DON STURDY ACROSS THE NORTH POLE

VICTOR APPLETON

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OR

Cast Away in the Land of Ice

BY

VICTOR APPLETON

AUTHOR OF "DON STURDY IN THE TOMBS OF GOLD," "DON STURDY WITH THE BIG SNAKE HUNTERS," "TOM SWIFT AND HIS AIR GLIDER," "TOM SWIFT AND HIS UNDERSEA SEARCH," ETC.

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THE DON STURDY SERIES

DON STURDY ON THE DESERT OF MYSTERY
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DON STURDY IN THE TOMBS OF GOLD
DON STURDY ACROSS THE NORTH POLE
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TOM SWIFT AND HIS CHEST OF SECRETS

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Don Sturdy across the North Pole

CONTENTS

DON STURDY ACROSS THE NORTH POLE

CHAPTER I

Down the Embankment

"The last one in is a Chinaman!" cried Don Sturdy, as he ran from a tent toward the bank of a creek, closely followed by two companions.

This was a stigma not to be borne without a strenuous struggle to avert it, and a spirited race ensued over the hundred yards of green turf that had to be covered before the creek was reached.

Don reached the bank first, and, pausing just long enough to get his balance, lifted his hands over his head and dived into the cool waters. Before he came up again, Teddy Allison had followed him, and an instant later there was a third splash, and Fred Turner had joined the other two.

Don shook the water from his eyes and looked mischievously at Fred.

"Don't know that I ought to bathe in the same water with a Chink," he said grinning.

"We ought to keep a good distance between us and the Yellow Peril," declared Teddy.

"How about the red peril?" Fred came back at Teddy, looking significantly at the lad's mop of flaming red hair that had won him the nickname of "Brick."

"Guess that will hold you for a while, Brick," laughed Don, as he struck out downstream.

The three boys were all good swimmers, and they enjoyed themselves to the full for an hour or more, practicing fancy strokes and dives, the coolness of the water having an added charm because of its contrast with the sweltering heat of the day.

"If we'd only had something of this kind in the Sahara Desert, eh, Brick?" suggested Don.

" 'Twould have been just what the doctor ordered," agreed Brick. "Or in the Egyptian desert, either. One was about as hot as the other."

"I'd have been willing to stand either of them, if I could have been where you fellows have been and seen what you've seen," remarked Fred.

"Still," he added cheerily, "I've got no kick coming when I think of the difference between me now and what I was a year ago. If anybody had told me then that instead of being a cripple I'd be standing on two good legs and able to run races with you fellows, I'd have thought he was just kidding me along. And I owe it all to you, Don."

"To my Uncle Amos, you mean," declared Don. "He was the hero in that matter. He was the one who found the drug that cured you."

"But you were the one that got him to do it," persisted Fred. "I tell you, fellows, that since that time it's been like living in another world."

The boys sported about a little longer in the water and quitted it with reluctance. They had a good rubdown in their tent, slipped into their street clothes, and then, immensely refreshed, threw themselves down in the shade of a great elm tree.

"Gee!" remarked Don, "Uncle Frank has all the luck."

"What do you mean?" asked Teddy lazily. "Somebody remember him in his will, or what?"

"He's going on an expedition to the North Pole," answered Don enviously.

"What?" exclaimed Fred.

"Sounds mighty good to me in this hot weather," said Teddy. "I'd like to be there at this minute throwing snowballs at the Eskimos. But what's he going up there for?"

"He's heard of a new species of polar bear to be found up that way," Don replied; "and he's been commissioned by a zoölogical society to get some specimens, if he can."

"He can, if any one can," declared Teddy

emphatically. "If the bears hear that he's coming they'll take to their holes. I guess that's the only kind of big game left in the world that he hasn't taken a shot at. Grizzlies, tigers, lions, elephants—isn't he ever going to get enough?"

"It's a mighty risky voyage," put in Fred. "I hope his ship doesn't get stuck in the ice."

"No danger of that, I guess," rejoined Don, "seeing that he's going in an airship."

There was an exclamation of amazement from both his hearers.

"You mean an airplane?" asked Teddy.

"No," replied Don. "In a big dirigible, like that one that came sailing over here the other day, the one shaped like a big cigar that shone like silver in the sun."

"Going to sail in a ship like that to the North Pole?" exclaimed Fred. "How does he know he can? It's never been done."

"That doesn't say it can't be done," was the reply. "There's got to be a first time for everything. Uncle Frank seems to be pretty certain that the *Red Monarch*—that's the name of the airship—can get there all right."

"I didn't know he owned an airship," said Teddy.

"He doesn't," replied Don, with a smile. "He's just going as a passenger with an expedition that's flying to the North Pole."

"What are they going there for?" asked

Fred. "I thought the Pole had already been discovered by Peary."

"So it has," said Don. "But all that Peary did was to find the spot, mark it, and then hike back as fast as he could to his ship, so as to save himself from freezing or starving to death. But there's a vast amount of territory in the neighborhood of the Pole, hundreds and thousands of miles of it, that nobody knows anything about. No one knows how much of it is land and how much is water. There may be lands rich in silver and gold, and even with all kinds of strange bird and animal and plant life.

"At any rate, a big scientific society wants to find out all about it, and so they've equipped a big airship and are sending it up there. Uncle Frank heard about it and arranged to go along. Of course, they were only too glad to have him, because of his strength and courage and his reputation as a hunter and explorer."

"Oh, how I'd like to go with him!" exclaimed Teddy.

"Not a chance in the world, old boy," said Don. "Unless," he added, with a grin, "you do the stowaway act, as you did when you went to Egypt."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't work twice," replied Teddy. "But I'd give everything I've got to be able to go along."

"Same here," chimed in Fred wistfully.

"Don't you think you could work it, Don?" urged Teddy. "Your Uncle Frank would do anything in the world for you, if you'd ask him."

"I've already asked him for myself," replied Don. "You don't think I'd let a chance like that go by without trying for it, do you? But there was nothing doing. The airship can carry only a limited number—about thirty or so, I think is the figure—and Uncle Frank says that the list is all made up. So that's that, bad luck to it."

"Look at this pair of peaches coming along," Teddy interjected.

They looked in the direction indicated by his glance and saw two figures advancing along the road that ran almost parallel to the creek, but at some little distance from it.

One was a boy of about fifteen or sixteen, as nearly as they could judge, rather dissipated looking, with pasty complexion and eyes set closely together. He was of heavy build, but the heaviness suggested flabbiness rather than hard muscle. A cigarette hung loosely between his lips, and his walk was a combination of a shuffle and a swagger.

His companion was a man of, perhaps, thirty years, of dark complexion, with a hatchet face, receding chin and furtive eyes. There were evil markings on his face that told of loose living. He was dressed in flashy raiment, and

a big stone, either real or paste, gleamed in his tie while another glittered in a ring on his little finger.

They were by no means an attractive pair, as they sauntered along, engaged so earnestly in conversation that they did not seem to notice the presence of the trio on the bank of the creek.

"This is a mighty hick town," the boys heard the man say to his companion. "It ought to be easy to pull off almost anything in a burg like this."

"Just a bunch of rubes," the boy answered, with a sneer on his weak face. "The kind that fall for gold bricks and who would buy Central Park or the Brooklyn Bridge if any bunco man offered to sell them for ten dollars apiece. It's a sin and a shame to do anything to them. They're too easy."

They passed on, and the boys looked at each other with grins on their faces.

"Cheap sports from the city," remarked Brick. "Wonder what they're doing up here? Do you know either one of them, Don?"

"Never saw them before," replied Don. "And I'm not especially anxious to see either of them again. I shouldn't wonder if they're up to mischief of some kind."

"I'll bet the man is a tough customer," surmised Fred. "Did you see the peculiar walk

he had? It wouldn't surprise me if he'd done the lockstep some time."

"And did you hear what he said about pulling off something?" asked Teddy.

"Oh, well, that may have been just brag to impress the boy who was with him," remarked Don. "That fellow was listening to him as though he were the real thing. And you could see by his talk that he was trying to be just as tough and 'wise' as the man himself."

The three chums soon dismissed the fellows from mind and chatted of other things. Don, at last, looked at his watch and sat up with a start.

"Didn't think it was so late," he remarked. "I'll have to be getting a move on me. I have to go on an errand to Mr. Thompson, about a little business matter for Uncle Frank, and I promised Uncle Amos that, later on, I'd help him get up the catalogue of those minerals of his."

"Some little busy bee," remarked Teddy, grinning. "On a hot afternoon like this, I'd rather be a drone."

"That's the easiest thing you do," retorted Don. "All right, then, you stay here and chin with Fred. I'll just run over to Thompson's and stop for you on the way back."

Mr. Thompson was the lawyer who transacted all of Captain Sturdy's legal business, and on this occasion he was preparing some

papers for his client's signature, so that Don had to wait a little longer that he had expected.

To save time on his way back to Teddy and Fred, Don took a short cut that led over some rough ground and across a little gully at the foot of a hill.

The gully was only five or six feet deep, and Don, in his hurry, instead of scrambling down the side, leaped down as he reached the brink.

At the instant he did so, he saw below him the man and boy to whom his attention had been drawn earlier in the afternoon. But it was too late, and though he tried to change the direction of his jump even while he was in the air, he could not help bumping heavily against the boy and sending him sprawling to the ground, knocking from his hand a sandwich he had been munching.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" cried Don, as he rushed toward the lad to help him up.

But the boy kicked at him in rage, and his face was livid as he scrambled to his feet.

"What do you mean by that, you clumsy clown?" he shouted. "You ought to have a good clip in the jaw for that."

"Sure he ought," growled his companion. "Why don't you hand him one, Jake? Show him where he get's off."

The blood rushed to Don's face, but he tried to keep his temper.

"I told you I was sorry," he said. "You can

surely see it was an accident. I didn't know you were there. I ought to have looked before I jumped."

"A lot of good that does me," howled the boy. "You've spoiled my sandwich and you've made me scrape my shins. I ought to take it out of your hide."

"Atta boy," encouraged his companion. "Show him that it doesn't pay to monkey with fellows like us. We're nobody's meat."

The boy picked up the sandwich and hurled it at Don's head. Don dodged and threw himself into a position of defense as both of the strangers advanced toward him with their fists clenched.

CHAPTER II

A Mysterious Theft

Don did not flinch, though the odds were heavily against him. His fighting blood was up.

He was sincerely sorry for the mishap due to his carelessness, and had been anxious to do all in his power to make amends. If the fellows had any sense of decency, they would have accepted his apology and let it go at that. But in their anger, their native coarseness came to the surface, and confident in the fact that they were two against one, they counted on getting even in the only way they knew.

"We'll teach him to run over us that way, eh, Jake?" growled the man, as, with a scowl, he advanced on Don.

"You bet we will!" answered the boy. "We'll knock his head off."

"You're not going to knock anybody's head off," retorted Don defiantly, his eyes flashing. "I'm not looking for a fight, but you won't see me run. You're two to one and you may lick me, but you'll know you've been in a fight."

He shifted his position a bit so that they

could not get behind him, and, his eyes bent on his adversaries, awaited their onslaught.

And while, with his head and courage high, he faces his foes, it may be well for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series to tell who Don Sturdy was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Don had been born and brought up in the town of Hillville, a thriving place of about 10,000 population, in an Eastern State and about fifty miles from New York City. He was now about fifteen years old, tall and muscular, with brown hair and eyes. Courage was a characteristic of his family, and Don had his full share of it. He never looked for trouble, but never dodged it when it came.

His father, Richard Sturdy, was a noted explorer who had traveled over all quarters of the globe. More than a year before we here make Don's acquaintance, Mr. Sturdy with his wife, Alice, and his daughter, Ruth, younger than Don by two years, had gone on an exploring expedition on the ship *Mercury*. Months passed and no news came from the travelers, and it began to be feared that the *Mercury* had gone down somewhere off Cape Horn.

Don, apparently bereft of parents and sister at one blow, was frantic with anxiety and grief. He had been left at home under the guardianship of his Uncle, Captain Frank Sturdy, a

noted hunter of big game in all parts of the world. Another uncle, his mother's brother, Professor Amos Regor Bruce, a famous scientist, helped to look after him and supervise his education.

Partly to get Don's mind off his troubles, his uncles, both of whom were bachelors, took him with them on an expedition to the Sahara Desert. There Don came across an American boy, Teddy Allison, of about the same age as himself, whom he rescued from an attack by Arabs. They became firm friends, and the plight of Teddy, whose father had been carried off into slavery by Sahara bandits, enlisted the sympathy of Don's uncles, who organized a party to go to his relief. In autos, especially made for the conquest of the desert, they set forth, not only to attempt Mr. Allison's deliverance, but also to find the City of Brass and the Cave of Emeralds, reputed to be somewhere in the remote recesses of the Sahara. The thrilling adventures they met with while on their triple quest are told of in the first volume of this series, entitled: "Don Sturdy in the Sahara Desert; or, Autoing in the Land of the Caravans."

From Mr. Allison, they learned that the *Mercury* had indeed been wrecked, but that some of her passengers had been rescued and taken on a sailing vessel to Brazil. This information revived hope that Don's parents and sister might

have been among the saved, and, shortly after their return to America, Don and his uncles started for Brazil. Captain Sturdy had a contract for the capture of big snakes, and Professor Bruce had been commissioned to secure some of the rare drugs of that country. How they followed up the slender clues they had; the exciting fights they had with alligators and monster snakes and jaguars; how the professor found a drug that cured Fred Turner, at that time an almost hopeless cripple; the outcome of their search in Brazil for Don's family are narrated in the second volume of this series, entitled: "Don Sturdy with the Big Snake Hunters; or, Lost in the Jungles of the Amazon."

Shortly after Don and his uncles' return home, they received further news of Don's parents, who, they learned, were in Egypt. They immediately set out for the land of the Nile. There was a joyous reunion of Don and his mother, and an investigation as to Mr. Sturdy's whereabouts was immediately started. He was supposed to have started for the Valley of the Kings to find the Tombs of Gold, the location of which he had learned from an ancient inscription. The party was reinforced by an old Egyptian, Zeta Phalos, to whom Don and Teddy had once been of immense service.

What wonderful adventures they met with in their hunt; their encounters with outlaws;

the danger they incurred of thirst and starvation; their startling adventures with a hideous apparition in the subterranean catacombs; how they discovered a marvelously rich treasure; and the result of the search for Don's father may be read in the third volume of this series: "Don Sturdy in the Tombs of Gold; or, the Old Egyptian's Great Secret."

And now to return to Don, as, standing at bay with his back against the wall of the gully, he faced the two rough characters who were advancing to attack him.

The rascals had evidently expected Don to run or to beg for mercy, and the fact that he did neither and evidently had not the slightest intention of doing either, somewhat disconcerted them.

They paused and looked uncertainly at each other.

"Aw, go ahead, Jake, and soak him one," urged the evil-faced man.

Jake hesitated. He did not like the looks of his opponent.

"Perhaps he's got his gang near by," Jake suggested, this being the only explanation he could think of for Don's coolness.

As though to justify his suspicion, the sound of voices and footsteps rapidly approaching were heard.

The man took a step or two up the side of the gully and peered over its edge.

"Right you are, Jake," he reported, as he stepped back. "There's a bunch of hicks coming. I guess we'd better be making ourselves scarce."

"It's mighty lucky for you," growled Jake, bristling again with pretended courage, now that he saw he would have no occasion to use it. "If they hadn't come, I'd have knocked your block off."

"You've got time to do it yet, if you think you can," replied Don. "I guess you're glad you didn't have to make your bluff good."

With muttered threats and scowls, the two strangers slouched away. Don relaxed as he watched them go. He was relieved and, at the same time, amused.

"A couple of blowhards," he murmured to himself, as he climbed up the bank and exchanged salutations with several people of the vicinity, whom he knew well and who passed on without any suspicion of the part they had played in averting the struggle that had threatened.

Don picked up Teddy on his way back, and they said good-bye to Fred, promising to see him again the next day. Then the two boys made their way to the Sturdy mansion, a substantial stone structure with ample grounds around it, where Teddy was spending a few days as a guest.

On the way, Don recounted to Brick the tense scene of a few moments before.

"The bums!" exclaimed Brick indignantly. "Two against one, and over a little thing like that! It shows what hardboiled toughs they are. At that, I believed you'd have licked them."

"Not likely," returned Don. "Two to one is big odds. The fellow called Jake would have been a pudding. But the other one was a rough customer, and ten to one he had a blackjack in his pocket."

The two boys passed into the gate of the Sturdy place and were passing the kitchen door when they heard the shrill voice of Jennie Jenks, the maid of all work, in animated conversation with Mrs. Roscoe, the buxom, good-natured housekeeper.

"Jennie's off again," whispered Don with a grin, as he put his hand on his friend's arm.

"She's better than a circus," responded Teddy. "Wonder what's eating her now. Let's find out."

"An' what I say is, it's sumthin' scand'lous the way the cap'n keeps flyin' in the face of Providence," Jennie announced, her eloquence somewhat impeded by the big wad of gum she was chewing vigorously. "He ain't never satisfied to stay at home. Home ain't nothin' to him 'cept a place to hang his hat. It wasn't enough for him to go out to that there Sarah

Desert an' fight with banquets in the Hog Platter. It wasn't enough to go into those Berzilyun jumboe an' take chances of bein' et up by golcondas an' cannonballs. It wasn't enough to go to the land of the pigamids an' the spinach an' get into them Egypt tombs with skellingtons that didn't have no heads on 'em. Now he has to git up an' fly to the North Pole."

She paused for breath and shifted her gum.

"The North Pole!" she reiterated. "As if he couldn't see all the poles he wanted right in the back yards. Goodness knows, I see too much of 'em when I'm hangin' out the clothes."

"But this is a different kind of a pole," said Mrs. Roscoe, with a twinkle in her eye.

"Mebbe a little bigger," conceded Jennie. "But, after all, one pole is jest about like another when it comes to that, I don't care what any one says.

"I seen a feller climb a greased pole at a county fair once, where I went with Dan Bixby," she went on, with the inconsequence which was one of her chief conversational features. "That is, he tried ter climb it, but he couldn't make it an' came down with a rush. An' Dan he sez to me, sez he: 'Tryin' to climb that pole hez made a differunt man of him,' an' I sez: 'I don't see no differunce 'cept he's got more grease on his pants,' an' Dan sez: 'Oh, yes, there is,' he sez, 'he went up a Pole

an' he came down a Russian,' an' I sez: 'why shouldn't he come down a rushin'? I guess you would if you tried to climb it,' an' Dan jest looked at me an' laffed fit to bust."

"I don't wonder he laughed," said the housekeeper, with a sarcasm which went clean over the head of its unconscious object. "But suppose you get busy now and set the table. Dinner's almost ready."

The boys moved on, their faces crimson, and it was only when they got beyond earshot that they gave full vent to their laughter.

"Isn't she a scream?" exclaimed Brick, as he wiped the tears from his eyes.

"The only one of her kind, and we've got her," chuckled Don. "She's too good for housework. She ought to be on the vaudeville stage. She'd have them falling out of their seats."

It was a thoroughly happy party that gathered around the table that evening. Don's heart swelled as he looked around and contrasted it with the times when only he and his uncles formed the company, each with a subcurrent of pain at the thought of the three empty places that might never again be filled.

Now they were filled. Don's father sat at the head of the table, handsome, genial, his splendid mind fully restored. At the foot sat Mrs. Sturdy, sweet and smiling, the load of terrible anxiety lifted from her heart forever.

And there was Ruth, blossoming into glorious girlhood, as gay and merry as of old.

The captain and the professor, who made their home in the old mansion when they were not absent from the country, Teddy and Don, completed the party, and Don wondered whether in all the world there was a family circle so replete with happiness.

"Did you see Thompson and get that matter fixed up?" Captain Sturdy asked Don, in the course of the conversation.

"Yes," answered Don. "I have the papers in my pocket. He kept me waiting a little longer than I expected, and I took a short cut back. Nearly got into a fight on the way back, too."

"Mrs. Sturdy gave an exclamation, which was echoed by Ruth, and Don's father looked at him inquiringly.

"Oh, it didn't really amount to anything," Don hastened to assure them, and then went on to narrate the incident.

"Ever see the fellows before?" asked his father.

"No," replied Don. "And I don't care if I never see them again. They were a couple of hard citizens, if you ask me."

"They were talking of its being easy to pull off something in this burg, as they called it," volunteered Teddy.

"Too many of that kind round here lately,"

remarked Mr. Sturdy, with a thoughtful frown. "I heard at the post-office yesterday that there had been two or three burglaries recently in the town."

"I wouldn't put it past those fellows to do something of the kind, the older one especially," said Don. "The young fellow looked more weak than bad. But the other one looked as though he might be a regular jailbird."

As he was finishing the meal, a thought occurred to Don.

"I'll help you with that catalogue you were speaking about, Uncle Amos, if you like," he said. "I haven't anything on to-night, and I can spend the whole evening at it."

"Thank you, Don," replied his uncle. "I'd be glad if you could. The time is getting short, and the work of classification has taken me longer than I expected. But Teddy is your guest, and I don't want to take you away from him."

"Oh, that's all right," chimed in Teddy. "I'll be glad to go over there with Don, if you're willing. I don't suppose I can help much, but I'll try not to get in the way."

The professor's collection was stored in a stone outbuilding on the grounds that had been constructed especially for the use of Don's uncles. There were two floors, the lower being reserved for the use of Captain Sturdy. Here

he kept his skins, heads, antlers and other trophies of the chase.

On the top floor, which was spacious and well-lighted, Professor Bruce had his laboratory and storeroom. Here were gathered together many rare specimens of minerals and antiquities that he had collected during his many journeys in out-of-the-way corners of the world.

At the present time, the professor was busy making a catalogue of specimens of minerals that were peculiarly valuable. The work was being done for a museum, and the professor had agreed to have the catalogue ready at a specified time, so that the collection could be placed on view in a special room of the museum that had just been completed for that purpose.

He had been busily engaged at the task for several weeks, and Don had been of great service to him. During their trips together, the boy's uncle had taught him a great deal about the specimens gathered, and he found this information, in conjunction with the lad's quick and alert mind, of great value just when it was needed.

Brick went over with his chum that evening, and found plenty of things to attract his attention and interest him while Don was busy with the professor.

"I suppose that collection is worth an awful lot of money," Teddy remarked to Don, as

they strolled back to the house after the evening's work was over.

"A good many thousands of dollars," replied Don. "These minerals represent years of labor and an awful lot of expense in getting them together. They're worth so much, in fact, that Uncle Amos is getting rather nervous over being responsible for them, and is anxious to get them off his hands."

Several days passed pleasantly, with Fred, Don, and Teddy getting together as often as possible for swimming and fishing and long hikes into the surrounding country. At the house there was a good deal of bustle and excitement, caused by the preparations of the captain for his forthcoming trip.

Don had occasion several times to attend to commissions in town for his busy uncle, and as he was coming back on foot one day he saw ahead of him a man whom he noticed for his peculiar shuffling gait. He knew it was a walk he had seen somewhere before, and he was trying to remember where when the man turned around and Don saw that it was the evil-faced companion of the boy who had been called Jake.

That the man had recognized him also was evident from the scowl that came over his face. Don wondered for a moment whether another encounter was in store for him. But he did

not for a moment relax the rapid pace with which he approached the fellow.

The man hesitated for a moment, then turned, and quickening his gait, passed down a side road near at hand and was soon out of sight.

The incident made no special impression on Don, and by the time he reached home other things had driven it from his mind.

Teddy had gone over that night to take dinner with Fred and Emily Turner, and Don spent the evening with his Uncle Amos, who was now nearing the completion of his task.

About half past nine the telephone bell rang, and the professor answered it. There was a hurried interchange, and Don's uncle turned to him with a troubled face.

"It's from Mrs. Thomas," he said. "Her husband has been taken suddenly ill and wants to see me at once. He's one of my oldest friends, you know, and I'll have to go. I'll leave you to lock up. You'll be careful to see that everything's all right, won't you?"

"Sure, I will," replied Don. "I'm sorry to hear Mr. Thomas is ill. You go right ahead. I'll tend to everything."

Professor Bruce hurried away, and Don, after finishing what he was working at, turned out the lights, locked the door of the storeroom carefully and went to the house.

The next morning at the breakfast table, Don inquired about Mr. Thomas.

"He's better, I'm glad to say," replied his uncle. "It was a sudden heart attack, and for a time it looked as though it might be fatal. But the doctor got it under control, and I guess he'll pull through all right."

After his long vigil of the previous night, the professor's appetite was light that morning, and he finished before the rest, excused himself and hurried over to his laboratory.

In less than five minutes he was back. He burst into the dining room, his face the color of chalk.

The others looked up in surprise at the way in which he rushed in, so much at variance with his usual placid manner. Then the surprise changed to alarm as they noted his excitement.

He sank into a chair, too agitated for a moment to speak, while the others sprang to their feet in consternation.

"What is it, Amos?" demanded Mr. Sturdy. "What has happened?"

"I've been robbed!" the professor gasped, waving his arms wildly above his head.

"Robbed?" came in a chorus.

"Robbed!" reiterated the professor. "My collection of minerals! Stolen! Gone!"

CHAPTER III

Under a Cloud

There was a moment of tense silence, while the others stood as if petrified, unwilling or unable to believe their ears.

Then, with a jumble of exclamations of surprise and grief, they all rushed pell-mell from the dining room to the laboratory, with Don and Teddy in the van.

Don went up the stairs two steps at a time and entered the room. A glance about confirmed his fears, and a sharp pain went through his heart like a knife.

Everything was in a wild confusion that showed with what haste the robbers had worked. Drawers had been rifled and papers thrown out on the floor. Panes in the doors of cabinets had been shattered and splintered glass was everywhere.

And the minerals, that precious collection that represented years of work in gathering them, were gone!

A few of the less important had been overlooked or discarded, but the great bulk of those worth while had been taken.

The blow to Professor Bruce was a terrible one, and his grief was shared in a lesser degree by them all.

Mr. Sturdy and the captain took charge of the matter, as the professor was too prostrated to be of much assistance for the moment.

The first thing they did was to report the theft to the police department of the town and ask them to spread the information to all the adjoining towns, so that the authorities could be on the lookout for all who could not give a good account of themselves. Then Mr. Sturdy, over the long distance 'phone, called up New York, reported the affair to the police there, and in addition summoned to his aid the help of one of the most noted of the detective agencies.

In the meantime, the captain had been examining the door and windows. The latter he found securely fastened, and there were no marks of jimmies about them. The door too showed no signs of violence. The lock had not been forced. The door had been slightly ajar when the professor had entered. It was this that had given him his first warning of what he might expect to see inside.

The captain examined the lock itself. It had not been strained or tampered with, and responded easily to the locking and unlocking of the key which Don handed him.

"It's queer," muttered the captain. "Is it

possible, Amos, that you forgot to lock the door last night?"

"It's impossible," replied the professor. "I always lock it with the utmost care. I must have done so last night. But wait!" he cried, as a sudden thought came to him. "I was called away last night to Mr. Thomas's house and left Don to do the locking up."

They all looked at Don, who all at once had the feeling that he was on the defensive.

"That's right," he said, flushing a little before the battery of eyes. "Uncle Amos asked me to lock up, and I did."

"Are you sure?" asked his father thoughtfully.

"Dead sure, father," Don answered.

"Couldn't you, by any chance, have thought you did and yet failed to do so?" asked the captain.

"I suppose I could; but I know I didn't," answered Don. "I distinctly remember turning the key in the lock and thinking at the time what an awful thing it would be if any thief should get in there and rob Uncle Amos."

"Sometimes we think we have locked a door when the bolt doesn't turn all the way," remarked his father.

"I couldn't have done that, either," replied Don. "After I put the key in my pocket I tried the door, so as to be perfectly sure that it was locked tight. And it was."

"That settles it," said his father, and the captain nodded assent. "I know that lads of your age are sometimes careless, and I thought that perhaps your mind had been busy with other things. But if you remember so distinctly all the little things connected with it, that's all I want to know."

"Well, then, some one got in by using a key that would open the lock," remarked the captain. "It must have been a pretty good fit too, for the lock isn't strained a particle."

"That's strange," observed the professor, "for it was a special lock, and the firm I got it from told me it was burglar-proof."

"Nothing is burglar-proof," said the captain skeptically. "There's nothing yet been devised that can't be opened, given time and opportunity."

The thought of the man he had met on the road the day before not far from the house came into Don's mind.

"I wonder if that could be the fellow," he said, after he had narrated the episode. "He certainly looks like a desperate character, and he was talking thieves' slang the day we first saw him on the road near the creek."

"It wouldn't be surprising," replied Mr. Sturdy, reaching for the 'phone.

He again called up the local police department and asked that a special search should

be made for the man whom Don described, and, if found, that he be detained on suspicion.

There was nothing more that could be done until the detective arrived. At Don's suggestion however, Dan, the hired man, was directed to bring out the car. Mr. Sturdy and the captain got in it with Don and Teddy, and for the greater part of that day they scoured the roads within a radius of twenty miles on the mere chance that they might discover the man in question or some clue that might prove helpful. But nothing of value developed, and they returned tired and dispirited.

A detective from New York arrived that afternoon and took the matter in charge. He made a careful examination of the premises, checked up the description of the stolen articles, and departed to put up at a hotel in the town, from which to prosecute his inquiries.

"Looks like a Slippery Jones job," was all that he vouchsafed. "If I didn't know that he's doing time now, I'd say he did it. Has all his earmarks. If it wasn't himself, it was one of his gang."

For that day and several that followed, a pall of gloom hovered over the Sturdy household. All felt a deep sympathy with the professor, who, although to all outward seeming he had resumed his usual placid demeanor, suffered keenly from his loss.

It was not because of the money value of

the stolen articles, though that was great. The blow was deepest to his professional pride. There were awkward explanations to make to the museum. Then, too, he cherished the precious specimens almost as though they had been his children, and it hurt him sorely to think of them in the possession of criminals.

Perhaps, of all the others in the family, Don felt most grief over the disaster, for it was nothing less than that. Apart from his sympathy with his uncle, to whom he was deeply attached, he could not help feeling as though he were under a cloud in the matter.

He had been the last to leave that room before it was looted. To him had been entrusted the task of locking up. He knew that they all believed he was telling the truth when he emphatically asserted that he had locked the door. That is, they believed that he believed he was telling the truth. But how could they be sure that his memory had not played him false? How could he himself be absolutely sure of it, for that matter? Many an honest person had been mistaken in his recollection.

"Snap out of it, Don, old boy," Teddy adjured him one day when he had been brooding. "You're not to blame any more than I am. It was just your hard luck that the thief or thieves happened to come on that particular night. And when all's said and done, it isn't the end of the world. It won't make your uncle poor."

"Oh, it isn't that," answered Don. "Uncle Amos's share of the treasure that we found in the Cave of Emeralds in the Sahara and the Tombs of Gold in Egypt has given him more money than he'll ever be able to spend. But he values those specimens a good deal more than money. They're part of himself, his life blood, as it were."

"I've been wondering what the thieves would do with them," remarked Teddy. "It doesn't seem to me that they'd find many people who would buy them. Wouldn't they have to sell them to a museum?"

"No museum would buy them," replied Don. "They've all been notified of the theft, and if any one came to them for that purpose they'd hand him over to the police. What they'll do will be to try to sell them separately, or a few at a time. Some of them are semi-precious stones, like garnets and turquoises. Jewelers, that is, the kind who are not particular where they get their stuff, will buy them. Then there are others that are extremely rare, and they'll be bought by collectors who want to round out their collections. Most of those fellows are rich, you know, and they think nothing of giving thousands of dollars if they can get something that nobody else has. Altogether, the thief will make a pretty good clean up, if the police don't nab him."

Suddenly Brick caught a glimpse of some-

thing that gave a totally different direction to their thoughts.

"Look! Look!" he cried, pointing to the sky directly above them.

Don looked.

There, like a great flaming comet, was a monster airship as clearly outlined against the blue heavens as though it were a cameo, cleaving the air with the precision and speed of an arrow.

"The *Red Monarch!*" cried Don.

CHAPTER IV

Monarch of the Air

Their hearts beating high, the boys looked, enthralled at the magnificent spectacle.

The great airship sailed on serenely, moving at terrific speed, and yet at such a height that it scarcely seemed to be more than floating.

"How fast do you think she's going?" asked Teddy.

"Oh, about seventy miles an hour," replied Don. "That's about her regular speed. But when they want to let her out she can make a hundred or more."

"Why, that's faster than the lightning express!" exclaimed Teddy.

"A train isn't in it compared to her," replied Don. "She could run rings around the fastest express in the world. She could beat an eagle at his own game. She's some traveler, if you ask me."

"How far up do you think she is?" asked Teddy.

"I should guess about five thousand feet," was the reply. "That would be higher than

six Woolworth Buildings piled on top of one another."

"Suppose she should fall?" remarked Teddy, in an awed voice.

"The crew would never know what hit them," replied Don. "But they've got that thing down now to such a fine point that it's hardly possible. You see, the gas is in different compartments, so that if a hole were made in one, the others would hold it up. It's on the same principle as the watertight bulkheads in a ship."

"Seems to me that I have heard of them falling, though," said Teddy doubtfully. "Didn't one of them go down in England? And didn't another tumble in this country?"

"Yes," said Don. "But that was before they knew as much about building them and running them as they do now. The one that went down in England buckled because there was a defect in the framework. They've corrected that. The one that fell in Virginia would have made a safe landing all right, but the metal nose came up against an electric light wire and set fire to the gas. But they're using a different kind of gas now, helium, I think Uncle Frank called it, and that can't get on fire. Then, too, if worst comes to worst, there are parachutes for all the members of the crew, and they can grab 'em and come down safely."

"But suppose the ship gets caught in a hurricane," persisted Teddy.

"That, of course, is a tougher matter," returned Don. "But you know what happened to the *Shenandoah.* That was blown away from her moorings in a gale, but she got through it all right. They simply ran before it just as a ship goes scudding in a storm."

"It sounds all right," remarked Teddy. "All the same, it seems to me there's a lot of risk about it."

"So there is," admitted Don. "But so there is about everything. Every time you go out on an automobile ride, you don't know but what a drunken driver may run into you and smash you up. And, after all, if there wasn't a little risk you wouldn't get any kick out of it."

"That's so," agreed Teddy, as he thought of the risks he and Don had taken in the Sahara Desert and in Egypt. "Gee! Your uncle is in for a whole lot of kicks when he flies to the North Pole."

"You bet he is!" agreed Don. "And he's tickled to death at the prospect. What wouldn't I give to go along!"

"Same here," said Teddy. "Perhaps you'll get a chance yet. And if you do, put in a good word for me, won't you?"

"Sure thing," promised Don. "But I don't think there's a chance in the world. And, if

there were, how do you know your father would let you go?"

"I'm afraid he wouldn't," sighed Teddy. "He says I've got to buckle down to my books. I'd tell him that I'd learn a mighty sight more from such a trip as that than I would from books, but I'm afraid he couldn't see it."

The chums watched the *Red Monarch* with fascinated eyes until the great dirigible disappeared below the horizon.

"Where is she going, do you suppose?" asked Teddy, as they resumed their walk.

"Over to Palinville, I guess," replied Don, mentioning a town that was about twenty miles away. "Uncle Frank says that's where she has her hangar. Perhaps we can go over there soon and get a closer look at her. Uncle Frank has a pull with the captain, and maybe he'd let us go all over the ship."

"Wouldn't that be dandy!" cried Teddy, with enthusiasm. "I've often wanted to see how a dirigible was made, but never had the chance."

Two days later, as Don stepped into the living room, he saw that Captain Sturdy was in earnest conversation with a tall, powerfully built man whom Don had never seen before.

Don excused himself and was about to withdraw, when his uncle called him back.

"This is the lad I was talking to you about," said the captain to his guest. "Don, this is

Captain Hargot of the airship that I'm going in. Captain Hargot, this is my nephew, Don Sturdy."

The two shook hands cordially. The visitor scanned Don with keen but kindly eyes, and seemed to be satisfied with the inspection.

"We were just talking about you when you came in," said Captain Sturdy, as he motioned Don to a seat.

"Saying nothing especially bad, I hope," remarked Don, with a smile.

"Quite the contrary," affirmed Captain Hargot. "Captain Sturdy seems to think that the sun and stars revolve around that nephew of his. And I don't wonder, after what he's been telling me about your adventures with the Arabs in the Sahara and the bandits in Egypt and the big snakes in Brazil."

"I'm afraid he's too partial," deprecated Don, who could not help being gratified at his uncle's affectionate pride in him, and yet was wondering why he should have been the subject of the conversation.

"I've got a boy just about your age, or perhaps a year or so older," observed Captain Hargot. "I guess that's the only respect in which he does resemble you, though," he added, with a sudden touch of bitterness.

"I'd be glad to have had you bring him with you," remarked Don politely.

"I don't know where he is," replied Captain Hargot somberly.

This was such an unusual statement, coming from a father, that Don and his uncle maintained silence, not knowing just what to say.

"You see," went on Captain Hargot, seeming to feel the need of unburdening himself, "the boy has no mother, and my work as an aviator has kept me so much away from home that I haven't been able to look after him as I should have liked to. A little while ago he wanted to go out with a camping party; but I didn't like the crowd that was going along —some of them were hard drinkers—and I wouldn't let him go. And a few days ago I got word from the housekeeper that he had run away from home."

"That's too bad," said Captain Sturdy sympathetically. "But it may be just a boyish impulse, and probably he'll soon turn up again."

"I wish I could think so," returned the visitor gloomily. "I've had search made for him everywhere, but I haven't been able to get any word of him. I'm afraid he's got into bad company. He's always been easily influenced. But there," the aviator added, straightening up in his chair, "there's no use of my burdening you with my private troubles. Suppose, Captain Sturdy, you put that thing we were talking about up to your nephew."

Don looked from one to the other in some surprise.

"Don," said his uncle, with a quizzical smile, "if you were asked just now what you'd rather do than anything else in the world, what would you say?"

"To fly with you to the North Pole," answered Don promptly.

"All right," said his uncle. "Come along."

CHAPTER V

A Startling Offer

Don fairly leaped from his chair in wild excitement.

"Do you mean it, Uncle Frank?" he cried, as his glance darted from one to the other of the two smiling faces. "You aren't fooling?"

"Not a bit of it," replied his uncle. "I wouldn't raise your hopes only to dash them. Captain Hargot tells me that there's a vacancy in his list. One of the men who was going with him has fallen sick. I knew how badly you wanted to go, and I suggested you. He was a little doubtful at first, thought you were too young, but when I told him of what you've already been through and the way you carried yourself, he consented."

"Oh!" gasped Don. "It seems too good to be true! How can I thank you enough?"

His uncle turned to Captain Hargot.

"Didn't I tell you he'd eat it up?" he queried, with a smile.

"You did," was the answer. "And since I've seen the lad I'm more glad than ever that

we've made the arrangement. But you'll have to hustle now, my boy, for we start a week from to-day."

"I—I suppose," said Don haltingly, as the thought of Brick came into his mind, "that you couldn't—that it wouldn't be possible to take one other along? I have a friend who's as crazy to go as I am myself. You know whom I mean, Uncle Frank! Teddy."

Captain Hargot shook his head kindly but firmly.

"Sorry," he said. "But an airship isn't like a street car. There isn't always room for one more. We have to figure very carefully on weight and sleeping quarters and everything of the kind. You'll just fill our quota, and there'll not be room for any one else."

There was no room for argument, and Don had to leave well enough alone, though his delight in going would have been doubled if he could have had his chum along with him.

Shortly afterward, Captain Hargot took his leave, and Don was left alone with his uncle.

"There's one thing, Uncle Frank," he said dubiously. "What do you think father and mother will say? Will they be willing to let me go?"

The captain looked a little puzzled and somewhat sheepish.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "The fact is, Don, that I've been your guardian so long

and so used to deciding these things for you, that in my talk with Captain Hargot I forgot that the reins had passed to other hands."

He pondered for a moment.

"I'm quite sure I can get your father to consent," he said. "Richard looks at these things a good deal as I do. But I'm not dead sure about your mother. In fact, I'm not sure at all. Women often feel differently about these things from men. But we'll put it up to them right away. There goes the dinner bell now. Leave it to me. I'll speak of the matter at the table."

The first part of the meal passed off as usual, though Don was so excited that he could scarcely eat. It was not until dessert and coffee had been reached that the captain exploded his bomb.

"Pussyfooting" was not in his nature, and he went straight to the point.

"Richard," he said, "and you, Alice, will you let Don come with me to the North Pole?"

There was a gasp of astonishment and consternation. Jennie, who was serving the coffee, dropped cup and saucer to the floor, picked up the broken pieces, swallowing her gum in her confusion, and fled to the kitchen.

"Upon my word, Frank," said Mr. Sturdy, "it's easy to see that you're a fighter and not a diplomat. No one can accuse you of beating around the bush."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Sturdy, who had turned pale. "Never!"

The captain was none too well satisfied with the reaction to his abrupt question.

"Never's a big word, Alice," he said, not ungently. "Why wouldn't you be willing to let Don go? Remember he'd be with me."

"Oh, do let me go, mother!" begged Don. "I never wanted anything so much in all my life."

"Oh, I can't!" said Mrs. Sturdy, tears coming to her eyes and her voice rising almost to a wail. "It's too dangerous. My boy! And I've just got him back after he's been away from me so long!"

"He'll be frozen to death! He'll never come back if he goes up there," declared Ruth.

There was evidently little to be hoped for from the feminine branch of the family, and the captain turned to his brother.

"How about it, Richard?" he asked.

Mr. Sturdy cleared his throat.

"You've come at us so suddenly you've almost swept us off our feet," he said. "Personally, I would be inclined to let him go, especially as his heart is so set on it."

Don's spirits took an upward bound.

"I've never been a believer in refusing to let a boy take chances, just because there's risk attached," Don's father went on. "It's that that makes men of them. And I've seen

enough of Don to know that he's fully able to take care of himself in almost any circumstances. He's almost a man in body, and he certainly is a man in coolness and courage."

Don looked gratefully at his father.

"But," went on Mr. Sturdy, "his mother has as much right as I have to decide on what he shall do. I suggest that we let the matter stand until to-morrow morning, so that she and I can talk over the matter."

"All right, we'll let it go at that," said the captain. "What do you think about it, Amos?" he asked, anxious to get all the reinforcement that he could.

"I'd let him go, by all means," said Professor Bruce, to Don's great delight. "A boy who can face anacondas and jaguars in Brazil, can stand off bandits in the Sahara Desert, can shoot the tassel from an Egyptian's fez, can be trusted to face the dangers of the Arctic regions."

"Hurrah!" cried Brick enthusiastically, and then subsided, covered with blushes at his involuntary tribute to his friend.

"Then, too," went on the professor, "apart from its making a man of him, as Richard has said, Don has been getting the finest kind of education. He knows more now about South America and Africa than any college professor who hasn't been there. He's been drinking in knowledge at every pore, the customs, habits,

buildings, cities, products, temples, religions, history and antiquities of different nations. Why shouldn't he go further and learn more? I vote yes with both hands up."

"Atta boy!" murmured Teddy, though he was careful to say it under his breath.

Later that evening Don was called into his parents' room. Mrs. Sturdy's face bore traces of tears, but she essayed a smile as she greeted Don with a kiss.

"Your mother and I have been talking that matter over," said Mr. Sturdy, "and she has finally agreed that you may go. It will be a wrench, of course, both to her and me; but we don't want to stand in your way and make you miss an opportunity that comes to few. And we know that your Uncle Frank will have the most vigilant care of your safety and well-being. But most of all, we're depending on your own character and resourcefulness. We're mighty proud of our boy, and trust him fully."

Don could scarcely trust himself to speak, but he stammered out his thanks as best he could and threw his arms about his mother's neck, consoling and reassuring her and promising that he would take the utmost care of himself and return to her safe and sound.

It was late when he left them and repaired to his own room, where he found Teddy waiting for him impatiently.

"How about it?" Teddy asked eagerly.

"It's all right," replied Don. "They're going to let me go."

"Glory be!" cried Brick, his own disappointment forgotten for the moment in unselfish gladness for his friend. "You'll have the time of your life, old boy."

"I sure expect to," replied Don. "But I'd feel twice as glad if you could go along with me. I tried the best I could, Brick, to work it, but it was no go."

"Hard luck," agreed Teddy. "But it can't be helped. The least you can do, though," he added, with a grin, "is to bring me back a nice little polar bear to play with."

"If the bear sees me first, he may put a spoke in that game," laughed Don. "From all I've heard, they have ideas of their own. And they're mighty peevish in their disposition."

The exhilaration of Don's feelings at the prospect of his trip was subdued at times by the mystery that still hung about the theft of the professor's collection.

All the researches and all the clues that at times seemed to promise success ended in nothing. The detective, though refusing to admit himself beaten, was clearly in great uncertainty. He emitted hints occasionally about being on the right trail, but they could see that this was only a professional pose.

"Guess the thieves have made a clean getaway," remarked Teddy.

"Looks that way," agreed Don. "The defective—I mean the detective—seems to be up a tree."

A bit of negative evidence was furnished by the fact that the dark, ugly man who had egged the boy, Jake, on to attack Don had gone away. Diligent search of Hillville and adjoining towns failed to show any trace of him.

That his disappearance should have taken place at the same time as the robbery had a certain significance. But it was by no means conclusive, and Don's family were not inclined to put too much weight on it.

The second day after Don had obtained his parents' permission to go on the polar trip, he and Teddy ran over in the car with Dan to Plainville where the *Red Monarch* was preparing for the long journey.

An exclamation of surprise broke from the boys as they came in sight of the hangar.

"That's a lallapoloozer!" cried Teddy, as he took in the dirigible's enormous proportions. "Why, it must be a quarter of a mile long!"

"Not quite so much as that, but almost," replied Don. "It takes some space to cradle that baby. The airship itself is over six hundred feet from tip to tip, and they have to have a

margin of a couple of hundred more to handle it and get it in and out safely."

"Talking about getting it out, there she comes now!" exclaimed Teddy, as he pointed to the nose of the monster that was just appearing at the doors of the hangar.

"Takes a small army of men to handle it," remarked Don, as he saw a great throng manning the ropes that depended from the lower part of the great air machine.

Up to this moment the sky had been clear and the air quiet. But suddenly, just as the airship cleared the hangar, there came a great gust of wind that made the machine plunge and rear like a frightened horse.

Another gust followed, and a cry burst from Don's lips.

"They can't hold her! They can't hold her!" he shouted. "She's breaking away!"

The next instant he had leaped from the car and was running like a deer toward the airship.

CHAPTER VI

Just in Time

There were hoarse shouts from the officers of the imperiled craft as they rushed among the men, urging them to hold on and throwing their own weight desperately on the ropes.

Teddy and Dan were close on Don's heels as he reached the crowd. From all quarters of the field, other volunteers came flying to do their bit in preventing a disaster.

It was a case where every ounce of strength and weight was needed to control the monster, which, with the rising wind, grew every moment more impatient of control.

As Don rushed to take hold of one of the ropes, his eyes fell on a concrete pillar, one of many that studded the field. In the top was an enormous iron ring.

Quick as a flash, Don thrust the end of his rope through the ring. Then he slipped it through again and tied it in a double knot.

The knot was equal to the pulling strength of twenty men.

Don rushed to another post at a little distance, and repeated the performance.

The idea was entirely his own, but as he glanced over the field he caught a glimpse of Captain Hargot doing the same thing, while his efforts were duplicated by several of his officers.

The giant airship might defy the strength of men, but it was powerless to pluck those mighty pillars from their bases, and in a few moments its plungings had ceased and it rested safely at its moorings.

Don found himself trembling from exertion and excitement, and his agitation had not subsided when Captain Hargot came over to him.

"I saw what you did, young fellow," he said. "I want to tell you that it was a mighty quick-witted thing to do. Perhaps it saved us from a runaway. It gave us a chance, anyway, to get her under control. But haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he added, taking a closer look under the visor of Don's cap. "Why, you're Don Sturdy, aren't you?"

"Sure thing," replied Don, with a smile. "We rode over this morning to take a look at the airship. I saw it once in the sky, but I wanted to see it at close quarters."

"Well, you couldn't have come at a luckier moment," said Captain Hargot heartily. "I'm twice glad that I arranged to have you come along with us to the Pole. You're made of just the kind of stuff we need on such a trip. And

as to looking over the ship, I'll show you over myself just as soon as I can get to it."

The chief aviator went away to another part of the field, and Teddy, who had been standing close by, turned to his friend.

"Gee, Don!" he said, "you've sure made a hit with the old man. How did you come to think of it?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Don modestly. "I just looked around, and the thing came to me."

"Just came to me," mimicked Brick, who would not have any such disclaimer of merit on the part of his chum. "Why didn't it come to me or any of these other fellows?"

"It did come to some," replied Don. "You notice that the captain and some of his officers were doing the same thing."

"That isn't the point," declared Teddy. "It was their business to do it. They'd practised doing it. They knew what those posts were for. But you'd never seen one before, and yet you knew in a wink just what to do. Don, you're the real goods, but you've got one fault. You're too modest."

"Guess I don't have to blow my own horn while I've got you to blow it for me," said Don, with a grin. "You're a mighty good press agent, Brick."

In a little while Captain Hargot returned, and Don introduced Teddy to him. He also

put in a good word for Dan Roscoe, the chauffeur, who was never likely to have such a chance again, and he was included in the party to be shown over the airship.

They were almost overwhelmed with admiration of the completeness and perfection of the huge craft. The captain, of course, knew every inch of her from stem to stern, and his pride in the vessel he commanded was evident in every word he spoke.

The boys were amazed at the intricate mass of struts and beams and girders in the interior of the craft. Seen from without, it had seemed like a huge tiger, and their thought had been that of a great bag with little else than gas within.

Now they found themselves in what might have been an enormous manufacturing plant, with metal beams crossing and intercrossing. It seemed as though the dirigible must weigh thousands of tons.

"How on earth can the ship carry such a weight?" asked Don, in wonderment.

"Does seem like an enormous load, doesn't it?" replied their guide. "The explanation lies in the material of which the struts and girders are made. If they were steel and iron, the ship would be anchored to the ground. There are nearly three thousand struts in the framework. But they're made of duralumin, an alloy that is light and strong at the same

time. Do you see that girder, sixteen feet long? Well, I could balance that on one finger. And yet seven or eight men could sit on it without it's yielding a particle.

"One of the big ocean steamers weighs somewhere round fifty thousand tons," the captain went on. "This airship is about two-thirds the length of a liner, but the whole thing weighs less than forty tons."

They passed on a metal plank between the great tanks of gasoline that furnished the driving power for the craft. They studied with interest the twenty separate gas bags on which the salvation of the voyagers from a fall depended.

"Big capacity there," commented the captain. "Equal to the cubic contents of seven hundred freight cars. You can see that every thing in this beauty of mine is on a gigantic scale."

One contrivance had scarcely aroused their admiration before it was succeeded by another. It seemed as though the skill and wit of man had been strained to the utmost for the equipment of the wonderful craft. There was the mighty rudder to guide her through the uncharted skies; the powerful engines that could send her whizzing through space at a dizzy speed; the marvelous collection of instruments for recording speed, height, weight and a host of other things necessary for the pilot to know;

the photographic laboratory with its motion picture reels; the flippers that acted like wings to gain elevation; the radio outfit; the keel corridor with quarters for the crew; the navigating room suspended from the keel, and a host of other things of which, in their quick inspection, the boys could get only the most superficial ideas, but which Don promised himself to master thoroughly in the future.

"She's the Pullman train of the air," said the captain proudly, when at last they stood on solid ground. "Only faster, smoother, and without any jolts or dust."

The boys and Dan fully agreed with him, and it was with the greatest reluctance that they at last turned their faces homeward.

"Wonder what the Eskimos will do when they see the *Red Monarch* come sailing through the skies," said Brick.

"Fall on their knees and pray, I suppose," replied Don. "They'll probably think it's some great eagle come to eat them up. I guess our own people would have felt just about the same way, if this had been sprung suddenly on them a hundred years ago."

"Gee, but we're lucky to be living now!" exclaimed Teddy. "Just think of it! A hundred years ago there wasn't any railroad, or ocean steamer, or electric light, or telegraph or telephone or automobile, or phonograph or radio or airship."

"You're dead right," agreed Don. "It shows," he added, with a grin, "how wise we were in choosing the right time to be born."

The boys were full of their subject, and the family listened with the keenest interest at the table that night, as Don and Teddy narrated the stirring events of the day. Don would have glossed over the part he had played, but Teddy would not have it, and what he had to say made Don blush and filled the eyes of his parents with pride. And more than ever did it confirm the parents in the conviction that a lad with such resources could be trusted to take care of himself as well as others amid the perils of the Arctic regions.

A few days later, Don had another occasion to go to Plainville on an errand from his Uncle Frank to Captain Hargot. This time he went alone, except for the driver, and, as it was late afternoon when he reached Plainville, he did not stay long. The gathering darkness and certain inward gnawings warned him that he must hurry if he was to get back to Hillville by supper time.

As he was moving away from the flying field to his car, he noticed a lad, apparently of about his own age, hanging around a fringe of bushes at the edge of the field.

At first he gave him only a passing glance, but then, as something about the figure struck him as familiar, he looked more closely. The

stranger seemed to him very much like the boy whose sandwich he had knocked from his hand when he leaped into the gully.

To make sure, he stepped into the car and slowly turned it until the figure was directly before him, though many yards distant. Then he turned on the headlights, and the powerful beams flashed full on the face of the skulker.

There was no mistake. It was Jake, the lad with whom he had nearly come to blows.

CHAPTER VII

A Vain Pursuit

There was a startled exclamation from Jake, for the sudden light almost blinded him. The next moment he got out of its range and plunged behind the bushes.

Don leaped from the car and started in pursuit. He was swift of foot, and in daylight would have had no trouble in running down his clumsy quarry.

But beyond the bushes was a patch of woodland, and it was into this that Jake ran. Don followed, but he had to slacken speed in the darkness, because of the danger of dashing against a tree trunk.

He went on for some distance, and then, realizing the futility of further search, returned slowly to the car.

"What were you chasing him for, Don?" asked Dan, who had been looking on in open-eyed wonder.

"I hardly know myself," replied Don, as he climbed in and Dan threw in the clutch and started homeward. "I suppose because I once

saw him in the company of the man who we think may have robbed my uncle. I thought I might be able to make him tell me something about that fellow and if he knew where he was."

"He cert'nly run like he had a guilty conscience," commented Dan, as he quickened speed and sent his machine purring along the road.

"He sure did," agreed Don. "Why should he have run at all, if he wasn't mixed up in something? I'll put the matter up to the detective as soon as I reach home. I have a hunch that, if we get hold of Jake, we'll find out something about the robbery."

Don made it his special business to communicate the information to the detective on arriving home, and the latter agreed that there might be something in it. He promised to go to Plainville at once, and hang around on the chance of catching the strange boy.

But nothing developed from this clue, and the mystery that enveloped the theft remained as deep and apparently as insoluble as before.

The eagerly awaited day came at last when the *Red Monarch* was to start on its long journey into the unknown. It was arranged that the whole Sturdy family, which included Professor Bruce, should go over to Plainville in the car to bid the voyagers Godspeed.

Dan was to go with them to drive the car, but

Don had to say his good-byes to Mrs. Roscoe and Jennie at the Hillville home.

The eyes of the two women were filled with tears, for they were greatly attached to Don, who, in turn, was very fond of them both, especially of Mrs. Roscoe, who had been with the Sturdys for many years.

"Good-bye Don," said Mrs. Roscoe, putting her arm about his shoulder. "It's awfully hard to have you go. I hope that God will bring you back safely to us."

"An' do be careful, Mister Don, an' don't let none of them bears git you," whimpered Jennie, wiping her eyes with her apron.

"I'll try not to," promised Don. "And I'll bring you back something nice, Jennie. How would you like a nice little Aurora Borealis?" he added playfully.

"I don't like none of them roarin' things," replied Jennie. "They git on my nerves. But if you could bring me a little splinter from that North Pole, I'd like to show it to my frens."

"I will if I can," replied Don, trying to retain his gravity. Then he climbed into the car and waved a farewell.

It was a rather quiet party that drove to Plainville, for all were busy with their thoughts. Mr. Sturdy was grave and absorbed, and Mrs. Sturdy was unable wholly to restrain her tears, though she tried to smile bravely as the time for parting drew near.

Ruth was very sober, and sat big-eyed and silent. Don's eyes were moist with tears of which he was not ashamed as, after pressing his mother and Ruth in his arms in a final embrace and shaking hands with his father, who was also profoundly moved, he stepped out of the car with Teddy and made his way to the airship which was to be his home for many weeks to come.

Fred and Emily Turner were there to see him off, as well as a number of other friends from Hillville, and his hand was limp from the shaking it had received when he prepared to climb into the dirigible.

Teddy was the last to grip his hand.

"The best of luck, Don," he said, as he tried to keep his voice steady.

"The same to you, Brick, old boy." responded Don, as he looked into the eyes of the faithful comrade who had stood by him in so many tight places.

A band began to play a stirring tune, the signal was given, and amid a lusty send-off from the throats of the crowd that had gathered, the great airship rose majestically into the air like a gigantic bird, turned its prow in a northwesterly direction, and was off.

Don waved to one little group below until they vanished from his sight. With the elation he felt, there was a deep undercurrent of heartache.

With the exception of his uncle Frank, who stood beside him, he was leaving behind him all that he held dear on earth. Would he ever see them again? Although he had made light of the dangers of the journey when he was talking with his family, he knew in his heart that it was full of perils, more, probably, than he had ever before encountered.

On his previous journeys he had gone to lands that had been known for centuries. Even in the jungle and the desert, he had not been so far out of reach of civilization as he would now be.

But this voyage would take him into the unknown, into regions most of which had never been trodden by human foot, into the domains of the Ice King who had claimed so many victims already. How did he know that his name would not be added to the list?

"A penny for your thoughts," came the rather amused voice of Captain Sturdy.

"I don't know that they are worth that much," answered Don, rousing himself from his reverie with a smile.

"How do you like your first experience in an airship?"

"Why, to tell the truth, I don't feel any movement at all," replied Don. "I thought at first it would be like going up in a swift elevator. But we might be at anchor, for all I can notice. The only way that I can tell we are

moving is by seeing the earth pass away beneath us."

"It certainly is smooth traveling," commented Captain Sturdy. "Even more so than an airplane, for that has its dips and dives, while we move along on an even keel."

"I suppose we're moving directly north," remarked Don.

"No, we're going northwest," corrected his uncle. "It's a case of the longest way around being the shortest way home. You see, if we went directly north, we'd have to travel for thousands of miles over Labrador and uninhabited parts of Canada where we wouldn't be able to replenish our supplies. So we're going straight across the United States until we reach Nome, Alaska. There we'll provide ourselves with everything we need, and then make our big hop-off for the Pole."

"How big a jump will that be?" asked Don.

"From Nome to the Pole is about fifteen hundred miles," was the reply. "With any kind of luck we ought to make it soon."

"Does Captain Hargot plan to come back the same way?" asked Don.

"No," answered Captain Sturdy. "For that would make a trip of three thousand miles from Nome to the Pole and back, and it might be hard to carry fuel and provisions for such a stretch. His plan is to fly from the Pole to Spitzbergen. That will be about six hundred miles, and there

we can replenish. After that, we'll come home by way of Europe and the Atlantic Ocean."

"But, of course, we'll have to land at the Pole and stay around there a while," suggested Don.

"Surely," was the reply. "There'd be no object in simply going there and coming right back. The Pole has already been discovered, so we'll be deprived of that honor. But Captain Hargot and the scientists with him hope to make discoveries that will be an immense addition to the knowledge of the world."

The liking of Captain Hargot for Don made the latter a privileged character, and he had the run of the ship. His natural adroitness and sure-footedness enabled him to thread the intricacies of the narrow passages with ease and safety, and he availed himself so fully of his privileges that he soon was as familiar with the great vessel as the members of the crew themselves.

That first night after supper he happened to be on the narrow footway between the gasoline tanks when he heard below him a cry for help.

He listened intently, thinking perhaps that his ears had deceived him.

"Help! Somebody help me!"

Again came the cry—a cry that was instinct with mortal fear:

"Help!"

Don looked downward and in the metal lattice work of the structure far beneath him could just discern the outline of a struggling human figure.

Without an instant's hesitation, Don swung himself out on one of the long narrow ladders and began his descent.

CHAPTER VIII

A Dangerous Descent

The upper part of the great airship was well lighted, but this availed Don little as he made his way downward, for the interlacing beams and girders threw such shadows that he soon found himself in semi-darkness.

The lad knew that he was taking great risks, but the knowledge that a fellow creature was in peril urged him on. He had to feel his way and get a firm foundation for his feet before he let go with his hands to clutch another support lower down.

It would have been comparatively easy had he been descending a regular ladder with horizontal rungs. But the beams and girders ran diagonally, and he found his feet resting on struts that inclined at an angle of forty-five degrees.

Twice his feet slipped, and he swung off into space, supported only by the grip of his hands. The sweat was pouring from him and his muscles ached.

"Help! Oh, help me!"

The cries still came from below, and Don kept on with frantic energy, fearing that perhaps he would be too late. At last his foot touched the shoulder of the crouching figure, and he maneuvered until he succeeded in letting himself down to a level with it.

In the darkness, which at that depth was almost complete, he could not discern the features of the face that turned toward him. The hands reached out and clutched him with such a force that he was almost torn from the support to which he was clinging.

"Easy there!" cried Don, as he braced himself. "I've come to help you, but we'll both go down if you pull at me like that. Just brace up and keep your nerve, and I'll try to get you up."

The tightness of the grip relaxed.

"That's better," said Don, as he slung his arm around a strut and thus took some of the strain off his hands. "Now, how are you caught here? What's holding you?"

"My leg's wedged in between two of these struts," came in a whimper that showed how thoroughly demoralized the victim had become.

Don lowered himself still further and felt around until he found the imprisoned leg. He pulled on it in order to release it, and his companion let out a howl.

"It hurts!" he cried. "Don't pull so hard!"

"Of course it hurts," replied Don, with a little

feeling of contempt. "But it's got to come out. It's jammed in here pretty tight."

He pulled and hauled until at last he released the imprisoned member, though not without an accompaniment of groans and cries that grated on his ears and nerves.

"There you are," he said, when he had finally worked the leg free. "Can you move it? Does it feel as if it were broken?"

"I don't know," moaned his companion. "It hurts horribly."

Don ran his hand over the leg, flexed the knee, thus assuring himself that no bones were fractured.

"I'll rub it for you until the blood gets to circulating," he said. "Then we'll try to climb out of here."

"I can never make it!" groaned his companion, as he looked fearfully upward.

"Of course you'll make it!" declared Don. "You've got to make it. But you'll never do it unless you keep your nerve. I'll help you all I can."

He assisted his companion to his feet and put his hands upon a strut immediately above.

"Now," said Don, "we're going to climb. You use both hands and both feet. I guess one hand will do for me most of the time, and I'll keep my arm about your waist so that you can't fall. Come along now."

With much groaning and whimpering, his

companion made the effort, Don encouraging him with each step gained and supporting him with one arm except for the moments when he had to use both in pulling himself from one strut to the next above.

It was like a nightmare, and more than once when his companion slipped and his full weight came on Don's arm, it taxed his grit and muscle to the utmost. He had to supply most of the strength and all of the courage for both. But he kept on grimly, and finally, with one desperate heave, got his companion up over the top, where he sprawled at full length on a narrow platform.

Don followed and sank down gasping, his lungs feeling as though they would burst and every muscle of his body sore and aching.

Then he looked at his companion, and an exclamation of astonishment broke from his lips.

"Why, you're the fellow they call Jake!" he cried.

"Why shouldn't they call me that?" Jake replied, in a surly tone that had in it no particle of gratitude for the help Don had given him. "It's my name, and I've got a right to it."

"How did you get here?" demanded Don.

"That's my business," was the answer. "But when it comes to that, I've got more right here than you have. My father is the captain of this airship."

Don was startled.

"Then you're Jake Hargot!" he exclaimed. "Your father told me that he had a son, but he didn't mention your first name. Said you'd run away from home."

"Guess a fellow doesn't have to stay around an old shebang all the time just because he was born there," growled Jake.

"Your father was mighty worried about you," said Don. "Said he'd tried all he could to find you. He'll be glad to see you."

"Guess he won't kill any fatted calf," grumbled Jake, who seemed none too sure of the parental reception.

Just at that moment Captain Hargot came in sight, making a round of inspection of the ship.

An exclamation of relief and delight came into his eyes as they fell upon the face of his son, who had risen and was regarding him rather fearfully.

"Jake! My dear boy!" he cried, hurrying toward the lad and throwing his arm affectionately around his shoulder. "How on earth did you get here? I'd been looking everywhere for you, and worrying myself to death about you."

"Guess I'd better be getting along," said Don, rising to his feet, as he felt that father and son ought to be left alone together.

"Just a minute," said Captain Hargot.

"How did you boys happen to be together? Do you know each other?"

"Why, we'd seen each other before," answered Don. "But I didn't know till just now that he was your son. I hadn't heard his last name."

"How did you know he was on the ship? You didn't help to smuggle him aboard without my knowledge, did you?" the captain asked, with a little sternness coming into his tone.

"No, I didn't," replied Don, nettled somewhat by the implied accusation. "It was only by accident I came across him a few minutes ago."

"Was he hiding up here?" asked the captain.

"Not when I first saw him," replied Don. "He had slipped and fallen down among those struts," and he pointed to the yawning gulf below.

Bewilderment and alarm chased each other over the bronzed face of the captain.

"Let's get this thing straight!" he exclaimed, and ordered sternly: "Tell me just what happened."

Thus adjured, there was nothing for Don to do but to tell the entire story, which he did as briefly and simply as possible.

"And you went down there and brought him up!" exclaimed Captain Hargot gratefully and admiringly. "That was a plucky

thing to do. That's twice you've placed me under obligation."

"I did my own climbing," growled Jake. "He helped me a little, but I would have got up, anyway."

Don said nothing, but the captain looked a little ashamed and disgusted.

"That's no way to look at it," he said sharply. "He risked his life to help you, and you might at least be thankful. How did you get on this ship anyway?"

"Oh, I got tired of loafing," replied Jake. "I thought I'd like to take this trip; so I slipped on board in the dark and hid behind these gasoline tanks. Then after the ship got started, I got hungry and was coming out to look you up when I slipped and fell down into this hole. I managed to catch on somewhere, but my leg got jammed and I couldn't get up."

"Well," said the captain, "I'm so thankful that I've found you and have you where I can keep an eye on you that I'm not going to give you the scolding you deserve. But you'll have to watch your step and toe the mark from now on. You're going to work just as hard as any of the crew. You'll get no favors because you're the captain's son. It's time that you got under rigid discipline, and perhaps it will make a man of you. Come along to my cabin now, and I'll see about fixing up your sleeping quarters."

With another warm word of thanks to Don, in which Jake did not have the grace to join, the father and son left him, and Don rejoined his uncle, to whom he narrated the things that had just happened.

Captain Sturdy listened with the keenest interest. He laughed when Don spoke of Jake's lack of appreciation.

"An illustration of the old Scotch proverb: 'Do a man a favor and he'll never forgive you,'" he chuckled. "Well, I'm glad that the captain's got his son back, though he's no great addition to the ship's company."

"I'm glad for another reason," remarked Don.

"What is that?" asked his uncle.

"Because I think that Jake is mixed up in some way with the robbery of Uncle Amos's minerals," Don replied. "I don't mean that he actually took part in the theft," he added. "But he was pretty thick with that fellow we suspected. Perhaps I can get something out of him that would help to find the thief. Though even if I did, it wouldn't help much until we got back."

"Yes, it might," declared Captain Sturdy. "We have a radio outfit on this craft, and if we could get anything of importance from Jake, we could wireless it back to Hillville and set the detective on the trail. See what you can do. But go about it cautiously. Don't let Captain

Hargot get wind of what you are after. He's had enough trouble with the boy already, and I don't want him to know that we think he may have been the companion of thieves."

Don and his uncle found their sleeping quarters, which were on one of the six cars that swung from beneath the craft, rather restricted, owing to the necessity of utilizing every inch of space and dispensing with every ounce of weight. But they were very comfortable. The crew slept in the compartments that ran along the keel of the airship.

The next day was full of new and delightful experiences for Don. His eyes never wearied of watching the panorama that unrolled like a ribbon below him. He had a map with him, and was able to indentify the cities and rivers and natural wonders over which they passed in their swift but serene flight. Farms and orchards, meadows and woodlands, hills and valleys, succeeded each other in bewildering and endless variety, and he learned to appreciate as never before the grandeur and immensity of America.

They passed over Niagara, and Don was entranced by the spectacle of the waters of the mighty cataract pouring over the brink, though he was too high to hear its thunders. They sailed above the Great Lakes, their rippling waters gleaming in the sun. They saw beneath them the great city of Chicago, with the smoke

from its plants and factories rising in the air. The busy bustling life and the teeming myriads of people below them seemed almost as remote as though they belonged to another planet.

It was a feast to the eye, the soul, and the intellect, and again and again Don blessed the good fortune that had enabled him to take this trip. The only "fly in the ointment" was the absence of Teddy. With his chum beside him, his happiness would have been complete.

He had no opportunity of seeing Jake until nearly evening, when he ran across him in one of the reserve oil compartments of the airship.

The captain's son was wearing a pair of overalls, and his face was wet with perspiration and stained with oil. It was evident that the discipline promised by his father had already begun. And it was equally evident that the discipline was not at all to Jake's liking, for his features bore a scowl, which deepened when he caught sight of Don.

The latter made up his mind to act pleasantly, and he greeted Jake with a friendly smile.

"How are you feeling after your fall yesterday?" he asked.

Jake merely grunted and kept on at his work.

"Leg getting on all right?" asked Don.

"Well enough," growled Jake.

"This is a great trip," Don persisted. "Ever been in an airship before?"

"No," snarled Jake. "And I never want to be again. If I'd known I'd have to work like a slave I'd never have come on this trip, you bet."

"But there's lots of things to see and learn," remarked Don.

"For those who have time to see them," grumbled Jake. "All very well for the passengers," he burst out bitterly. "But I'm just one of the crew."

"Well, you're in good company, anyhow," remarked Don. "They seem to be a fine lot of fellows"

"Mebbe," growled Jake. "But there's a heap of other fellows I'd rather be with."

"Like Slippery Jones for example?" asked Don carelessly, as he suddenly recollected a name that the detective had used when he first came to Hillville.

Jake jumped as though he had been shot.

"What do you mean by that?" he cried.

"Just what I said," replied Don. "What is there about the name of Slippery Jones to make you jump?"

For answer Jake doubled up his fists and advanced against Don threateningly.

CHAPTER IX

The Shaft Goes Home

Don refused to budge, and gazed unflinchingly into the angry eyes of his adversary. Jake Hargot was heavier than he was, but not so muscular, and Don was sure that he had a cowardly streak in him that would make him think twice before he struck a blow.

"Look here," demanded Jake, "what do you mean by coming up here to ask me questions? Who do you think you are, anyway? Who gave you any license to meddle in other people's business?"

"Perhaps it's my business, too," answered Don. "My uncle was robbed, and the detective thought that it looked like the work of a jailbird called Slippery Jones. I saw you hanging out with a tough-looking man, who disappeared just after the robbery. For all I know, that fellow may have been Slippery Jones."

"Do you mean to say that I robbed your uncle?" demanded Jake fiercely.

"I don't say anything of the kind," replied Don. "I only say that I saw you in the company

of a man we suspect of being mixed up with it. It doesn't say that because you were with him you knew what he did or what he was planning to do. You might not have thought that he was a robber."

"Well, I don't know anything about the robbery, and it's mighty fresh of you to ask me questions as if you were a detective and I were a thief," growled Jake. "You can't get away with anything of that kind here. I've a good mind to knock your block off."

"You'd better change your mind then," advised Don. "You might not find it such an easy thing to do. I wouldn't stand here quietly while you were doing it, you know. But if that fellow's name wasn't Slippery Jones, what was it?"

Jake's jaw dropped. He was clearly taken aback.

"It—it was Smith," he stammered. "Yes, that's it, John Smith."

Don smiled to himself at Jake's poverty of invention.

"Common name, isn't it?" he remarked, with a touch of sarcasm. "There's an awful lot of John Smiths in the directory. First name one would think of, if he had to invent one in a hurry, isn't it?"

"Do you mean to say that I'm not telling the truth?" blustered Jake, though, by the wavering of his eyes, Don knew that he was not.

"Not at all," replied Don. "I'm not saying anything of the kind, though, of course, I have a right to think what I like," he added.

"You clear out of this oil room!" cried Jake furiously. "And you keep away from me after this, or it will be the worse for you."

He turned his back and Don departed, well satisfied with the result of his stormy interview.

The shaft he had shot at a venture had gone home.

He felt reasonably sure that Jake's ill-favored companion had been Slippery Jones, and his uncle agreed with him when Don told him of his talk with Jake.

"It's the only reasonable explanation," Captain Sturdy remarked. "Else, why should he have been so flabbergasted when you mentioned the name? You wouldn't have jumped. Neither would I. It was a guilty conscience."

"There's one thing that puzzles me, though," observed Don. "The detective, Lawson, said that Slippery Jones was doing time in jail. If that's so, he couldn't have been at Hillville when the robbery took place."

"The detective may have been mistaken," replied Captain Sturdy. "He may have known that the man had been sentenced, but perhaps his term had expired. Perhaps he had been released on parole. Or possibly, he had escaped from prison."

"What shall we do about it?" asked Don.

"I'm going to send a radio message urging Lawson to concentrate on Jones, to look up his case and find whether he's actually in prison," replied Don's uncle. "It's a clue that may prove fruitful, if it's followed up."

Don saw little of Jake Hargot for the next day or two, as the latter seemed to take care to keep out of sight as much as possible. Occasionally Don ran across him, but Jake passed him without a sign of recognition.

They had passed over the great prairies of the West, had witnessed the beauties of Yellowstone Park and the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, and were now flying over the Rockies. To avoid collision with the snow-clad peaks, they had to fly at a much higher altitude than usual, and Don noticed a little difficulty in breathing, owing to the rarity of the air. He noted, too, that they were moving at considerably less speed than when they had been passing over the level stretches.

"I suppose that's to avoid the danger of collision with the mountain peaks," Don remarked to his uncle.

"In part, yes," was the answer. "Though there wouldn't be much difficulty in doing that, except in case of fog or darkness. The real reason for the slower speed is that the engines can't develop so much power in this rarefied atmosphere. You've noticed that each of our power cars has in it a three hundred horse-

power motor. But that three hundred becomes less than a hundred and fifty when the ship gets up to a height of twenty thousand feet."

On and on the airship went at a steady pace that ate up the miles amazingly, on over the top of Mount Lassen, the only active volcano in the United States, over the snow-piled summits of Mount Shasta and Mount Jefferson, rearing their peaks in solitary grandeur toward the skies, over the heights of Mount Hood, that at the moment was shrouded in a sea of fog far below them, and then into a bleak country where the growing cold soon made it necessary to put on heavier clothing to withstand the nipping of the upper air.

"Out of the United States now," observed Captain Hargot. "That is, continental United States. This is Alaska, our extreme northwestern outpost. We're getting pretty near the edge of civilization now, my boy."

They reached the city of Nome, and here the great dirigible descended, to be welcomed with cheers from what seemed the whole population, gathered at the flying field. The airship proved an enormous attraction through the three days it remained there, while fuel and supplies were replenished, a careful inspection of every inch of the monster craft was made, and, as the captain expressed it, "belts were tightened" for the great hop-off into the ice-bound wastes of the Arctic.

Don and his uncle found telegrams awaiting them from those at home—there had, of course, not been time for letters to reach them—and Don answered with long letters full of affection. He thought as he posted his letters that by the time they should be received he would be far into the mysterious regions of eternal ice.

When the last detail had been completed, the *Red Monarch*, to the accompaniment of a great send-off, soared once more into the skies, looking from beneath like the flaming tail of a comet, and turned her nose toward the Pole.

Now indeed passengers and crew had to arm themselves against the bitterness of the Frost King. The air was tingling with cold, and the descent of the scarlet thread in the thermometer could almost be seen. All donned their furs until they looked like Eskimos, and braced themselves to meet whatever might be in store for them.

The day after they left Nome, the barometer began to go down with startling rapidity, and the faces of the captain and officers wore anxious looks.

Great banks of cloud reared themselves on the horizon, ominous and sinister. With every passing minute they grew darker and heavier, and violent gusts came at intervals that caused the airship to rear and plunge like a vessel in a storm.

Below stretched great fields of ice, in places

comparatively smooth, in others heaped high with great floes that had crashed together and lay about in all sorts of grotesque and monstrous shapes, as though they had been the playthings of giants, who had tossed them aside when tired of them.

"About time to reef sails, isn't it?" Don asked his uncle, as they watched the gathering of the storm.

"That's what any captain of a vessel at sea would have done before this," was the reply. "But it can't be done up here. Nothing can be done, in fact, except to see that everything's tight and shipshape and to be ready to let out ballast in case we're driven down too near the ice field. After that, all we can do is to wait and hope."

They had not long to wait. Darker and more threatening grew the clouds, while the gusts became more frequent and spiteful. It was as though the elements were warning the intruder to withdraw before they loosed their full fury against it.

Then the storm came—came with a rush and a roar and a rage that were indescribable. It seemed to come from all quarters at once.

The *Red Monarch* had been turned with its back toward the point from which the storm threatened, so as to run before the wind. There was no chance to head into it. All the driving

power of the engines could avail nothing against such a gale as menaced.

But, as though to mock the precaution, the wind now struck the great airship on all parts at once. It was as though the dirigible was in the center of a waterspout and being whirled around and around. Upon every part of the huge envelope the gale beat in fury.

The *Red Monarch* was in the grip of a hurricane!

CHAPTER X

At the Mercy of the Storm

At the first onslaught of the gale the *Red Monarch* had careened so violently that Don and his uncle were thrown to the floor of the cabin. Reaching out desperately to catch hold of something stable, their hands encountered a stanchion, which they clutched. They held to this with the grip of drowning men, while they were slatted and tossed hither and thither, being knocked against other objects in the cabin until their bodies were covered with bruises.

Don's head was whirling with the dizzy motion, as the airship tossed up and down and sideways, as though it were in a giant whirlpool. It seemed as helpless as a chip on the waters of a cataract.

"Do you think she'll turn turtle?" Don asked of his uncle, shouting to be heard above the roar of the storm.

"Not that," replied Captain Sturdy. "Her keel is too heavily ballasted for that. I don't think a storm ever brewed that could ever turn her completely over."

For more than an hour the storm raged with unabated fury. Then it gradually moderated, and finally retreated like a wild beast to its lair, growling over having lost its prey.

As the tempest lessened, the plungings of the airship ceased, though she still rocked from the quiverings of the storm's aftermath. Soon she had swung into her course again, and was voyaging with apparent serenity through the air.

It had been a terrifying experience, as was evident from the pale faces of the officers and crew, as they began to move about on their accustomed tasks.

"A terrible storm, Captain," remarked Don's uncle, as he met Captain Hargot emerging from the engine room.

"The worst I ever knew," was the reply.

"All's well that ends well," remarked Captain Sturdy. "How has the ship seemed to stand it? Has she come through without damage?"

"Can't tell yet," replied Captain Hargot. "We'll have to make a careful examination. The envelope doesn't seem to have given anywhere, and the gas pressure is the same as usual. As to the framework, I don't know. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that some of the trusses had been bent or strained. I'll know before long."

"It seems to me almost a miracle that it

didn't tear a hole in the bag itself," remarked Don to his uncle, as they strolled through the keel corridor. "That seems so light and thin."

"It's very tough though," replied his uncle. "The cotton cover fabric is of the best quality, and the gas bags are lined with what they call goldbeater's skin, a tissue from the intestines of oxen. I am told that it took the membranes of over two million cattle to line the bags in this airship. It seems as thin as gossamer, but it's almost as tough as iron."

At dinner that night, Captain Hargot was grave and abstracted and the same mood seemed to descend upon his officers. It was evident that something had occurred to cause them serious anxiety.

All that night the usual quiet was lacking, and the air was resonant with the clanking of hammers and other implements.

The next morning dawned bright, but bitterly cold. Don, looking over the side after he had come out from breakfast, was surprised to see how low the ship was flying.

Ordinarily it kept at a height of a thousand or two thousand feet. The lower altitude was chosen for the purposes of the photographers of the expedition, so that they could get as close as was safe to the objects they wanted to picture.

As Don looked now, he saw that they could not be more than three hundred feet high. The

glittering ice floes beneath him stood out with startling distinctness, and he could trace the ridges between them.

He turned to his uncle for an explanation.

"Isn't Captain Hargot taking a pretty risky chance in flying so low?" he queried.

"No more than he has to take," was the answer. "The fact is, he's thinking of making a landing."

Don's heart took a bound.

"You don't mean that we've got to the Pole already?" he asked eagerly.

"Not by a good many hundred miles," replied Captain Sturdy. "That storm yesterday blew us a long way out of our course. No, he's thinking of landing now not because he wants to but because he must."

"What has happened?" asked Don.

"The storm has done a good deal of damage to the airship," returned his uncle. "The captain tells me that besides some injury to the framework, the supports of the two aft power cars have been weakened. One of the supports has been torn entirely from its fastenings. He doesn't dare leave it that way, for another storm would wrench it clean from the ship."

Don shuddered as he thought of that car with its doomed occupants hurtling down through space.

"He can't repair it properly while aloft, of course," remarked Don. "So there's nothing

left for him to do but make a landing. Luckily it isn't open sea beneath. But how's he going to land?" he asked, in some perplexity. "It takes hundreds of men to pull the ship down and hold it."

For answer, the boy's uncle led him to another part of the corridor, where Captain Hargot and a number of his officers and crew were grouped about a huge anchor, to which was fastened a heavy cable.

"There's the joker that's supposed to do the trick," said Captain Sturdy, pointing to the anchor. "It's really an experiment, for it has never been used before, since there never before has been a North Pole dirigible flight. But it's all right in theory, and it ought to work in practice. It'll not be long before we know."

Don pondered the matter for a while, then said slowly:

"The idea is, I suppose, to let the anchor down and drag it along until it gets a grip on the under part of a berg or a floe. When it does, the airship will go lower and lower."

"That's it," replied his uncle. "The slack on the rope being gathered in by a windlass, you know. When the pneumatic bumpers on the bottom of the cars touch the ice, we'll know that we've arrived."

A considerable time elapsed before they came to a place that seemed to Captain Hargot suitable for an anchorage. But at last they

reached a section of ice that, while smooth in spots, was studded at intervals with great hummocks and bergs, amid whose interstices the anchor might get a grip.

In the meantime the airship had been settling lower and lower, until now it was within a hundred feet of the surface of the ice field.

At the proper moment, Captain Hargot gave a sharp word of command, and the anchor was let down over the side. It struck the ice with a metallic clink.

All on board watched breathlessly as the *Red Monarch,* with her engines stopped, drifted along under a slight momentum. The anchor scraped and banged over the ice, its flukes catching for a moment on some projecting point and tearing it away, until finally they were caught between two giant floes and held.

Some of the crew pulled in gently by aid of the windlass to see if the grip were tight and to dig the flukes still more deeply into the ice. The test proved satisfactory. The anchor held!

A cheer rose from the anxious watchers, and a moment later the windlass was busy gathering in the slack and gradually forcing the airship down.

At last the pneumatic bumpers touched the ice, and a moment later all scrambled out.

The mechanics set to work at once, as did also the photographers and the meteorologists

who had accompanied the expedition, all intent on their several interests. Don and his uncle wandered about, studying with curiosity the scene so new to them.

At a little distance, a seal, who was fishing at a hole in the ice, went off with a splash and dived under the floes. A moment later the huge head of a walrus popped up through the hole, grunted his vexation and dismay at the sight of the intruders, and disappeared.

As he lifted his gaze from the hole where the walrus had been a moment before, Don's keen eyes caught a glimpse of two figures a long distance ahead. At first he thought that they were some of the grotesque ice shapes, but an instant later he was sure that they were moving.

"Will you lend me your glasses, Uncle Frank?" he asked.

The glasses were handed over, and Don focused his eyes on the distant objects.

One glance was enough.

"Bears!" he shouted. "Polar bears!"

CHAPTER XI

The Jaws of the Bear

Captain Sturdy snatched the glasses from Don's hand.

"By Jove!" he cried. "So they are! Here's our chance. Let's get after them!"

He hurried to Captain Hargot, who was directing the work of his men.

"Captain, how long do you expect to have to stay here?" he inquired hurriedly.

"For the greater part of the day, I expect," answered the captain. "We find that there's more to be done than we bargained for. We'll be lucky to get off by late afternoon. Why?"

"I've just got a glimpse of a couple of polar bears," was the answer. "If I have luck, you can have some bear steaks for supper tonight."

"Look out that it isn't the other way round," said Captain Hargot, with a smile. "These polar bears are mighty bad medicine, especially when they travel in pairs. But if you want to take a chance, good luck go with you. Only be sure to get back in time."

"We'll do that," promised Captain Sturdy, as he hurried to his cabin to get rifles for himself and Don.

Don was aflame with excitement. He knew that the sport was perilous, but that only gave it an added spice. He examined his rifle carefully, and after making sure that it was in good shape hurried off with his uncle.

The quarry had considerably increased the distance between them and their pursuers, and were loping along at a sort of dog trot. If they kept this up, it would be impossible to overtake them on foot. The only hope of success lay in the chance that the animals might stop to fish or rest.

The difficulty of pursuit was increased still further by the fact that what wind there was was blowing directly from the hunters in the direction of the bears. The keen scent of the latter could be depended on to reveal the presence of their enemies. It was necessary therefore to make a long detour and attempt a flank attack.

The two hunters set off therefore, describing a semi-circle and relying upon the numerous hummocks in the ice to veil their movements until they got near enough for a shot.

It was hard and slippery work, and before long, despite the cold of the air, Don found himself perspiring. Several times he fell, and received numerous scrapes and bruises. But

the difficulty of the chase only hardened the determination of both uncle and nephew.

At intervals the hunters caught sight of the two lumbering figures, and were glad to note that they were proceeding more slowly. Once they stopped altogether, and remained stretched out on the ice for several minutes before they resumed what had now become little more than a walk. It was probable that the sudden appearance of the airship had first set them in motion, and that their first alarm at the monster from the skies was now subsiding.

Then, all of a sudden, the hunters lost sight of their quarry altogether. Again and again they peered cautiously about the edge of hummocks, with nothing to reward their gaze.

The captain unslung his glasses, but they, too, revealed nothing. No moving figures dotted the ice field. Yet, it was impossible that the bears should have vanished beyond the horizon.

"Do you think they could have sighted us and are lying in wait for us?" asked Don, as his eyes swept the ice field.

"I don't think so," replied his uncle. "They're more likely to have gone into their ice cave, if it's hereabouts. Or they may be lying down and resting behind some big hummock. At any rate, we're probably getting

nearer to them all the time, and that's what we came out for."

The hunters moved on for some distance farther, and then the captain called a council.

"Now, Don, my boy," he counseled, "I think that we'll come across those fellows before long. I want to warn you that wounding them won't do much good. You've got to make the first bullet do the work. Send it through the eye or the heart, whichever gives you the best target."

"I'll remember," promised Don, as he clutched his rifle more tightly.

Soon they came to a cluster of hummocks covering a space of perhaps two hundred feet.

"I'll go round one side of these, and you go round the other," whispered Captain Sturdy. "Remember that the first one who hears a shot will come running toward the other to give help if necessary."

Don nodded, and began to skirt the side that had been assigned to him, his heart beating high, not with fear, but with excitement. But he knew from experience that his eye would be true and his arm steady when the crisis came.

He moved with all the stealth of an Indian, just creeping along at times, all his senses on the alert. He heard nothing.

Suddenly, he became conscious of an acrid odor in the air, a taint that had not been there a moment before. As softly as a shadow, he

moved forward another few steps. Now he could hear what sounded like a faint scratching or crunching.

Right ahead of him was a jumbled mass of ice floes that rose to a height of about ten feet. He crept to the edge of this and slowly, very slowly, peered around it.

He had found what he sought!

About twelve feet away from him, with its back toward him, lay a great bear, munching some fish that had evidently just been scooped out of the water.

A few feet further was its fellow, even more monstrous in size, watching a hole in the ice, with paw close to the water ready for the lightning stroke that would provide it also with a meal.

Don was to the leeward of the game, so that they could not catch his scent, and, besides, they were so busily engaged as to have laid aside for the moment their natural wariness.

In the position he was in, Don could not get a shot, for his left arm was in advance, and his right was still behind the hummock. He would have to step out into the open to take aim.

For a moment he thought of going around to the other side of the heaped ice floes and try for his quarry without exposing himself. But he dismissed that, because of the fear of making a noise and because that would have brought him to windward.

Withdrawing for a moment into the shelter of the hummock, he rose to his feet. He had decided on his plan of action. The further bear was to be his first target. If he brought that one down, he would be ready for the other by the time it had scrambled to its feet and turned to face him.

With his rifle already at his shoulder, he stepped boldly out into the open.

The sound of his footfall acted like an electric shock on the monsters.

The bear that was fishing turned like a flash toward the disturber of its retreat. With a horrible growl, it reared itself on its hind legs and started toward Don, great jaws open and eyes glaring with fury.

In doing this, it furnished a broad target in the immense breast, covered with coarse yellowish white hair. It was this on which Don had counted.

Don's rifle cracked, and the bullet went straight to its mark, penetrating the creature's heart. Without delay Don aimed at the second bear, which by this time had scrambled to its feet.

But the boy had not reckoned with the tremendous vitality of the polar bear. A smaller animal, thus wounded, would have fallen in its tracks. But the impetus with which the wounded bear had launched itself against the foe carried it forward for a considerable dis-

tance before it finally yielded to the inevitable and fell, with a last lurch of its formidable paw against the enemy.

Don was forced to dodge, or the bear would have crashed down on him, thus making him an easy victim for the beast's mate. As he jumped aside, the sweep of the bear's paw caught the stock of his rifle and tore it from his hands.

It fell with a clatter and slid over the ice several feet away. Don rushed for it, but his foot slipped and he went down.

He scrambled up, but as he did so he saw that the other bear was within ten feet of him, and coming toward him like an express train. He was too late. If he stooped now to get his rifle, the bear would be upon him before he could straighten up.

He turned and ran for his life!

CHAPTER XII

Lost in the Fog

Behind him as he ran, Don could hear the padding of the monster's feet and the ferocious grunts and growls that issued from its cavernous jaws. The sound struck terror to his heart and added wings to his feet.

On solid ground, he might have had a chance for a while of outdistancing the animal, though the bear's superior endurance would have triumphed in the end. But on this slippery surface, he was at a terrible disadvantage.

The padding and the growls grew more distinct, and Don knew his pursuer was gaining on him. He did not dare look over his shoulder, for that would have slackened his speed.

A moment later, he could feel the hot breath of the bear on his neck, and knew that the beast was preparing to reach for him. He turned suddenly at right angles to the course he had been pursuing.

The unexpected move baffled his enemy for a moment, and by the time the bear had checked itself and turned, Don had gained several feet.

But this advantage was only transient, and Don felt that he was doomed. His breath was coming fast, his lungs seemed as though they would burst from his body. The slippery surface made him feel as though he were running in a nightmare. He knew that if he went down—

And just then he did go down!

There was a fierce growl of satisfaction from his pursuer, and Don looked up at a pair of wicked eyes and slavering jaws and resigned himself to death.

A rifle cracked sharply. The bear shivered. Another shot followed instantly, and the great creature went down with a crash, so close to Don that he could feel the rough rasping of the hide as it scraped against him.

Don struggled weakly to his feet, and the next minute his uncle's arms were around him, supporting him.

"You're not hurt?" the captain asked anxiously, as he looked the boy over.

"Nothing except my feelings, I guess," said Don, trying to summon up a smile, in which he had only indifferent success. "I never had such a scare in my life!"

"It was a close call," said his uncle soberly, as he looked at their prostrate adversary, whose body was still twitching. "I ran the instant I heard your shot, but I don't mind admitting that my heart was in my mouth when

I saw how close the animal was to you. But where's the other bear?"

"He's done for, I guess," responded Don, to whom his strength and spirits were returning. "I plugged him first, and he went down. If he hadn't knocked the gun out of my hand, I'd have had time to get this one too."

"Fine work, my boy!" exclaimed the captain, patting him on the shoulder. "I'm proud of you. But now we'll go back and get your gun and take a look at the other bear to make sure it's dead."

They went back cautiously, the captain keeping his rifle ready for instant use. But the precaution proved needless. The victim of Don's prowess as a marksman lay sprawled out on the ice, with eyes glazed and body already stiffening.

"Magnificent specimens, both," cried Don jubilantly.

"And of just the species that I came up here to seek. This is one of our lucky days," added Captain Sturdy, hardly less excitedly.

"Guess we'll be able to keep your promise to have bear steaks for supper," remarked Don, with a smile.

"Thanks to you," remarked the captain.

"Thanks still more to you," returned Don.

"Well, we won't quarrel about it," said Captain Sturdy. "Each of us has bagged a bear, so honors are easy. But now that we've

got them, the question is, what we're going to do with them."

"We might take their teeth and claws as trophies," suggested Don.

"That wouldn't be enough," was the reply. "I want to get skins, heads, and everything, so that they can be stuffed and set up in the museum when we get home. I'll just take some notes of them now, and mark down the respects in which they differ from previously known species. Then we'll get back to the airship and get help to have them taken over there. We'll have to have a fire to skin them by, for this air will freeze them stiff in a few minutes."

Captain Sturdy took out his notebook and was soon busy with his scientific memoranda, while Don examined with interest the creatures a little while ago so terrible and now so harmless.

He noted the humpy shoulders, as powerful as those of a lion, the fearful claws and teeth to which he had so nearly fallen a victim, the network of hairs on the paws that prevented the animals from slipping on the ice and had given his pursuer such an advantage over him in that race for life. He shuddered as he thought of his narrow escape.

In their preoccupation, neither Don nor his uncle had noted the haze that had come over

the sky and was gradually blotting out from view all objects at a distance.

The captain finished his work at last, closed his book with a snap, and rose to his feet.

"Well, that's that!" he ejaculated with great satisfaction. "I guess we've done something that will make the scientific folk at home sit up and take notice. Great Scott!" he exclaimed, as he looked about him in consternation. "What's happened?"

"Just a bit of a fog," remarked Don carelessly. "I guess it will lift in a few minutes."

"A bit of a fog!" repeated the captain. "Why, it's a regular shroud, and it's getting thicker every minute!"

"Guess we'd better be getting back to the airship," said Don, his ease of manner vanishing as he noted the unmistakable alarm in his uncle's tone.

"Easier said than done, perhaps," muttered the captain, as his eyes sought vainly to penetrate the fog that was settling down on them like a blanket—a wet dank blanket, worse than the dry cold, and which sent a chill to the very marrow of their bones.

"Have you any idea of the direction in which the airship lies?" Captain Sturdy asked his nephew.

"Not the least," replied Don. "I lost sight of it some time ago, and we've done so much doubling and twisting since then that I'm all

turned around. I don't know whether I'm facing north, east, south or west."

The captain took from his pocket a small compass that was his inseparable companion.

"Our general direction was due north when we set out this morning," he said, as he examined the instrument closely. "If we had pursued a straight line, all we should have to do now would be to go due south to get back to the ship. But, as you say, we've gone in so many different directions that our angle may be different. Due south sounds rather definite, but it may lead us miles to one side or the other of the ship. Still, south must be our general direction, and we'll have to take our chance."

He took out his big hunting knife, slashed into the skin of one of the bears and cut off a great chunk of meat near the flank.

"Getting Captain Hargot's steak ready?" asked Don.

"Perhaps, if everything goes well," was the reply. "But there's a possibility that we'll feast on this ourselves. It's best to be prepared for any emergency."

"Don't you think they may send out a party from the ship to find us?" asked Don.

"They certainly will if we don't get back soon," replied his uncle. "And they'll come in this general direction. For that reason, we'll move slowly so as not to get past the ship

and on the other side. And at intervals we'll fire our rifles, so as to serve as a guide. Then, there's always a chance that the fog will lift at any time."

But the fog did not lift. It seemed, if possible, to get thicker and thicker, until if the two hunters separated for a few yards they lost sight of each other and could only find each other by the sound of their voices.

An hour passed—and another—and another. Again and again Don or his uncle sent out a rifle shot without receiving an answer. At last their ammunition grew so low that they scarcely dared to take a chance of wasting it, and fired only at long intervals.

Captain Sturdy kept up a pretence of cheerfulness, but the grimness of his face belied the laugh that came from his lips.

They were perplexed at their failure to hear any sound from the party that they felt sure had started to hunt for them. They strained their ears for a shot or a shout, but neither came. All about them was the stillness of the grave.

Don remembered that his uncle had spoken of the fog as a shroud. He wondered with an uncomfortable thrill if the word were only too significant. Was it indeed to prove a shroud for their last sleep?

If they failed to find the airship, what chance had they in these icy wastes that stretched

about them for hundreds of miles? He thought of the crews of scores of ships whom the Arctic Circle had enfolded in its clasp and who had never afterward been heard from. Was this to be his uncle's fate and his own? he asked himself, with a tightening at his heart.

From these gloomy thoughts he roused himself, and was moving forward briskly when suddenly he seemed to step forth into space.

There was a startled cry, a splash—and then the waters of the Arctic Ocean engulfed him!

CHAPTER XIII

Close to Death

Even as the waters closed over him, it came to Don in a flash what had happened to him.

He had stepped into one of the holes that studded the ice fields at intervals, a hole similar to the one in which the bears had been fishing and into which the seal had disappeared.

A horrible chill shot through him as the icy waters enfolded him. Down, down he went, until it seemed as though he were going to the bottom. Then he began to ascend.

But instead of coming up where he had gone down, his head came up with a bump against the ice. The blow almost stunned him, but his senses were not yet so dazed but that he could realize his terrible situation.

He was trapped beneath the field of ice!

And the darkness was so intense that he did not know the direction in which safety lay. He could not tell whether the hole was in front of him, or behind or at either side. In whatever direction he swam, he might be going farther and farther from his only chance of salvation.

His lungs were straining, his head throbbing, and his eyes almost bursting from his head from the necessity of holding his breath. He knew that life or death now was only a matter of seconds. He might hold his breath for half a minute longer, perhaps a minute. No longer. Then would come unconsciousness—and the end.

But he had to try somewhere, and with the most fervent unspoken prayer that had ever come into his heart, he struck out at random.

His senses were fast ebbing when a strong arm reached down, caught him by the collar, and with one yank pulled him up, to lie gasping on the ice pack.

"Don! Don! My dear boy! I feared I had lost you!" cried his uncle, in a husky voice, as he chafed the boy's wrists and rubbed his hands.

He continued this rubbing vigorously until Don began to feel a little circulation of the blood through his numbed body. The boy tried to speak, but was too exhausted.

"Don't try to talk," admonished his uncle, as he bent himself with redoubled energy to the rubbing.

"Pretty close call," Don murmured at last, as his uncle helped him to his feet. "I thought I was a goner that time."

"You'll probably never be nearer to death and live," replied his uncle solemnly. "I think

I suffered the agony of death myself for a minute or two."

But now that their first anxiety was past, a new one assailed them. Don was drenched to the skin, and his garments were already beginning to freeze on him. Unless he could get to warmth at once, pneumonia would finish the work that his immersion had begun.

Don did all he could to get his blood in motion by jumping and stamping and running, but though this availed something, the ice in which he was encased still struck its deadly chill through him.

The captain had matches with him, but there was not a stick of fuel in sight, so that a fire was out of the question.

In desperation, they fired their rifles once or twice, notwithstanding that their stock of cartridges was already alarmingly low. But no answering shot resounded, and their spirits sank to zero.

All at once, the captain, who was in advance, halted and listened intently.

"What is it?" asked Don, stepping to his side.

"I thought I heard voices!" replied the captain.

The next moment he lifted his voice in a loud halloo.

To their delight, there was a startled exclamation in guttural voices, and a moment

later two squat figures, heavily clad in furs that made them seem almost as wide as they were high, emerged from the fog.

All that could be seen of these men were their faces. A glance at these revealed broad features, squinting eyes, high cheekbones and coarse black hair falling over their foreheads.

"Eskimos!" exclaimed the captain, advancing to meet them, with palms held out as a symbol of friendliness.

The natives looked at Don and his uncle with their eyes almost bulging from their heads from surprise. They were evidently taken aback by the appearance of these men, so different from themselves. They stared and stared, and then fell to jabbering one to the other.

Captain Sturdy tried to convey to them by signs the plight in which they found themselves. He pointed to Don's frozen garments. Then he shivered violently. Then he struck a match and held his hands over the flame with expressions of satisfaction.

It was evident that the natives caught his meaning, for they nodded vigorously and then made signs for the strangers to follow them.

They led the way at a rapid gait, and before long a small conical hut built of blocks of ice became visible. The natives fell on their knees and crawled through the low opening, after

indicating that Don and his uncle should do the same.

They did so, and found themselves in a small room, the rancid smell of which was almost overpowering. But it was as hot as an oven, and the hearts of the wayfarers leaped with delight at the sight of a blazing fire that took up almost all one side of the room.

It was the work of a moment for Don to strip, throw his garments over a rude bench that stood near the fire, and luxuriate in the glowing heat. How he exulted in the glorious warmth that sent comfort stealing through every nerve and fiber of his chilled frame! He toasted himself on every side, until he was almost blistered and forced to move a little farther back.

His hosts watched him passively without betraying any emotion. Their attitude was neither friendly nor unfriendly. It was rather one of watchfulness and conjecture. What had brought these white men to that region? What did they want?

After a while one of them brought out chunks of blubber and put them in a kettle that hung by a hook over the fire. They were evidently getting ready their evening meal.

The thought of being invited to partake of such a mess, hungry as he was, almost turned Don's stomach. But the captain saved the

situation by bringing out from his pouch the great slab of bear steak.

At the sight of it, the natives' eyes glistened, and they jabbered with delight as they stretched it in a rude wire frame above the fire and sniffed the savory odors that rose from it as it broiled.

When it was done, they drew it out on one corner of the bench, which seemed to serve alike as chair and bed and table, and set to work on it with zest, cutting it into chunks with their hunting knives, and inviting by signs their visitors to partake.

The two Sturdys were not slow in accepting the invitation. The table manners of their hosts could have been improved on, as they crammed the food into their mouths until it seemed they would choke; the atmosphere of the place was stiflingly fetid; but both Don and his uncle were ready to aver that they had never enjoyed a meal so much in their lives.

Don resumed his clothes, which were now thoroughly dry and luxuriously warm, and looked at his uncle.

"Hadn't we better try to get these natives to act as guides to the airship?" he asked Captain Sturdy. "But the first thing we'll have to do is to find out if they know where it is."

The captain nodded and tore a sheet of paper from his notebook. He rapidly traced on it the

outlines of the *Red Monarch.* It was roughly done; but intelligible.

The captain pointed to Don and himself and then to the drawing, which he held up before the Eskimos.

The effect was startling. The natives uttered a guttural cry, looked at each other, and then threw themselves prostrate at the feet of Don and Captain Sturdy.

CHAPTER XIV

A Haven of Refuge

Don and his uncle looked at each other in bewilderment, and then at the natives groveling at their feet.

"What's the big idea?" asked Don.

"I don't know," replied his uncle, equally puzzled. "Just because I showed them a drawing of the airship—"

"I have it," Don burst out. "They saw the airship come down from the skies this morning, and they think we're gods. Gods!"

The idea was so amazing, and at the same time so amusing, that he had all he could do to prevent himself going off into spasms of laughter.

"Don't laugh," admonished the captain hurriedly, laying a hand on his nephew's arm. "It might spoil it all. We've got to live up to our reputation."

Don straightened his features as well as he could, and the captain put on his most gracious and majestic appearance.

He stooped and touched the prostrate men

on the shoulders, and when they looked up fearfully, he motioned them to rise to their feet.

They did so, and stood before the strangers, abashed and trembling. The captain gave them a kindly and reassuring smile, and then with the aid of the drawing tried to get them to understand that they were to show him the way to the airship.

It was evident that at least he had succeeded in conveying his idea to them, but it was clear also that they shrank from it. Doubtless they feared that the ship, like some great eagle, would carry them off into the skies, from which it had so unexpectedly descended.

So they hung back until the captain, putting on a stern and displeased expression, stamped his foot, made a number of mysterious passes in the air, and then pointed to the low door of the igloo.

This decided their hosts, and they wrapped themselves up in their skins, crawled through the door, and the whole party found themselves in the open air.

The fog was still as dense as ever, but the Eskimos did not hesitate a moment and started in a certain direction with as much certainty as hounds follow a trail.

"How do they do it?" asked Don.

"A sort of sixth sense, I suppose," his uncle answered. "Partly instinct, or inheritance,

partly experience. I suppose they could shut their eyes and do just as well."

"They must think we're queer kind of gods to lose our way and fall into a water hole," chuckled Don.

"We are pretty poor specimens," replied the grinning captain. "But they probably don't think of that at all. It was enough that we came from the skies. It went then without saying that we must be gods, or at least messengers from the gods. But don't let's look a gift horse in the mouth. It's mighty lucky for us that they've got the idea."

They had gone about two miles when a shot rang out.

"It's a searching party!" cried Don rapturously, and lost no time in firing an answering shot.

A minute later they caught the red flare of torches in the mist. He and his uncle ran forward, shouting, and in a moment were shaking hands with Captain Hargot, Lieutenant Merriman and the half dozen other members of the searching party.

"Thanks be that we've found you!" exclaimed Captain Hargot, with immeasurable relief on his bronzed features. "We've been looking for you for hours, and had almost given you up."

"We've had a mighty anxious time our-

selves," replied Captain Sturdy. "And if it hadn't been for these Eskimos—"

"Hello, where have those fellows gone?" demanded Don.

All looked about, but could discover no traces of the natives. They had vanished into the mist, evidently having concluded that their work was done and that the so-called gods needed them no longer.

"You didn't know that you had such distinguished visitors on your airship, did you?" asked Don, as he related the ludicrous mistake made by the natives.

Captain Hargot laughed.

"I haven't much use for superstition," he replied. "But there's no denying there are times when it comes in handy. And this was certainly one of them."

A hearty greeting awaited the two wanderers from the rest of the airship party, camped about a huge fire that had been built on the ice. The story of their adventures was listened to with the liveliest interest, especially the part concerned with the bears.

"Glad you got them," remarked Captain Hargot. "But gladder still that they didn't get you."

"It was touch and go for a moment," admitted Captain Sturdy. "If Don hadn't got one of them with the first shot, it would probably have been all up with us."

"Some nerve to face a polar bear and plug him at a distance of a dozen feet," observed Lieutenant Merriman, looking admiringly at Don.

"I hope our getting lost in a fog hasn't delayed the party or deranged your plans," remarked Don's uncle.

"Not at all," Captain Hargot assured him. "We found that the repairs needed were more extensive than we thought, and that we couldn't get through before some time to-morrow, anyway. We'll be lucky if we get through then."

"In that case then," replied Captain Sturdy, "I suppose there'll be no difficulty in the way of taking sledges and bringing in those bears to-morrow. I'm rather keen on saving those skins."

"Not the least in the world," was the reply. "You can have as many of the men to help as you need."

Don and his uncle slept in their usual quarters on the airship that night, and soon after breakfast the next morning set out with two sledges and half a dozen assistants to bring in the victims of their rifles.

It did not take much searching to find the bears, and exclamations of astonishment arose as the party noted their tremendous size and strength. The stock of Don and his uncle as marksmen went up with great rapidity. And

it was not only their skill that aroused admiration, but the iron nerve that refused to falter when the slightest wavering would have meant certain death.

The task of skinning the game after they got back to the ship was an arduous one, made doubly so by the freezing climate that had made the hides as tough as a board. But the roaring fire near which the work was done modified this difficulty somewhat, and Captain Sturdy was an old hand at the work, so that before the afternoon was half gone the skins were salted and stored away in one of the store rooms, there to rest till they should interest and instruct thousands in one of the most famous of American museums.

The repairs were completed in the late afternoon, and preparations were made to get under way at once, for Captain Hargot felt safer with the *Red Monarch* in her native element than on the rough ice floes, where a fierce gale, if it should spring up, might batter her to fragments.

It proved a task of no little difficulty to release the anchor from the ice, for the ceaseless tugging of the great craft had steadily embedded the monster flukes deeper and deeper into the floe upon which they had caught.

All the provisions and implements were taken on board, and most of the ship's company found their accustomed places. Then a

selected party with picks and axes dug away at the ice.

"Some job getting that clear," commented Don, as he watched them from over the side.

It was indeed a herculean task, for in places the floe was twenty feet thick.

"Should think a stick of dynamite would do the work more quickly," remarked Don, after a short silence.

"It undoubtedly would," agreed his uncle. "But it also might blow the ship skyhigh. We're too close to the ground for that kind of work."

At last the men had cut through as deeply as they dared, and when they saw that the anchor was beginning to eat its way through the thin crusts that remained they ran for one of the cars and climbed in.

Then the engines began to purr, the giant flippers started to move, and the windlass let out the anchor rope until the airship was about a hundred feet above the ice.

Then the windlass stopped revolving and the great cable attached to the anchor began to stiffen under the strain. All watched it breathlessly. Would the cable hold? Would the anchor give?

A tremendous cheer went up a moment later when, with a terrific grinding and crunching, the great anchor tore through the last covering of ice and swung free.

It was the work of only a few minutes then for the windlass to draw up the anchor to its regular resting place. To the captain and officers of the airship it was an event. It demonstrated for the first time in history that what had hitherto been only a theory was now a fact, and that one of the problems attending air flights into the Arctic had been successfully solved.

The fact that the ship was in first class shape again and that they had resumed their course for the Pole put all the passengers and crew in the highest of spirits.

All, that is, except Jake Hargot.

That worthy, who had been dubbed "Gloomy" by the members of the crew among themselves, though they would have hesitated to fix the nickname publicly on their captain's son, was still in the dumps.

Many times he lamented the impulse that had prompted him to hide himself away on the *Red Monarch.* He longed for the cheap pleasures he was accustomed to have with his dissipated companions. He resented the work that his father compelled him to do.

He had long since realized, also, that this expedition was far more than a mere pleasure trip, and that it was attended by dangers of which the hurricane had given an example and which had set in action all the fears lurking in his craven heart.

He hated everything, hated the ship, hated the crew, hated the work, and almost hated his father.

More than all, he hated Don!

That the latter had saved him from great danger and possibly from death did not count. He hated Don for the way he had defied him that day in the gully. He hated him for the disconcerting questions he had asked about Slippery Jones. He hated him because he felt that if he came to blows Don would prove his master.

But the capsheaf to his bitterness was furnished by Don's exploit with the bears. Wherever he went, he heard that talked about. The members of the crew were brave men—none others would have been chosen to go on such an expedition—and they were able to recognize and admire bravery in others. They realized to the full the nerve and courage that Don had shown in tackling the monsters.

All this was gall and wormwood to Jake, the more so as the disparaging sneers that he had ventured to offer on the subject had been resented with hot indignation or cold contempt.

Don, on his part, cherished no enmity against Jake, despite the reasons he had for such a feeling, and always greeted him with a pleasant word, to which Jake responded with a grunt, when he deigned to reply at all.

The afternoon following the resumption of

their flight, Don ran across Jake as the latter was working in the paint room.

Don greeted him in friendly fashion and was passing on when the festering bitterness in Jake's heart found expression.

"Pretty good runner, ain't you?" he remarked casually, as he bent lower over his work.

"I don't quite get you?" answered Don, genuinely puzzled.

"I said you were a pretty good runner," repeated Jake.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Don, still not catching his drift. "Just fair—about the same as other fellows, I suppose."

Don turned, intending to pass on and go about his own affairs.

"I should think you were a little better than most," sneered Jake, "judging from the way you ran away from the bear."

The insult was so gross, so unprovoked, that Don's blood rose to the boiling point.

He stepped quickly up to Jake with clenched fists.

"Look here," Don said quietly, but with a dangerous glint in his eye, "I've stood just about as much of your beastly manners as I'm going to stand. Now you take it back and take it back quick."

"Take what back?" demanded Jake, trying

to put up a bold front, but inwardly quaking. "You did run away, didn't you?"

There was a moment of silence. Then—

"Take it back," commanded Don, advancing on his adversary.

Jake shrank back so quickly that he stumbled over a pot of paint and fell heavily on the floor.

He sprang to his feet with a cry of fury.

CHAPTER XV

A Critical Moment

"I'll make you pay for that!" shouted Jake, fairly foaming with rage.

"All right," replied Don. "Come and collect."

Jake rushed at him like a mad bull. Don dodged the swing he made at him, and caught him in return square between the eyes.

Again Jake rushed and again he missed, while Don handed him a terrific blow on the chin that shook him from head to heels.

Just at that instant the door swung open, and Captain Hargot strode into the room.

"What does this mean?" he cried in a voice of thunder, as he looked sternly from one to the other. "I'll have no fighting on my ship. Jake, how did this thing come about? Tell me at once, and tell me straight."

"He pushed me over that pot," whimpered Jake, nursing one of his eyes that was already assuming a darkish hue.

Don gasped his indignation.

"Is this true?" asked the captain, turning to Don.

"No, sir, it isn't!" declared Don. "He was backing away from me, and he tripped and went down. I hadn't touched him up to that time, and he knows it."

"How about it, Jake?" asked the captain, turning to his son.

"I—I thought he pushed me," stammered Jake, not meeting his father's eyes. "It isn't likely I'd have gone down of myself, is it?"

"You might have very easily if the paint pot had been in your way," replied his father coldly. "Now, look here, I want to get the rights of this thing. One thing is plain, that you were fighting when I came in. There must have been some reason. What was it?"

He looked from one to the other, but both maintained silence.

"I'm accustomed to being answered when I ask a question," said the captain of the airship sharply.

"It was all his fault," declared Jake. "He started it."

"Tell your father what you said to me when I was passing through here," said Don.

"Had you spoken to him first?" the captain demanded.

"Only to say good afternoon," replied Don.

"Jake, what did you say to him in return?" asked his father.

Jake hesitated.

"Out with it," snapped his father.

"It—it was only a joke," stammered Jake. "I asked him whether he was a good runner. What was there wrong with that?"

"Much or little, according to what you meant by it," replied his father. "Go ahead. What did he say?"

Jake squirmed uneasily, but the eye of his father seemed to bore him through.

"He said that he supposed he was fairly good—about as good as the average," was the reply.

"Innocent enough so far," commented the captain. "Now, let's get to the nub of it. What did you say next?"

Jake hung his head.

"Out with it," thundered the captain. "By the great horn spoon! have I got to drag everything out of you piecemeal?"

"Then I said that I guess he was better than most, judging from the way he ran away from the bear," blurted out Jake desperately.

For a moment there was dead silence, the lull before the storm.

"And to think that you're a son of mine!" Captain Hargot exclaimed, in a tone in which grief and anger were equally mingled. "To fling such an insult at one of the finest and bravest lads I have ever met, a boy that I'd be proud to have for my son, a boy whose praises are being sung all over the ship. And to make it worse, that boy risked his life to help you

the first night you came on board. What kind of a fellow are you anyway?"

Jake wilted before the contempt in his father's eyes, and Don ventured to interpose.

"I was to blame too, Captain Hargot," he said. "I ought to have kept my temper. I'm willing to shake hands and call it quits. How about it, Jake?"

"That's generous of you," said the captain. "But he must apologize first. Go ahead, Jake. Tell him that you take it back."

It was bitter medicine for Jake to swallow, but he mumbled an apology and then put a limp hand in one that Don extended to him. Then Don excused himself and left the room, leaving Jake to a painful interview with his father, from which he emerged with a spirit bruised and flayed, but with his bitterness toward Don in nowise allayed. Nor was his resentment lessened by the jokes passed by the members of the crew on the black eye and swelled nose that for two or three days were galling reminders of the fray.

"Queer that a fellow like that should be the son of such a splendid man as Captain Hargot," observed Don, after he had recounted the affair to his uncle.

"It is odd," agreed Captain Sturdy. "Perhaps he's a throwback to some ancestor who has a yellow streak. But then, too, we must remember that he has no mother and that

his father has had to be away from him for months at a time. That makes a lot of difference and explains many things."

"Do you think I did wrong by mixing it up with him?" asked Don.

"Not a bit of it," replied the uncle emphatically. "There was nothing else for you to do. You know I don't believe in unnecessary fighting. But a boy that would take an insult like that without resenting it wouldn't be worth his salt."

All through the night the *Red Monarch* kept serenely on her way. Not that there was any night in the sense of darkness. They had reached the region of the six months Arctic day. The sun was visible every hour of the twenty-four, moving in a circle about the horizon; or appearing to do so, for of course it was the earth that was actually moving. There was no way except by their watches that they could distinguish what would ordinarily be the day and what the night.

Don was delighted at the novelty of the experience, which so few of his race had ever shared or ever would share with him.

"Just think of seeing the sun at midnight!" he exclaimed.

"It's great," replied his uncle.

"It's a proof that we're getting up to the very top of the world. Reserved seats on the roof," Don remarked, with a whimsical smile. Then

he added soberly: "But getting up on the roof is one thing and getting down is another."

"That's what many an Arctic explorer has found before this," Captain Sturdy admitted. "And some of them have left their bones here to prove it."

"Here's hoping that we'll have better luck," said Don.

"Amen to that," rejoined his uncle fervently. "By the way, Lieutenant Merriman tells me that if all goes well, we ought to be at the Pole before another day is over."

Don's heart gave a bound.

"The North Pole!" he exclaimed. "The place where only one man in the world has ever been before."

"One white man," corrected his uncle. "Peary had a party of five with him, one colored man and four Eskimos."

"How shall we know the place when we get there?" asked Don.

"We'll have to depend on the scientific men on board to tell us that," was the reply. "They'll be taking observations right along, and they'll tell us when we get there. And for the first time in your life, my boy, you'll be at a place where there's no east or west or north. Three of the cardinal points will have disappeared."

"What do you mean?" asked Don, in some bewilderment.

"Just what I say," returned his uncle. "Everything will be south. Everywhere you turn you'll face the south. You could spin around on your heel like a top, and you'd always be looking toward the south. It would be when you started to climb down from the top of the world that east and west and north would come back again."

It was a new thought to Don, and a rather uncanny one. He had a feeling as though he were destined to be a sort of disembodied spirit, as though a very little more would waft him off the earth altogether.

His uncle seemed to read his thoughts and laughed.

"Don't worry, my boy," he said, as he clapped him on the shoulder. "You'll find lots of other queer things about the Pole before you get through. And don't forget," he added, with a grin, "that you've got to take a splinter of it back to Jennie."

When Don turned out the next morning he found that the sky was a ghastly gray. The sun was hidden behind watery clouds and the barometer was rapidly falling.

"Do you think another storm is coming?" he asked at breakfast.

"Looks that way," replied his uncle. "although this time there'll probably be snow with it. Captain Hargot told me that he thought

we were in for something that would make a Dakota blizzard look mild and gentle."

There was nothing to be seen below, as the ice was hidden by the haze, and Don took advantage of the opportunity to clean and oil his rifle. He took it with him down to one of the forward power cars, so that he could chat while he worked with Powell and Stinson, two of the crew with whom he had struck up a friendship and whose post of duty was in that car.

Captain Hargot's prophecy was soon fulfilled, for the snow began to fall heavily, blotting out everything within a few feet of the car.

"Might think it was Christmas," remarked Don, as he looked at the swirling flakes.

"Don't see any presents floating around," replied Powell, with a grin, as he examined a bearing of one of his motors and applied a little more oil to one of the joints.

"The best present I could have would be a little glimpse of sunshine," observed Stinson.

"Better send up and get Jake, then," grinned Powell. "He's a little sunbeam that's always brightening the corner where he is."

The wind was rising now, and the airship began to pitch and reel like a vessel in a storm at sea.

"Looks as though we might be in for another hurricane," remarked Don, as the gale increased in violence.

"Hope not," replied Powell. "I'm sore and bruised yet from the tossing about I got in the other one."

"I wouldn't mind so much if we could see something," muttered Stinson. "With this solid wall of snow about us I feel something like a rat in a trap."

Momentarily the storm grew fiercer, until it seemed as though all the demons of the Arctic were beating on the *Red Monarch* and trying to tear it into fragments.

The power car strained and groaned, and the shaft that furnished communication with the keel corridor above creaked ominously.

"Do you think she'll stand it?" asked Powell of his mate, as he looked up anxiously.

"I guess so," replied Stinson. "Though I doubt if the builders ever counted on her being put to such a test as this," he added. "The gales we have in the States are only jokes compared with this Arctic stuff."

Soon the howling of the storm made speech impossible, and the violent swaying of the car compelled those in it to stop work and cling to any stationary object at hand.

Suddenly there was a sharp crack above them, and Don saw a rent in the shaft that kept widening while he looked. At the same time two of the struts on the windward side snapped with reports like those of a pistol.

Don sprang to his feet, relinquishing as he

did so his hold on a stanchion. At the same instant the car gave a tremendous lurch and hurled him like a stone from a catapult against the window on the further side.

There was a crash of glass and Don went through. He clutched frantically at the side of the window, but missed.

Then he fell!

CHAPTER XVI

Falling through Space

In that awful instant, Don felt that he was doomed.

Down, down he went, the speed of his falling body increasing with every second.

His head was surcharged with blood, his temples beat like trip-hammers, his lungs were strained to bursting. It was impossible for him to breathe.

Down, down, still down, the snow seeming to wrap around him like a winding sheet. One last despairing farewell to his loved ones, one last word of prayer—and he knew no more.

Some time afterward—how long Don never knew; it seemed to him like ages—he woke to consciousness.

Singularly enough, he felt no pain. Every nerve was numbed. He seemed to have no body. He wondered if this were death, if his spirit had been released from the flesh. He lay perfectly content, his only emotion one of mild curiosity.

Then gradually his brain began to work. Slowly he recalled his being in the car. Why

was he not there now? What had happened?

Oh, yes, there was a window. He had gone through that window. He had tried to catch hold of the side.

He looked at his hands. They were bleeding. Mechanically he drew over them the heavy mittens that were attached by a cord to his wrists.

The action helped to bring him to a sense of reality. He was not dead. He was still in the body. His hands were there.

His thoughts went back to the window. He had missed catching hold of it. Then he had fallen. He had fallen.

Oh, that fall! A shudder ran through him as he thought of it. If he were not dead, he had as least tasted the bitterness of death.

But he was alive! It seemed to him a miracle, but he was alive. And with the thought, the will to live came rushing back to him.

His mind was clearing rapidly now, and he looked about him. He was in a grayish darkness, and all about him was a fleecy substance that seemed to flee away before him as he pressed his hands against it.

Above him he could discern a filmy, wavering light, that seemed a long way off. It was as though he were at the bottom of a well, looking up at daylight.

Then the full realization of what had happened came upon him. The airship must have

been beaten down by the gale a great deal nearer to the earth than he had supposed. The fierce wind that was prevailing had heaped the snow into giant drifts. And it was into one of these drifts that he had fallen.

The speed at which he struck the drift had dashed the snow aside with such violence as to make a broad furrow that permitted some light and air to get to him. Otherwise he would have been smothered and the drift would have become his tomb.

He realized that it would be that anyway, unless he roused himself and got his blood in motion. The very comfort that he felt frightened him. He recalled that he had read that freezing was one of the pleasantest ways to die.

A great longing to live surged through him, and he summoned all of his energies to the work of freeing himself from the drift.

At first he felt as though he were in a nightmare. His arms seemed as heavy as lead. There was no feeling in his hands as he sought to widen the snow cavity in which he lay. If his situation had been less desperate, he would have been tempted to abandon the struggle.

Still he fought on, and after a while the very effort he was making put his blood in circulation and made his task easier. Soon he was able to take a sitting position, and a little later he managed to stand, though very shakily, on his feet.

With every passing moment now his resolution grew harder and his muscles stronger. And a new impetus came to him with the thought that the airship might even now be circling above the spot, with many eager eyes on the lookout for him.

Not that those on the dirigible would expect to find him alive. No doubt all hope of that had vanished from the moment they learned of his fall. They must already be mourning him as dead. But on the mere chance of his being alive they would search for him, and in any event would seek to recover his body.

Gradually and painfully Don worked his way up through the drift until at last he stood at the top. He felt like one issuing from a tomb. But he was out of it, his shroud of snow had fallen away from him, and he was once more in the land of the living.

It was like heaven to get a breath of the pure outside air, though it was so bitterly cold that it made his eyes smart and his nostrils sting.

The fury of the gale had abated somewhat, but the snow was still coming down as heavily as before, forming so dense a wall that he could only see through it for a few yards in any direction. He turned his eyes skyward, in the hope that he might catch a glimpse of the *Red Monarch* cruising overhead. But here again the snow interposed a barrier, and he saw nothing but the whirling flakes.

About him stretched the vast expanse of ice, extending for hundreds of miles in every direction. As far as he knew there was not a single human being on it besides himself. He remembered that Peary, in his dash for the Pole, had not met a soul in the last four hundred miles.

Stark horror came upon him as he realized his awful plight, and he wondered if it would not have been better if he had perished in the fall.

His only hope of salvation lay in the airship. But where was it now? It might have been blown a hundred miles away. And even when it returned and sought for him, as he knew it would, what chance would there be of discovering a little black spot on the ice?

It would not even be black. His fur suit was of a grayish-white, scarcely to be discerned on the surface of the ice a hundred yards away. He could hardly be found more easily than the traditional needle in a haystack.

And if, by an almost miraculous chance, they should find him, would they come across anything but a dead body? Long before that time, he would probably either have frozen or starved to death.

He had not a particle of food with him, and no hope of getting any. Nor had he any shelter from the freezing blasts. Without food to keep up the natural heat of his body, how long could he resist a temperature which he knew must

be twenty or thirty degrees below zero, and might fall to sixty?

By constant motion he could keep his blood in circulation and stave off the inevitable end for a few hours, perhaps even a day or two. But with his body enfeebled from lack of food, he could not keep up the struggle very long. And at last the need of sleep would become irresistible. But he knew that the moment he yielded to it, he would drift into the sleep that knows no waking.

Don had been in many perilous positions before, but all these seemed as nothing compared with his present situation. He felt that in all probability he had reached the end of the trail.

By a mighty effort, he roused himself and drove these thoughts from his mind, for he knew that in their direction defeat lay. At all costs he must keep up his courage. He must struggle to the end. If he went down in the unequal combat, he would at least have the consciousness at the end that he had gone down fighting.

He climbed down from the drift and started to walk. There was absolutely no use in choosing any special direction. One was as good as another. In any event, like most lost travelers, he would probably describe a circle. The essential thing was to keep moving, always moving.

He drew the fur of his headpiece as far over his face as possible, for the wind cut at the unprotected parts like a knife. Then he plunged on resolutely but blindly.

In places there were heavy drifts, and in others the swirling winds had swept the ice fairly clear of snow. But all looked alike to Don. In fact, the harder the going, the better, for the struggle helped to keep him warm.

He found some parts of the ice itself comparatively smooth, but he met with others where the movements of the tides and the crashing together of giant floes had forced the ice into great pressure-ridges that looked like miniature icebergs. Sometimes Don halted in the lee of them to get a momentary respite from the wind and rest his weary legs and body.

But he never halted long. Almost immediately he would begin to feel the deadly cold numbing his arms and legs and piercing his very vitals. Then he would resume his journey, a journey that had no destination—except perhaps death!

And now the pangs of hunger, intensified by the cold and exercise, began to make themselves felt. With every hour they grew keener. He began to feel faint and dizzy.

He thought of the bountiful table in the *Red Monarch,* of the profusely supplied dining room at home. Abundance and to spare was there. What would he have given for the hardest

crust! He knew now why the Prodigal Son craved even the husks of the swine. By an odd mental twist, his mind recurred to the sandwich that he had knocked from Jake's hand and that he had last seen lying in the dirt of the gully. If he could only have it now!

The feel of his rifle in his hand would have given him some comfort. Not that he thought that there was any probability of finding much, if any, game in that region. Still, there would have been the off chance of a seal, a walrus, or possibly a bear.

But his trusty weapon was in the car of the airship, where he had been cleaning and oiling it when this terrible calamity had come upon him. He never expected to see it again. What would he ever see again, except this universe of snow and ice, ghastly under the spectral light that came from the sun?

Hours passed. A terrible weariness, born of mental agony and physical effort, had taken possession of him. He could scarcely drag one leg after another. He found himself slipping and stumbling. One fall was so violent that he thought for a moment his leg was broken. That would, indeed, have been the end.

At some of the pressure-ridges he encountered, he dragged himself up painfully to the top and scanned the horizon. But not a speck in the heavens rewarded him. The skies were as empty as the earth.

On he went, staggering now. His face was almost skinned from the way he had been compelled to rub it to prevent its being frost-bitten. His eyelashes froze together, and it was agony to loosen them.

The snow had ceased now, and the cold had grown more intense. If it had been thirty below zero before, it was now fifty. It was intolerably cold, the cold in which even the hardy Eskimos abandon their hunting and huddle around the fire in their igloos. It seemed to send a thousand needles through the sealskin kamicks that clothed his feet, the heavy furs that encased his body.

Into Don's tortured mind came memories of the Sahara Desert, where he had sweated and sweltered under the terrible heat. At the time it had seemed as though he could not bear the scourging of the sun. What would he not give now to be under its scorching beams! Could it be that that was the same sun that he saw now moving slowly around the horizon, cold and pale and swathed in vapor? Could it be that even at this moment Arabs were seeking relief from its fierceness in the shade of their tents?

He was stumbling on mechanically now, not under the direction of his mind, but simply obeying the urge of self-preservation. He felt at times that he must stop, that he could not go a step further. Then, when it seemed as if he had

reached the limit of human endurance, instinct, like a lash on the back of a galley slave, stung him into further effort. He knew that if he stopped for only five minutes in that temperature he would never go on again. The cold would claim him, paralyze him, kill him. He must go on—go on till he dropped.

A flicker of curiosity stirred his jaded mind as he noticed that it was growing darker. But, after all, he asked himself, what was there queer in that? He had been trudging for what seemed countless hours. It was time for night to come.

Then suddenly a thought came to him that almost made his heart stop beating.

There was no night at that time in that latitude! The sun shone through all the twenty-four hours!

Why then was darkness gathering around him, why was everything gradually becoming enveloped in a purple haze?

The awful truth burst upon him.

He was going blind!

CHAPTER XVII

The Depths of Horror

Blind! Starving! Freezing! Alone and blind on the ice near the North Pole!

A cry of anguish broke from Don's lips as he realized the full terror of his situation.

That crowning blow was all he needed to make his agony complete and his doom certain.

Deprived of his sight, there would be nothing left for him to do but to stagger on in darkness, stumbling over obstacles that he could not avoid, unable to see and signal the airship if it should be hovering above him, liable to fall into the water through the cracks in the ice formed by the tides, a helpless prey to a bear, if there should happen to be any in the vicinity.

Never in all his life had such a wave of despair swept over him. His suffering seemed more than he could bear.

He knew perfectly well the danger of snow blindness in the Arctic regions, and, in common with the rest of the airship party, had prepared to meet it. Among his belongings were several pair of dark glasses, heavy goggles, to

be worn on the ice. What would he have given to have one of them with him now!

For many hours the pitiless glare of the snow and ice had beaten on his unprotected eyes. It would have been a severe strain under any circumstances, but it had been doubly so in his condition, weakened by hunger, shaken by his fall, and with his mind in a tumult of anguished emotions.

He opened his eyes and looked again upon the gleaming expanse, devoid of every sign of life and hope.

It was not utter blackness—yet. But his horizon was steadily narrowing. Where before he had been able to see for miles, it seemed to him now as though a mile were about the limit. And this he knew would gradually lessen until at last his sight would leave him altogether. And then—

By a tremendous exertion of the will, he braced himself. He was still Don Sturdy, and he would not belie his name. While there was life there was hope. He would keep up his courage to the very last. If he had to die—well, he would die. He was no longer master of his fate. But he could still be the captain of his soul.

So he stumbled on, summoning up the last reserves of his strength and banishing from his mind as far as possible the thoughts that threatened to overwhelm him.

He ate some snow to quench his thirst, and this served to some extent also to abate his hunger. His body still responded to the urgings of his mind, as a tiring but gallant steed to the spurs of its master. But he was growing dreadfully weak, and he knew that the end could not be long delayed.

He kept his eyelids narrowed so as to expose as little of his eyes as possible to the terrible glare of the ice and snow. At times he opened his eyes and looked about to test his sight. And each time with a sinking of the heart he realized that his range of vision had grown less. He dreaded the time, which he knew would come soon, when he should open them and see—nothing.

The last time that he made the test he was startled to see something red a short distance ahead of him. At first he attributed this to the bloodshot condition of his eyes.

Then he looked again, and this time he could discern a flickering like that of a flame. He thought, too, that he detected two gray figures. It was for all the world as though a bonfire had been built on the ice and that two men were standing near it.

At first he thought that his mind was wandering. He had been dreading the coming of delirium. Had it come at last?

Then he heard a shout. It was echoed im-

mediately by another, and the two gray objects seemed to be running in his direction.

He shouted in reply, though his voice seemed to him like a whisper, and began to run toward the figures. In his weakened state he stumbled and fell, but got on his feet just as Stinson and Powell threw their arms around him and supported him.

They half-led, half-carried him toward what was indeed a fire, and seated him before it while they rubbed his arms and legs, fairly shouting in their astonishment and delight.

Then Stinson ran back a little way and returned with a thermos bottle of hot coffee, which he placed at Don's lips with an injunction to drink.

Don needed no urging, and the hot stimulating drink seemed to run through his veins like nectar. He was still too dazed and weak to ask questions, but an ineffable relief and delight had taken possession of him. He rested there, eating some of the food that Stinson soon brought, and basking in the warmth of the fire while the two men hovered about him as those who were welcoming one from the dead.

They let him eat and drink and rest and toast until he had recovered something of his strength before they plied him with questions.

His curiosity was as great as their own. By what astounding series of circumstances had they come together in these frozen wastes?

"I don't know whether this is a dream or the real thing," Don said at last. "When I caught sight of that fire I thought I was going crazy."

"No more surprised than we were when we saw you," replied Stinson. "I never thought I'd see you again after you went flying out of that window."

"But how did you get here?" asked Don. "And where is the airship?"

"I'd give a lot to know the answer to that second question," replied Stinson. "As to how we got here, we did the same as you did. We dropped."

"The car came down with us," said Powell. "You remember the crack in the shaft just before you went out. Before we could get up through it to the main corridor, it broke away altogether. Then all the car had to support it were the struts. They couldn't stand the strain, and they broke one after another. And it wasn't very long after you went down before we followed suit."

"But I should think the car would have smashed," said Don, in bewilderment.

"It would have broken into splinters nine times out of ten," replied Powell. "But we must have been beaten down a good deal closer to the ice than we had thought, and then, too, we had the luck to strike a drift. The pneumatic bumpers at the bottom took up a good deal of the shock, and to our great sur-

prise we found that we were alive, although we had given ourselves up for dead. As it is, the car was put pretty well on the blink and it will take a lot of fixing. That is, if the airship ever comes along to fix it."

"Where is the car?" asked Don, looking around.

"Only a little way back there," replied Powell, pointing to a spot back of him.

"I don't see it," said Don.

"Don't see it!" exclaimed Stinson in surprise. "Why, there it is, right in plain sight."

"I don't see it just the same," replied Don soberly. "The truth is, fellows, I'm afraid I'm going blind."

They cried out in consternation.

"Snow blindness!" exclaimed Powell. "We got hold of you just in time. I've got something in my medicine kit that will check it. Come right along now to the car and we'll fix you up. Then you're in for a good long sleep. We've got sleeping bags there, and you're going to curl right up inside of one of them and forget all your troubles."

The men led the way to the car, which, though battered up considerably and split open in two places, still afforded a shelter from the bitter cold.

Powell got out his kit and bathed Don's eyes with lotions and put a bandage around them. Then Don tucked himself in one of the sleeping

bags, and a moment later was dead to the world.

He was allowed to sleep as long as he would, and it was twenty-four hours later when at last he awoke. Stinson had gone out to feed the fire, but Powell was busying himself about the car.

Don pulled the bandage from his eyes and looked at Powell, who returned the glance and grinned.

"Slept clean around the clock," Powell remarked. "That ought to have done you a lot of good."

"It has," replied Don. "I'm beginning to feel like myself again."

"How are the eyes?" asked Powell.

"Much better," replied Don. "They're a good deal clearer, and they don't smart nearly so much."

"I guess we caught that just in time," said Powell. "But you'll have to be careful of them for some time yet. Here's something I've been fiddling at that I think will help you."

He held up an oblong piece of wood, that he had blackened with a charred ember from the fire. It was curved a trifle at the top and bottom and a slit had been cut through the center. Strings had been fastened at the ends.

"There you are," laughed Powell. "Not very pretty to look at, but as good as a pair of goggles. Tie that around your head and

you'll be all right. The curves at top and bottom will protect your eyes from the glare of the sun above and the reflection from the ice beneath. And you can do all the seeing that you need through the slit."

Don tried on the home made contraption and found that it suited his need admirably.

"And now how would a bit of grub hit you?" went on Powell. "You notice I say a bit, for this hotel is running on short rations just now."

"I've been on short rations before," answered Don, as he recalled his experience in the Tombs of Gold. "And I'll be so thankful to get anything at all that I'm not likely to kick."

Stinson returned just then, and the three had a very frugal meal, washed down by little more than a sip of the precious and fast diminishing coffee.

Then they took account of stock and held a council. And it was a very sober council, for they realized that their position was desperate.

Fuel and food would soon be gone. One more day would see them at the end of their resources.

The woodwork and some of the furnishings of the car had furnished the material for fire. But this was nearing its limit, and they could not demolish the car itself without depriving themselves of a shelter from the blasts. They

had no tools that would help them in constructing an igloo.

There had been a little store of food in the car when it had broken away, some crackers, a few cans of tinned meats, cakes of chocolate, a package of tea and the thermos bottle of coffee. But some of this had already been used, and there was barely enough to last them another twenty-four hours.

"Looks as though we'd have to tighten our belts," remarked Stinson, as they finished taking their inventory.

"But the *Red Monarch* may turn up at any time," suggested Don hopefully.

"She may, and then again she mayn't," returned Powell. "Of course, she will if she can, but even if she does, it isn't dead certain that she'll see us. Then, too, she may be in such a fix that she can't get back. For all we know, she may be down on the ice somewhere for repairs. That gale may have played the mischief with her. See what it did to our car. No, we'd better leave her out of our calculations for the present."

"But she's the one thing we don't dare leave out of our calculations," replied Stinton. "She's our only hope of salvation. In a day or two at most we'll be out of both fuel and food. Then it's just a question whether freezing or starvation will grab us first. If there were any game about here, it might prolong

the agony a little. But the end would be sure anyway."

"Let's not think of that," said Don, with a buoyancy that he was far from feeling. "Let's make up our minds that by hook or crook we're going to get out of this fix. The very thinking will give us a better chance to do it. Who would have given us one chance in a hundred to come out of the falls we had yesterday? But we landed right side up with care, and I have a hunch that we'll do it again. By the way, speaking of game, did my rifle come down without being broken?"

"I haven't examined it," replied Stinson, "But you'll find it over in that pile of blankets."

Don made a dive for the blankets, and his heart leaped as he uncovered his beloved rifle, apparently uninjured. He examined it with the utmost care, and was delighted to find that it had sustained no damage. Luckily too, his cartridge belt was full.

"Bully!" he shouted, as he handled the weapon caressingly. "Just the touch of it makes me feel a hundred per cent better."

"I only hope you can find something to try it on," remarked Stinton.

"A bear steak would come in mighty handy just now," said Powell.

"Beggars can't be choosers, and I'll be only too glad to bag anything that comes along,"

returned Don. "It will be good for signaling too, if we see the *Red Monarch.* They may hear when they can't see."

For many hours of that day and for all of the next, Don scouted about on the lookout for game, but without results. Steadily their scanty stores dwindled. No footprints save their own could be detected, no living creature, large or small, met their view.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Thrilling Discovery

On the third day, when their last morsel of food had been consumed, Don was nearing a hummock, when he heard a sound between a grunt and a bellow, followed by the slap of a heavy body on the ice.

His heart leaped into his throat, as he silently made his way up the hummock and peered over on the other side.

There, by the side of a great hole from which it had evidently just emerged, lay a huge walrus, its dripping body and ivory tusks gleaming in the sun!

The head of the walrus was turned away from Don, so that the latter had ample time to get a firm footing on the hummock and take aim.

He had never shot at one of the creatures before, and was not sure where a vital spot could be found. But he recalled a maxim of his Uncle Frank's that when in doubt he was to go for the head, and preferably for the eye.

Everything depended on getting his quarry

at the first shot. If the walrus were only wounded, it would slip at once into the water and disappear beneath the ice. And with its escape would probably vanish the only chance that Don and his party had of avoiding starvation.

He took careful aim at the head and shouted. The walrus turned like a flash, and Don saw the round head, the small eyes, the bulky shoulders, and the broad muzzle with a mass of stiff bristly whiskers on each side.

As it saw his foe, the walrus gave utterance to a fierce bellow. It was his last. Don's rifle cracked, and the bullet entered the eye and reached the brain.

The walrus lurched forward so that a large part of its huge body overhung the hole from which it had emerged. Both skin and ice were slippery, and Don saw that in another moment it would fall into the water.

He dropped his rifle and jumped from the hummock just in time to check the slide by grasping one of the fan-shaped hind limbs. But though this served to stop the descent, the boy was not able to draw back the huge animal, which was nearly ten feet long and probably weighed close to a thousand pounds.

But he held on with grim desperation and shouted for help. Stinson and Powell were not far away, and as sound travels far in the Arctic

solitudes, there was a chance that they had heard the report of the rifle.

In a few minutes he heard answering shouts, and his comrades came running. They yelled with delight when they saw him and his prey, and their united efforts soon had pulled the body to a place of safety.

They were filled with joy. This unexpected boon had drawn them from the very jaws of death. They shouted until they were hoarse. Powell and Stinson fairly hugged Don in their enthusiasm.

"No need now of tightening our belts," chuckled Stinson, as he surveyed the huge body.

"There's enough meat there to last us for a couple of months," gloated Powell. "And the fat will serve for fuel. Talk about manna in the wilderness! Don, old boy, I take off my hat to that rifle of yours."

"The rifle wouldn't have been much good without the arm and eye behind it," was Stinson's tribute. "But now let's get busy and haul this lallapallozer back to the car."

Stinson went back and got ropes, and then they drew their capture over the ice to a spot near the car.

"It's hard work," panted Don; "but the most joyful work I've ever done in all my life."

With their knives they cut a steak from the flank, and soon had it broiling over the fire.

Their hunger was so great that they did not wait for it to get thoroughly done, but drew it away when it was half roasted, cut it up into chunks, and sat down to eat.

They had nothing else, not even a drop of tea or coffee to drink with it, but they found it a feast fit for a king. They ate ravenously, without a word, and as they ate they could feel strength and vitality creeping back into their veins and courage into their hearts.

"Funny how different the world has become in one hour," remarked Powell at last, as he sank back with a sigh of content.

"Right you are," assented Stinson. "An hour ago I was full of gloom and thinking of death. Now I'm full of ginger—"

"Full of walrus meat, you mean," said Don, with a grin. "They say that a liking for walrus is an acquired taste; but I notice that we acquired it mighty quickly."

"I don't suppose it would make much of a hit on New York tables," observed Powell. "But I'm not turning up my nose at it. I'm sinking my teeth into it."

"Wonder how the old fellow got up this far," remarked Don. "He seemed to be all by his lonesome."

"Some stray from the herd, I suppose," conjectured Stinson. "Like a rogue elephant that won't hobnob with the rest. I'm mighty

glad his wanderings led him up in this direction."

They spent some hours skinning and cleaning the animal, carefully laying aside the edible parts and saving the superfluous fat and blubber.

"Good for light and good for fuel," remarked Stinson.

"But we don't need it for light," objected Powell.

"Not yet, but soon," returned Stinson. "It won't be long now before the Arctic night is due, and then we'll be glad enough to have some oil for our lamps as the Eskimos do."

"Here's hoping that long before the night comes on we'll be back in the airship," murmured Don, as he turned his eyes toward the skies once again in search of their only hope of salvation.

He did not deceive himself as to their desperate situation. The securing of the walrus had indeed been a Godsend, as it relieved their most pressing needs. But it only deferred the day of reckoning. Soon it would be gone. A similar opportunity might never recur again. Soon, too, every scrap of fuel would be gone, and the Frost King's icy fingers would close upon them. In the airship, and in that alone, lay their chance of safety.

But suppose the airship itself had perished! How else could they explain its failure to

appear? Several days had now elapsed since he and his companions had found themselves marooned on the ice. Surely, by this time, they ought to have caught a glimpse of the dirigible hovering overhead. Had the *Red Monarch* herself fallen a victim to the storm? Don did not dare think of this possibility, which would have spelled doom for him, his uncle, and all the crew.

And the thought of the oncoming Arctic night congealed his blood. Even with the sun shining, their plight was terrible beyond words. But with that light withdrawn, with blackness all around them, while the gales roared and the cold pierced, with no possibility of hunting for food—it meant madness and death!

There were some rockets in the car that might serve for signaling, and these they treasured as a last hope. They were useless now while the light lasted, but when darkness came they might have their uses.

All three kept a constant watch on the sky. They went out in different directions as far as they dared without losing sight of the car, so as to extend their range of vision as much as possible.

The day after the killing of the walrus, Don had gone a considerable distance from the car when he found himself near a pressure-ridge that reared itself to a height of twenty feet. The sides were slippery, and he was seeking

a way around it when his attention was caught by a queer object encased in a block of ice.

He approached it curiously, and gave a gasp of surprise when he saw what it was.

Lying in the ice about six inches from its outer surface, was a bottle!

Was he dreaming? Could he believe his eyes? How had it got there? Who had put it there? What did it mean?

He must find out. He must get that bottle out of its crystal envelope.

He drew his knife from his belt and hacked away at the ice.

CHAPTER XIX

At the North Pole

Don worked with feverish intensity, spurred on, not only by curiosity, but by a tingling feeling that he was on the brink of some important discovery.

He had heard of bottles that had been thrown overboard, sometimes by shipwrecked sailors in the hope that they might somewhere reach others, carrying their messages of their plight, sometimes for scientific purposes to test the drift and direction of currents.

Possibly this was one of those; perhaps it contained a story of some tragedy of the sea. If so, what wanderings it must have had before it had found a resting place in the Polar solitudes and been encased in ice!

It took the lad some time to cut off the surrounding ice, and when he was nearing the bottle he had to work with excessive care to avoid breaking it. But at last he had it freed, and it was with a trembling hand that he held it up to the light.

He could see that there was paper in it that

had been written on. And there was a discolored fragment of what appeared to be silk, on which he could faintly discern a star.

It was tightly corked, and he had to cut around the cork before he could get it out.

He drew out the bit of cloth first, and his heart leaped as he saw that it was a strip of the American flag.

Old Glory! The Stars and Stripes! He pressed it to his lips.

But what was it doing here?

He drew out the paper and unfolded it. The ink had paled, but he had no trouble in reading it.

And this is what he read:

"90 N. Lat. North Pole
April 6, 1909.

"Arrived here to-day, 27 marches from C. Columbia.

"I have with me 5 men, Matthew Henson, colored, Ootah, Egingwah, Seegloo and Ookeah, Eskimos; 5 sledges and 38 dogs. My ship, the *S. S. Roosevelt,* is in winter quarters at C. Sheridan, 90 miles east of Columbia.

"The expedition under my command, which has succeeded in reaching the Pole, is under the auspices of the Peary Arctic Club of New York City, and has been fitted out and sent north by the members and friends of the club for the purpose of securing this geographical

prize, if possible, for the honor and prestige of the United States of America.

"The officers of the club are Thomas H. Hubbard, of New York, President; Zenas Crane of Mass., Vice-President; Herbert L. Bridgman of New York, Secretary and Treasurer.

"I start back for Cape Columbia to-morrow.

"Robert E. Peary,
"United States Navy."

"90 N. Lat. North Pole

"I have to-day hoisted the national ensign of the United States of America at this place, which my observations indicate to be the North Polar axis of the earth, and have formally taken possession of the entire region, and adjacent, for and in the name of the President of the United States of America.

"I leave this record and United States flag in possession.

"Robert E. Peary,
"United States Navy."

Don's head was in a whirl, and he thrilled from head to foot. He could scarcely believe his eyes. He read and reread the precious document, handling it reverently as he tried to realize the stupendous fact.

Here in his hands, in his, Don Sturdy's, was Peary's own record of the discovery of the North Pole! Here, close to that very spot, the great explorer, lying flat on the ice, with his instrument box imbedded in snow, had taken

the observations of the sun that told him that he had reached his goal, the goal for which nations and individuals had been striving for the last four hundred years and in the quest for which hundreds had lost their lives.

Don's sensations were overpowering. He found himself trembling like a leaf. He was staggered at all that his discovery implied. But one thing stood out clearly:

If Peary and his party were the first to reach the Pole, he, Don Sturdy, was the second!

He was still trying to realize what all this meant when suddenly he heard the report of a rifle.

He started as though he himself had been shot.

Neither Stinson nor Powell had a rifle.

He tried to reason with himself that the sound must have been caused by the cracking of an ice floe, but just then a second report came that was unmistakable.

He had already put the paper and the bit of flag back into their former resting place, and now he hastily set the bottle down and scrambled up the pressure ridge in the direction from which the shot had come.

He reached the top, and his heart seemed to turn over as he saw a party of men, six or eight, as well as he could make out, trudging along in his direction drawing a sledge behind them.

He waved his hands and shouted like a maniac and discharged his own rifle. That they saw him was evident from their excited gestures. Several of the men dropped the rope and hurried toward him. But there was one stalwart figure that outstripped all the others.

Don had started running, too; and soon he and his Uncle Frank rushed into each other's arms.

"Don! Don! My dear boy! Alive! Thank God! Oh, thank God!" cried the captain, hugging his nephew convulsively, while tears ran down his bronzed cheeks.

Don himself was so moved that he could only babble incoherently and cling closer to his uncle. Sheer joy seemed to be choking him.

It was a long time before they could talk intelligently, and in the meantime the other members of the party, consisting of six of the airship's crew under the command of Lieutenant Merriman, came up and were only less exuberant than themselves with delight at the reunion.

"We feared that we would find only your dead body," said the lieutenant. "Thank Heaven, boy, that you're alive and well! But we'll have to keep up the search for the bodies of poor Stinson and Powell. You don't know, of course; but they fell with the car soon after—"

He stopped and stood open-mouthed. Powell

and Stinson, who had heard the shots, came galloping into view and charged down upon the party.

There was pandemonium for a few minutes, as all tried to talk at once, and it was a happy party that finally applied itself to the sledge and drew it to the car.

This was promptly transposed into an abode of plenty, for the sledge was abundantly supplied with all kinds of provisions, implements and utensils. Among the latter was an alcohol lamp on which was brewed tea, and the hot, steaming drink was like nectar to the three who had had only snow water to drink with their meals.

On the way back to the car, Don had picked up the precious bottle, but in the general excitement this had provoked no comment.

The meal was a prolonged one, owing to the ceaseless flow of questions and answers. Don, Powell, and Stinson told of their providential escape from death, and in turn learned what had happened to the airship after they had been flung from it.

"We weren't so very long behind you in finding the ice ourselves," explained Captain Sturdy. "The rudder broke, and we were more than ever at the mercy of the storm. We were beaten about for a time like a bird with a broken wing, and when at last the wind permitted it, we found an anchorage on the ice."

"How far is the ship from here?" asked Don.

"About forty miles, I should judge," answered his uncle. "They're repairing it as fast as they can. But our party set out at once, and we've been scouring the ice for days, looking for your bodies but not daring to hope we'd find you alive. But God was better than our fears."

"Unless our repairs are finished soon, the Arctic night will be upon us and we'll have to give up our search for the North Pole," remarked Lieutenant Merriman.

Then Don exploded a bombshell.

"I've already found it," he said calmly.

CHAPTER XX

Consternation

The effect of Don's statement was electric. Captain Sturdy jumped to his feet, and the rest of the party were visibly agitated. All looked at Don in amazement, not quite sure whether he was joking or in dead earnest.

"What's that?" cried his uncle. "Are my ears playing tricks with me?"

"Not at all," replied Don, enjoying the sensation he had created. "I mean just what I say. I was standing at the North Pole this afternoon. For that matter, you passed over it on your way to the car."

A scared look came into the captain's face. Could Don's fall and the suffering he had gone through have deranged his mind?

"How do you know this?" he asked. "You haven't any instruments and you couldn't have taken any observations."

Don picked up the bottle and handed it to his uncle.

"There's the answer," he said.

In utter bewilderment, and with his doubts

as to Don's sanity increased rather than lessened, Captain Sturdy took the bottle, uncorked it and drew from it the fragment of flag and the paper.

He gave an ejaculation of astonishment as he recognized that the silk was part of the Stars and Stripes, but his amazement became overpowering as he started to read the paper aloud and began to grasp its import.

"Why—why," he gasped, his eyes starting from his head as he looked lower down for the signature, "it's Peary's own report of the discovery of the Pole! Where did you find it? How did you find it?"

"In a place between the ice cakes of a pressure ridge," replied Don. "The same ridge on which I was standing when I first saw you."

The whole party read and reread the document amid a chorus of excited exclamations.

"Don, you've beaten us all to it!" ejaculated his Uncle Frank, throwing his arm affectionately over his nephew's shoulder. "You've rediscovered the North Pole. You're the second white human being alive to stand on the spot. But we're not going to be far behind you. Come along," he said, addressing the company. "We'll all stand at the North Pole and have a glorious memory for all our lives."

The others needed no urging, and all hurried over to the pressure ridge. There they

deposited reverently the precious bottle in the place from which it had been taken. But first Captain Sturdy made a careful copy of it and added a statement as to its finding which was signed by every member of the party.

"This document may some day be beyond all price," he remarked as he carefully placed the statement in his pocket. "And it will create a world-wide sensation when it is published on our return to the United States."

"Aren't we in the United States now?" asked Don, with a smile.

"By Jove, you're right!" exclaimed the captain, slapping his knee. "Or at any rate, we're on territory that belongs to the United States by right of discovery. That right has always been recognized by the nations of the world. Peary claimed it for his country, and the claim won't be disputed."

They placed a copy of their own statement in the bottle, which they carefully packed about with snow and ice so that it could not be disturbed by the elements, and then reluctantly left the memorable spot and returned to the car.

"I remember now," said Captain Sturdy, as they walked along. "Peary, in his story of the discovery of the Pole, told about having placed the statement and the strip of flag in a bottle which he left between spaces in a pressure ridge. That flag, by the way, had quite a

romantic history. Peary had carried it wrapped about his body during his different expeditions for fifteen years. At the highest point he reached on each trip he left a strip of it, so that by the time he actually reached the Pole there wasn't much of it left. But there was enough to mark the greatest discovery of modern times. I never in my wildest thoughts dreamed that I should ever see and handle it."

It was a wrench to turn their thoughts to other things. But time was pressing, it behooved them to get back as quickly as possible to the airship. The first dim twilight of the Arctic night was beginning to gather, and they knew that in a few weeks they would be in utter darkness. Whatever they did had to be done quickly.

They planned, therefore, to get their supper and go early to sleep, so that they could start on their return journey the first thing the next morning.

They had walrus steak for supper, and all were interested in Don's story of the capture of the huge animal and of how nearly it had eluded him.

But Captain Sturdy had additional reason for the intentness with which he listened.

"It's a very unusual thing," he remarked thoughtfully, "for the walrus to be found so far from land."

"But Peary found no land for the last few

hundred miles of his dash for the Pole," objected Lieutenant Merriman.

"That is true," agreed the captain. "But that doesn't say that there wasn't land somewhere to the right or left of his line of march. He thought himself, from soundings and observations of the tides, that there was land somewhere in the vicinity of the Pole that remained to be discovered. Perhaps there is, and that may explain the presence of the walrus. It may be our luck to discover it. And if we do," he added, turning with a quizzical smile to Don, "we ought to give it the name of Don Sturdy Land. It seems to me that's only due to the re-discoverer of the Pole."

"Now you're kidding me," remonstrated Don.

"Not a bit of it," declared Lieutenant Merriman stoutly. "No name would fit it better."

They found it close crowding to bunk the whole party in the car, but managed it after a fashion.

They set out early the next morning, after having packed all their provisions and belongings on the sledge. This was a strong structure, capable of supporting as much as twelve hundred pounds. It was about twelve feet long, two feet wide, and had solid sides seven inches high, lashed together with sealskin thongs. The ash runners were two inches wide and shod with steel shoes.

There was room on the ropes by which it was drawn for about six men, and these were relieved at intervals by the other members of the party.

There was no reluctance on the part of any one to do the work, for though it was hard and trying in the extreme, it helped to keep them warm. The air was clear but bitterly cold, searching to the very marrow, and serving as a spur to hurry the explorers on to the warmth and safety of the airship.

On the smoother sections of the ice the travelers were able to move at a good rate of speed. But again and again they came to pressure ridges, where they had to push and pull the sledge up one side and down the other, taxing their united strength to the utmost. At noon, they calculated that they had made perhaps ten miles. And there were about thirty miles yet to go!

They stopped for a hasty meal which they ate in the lee of the loaded sledge, crouching low to escape the force of the wind. Then they moved on again, tired but dogged and determined.

They had gone about three miles further, when Don, peering ahead, gave vent to a sharp exclamation.

"Look at that smoke!" he cried. "It looks as though it came from a fire!"

Some distance ahead of them there was a

dense, black series of folds in the air that seemed to be settling over the ice like a pall.

"It isn't from a fire," said the captain grimly, exchanging a significant look with Lieutenant Merriman.

"Hurry, men! Hurry!" commanded the lieutenant. "Put your backs into it. Get to going and keep going fast."

His voice was like the crack of a whip, and those hauling the sled strained at the ropes, knowing that danger threatened.

What that danger was they were not long in learning.

A few minutes more and a cry broke from the lips of all as they halted abruptly before a stretch of open water.

A great chasm had split the ice field asunder! The rent was rapidly widening before them! At right and left the water extended as far as the eye could reach!

CHAPTER XXI

A Daring Leap

The party from the *Red Monarch* had met one of the greatest perils in the Arctic, a thing that Peary dreaded above everything else, a menace that is ever present and that has caused scores of explorers to leave their bones in the frozen North.

They stood on the edge of a lead—a split in the great ice pack—caused by a combination of wind and tide that had riven the masses apart, leaving an intervening space of open water, over which they had no means of passing.

They had no boat nor raft nor any material with which to make them. Swimming was out of the question in the frightful cold of that icy gulf. Even if it were feasible, they dared not abandon the supplies.

"Trapped!" ejaculated Captain Sturdy.

"We're up against it, sure enough," asserted Lieutenant Merriman.

"The only thing to do, I suppose," suggested Don questioningly, "is to follow the edge of the

ice in the hope that we'll reach the end of the lead and work around it to the other side, or at least find a place narrow enough to get across?"

"It's a forlorn hope, but its our only chance," replied Lieutenant Merriman.

"In what direction would we better go?" asked Don.

"It's a toss-up," returned the lieutenant. "One chance is as good as another. But we've got to hurry, for the crack is widening all the time. We'll go to the right."

The "smoke," as Don had interpreted it, but which was really the black, heavy vapor rising from the open water, enveloped them in it's dank folds as they hurried along as fast as their heavy load would allow. All put forth every ounce of muscle they had, for they knew that they were racing against time and perhaps for their very lives.

Everything depended upon their getting to a spot to which the crack had not yet extended. Once on the other side of that ominous streak of water, the peril would be over. But as long as they were forced to remain on this side, they were as effectually shut off from any chance of reaching the airship as if a continent lay between them.

On and on they went, until, despite the bitter cold, they were drenched with perspiration.

Still the water intervened, sometimes wider, sometimes narrower, but always there.

"Don," panted the lieutenant, "you're the quickest on your feet of any of us. Run ahead and see if you can find any place where there's a chance of our getting around or over. If there doesn't seem to be any, perhaps it may be better for us to double on our trail and try our luck in the other direction."

Don set off at a rapid pace, and was soon lost to sight in the mist ahead. The hummocks and pressure ridges made it rough going, and he soon found himself gasping from his exertions.

He had gone perhaps a mile when a gleam of hope came to him, as he noted a spot where the crack had narrowed until not more than six feet separated the shores of ice. At first he thought that this indicated a gradual closing of the two parts of the icefield, but as he looked beyond he saw that it widened again.

Here was the spot that promised possible salvation, and with the quickness of resolution that was one of his chief qualities he took instant advantage of it.

If he had been fresh and lightly clothed and had had a footing of solid ground, he could have made the leap without difficulty. He had often done more in practice on the athletic field of the high school.

But now he was panting with his exertions,

his heavy clothing hampered him, the sealskin kamicks that clothed his feet were worn smooth and took no grip on the ice, and the ice itself gave him only a slippery footing.

The banks of the thick ice rose sheer from the water many feet high. If he slipped and fell into the water, he could never climb out, and before help could come to him the icy water would have paralyzed him and swallowed him up.

But the crack might widen at any minute. It was now or never. Don determined that it should be now.

He moved as far back for his run as the ice permitted. Then, with his back to the hummock, he measured the distance, ran to the edge of the chasm and leaped.

The fortune that favors the brave was with him. He struck the other side and stood swaying for a moment on the brink. Then he fell forward, sprawling on the ice and bruising himself cruelly.

But he was up in a moment and shouting at the top of his voice.

Several minutes elapsed before he heard answering shouts. A little later his party came in sight.

Captain Sturdy and Lieutenant Merriman rushed forward to the spot opposite Don.

"Quick!" cried Don. "Get the sledge up

here and throw over the rope to me. The crack is getting wider. Quick! Hurry!"

There was no time for questions or hesitation. The men grasped Don's idea instantly, and in a moment the sledge was at the edge of the crack, with its nose pointing toward Don.

They threw the rope over to him, and Lieutenant Merriman took command.

"Steady now, men," he ordered. "Hold the sled up so that as little of the weight as possible comes on Don and push it over the crack. Once get the front end of it on the other side, and we'll have a bridge on which we can cross."

The men pushed the sled over gradually, bearing their weight at the same time on the back of it, so as to keep it as level as possible.

Even at that, the strain on Don was terrific. It seemed as though his arms would be wrenched from their sockets. But he held on grimly, and at last the runners of the front end rested on Don's side.

Then the sled was pushed on until three feet of it was on one side and three on the other, while the remaining six feet of the central part bridged the chasm.

"Over with you, men," commanded the lieutenant. "One at a time, but be quick!"

One by one, the men climbed over the extemporized bridge, Captain Sturdy and the lieutenant coming last.

Then, bearing all their weight on the front end to prevent the back part from falling into the water, the crew drew the sledge over until it was free of the crack.

They had scarcely done so before there was a loud report, and a large section of the ice on the other side split from the parent pack and the water rushed in to take its place. To have crossed now would have been impossible.

"Just in time!" exclaimed Don gleefully. But Captain Sturdy, looking at the lad, said feelingly:

"Don, my boy, you've saved us. And you risked your life in doing it. I'm very proud of you."

"You're all wool and a yard wide," cried the lieutenant, clapping the boy on the shoulder.

"When it comes to quick thinking and quick acting, that lad is sure there," declared Stinson, a sentiment that was greeted with shouts of approval by his mates, jubilant over their rescue from frightful peril.

All were so exhausted from the excitement and their strenuous exertions that they were forced to take a little breathing spell. But the rest was of brief duration, and soon they were off again, more eager now than ever to reach the airship before another break in the ice should put them in the same situation.

But mile after mile passed without any other glimpse of the dreaded "smoke." They had

struck a section of the ice where the going was easier, and as the wind was behind them it helped to hurry them along.

They had covered about eight miles on this second lap when Don's keen eyes caught sight of some moving figures a long distance ahead of them. At his exclamation, the others looked in the same direction.

"A party coming from the airship to meet us," conjectured the lieutenant.

Captain Sturdy unslung his glasses and told his nephew to take a look.

"By the great horn spoon!" Don exclaimed, "they're Eskimos!"

CHAPTER XXII

As from the Grave

"Eskimos!" exclaimed Lieutenant Merriman. "Are you sure, Don? It doesn't seem possible that they should be so far north as this."

"They're Eskimos, right enough," replied Don, handing the glasses to him. "Look for yourself."

"It's only another indication, added to that of the walrus, that there's land nearer to the Pole than has been thought," said Captain Sturdy.

The lieutenant looked hard and long.

"By Jove! Don's right," he agreed. "And they're coming right toward us. They're probably as much surprised as we are to find others here."

Captain Sturdy now took the glasses and studied carefully the oncoming Eskimos.

As the newcomers approached, it was seen that there were two men with one sledge to which eight dogs were attached. They stopped when they got within a hundred yards, and

jabbered excitedly with each other as they saw that the strange party consisted of whites. Doubtless they had expected to see some of their own kind.

Lieutenant Merriman, who had been on several expeditions to the Arctic and had picked up enough of the Eskimo language to make himself easily understood, went forward to meet them with signs and words of friendship.

While the conversation was going on, Don looked curiously at the dogs. They had thrown themselves down on the ice to rest, as far as their harness permitted. They were powerful creatures, weighing apparently about a hundred pounds apiece. They had a pointed muzzle and sharp ears, great breadth between the eyes, thick soft fur, muscular legs, and a bushy tail almost like the brush of a fox. They were of various colors, black, white, yellow and mottled.

"Magnificent beasts, aren't they?" Don remarked to his uncle.

"They're all of that," replied Captain Sturdy. "There's a strain of the wolf in them, and they fight each other on the slightest provocation. They're the hardiest dogs in the world. They can work for days on almost nothing. They live outdoors, even when they're at home, all the year around. A temperature of sixty degrees below zero doesn't bother them."

Lieutenant Merriman now came toward his party, with the Eskimos slowly following him.

"As nearly as I can make out," he said, "they belong to a tribe living on an island somewhere to the west. They were with a hunting party and got separated from them by a storm that opened a lead very much like the one that we met. They've run short of provisions, and were figuring on killing one of their dogs for meat. Their names are Akting-wah and Oquebah. I told them we'd give them what they needed."

"I'm glad we met them," said Captain Sturdy. "They may be of service to us in a number of ways, and we can probably get from them some of the information that was one of the objects of the expedition."

"They offered to build us a couple of igloos," said the lieutenant, "and I guess we'll let them get busy at once. We've had a pretty hard day of it, and I'm going to call a halt. We'll get a meal and a few hours sleep, and then start on the last lap for the *Red Monarch*."

The Eskimo could read the friendliness on the faces of the white men, and their shyness soon wore off. A favorable spot was selected, and they started to build the igloos that would serve as sleeping quarters for the night.

It was astonishing to see the quickness and deftness of these children of Nature. Each took from the sledge a saw-knife about eighteen

inches long, with a cutting edge on one side and saw teeth on the other. They cut a number of blocks of snow of different sizes, larger for the bottom row, smaller for the upper rows, but all curved on the inner side so that when they were placed together they formed a circle.

When enough blocks were prepared, one of the Eskimos took his place in what was to be the center of the house, and the other, aided by the members of the exploring party, brought the blocks, which were laid in a circle and in rows sloping toward the top, something like a beehive in shape. Then the last hole in the top was filled in as a keystone and the building was complete. A hole big enough for a man to crawl through had been left for an entrance.

In an amazingly short time, two igloos had been built, large enough to accommodate all the members of the party. Then the dogs were fed with some of the walrus meat that had been brought along, supplies and sleeping bags were thrust through the openings, followed by the men themselves, the entrance was blocked up so as to let just air enough for breathing come in, and they found themselves in a snug retreat, sheltered from the wind.

The animal heat from their bodies, swathed in furs, aided by the alcohol lamps on which they brewed their tea and the lamps of the Eskimos, fed with oil from blubber, soon made the crowded igloos comfortable, and all laughed

and joked as they ate their meal and talked over the stirring incidents of the day.

"Hope we can get the Eskimos to keep on with us till we get to the airship," remarked Don.

"I guess we can," replied the lieutenant. "Time is of no consequence to an Eskimo, and he doesn't care much where he is, as long as he's well fed. But when they see the airship, there's no telling but what they'll turn about and run from it."

"They won't be so scared, though, as though they saw it for the first time in the air," predicted Don. "It will be close to or on the ice, and they may think it's some strange kind of sea vessel. Then, after they've got a little used to it, we may be able to explain to them what it is."

They were all tired and would gladly have slept "around the clock," as Don had on a previous memorable occasion, but Lieutenant Merriman, in whom the experience of the previous day had inspired a great wariness of leads, routed them out after but four hours of slumber.

They fortified themselves with a heavy meal, and then the sledges were loaded, the dogs harnessed, and they bade farewell to the igloos and set out on the last half of their journey. The Eskimos agreed to go with them to the airship, induced largely by the lieutenant's

promise to stock them with provisions sufficient to last them on their journey to their tribe.

More than once that day the whites of the party congratulated themselves on having met the natives. Their sledge was able to take a large amount of weight from the other, and the hardy dogs made nothing of the extra load. Then, too, the Eskimos were able from instinct and long practice to pick out the easiest going, and much needless labor was avoided.

They halted only once for a hasty meal, and then pushed on. They made such rapid progress that about the middle of the afternoon a great shout went up, for they saw the huge mass of the *Red Monarch* outlined against the horizon.

It was a delightful sight for the eyes of the explorers, but an amazing and terrifying one for the Eskimos, and they halted in their tracks.

"Tornarsuk!" exclaimed Aktingwah, and Oquebah nodded emphatically.

"He says it's the devil," explained the lieutenant.

They jabbered together volubly, and at last Aktingwah turned his dogs' noses toward the east.

"He thinks that he'll go while the going's good," commented Don.

"Promise them anything, Lieutenant," urged Captain Sturdy. "Tell them we'll give them

saws, hatchets, mirrors for their women, if they'll come along with us."

"It's lucky Lieutenant Merriman can talk their language!" was Don's satisfied exclamation.

Lieutenant Merriman talked earnestly with the Eskimos, while the rest of the party waited with anxiety for their decision.

It was a hard task to overcome their superstitious fears, but at last the two men yielded to the lieutenant's persuasions and accompanied the others, although with much inward quaking.

They soon got so near the *Red Monarch* that they could see the figures of the crew on the ice busily working at the repairs. It was not long before their own approach was detected, and their old comrades of the airship came hurrying to meet them.

"There'll be some little surprise party when they find that this isn't a funeral march," said Captain Sturdy to Don with a smile.

"We're mighty lively dead ones," returned the grinning Don.

"Let's keep in the rear of the others," suggested Stinson, "and watch their jaws drop when they see us."

The three who had been lost adopted the suggestion, and the others crowded ahead of them to shield them.

Captain Hargot was in the van, and his

greeting was hearty, though tempered with sadness as he scanned the sledges.

"Didn't find the bodies?" he asked. "I hardly expected that you would. Poor, poor fellows! It breaks my heart to think that we've seen them for the last time."

"Guess again, Captain Hargot!" cried Don, stepping out, followed by Stinson and Powell.

CHAPTER XXIII

Amid Grinding Floes

If those returning expected to see Captain Hargot's jaw drop, they were not disappointed.

For a moment he stood as if paralyzed. Then with a shout of delight he rushed forward, followed by the others. There was a wild scene of mauling and pounding on the part of the crew that seemed as though it would never stop.

Then followed a babel of questions and answers and exclamations of wonder, as the happy party wended their way back to the airship.

"All together once more!" exulted Captain Hargot. "I haven't had one happy moment since I thought I'd lost you three. That you could possibly be alive never entered my mind. All of us have been working as though under a pall. But now we'll go through the rest of these repairs like a house afire!"

There was only one discordant note in the chorus of relief and happiness. That was furnished by Jake.

Though he would have denied it, he had felt

the supposed loss of Don to be a relief. It would be going too far to say that he was not shocked when he learned of Don's fall to certain death, as he supposed, or that he would not have prevented it if he could. But after the first shock had worn away, it had been succeeded by a certain sense of satisfaction.

Don had been a thorn in his flesh from the time he had come on board the airship. He hated him because he possessed most of the qualities in which he himself was deficient. He was jealous of his father's admiration for Don's character and exploits. The memory of their short bout of fisticuffs rankled. And he had congratulated himself more than once that now Don had been removed from his path.

So that now, though he forced himself to smile vaguely when Don greeted him, the hand that he extended was limp and clammy, and he turned away as soon as he decently could and pretended to busy himself at other things.

Don was so happy, however, that though he gauged Jake's feelings perfectly, it had no effect on him. It was more than made up for by the warmth of the others. And it was almost sufficient happiness to get once more in touch with civilized conditions, to be able to bathe and change his clothes, to sit at a bountiful table and sleep in a bed with sheets.

The Eskimos had at first viewed the ship with fear and trembling. But the kindness

with which they were treated and the presents that were made them soon dispelled their inward quakings, and they were as happy over their new acquisitions as children with their toys.

Don became very chummy with them, and soon picked up many words of their language. They taught him how to handle the dog team, and he soon became fairly expert.

One day he was practicing driving at some distance from the camp, under the direction of Aktingwah. Suddenly the dogs began to tug wildly at their traces, and the Eskimo gave vent to an excited exclamation.

"Oomingmuksue!" he shouted, pointing to some black dots on a distant ice slope.

He lashed the dogs, who needed no urging, for they themselves had recognized the dots as musk oxen, and the prospect of fresh meat urged them on to the top of their speed.

But the musk oxen had also descried their pursuers, and set off at a gait that promised to distance the hunters.

Seeing his, Aktingwah halted his team, released the dogs from their traces, and they tore ahead after their quarry while Aktingwah and Don raced along on foot.

The dogs, freed from their burdens, were much fleeter than their heavier prey, and before long they had overtaken them, surrounded them, leaping and nipping at their heels and

retarding their flight until Don and his companion could come up to them.

Pausing for a moment to catch his breath, Don found himself facing the shaggy forms and pointed horns of three musk oxen, at bay with their backs to a high pressure ridge.

A big bull, his eyes gleaming with rage, broke into a bellow as he saw Don and rushed for him. Don sent a bullet through the vulnerable point in the fore shoulder. The bull went down, killed instantly. The other two were cows, and were quickly dispatched.

Aktingwah beat off the dogs, who wanted their feast at once, drove them back to the sledge and harnessed them, and they drew the body of the big bull to camp behind the sledge, leaving the others to be brought in later.

Their arrival at camp was hailed with acclamations, as the fresh meat furnished a welcome addition to their canned goods, while the magnificent heads and horns were a valuable contribution to Captain Sturdy's collection.

The repairs to the airship went on rapidly, and it seemed probable that in another day or two they would be completed.

The time had not been wholly lost, for during the time of waiting many of the objects of the expedition had been accomplished. Valuable observations had been made as to winds and tidal currents. Captain Sturdy had mounted superb specimens of the special va-

riety of polar bear he had gone to seek. And, above all, the prime object of the trip, the reaching of the North Pole on an airship trip and the confirmation of Peary's discovery, had been accomplished, thanks to Don Sturdy.

The day before the airship was expected to be ready to resume its flight, a party started out to make some soundings at a point about three miles distant. Captain Sturdy was in charge, and Captain Hargot had designated Don, Powell, Aktingwah and Jake to go along with him and the scientists.

The sounding apparatus consisted of a wooden reel, a detachable wooden crank to go on each end of the reel, six thousand feet of specially made piano wire and a fourteen-pound lead. The latter had at its lower end a small bronze clam-shell device for the purpose of bringing up specimens from the ocean bed.

The party had reached its destination, found a hole in the ice, and all were busily at work letting down the lead when the skies suddenly began to darken. Great masses of cloud banked themselves along the horizon and the temperature fell with alarming rapidity.

"Looks just as it did when we had that first hurricane," remarked Don.

Aktingwah began to talk excitedly, pointing to the cloud banks that every moment became more threatening.

"Wind up the reel," commanded Captain

Sturdy, as he looked anxiously about for some place of shelter.

It was useless to think of trying to get back to the airship, for the storm promised to break at any moment. Already great gusts were coming out of the north, and if they were caught out in the open they would be whirled around and beaten down like forest leaves.

At a little distance was a high pressure ridge, in which Don descried an opening. This he pointed out to his uncle.

"Make for that cave!" captain Sturdy commanded. "It's our only chance!"

The assistants seized the reel on which all the wire was now wound and they and Captain Sturdy hurried to the cave, which, they found, extended for many feet into the heart of the ridge.

They were not a moment too soon. Scarcely had they got under cover before the storm broke in all its fury.

To them, as they cowered as far back in the cave as they could get, the previous hurricane seemed like child's play compared with this. The roar of the gale was thunderous. It beat upon the ridge as though it would tear it apart.

There was danger that at any moment tons of ice would come tumbling down upon them. But they had to take that chance. It was the lesser of two evils. In that terrific cyclone

they could not have survived two minutes in the open.

The severest test of courage is to bear up under a danger that one can do nothing to avert. The party met that test. All but Jake.

For some minutes he had been whimpering, but at last he broke out into frantic crying.

"Oh, we'll be killed!" he wailed.

"Keep still," Captain Sturdy commanded curtly.

"I can't," moaned Jake. "We'll never get out of here alive."

Aktingwah looked at him curiously, and the others found it hard to conceal their contempt.

Suddenly they were conscious of a rocking motion, and they had all they could do to maintain their balance.

"Oh, it's an earthquake! It's an earthquake!" shrieked Jake.

"It's not an earthquake," replied Don. "But perhaps it's worse. We're afloat!"

CHAPTER XXIV

The Slash of the Knife

As though to confirm Don's statement, a wave broke into the cave, submerging the ice to the depth of a foot, and then receded as the berg rose in the other direction.

The full meaning of their situation burst upon all in the party. The gale had broken up the ice field, and the cave in which they had sought refuge was floating on the waters of the Arctic!

It rocked and swayed as other great masses of ice were dashed against it, and they had to cling to any jagged projection they could lay their hands on in order to retain their footing.

Jake was frightened out of his wits, and was on the verge of hysterics.

"I told you we'd all be killed!" he sobbed. "There's nothing now can save us from drowning."

How big or how small was the special floe of which the cave formed a part, they had no means of knowing. Through the narrow passage in front of them they could see giant

blocks of ice rising and falling on the waves and grinding against each other as though locked in mortal combat.

All knew that at any moment the cave itself might split apart or break up into small fragments, leaving them engulfed in the icy waters.

The gale still persisted, though it showed some faint signs of abating. The motion was sickening as their floe was tossed up and down like a chip in a torrent. But with the exception of Jake, they gritted their teeth, summoned up all their courage, and awaited the outcome with what fortitude they could command.

"Keep steady, men," counseled Captain Sturdy, his voice as calm and strong as though no peril threatened. "You know as well as I do that we're in a tight fix. But many of us have been in others just as bad and come through all right. Keep your nerve and be ready for whatever may happen."

"Oh, if I'd only stayed in the airship!" wailed Jake.

The gale soon lost its force, and with its moderating, hope revived. In a little while they were able to emerge from the cave on the platform of ice in front of it that had not been broken away, and take account of their situation.

They were in the midst of scores of ice floes that had been broken by the tempest from the main field. Back of the pressure ridge that

was the highest point of their own floe was a sheet of comparatively smooth ice, perhaps an acre in extent.

Even as they looked, however, a huge piece broke off from this, still further diminishing the size of their floating island. How long it would be before the whole mass disintegrated under the grinding of other floes they could only guess.

The stretch of tossing water had developed a width of over a mile. Either shore would have offered temporary safety if they could have reached it. But to reach either in this welter of waves and floes was impossible.

"There's nothing to do but wait," announced Don, a grim look coming into his eyes.

"The waters will subside after a while and then we may be able to jump from one ice floe to another—" said his uncle.

"Oh, I'd never be able to make it!" whimpered Jake.

"And reach the shore," went on the captain, paying no attention to the coward. "Naturally, we want to get on the same side as that on which the airship lies. But if the other offers a better chance, we'll take that."

A couple of hours passed before the waves had settled down enough to warrant an attempt to carry out Captain Sturdy's plan. At the best it would be hazardous. The slightest slip or miscalculation, and they would be lost,

either engulfed in the water or crushed between the floes. But desperate situations require desperate measures.

They were reconnoitering the ice to find a place that best promised success for their venture. Don was a little apart from the others when suddenly Aktingwah broke out with a shout of warning:

"Nanooksoah! Nanooksoah!" he shouted, his voice rising to a shriek.

Don knew what that ominous word meant, and he whirled about quickly.

A floe had ground against their own, and from it was coming a huge polar bear that, like themselves, had been marooned upon the floating ice.

It was not more than twenty feet away and directly between Don and the rest of his party.

It caught sight of Don, and its eyes gleamed with malignant fury. With a hoarse growl the bear started for him.

Don cast wildly around for a way of escape. His rifle had been left on the sledge when the storm broke upon them.

There was no time for hesitation. There was a group of floes close together that extended toward the further shore for a distance of about fifty yards. Beyond that were floating masses with gaps of water between them.

Don jumped to the first floe and the bear followed him. The chase was on.

Under the weight of pursuer and pursued, the floes rose and fell, making it difficult for either to keep his footing. But the advantage was with the bear, whose feet were especially made for such precarious footholds, and Don's glance behind him showed that his enemy was gaining.

On he went, straining every nerve, more from the instinct of self-preservation than from any hope of escape.

If he slipped, he was doomed!

He was nearing the edge of the clustered floes. The bear was close behind him now, and Don could catch the fetid smell of the brute and hear his savage grunts.

As he neared the edge of the field the boy saw a floe tossing about four feet distant. He gathered all his powers and leaped for it.

He made it with a few inches to spare. And a gleam of hope shot through his heart as he saw that for the moment he had baffled his enemy. The bear could not jump so far, and had halted on the edge of the field that Don had just left.

But Don's exultation lasted for only an instant. The monster was not to be so easily balked of its prey.

It hesitated only a moment, and then slipped off into the water and commenced to swim toward Don, who had now drifted some feet farther away.

Don looked desperately around. There was no other floe to which he could jump. The nearest was as much as fifteen feet away. In another moment the bear would climb on the floe. That would be the end.

His hand fell on the hunting knife at his belt. It took courage to fight the monster at such close quarters; but there was no other course left.

The bear had reached the floe and put his forepaws on it to climb up.

Don drew his knife, rushed to the edge, and slashed with all his force at the bear's right paw.

With a hideous snarl of pain and rage, the bear drew his paw back.

Instantly Don struck at the remaining paw, cutting deep into the sinews and tendons.

That too relinquished its hold, and the bear fell back into the water. The baffled beast, incapacitated for any more climbing in the face of so formidable an enemy, swam away to an accompaniment of roars and growls.

Don sank back on the floe, utterly exhausted and oblivious for the moment, of the chorus of rejoicing shouts from the rest of the party who had watched the chase and the fight with their hearts in their mouths.

Before long his floe floated near enough to the main cluster to enable him to leap upon it and make his way back to his comrades. His

uncle threw his arms around him and hugged him jubilantly.

"Great work, Don, my boy!" he exclaimed, his voice husky with emotion. "But it was a terribly close call. If I had had my rifle, I would have shot the brute long before he got to you."

A shout came from the shore, and they saw Captain Hargot with a crew from the *Red Monarch* who had come in search of them.

They shouted in return, and as the ice floes extended now in a line broken only at intervals toward the shore, they started on their perilous journey.

They got over the first few hundred yards safely. Then they found gaps of water between the floes and had to leap from one to the other.

Jake was making the jump when the floe for which he was headed veered suddenly. With a shriek he fell into the water and vanished.

The next instant Don had dived after him!

CHAPTER XXV

Down the Rope

As Don's body cleft the green icy depths the terrible cold seemed to make his heart cease beating.

One hand came in contact with a heavy body, and his fingers closed on it convulsively.

He came to the surface bringing it with him, and he saw the livid face of Jake, whose eyes were closed and who was evidently unconscious. The sudden immersion, combined with fright, had robbed him of his senses.

This rendered Don's task the easier, and in another moment he had reached the edge of a floe where several hands were extended to grasp his burden. Then they pulled him out, shivering, and blue with cold.

The ice was crowded more thickly close to the edge of the main icefield, and in a few minutes they were in the midst of their mates, who welcomed them as those returned from the dead.

Quick work was necessary, and both boys were piled into the sledge, covered with warm

furs and blankets, and hurried as fast as possible to the airship where they were dried, warmed, and vigorously massaged and put to bed.

The next day Don was around as usual, feeling none the worse for the icy bath. Almost the first one he met was Captain Hargot, who took the boy's hands in a crushing grip as he poured out his thanks for his son's rescue.

"Oh, that's all right," said Don, embarrassed by the gratitude and the praise for his courage mingled with it. "I'm only glad that I was there when the thing happened. By the way, how is Jake this morning?"

"Pretty weak and not able to be around yet," the captain answered. "But the doctor says he'll be all right in a day or two. He asked me who saved him, and I told him it was you. He says he wants to see you just as soon as he is strong enough."

That day the *Red Monarch* took flight and sailed over to the power car that had proved Don's ark of safety when he was threatened with snow-blindness. Another day was required to repair the car and restore it to its proper place, and then the great airship was in as perfect condition as when it had first started on its eventful voyage.

Aktingwah and Oquebah had been persuaded to trust themselves to the mysterious machine, and they and their dogs were carried in the di-

rection they indicated. The *Red Monarch* landed on an island of considerable extent, hitherto unknown to the world at large, and the two Eskimos joined their tribe. A large amount of information was gathered that afterward aroused intense interest and discussion when it was placed before the leading scientific societies of the United States and Europe.

But the Arctic night was creeping on apace, their supply of gasoline was getting low, and at last the *Red Monarch* bade farewell to the Arctic Circle and turned her nose toward civilization.

She flew to Spitzbergen, where she replenished her supplies, then to Norway, where her arrival was published to all the world and whence the voyagers sent their own private cables home. Then the dirigible started on her journey across the Atlantic to America.

Jake had long before this expressed his thanks to Don for saving his life. He was a very different Jake Hargot from what he had been previously. His narrow escape from death had sobered him and the fact that Don had rescued him in spite of the meanness he had shown to him had made him thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"I've been a rotter, Don," he said. "I've been meaner than dirt. Nine fellows out of ten that I had treated as I did you would have left

me to drown. At any rate, they wouldn't have risked their lives for me. I can never thank you enough for what you did for me."

Don, on his part, put aside all his feeling against Jake and accepted the apologies and thanks as wiping the slate clean of the differences between them.

Jake seemed at times to be hovering on the edge of some disclosure, and Don suspected that it had something to do with the robbery of his Uncle Amos's treasures. But he did not want to ask any questions now for fear that Jake would think he was taking advantage of the debt he owed him.

One night, however, after the *Red Monarch* had started on its trans-Atlantic journey, Jake came to Don at a moment when he happened to be alone.

"I might as well get it off my chest, Don," he said, as he seated himself beside him. "It's about that robbery."

Don was all attention in a moment.

"All right, Jake, go ahead," he said.

"That fellow you saw me with did go by the name of Slippery Jones," Jake admitted. "I fell in with him at a hangout where there were some pretty tough birds, and he and I became pals. But I want you to know that at first I didn't know that he was a thief. I don't really know that he is now. But after a while he began to hint at something that a good deal

of money could be made at, if we went into it together. He gave out that he was a mineral collector from Chicago. Bought minerals and sold them to rich men, you know. I took it all in at first and thought that he was the real thing. But when he kept on hinting—he never came right out with it—I began to get uneasy and shook him. A little while after that I heard of the robbery at your place, and I guessed right away that he was probably the thief."

"I've thought so for some time," remarked Don, "and what you tell me makes me feel sure of it. Have you any idea where the fellow can be found?"

"Nothing definite," replied Jake. "He always gave out that he was from Chicago, but his exact address he kept under his hat."

"Guess he had a good reason to do so," murmured Don.

"Now, that's the whole story," said Jake. "Of course, what I ought to have done was to tell all I knew at the time of the robbery. But I was afraid that I'd be arrested on the charge of being an accomplice. And when you asked me about it I was more scared than mad, though I was a good deal of both."

"Well, we'll get after this Slippery Jones as soon as we get home, if they haven't nabbed him already," remarked Don. "I'm much obliged to you for telling me this, Jake, and you can

be sure that your name will be kept out of it altogether."

They journeyed along swiftly in splendid weather. The second night was made glorious by a dazzling exhibition of the Aurora Borealis. Great streamers of shifting lights shot athwart the skies, until the airship seemed to be sailing in a sea of flame. Never had they seen such a magnificent spectacle, and its splendor held them enthralled for hours until the lights slowly faded into nothingness.

"And to think," remarked Captain Sturdy whimsically, "that Jennie rejected your offer to bring her back one of these."

"I'm glad she didn't take me up," laughed Don. "I'm afraid I'd have to sneak out of my bargain."

As Don reviewed the stirring events of the past few months he felt certain that nothing so exciting could ever happen to him again. How mistaken he was will be seen in the next volume of this series, entitled: "Don Sturdy in the Land of Volcanoes; or, The Trail of the Ten Thousand Smokes."

The next morning the *Red Monarch* reached New York. The hearts of all on board thrilled with joy and patriotism as the airship sailed over the statue of the Goddess of Liberty and headed up the State for the hangar at Plainville.

They had surmised that a big reception

awaited them, but they were taken clean aback by the tremendous crowd that had gathered to witness their triumphal return home. The flying field was fairly black with people, bands were playing, and a thunderous roar of welcome came up to them as they circled the field preparing for their landing.

Lower and lower the great craft settled, while Don scanned the crowd for familiar faces. He caught a glimpse of his parents and Ruth and his Uncle Amos, and his eyes filled. He saw good old Teddy and Fred and Emily and waved to them. Then he saw some one else, and an electric shock went through him.

Almost directly below him was Slippery Jones!

He looked again to make sure. But there was no mistake.

The *Red Monarch* was now within fifty feet of the ground. If Don waited for the regular landing there wouldn't be a chance in a thousand of locating the rascal.

Long ropes had been let down to be grasped by those beneath to pull the airship.

Quick as a flash, Don clutched one of these, swung himself over the side of the ship and let himself down, hand over hand.

A cry of astonishment, not unmixed with fear, came from the crowd as they watched the daring descent.

The instant Don's feet touched the ground,

the throng closed in on him. Almost in the front rank was Slippery Jones.

The next moment both Don's hands were on the man's collar.

"Arrest him!" he shouted.

The fellow, with a savage snarl, tried to break loose, but instantly a half dozen muscular arms grabbed him. An officer pushed his way through the crowd, and the man was delivered to him to be held for examination.

It was proved later that he was the thief of Professor Bruce's minerals, almost all of which were recovered, while the culprit was sentenced to a long term in prison. He had hung around Hillville long enough to take a wax impression of the lock and have a key made at a thieves' joint, and so had left no clue to his manner of entrance.

Through the crowd that tried to press his hand and clap him on the shoulders, Don pushed his way, and a moment later his mother and Ruth were hugging him and crying over him, while his father and Uncle Amos were trying to tell him how proud they were of him and blowing their noses hard in the process, and Teddy and Fred were doing their best to make his hands lame for life.

That night in the Sturdy household was one long to be remembered. His audience listened with smiles and tears and shudders as Don narrated his exciting adventures and hair-

breadth escapes, Captain Sturdy breaking in at times to emphasize exploits that Don glossed over too lightly. Dan Roscoe was there also and Mrs. Roscoe and Jennie, whose excitement was such that she had to be slapped on the back several times when her chewing gum threatened to choke her. Teddy was there, and Fred and Emily, their eyes full of hero worship as they rested on Don.

It was very, very late when the gathering broke up and Don and Teddy went to their room.

"I know now the fellow the papers refer to when they speak so mysteriously of the 'man higher up,'" remarked Teddy, with a grin.

"Who is it?" asked Don unsuspectingly.

"Who else but you," replied Teddy. "Haven't you stood on the top of the world?"

THE END

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