Then a native who seemed to be a leader began a long talk to the others.

Judging from his gestures he was telling about the fight at the airship and the capture of the captives. At times he would be interrupted by those who wanted to question him.

At length the recital was done. All the Esquimaux, save about half a dozen, crawled out of the hut. One of those who remained placed an earthen pot over the flame of the stove, and soon a delicious smell filled the air. Evidently something good was being cooked.

"It's chicken pot-pie," said Washington. "How I does love chicken!"

Presently one of the natives removed the pot from the stove and set it in front of the captives. The contents were steaming hot, and seemed to be some sort of meat stew, made with chunks of flesh, gravy and moss.

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"How are we going to eat, without knives, forks or spoons?" asked Andy.

He soon found out. The natives who had remained in the hut drew up to the pot. They dipped their bare hands in, drew out pieces of meat and wads of the moss, and ate without ceremony.

"Fingers were made before forks," quoted the professor. "We'll have to eat as the old cave-dwellers did. Well, I'm hungry enough not to stand on politeness."

He reached in the vessel and got some meat. It was hot, but he did not mind that, and ate it with a relish. Andy and Washington followed his example, and soon the travelers from the Monarch and the Esquimaux were eating together as if they had been friends all their lives.

When the rude meal had ended, the prisoners felt much better. They were warm, their hunger was appeased, and, in spite of their many worries over the loss of the airship and their companions, they were so tired out that they felt very sleepy. Soon the professor's head nodded over, shortly Andy was snoring and in a little while Washington too slumbered.

They did not know how long they had slept, but they were suddenly and rudely awakened by being shaken. Opening their eyes, they saw the hut was filled with Esquimaux, all clothed in suits of spotless white fur.

"These must all be chiefs," remarked the professor.

With quick motions the natives bound their captives again, with stout thongs. Then, like so many logs of wood, they were pulled out of the hut on their backs, a native outside hauling on one end of the skin ropes.

There was no telling what hour it was, for the sun shone as brightly as it had been doing for days past. Once more the three men were tossed on sleds, and the dogs, driven by the Esquimaux, hauled them off. But it was not a far journey this time. In about fifteen minutes the sleds came to a stop, the prisoners were lifted off, and carried, as they could see, toward a large opening in a hill of ice and snow.

As soon as they had passed from the sunlight to darkness, the captives knew they were in a sort of cave. The blackness was intense, but in a short time there was a faint glow observed ahead, caused by a number of the stone lamps burning.

At that point were gathered several more of the Esquimaux, all attired in white furs. There was some excitement when the prisoners were brought in, and all crowded around to see them.

Then began what seemed a discussion among the natives. They talked loud and long. Finally from some other part of the cave two tall men, dressed as the others were, in white, came in. They seemed to be in authority, for when they had spoken all the others were silent.

While the captives waited in anxiety for what would happen next, the whole cave was illuminated with a wonderful light. It was rosy red at first, then changed to a golden hue, then to green, yellow, blue and purple. The captives could not see where the fire came from, but they gazed at the light in mingled fear and admiration.

"It is the northern light; the aurora borealis!" exclaimed the professor. "It is the most beautiful light in the world."

"What makes it?" asked Andy.

"Electricity, magnetism, the sun and the intense cold; no one knows exactly what produces it," replied Amos Henderson. "It is quite likely that there is some opening to this cave, and the sun shines in it, or the lights may be reflected from outside by reason, of the ice, which acts as a mirror."

"It's pretty," observed Andy, "but all the same I'd rather--"

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He got no further for the two giant-sized natives advanced quickly toward them. One roughly seized Professor Henderson, and, with the help of his companion, began stripping off his clothes. Andy started forward to aid the captain, but the other natives held him back. Washington, too, was restrained by several hands.

In a few minutes the professor was stripped, except for a piece of fur about his middle. Then a rude litter was brought in. The two big natives, after pouring some oil over the old man, placed their victim on the stretcher, and then began a march up the cave. Washington and Andy were forced to walk directly behind the inventor, and were surrounded by natives on every side. The poor professor soon became half insensible from the cold.

"This is terrible!" groaned Andy.

"Dey is goin' to slaughter him!" wailed Washington. "He'll be sacrificed and burned up! See, de altar ob de sacrifice am just ahead. Oh! I wisht we wuz all dead!"

"We're likely to be, soon enough," muttered Andy. "But keep up your courage!"

At that instant the head of the procession was close to the ice altar. Behind it the mysterious lights played and flickered in streamers of red, green and gold. Up the steps went the two gigantic men, carrying the professor. They were about to sacrifice him in a horrible way!

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" screamed a woman's voice. At the sound of it Andy started.

"That was Dirola!" exclaimed the old hunter. "How did she get here?"

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CHAPTER XXIV

SAVED BY DIROLA

Instantly the ice cavern was a scene of great uproar and confusion. The procession broke up as soon as Dirola cried out and the intruders at the sacrifice were observed. All, save those carrying the victim and those guarding Andy and Washington, rushed with their long bone knives at Jack and Mark and the two helpers from the airship.

"There are the boys!" cried Andy, trying to break away from those who held him.

"An' Tom an' Bill is there likewise!" exclaimed Washington, who had caught a glimpse of the two helpers. "De heathen am goin' to kill 'um!"

"We're here, Jack!" sung out the hunter. "Make the best fight you can, for we are in terrible hands. The poor professor is done for, I guess, and we'll soon be, too!"

His voice rang out high above the shouts and yells of the natives, who were now in a dense circle about the two boys and their companions.

"We haven't anything to fight with!" called back Mark.

"Well, I have!" yelled Andy.

With a quick motion he snatched his arms from the encircling ones of his captors. His fists went back. There were two quick, sharp blows, and two of the Esquimaux who were guarding the old hunter toppled backward.

With suddenness that was startling Andy drew a brace of revolvers from his inner pockets. He leveled them at the mass of white figures in front of him, on whose fierce faces the colored lights gleamed and flickered.

Andy's fingers trembled on the triggers. He was about to fire.

"Lay low, boys!" he called to the Monarch's crew. "I'll get rid of a few of these savages before I go!"

"No shoot! No shoot!" screamed Dirola.

She darted from her place, broke through the circle of natives, and rushed up to where Andy stood with leveled weapons.

"No shoot! Me save!" she cried.

She was all but too late. Andy's fingers had crooked on the triggers, but Dirola pushed his arms upward, and when the two reports rang out the bullets struck the icy roof of the cavern.

In the confined space the shots sounded almost like thunder. A silence that was startling in its suddenness fell as the echoes of the reports died away. Dirola ran toward the altar. She grasped the arms of the two big Esquimaux, who had taken Professor Henderson from the litter with the intention of sacrificing the old inventor.

She cried out one word in a strange tongue.

The men stopped as though she had struck them. Then, with a dramatic gesture, she mounted to the top step of the altar.

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A chorus of cries greeted her. She seemed to pay no heed. Silent and straight she stood there on the steps of ice, her figure in dark relief against the background of flickering lights.

The next instant Dirola, with a motion so quick the eye could scarcely follow, slipped off her suit of black fur, and stood revealed in dress of white fur, the exact counterpart of that worn by all the others in the cave.

A low murmur of astonishment ran around the vast cavern. Then, as if by common impulse, every one kneeled down, Dirola alone of all the Esquimaux remaining upright. The cave dwellers were bowing down to one they either feared or loved.

Then Dirola spoke. At first her words were slow. Gradually she talked faster, until she was speaking a very torrent of sounds. She pointed, first to the insensible body of the old inventor at her feet, next to the group of white men and boys, and then to Andy and Washington. She gave some command, evidently, for no sooner had she ceased than those who had attacked Mark, Jack and the two farmers drew back, and left them free.

At the same time, those surrounding Andy and the negro withdrew. Then some warm furs were thrown over the cold body of the professor and he was borne gently away.

Dirola glided to where Andy stood, not knowing what to make of it all.

"No be feared now," she said. "They take ole man way an' warm him an' feed him. He be all right. So you be all right, an' boys an' oder mans. No be feared now. Them do what I tell 'um!" and she motioned to the natives, who had risen to their feet as soon as she left the ice altar.

"How in the world did you do it?" asked the old hunter.

"Me chief one--what you call 'um--queen here. Long time go. Me be take prisoner when you found me. Me come back. Me glad. No let Ingliss mans an' boys be hurt, nor 'um black man too. Me save. Me be queen agin!"

"How does that strike you?" went on Andy, to Mark and Jack, who had joined him. "The luckiest thing we ever did was to pick up Dirola."

"To think we should land right among her own people, too!" spoke up Jack. "It's just like a fairy story."

"But where in the world did you come from?" asked Andy. "We thought you were all killed by falling from the ship."

"Not a bit," replied Jack, and he told the old hunter what had happened to himself, Mark and the others. In turn Andy related his experiences.

"If only the poor professor comes around all right we'll be in pretty good shape," finished the old man. "But I'm afraid he's frozen. I wonder what they were going to do with him."

"Put him in big hole, where all ice," broke in Dirola. "That what we do when the lights shine. But we no hurt any you now. You all safe. Me save!"

"I guess that was their intention," muttered Andy. "They were going to sacrifice him to the Goddess of Ice, I suppose. Well, well, we certainly are having plenty of experiences."

Many of the natives had now left the cave. Dirola gave an order to one of the big Esquimaux who had remained, and he went off on the run.

"We eat now," the woman remarked. "Me plenty hungry too, Professor come back an' eat wid you."

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In a few minutes Professor Henderson, warmly clad, was brought in, leaning on the shoulder of the big man who, a little while before, had been about to sacrifice him. The old inventor was weak, but had suffered no serious harm. His body had been coated with thick oil before the proposed sacrifice, as part of the ceremony, and this had served, in a large measure, to keep the cold out.

He was warmly greeted by his friends, and then they all squatted down on the ice, while in a few minutes a big earthen pot of hot stew was brought in. Dirola ate with them, dipping her fingers in with the others.

"It's the first time I ever ate with a queen," said Jack with a smile.

"Me sure queen," said the woman with a laugh. "Me tell you 'bout it."

Whereupon she related how she was of the royal house, and had, on the death of her father, ascended to the throne. Then came the visit of the white men, including Andre, whose strange message the adventurers had found. He was driven, with his companions, from the land. Then the Esquimaux of Dirola's tribe had been attacked by others living farther south. A great battle had been fought and the queen and others were taken prisoners. Dirola had been held captive until the advent of the Monarch.

She did not know how close she was to her own people and the big sacrificial cave, until she fell into it with the boys and farmers. Then the procession came in and Dirola recognized Professor Henderson as the victim. She at once resolved to declare herself, and did so, showing that beneath the black fur she wore the white robes that none but members of the royal household could don.

The woman also explained how the big cave was used for religious services by her people, who worshiped the northern lights, or magnetic fire that never burned, and she told how they sacrificed to it at times.

"Well, I hope they don't sacrifice any of us," said the professor. "I was as near death as I ever care to go. I wonder what has become of my airship. If we--"

"What's that?" cried Jack, starting up.

"Listen!" came from another.

Far off in the cave sounded a strange, wild, weird chant. Then came the tramp of many feet. A little later a great concourse of people came rushing into the cave, led by a score of the white-robed men.

"They're coming back after us!" cried Andy. "Here, take a revolver, Professor, and defend yourself!"

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER XXV

ADRIFT ON THE ICE

"No shoot! Me save!" exclaimed Dirola, springing in front of Andy. "You trust me!"

On came the crowd, plainly visible because of the magnetic fire. It came to a halt a short distance in front of the adventurers, while from the ranks of the white-robed ones stepped forth a native. He spoke rapidly to Dirola, who answered him in fierce tones.

For several minutes the conversation was kept up. At length Dirola appeared to gain her point, for the crowd withdrew and once more the captives were alone with their Esquimaux friend.

"What did they want?" asked Andy.

"Some people no believe me queen," explained the newly-discovered ruler. "They come in an' be mad. Then some no satisfy. They want have sacrifice. I tell 'um no sacrifice of 'um white men what save my life. I save 'um for they bring me back. People no like, but must do. Me queen!" and she drew herself up proudly. "Them must do what Dirola say!"

"They may this time," muttered Andy, "but the next time they may not. I think this isn't a very healthy place for us, Professor."

"I would only be too glad to get away, and back to my ship," said the inventor. "I am satisfied I have reached and passed the north pole. I would be glad to go back home again."

"Me take care you," spoke Dirola. "Wait few days. See! You come, me hide you."

She looked carefully around. There was no one in sight save the party from the Monarch. Then, proceeding with caution, Dirola led the way up to and behind the big altar of ice. The mysterious fires behind it had died out somewhat, and once in the rear of the steps the captives could see a long icy shaft, leading down deep into the earth. There was also an opening in the roof of the cavern, down which the sunlight and magnetic currents came.

"Go easy so no fall," cautioned Dirola. "If fall down hole never git up!"

The prisoners needed no bidding to warn them to be wary of the cruel looking shaft, and they gave it a wide berth. Dirola led the way past it to a small chamber or room, hewn out of the ice to the left and rear of the altar.

"You stay here," she said. "They no find you here. This great place--what you call holy place. Here all white robes stay," and she showed where were piled many of the garments of white fur. The place was evidently a storehouse for the ceremonial robes.

"Me go now an' come back," spoke Dirola. "Me try find ship. You keep quiet!"

She glided away, almost like a ghost in the semi-darkness, through which her white furs showed plainly. Left to themselves, the captives were in no easy frame of mind. They did not know what would happen next, whether they could depend on Dirola or whether the mob would come after them to offer all of them up as sacrifices to the Goddess of Ice.

"What puzzles me," said Andy, "is how we both happened to fetch up in the same cave. You boys, with Bill, Tom and Dirola, land in one place on the ice and fall into this cave. We in the ship continue on for some distance, are brought a good ways on sleds and yet here we are with you."

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"The ship might have been blown backward instead of forward after the boys fell off," suggested the professor. "That would explain it. The Esquimaux were traveling to this cave with us, and simply brought us from where the ship had been blown, up to where the boys landed."

"I guess that must be it," admitted Andy; "but listen! some one is coming." Footsteps were heard approaching. In a few seconds Dirola entered the ice chamber.

"I fix it!" she exclaimed. "You must all go 'way quick. The people want kill you, but me save. Listen. You climb up the slide me an' boys come down. Me bring sharp bones," and she brought out from under her jacket several sharp bone picks. "Make um steps in ice; climb up. Go in little cave, where boys know. There man wait for you wid sled an' dogs. He take you to airship. But hurry, hurry! People be after you soon when find you gone. Me keep 'um back long what I can, but not for very long, so you go fast."

"We must lose no time," said the professor. "This may be our last chance. How can we thank you, Dirola?"

"Never mind talk, go!" exclaimed the Esquimaux queen. "Must hurry!"

The captives were anxious enough to escape. Led by Dirola they went out into the main cavern. It was quite dark, as the sun had moved around so it no longer shone in the opening, and the mysterious lights had died away. They were soon at the bottom of the slope by means of which the boys and the helpers had fallen into the ice cave.

"Now climb up!" Dirola commanded. "Me give people big feast 'cause I back again. They eat an' no think of you for long time, but they chase when they find out. Hurry! Hurry!"

It was no easy task for the prisoners to make their way up the icy slope. Each one was given a pair of short sharp-pointed heavy bones. With these in their hands, using them much as a seal does his tusks, they managed to scramble up the slippery incline. Soon they found themselves able to enter the cave the boys, Bill, Tom and Dirola had made, through the opening from which they had tumbled.

"Good-bye," called Dirola to them, as they passed out of her sight.

"Good-bye," all called back softly, from the roof of the cavern. It was the last they were to see of their kind friend.

Outside of the little cave they found a native waiting with a large sled, to which twenty dogs were hitched. The Esquimaux seemed to be watching for them, for he made a sign that they were to get on a sled. No time was lost. Dirola had evidently made her plans well and in haste. The dog driver looked to see that his charges were safe, and then cracked his long whip.

Off went the sled at a swift pace, the animals tugging at their harness. Not a native was in sight save the one driving the sled. They were all probably at the feast Dirola had prepared in celebration of her home-coming.

"This is the first sled ride we've had when we were not tied on like so much cordwood," observed Andy. "Now we have a chance to observe the scenery."

Faster and faster went the sled. It was a calm clear cold day--or it might have been night as far as time went, but the sun shone from a blue sky. It was very cold, and the heavy furs made the adventurers none too warm.

Suddenly, as the party sped on, there came a loud explosion. It was like a great cannon being fired.

"What was that?" exclaimed Andy, starting in alarm.

With a cry of fear the dog driver pointed behind him.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

Looking over their shoulders, the escaping ones saw a great crack in the ice field. In it showed the black waters of the ocean. Ahead appeared an ever-widening black line, and on either side it was the same.

A large part of the ice field had become detached and was floating out to sea. Though they did not know it, the adventurers had driven over the water and away from the land.

"We are adrift on the ice!" cried Andy. "We only escaped from one danger to fall into another!"

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER XXVI

FIGHTING WILD DOGS

For a moment the realization of their horrible position struck all dumb. Adrift on the great polar sea, they might freeze to death before they again got near to the main land. The dogs continued to run on, approaching nearer the ever-widening crack in front. The driver seemed to suddenly awaken to the danger.

With a series of sharp commands he brought the team to a halt. Then, signing to the adventurers to get off the sled, he turned it over on the side.

Next he unhitched the dogs, and fastened them by their thongs to his whip handle, which he stuck in a crack in the ice. The beasts were thus secured at some distance from the sled.

This done, the Esquimaux took the fur robes that had been on the sleigh, and, spreading them over the frame of the vehicle, made a low but fairly large and comfortable tent. He motioned for the men and boys to crawl inside, which they were glad enough to do, to escape the bitter wind. Then the native sat down in the low doorway of the shelter and seemed willing to wait for whatever turned up.

"It doesn't seem to worry him much," observed Andy.

"He certainly has made us comfortable," said Jack. "I wonder what we are going to do?"

"Wait and see what turns up," advised the professor. "We are on a large ice floe. It may float for many days, and, after a while, strike the main ice again. When it does we will escape."

"Yes, an' what am we goin' to eat in dat time?" demanded Washington. With a triumphant gesture Jack pulled from his pocket a tin can. It contained the patent condensed food capsules.

"Hurrah!" cried the professor on seeing it. "This will keep us from starving for many days!"

"Lucky I didn't lose this after all I've been through," said Jack.

The meagre rations were distributed, the Esquimaux driver coming in for his share. The patent food, though a small quantity sufficed for a meal, was fairly satisfying, and soon all felt better. It was quite warm under the little tent, and the adventurers stretched out for a rest.

They had been dozing several hours when a series of wild yelps and barks outside roused them. With an exclamation the driver jumped to his feet and rushed toward where he had tied the dogs.

The professor and the others crawled from the tent to see what the trouble was. They saw that which filled them with fear.

The Esquimaux dogs, never any too tame, had gone half mad and wild from fear at seeing the water all around them, and from lack of food. They were fighting among themselves, snarling, biting and barking viciously.

Just before the driver reached them they broke loose from the thongs that held them, and started for the tent. The Esquimaux tried to stop them, but two of the savage brutes sprang at him and soon had him down on the ice. The other dogs rushed on toward the group of adventurers, who stood still, awaiting the onslaught, and not knowing what to do.

"We must defend ourselves!" cried Andy. "Those beasts will tear us apart! They are as savage as wolves! Oh, for my rifle!"

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

"Haven't you a revolver?" cried Jack.

"Of course! I forgot," said Andy, bringing out his two weapons. "Washington has one, too! Hurry up with it, Washington!"

"I'll give mine to Jack!" yelled the negro, handing the boy the weapon, and then, taking to his heels, ran away from the on-coming brutes.

The animals were now fifty feet off and advancing rapidly. Their eyes flashed with the mad rage of hunger and fear, while foam dripped from their jaws.

Taking careful aim, Andy fired both revolvers at the pack of animals. They were so close together he could not help hitting some. Two fell, killed or badly wounded.

Jack also fired and dropped one dog. But the others came on, never halting.

"Fire as fast as you can!" cried Andy. "It is our only chance! We must stop them!"

The old hunter and Jack pulled the triggers of their weapons rapidly. spurts of flame and small clouds of smoke issued from the muzzles, and several more of the dogs were killed.

There were at least a dozen dogs left when the revolver chambers were empty, and with wild bounds they leaped upon the adventurers. The yelping and barking sounded loud above the hoarse shouts of the men and boys, who, with their fists, prepared to fight the wild dogs.

"Hit 'em with chunks of ice!" called Andy.

His advice came just in time. Each one grabbed up a chunk of the frozen water. It was as hard as a stone. One big brute leaped for the professor's throat. In his weakened condition, caused by his exposure in the ice chamber, it seemed as if the old inventor would be killed.

Suddenly a white object flew through the air. It struck the dog on the head, and the brute, with a howl, fell back. Jack had launched his chunk of ice just in time.

"Good shot!" cried Andy.

He hit another of the brutes over the skull with some of the frozen stuff, and Washington, whose courage had returned, did likewise. Tom and Bill disabled the two dogs nearest them.

Mark aimed at once fierce beast, but missed his shot, and, slipping on the ice, fell right in the animal's path. In an instant the brute was upon him.

"Lie on your back and cover your head with your arms!" shouted Andy, as he ran toward the animal. Mark did as he was told. The dog endeavored to bite him, but the stout furs on his back prevented much damage being done. Then, having secured a large chunk of ice, Andy ran up behind the beast and stretched it out with a well-directed blow. Mark was saved, and scrambled to his feet uninjured.

Suddenly there sounded a series of sharp reports as if a rifle was being discharged. The refugees looked up, expecting to see some armed force coming to their aid. Instead, they beheld the Esquimaux driver approaching on the run. He was swinging his long-lashed whip, which he had secured from the crack in the ice where he had stuck it, and was snapping it vigorously.

At the same time he called in his native language to the dogs to lie down. The brutes heard the cracking of the cruel thong, whose force they knew but too well, and they recognized their master's voice. On came the Esquimaux, until, reaching the pack of dogs, he laid about among them with good will, the blows of the whip bringing blood.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

Sticking their tails between their legs, the remaining dogs ran away with frightened yelps. The driver had come in the nick of time.

"That was quite a fright!" panted Andy, when the excitement was at an end. "My, but those were fierce brutes!"

While the dogs that were left alive among the pack, including several wounded ones, withdrew to a far end of the ice floe, the adventurers crawled back under the tent for a much-needed rest. The Esquimaux, with a silence worthy of an American Indian, took up his position in the small doorway.

It was growing much colder, and the big chunk of ice that served the refugees as a raft was moving quite rapidly over a choppy sea.

It was several hours later that the Esquimaux with a loud cry attracted all the others to the tent opening. He pointed ahead.

"I believe we're drifting back to shore!" shouted Andy.

THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER XXVII

BACK TO THE SHIP

With anxious eyes the adventurers crawled out on the floe and gazed ahead. Across the black stretch of water could be seen a dim whiteness. It looked like the main ice pack, but they realized that it might be only another floe or berg. The current was setting strong in the direction of it.

"We will soon learn our fate," said the professor. "We should be up to it in an hour."

In less time than that they were near enough to the white mass to tell that it was no floe or berg, but the main field of ice, part of that from which they had been separated.

"I don't know as we'll be much better off when we get there," said Andy. "There are not dogs enough left to draw the sled, and if we have to walk back to where the airship is, providing this Esquimaux can find it, we'll freeze."

"Let us wait until we get to shore before we begin to find new trouble," counseled the professor.

In a little while the floating floe bumped up against the main ice field with a grinding and crashing. No sooner had it touched than the dogs scampered off, and were soon lost to sight. The Esquimaux did not seem to worry much over their disappearance. He coolly righted the sled, having first demolished the temporary tent, and proceeded, unaided, to haul the vehicle ashore.

"Give him a hand, Washington," said the professor. "He is our friend, and rendered us good service. We must help him."

Then, while Washington and the native dragged the sled, the others followed afoot, and in a short time were safe on the main ice.

"Now, the question is," said the inventor, "can our guide take us to the ship?"

But the Esquimaux guide seemed to be in no dilemma. He gave one look about, after reaching the main shore, and then, with Washington helping him pull the sled, started off across the ice.

It was no easy path for the adventurers to follow. There were little hills and hollows, many rough and few smooth places. Their feet were weary before they had gone two miles. But the native did not seem to tire.

"I declare to goodness I'se dat kerflusteredcated dat I can't extradition myself forward in dis line ob progression de leastest moment longer!" exclaimed Washington at length, coming to a halt. "I'se prognosticated in de lower extremities!"

"I suppose he means he's too tired to go any further and his legs ache," translated Professor Henderson. "Well, he takes a lot of words, but I guess his condition is about like that of all of us. I'm tired too."

One after another all admitted that they felt the need of rest. At the professor's direction they came to a halt under the shelter of an ice hill, that kept off some of the wind. Here they made some sort of a meal of the condensed food.

This served to render their fatigue a little less, and, after an hour's rest, they started off again. There did not seem to be much need of dragging along the sled, which was useless without dogs to pull it, but the vehicles are scarce and hard to make, so, doubtless, the Esquimaux did not want to desert his property.

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Mile after mile the refugees traversed. It was hard work and walking over the humpy ice was quite different from anything the adventurers were used to, and their feet ached very much. But they knew their only safety was in keeping on.

The cold was terrible. They had no instruments for telling how low the mercury might be, but the professor ventured a guess that it was at seventy degrees below zero. The wind, too, sprang up, and adding to the unpleasant situation the sky was overcast with heavy clouds that threatened a snow storm.

That would mean a calamity which might bring to an untimely end the brave men and boys who had dared so much in the search for the north pole. A blinding fall of the white flakes would result in the guide losing his way, and they might all perish. So they hurried on, anxious to get to the Monarch, if they were lucky enough to find her.

There was no use asking the guide any questions or trying to learn how much farther they had to go. Professor Henderson tried to learn from him if the journey would last much longer, but the Esquimaux only shook his head, pointed in advance, and uttered but one word:

"Ship!"

They kept on for several hours more. Their pace was slow, for all of the adventurers, men and boys, were foot-sore and weary. The guide, however, did not seem to mind it. Tom and Bill took turns relieving Washington at helping pull the sled.

At last the party came to a long hill of ice. It was the hardest kind of going to climb to the top, but the Esquimaux inspired hope in all their hearts by showing signs of excitement, while he exclaimed rapidly:

"Ship! Ship! Ship!"

Up the long slope they toiled, almost ready to drop at every step. Finally they gained the top. The guide was in the lead. As he got to the summit he pointed down and gave a joyful cry.

Andy, weary as he was, hurried to his side. He gazed long and steadfastly in the direction the Esquimaux pointed.

"It's the Monarch sure enough!" cried the old hunter. "I can make out the yellow gas bag against the snow bank! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" yelled Jack, Mark, Bill, Washington and Tom. Even Professor Henderson joined in, and the Esquimaux added his voice in a queer sort of native cheer that made all of the others smile.

"Now if we could only fly to her we'd be all right," exclaimed Mark.

The guide was busy overhauling the sled. He tightened some of the retaining thongs that had become loosened, and then, with guttural cries, he pointed to the vehicle, to the different members of the party and to the long slope that lay before them, and which led down almost to the abandoned airship.

"I believe he means for us to coast down the hill on the sled!" cried Andy. "That's a good scheme. It will beat walking all to pieces!"

Down, down, down the adventurers went, like an arrow shot from a stout bow. The bone runners of the sled glided over the frozen surface, which was as slippery as glass.

The speed was very swift and the wind caused by the rapid passage cut in their faces so that all had to pull their fur hoods over their heads. The ice, scraped up by the runners, flew in a shower on either side.

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The Esquimaux skillfully steered the sled. He avoided several hollows and gullies that would have brought disaster, and kept the vehicle on a proper course. In less than five minutes from the start at the top of the hill they were at the bottom, more than a mile's distance, and within a quarter of a mile of the airship.

Joy at the discovery of the _Monarch_ lent strength to travel-weary legs. The refugees hastened on, and soon were at the place where the craft had settled on a bank of ice and snow.

"Back to the _Monarch_!" shouted Andy. "I hope the ship is in working order!"

Indeed this might well be a source of worry. One glance served to show that the airship was frozen fast in the ice, while the gas bag, which had collapsed, and was resting on top of the deck-house, was partially covered with snow!

As weak as they were the boys set up a cheer and the men joined in, the sound echoing for a long distance around.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

ATTACKED BY THE NATIVES

"We must clear away the snow and ice!" said Professor Henderson. "Come, boys, we must work quickly. We have no time to lose! Remember what Dirola said about the natives following us!"

Now that he was back at his craft the inventor seemed to have recovered all of his energies.

"Washington and I will see to the machinery, and get the bag inflated," he continued. "The rest begin to dig out the ship from below."

Fortunately the professor had foreseen the need of shovels on his northern journey and had a supply in the ship. They were quickly brought out. The snow was soon cleared from the silk bag, it being rather light. Then, while the professor and the negro went to the engine room to start the various apparatus, the others began chipping away the ice that held the main body of the Monarch in a tight grip.

Inside the airship matters were in bad shape. The intense cold had contracted all the metal and made it very brittle. Care had to be exercised in handling every piece of apparatus. There was no heat in the ship, and it was almost as cold as outside.

However, the gas generating machine was set in operation by a current from the storage battery. Some of the gas was turned into the heating stoves, which were constructed to burn it, and this made heat which soon enabled the professor to work on the motors and dynamos. In a little while the gas began filling the bag, which slowly distended.

"Hurrah!" yelled Jack, seeing that the Monarch was beginning to look like herself again. He and the others were working hard at the ice, which did not seem to want to let the ship go.

The inventor went about testing each separate piece of apparatus. He found that, with a little tinkering, all the machinery would work well. Meanwhile the gas continued to fill the bag, until it was tugging at the net and cords that fastened it to the airship. But all the lifting power that could be produced from the machine would not elevate the Monarch while it was held fast in the ice.

However, the forces attacking the frozen crystals worked to good advantage. In the midst of their labors Washington brought out some hot coffee, which was received with cheers. It was the first white man's food, except the patent capsules, they had tasted since leaving the ship.

At last, after several hours' hard digging, the body of the ship was all but free. A few more blows would sever the last connecting grapple of ice.

Suddenly Jack, who happened to glance up, gave a loud cry. All the others stopped their digging.

"Here come the Esquimaux!" yelled the boy. "I just saw them around that big iceberg!"

This was alarming news. Old Andy dropped his shovel and scrambled over the side of the ship.

"What's de matter? Am yo' skeered?" asked Washington.

"Not a bit of it!" cried Andy. "I want to get a gun and give those fellows something to remember me by!"

"Never mind them!" shouted the professor. "Get the ship free and we need not stay to fight them. We are almost ready to start!"

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But Andy was bound to have a shot at the savages, and he grabbed up his rifle, which was fully loaded, and came out on the deck.

The natives came on with a rush. There were about two hundred of them, and they had arrived on several big sleds. The Esquimaux who had piloted the adventurers back to their ship had disappeared, for he knew he would be killed as a traitor if his tribesmen caught him.

"Come on!" cried Bill to Tom and the boys. "Let's get aboard. We'll be killed!"

"You can go!" shouted Jack. "I'm going to stay down here and free the ship from ice. That's the only thing to do."

"I'll stay with you!" exclaimed Mark.

Tom and Bill scrambled up the sides of the ship and disappeared into the cabin. The boys remained on the ice, partly under the airship, chipping and picking to free the bottom.

With loud shouts and yells the Esquimaux surrounded the Monarch. The savages were armed with bows and arrows, and soon a shower of these missiles were shot toward the craft.

Professor Henderson was in mortal terror lest one of the sharp weapons would pierce the gas bag, but, for some reason, the natives fired at the lower part of the ship. Andy and the two helpers were now ready to return the fire. Their guns rattled out and the reports caused the natives great astonishment.

The first shots the defenders had fired over the heads of the Esquimaux, not wishing to kill them if they could help it. But though the reports caused a momentary falling back, the attackers soon rallied again, and shot a thicker cloud of arrows, some of which fell uncomfortably near.

"Let 'em have it right in the faces this time!" shouted Andy.

He took careful aim at the mass of natives who were advancing, and one fell. Bill and Tom followed his example, and the onslaught was checked for a time.

But now reinforcements to the Esquimaux arrived until there were fully five hundred of the fur-clad savages out on the ice surrounding the airship. To cope with such a force seemed madness. Bill received a slight wound in the arm, and Tom had a narrow escape from being killed, a big spear just missing his head.

"Drop down below the rail!" yelled Andy. "They can't hit us so easy then, and we can fire just as good!"

The defenders dropped flat to the deck, outside of the cabin. A loud yell on the part of the Esquimaux told that they thought the adventurers had been killed, and there was a rush to capture the ship.

"Let 'em have it! As fast as you can pull the triggers!" cried the old hunter. "We'll show 'em what we can do!"

The three guns rang out again and two of the natives fell, both badly wounded.

"I wish we had more help!" exclaimed Andy. "We're likely to have trouble soon! Why don't those boys come up; in a few minutes they won't have a chance!"

Indeed it would have been risky now for Jack and Mark to venture out from under the ship, where they were still bravely chipping at the last remaining bit of ice that help the ship fast. So far their presence had not been noted by the enemy.

At that instant Professor Henderson ran out of the engine room.

"Use the machine gun!" he yelled. "That is our only hope!"

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The next second he fell to the deck, struck by a spear.

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CHAPTER XXIX

THE ESCAPE

"He's killed!" cried Andy.

"Oh Perfessor! Perfessor!" exclaimed Washington. "I tole yo' not to go out."

"Never mind! Start the machine gun!" yelled Andy. "We must fight off these human fiends!"

"Call up the boys!" shouted Bill. "They'll be killed under the ship!"

"I'm afraid it's too late," said Andy. "Here, Tom, you help Washington work the machine gun!"

The weapon had been covered by canvas, and, fortunately, the snow had not harmed it. The canvas was yanked off, and, while Tom prepared to feed the cartridges down the hopper, Washington worked the crank. In a few seconds there was a fusillade that sounded like a small battery going into action.

From the muzzle of the machine gun poured out a leaden hail. It struck the Esquimaux fairly and though they tried to stand against it they could not. Their arrows and spears dropped from their hands and they staggered back, many badly hurt or killed.

"Why don't those pesky boys come up!" wondered Andy. His gun was again empty. He hastened into the cabin to reload the magazine. As he did so he heard a tapping on the plate glass window set in the floor of the car.

"Who is there?" he cried.

"It's us; Jack and Mark!" a voice answered. "Let us up! The ship is free!"

Andy flung open the window. It was just large enough for a boy to squeeze through. In a moment Jack and Mark were in the cabin.

In the meanwhile Bill had dropped his gun and carried the professor from the deck inside. The old man was unconscious, but a glance showed that the spear had made only a slight wound on the head, and not one that was likely to be dangerous.

"Is he dead?" cried the boys.

"We hope not," answered Andy. "But we have no time to lose. Can one of you start the ship?"

"I can!" exclaimed Jack.

"Then do it, while I help hold the enemy at bay!"

The Esquimaux, in spite of their losses, were returning to the attack. Closer and closer they pressed to the ship. The machine gun was making great gaps in their ranks, but they did not seem to mind. They were bent on recapturing their former captives, whose track they had followed from the ice cavern.

Jack ran to the engine room. He saw that everything was in readiness for sending the ship aloft. But little gas more was needed in the bag. He turned on the full supply. The noise of the guns, the shouts and yells of the natives, made the place resound with wild noises. It was a battle such as the arctic regions had never before witnessed.

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A tremor shook the _Monarch_. The ship shivered. Jack ran to the conning tower. He grasped the lever that started the propeller. Then came a sudden lurch. The airship tore loose from the ice and rose swiftly in the air. Jack set the screw to working and turned the steering wheel so that the _Monarch's_ nose was pointed due south, away from the land of perpetual ice and snow.

A wild yell of disappointed rage burst from hundreds of throats as the Esquimaux saw their captives escape. They filled the air with arrows and spears, but to no purpose. Andy sent the last shots in his rifle at the savages, and, as the ship rose a hundred feet in the air, the remaining cartridges in the machine gun were exploded.

"Hurrah!" cried the old hunter. "We're off!"

On and on sped the _Monarch_, every second putting the frozen north behind her. Jack had all the engines going at full speed.

"What has happened? Where are we?" asked Professor Henderson, suddenly recovering consciousness.

"We's on de _Monarch_ an' we's done left dem cantankerous conglomerated disputatious Mosquitoes down on de ice!" exclaimed Washington, coming in to see how his master was. "Are yo' much hurted, Perfessor?"

"It's only a scratch," replied the inventor. "I'm all right," and he insisted on getting up and seeing how the engines were running. He was a little weak, but some medicine which Washington fixed at his master's direction soon brought him around.

The airship was working beautifully in spite of being frozen up in the terrible cold. On and up she went until she had left the vicinity of the savages far behind. After about an hour's flight the professor had Jack lower the craft to within half a mile of the surface, as he said he wanted to see what was below.

The boy, who was in charge of the conning tower, set the necessary machinery, while the professor went to the window in the bottom of the ship to watch.

"We're over the sea!" he exclaimed. "There is no land or ice in sight!"

"Come here quick!" cried Washington, from the engine room.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed the professor.

"De gas machine am gone on a rampage ag'in!"

Then, all at once, the airship began to sink. All rushed to the engine room. The gas generator had ceased working and the craft was settling toward the ocean, there being nothing to keep it aloft.

Frantically the professor and Washington worked at the apparatus. It could not be adjusted. Despair was on every face. Faster and faster sunk the _Monarch_.

"Will we sink?" asked Andy. "I can't swim."

"We may float," said the professor. "The bottom part of the ship is water tight. We may float long enough to fix the machinery."

Then, with a splash, the _Monarch_ settled into the ocean, the gas bag falling limply on top of the cabins.

"Get out the life preservers!" shouted the professor. "They are in the forward part. Put them on, while Washington and I try to fix the gas machine!"

The airship had now become a water ship. It rose and fell on the waves, rocking from side to side.

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"Get ready to jump!" yelled Jack, running in from the conning tower.

"What now?" asked Professor Henderson, "Haven't we troubles enough?"

"There's a big whale and he's headed right this way!" yelled Jack. "He's coming on like a locomotive, to ram us!"

Andy caught up his gun and hastened to the tower. As Jack had said, a big sperm whale, spouting water high in the air from his nostrils, was headed for the Monarch, which, as it lay on the surface, the whale evidently took for a rival.

"I wonder if I can stop him with this rifle," exclaimed Andy.

"No, but you can with the machine gun!" said Jack.

"Not while it's in the stern," replied the old hunter. "I guess we are done for this time. I'll fire a few shots, anyhow, before I die!"

"Wait!" yelled Jack. "I'll turn the ship around!"

"Can you do it?"

"I think I can," was the short reply.

"We cannot use the machinery."

"I know that, but I can use something else--that is, I think I can."

"There is nothing to use."

"Yes, there is. See here!"

As the youth spoke he seized a long pole from the deck, and stuck one end of it in a large cake of ice that floated close by. Slowly, but with the strength of despair he pushed the bow of the airship around so that it was pointed away from the on-coming whale.

"Run to the rear!" the boy cried to Andy. "And hurry up!"

The hunter did so. A few seconds later the stern of the ship was toward the ocean monster. Andy called for some one to bring ammunition and feed the hopper of the machine gun, and Bill responded.

Then, when the whale was within a hundred feet of the Monarch, Andy began turning the crank. A storm of lead shot out toward the big fish. The water about was dyed with blood and the spouting streams from the nostrils were changed from white to red. With a terrible flurry, lashing the waters of the ocean to foam with its broad flukes, the whale died, hundreds of bullets in its head.

The airship was saved.

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CHAPTER XXX

HOMeward BOUND

"We're sinking! we're sinking!" yelled Bill Jones. He pointed to a stream of water that was trickling up from the cabin floor. The freezing of the ship in the ice had strained the seams.

The professor and Washington were working earnestly over the gas machine. They piled in fresh chemicals and started the electric current. The water in the cabin continued to rise.

"Well, I guess I might as well have let the whale finish us," sighed Andy. "We're bound to die, anyhow!"

"Not yet!" cried the professor suddenly. "Not if I can help it! Quick, Washington. Another turn to the handle, and I think we will be safe!"

The negro adjusted the machine as the professor had directed.

"Is the water gaining?" asked Amos Henderson.

"No. It's stopped coming in," replied Bill.

"Then we are saved!" announced the inventor. "The gas is entering the bag and lifting the ship!"

Sure enough, the Monarch no longer pitched and tossed on the waves. It was rising in the air. In a little while it was quite a distance above the ocean. All on board watched anxiously, but the craft appeared to be on its good behavior and mounted steadily upward. The propeller, which had been stopped, was again set in motion. The professor went to the conning tower and began steering the ship to the south. The adventurers were homeward bound at last.

For some time no one spoke, so anxious were they lest another accident should occur. But when, after another hour or two, the ship still kept on its flight, all breathed easier.

"Well, we've been to the north pole," remarked Jack, after a long pause. "That's something very few can say."

"Yes, I think we can safely assert that we have accomplished what we set out to do," remarked the professor. "True, we did not land on the exact spot, and I am inclined to believe it would be impossible, because of the whirlwind of the electric currents. But we certainly were at the exact north, as the deflecting needle showed."

"I wonder if the south pole is like this?" asked Mark.

"I do not know," returned Amos Henderson with a smile. "I hope the south pole is a little nicer. We might go and see, some day. Would you boys like to make the trip?"

"You bet!" exclaimed Jack fervently, speaking for himself and Mark.

The Monarch sped on her way. Every hour brought her nearer to her starting point. When it became evident that the machinery was now in good working order and not liable to a breakdown, the professor ordered a meal gotten ready, since all were hungry.

With thankful hearts they sat down to a spread of the best the patent foods afforded, and ate heartily. Then, being worn out with fatigue, the professor advised all to take to their bunks and get some sleep. He said he would steer the ship for a while, to be relieved by Washington and Jack in turn.

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Regular watches were established before the adventurers sought their bunks, and then, while the craft shot southward, quiet reigned aboard.

No further mishaps occurred. For some days the *_Monarch_* was kept on her course. Every hour it grew warmer until the fur garments were discarded, and at length the windows were opened and the fresh breezes blew inside the cabins. The temperate zone had been reached.

Over green meadows, woods, hills and valleys the airship flew; across wide bays, great rivers and large lakes. Now it was high in the air, above the clouds, and, again, close to the earth, as the captain directed.

At last, just at dusk one summer afternoon, a little less than a month from the time they had left, the inventor stopped the propeller.

"We are right above my old cabin," he said. "Now we are going to land. This ends the voyage to the north pole, and we are back safe and sound."

The ship settled down, about a hundred feet from the balloon shed, which remained the same as when the adventurers had left it. No one was in sight, and the travelers stepped out on the ground.

"If you will come inside I will pay you for your time, Andy," said Mr. Henderson; "and you, too, Bill and Tom. You know I promised you good wages while you were with me, and I think you have earned the money."

The hunter and the two helpers were liberally rewarded for the time they had spent. Bidding the professor good-bye, they went their several ways, to astonish their friends and acquaintances with their strange tales.

"As for you, boys," went on Amos Henderson to Jack and Mark, "I will pay you, too, if you like, or you can continue with me, and perhaps some day we'll make a trip to the South Pole--if not through the air, then under the sea, for I have in mind to build a submarine boat next. What do you say?"

"I'll stay," said Jack.

"So will I," exclaimed Mark. "Hurrah for the South Pole!"

"Then come on in to supper," cried the professor gaily, leading the way to his cabin.

THE END.

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