

LOST AT THE SOUTH POLE



Ted Scott
Flying Stories

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

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HE PUT AN ARM BENEATH THE SHOULDERS OF THE OLDER MAN.
Ted Scott: Lost at the South Pole. Frontispiece (Page [191](#))

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

LOST AT THE
SOUTH POLE
OR
TED SCOTT IN BLIZZARD LAND

By
FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF
"OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS,"
"THE LONE EAGLE OF THE BORDER,"
"THE HARDY BOYS: THE SECRET OF THE OLD MILL," ETC.

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THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS
RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS
OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL
FIRST STOP HONOLULU
THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS
SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE
ACROSS THE PACIFIC
THE LONE EAGLE OF THE BORDER
FLYING AGAINST TIME
OVER THE JUNGLE TRAILS
LOST AT THE SOUTH POLE
THROUGH THE AIR TO ALASKA

THE HARDY BOYS MYSTERY STORIES

THE HARDY BOYS: THE TOWER TREASURE
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THE HARDY BOYS: THE MYSTERY OF CABIN ISLAND
THE HARDY BOYS: THE GREAT AIRPORT MYSTERY

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Lost at the South Pole

Made in the United States of America

TO THE HEROES OF THE AIR

WILBUR, WRIGHT—ORVILLE WRIGHT
The first men to fly in a heavier-than-air machine

LOUIS BLERIOT
The first to fly the English Channel

CAPTAIN JOHN ALCOCK
The first to fly from Newfoundland to Ireland

COMMANDER RICHARD E. BYRD
In command flying over the North Pole

COLONEL CHARLES A. LINDBERGH
First to fly alone from New York to Paris

CLARENCE D. CHAMBERLIN
First to fly from New York to Germany

LIEUTENANTS LESTER J. MAITLAND—ALBERT F. HEGENBERGER
First to fly from California to Hawaii

CAPTAIN HERMANN KOEHL—COMMANDANT JAMES C.
FITZMAURICE
First to fly Westward across the North Atlantic—Ireland
to Greenely Island

CAPTAIN GEORGE H WILKINS—CARL B. EIELSON
First to fly over the Polar Sea from Alaska to Spitsbergen,

And a host of other gallant airmen of the Past and Present who,
by their daring exploits, have made aviation the wonderful
achievement it is to-day

THIS SERIES OF BOOKS
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

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CHAPTER I

IN FLAMES

“So you’d like to go on that expedition to the South Pole, would you, Ted?” asked Walter Hapworth, as he threw down the newspaper he had been reading.

“You bet I would,” replied Ted Scott, the famous young aviator, who had been the first to fly over the Atlantic Ocean from New York to Paris. “Nothing in the world would suit me better.”

“It’ll be a mighty dangerous venture,” continued Hapworth. “Do you remember how poor Scott—same name as yours, by the way—froze to death with his four companions on the way back from the Pole?”

“Yes,” said Ted. “That sure was tragedy. But it’s the kind of thing that’s bound to happen in the first stages of exploration. Those who come later can profit by the mistakes and mishaps of those who have gone before. This Raymond Expedition that we’re talking about is going to be wonderfully equipped, I understand.”

“Yes,” agreed Hapworth, “it will be far ahead of any previous one, as far as preparations are concerned. It’s under government auspices, for one thing, and that means there won’t be any lack of money. Then, too, Captain Raymond, who heads it, has had vast experience in Arctic exploration, and he knows just what will be needed. He’ll see that the party has the proper clothing, the right equipment, and an abundance of food. They’re going to take along a lot of Eskimo dogs, big huskies to draw the sledges. They’ll establish depots of supplies every hundred miles or so along the route they traverse, so that, if one lot gives out, they’ll know where they can find more. Altogether, it looks as though they had a better chance of succeeding than any who have gone before them.”

“I guess you’re right,” assented Ted. “But the airplanes will be depended on to do the greater part of the work this time. The huskies are all right, but the airplanes can go farther in an hour than they can in a day.”

“Yes,” agreed Hapworth. “Then, too, there’s nothing in the air to stop the planes, while the sledges may find barriers at any time that men and dogs will have to work like the mischief to get over.”

“Gee, it will be a thrill for the fellow who first flies over the South Pole!” exclaimed Ted enthusiastically.

“Of course the Pole itself has been reached by both Amundsen and Scott,” went on Hapworth. “But that was on the ground, or rather on the ice. No one

has yet flown over it. I hope that pleasure is reserved for you, Ted. By the way, have you had any answer yet to your application to go along with the expedition?"

"No. It's some time, too, since I wrote to Raymond about it and there's been plenty of time to get a response. I'm rather surprised that I haven't received it yet. But then, I suppose he's very busy in making his preparations and he hasn't reached to writing to me yet."

Walter Hapworth considered for a moment. "I hardly think it's that," he said slowly. "Of course he's a mighty busy man. But you'd think he'd jump at the chance to take along Ted Scott, the most famous aviator in the country. It would add immeasurably to the prestige of the expedition and to the popular interest in the trip. The natural thing for him to have done would have been to drop everything else and rush a telegram to you, accepting your proposal with thanks. The question is, why hasn't he done it?"

"It may be that my letter to him miscarried," suggested Ted, who himself had been greatly puzzled by the delay.

"Hardly a chance of that," replied Hapworth. "How many letters miscarry? Not one in a million. No, I don't think it's that."

"What is it, then?"

"I'll tell you. The fly in the ointment or, to vary the figure, the nigger in the woodpile is, in my opinion, that some underhand work is going on. Some one who doesn't want you to go on that expedition is gumming up the works."

"Who do you think it is?" asked Ted, in surprise. "I've had a number of enemies in my career, but most of them are now in jail," he added, with a grin.

"This fellow I have in mind isn't in jail," returned Hapworth. "I think it's Gustavus Hollister who's trying to queer you in the matter of this Raymond expedition."

"Hollister!" exclaimed Ted, as his thoughts flew to a well known Arctic explorer. "I've known for some time that that fellow has not liked me, but I've never known why. I've never done anything to him. Perhaps he doesn't like my shape or the color of my eyes."

"There doesn't always have to be a reason for a man's enmity," replied Hapworth. "That is, a good reason. Sometimes it arises merely from the meanness of the man's nature. But I can think right now of two or three possible reasons why Hollister's trying to put a spoke in your wheel."

"Just what are they?" queried Ted. "This is getting interesting."

"Well, do you remember that, after you'd made your wonderful flight over the Atlantic and the whole country was wild over you, Hollister came back from an expedition he had made up in the vicinity of the North Pole?"

"I do remember, now you speak of it. He made some notable discoveries up there."

“Exactly,” agreed Hapworth. “He’s no slouch as an explorer, though he’s got some mighty unpleasant qualities as a man. It would have been quite a triumphal return for him if you hadn’t happened at the time to be taking up so much of the limelight. As it was, everybody was thinking of you and his work passed almost unnoticed. Of course, the scientific societies appreciated his work and gave him full credit for it. But the general public didn’t take the notice of it that they would have under other circumstances. For that he’s never forgiven you.”

“Pretty small potatoes,” remarked Ted. “It was nothing I was to blame for.”

“Certainly not,” replied Hapworth. “A really broad-minded man, even though he might have been a bit disappointed, would never have laid it up against you. But there’s the fact. I’ve heard from various sources that he never speaks of you without bitterness and without attempting to belittle your exploits.”

“Well, that’s number one,” said Ted lightly. “What’s the next count in the indictment?”

“The second comes naturally from the first. Hollister is a born gambler. He’s got the betting fever in his blood. He wagers heavily on most big events. Now, you know that in almost every big thing you’ve done, your flight across to Hawaii, your hop to Australia, your winning of the altitude and endurance records, there’s always been a lot of bets laid both for and against your doing what you set out to do. Naturally, Hollister has done his share of the wagering. But his chagrin has twisted his judgment and he’s always bet against you. Well, naturally, he’s always lost, for you never yet have failed in anything you undertook. So I suppose he’s more bitter than ever against you because of his losses. I’ve heard it said that they amount to many thousands of dollars.”

“Too bad I couldn’t lose just to oblige his nibs,” laughed Ted. “What other awful things have I done?”

“It’s what you may do that I think is keeping him awake at night,” replied Hapworth. “You see, he’s going on this Raymond expedition, and because of his reputation as an Arctic explorer he’ll be one of the king-pins of the party. That is, if you aren’t there. But the minute it’s known that Ted Scott is going on the trip the public will center on you to the exclusion of almost all the others. It’ll be what Ted Scott is doing, where Ted Scott is flying, and so on. All the rest will be playing second fiddle, and if there’s anything Gustavus Hollister abominates, it’s playing second fiddle to anybody. He wants to be the whole show.”

“I see,” mused Ted. “A whole lot of things are clear to me now that were mysterious before. It looks as though you were right, Walter. That explains perhaps why Raymond hasn’t answered my letter.”

“I think so,” agreed Hapworth. “Although, of course, this is really

conjecture. Raymond himself is a fine fellow. They don't come any finer. He doesn't want to have trouble in the party and he has to consider Hollister to some extent, not only because he is really a noted explorer, but because I believe he is putting up some of the funds for the expedition. I've no doubt he's trying to smooth things out so that Hollister will see reason. I'm sure that Raymond himself is eager to have you go along. He knows there's no airman in the world that can do as much for the success of the expedition as you can, and the more glory you win the better he'll be pleased. He has the mind of the true scientist, while Hollister is thinking chiefly of himself."

"Well," said Ted, "we'll have to wait and see how the thing works out. I shan't lose any sleep over it. Yet, I would really like to go, for there's something in it that appeals to my sporting blood. I should like to be the first man in the world to fly over the South Pole. Then, too, I'd be glad to add to the world's knowledge on the subject of the great Antarctic region. It's about the only part of the world that hasn't been conquered, and I'd like to do my share in conquering it."

"It'll be mighty bleak and cold," remarked Hapworth. "Makes me shiver just to think of it. Thousands of miles of ice and snow! A good deal worse than the North Polar regions, if you ask me. Up in the Arctic you do have human companionship of a kind, the Eskimos, for instance. But down in the Antarctic I don't suppose you'll find a human soul."

"Probably not," agreed Ted. "But we'd have enough companionship in the members of our own party. As for the cold, I don't care a fig for that. And there'll be a tremendous fascination in learning all there is to learn about a region that has been a closed book to the human race since the beginning of history. There are mountains to be measured, seas to be plumbed, strange specimens of birds and fish to classify, fossils of extinct species to be studied, coast lines to be traced, perhaps gold mines to be discovered. Why, that Antarctic Continent is nearly as big as the United States and Canada put together! For centuries it's been challenging the world to find out about it, and I'd like to be one of those who take up the challenge."

"The same old Ted," laughed Hapworth. "The greater the danger, the greater the attraction. The prospect of adventure to you is like a red rag to a bull. You simply have to charge upon it."

"Only, if your suppositions about Hollister are true, I may not get the chance," replied Ted, with a rueful smile. "Well, I've got to be getting on, old man. See you later."

"Where are you going?"

"Taking my new plane up for a spin," was the reply. "Don't you want to come along?"

"Like to," said Hapworth, rising from the chair on the hotel veranda where

he had been sitting, "but I have an appointment about fifteen minutes from now. Some other afternoon. So long."

They parted, and Ted Scott hurried over to the flying field where his plane was stored. He brought it out of its hangar, and after the careful inspection he always made when about to ascend took his seat in the cockpit and started down the runway.

A short run of a couple of hundred yards and the plane left the ground and mounted into the skies.

Ted Scott thrilled as always when he found himself aloft. He had climbed up toward the skies many times, but no amount of experience could ever rob him of the delicious tingling of every nerve and fibre that marked each new ascent. The air seemed more his natural element than the earth. He felt as if everything that shackled him on the ground was snapped the moment he soared into the ether. Flying with him was not merely a vocation, it was an unspeakable delight. All the soil and stain of earth seemed stripped away in that clean, cool upper air. He was brother to the sun and moon and stars.

He circled about the field once, and then lay a straight course, intending to go perhaps a hundred miles and back while he tested the working of the plane, which had just come to him from Hapworth's factory in Detroit.

As he flew along, gradually increasing his speed, his thoughts recurred to the conversation between Walter Hapworth and himself. He had counted much on joining this Antarctic expedition. The mystery of that great frozen realm had taken a strong hold on his imagination. The danger involved only added strength to the appeal.

He had never dreamed that his application to become a member of the party would be objected to by anybody. Hapworth's suggestion as to Hollister's possible tactics had come to him as something of a shock. His own nature was so broad and generous that it was hard for him to conceive of such pettiness in others.

He was brooding on this when his attention was attracted by a bright glare in front of him. He leaned over the cockpit and looked down to discern the cause of it.

His pulses quickened.

The Red Terror was at work!

Almost beneath Ted Scott a house was in flames!

CHAPTER II

QUICK WORK

Red tongues of fire were darting from many parts of a spacious and handsome house that stood in the midst of a considerable estate. Columns of black smoke were rising in the air and some shreds of it wove in and out of the plane.

Recovering from his moment of stupefaction, Ted Scott shot quick glances about for a landing place.

He could not come down in the grounds immediately surrounding the house, because of the shrubs and trees. At a little distance to the right, however, was a fairly level field. Ted made for this. He pushed on the stick and the nose of the plane turned downward. The young aviator selected what seemed to be the best space for landing and brought the plane down lightly. It ran along for a way and stopped. Before it had come to a complete pause Ted had flung himself out of it and was running with all his speed toward the house, in which the flames were steadily gaining headway.

Even as he ran, it occurred to Ted that it was strange there was no human figure to be seen. A place so large must have required quite a staff of servants, and it was natural to expect that some of these would be in evidence.

But there were no frantic people about, no screams, none of the signs of terror that such a catastrophe usually invoked. Perhaps, Ted thought as he sped along, the house was closed for the summer. He ardently hoped that such might be the case.

But as he neared the imperiled structure his ears were greeted by piercing screams.

“Save me! Save me!” came in shrieks of mortal terror.

He looked in vain at first for the source of the screams. The crackling of the blaze made it difficult to locate the sounds.

They did not come from the front of the house, which was fully enveloped in flames and smoke.

He raced around the right side of the house. There was no one there. To the left. Then he knew whence the shrieks were coming.

Leaning from a window in the third story was a woman of middle age. Her face was contorted with deadly fear. At every instant she looked behind her to see if the flames were encroaching on the room in which she had taken refuge. From her throat came scream after scream.

She caught sight of Ted and her shrieks redoubled in volume. She leaned

far out and held out her arms to him.

“Save me!” she screamed. “Save me!”

“I will,” Ted shouted back.

He looked frantically about for a ladder. There was none to be seen.

“Hurry! Hurry!” urged the woman. “The door is burning down!”

In her desperation she climbed up on the window sill, as though she intended to leap out.

“Don’t jump!” shouted Ted. “You’ll be killed if you do. Wait! I’ll get to you.”

His eyes had lighted on a great tree standing near, one of whose heavy boughs came close to the window in which the woman was standing.

He knew that there was no chance of getting through the front of the house and reaching the room. The stairway must be a mass of flames. No one could go through that way and live. The tree was the only hope. A forlorn hope, perhaps, but the only one.

Ted threw off his coat, rushed to the tree and began to climb.

While the young aviator is making his way up with all the power of his muscular arms and legs, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Ted Scott was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Ted had no memory of his father or mother. He had been brought, an orphaned child, to Bromville, a thriving town in the Middle West, by James and Miranda Wilson, a couple who had migrated with him from New England. They had few worldly goods, but were wholesome, kindly people who sent the child to school and did all they could for his comfort and well being. They died within a few months of each other when Ted was about ten years old, and the little fellow was left to the tender mercies of the world.

The forlorn condition of the little waif touched the hearts of Eben and Charity Browning, a childless couple, and they adopted Ted as their own. They were goodness itself to him, and he loved them as devotedly as though they had been his real parents.

Eben Browning, hale, friendly, upright, was the proprietor of the Bromville House, a hotel that had once been the leading one of the town. Eben’s geniality and Charity’s cooking had brought it a good deal of custom in the early days.

But a marked change took place in Eben’s fortunes when the Devally-Hipson plant, a mammoth concern that manufactured airplanes, was established in Bromville. A host of workmen and officials came in the wake of the plant and the quiet little town became a center of bustling activity. What had been good enough for it in the early days was good enough no longer. New hotels, equipped with all modern facilities, sprang up almost over night, and the homely, comfortable Bromville House was thrown into the shade.

The hardest blow of all came when the great Hotel Excelsior was built. This was a magnificent hotel, up to the minute in all its appointments and with a splendid golf course attached that drew tournament players from all parts of the country.

Against the proprietor of this hotel Eben had a special grievance. Eben had owned the ground on which the building and golf links and had sold it to Brewster Gale for what he regarded as a fair price. But, apart from the few hundred dollars paid to bind the bargain, Eben did not receive the rest of the purchase price. Gale was utterly unscrupulous and by the aid of legal technicalities and cunning lawyers he so maneuvered that poor Eben was frozen out entirely.

Ted, as he grew older, did all he could to help his foster parents. He worked about the place, painting, repairing, running errands. Then, when he was old enough, he got a position in the airplane factory and was so diligent, so clever, so ingenious, that he rapidly rose from one position to another until he was earning good wages, all of which he turned over to the old folks.

The making of airplanes fascinated him. He loved the work and everything pertaining to it. But he was not satisfied merely with making planes. He wanted to fly them. The one consuming, burning ambition of his life was to be an aviator. At every flying meet he was an absorbed and fascinated spectator. But what chance did he have to realize his longing! To go to a flying school would cost him more dollars than he had cents. Besides the expense, his foster parents would be without his wages all the time he was learning.

But fate sent Walter Hapworth to the plant one morning. He was a wealthy young business man and an expert at golf. At the moment he was in Bromville to take part in a golf tournament on the Hotel Excelsior course. He had had most thrills that sport could give and he thought to get a new one by taking up flying. He dropped over to the Devally-Hipson works to look over the planes and Ted was assigned to show him around. Ted answered so readily all questions that were asked, showed such an astonishing grasp of every detail that Hapworth was strongly attracted toward him.

Learning the boy's ambition to become an airman, Hapworth offered to bear all his expenses for going to a flying school and enough, also, to cover the wages he would otherwise lose. Ted was delighted and accepted the money as a loan, which he afterward paid back.

At the flying school Ted soon became a star. He was a born airman, and his skill, his courage, his coolness rapidly developed him into one of the most expert of flyers. On leaving the school he secured a position in the Air Mail Service. His route was between Chicago and St. Louis and he soon became the most daring and valued aviator in the whole division.

At about that time the whole country was agog with interest over a prize of

twenty-five thousand dollars that had been offered for the first successful airplane flight over the Atlantic from New York to Paris, a feat that up to that time had never been accomplished. Some of the most famous airmen of America had entered for the contest, and discussion was rife as to which of these would win the prize.

Ted had been deeply stirred by the offer and would have given the world to be able to compete. But he had no money to speak of, and it would require perhaps fifteen thousand dollars to procure a plane and provide for other necessary expenses. So he put the matter regretfully aside as impossible.

But here again Walter Hapworth came to his help. He learned of Ted's desire and offered to back him. Ted accepted and hurried off to San Francisco to supervise the building and testing of the plane destined for the ocean journey.

Then one day Ted Scott jumped into his plane on the Pacific coast, shot like a bullet over the Sierras and the Rockies and landed at one jump in St. Louis in the fastest time that had ever been made by a man traveling alone in a plane.

When, scarcely waiting to take breath, he made New York in a second jump, the field was black with the crowds that had gathered to greet this young Lochinvar. He had become famous in a night and America rang with his name.

A few days were spent on the field tuning up the plane, getting fuel and supplies and making the last preparations for the momentous trip. Then one misty morning Ted Scott lifted his plane into the skies and turned its nose toward the yeasty surges of the Atlantic.

What perils he faced and conquered on that hazardous trip, how he winged his way through fog and sleet and gale, how with high heart and dauntless courage he faced dangers that would have appalled the stoutest heart, how he hit the Irish coast, skimmed across great Britain, over the English Channel and swooped down like a lone eagle on Paris, winning the prize and setting the world aflame, is told in the first volume of this series, entitled: "Over the Ocean to Paris."

Ted woke the next day to find himself famous. No event for a generation had so stirred the imagination of the world. America went wild over him. Europe heaped him with honors. And when he came back to the hearts of his own people he received one of the greatest ovations recorded in history.

Soon after his return a terrible Mississippi flood took place. Ted enlisted in the aviation section of the Red Cross and his untiring work in the devastated districts added more laurels to those he already wore. Later on he rejoined the Air Mail Service in the Rocky Mountain Division, its most dangerous section, and had many thrilling adventures amid the peaks and gorges.

A prize was offered for the fastest flight over the Pacific from the Pacific

Coast to Hawaii, which Ted Scott won after encountering great perils on his flight. These perils were matched a little while later when he headed a rescue expedition over the West Indies in search of missing flyers who had gone on a hunt for hidden pearls. Again, in Mexico, he came in contact with bandits, and at one time came so close to death that the noose was tightening about his neck.

But adventure was the very breath of life to the young aviator and he found plenty of it when he brought to justice a band of mail robbers in the Western wilds. There was no lack of adventure either when he made an overseas flight from America to Australia and incidentally found that he was carrying a madman in his plane.

In the course of these exploits he solved certain personal problems. He vindicated the memory of his dead father, who had been falsely accused of a crime and had died before his innocence was made manifest. He also unearthed facts that proved Brewster Gale's rascality and restored to Eben Browning the money of which he had been defrauded.

The activity and audacity of a diamond smuggling ring operating over the Canadian border enabled Ted to do a signal service to his country in capturing the criminals. Shortly afterwards he was on a journey to the coast when he was caught in a blizzard, rendered unconscious and would have frozen to death, if it had not been for the courage of a young girl, Grace Larue.

Ted was intensely grateful to his young deliverer and he soon had an opportunity to prove his gratitude. The father of Grace, a noted explorer, Hamilton Larue, had been lost with his party in the jungles of Brazil. Ted organized an expedition and set out by plane in search of the missing ones.

What dangers he encountered in those fearful jungles, dangers from snakes, jaguars, and other terrors of the wild; the battles he had with cannibals and headhunters; the thrilling climax when he rescued the explorers from the tower in which they had been held prisoners; all is narrated in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: "Over the Jungle Trails."

Now to return to Ted Scott as with desperate energy he makes his way up the huge tree near the burning house, the screams of the frantic woman ringing in his ears.

He reached the first bough and swung himself up into the body of the tree. Then he mounted higher until he stood on the heavy bough that extended almost to the side of the house and a little beneath the window at which the woman stood.

As he advanced, holding to the bough above to steady himself, he could see through the window that the door at the back was already a glowing ember that threatened at any moment to collapse and let in the devouring flames.

Once that door was down, the flames, caught by the draught from the open

window, would envelop the woman at once.

She sensed that danger and her screams were heart rending.

“They’ll get me! They’ll get me!” she shrieked. “I must jump! I’d rather be crushed than burned to death.”

“No! No! Don’t jump!” commanded Ted. “I’ll be with you now in another second.”

He got within two feet of the window. He could go no further.

He planted his feet firmly on the bough and with one hand held with a death grip the branch above. Then he extended his right arm in a sort of semi-circle.

“Jump!” he commanded. “I’ll catch you.”

She covered her face with trembling hands.

“Oh, I can’t!” she wailed. “You’ll let me drop. You can’t hold me!”

“Jump, I tell you!” shouted Ted. “It’s your only chance.”

Still she hesitated.

The door went down. The flames rushed in. The woman jumped!

Chapter III

THE JUMP FOR LIFE

As the woman leaped from the window, Ted Scott's powerful right arm shot out and encircled her with a grip of iron.

The impetus of the leap, together with the weight of the woman, made the shock tremendous. It drove Ted's feet from the bough, and for a moment he hung suspended in space, his only support being the clutch of his left hand on the bough above.

He felt as though his arms would be wrenched from their sockets. But he held on with the strength of desperation, while his feet felt for the bough.

They found it and thus relieved the strain on his left hand. He stood there for a moment while he tried to recover his breath.

Had the woman been of heavy build, it would not have been in flesh and blood to sustain her at the moment when she landed in his arm. Luckily, she was slender, and that fact proved her and Ted's salvation.

He had feared that in her hysterical condition she would struggle violently and thus increase the danger of his problem. But as he looked down at her white face he saw that she had fainted. That last moment of terrible fear had been too much for her.

With exceeding care and with every nerve and muscle at the highest tension, Ted Scott moved step by step along the bough until he reached the trunk.

There he was able to place his senseless burden in the crotch of some branches and thus relieve himself of her weight, though he had to maintain a tight hold of her to keep her from slipping. Then at last he was able to breathe a sigh of relief. He had conquered! They were safe!

And now help was at hand. Ted could see men and women running from several directions toward the burning house. A few moments more and there was a group assembled on the grounds, most of them rushing to and fro aimlessly and uttering ejaculations, while some of the men were trying to form a line and bucket brigade in the attempt to save some part of the imperiled structure. Most of the house was doomed beyond hope, but there was still a right wing that was not yet in the power of the flames.

Ted shouted and several men came rushing toward the tree with exclamations of wonder.

Ted pointed to the unconscious woman.

"Get a ladder, some of you," he directed. "She's fainted."

A couple of the men scurried back to a garage in the rear, burst open the door, and emerged with a ladder which they brought to the foot of the tree.

Some of them mounted and Ted delivered to them the woman he had rescued. With infinite precautions and great difficulty she was taken to the ground. They took her to a shady place beneath the trees and the women flocked about and ministered to her.

Ted descended from the tree, his heart full of thankfulness, but with every muscle and ligament sore and bruised and aching. It had been a fearful ordeal for both mind and body.

But his work was not yet done and he joined the fire and bucket brigade and did his utmost, although he knew in his heart that the house was doomed. A telephone call had been sent from an adjoining house, summoning the fire company of the nearest town, but as that was several miles away he felt sure that the engine could not arrive in time to do anything of consequence.

In the course of his running back and forth, he passed near the group of women who were attending to the woman of the house. She had just been brought back to consciousness and was moaning incoherently. Then as the full consciousness of what was going on came to her, she half lifted herself up from her recumbent position and looked about her wildly.

“My husband!” she cried frantically. “Where is my husband?”

They tried to soothe her, but to no purpose.

“He’s in there!” she screamed. “He’s in the house! He’ll be burned up!”

The group surrounding her looked at each other with pale faces and fright in their eyes.

Ted hurried over.

“Are you sure he was in the house?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “Oh, please save him! Save him!”

“What part of the house was he in?” Ted asked her.

“In the right wing,” was the reply. “He was sleeping there. He had been out late last night and was tired. Oh, he will be burned to death! I must get to him!”

She struggled to get up, but they managed to restrain her.

“I’ll try to get him,” promised Ted, and hurried off.

He called to some of the men and they followed him as he ran around to the right wing of the house.

There was a door to this in the front and they burst it in. A volume of smoke and flame belched forth and drove them back. They could see that the stairs were on fire.

There was no hope in that direction and they rushed around to the back. The door was unlocked. There were no flames yet visible in the hall, but the smoke was so dense that the air was nearly unbreathable.

The men gave back, coughing and choking.

Ted whipped a handkerchief from his pocket and doused it into a bucket of water near by. He tied it hastily about his nose and mouth.

“Don’t try it,” begged one of the men in alarm. “It’s no use. You can’t make it. It will be just committing suicide.”

Ted made no answer, but was inside the door and on the stairs in a flash. They grabbed at him to hold him back, but he eluded them.

The smoke was blinding. He had to feel his way. His eyes were smarting. He kept them as nearly shut as he could.

Before he reached the first landing he noted that flames were at last creeping into the hall beneath. But he kept on.

He opened the first door he found and groped about. It was a bedroom and the bed clothes were heaped in a cluttered mass as though they had been pushed back in a hurry as some one leaped out.

Ted felt with hands and feet along the floor, stumbling at times and nearly falling. But he found no body.

Into an adjoining room he rushed, and here again his search was fruitless.

His bandage slipped and he was almost smothered with the acrid fumes before he could readjust it.

His face was getting blistered with the heat. His overburdened lungs felt as though they were bursting. Beneath he could hear the crackling of the flames.

His hand fell on the knob of a door. He pulled it open and found himself in a small storeroom adjoining the bedroom. He tripped over something, and, reaching out to grasp something to steady him, touched a human body.

Whether the man were dead or alive he did not know. He lay like a log across a trunk on which he had fallen.

With an almost superhuman effort, Ted Scott reached down, lifted up the body, and threw it over his shoulder. Then he staggered into the adjoining bedroom and thence into the hall.

The smoke in the hall was lambent now with the glow of flames, and as Ted looked down through his half-shut lids he saw that the stairs had caught.

Some of the lower steps were burning and scarlet threads of flames were creeping up the banisters.

Down Ted went with his heavy burden step by step. Cries of encouragement greeted him from the panic-stricken group near the door. Two of the men, after dipping their heads in the water bucket, rushed in as the young aviator reached the foot of the stairs. They grabbed his burden from him just as he plunged through the door and out into the blessed air.

He fell on the grass and lay there for a moment, panting and gasping. Eager hands then helped him to his feet, and he staggered to a tree that was out of reach of the heat and sat down there with his back against the trunk.

There was a clattering and ringing of bells and the fire engine arrived on the scene. The firemen went to work at once in businesslike fashion, directing their efforts to saving what was left of the right wing. The rest was beyond redemption.

Two doctors arrived and busied themselves with the master and mistress of the house.

The men of the neighborhood, relieved of their labors now that the professional fire fighters had come, gathered around Ted with loud expressions of admiration.

“Pluckiest thing I ever saw in my life,” said one of them.

“Both of those people would have been burned to death if it hadn’t been for you!” exclaimed another.

“How in thunder could you do it?” demanded another. “You must have muscles of iron. And as for courage—well, that speaks for itself.”

Ted waved their praise aside.

“Just happened to be on the spot, that’s all,” he muttered. “What surprised me was that there was nobody else on hand. A house like this must have a lot of servants.”

“That’s right,” put in one of the men. “I myself am the gardener. Then there’s the chauffeur and the cook and a couple of maids. But you see, as luck would have it, we’d all been given leave this afternoon to attend a party of all the help on the estates around here, so that none of us was on hand when the fire broke out. We came running, though, I can tell you, when we saw the blaze. It would have been an awful thing, if the master and the missus had been burned alive, and they would have been, if you hadn’t come along.”

A few minutes later one of the doctors hurried up to Ted.

“So this is the hero that everybody is talking about,” and he smiled genially. “By Jove, you’ve done wonders to-day! You saved both of them and each one at the risk of your life! Never heard of a thing so daring. But how about you yourself? Hadn’t I better look you over?”

“Thanks,” said Ted. “I’m all right. A bit burned and blistered here and there, but nothing to speak of. Tired, though, as though I’d been drawn through a knothole. How are your patients getting on?”

“They’ll pull through all right,” was the reply. “Mrs. Hollister is suffering chiefly from shock, and she’ll be in a highly nervous condition for some time. Mr. Hollister’s case is more serious. He’s taken in a good deal of smoke. In another five minutes he’d probably have been dead. You got him out just in the nick of time. But he’ll recover.”

Ted sat up straight.

“Hollister, did you say?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied the doctor. “Perhaps you’ve heard of him. Quite a noted

man in his way. Arctic explorer, you know. Gustavus Hollister.”

“Yes, I’ve heard of him,” murmured Ted Scott.

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

Gustavus Hollister! The man who was doing his utmost to keep Ted Scott from achieving the ambition that was nearest his heart! And Ted had just saved his life at the risk of his own! And not only his life, but that of his wife!

There was sardonic humor in the situation that brought a quizzical look into Ted Scott's eyes.

The doctor was regarding him curiously.

"You seem to be amused about something," he remarked.

"Do I?" asked Ted. "Well, I am, rather. Life's a funny thing sometimes. Don't you think so, doctor?"

The physician looked rather puzzled.

"Why, yes, I suppose it is," he assented vaguely. "Though it seems to me there's more tragedy than humor in the present case."

"I suppose so," agreed Ted. "Though I'm thankful that just now it's only a near tragedy. Well, I guess I'd better be getting on," and he rose to his feet.

"Oh, but you're not going yet," interposed the doctor quickly. "You'll surely wait till my patients are in a condition to thank you for having saved their lives. They'd never forgive me if I let you go without that."

"Put all the blame on me," replied Ted. "Tell them that I had an engagement and couldn't wait."

"Just five minutes," pleaded the doctor. "They'll be in condition to talk to you by that time."

"Can't be done," replied Ted, smiling.

"Leave me your name and address, anyway, so that they can communicate with you later," urged the doctor, himself consumingly curious to know the identity of this mysterious personage who was evidently as modest as he was brave.

Ted shook his head.

"I'd really rather not," he said. "Just tell them that it was some one who is mighty glad that he could have been of service and let it go at that."

The physician could not dissemble his disappointment.

"You're an aviator, aren't you?" he asked, looking from Ted's flying togs to the machine in the field near by.

"Guilty," returned Ted lightly. "I can't deny that with so many proofs at hand. To confirm it still further, I'm going up into the air right now."

"Well," said the doctor, extending his hand, "let me at least have the

privilege of saying that I've shaken hands with the bravest man I've ever seen."

Ted grasped the extended hand heartily.

"Kind of you to say so, doctor, though you're putting altogether too much value on the little thing I was able to do," he said. "Good-by and good luck."

He went over to where the plane was standing, and practically the whole crowd, except those directly ministering to the patients, streamed along after him. All were eager to clasp his hand, and it was only with difficulty that he could get into the cockpit. Then he waved to them to stand clear, darted along the field for a little way, and zoomed up into the skies.

He had no desire to extend his spin any further. He was aching in every muscle. He felt that he knew now the sensations of a man who had been subjected to the torture of the rack. Yet his heart was jubilant at the thought that, had it not been for him, two human beings would have suffered a horrible death.

He caught a glimpse of himself in the little mirror of the plane and grinned. He was as black as a negro, except for the little patches where his skin was red from burns. The smoke stains had proved a most effectual disguise. He knew now why he had not been recognized.

The familiar sights of Bromville soon came into view and Ted Scott prepared to descend. He did not care to be seen in his present condition, for he knew he would be chaffed unmercifully by his friends. His one thought was to get into the privacy of his own room where he could wash and change his clothes.

As he looked at his watch he gave a sigh of thanks that it was not yet closing time at the aero works that adjoined the flying field, and that he would therefore escape the scrutiny of the hundreds who would come trooping out when the whistle blew.

The field, in fact, was practically deserted. Ted swooped down and made a perfect landing, so maneuvering his plane that when it stopped after its run it was almost directly in front of its own hangar.

Jackson, Ted's mechanic, who had recognized the plane while it was still in the air from the markings on it, ran forward to greet his employer. He started back aghast at the apparition that stepped from the cockpit.

"For the love of Pete, Ted!" he cried, "what on earth have you been doing to yourself?"

"Qualifying for a beauty show," replied Ted, grinning as he removed his helmet.

"You're not hurt, are you?" asked Jackson anxiously. "You look like a boiled lobster in places."

"I'm all right," asserted Ted. "Came across a fire on the way and joined a

bucket brigade in trying to put it out. But say, Jackson, I want to get home as quickly and quietly as possible. I'd never hear the end of it if the fellows saw me as I am now. You hustle out and get me a taxi, and until you get back I'll stay under cover in the hangar. Get a move on, old boy."

Jackson scurried off and in a few minutes returned with a cab. The driver grinned as he saw who was to be his passenger. Ted grinned in return.

"It's all right, Bill," he said, as he clambered in. "Double fare if you keep your mouth closed. Over to the Bromville House, pronto."

In a few minutes he reached the hotel, jumped out, and ran up the steps.

Charity Browning met him as he sped through the hall. She looked startled at the sight of the colored man hurrying through the house with such scant ceremony. The next instant she had thrown her arms about his neck.

"Ted!" she screamed. "My boy! Oh, Ted, tell me what has happened! Are you hurt?"

"Not a bit, Mother," Ted assured her cheerily, as he kissed her. "But just look what's happened to your white apron! And I've left a smudge on your nose, too."

"Bother the apron and the nose, too!" exclaimed Charity. "I can get others. Other aprons, I mean," she added hastily, as Ted laughed and tweaked her ear. "You stop laughing at your old mother. But, Ted, dear boy, are you sure you're all right?"

"Perfectly sure, Mother," replied Ted. "Was helping put out a fire and got all messed up with smoke. All I want is a bath and a change of clothes. I'll tell you all about it when I come down."

He hurried up the stairs, got out of his begrimed clothes and slipped under a shower. Never had one felt more grateful. Then he applied an unguent to the burns he had here and there, and when he was dressed in fresh, cool garments felt like himself again.

He rested in his room until Charity called him to supper in the little private dining room that the family had to itself apart from the main dining hall of the hotel.

The old couple were all agog with curiosity and concern about the afternoon's happenings, and Ted, who never had any secrets from them, told them of the whole affair from beginning to end, his narration being frequently interrupted by questions and exclamations.

"Oh, Ted, I'm so proud of you!" exclaimed Charity, wiping her eyes with her apron. "At the same time I'm skeered. You're always taking such awful risks. Of course I'm mighty thankful that you saved that poor woman and her husband, but suppose when you went into that awful blazing house you hadn't come back! Think of us, father and me. I should surely die if anything happened to you."

Ted reached over and patted her hand fondly.

"Nothing's going to happen to me, Mother dear," he assured her. "Someway or other, you notice I manage to pull through."

"You say this man you saved was an enemy of yours," put in Eben. "What's he sore at you about?"

"If he's an enemy of Ted's, he's a wicked man," declared Charity indignantly, up in arms at once in defense of her idol.

"Oh, that doesn't follow," laughed Ted. "I suppose there are lots of fellows I've rubbed the wrong way. But in this case there really isn't any reason. The chief thing seems to be that I came back from my Atlantic trip at the wrong time to suit him. He thought I was hogging too much of the limelight. So now he's trying to queer me."

"And you saved his life!" exclaimed Charity. "You heaped coals of fire on his head!"

Ted laughed.

"Quite the other way, Charity," he said. "I saved coals of fire from dropping on his head. But, after all, it doesn't matter. I'll get along without his goodwill."

"You said he was trying to queer you," said Eben. "In what way is he doing that?"

"Oh, interfering with a little trip I have in mind," replied Ted evasively.

"What trip?" asked Charity, a look of alarm leaping into her eyes.

"Down toward the south a little way," replied Ted uncomfortably. "That was a dandy supper, Mother," he added, as he rose from the table and pushed back his chair. "There's nobody in this burg that can cook as you can."

But Charity, her suspicions once aroused, could not be put off by compliments.

"Oh, Ted," she wailed, "you ain't goin' away on any more of them dangerous flights, are you?"

"Not if Hollister can help it," replied Ted.

"Now you're giving me a real friendly feeling for that man," returned Charity, to whom any one was a friend that could keep her foster son at home. "But suppose he can't help it? Oh, Ted, where is it that you were thinking of going?"

"Toward the south," reiterated Ted.

"Not to South America, where them snakes and headhunters are?" asked Charity anxiously. "The last time you were there I kept seein' you in my dreams comin' home without your head."

"There wouldn't be any snakes or headhunters in this trip," replied Ted.

"But other things, maybe, that's just as bad," persisted Charity. "Now, Ted, you ain't goin' to get out of this room until you tell me."

Driven to his last entrenchments, Ted Scott surrendered.

“Well, if you must know,” he said, “I want to go to the South Pole.”

CHAPTER V

SUSPENSE

Eben Browning started violently as Ted Scott made his declaration. Charity lifted her hands in dismay.

“The South Pole!” she ejaculated.

“Yes,” Ted admitted. “But don’t worry, Mother,” he hastened to add. “I probably shan’t be able to go there. Hollister has thrown a monkey wrench into the machinery.”

“But that you even thought of going there!” wailed Charity. “Oh, Ted, it’s the very end of the earth!”

“It would be a very dangerous trip, my boy,” put in Eben gravely.

“No more so than many others I’ve taken, and I’ve always come back safe and sound.”

“That’s not saying that you would this time,” interposed Charity. “There’s apt to be an end to good luck sometime.”

“Speaking for myself,” said Eben, “I don’t see any special reason for going there. Now the last time you went to Brazil you went to save the lives of those explorers. That was all right, even if it was mighty risky. Grace Larue had saved your life and you felt you had to try to save her father’s. And I didn’t have any kick when you went to the West Indies to look for them lost flyers. Nor in Mexico when what you did among them bandits was to help your country. But the South Pole! What is there, except snow and ice? It’s there now and has always been there. It will be there when you come back. What’s the use of taking all that risk for nothing?”

“It won’t be for nothing,” declared Ted. “Nothing is unimportant that increases human knowledge. It’s up to man to conquer the earth, to wrest from it all its secrets. What are we put here for, if not for that? And there’s a great continent there almost as big as the United States and Canada together, of which very little is known. It has practically defied the human race to find out about it. And defiance is something that the human race won’t stand.”

Eben with a sigh gave it up. He was silenced, if not convinced.

“But even if all these things are true,” persisted Charity, “let other folks find out about them. There are plenty without you. Remember, Ted, you’re all we have. If anything happened to you, life would be all over for Eben and me.”

“I know, Mother dear,” said Ted, kissing her affectionately. “And for your dear sake I’d be especially careful in case I went. Of course, as you say, there are plenty of others to do these things. But suppose everybody said that? Who

would there be to do anything? There were plenty of others to fly over the Atlantic. Wasn't I right to try to do it first? If I have any gifts for flying, oughtn't I to use them, especially when a chance comes to be of service to the world? But now just let's forget it. As things go, I probably shan't have a chance to join the expedition."

With a parting hug the young aviator went out on the veranda of the hotel, where he found Walter Hapworth awaiting him.

"Hello, hero," was the greeting of Ted's friend.

"Lay off," replied Ted. "Where do you get that stuff?"

"Oh, just by putting two and two together," laughed Hapworth. "I'm not perhaps such a fool as I look. You'd be surprised to know how intelligent I am. Now, for instance," he went on, indicating the paper in his lap, "I see here a dispatch from the Associated Press telling about a very daring rescue of two people from a blazing house. Climbs a tree and catches a woman in his arms as she leaps from a window. Forces his way through smoke and flame to an upper floor and comes staggering out with a man thrown like a sack of wheat over his shoulder. When I got that far I began to smell a mouse. 'That sounds like Ted Scott,' I said to myself. Then I learn that the fellow is an aviator. By that time the mouse has come into full view. A little farther, and I learn that the fellow was so modest that he wouldn't tell his name. By that time I've caught the mouse. Then I look at you as you come out of the house and see the marks of burns on your face and hands. Now I let the mouse go. I need him no longer. You are the man," and he pointed his finger sternly at his friend.

Ted grinned.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "As a detective you've got them all beaten to a frazzle. No use trying to hide anything from you. I plead guilty and throw myself on the mercy of the court."

"The court suspends sentence," laughed Hapworth. "But really, Ted, it's a splendid thing you've done. Sit down here and tell me all about it."

Ted sketched briefly the happenings of the afternoon and Hapworth drank in the details avidly.

"Magnificent!" he commented when Ted had finished. "It was just like you, old boy, and nobody can say more than that. But wasn't it the queerest thing in the world that the man you rescued happened to be Gustavus Hollister?"

"It was," admitted Ted. "I was struck all in a heap when I learned his name. But coincidence has a long arm."

"It just fits into your plans," exulted Hapworth. "It removes the last obstacle in the way of your going on the Antarctic expedition."

"I don't see how."

Walter Hapworth looked in amazement at the young aviator.

“You don’t see how?” he repeated. “Why, you don’t suppose for a minute that Hollister would keep up his objection to your going when he learns that it was you who saved his life and that of his wife, do you? No decent man would ever speak to him again in his life, if he did that.”

“I know,” admitted Ted. “That is, if he knew that I’d saved him. But he isn’t going to know.”

Hapworth looked at his friend as though he thought he was going out of his senses.

“Oh, come, Ted, that’s carrying modesty too far,” he protested. “It’s all right within certain limits, but there’s no use of going to extremes. Of course he’s got to know about it. If you don’t tell him, I’ll tell him myself.”

“Not with my consent,” replied Ted firmly. “Please, Walter, keep this to yourself.”

Hapworth fumed and stormed without avail.

“It’s the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of,” he exclaimed. “It isn’t as if you’d set out to do him a great service, the greatest service that any man can render, just for the sake of gaining his favor and removing his objections. The opportunity came without your seeking. Fate itself has thrown a big juicy plum in your lap and you refuse to pick it up.”

“I can’t help it, Walter,” returned Ted stubbornly. “I may be a fool, as you intimate, but I’m just built that way. I’m not going to get a thing through gratitude that I don’t get right on the merits of the case. That’s all there is about it.”

“Well, there’s one thing,” said Hapworth hopefully; “he’ll learn about it, anyway. This mystery about the unknown airman will stir the curiosity of the newspaper reporters, and they’ll follow the matter up and pin it on you.”

“Maybe,” admitted Ted. “But they’ll have a fancy time doing it. You and Eben and Charity are the only ones besides myself who know the identity of the airman, and you’re not going to tell. And I’m pretty good at keeping silent.”

“If you refuse to answer, that will be almost the same as admitting it,” argued Hapworth.

“They’ll know that you’d say no promptly if you weren’t the man.”

“I’ve thought of that,” replied Ted. “So I’m going to be out of the way when they come around. I’ve got to see my publishers in Chicago about the new book I’m writing about that trip to Brazil. I hadn’t intended to go for a few days yet, but under the circumstances I’ve decided to start to-morrow morning. I’ll stay in Chicago for a few days, and by the time I get back interest in the matter will have died down.”

“A wilful man must have his way,” grumbled Hapworth disappointedly. “But of all the pig-headed idiots—” further words failed him.

“Cheer up, old boy,” laughed Ted. “Behind the clouds the sun is shining. I have a hunch that I’m going on that South Pole expedition, yet.”

“You and your hunches! Here you’ve got something that’s worth all the hunches in the world and you haven’t got sense enough to use it. I’m out of patience with you.”

CHAPTER VI

THE ENSHROUDING FOG

“I’m off, Mother,” said Ted to Charity, as he went into the sitting room after Hapworth had taken his departure.

“Oh, Ted, has it come so soon?” almost shrieked Charity, as she put her hand to her heart.

“Not to the South Pole,” explained Ted, as he tweaked her ear affectionately. “Only to Chicago. I want to have a talk with my publishers about my new book.”

“Oh, if it’s only that!” returned Charity, with a sign of great relief. “I’ll lay out your things for you and pack your suitcase.”

“Thanks, Mother,” replied Ted. “You needn’t put in much, for I’m to be gone for only a few days. And listen, Charity. There may be reporters around trying to find out if I was the one that saved Hollister and his wife. Don’t tell them anything. Tell them if they have any questions to ask they’ll have to see me. If they want to know where I am, don’t let on. I’ve simply gone away on a little trip. You’ll keep mum, won’t you?”

“I suppose I’ll have to,” assented Charity.

Ted got a long sleep that night in preparation for his journey, ate his breakfast and hurried out to the flying field, where he had previously warned his mechanic to have his plane in readiness.

He found that Jackson had drawn the plane out of the hangar and groomed it beautifully, so that it stood there resplendent in the early morning sunshine, quivering like a thing of life, its wings spread in readiness to fly.

Jackson greeted his employer with a grin.

“Look quite different from what you did yesterday,” he said. “Thought then when I first looked at you that you’d been blacking up for a minstrel show. But I’ve read the papers this morning and I know different now.” Ted looked at him sharply.

“What do you know?” he queried.

“Oh, I ain’t so dumb,” replied Jackson. “I know beans when the bag is open. I knew you could do a lot of things, but I never knew you were so good a tree climber. Gee, but I’d like to have been at that fire!”

Ted smiled in spite of his vexation.

“You’re a great guesser, Jackson,” he said “But mind, I want you to keep that thing to yourself. You’re the only one that knows it, outside of the Brownings and Mr. Hapworth. Mum’s the word. Understand?”

Jackson looked greatly disappointed.

“Sure, if you say so,” he promised. “You know that wild horses won’t draw it from me if you don’t want me to talk. But I sure was planning to do some boasting to the boys about the kind of boss I’ve got.”

“It’ll keep,” rejoined Ted. “Some day it may come out, but I have a special reason for having it kept quiet now. If any reporters come around, don’t let them worm anything out of you. Now let’s have a look at the plane. She seems in great shape. You’ve done a good job on her.”

“Ain’t she a beauty?” asked Jackson proudly.

“She sure is,” agreed Ted as he patted a wing caressingly.

He went over the machine with the greatest care. This was his invariable custom. The precautions he took had more than once saved him from maiming or death.

From his success in practically everything he undertook he had sometimes been called “Lucky Scott.” He had always subconsciously resented this. Luck had nothing to do with it. It was care, the most minute and unceasing care, that had carried him to the pinnacle of success and achievement. So now he went over every part of the machine as with a fine toothed comb. He examined all the open control wires, all the wires and pulleys that could be seen through apertures, and all the hinges on the control surfaces. He inspected the landing gear, wheels, fittings and shock absorbers.

He gave the engine a warming-up test, during which he observed the functioning of all the engine instruments. He took note of the engine exhaust manifolds and exhaust pipe extensions. He examined the carburetor and fuel feed lines. All the parts of the fuselage passed under the glance of his keen eyes.

He tested the main plane external bracing, including fittings and struts, external wires, cables, turnbuckles, the fabric and covering. He made sure that the cowlings were properly secured and safetied. He looked into the condition of the propellers. He saw to the cooling system and connections. He ascertained that the tanks were adequately filled with gasoline.

Then he straightened up, adjusted his parachutes, and drew on his helmet and gloves.

“She’s in dandy condition, Jackson,” he complimented his mechanic. “You’re right on the job.”

“I have to be, with eyes like yours going over the old bus. Hope you have a pleasant trip.”

“Thanks,” replied Ted, as he climbed into the cockpit. “Give the propeller a whirl and knock away the blocks. I’m off.”

Jackson complied, and with a rush and a roar the plane started down the runway, quivered a moment as though hesitating to leave the earth, and then

zipped up into the ether.

Ted's course for the first part of his journey took him in the same direction that he had traversed the day before, and he made it a point to catch a glimpse of the structure that had burned and in which he had risked his life.

In due time he came in sight of it and slackened speed. He pushed the stick and went down until he was sailing at a height of not more than five hundred feet. From there he had a clear view of what remained of the mansion.

It was a melancholy sight. Almost all of it had burned to the ground, which was a mass of blackened beams and ashes. The right wing, he noticed, still remained standing, although part of that was scorched and seemed rather shaky.

He noted the huge tree that he had climbed, and his muscles tensed involuntarily as he remembered the tremendous strain they had undergone in that stark fight for life.

From the morning papers he had learned that the Hollisters, husband and wife, had been removed to the nearest hospital. Mrs. Hollister was still in an hysterical condition from shock, but was expected to be about in a few days. Hollister's recovery would take perhaps a couple of weeks, but he was wholly out of danger of any fatal termination.

Both had been briefly interviewed by reporters, and were said to be intensely grateful to their unknown deliverer and anxious to know his identity so that they could thank him personally. They could not understand his unwillingness to make himself known. Their mystification seemed to be shared by everybody else. The doctor who had talked with Ted had tried to give a description of him, but apart from his shape and height was very vague as to details.

Ted roused himself from his musings and cast an anxious glance at the weather.

The sun, which had been shining brightly when he started, had disappeared. A thick haze obscured its face. That haze was growing thicker and thicker, was changing from a light cream-color to a sullen brown.

Soon the landmarks below were blotted out. They disappeared one by one, stream and woodland, pasture and farmhouse, until only the top of an occasional church tower or hill could be seen. They too disappeared, until Ted was flying wholly by his instruments. The earth was shut out. He and his plane were mere specks flitting through immensity.

Ted pulled on the stick and shot upward, seeking escape from the fog in the higher reaches of the air. But everywhere it was the same. Three thousand, five thousand, seven thousand, ten thousand feet! Everywhere the fog clung to him, wrapping him closer and closer in its wet, smothering folds.

Ted had been in a similar situation many times, but never without a feeling

of intense uneasiness. Fog is the most dreaded enemy of the airman. It robs him of his eyes. It leaves him groping like a blind man in the dark. It is not violent like the gale and the lightning, but it is often more deadly than either. If anything goes wrong with the plane, the airman dare not, cannot land.

But this condition, which had always existed, was becoming far more perilous with the rapid multiplication of airplanes. In the early days when the voyagers of the air were few, there was little danger of collision. It was only a thousand to one, a million to one, chance that two planes would meet each other head on.

Now that there were thousands of planes abroad where formerly there had been scores, now that the airways of the skies, if not crowded, were at least populous, the danger was vastly increased. Mail planes, commercial planes, army and navy planes, sporting planes, pleasure planes—their name was legion.

Hurling through the ether like catapults, tearing along the invisible paths of the skies at a hundred miles an hour, there was no chance of escape if two collided. Both would curl up into crumpled masses and go whirling down to earth, carrying their luckless pilots with them to certain death.

So Ted Scott had ample reason for uneasiness. Almost any other evil might be avoided by quick wit and unflinching nerve. But in this situation he was almost wholly dependent upon blind chance or a watchful Providence.

Twice before he had narrowly escaped collision under almost similar conditions. He did not care for a third experience. Would it be three times and out?

He thrust the thought into the back of his mind. If it came, it would come, and that was all there was to it. It would not do any good even to slacken speed. So he gave his plane full throttle and shot like a meteor through the murk.

Then it came!

Far off, ahead of him, a distant humming like that of a swarm of bees!

Ted's pulses quickened as he stared ahead, trying to pierce the dark, though he knew it was hopeless. He could not see ten feet in front of his plane.

The humming was louder!

Might it not be the southing of the wind? There was not a breath of air stirring.

The humming deepened into a song. It burst into a roar!

There was no mistaking that roar. An airplane was coming directly in front of Ted Scott, plunging through the dark like a thunderbolt!

CHAPTER VII

THE JAWS OF DEATH

Ted Scott's knuckles were white as his hand gripped the controls, ready to move with the swiftness of lightning.

His ears were strained to the utmost to gauge the direction and speed of the onrushing plane. But the roar of his own motor, combined with that of the unknown plane, made calculation difficult.

As nearly as he could, he figured out that the other plane was directly in his path.

He swerved sharply to the left. He had scarcely done so when he became conscious from the difference in the sound that his adversary—an innocent adversary—had done precisely the same thing.

Ted pressed the stick and shot downward. Instantly the same thought had come to the other pilot. It was as though their minds were working in unison.

It was ghastly, each trying desperately to avoid the other and yet seeking each other out apparently with the most deadly malignity, as though determined there should be no escape.

Ted pulled the stick and darted upward.

Out of the dark leaped a mighty, formless mass that passed directly beneath Ted's plane, so close that it almost grazed it, and was swallowed up in the darkness beyond.

In that awful moment Ted Scott caught a glimpse of a white, drawn face that stood out like a lighter patch on the darkness. He knew his own face must bear the same expression, the look of one who sees before him the glaring eyes of death.

The roar of the receding motor grew fainter and fainter in the distance until it ceased altogether.

Ted's grip on the controls loosened and he sank back into his seat. He was drenched with perspiration, which had started out from every pore. Those few awful moments, when death had seemed inevitable, had taken their toll of him.

"A whopping big plane that was," he murmured to himself. "Looked like an army bomber or one of the newer mail planes. Gee, I'll bet that other fellow, whoever he is, is feeling just as thankful at this minute as I am, and that's saying a lot!"

He felt the need of refreshments and regaled himself with a couple of chicken sandwiches, followed by the delicious hot coffee that Charity had made for him with her own hands that morning and stored in a thermos bottle.

The parachutes at his back bothered him a bit and he adjusted them so as to be more comfortable. He had two of them, as had become the custom, so that if one of them failed to open, the other would still be available.

“Of course if that fellow’s plane had hit me full I’d have been smashed to bits as well as he,” he muttered. “But if he’d hit me a glancing blow I might still have had a chance with these. They’d have carried me down all right, though goodness knows on what I’d land. On a church steeple, maybe.”

Guided only by his instruments, the young aviator flew on with unabated speed toward his destination.

Every nerve was on the alert. On the law of probabilities, there was no likelihood that what was nearly a collision with the stranger plane would be repeated. Still, lightning did sometimes strike in the same place, and Ted was taking no chances.

According to his schedule, he ought to reach Chicago before dark. There was still no reason why he should not do so, for, despite the fog, he had kept up his regular speed.

But it would do him no good to reach the metropolis before dusk closed in, if the fog persisted. A landing would be impossible and he would have to stay up in the air until it shredded away.

This would be annoying, but it did not worry him much. He had plenty of gas in his tanks and could go on if necessary until the following morning.

It would be mighty awkward, however, if anything should happen to the plane to prevent its staying aloft. It was a new plane and he was not yet by any means as sure of its capabilities as he had been of the splendid machines that had carried him so royally on his famous flights to Europe, to Hawaii, and to Australia.

Still, so far it was working beautifully, and he had few apprehensions on that account. So he settled back in his seat and watched the instrument board with the eye of a hawk.

Presently a ray of light shot through the shreds of fog, turning them to molten gold. Then, suddenly, the sun burst through and flooded the plane with glory.

Ted’s heart leaped. Now he could see again, no longer be dependent on his instruments. Before him unrolled all the panorama of nature, fertile fields, verdure-clad hills, broad rivers, placid lakes, cozy cottages and thriving towns. He was once more in touch with the world!

He wanted to shout, to sing, to call on earth and sun as witnesses of his joy, a joy that was all the greater because of its contrast to the anxiety and strain of the hours preceding.

He recognized the landmarks over which he was passing and checked his instruments by them. The calculations hardly varied by a hair’s breadth. His

faithful instruments had not played him false.

On he sped, on and on until, while the sun was still shining, he came in view of the spires and skyscrapers of the queenly city by the lake.

It was not his first visit there, and he had no trouble in finding the flying field that he had chosen for his descent. He spiraled about it for a few minutes and then came down as gracefully as a swan settling itself upon the waters of a pool.

It was too late for him to attend to any business that night, and after arranging for the safe storage of his plane, he went to one of the leading hotels.

He had a long and restful night's sleep and awoke refreshed. As soon as business hours were on he made his way to the office of his publishers.

"Card, please," said the office boy, as Ted entered the anteroom of the concern.

"I haven't one with me," replied Ted. "Just tell Mr. Ellison that the author of the book on Brazil wants to see him."

The office boy looked at him rather dubiously. He was used to book agents, bond salesmen, and insurance men who on various pretexts sought to "crash the gate" and he was skeptical.

But as he looked his face changed.

"Hully gee!" he gasped. "Are you Ted Scott, the flyer?"

"Never mind, sonny," replied Ted good-naturedly. "Just give Mr. Ellison my message."

The office boy, with an energy wholly unusual to him, rushed down the aisle, scattering his news right and left.

The effect was electric. Bookkeepers dropped their pens, girls jumped up from their typewriters, and in a moment the young aviator was the cynosure of all eyes. They gathered in a crowd a little way off from him and gazed with interest at the young man whose name was a household word all over the country.

Mr. Ellison came bustling through the throng with both hands extended in greeting.

"Come right in, Mr. Scott! Come right in!" he exclaimed. "Delighted to see you. This is indeed an unexpected pleasure."

Ted drew his chair up to Mr. Ellison's desk and for the next hour or so they discussed Ted's forthcoming book on his adventures in Brazil, the style of paper and binding, illustrations and other matters connected with its publication.

"Are you sure that you'll have all the manuscript in before you start off on any other venture?" asked Mr. Ellison.

"Perfectly sure," replied Ted. "I'll have the last pages in within the next two weeks. You can depend on it."

“Good!” exclaimed Mr. Ellison. “It’s going to be a tremendous seller. You’d be surprised at the number of orders we’ve received in advance of publication. The public is stirred up about it. Anything with Ted Scott’s name on it is bound to sell enormously.”

“That won’t make me mad,” laughed Ted.

There were a number of other business matters that Ted had to attend to in the city, and they occupied his time for several days. But in between he spent many hours in the public library, reading with great avidity everything he could get his hands on that bore on Antarctic exploration. The more he read the more he became fascinated with the subject. The lure of that mighty, almost unknown land drew him with resistless power.

How many gallant men had tried to penetrate its secrets, men of almost every nation—for courage and love of adventure have no national boundaries—tried and for the most part failed! Amundsen had reached the Pole, to be sure, but apart from that exploit had been able to make very few discoveries of scientific value. Shackleton had come within ninety-seven miles of his goal when he was forced to return. Scott had attained the Pole, only to find that Amundsen had been before him. Ted Scott’s heart swelled with pity and admiration as he read of that tragic retreat of Scott’s, in which he and his four companions perished. He read of the gallant Captain Oates, who, when his strength was failing, walked deliberately out of his tent into a raging blizzard and perished rather than be a drag on his remaining comrades. The sacrifice was fruitless, for they, too, succumbed to the terrors of the frozen South.

Heroic names written high on the scroll of fame! But there was room on that scroll for other names. Ted Scott wanted his to be written there. He sighed as he reflected how improbable that was in the present situation of affairs.

His desperation was heightened as he read column after column, page after page, in the newspapers concerning the forthcoming Raymond expedition that he longed so eagerly to join.

That was being equipped on a scale that had not hitherto been dreamed of. More than a million dollars was being spent in outfitting it. The men who were to take part in it were being selected with especial care. All were being subjected to the most rigorous physical examinations, and the least defect of any importance served to exclude them from consideration.

Besides the crew themselves, there were to be a host of scientists, engineers, radio experts and aviators. There were to be snow motors and caterpillar tractors. Powerful radio sending and receiving sets were to be taken along and during the long Antarctic night the explorers would be able to keep in touch with civilization. Carefully chosen Eskimo dogs, to the number of forty or more, were to be taken to draw the sledges of the expedition. There were more than a thousand items in the food supplies, tons upon tons of beef,

ham, bacon, poultry and groceries. As far as humanly possible, nothing was to be left to chance. If an expedition so equipped and manned could not succeed, the whole project of Antarctic exploration might as well be given up as impossible.

In many cases the names of the scientists and experts in various branches were given. But Ted noted that the aviators had not yet been selected. Yet in the nature of things it would seem as though they ought to have been, for the time when the expedition should start was rapidly coming near.

Why this singular reticence on the subject of airmen?

Ted saw in this a gleam of hope. Could it be that Raymond was holding off, hoping to break down the stubborn opposition of Hollister to Ted's going on the trip? Was there still a chance?

Ted knew that there was not only a chance but a certainty if Hollister were once made acquainted with the fact that the man he hated had saved his life. If this were done, he was sure that Raymond would send for him to-morrow and ask him to go. Was he, Ted, foolish in standing so sternly to his guns? Hardly any man on earth would stick at such an apparent trifle.

But no! Ted Scott sighed and put the temptation behind him. However legitimate the weapon might be, he would not use it. Call it pride, call it stubbornness—it did not matter. He could lose the chance of going on the expedition, bitter as that loss might be. He could not forfeit his self respect.

He finished his business in Chicago and prepared to start for home. He felt that he had outwitted the reporters in the matter of the fire. It had been a nine days' wonder at the start and had occupied a prominent place on the front pages. Now other events were pressing to the fore, and Ted hoped that soon his own exploit would be forgotten.

The day he had chosen for his return dawned raw and forbidding. But it was no worse than hundreds of other days when Ted had skimmed the sky and he was in no mood to be deterred. He was anxious to get back to see Hapworth, who, he knew, was keeping in touch with Raymond and might have some news for him.

He took off from the Chicago airport and had traveled for about an hour when the signs of a storm became apparent. The horizon began to pile up with ominous-looking clouds that Ted knew had wind in them.

A sailor under such circumstances could shorten sails or reef them snugly. An airman had no such recourse. He must take what came and weather it.

Blacker and blacker grew the clouds. The sun was blotted out. The atmosphere assumed a ghostly gray. Still there was no wind.

Then suddenly the gale struck the plane with the force of a thunderbolt!

CHAPTER VIII

THE TEMPEST'S FURY

The blast had struck so suddenly and with such terrific force that the plane turned completely upside down, and Ted Scott found himself flying with his back toward the earth.

A lesser pilot in such a position would almost inevitably have lost his head. A moment of confusion or terror, and the plane would have gone plunging to the earth, completely out of control.

But Ted's mental processes worked like lightning. Like a flash he busied himself with the controls, and by herculean efforts brought the plane to an even keel.

He found himself in a veritable war of the elements. The wind was howling with demoniac fury, and it tore at the fabric of the plane as though to rend it into shreds. Had it been coming from only one direction, the aviator would not have been at so great a disadvantage. But it seemed to come from all quarters at once, and the plane appeared to be in the center of a cyclone.

It was tossed hither and thither, first up and then down, around and around, like a chip on the surface of a cataract.

But Ted Scott was always at his best when called upon to face a great emergency. He knew that this was no ordinary storm. He had been in many, but none so fierce as this except the time he had been caught in a hurricane over the West Indies.

Now in this howling gale he showed the qualities that had made him the premier airman of the world. Never for a moment did he lose his self-possession. Never once did he quail before the terrors of the storm. His head was like ice, his nerves like steel. He might die, but he would not surrender.

So, cool and indomitable, he jockeyed his plane as a skilful rider does his steed, coaxing, wheedling, urging it on to its best efforts as though it were a sentient thing. He yielded where it was necessary to yield, leaped forward when an opening was given, baffling the wind at every turn, making its very power react upon itself, never for an instant losing heart or hope.

Very soon other terrors were added to those of the gale. The heavens opened and the rain came down in torrents. It dashed against the panes of the cockpit until it seemed as though they would be driven in. It splashed into the fuselage and drenched the pilot to the skin. It beat against his eyes, blinding him. It swirled about his feet in rivers.

It was impossible to think of landing. The wind would have flattened the

plane into fragments. The battle must be fought out where it began, in the air.

There came a blinding flash and Ted knew that the plane had been struck. A great ball of fire ran along the engine and slid off into the void.

How much damage had been done, the young aviator could only guess. If the engine had been put out of commission, his doom was sealed.

With his heart in his throat he listened to the engine's workings. Would it falter? Would it knock? Would it stop?

With infinite relief the pilot noted that it still kept up its steady roar. The lightning had struck the engine a glancing blow and had veered off.

Then, abruptly, the plane was filled with a blinding light and Ted Scott almost lost consciousness. He struggled against it, struggled desperately, fiercely, fought like a tiger to keep his senses.

He felt that he was falling, falling through fathomless space. He grabbed the control and sought to bring the plane out of the dive. All his superb craftsmanship was put to the test.

He was rushing toward a black clump of tall trees. If he struck them he would smash. Could he escape them in time?

The plane was yielding now slowly to his control, but the terrific speed it had gained could not be checked in a moment. Down it plunged, nearer and nearer, with the young aviator fighting frantically to bring it to an even keel.

Closer and closer to the trees! Ted could see them now so near that he could almost have counted the leaves on the branches. Nearer yet and then

The man conquered! The plane flung up its nose just in time to escape impalement on the topmost bough, skimmed along over the foliage, and then gradually rose to the upper skies and safety.

It had been a terrific fight and Ted felt as limp as a rag. But he had no time to exult in his narrow escape. He could not let up for a single moment. Death had been baffled for a moment, but it still had other weapons in store. So, though every nerve and fibre in him clamored for rest, he kept on battling with the storm until at last it had exhausted its fury.

With a surge of hope, Ted presently noted that the tempest's wrath was lessening.

The wind still came in fierce gusts, but not with the steady anger that it had shown at first. He could gauge it better now, know where to look for its next onslaught. The rain, too, was subsiding. Its sheets had hidden the earth from him, but now he could discern bits of green here and there. The lightning was not so incessant and the thunder was lessening in volume as it receded over the distant hills.

The worst was over. Soon the wind had subsided to a mere zephyr, as though it were ashamed of its fierce outburst of anger and was now trying to

make amends. The rain faded away to a drizzle and then ceased altogether. Finally the sun came out.

Ted leaned back in his seat, utterly tired out. Every ounce of strength had been drained from him. He felt as though he had been drawn through rollers and flattened out.

“If my hair hasn’t turned gray, I’m lucky,” he muttered to himself.

When he had somewhat recovered, he took account of stock. The motor was still giving out the steady hum that is the sweetest of music to the ears of an airman. The fuselage was deep in water, but that he soon bailed out. The wings seemed to be uninjured. The only damage sustained was to a couple of strained struts that could easily be repaired.

He tried to figure out the reason for his sudden, almost complete loss of consciousness. He remembered the blinding flash. It must have been that the lightning had passed so near him that an unknown amount of electricity had passed through his body, temporarily numbing his brain.

Even now the effects of the shock had not been entirely dissipated. He was tingling all over his body. He took off his helmet and felt of his hair. It was standing on end. For the moment he was an electric dynamo.

“I suppose it would have been an easy death to die,” he muttered to himself. “All the same, I’m mighty glad that I didn’t get a few more volts.”

For the rest of the trip he flew on serenely. The sun shone brightly, the air was fresh and sweet after its washing by the rain, and what little breeze there was was a following one and helped, rather than hindered, the progress of the plane.

Under these conditions he made rapid speed and the sun was still high above the horizon when he found himself hovering over the airfield at Bromville. Jackson was waiting for him when he landed and greeted him cordially.

“Any reporters been around?” was Ted’s first question.

“Slews of them,” responded Jackson. “But they went away no wiser than when they came. They tried everything, and let me tell you those boys are smart! But I just gave them the baby stare. I didn’t know nothing nohow. You’d be surprised to know how dumb I can be when I want to be.”

Ted laughed.

“It’s a mighty useful quality sometimes,” he commented. “You’ve done well, Jackson. Just keep it up with the next comers, though I hardly think there’ll be many more.”

“I see you’ve got a couple of strained struts,” remarked Jackson. “Guess you’ve been in some rather heavy weather.”

“You guess right,” replied Ted. “Regular giant of a gale. Thought at one time I’d never see Bromville again.”

“As bad as that?” asked Jackson, in concern.

“Worse,” replied Ted briefly. “Give me your hand, Jackson.”

The mechanic unsuspectingly obeyed and started back with a howl of surprise.

“Gee, you gave me a shock that time,” he explained. “It was as if I had touched a hot wire. How did you get that way?”

“Electricity,” laughed Ted. “I’m full of it. Bolt of lightning thought I was a rod and made for me. Be some time, I guess, before I get it all out of my system. Any time you want a battery charged, send for me. Tell you all about it later.”

He hurried off, leaving the mechanic looking after him with mouth agape.

Ted was greeted enthusiastically by Eben and Charity Browning, and gave them a sketchy recital of the results of his trip.

“Did you have good weather?” asked Charity anxiously.

Did he have good weather? Ted kept his face straight with an effort.

“Nothing to brag of,” he answered carelessly. “A bit of fog going and a bit of wind coming back. But we can’t have weather made to order. Now I’ll hustle up to my room and change. Gee, that shower will feel good!”

An hour later, having come downstairs again, he met Hapworth just entering the hall.

“Heard you were back,” said Hapworth, “and I hurried over with this.” He held up a yellow paper. “Telegram I just received from Raymond.”

Ted took it eagerly.

CHAPTER IX

GOOD NEWS

The telegram that Walter Hapworth handed to the young aviator was brief and rather cryptic.

HOLD TIGHT FOR FEW DAYS THINK SOMETHING GOING TO BREAK.

RAYMOND

Thus the message. Ted Scott read it over three times. Then he looked at his friend.

“What do you suppose it means, Walter?”

“Come out on the porch and I’ll tell you what I think is the meaning of it.”

They took seats near together on the veranda and Ted bent forward eagerly.

“Spill it,” he demanded.

“I’m no mind reader,” replied Hapworth, “and of course I can only guess at the meaning of this. What I think it means is that it concerns your going on the Antarctic expedition.”

“What makes you think so?” asked Ted, hope of achieving his ambition welling up anew in him.

“Several things. In the first place, Raymond would have no reason on earth for sending me a wire except in connection with the trip. It’s the only thing we’ve been discussing at off times during the last month or two.”

“Discussing!” exclaimed Ted, in surprise. “I didn’t know that you knew Raymond at all, except by reputation.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” replied his friend. “I’ve known him for some years rather well. I’ve had several communications with him on this matter of his latest trip, and while you were in Chicago I had a talk with him over the long distance telephone.”

Ted looked his bewilderment, but said nothing.

“Now this first part of the telegram,” went on Hapworth. “‘Sit tight for few days.’ That means, if I’m any prophet, that he doesn’t want you to make any other arrangements until you hear from him further. But why should he care what arrangements you make unless he wants you to go along with him?”

“But if he meant that for me, why didn’t he send it to me direct?”

“Well, you see, I’m acting to some extent as your representative,” explained Hapworth, with a little shade of embarrassment. “Rather brazen of me, I admit; but put it down to the score of old friendship. I know just how much you want to go on this expedition, and I happen to know just how much

Raymond wants you to go. But he's hampered by certain considerations that he can discuss better with me than with you. I plan to get that obstacle removed so that those who are crazy to have you go can have their wishes gratified. And that is Raymond's hope, too."

"Obstacle!" exclaimed Ted. "By that of course you mean Gustavus Hollister. Walter," he went on quickly, "you haven't—you wouldn't——"

"Told Gustavus Hollister that you were the one who saved his life?" Hapworth concluded the sentence. "No, of course I haven't. You ought to know me better than that."

"Forgive me, Walter," apologized Ted. "I knew you wouldn't tell him directly; but I thought you might have inadvertently let it slip to somebody else who might have conveyed it to Hollister."

"No," said Hapworth, "I haven't spoken of it to a living soul and I won't. But I have gone over the whole matter with Raymond. As a matter of fact, he was the first one that introduced it. He knew how chummy we were, knew that we had flown the Pacific together and gone together on that Brazilian expedition. He asked me if I thought you'd be willing to go on the Antarctic trip and told me how ardently he desired it. I sounded you out on the matter and found you would be glad to go. Then you wrote that letter to him and I thought it was as good as settled.

"But later on Raymond called me up in great perplexity. Said that he had taken it for granted that there would be no objection from any member of the party. Never dreamed there would be. But then, to his great surprise, one of the members did object most strenuously. Raymond wouldn't tell me his name, but he did say that it was a man who had made some reputation as an Arctic explorer. That wasn't very clear, for most of the men who are going have had Arctic experience. Then he went on to say that this man in question was wealthy and had contributed quite a large sum of money to the Antarctic project. Now, as you know, most scientists aren't wealthy. Hollister is. Some of the ways he has accumulated his money are pretty shady, as I happen to know. But that's beside the question. Putting two and two together, I fixed on Hollister as the man."

"I guess you made no mistake there," muttered Ted.

"I was sure of it," replied Hapworth; "but to make assurance doubly sure I employed a private detective agency to look up Hollister's career. I found that he had inherited a lot of money, that he got more with his wife when he married her, and that he had increased the amount still more by a lot of get rich quick enterprises that are really rotten, but so cunningly devised that a man can keep out of jail.

"Now that didn't mean so much, except as to showing what Hollister really is. It shows that a man can be really interested in scientific research and yet be

a rascal, though as a rule the two don't go together. But where you come in is this. Do you remember Dago Dan, the head of the Chicago gambling ring that bet so heavily against you when you made that coast-to-coast flight?"

"Remember the man who with his gang tried to kidnap and kill me?" returned Ted grimly. "You bet I remember him!"

"Well, I've learned that Hollister supplied a good deal of the capital for his gambling operations," went on Hapworth. "So of course when you won the coast-to-coast flight it made a tremendous dent in their bank rolls, both Dago Dan's and Hollister's. Hollister never has forgiven you for that. What's more natural for a man of his character than to try to get even by thwarting your chief present ambition when he has a chance?"

"You make out a strong case," admitted Ted.

"Now, mind you, I've never mentioned Hollister's name to Raymond," continued Hapworth, "nor has he to me. But I have a hunch that things are coming to a showdown between Raymond and Hollister. Either Raymond has found some way to remove Hollister's objection, or he's found some way to get rid of Hollister altogether. Look at the last sentence of that telegram, 'Think something going to break.' What's going to break? Either Hollister's opposition or Hollister himself. That's the answer for a thousand dollars."

"How I hope you're right!" exclaimed Ted fervently.

"I'm sure I'm right! Take my tip, old boy. The skies are brightening. You and I will still go to the South Pole together."

Ted Scott sprang from his chair and stared at his friend in amazement.

"You and I?" he gasped. "Together?"

CHAPTER X

SOMETHING BREAKS

Walter Hapworth grinned as he observed Ted Scott's agitation.

"Thought perhaps that the news of my presence on the Antarctic expedition would give you a little jolt," he said. "Yes, I think I'll go along. Thought at first that if I contributed a check to the funds for the expedition I'd be doing my part. But later I thought I'd give myself as well as my money."

"You old rascal!" cried the young aviator, wild with delight, as he slapped his friend on the shoulder with a force that made him wince. "Say, that's the best news I've had for an age! And there you were, keeping that to yourself all the time! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Well, I didn't want to speak about it till I was sure you were going. As a matter of fact, I shan't go at all if you are left behind. But this telegram makes me feel sure that the way is being cleared for you to go, and so there's no use in keeping it secret any longer. I've talked the matter over with Raymond, and he's keen to have me as a member of the expedition. He knows of the flights I've taken with you, and he thinks I'll fit in with the aviation branch of the expedition. Of course, I'm no great shakes as an airman——"

"Cut that out," interrupted Ted. "You can fly a plane as well as any professional flyer, and as a navigator you're right there with the goods. There's no one on earth I'd rather have along with me."

"Well, whatever I've learned is due to the fact that I had the best teacher in the business," rejoined Hapworth. "At any rate, such as I am, I'm at the service of the expedition. It will be a tough game, but there'll be plenty of thrills in it, and it will be some satisfaction to feel that together with the fun of it I'll be rendering some service to science."

"Right you are," affirmed Ted. "Gee, Walter, you don't know how glad I am that you've reached that decision! It will double whatever pleasure I may have in the trip. But here I am, counting my chickens before they are hatched. Hollister may win yet, and I'll be left holding the bag."

"I'm betting that you won't," replied Hapworth emphatically. "This telegram has given me a new lease of life. Raymond's a mighty conservative man and he wouldn't have loosened up enough to send that wire if he didn't feel pretty certain of his facts. We'll have to hold tight as he suggests and wait with what patience we may until the something, whatever it is, breaks. And I don't imagine we'll have to hold tight long."

With a mind greatly relieved, Ted Scott applied himself to gathering up

what loose threads he had in hand, so that he might be entirely free from all other responsibilities if the hoped-for summons came.

Chief among these was the completion of his book narrating his thrilling experiences in Brazil. He had promised the completed manuscript in two weeks, but he applied himself to the task with such zeal and determination that at the end of one week he had put the finishing touches to the work and had sent it on to the publishers.

On the very day he put the last instalment in the mail something broke!

Ted was glancing over the pages of the newspaper when his eye was caught by a headline, followed by a long dispatch from the Associated Press. He read it with growing excitement.

Walter Hapworth, lounging in a chair beside him, glanced at the young aviator in some curiosity.

“What’s up?” he asked. “Another airplane smash?”

“Nothing like that,” replied Ted. “Walter, the break has come. Raymond knew what he was about when he sent that wire. Read that,” and he handed the paper to him.

Hapworth read the dispatch with as keen an interest as that which had so stirred his friend.

The story ran that there had been a change in the plans of the great Antarctic expedition. Gustavus Hollister, the well known Arctic explorer, who was to have been one of the most notable of the party, had severed his connection with the project and had also requested the return of the considerable sum of money that he had contributed to further its success.

What the reason for this was had not been fully ascertained. It had come as a surprise to scientific circles. Hollister’s experience had been counted on quite heavily, and he himself had seemed to be very enthusiastic about the forthcoming trip up to a short time before.

The natural inference, of course, was that there must have been a serious difference of opinion between Mr. Hollister and Captain Raymond relative to the expedition. What had been the cause of it, if it had really occurred, was only a matter of surmise. Reporters had interviewed both of the men concerned, but both were uncommunicative. Each had refused to make any statement to the public. Other members of the party when seen had either expressed ignorance concerning the matter or refused to be drawn into controversy.

It was conjectured that possibly Mr. Hollister’s health was at the bottom of the issue. Readers would remember that a little while before his house had been burned and he himself had suffered serious injury from smoke. It had been understood, however, that he had practically recovered from the effects of that, which still further deepened the mystery attending his withdrawal from

the expedition. Further efforts would be made to secure information, but at present that was the way the matter stood.

Ted Scott and Walter Hapworth looked at each other.

“Raymond is keeping mum, like a good sport,” remarked Hapworth. “He doesn’t want to queer Hollister in the eyes of the public by telling all he knows. But it’s dollars to doughnuts that Raymond has learned something about Hollister’s shady activities and has asked an explanation. Raymond wouldn’t want discredit thrown on his expedition by any scandal that might develop in regard to Hollister. Hollister hasn’t been able to explain things satisfactorily to Raymond, and so they’ve come to an open break. Look who’s coming.”

A telegraph messenger was approaching with a yellow envelope in his hand.

“Message for Mr. Scott,” he said, as he neared the veranda. “Sign here, please,” and he reached out a grubby hand with a pencil.

“From Raymond, I’ll bet,” exulted Hapworth. “The old boy is losing no time.”

Ted tore open the envelope, flattened out the message and read aloud.

WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO HAVE YOU COME WITH ME ON THE
ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION AS HEAD OF THE AVIATION BRANCH HOPE YOU
CAN DO SO PLEASE WIRE ANSWER IMMEDIATELY.

RAYMOND

Ted’s eyes were dancing as he folded up the paper. His dream had come true!

“Will I go?” he exclaimed. “Will a duck swim? You bet I’ll go!”

“Put it there,” smiled Hapworth, extending his hand, which Ted shook fervently.

Instead of telegraphing, Ted called up Captain Raymond on the long distance phone. The captain was delighted with Ted’s acceptance of the proposal and invited the young aviator to pay him a personal visit at his headquarters in Washington.

Ted agreed, and the very next day jumped into his plane and winged his way to the national capital. He called at the explorer’s office and was at once ushered into the room of the chief.

A man advanced with outstretched hand to meet him and Ted Scott saw for the first time one of the most famous explorers living—the man who was to head the great Antarctic expedition.

CHAPTER XI

OFF FOR THE POLE

Captain Alonzo Raymond was a tall, muscular man in his early fifties. There did not seem to be an ounce of superfluous flesh on his powerful body. He had a massive head and a leonine mane of hair that was slightly graying at the temples. His nose was aquiline, his mouth generous in size, his jaw firm and determined, his eyes blue and piercing.

His whole presence radiated power, and the impression he conveyed was justified by his achievements. He had led exploring parties in almost all quarters of the globe, in the torrid as well as in the frigid zones. His skin was tanned to the color of bronze from wind and sun. He was the recipient of degrees from a number of learned societies, both in America and abroad, for the services he had rendered to science.

A genial, kindly man, the young aviator judged from the humorous crinkles about his eyes, but not one to be trifled with, a man who, though not arbitrary or passionate, would expect to be obeyed and would see that he was obeyed. Altogether, Ted Scott's first impression of his future leader was a favorable one.

"So you've let no grass grow under your feet, Mr. Scott!" exclaimed Captain Raymond, as he shook Ted's hand warmly. "This is a pleasure I've been looking forward to for a long while."

"I, too," replied Ted, as he took the chair that the captain drew up for him near his desk. "But I'd begun to think that it was one that would never be realized."

Captain Raymond smiled.

"I don't wonder," he said. "I really owe you an apology for not having written to you before in response to your application. But you're such an independent young man that I thought, if I hinted that there was something delaying acceptance of your offer, you'd go up in the air at once and then I'd lose you. You see, as an aviator, you're used to going up in the air, anyway," he laughed.

"I do get up there occasionally," and Ted grinned in response.

"I was desperately anxious to have you," went on the captain. "I knew that the luster of your name would add immensely to the prestige of the expedition. Then, too, on this trip, the airplane is going to be our chief reliance. Dog sledges are good in their way, indeed are indispensable. But they can't compare with the planes in swiftness and mobility. You, for instance, could go

as far in a day as the sledges might in fifty, considering the terrible obstacles in their way.”

“I realize that,” remarked Ted. “If the early explorers had had planes, polar exploration would be much further advanced than it is to-day.”

“Exactly,” agreed Captain Raymond. “When we first conceived this project, your name, of course, was the first that popped into my mind. And I was amazed beyond measure when I found that one member of the expedition didn’t feel the same way. He was quite an important member, too, as he had a record for Arctic research. He is wealthy, also, and had contributed a large sum for the purpose of the expedition.”

“I can see that it put you in an embarrassing position,” observed Ted. “Of course you were anxious to have harmony in the party. The South Pole is no place to have quarrels.”

“No, indeed,” agreed the captain. “At first I thought that I could smooth things out. I argued with the man, tried to get at the bottom of the reasons for his opposition. But he was stubborn and would not tell. He simply wouldn’t have it that you should go along.

“In the meantime I was communicating with your friend, Mr. Hapworth—a fine fellow, by the way—and seeking to have him hold you off from engaging yourself in any other project until this thing could be straightened out. I kept hoping it might be, but I was firmly determined that if it came to a final issue between you and Hol—this man in question, he would have to withdraw in your favor.”

“You needn’t have hesitated on the name,” remarked Ted. “I know that the man you mean is Gustavus Hollister.”

“I wasn’t going to bring his name in,” remarked the captain, “but I suppose you’ve guessed from the Associated Press story that he was the man. Yes, it was Hollister. By the way,” he broke off sharply, “were you the aviator who saved Hollister and his wife from the burning house?”

Ted flushed to the temples, but said nothing.

“You needn’t reply, you confoundedly modest hero,” laughed the captain. “When I first read of the occurrence I said to myself that Ted Scott was probably the only aviator in America that had the nerve, the strength, and the quick wit to do a thing like that. Why in thunder didn’t you admit it?”

“I didn’t want to get anything from Mr. Hollister through gratitude,” replied Ted. “It would have taken all the joy out of the expedition if I had known I owed my part in it to that.”

Captain Raymond nodded.

“I see,” he said appreciatively. “I like you all the better for it. Well, that’s that. Hollister’s out—there’s no need of going into the exact thing that forced his withdrawal—and you’re in. Now let’s look toward the future. I want you, if

you will, to take entire charge of the aviation branch of the expedition. Is it a go?"

"It surely is," replied Ted enthusiastically. "And I thank you with all my heart for the offer."

"It's I who should thank you," replied Captain Raymond. "Your acceptance takes a great load off my mind. Now, as to the matter of compensation——"

Ted held up his hands.

"Not a cent!" he declared. "I don't need it and I don't want it. Whatever my services may be worth can go as my contribution to the expedition."

"That's wonderfully generous of you!" exclaimed the captain gratefully. "But of course your assistants who may not be so fortunately placed will be adequately paid for their services. You are authorized to offer them——" he named a sum which Ted regarded as ample. "That brings me to another point. Can you assemble enough good men to man the two planes that we shall take along? You know practically every aviator of any importance in America. You know their strong and their weak points. Of course, this isn't like an ordinary trip, where almost any aviator who can fly a plane will do. They must be men of tested courage, quick in emergencies, ready to rough it, and willing to take whatever chances may be necessary. Do you know of men that meet those requirements?"

Ted's mind ranged over the list of his acquaintances.

"I can find them," he said. "Men that will measure up to every thing you said. About half a dozen, I suppose, will be sufficient."

"I should think so," answered Captain Raymond. "But I shall leave that entirely to you. Whatever you decide will be all right with me in advance. Now that that's settled, come over here with me and look at this map."

He led the way to a huge wall map of the Antarctic regions that almost covered one side of the room.

Upon the map was recorded all that was already known of the vast mysterious continent. The lines were traced which all earlier explorers, Scott, Shackleton, Amundsen and others, had followed in their efforts to reach the pole.

Captain Raymond was so familiar with every detail that he could probably make a fair duplicate of the map if the present one should be lost. To Ted there was much that was new, but he had made such a careful study of the continent during the few days he had spent in the Chicago Public Library that he was a very intelligent listener, and the captain's respect for his quick perception deepened at every moment.

"Here is the mighty Queen Maud Range not far from the place where it is joined by Carmen Land," the captain pointed out. "We are ambitious to collect

data that will show the relationship between the two mountain masses and find out also whether the Queen Maud Range is a continuation of the great mountain systems from the eastern border of South Victoria Land. We shall attempt to climb Mount Nansen, which is fifteen thousand feet high, by way of getting a cross section of the geology of the range.”

He went on to describe the hoped-for work of the botanists, the geologists, the biologists, the meteorologists, in solving the many things that had been a puzzle to the scientific world. By the time he got through, Ted Scott had a heightened conception of the great services the expedition was expected to contribute to the world’s knowledge, and his ardor to go with it and do his share became keener than ever.

An hour or two more were profitably employed, and then Ted, with a perfectly clear idea of the duties that devolved on him personally, said good-by and flew back to Bromville.

His heart was full of exultation as he sped along. At last he had achieved the ambition he had nurtured for months. Adventure beckoned him. He was going to wing his way to the uttermost end of the earth!

One reflection sobered him. He must break the news to Eben and Charity!

Break it he did when he reached home with infinite tenderness and precaution. There was moisture in Eben’s eyes and Charity was swept with a tempest of sobs.

This passed, however, and they resigned themselves to the inevitable. Ted explained at length the great care with which the expedition was to be equipped, the various devices for the comfort and safety of the party, and emphasized the fact that at least there would be no wild beasts or snakes or head hunters to meet, such as he had encountered on his trip to Brazil. This latter fact proved more effective in mollifying Charity’s fears than anything else.

Ted sought out Hapworth, and they plunged into the details of their own special work.

“I’ve got to get the men together,” Ted said. “The planes have been already bought. They’re splendid tri-motored machines of the very latest make. Even the names have been given them. One is the *Ice Bird* and the other is the *Albatross*.”

“Very appropriate, considering the land we’re going to explore,” commented Hapworth. “I’m glad that that thing is settled. Now, how about the men?”

“Raymond thought we’d need about half a dozen,” replied Ted. “Three to each plane. I guess that’ll be plenty. You and I make two. That leaves four to get. They must all be bachelors.”

“We qualify in that respect,” remarked Hapworth.

“Yes,” laughed Ted, “and probably will for a long time to come. An expedition of this kind is no place for married aviators. They might get worried about wife and kids and become unfit for work. A man’s mind has got to be free from those things.”

“That being granted,” returned Hapworth, “who are the other four?”

“I know whom I want,” was the reply. “Whether they’ll be willing to go is another question. Mark Lawson and Jack Forrest are two of them. They’ve already tasted adventure in our trip to Brazil and they’ll probably jump at the chance for more. What do you say?”

“I say yes, emphatically,” declared Hapworth. “We’ve seen them in the most ticklish situations and know that they are true blue. There isn’t a yellow streak in them.”

“I thought they’d satisfy you,” resumed Ted. “Then there’s Bill Twombly, and also Roy Benedict. You’ve met Bill and know what he is, and I can assure you that Roy’s of the same stripe. I’ve seen them in all conditions of danger, and they never turned a hair. Dandy airmen, too. What they don’t know about a plane isn’t worth knowing.”

“Just made to order for our job, I should think,” returned Hapworth. “Get them, by all means, if you can.”

“I’ll see Mark and Jack to-day and put the matter up to them,” decided Ted. “Bill and Roy are in the Rocky Mountain Division of the Air Mail Service. I know Mr. Bruin, who is at the head of that, and I’ll have no trouble in getting leave of absence for the boys if they want to go.”

As he had predicted, Mark Lawson and Jack Forrest accepted with enthusiasm. Ted could have written to Bill and Roy as well as to Mr. Bruin, but he reasoned that there was nothing like a personal interview, so he jumped into his plane and shot over the Rockies to Denver. His reception was uproarious, and Bill Twombly and Roy Benedict were enthusiastic over the plan. Mr. Bruin readily granted the desired leave of absence, and the matter was settled before Ted left Denver.

Three weeks later the last good-byes had been said to those at home, the party had assembled in New York, the port of departure, and the stout steamer *Penguin*, packed to the guards with men and supplies, passed the Statue of Liberty, nosed her way through the Narrows, left Sandy Hook behind and dipped her prow into the surges of the Atlantic.

“We’re off!” cried Ted, as he waved his hand at the receding shores. “Good-by America! Hail to the South Pole!”

CHAPTER XII

THE LAND OF FROST

Once fairly out of sight of land, Ted Scott and his chums roamed about the ship, penetrating every nook and corner and making acquaintance with their new companions, whom they would be compelled to know so intimately in the months to come, whether they wanted to or not. There would be no opportunity of getting away from each other's company in the frozen solitudes of the South.

They found that they were in the company of a fine lot of men. All in the party had had to pass physical examinations of great rigor. The South Pole was no place for weaklings. Their mental and moral qualities, also, had been looked into with great care. A more desirable lot of men from any standpoint could scarcely have been gotten together, and the personnel reflected credit on the acumen of Captain Raymond in choosing his assistants.

Most of the men were highly educated. This of course went without question as regarded the scientists of the party, who were all men of eminence in their respective callings. Among the others, less versed in books, there was a high degree of intelligence and proficiency in their vocations.

It was not many hours before all were on terms of greater or less intimacy. A pleasant atmosphere pervaded the ship that augured well for the future.

The *Penguin* itself was a stout ship, especially designed for adventuring in polar ice. It was built for strength rather than speed, yet went along at a fairly good rate. But it was by no means an ocean liner that could cut through many waves at once. It pitched and tossed considerably as the wind freshened and the water grew rough, and Ted Scott noticed that there were a good many vacant chairs at the tables on the first night of the voyage.

He himself was a good sailor and felt no inconvenience. Walter Hapworth, also, had voyaged much and was immune from the pitching and tossing. But Mark Lawson and Jack Forrest were a little greenish "about the gills," though they made a manful effort to remain indifferent. They simply toyed with their food, however, and left the table before dessert was served.

Roy Benedict had occasional qualms and betrayed an unusual interest in the rail of the ship, which he visited at intervals. But poor Bill Twombly was completely down and out.

"Get away from me," he moaned, when his friends came to see how he was getting on. "Let me die in peace."

"Brace up, old man," counseled Ted. "You're not going to die."

In a day or two Bill, as well as the rest, was feeling well and made up at table for what he had lost.

For many days the weather was fine and the *Penguin* made notable progress. It passed down the United States coast, skirted the West Indies, and reached the South American continent.

It had been planned to make no stops of any kind whatever. There was no occasion to replenish their supplies, and they did not care for the fêtes and receptions that were sure to be accorded an expedition of that importance at any port where they might stop. They were closely intent on the work they had in hand and did not want any interruption.

The weather grew intensely hot as they neared the equator. Heavy outer clothing was discarded and the party lolled under awnings while the pitch softened in the seams between the boards. The air was stifling.

They passed the equator, and with every day thereafter the weather grew cooler. Before long, overcoats were in demand. The air had a nip to it that was prophetic of what awaited them farther to the south.

One day Captain Raymond approached the group of Ted and his friends with a message that he had just received by radio.

"This is something that will interest you," he said to Ted. "Your old friend Gustavus Hollister is on the job. Read it," and he thrust the message into Ted's hand.

Ted read it aloud and his friends listened with the keenest interest. It was from an intimate friend of Captain Raymond in Washington, and stated that Gustavus Hollister had left Boston in a steamer that he had chartered for a voyage to the South Pole. The steamer was named the *Gray Cloud*, and was unusually fast. It had been gotten ready with elaborate efforts for secrecy, and little had been known about the project until within a few days of sailing. Those were the main points of the radiogram.

Ted looked up with a quizzical smile.

"So we have competition," he remarked, as he handed the message back. "Well, the more the merrier. Competition is the life of trade."

"He's trying to steal a march on us," observed Captain Raymond. "Take the wind out of our sails. He's welcome to try it, but I have a feeling that he'll come to grief. It wasn't possible to equip and outfit his party properly in the time he had at his disposal."

The prospect of a race to the Pole was not without its attractions to the younger and more sporting members of the party. It promised to add one more thrill to the many they had in store.

The *Penguin* put on more speed, and soon passed the tip of the South American continent. The weather turned bad and the hatches were battened down. There was only one severe storm of any consequence, but there were

many minor ones that made staying on deck a matter of some peril and infinite discomfort.

Now they were out of the beaten track of vessels, and about them stretched a gray, angry sea. Icebergs began to be met with frequently and unceasing watchfulness was necessary in navigating the ship. Once in a great while the sail of some distant whaling vessel stood out against the horizon.

But one day toward evening they caught sight of a distant ship, wholly different from the ordinary type of whaler.

“American built,” declared Captain Raymond, as the members of the party clustered about him in the bow. “Shouldn’t be a bit surprised if it were the *Gray Cloud*. And she’s stepping along pretty fast.”

They lost her in the night and were left to their conjectures.

Within a short time after sighting the mysterious vessel they were in the ice fields. Thousands of floes filled the waters and bumped against the side of the ship. After several days of this a cry came from the masthead bow that thrilled to the core those who heard it.

“Land ho!”

CHAPTER XIII

OVER THE ICE FIELDS

The *Penguin* came to rest, her bow breasting fields of ice. As far as the eye could see was a vast expanse of white, backed by towering, snow-capped mountain peaks.

It was a thrilling vista, stark, barren, and above all subtly challenging.

“Where no man has yet set foot,” Ted Scott murmured, his eyes lingering dreamily on the distant peaks.

“I’ve never thought much of my abilities as a mind reader, but I’ll guarantee to read your thoughts.” Ted glanced up to see the tall figure of Captain Raymond beside him at the rail.

The young aviator grinned.

“Try it,” he invited.

“You were thinking that, majestic and awe-inspiring as those mountains appear, they have no terrors for you; that by means of a simple little mechanism, a couple of wings and a stick control, you can surmount even those lofty peaks, look down upon their mysteries, and force them to divulge their secrets.”

He smiled at Ted’s earnest face.

“Confess now,” he challenged. “Weren’t your thoughts something along that line?”

“Yes, they were,” admitted Ted. “In fact, at the moment you spoke I was wishing myself in the *Ice Bird*, flying above those mighty mountains. There’s nothing quite to compare with the thrill a thing of that kind gives. Only you make a mistake, sir, if you don’t object to my saying so, in describing the *Ice Bird* as a piece of mechanism, two wings, and a stick control. In my opinion, any airplane is far more than that.”

Captain Raymond chuckled good-naturedly.

“It has a soul, has it, like a ship? Well, I shan’t quarrel with you on that point. I’m inclined to believe it myself as regards ships, and an airplane is only a different kind of vessel. One goes through the air and the other through the water, but whatever the element, they certainly seem endued with life.”

The *Penguin*, having definitely ended her cruise in the ice-choked waters, was a-bustle with preparations for the landing of men and supplies. A sensation of relief that the long voyage was over was apparent everywhere. Now, after all these weeks, they had at last come to grips with the mysterious continent whose secrets they were keen to discover. The voyage had only been

a necessary detail; their real work lay before them.

Near him Captain Raymond gave orders in a quiet incisive way, commenting meanwhile on various aspects of the animated scene.

“They’re bringing up the huskies now,” as a wild chorus of excited barks and yelps broke forth. “The dogs are always happy to be released from their long imprisonment.”

“No wonder,” remarked Ted. “They’re used to an open-air life and they must feel confinement keenly.”

“They’re apt to be temperamental and touchy after it,” replied the captain. “For the first few days one has to be on guard. They have to be handled with gloves.”

“I take it that you mean that literally,” observed Ted, with a nod of his head toward one great, heavy-shouldered dog who was making life very interesting for his handler, cavorting nervously and snapping, whether half in play or wholly in earnest, at the hand that held the leash close behind his massive head.

“Just that,” agreed Captain Raymond. “You know they’re supposed to have a wolf strain in their composition, and you can readily believe it when you see them in their tantrums. Even among themselves they fight to the death.

“Now that fellow is Tanuk,” he went on, indicating the dog to which Ted had referred. “He’s the lead dog, and a finer, more intelligent husky could scarcely be found. High strung and nervous, though, and hardly safe even for his handlers to play with.”

“I’d like to make friends with him,” remarked Ted.

As he started forward Captain Raymond laid a restraining hand on his arm.

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

“Make friends with Tanuk, if you have no objection. Dogs take to me,” he added, with a smile at the captain’s serious face.

Before the latter could reply, Ted Scott had already pressed through the group surrounding the yelping huskies.

“Better stand back,” warned the man who held the huge lead dog. “That baby’s nothing to fool with at his best. He’s in a tricky temper right now.”

The great husky glared up at the young aviator. His ears were flattened against his head, his gleaming eyes were hostile, and a growl rumbled deep in his massive throat.

Ted folded his arms across his chest and stared back. His glance was friendly and undismayed.

“Hello, old chap,” he said presently. “You’re a grand fellow, aren’t you? You’ll be a great help to your mother when you grow up. I have an idea you and I are going to be friends. And I’m sure in a minute you’ll feel the same way.”

Ted stretched out a hand and rested it gently on the great shaggy head.

“Good old Tanuk! Fine old Tanuk! How about it, old fellow? Are we friends?”

Everyone had paused to watch the little drama between a man and a dog that was almost human. They held their breaths for the outcome.

They saw Tanuk stiffen beneath Ted’s touch, then relax and gradually settle back on his haunches. The heavy jaw slacked and the tongue rolled out in a typical canine grin.

“Jiminy!” breathed the handler. “How did you do it? Are you a magician, or what?”

Ted continued to fondle the great shaggy head. Tanuk even submitted to be scratched behind the ears, a liberty seldom permitted by the haughty husky.

At the chorus of congratulatory phrases that greeted the phenomenon Ted merely grinned.

“I knew by the look of that dog we were going to be friends,” he said simply. “What a magnificent beast he is! We’re going to see a lot of each other, Tanuk.”

“Going ashore” on an expedition of this kind was no easy undertaking. Ted Scott and his friends were amazed and intensely interested by the number and variety of things that must be done before a landing on the ice could become an accomplished fact.

Tents had to be erected for the accommodation of the voyagers. Temporary storehouses must be knocked together to house the supplies. Tons of goods must be unloaded and promptly put under cover on guard against the weather. Dog sleds must be lowered with their complement of snapping huskies.

As the pile of materials grew on the ice, Jack Forrest came to stand beside Ted at the rail, and together they watched the unloading with fascinated interest.

“When you think of all the work that goes into the making of that outfit,” Jack remarked, “it gives you an idea of the big scale on which this expedition has been planned.”

Ted nodded.

“That’s what makes it so likely to succeed,” he said. “The trouble with most Polar expeditions has been that they haven’t been prepared for adequately in advance. They’ve been haphazard sort of hit or miss things, and of course have come to grief. The North Pole would have been discovered long before it was if the early explorers had taken the same precautions that Peary did when he at last made the goal.

“Brains have gone into this trip of ours. It’s inspiring to see how much thought has been put into every detail, no matter how small. Everything is of the best and latest make. Take sleeping hags, for instance. They’ve been only

half way affairs up to now. But those we've brought along are absolutely guaranteed to keep out the cold."

"Let's hope so," returned Jack, settling his chin deep into the fur collar of his jacket. "This temperature makes warmth the most important thing in life."

"Hankering to go in for a dip?"

The question was asked by Mark Lawson as he sauntered up to the two at the rail of the *Penguin*. He pointed to a thin blue stream of water where it appeared between two heavy ice packs. "If there are many of those breaks, it's going to make sledging to the foot of those mountains not quite as simple as it looks."

"There will probably be more than one ice crack in what looks to be a solid field," admitted Ted. "However, with Captain Raymond and the drivers of the dog teams to boss the job, I guess we can count on reaching there all right."

"There's only one form of transportation that seems to me to be absolutely safe," remarked Jack, with a sidelong look at Ted. "That's via the *Ice Bird*."

Ted laughed and shook his head.

"Did you say 'safe'?" he rejoined. "Why, we are not even certain that we can make a respectable landing! However, I'll ask Captain Raymond what he thinks about it."

"Already straining at the leash, are you?" asked the captain, smiling when Ted put the question to him.

"Yes," replied Ted. "With everybody else working their heads off, it doesn't seem right that we should be the only loafers in the outfit."

The captain considered for a moment.

"With the ice so thickly packed at a considerable distance from the shore line you'll probably find a solid sheet of ice at the base of those mountains," he said. "If you do, that's where I'd like to make our camp. The mountains extend in a direction that will ward off from us to a great extent the freezing winds from the direction of the Pole. Suppose you take a little trip out in that direction and tell me what you find. It will be bumpy and rough enough, no doubt, but I think you'll find little difficulty in making a landing. If you do, simply stay in the air and come back. Go to it. But don't go very far this first day."

Elated, Ted Scott returned to his friends.

"Come along, you two," he said to Mark and Jack. "We're going to find out what the upper air of the Antarctic feels like."

On the port side of the ice-locked *Penguin* stretched what appeared to be a solid field of ice several hundred yards in length that seemed to be suitable for a take-off. Though here and there long, irregular, blue veins betrayed the presence of weak places in the ice, the mass held together well enough. It seemed probable that the *Ice Bird*, skimming lightly over the surface, would be

able to take the air without involving herself in serious difficulties.

“Don’t like the looks of those veins,” Mark observed, as the trio went below to get into their flying togs. “We’ll be lucky if we don’t take our first dip in the waters of the Antarctic. A chilly swim it would be, if you ask me.”

“Not a chance,” declared Ted. “The *Ice Bird* will make the take-off all right. Just watch her.”

The plane was lowered by means of a long inclined runway to the ice. The long runners, or skis, with which it was equipped slid smoothly over the slippery surface. The *Ice Bird* came to rest, its wings poised as though eager for flight.

“Isn’t she a peach?” Ted’s heart was in his eyes as he gazed. “Did you ever see such a perfection of line? Say, fellows, it’s a privilege to pilot a plane like that!”

His companions grinned and Mark gave Jack a nudge in the ribs.

“Ted’s sweetheart,” he commented.

“May he never have a worse one,” toasted Jack, as they gathered about the plane.

Before the *Penguin* had started on the last lap of her journey, the *Ice Bird* had been thoroughly groomed and was in perfect shape. Nevertheless, the aviators made a careful inspection to make sure the mechanism was in perfect working order. Then they drew on their gloves and climbed in.

A sharp twist was given to the propeller and the engine barked hoarsely, shattering the brittle stillness of the vast ice-bound region. A moment more, and the barking had settled into a steady pulsating roar.

Ted Scott pulled down his goggles and settled in his seat with his hand on the control. The plane glided smoothly over the ice field, swiftly gathering speed.

The content in Ted’s eyes was suddenly banished by a look of alarm.

Directly before him a wide crack had opened in the ice, showing a streak of sapphire water!

CHAPTER XIV

A CLOSE CALL

Ted Scott's heart beat fast as he noted that ominous rushing current of water directly in the path of his plane.

"Will the *Ice Bird* plunge into it?" he asked himself. "Will the speed at which she's traveling carry her safely over the gap? Will she rise before she comes to it?"

His companions, too, had seen the break, and Jack Forrest reached forward involuntarily as though to touch Ted's arm.

Mark Lawson grasped his extended hand.

"No back seat driving!" he muttered savagely. "Leave it to Ted."

Ted Scott sat there like a statue. He had never been more alert, more completely master of himself than at this moment when the fate of himself and his companions hung in the balance.

He called into action every resource of his craftsmanship to lift the plane into the air.

The treacherous break was almost beneath the runners when he felt the *Ice Bird* rise ever so slightly.

"That's right," he urged. "That's right, beauty! Lift yourself up over this thing. Don't let it get you. That's it, you're making it—a little higher! We've made it!"

The exultant cry was brushed from his lips by the rush of icy wind. The *Ice Bird* had justified his faith in her. She had achieved what at first sight had seemed impossible. The ice with its treacherous cracks and fissures had been left behind. He and his companions were in the air, safe, free!

He could have crowed with triumph. His whole being was swept with an immense rush of exhilaration. He and the *Ice Bird* were once more in their native element.

He turned to his companions with a grin.

"Close shave, fellows," he remarked.

"I'll tell the world it was," replied Mark. "My heart was trying to climb out of my throat. Gee, the way you handled that plane was a marvel, Ted!"

Higher, higher the *Ice Bird* mounted, the flyers reveling in the rush of the icy wind. As yet the cold was not so intense as to be painful. Both Ted and his companions were dressed in the very latest inventions of those who spend their time and ingenuity in devising cold-excluding clothes.

They wore paper vests, heavy fur and leather outer garments, socks and

shoes that had been planned to keep the feet warm without making them perspire. Over their faces were masks to protect the skin against frostbite, and over the eyeholes in the mask were heavy goggles.

All these precautions, together with heavy gauntlets that effectively protected their hands, left not an inch of their bodies to the attacks of a climate that knew no mercy. It would be hours before the cold could permeate all these layers of garments sufficiently to cause any great discomfort.

They flew swiftly over the ice-blanketed region until they neared the outposts of the great range of mountains.

There Ted moderated the speed of the plane and circled about with interest over the field where Captain Raymond proposed, if the conditions were favorable, to set up his first camp.

As the captain had predicted, the field looked to be a solid sheet of ice. There were no straggling blue veins here to denote a treacherous ocean close beneath the surface.

“The ice at this point seems to be frozen many feet deep,” remarked Ted.

“Thirty or forty feet, I shouldn’t wonder,” returned Mark. “It looks that way from here.”

“Possibly there’s land beneath it instead of water,” chimed in Jack. “It isn’t likely that the earth ends exactly at the base of the mountain.”

Circling still lower, Ted saw that there was a large, cave-like indentation at the foot of the range.

“An excellent place for the cook tent and the main part of the supplies,” commented Ted.

“And look at the shelter the mountain gives against the wind,” remarked Jack. “In the lee of that, one could be almost snug.”

“Place looks ideal to me for a permanent camp,” observed Mark.

Ted pushed the stick and went still lower. He could see that the ice was reasonably smooth and free from the ridges and excrescences visible in many other parts of the ice field. To put matters to the supreme test, he actually made a landing and found that it proved an easier feat than he had imagined.

“A good airplane base as well as a camp site,” he murmured with great satisfaction. “We could knock some hangars together and there’d be no great trouble either in taking off or coming down.”

Having completed his observations of this particular locality, Ted lifted the plane into the air again and turned it in the direction of the expeditionary party.

The return trip was made without mishap. But as they neared the temporary camp Ted noted that the unloading was not nearly as far advanced as he had imagined it would be. The landing was consuming a greater amount of time than had been counted on.

His appetite for flying had only been whetted by the brief experience yet

enjoyed. So he merely signaled that all was well and turned the plane about again.

“Might as well fill in the time until the unloading is over,” he thought to himself. “I’ve a hankering to see what that mountain range looks like, viewed from above.”

Mark and Jack were equally eager. They, like Ted, had grown to love the air as a gypsy loves the open road. There was an added thrill in exploring this virgin region where no plane had ever before spread its wings.

As Ted approached the majestic, snow-capped peaks he was overwhelmed by a feeling of awe in the presence of a force too great for his mind to grasp.

Looking down upon that ice-encased world he was gripped by a feeling of his own insignificance, his comparative unimportance in the scheme of things. He was merely an atom whirling about in the white immensity of space.

“Yet, here I am, riding above it all,” he marveled, “as smug and self-satisfied as though the whole show had been arranged for my special benefit. I guess it’s up to me to be humble.”

These philosophic musings did not occupy his mind for long. As the first snow-capped peak slid beneath the body of the *Ice Bird* he became lost in the wonders of a magic world.

Here was a mass of snow-swathed peaks and ridges with here and there wind-swept spaces of bare rock. These rocky protuberances jutting above the snowy surrounding expanse reminded Ted of a husky swimmer who was having a hard time keeping his head above water. The bare rock stood out in pronounced contrast to the rest of the mountain top.

“Looks as though there must have been mighty heavy winds to sweep the rocks clear of snow like that,” thought Ted. “I only hope that we don’t run into a cyclone or a blizzard, at least until we have a clearer idea of our surroundings.”

Seen from the plane, the mountains were not so imposing as they had appeared when viewed from the ship. It was impossible for Ted Scott, who was no scientist, to judge accurately the height of them. However, he calculated as closely as he could in the hope that his observations would be of use to Captain Raymond later on.

Spiraling low over a fascinating welter of peaks and gorges, Ted observed a snow-swept plateau that proved too great a temptation for him to resist.

It was several thousand feet in length and almost as wide. He would have no difficulty in making a landing, and it would be great fun to view that scenery while on a level with it.

Lower and lower he swooped until, with a final graceful motion, the *Ice Bird* touched the plateau and glided along it with scarcely more friction than if it had been in the air. A moment later pilot and crew slid to the ground.

They shook themselves and stretched their cramped arms and legs.

“Where no man has ever trod before,” remarked Mark Lawson. “Say, Ted, ain’t it a grand and glorious feeling?” he added, perhaps to cover his real emotion.

“It is,” agreed Ted, with a smile. “Now that we’re here, we might as well look around a bit. I want to get an eyeful of this scenery.”

“The first members of the Raymond expedition to touch uncharted land!” exclaimed Jack Forrest. “I don’t mind telling you fellows that my chest is expanding and my head enlarging with every minute.”

“Better clamp down on them,” advised Ted. “If you outgrow your helmet and your chest protector in this climate, you’ll certainly be out of luck. Wonder if it’s safe to leave the *Ice Bird* here while we go to look around?”

“I don’t see what could happen to it unless a gust of wind should blow it over yonder ravine,” remarked Jack, with a wave of the hand toward a spot a few hundred feet distant where the plateau appeared to drop sharply for an incalculable distance.

“The air is as still as a summer’s night just now,” said Ted. “We won’t go far. Come along. Let’s hike.”

They found, however, that it was impossible to hike far. Their plateau appeared to be hung in the midst of space with very little on any side of it except in the rear, where it was firmly attached to the mountain.

On the other three sides there were sheer descents into dizzy depths from which the young voyagers instinctively drew back.

Ted picked up a stone and dropped it over the edge. A long time elapsed before they heard it strike, far below.

“That would be a bad place for a fellow to fall,” remarked Jack, with a shudder.

“Almost as bad as from an airplane,” added Mark.

At one point only was there a possibility of descent, and that an extremely perilous one. The sides of the ravine were not as steep as at other points, and midway between the top of the plateau and the valley below was a narrow, ice-covered ledge.

“If a fellow could get down to that ledge without breaking his neck, I suppose he might be able to go the rest of the way,” mused Ted.

“None of that, Ted,” protested Mark Lawson. “We’ve no desire to fish your frozen body from the snowdrifts beneath. Be yourself.”

“Oh, I wasn’t going,” replied Ted. “I was only——”

He was interrupted by a sharp cry from Jack.

“Your hand quick! I’m slipping!”

Ted and Mark sprang forward, but they were too late.

With a final despairing cry their companion disappeared over the edge!

CHAPTER XV

IN DESPERATE PLIGHT

For a moment Ted Scott and Mark Lawson had to fight for a footing on the slippery brink. They clawed at each other and at the air and eventually managed to recover their balance. Then, dreading what they might see, sick with fear for their comrade, they looked over the edge of the steep drop.

Had Jack gone to certain death in the snow and ice-choked valley below?

At first they feared that it must be so, but Ted's horrified gaze, raking the void into which Jack had tumbled, came to rest on a figure sprawled darkly against the gleaming white of the ice ledge.

"He's caught on!" Ted exclaimed in a shaking voice. "How he kept himself from bounding off that slippery surface I don't know. But he can't hold on long, Mark. We've got to get down there to him."

"But how?" Mark countered hoarsely. "We haven't wings to fly, Ted. We couldn't make that slippery grade without them. It's impossible."

"Nothing is impossible," declared Ted grimly.

He flung himself face downward on the slippery rock. His eyes left the sprawled figure of his comrade and began deliberately to explore the cliff face directly beneath him.

He saw with a touch of hopefulness that the mountain side failed to present the flawlessly smooth surface he had at first attributed to it. During a thaw streams of water had plowed their way with considerable force through the ice. When the inevitable freeze followed, there had remained irregular ridges on the ice coating of the mountain.

These might, Ted considered, form toe and finger holds for a particularly agile person should he decide to descend the cliff. It would be a ticklish undertaking, a hair-raising undertaking, but as far as Ted Scott was concerned he had no alternative but to try it.

He lowered himself over the edge.

"I'm going with you," declared Mark, preparing to follow his example.

But Ted staid him with a gesture.

"You'd better stay here," he said. "Run to the plane and get a coil of rope and stand ready."

As Ted lowered himself slowly, cautiously, he had the sickening sensation of hanging over a fathomless abyss. His fingers slipped. He clutched and groped. In another moment it seemed that he would be dashed into eternity.

But he did not fall. By a miracle he remained clinging to the icy precipice

like a fly to a wall, his body pressed close to the slippery cliff, his fingers digging into ice fissures, his toes groping for a hold.

His progress was slow, creeping, nightmarish. But each inch was that much gained; each moment that he defied the yawning emptiness beneath him a signal victory.

At the back of his mind, goading him on, was the desperate need for hurry. Each moment of his creeping descent might mean the difference between life and death for Jack Forrest.

How long could the young fellow, half stunned as he must be by such a fall, continue to cling to the narrow ice ledge? Suppose with his slipping senses, his grip relaxed!

A groan broke from Ted's lips.

"I've got to hurry and I can't!" he muttered in desperation. "I'm slow, slow _____"

He broke off suddenly and an appalled expression came into his face.

His foot, groping downward, encountered only a smooth, glazed surface of ice. Suppose he had come to the end of the fissures! No hand hold! No toe hold!

What hope remained?

He continued to grope cautiously with his foot. In trying to reach downward his fingers slipped, and for one horrible moment he gave himself up for lost. Claw at the ice as he might, he could make no impression on its solid surface. He was slipping, slipping, falling into immensity!

He came up with a sharp bump against something hard, something that stung his feet but offered them a precarious hold.

It was the ledge!

The discovery nearly proved Ted Scott's undoing. He looked downward and grew dizzy. He experienced the obsession that comes to some at such times to stop struggling, to fling himself into the vast abyss that yawned for him.

He closed his eyes and pressed himself close against the cliffside, striving to dig his fingers in.

"Steady!" he cautioned himself. "Chances are I won't have to do such a crazy thing as throw myself down. One slip of the foot and the matter settles itself."

That one brief glance downward had been sufficient to show Ted that he had dropped on the ledge only a few feet from where Jack Forrest lay, still sprawled, face down, upon it. Moreover, the ledge was wider than it had seemed to be from above.

It should be a comparatively easy matter to edge along the cliff face until he reached his comrade. But what then? Would he be able to get an

unconscious man to his feet? How was he to urge, cajole, shove, lift, Jack Forrest up the ice-encrusted face of the cliff, when he could scarcely expect to make that fearful climb alone and unburdened?

There seemed to be no answer to these questions, and for the moment the daring aviator shut his mind to them. He felt his way slowly, inch by inch, along the perilous pathway. His feet, shod as they were with rubber soled boots, clung to the ice, and more than once saved him from plunging down to doom.

As he was feeling cautiously sideways, his right foot slipped off into space. By a tremendous effort Ted checked the movement and recovered his balance. Then, schooling himself to control, he once more looked down.

Something he had not seen in the first dizzying glance downward struck him with the force of a blow. There was a gap of a yard or more in the ice ledge, and this gap lay between him and Jack Forrest.

“Just to make it a little harder,” he muttered to himself grimly. “That gap might as well be a mile wide for all the hope I have of crossing it safely. Well, here goes, anyway. Do or die!”

He paused for a moment, flogging his determination into the taking of one desperate chance. He would cross that gap in the ledge or die trying.

Easy now, take it easy! Feel with one foot and hang on with the other. Dig fingers into the ridge of ice deeper and deeper. There you go! The foot has reached the other side. Slide it over a little farther—farther still. Now let go with one hand carefully, feel along that smooth, treacherous surface for a grip. There it is! Hang on now, hang on!

Here we are, straddling the gap, one foot and one hand on either side, not daring to let go with either, not daring to move, scarcely to breathe.

This will never do. Let’s get on with it. Slip over a bit, an inch or two—the left foot’s slipping—hang on—hang on!

Waiting a minute, clinging breathlessly, muttering, praying, not daring to look down——

Now just another minute and it will be over one way or the other. Steady on! Take your courage in both hands. Slide over there, foot! That’s right! An inch, two inches—now the other foot! Right! We’ve made it. Now the other hand, gripping, exploring! The thing is done!

His heart thrilling with his hard-won victory, Ted Scott clung to his precarious perch, gathering his forces for the herculean effort that was yet to come.

Jack Forrest lay almost at his feet. Ted wondered if his friend had been fatally injured by his fall. He appeared to be unconscious. Or had he merely frozen into immobility for fear that an unconsidered movement would fling him over the ledge?

In answer to the question a voice came from the seemingly inanimate bundle at Ted's feet.

"That you, old scout?" the voice asked faintly. "I might have known you'd come."

"Thank goodness you're conscious!" cried Ted fervently. "Are you much hurt, old man?"

"I don't think so," replied Jack. "Breath knocked out of me, lots of sore spots here and there. Clawed at everything as I came down and so stayed my speed and broke my fall. I haven't dared to move since I brought up here, for fear I'd slide off the ledge. I got one look at what's below us and that nearly did for me."

"Think you could stand up—with my help?"

"I could try, Ted. But it's a ticklish business." He tried to move but sank back with a groan. "I'm still dizzy from the fall, I guess. If I try to stand up even with your help, I'll go barging down into that abyss and pull you with me, probably. No use, Ted. I'm a total loss. Get back to the plateau, if you can without breaking your neck. I don't want your death on my conscience."

"Sounds like me to do that, doesn't it?" scoffed Ted. He was thinking rapidly, desperately.

He knew that whatever was to be done must be done within the next few minutes. He knew that neither of them could remain there long. The cold was beginning to get through to him. His bare fingers—for he had thrown off his gloves when he lowered himself from the plateau—were becoming numb. Something must be done and that soon, or both he and the man who lay there on the ledge were doomed.

"Listen," he cried desperately. "You've got to pull yourself together, old boy. I won't leave you and there's no sense in staying here until the cold gets us and we both go barging off into space together. Help me to help you, old man. If you don't we're both goners."

In response to the frantic appeal, the prostrate man raised himself on one elbow. He averted his glance resolutely from the dizzying drop so close to him. His face was haggard with strain.

"If you say so, I'll try it, Ted. But I fear I'll never make the grade——"

A joyful cry from Ted arrested him, caused him to look up. Over the dazzling white face of the cliff close to Ted's hand dangled the end of a coil of rope!

Ted Scott cautiously released one hand and grasped the swaying rope. A noose was fastened to the end of it. Ted tugged at it twice and was answered from above.

Good old Mark! He had come to the rescue, and not a moment too soon.

A faint hail drifted down to the marooned pair.

“The rope is made fast to a rock up here,” shouted Mark, hand cupped about mouth in the form of a megaphone. “Don’t be afraid to trust to it. Come on up!”

CHAPTER XVI

BROKEN STRANDS

“Come on up!”

Never had invitation sounded more delightful, now that the means had been provided for its acceptance. It was not so easy as it sounded, though, at that.

The noose could not be slipped over Jack’s shoulders until he had gotten to his feet. This was accomplished with difficulty, and more than once in the process the young men came near to meeting the fate that they had so far cheated of victory.

At last the rope was slipped under Jack’s arms. Mark Lawson tugged stoutly from above and Jack, heartened by the unexpected possibility of rescue, put himself to the task of working his way up the rope with his hands, while his feet sought what footholds they could find to lessen the weight.

Finally, almost at the point of exhaustion, Jack reached the level ground above and lay panting on the ground while Mark quickly proceeded to unfasten the rope from his body.

Down went the rope again until it was within reach of Ted Scott’s hand. It was with an almost painful relief that the young aviator felt it grow tight around his chest under his armpits. Another moment and he began his climb, and in much quicker time than Jack had made reached the top and swung himself over to safety.

For some time Ted and Jack lay on the ground panting and gasping, after the terrific strain on mind and body. They were bereft of speech, and Mark was so overcome with emotion that he did not dare trust himself to talk.

At last Ted rose and gripped Mark’s hand.

“There isn’t much I can say, old boy—” he began.

“Forget it, Ted,” protested Mark. “Do you think I want any thanks? Besides, it was you that pulled off all the heroism.”

“That rope sure came in handy.” It was Jack who spoke. He was sitting up, feeling himself all over with a cautious regard for bruises and possible broken bones. “You dropped it down the side of the cliff just in the nick of time, old top.”

“Anything broken?” asked Ted, regarding Jack’s anatomical explorations with concern.

“Nothing, as far as I can tell. Though I must admit it’s a bit of marvelous luck. I’m mighty stiff. Have to take it easy for a day or two, I guess. I’ll always

remember what you boys have done for me to-day.”

“Forget it,” directed Ted.

“Only what you’d have done for us, if conditions had been reversed,” said Mark, as he went to unfasten the rope from the rock.

He uttered a sharp exclamation and motioned his comrades to come to where he was standing.

“Look here, fellows,” he cried. “The rope is nearly cut through!”

In grim silence the young men examined the frayed edges of the rope. A jagged point of the rock to which it had been fastened had cut it nearly through, as neatly as a saw could have done. Only one slender strand still held.

Ted laughed shortly.

“One thing seems pretty certain,” he remarked. “This wasn’t our day to die.”

“Of all the fool luck!” murmured Jack.

“One minute more—and then——”

“You needn’t draw gruesome pictures,” interrupted Mark. “Our imaginations are in good working order. Lucky I thought to store away that coil of rope,” he added. “Had a notion we might find some use for it.”

“Take good care of it,” advised Ted. “It may come in handy again.”

They lost no time in leaving the place that had so nearly witnessed a tragedy.

“A few minutes ago I wouldn’t have given a dime for my chance of seeing the *Ice Bird* again,” remarked Ted, as he took his place in the pilot’s seat.

“The old bus never felt so good to me before,” observed Mark.

The plane took off from the plateau with a graceful ease that justified its name. Ted lifted her to a considerable altitude, so that there would be no trouble in clearing the mountain top, and flew back toward the *Penguin*.

The atmosphere was as clear as crystal and everything on the ice below stood out with the sharpness of an etching.

They had traveled but a little way when they caught sight of a couple of sledges each drawn by a yelping, moiling team of huskies.

“Taking the dogs out for an airing after their long imprisonment in the ship,” commented Ted.

The sledges rattled over the ice at a merry pace, the dogs barking with delight at their new freedom, the whips of the drivers cracking like pistol shots in the brittle air.

Seen from the height at which the plane was sailing the sledge seemed to crawl, the huskies were laboring blots against a dazzling background.

Ted had passed over the first team and was nearly over the second, which was some distance behind, when Jack leaned over and caught him by the shoulder. His words were drowned in the rush of the wind and the roar of the

motor, but his downward gesture was eloquent.

Following the sweep of his comrade's arm, Ted saw at once the peril that menaced the second dog sledge.

It was halfway across a great ice floe that doubtless appeared from below to be part of the solid field of ice. The driver, cracking his whip gayly over the rushing huskies, would probably not notice the seam that had just opened in time to check the speed of his team. If he failed to note it, man and dogs might be engulfed.

The *Ice Bird* swooped downward so steeply that it almost seemed to be in a nose dive. But Ted Scott was operating the stick, and his companions felt unafraid.

The headlong descent accomplished its purpose. The driver of the team evidently thought the plane was falling and stopped aghast. He stared upward and stopped the sledge, tugging at the lines with a vehemence that pulled the protesting huskies back on their haunches.

Ted took the plane as close to the ice as he dared. He leaned far out of his seat, shouting a warning and pointing to the rift in the ice.

The dog driver gestured to signify that he understood, and the *Ice Bird*, its errand done, darted upward again and resumed its journey to the temporary camp, which they found still in the throes of apparent confusion.

But the confusion was only apparent, due to the great mounds of supplies and provisions that had been taken from the hold of the *Penguin*. In reality, every man knew what he had to do and was doing it. The main necessity was to get everything under cover for the night. As for sleeping quarters, the whole party would bunk that night on the *Penguin*.

Captain Raymond listened with the keenest attention to Ted's report of the conditions of the ice field at the foot of the mountain.

"Sounds to me as though it would be a capital place for a camp," he said, "especially if there is land under the ice, instead of water. I'll sledge over there myself to-morrow with some of the scientists and get their opinion on that point. You've done a good day's work."

Ted had refrained from saying anything to the captain about their misadventure at the plateau. But when he and his companion sought out Walter Hapworth, Bill Twombly, and Roy Benedict, they were not so reticent.

The plane of the latter group had not been as ready for action as the *Ice Bird*, and they had been busy all day in grooming it for the arduous work in store for them. They looked with envy at their more fortunate companions who had the first spin in the Antarctic air.

But they speedily lost thought of that when they heard of the thrilling escape from death of Ted and Jack.

"That was a horribly close call!" exclaimed Hapworth. "It makes my blood

run cold to think of it.”

“Been a nice thing for us to fly around looking for your bodies,” said Roy, with a shudder.

“Would have ruined the whole expedition at the start,” vouchsafed Bill.

“Well, a miss is as good as a mile,” returned Ted. “But I tell you, it’s mighty good to be looking at your bright young faces—even if you do need a shave,” he added, with a grin.

Bill made a pass at him that Ted adroitly ducked.

“You’ve got plenty of alfalfa yourself on that mug of yours,” declared Roy.

“And there’ll be more,” promised Ted. “I’ll bet before this trip is over we’ll all be as hairy as the Wild Man of Borneo.”

“When do we eat?” broke in Mark, sniffing the air like a hungry dog.

“What do we eat?” wondered Bill. “What are the articles on an Antarctic bill of fare? Walrus steaks, seal chops, whale blubber?”

“We haven’t come to that yet,” returned Hapworth, smiling. “Though there’s no telling what we may come to before we get through. If I’m any judge of the aromas that come from a cook tent, Svenson is cooking a beef stew.”

“And maybe I won’t lay into it,” predicted Mark.

That hardy Swede, Svenson, had done exceedingly well in preparing this first meal eaten on the Antarctic ice, and his broad, red face was illumined with smiles at the acclamations that greeted the cherry pies with which he wound up the repast, as flaky and tender and delicious as any cooked in the kitchen of a first class New York hotel.

“Some cook, that boy,” was Mark’s tribute at the close of the feast.

“May his shadow—and his cooking—never grow less!” exclaimed Bill fervently.

The next day Captain Raymond visited the region that Ted and his companions had surveyed and gave it his emphatic approval.

For the next two weeks all turned to and worked like beavers. It was a work of days to get all the supplies over to the site chosen for the permanent camp. Then came the building of what, when it was finished, resembled a miniature village. For a place of such mushroom growth it was a marvel of convenience and efficiency.

The tents that had afforded temporary shelter had given place to several houses made of snow, which were far warmer.

Besides these, storerooms sufficient to contain all their supplies had been burrowed out of the snow. There was a machine shop, which was mainly a workroom for the radio men, although any member of the party was at liberty to use it, should he so desire.

A crude radio tower was erected, and to it were strung long antennae

capable of reception or sending for long distances.

"We'll be hearing jazz from New York soon," Jack observed, as he watched the progress of the work. "Of all modern miracles radio stands at the head."

"A thing which few will dispute," replied Ted. "I don't feel so sure of hearing from New York. There's a mighty amount of static in the Antarctic. But we can easily get Australia and New Zealand, and from them learn all the news of the world."

The airplane hangars, which of course were of special interest to the young aviators, were well built and commodious and equipped with an abundance of the tools and spare parts that might be needed to repair their planes.

There was a half mile of tunnels dug through the snow for the comfort and shelter of the dogs.

"They sure know how to care for their live stock," was Ted's admiring comment on the completion of the tunnels. "Captain Raymond takes as much care of them as he does of his men."

"Right, too," replied Mark. "Those huskies are a very important factor in the expedition."

"Yes," agreed Ted, "if anything happened to the sledge dogs, we'd surely be out of luck." Whereupon he went to hobnob with Tanuk, the savage lead dog, who was now his bosom friend.

There was also a gymnasium with a small opening in the roof which was designed to keep the men in good health and spirits and serve as a recreation center when blizzards and other weather conditions made exploration impossible.

Explosives of all sorts were placed at a considerable distance from camp, owing to the danger of explosion at very low temperatures.

The whole arrangement was a most creditable triumph of planning, and it had been a delight to see it taking shape.

"All the same," remarked Ted, after two weeks had passed, "I'll be glad when we can actually get started on our exploring trip. We've been on the ground altogether too long to suit me. The *Ice Bird* is honing to spread her wings."

"So is the *Albatross*," replied Hapworth. "Our boys are just wild to show how good she is. But we've got to hold on to our patience, Ted. We'll probably see plenty of flying before we get back to civilization."

One morning, not long after, Captain Raymond summoned the aviators to his office.

"I'm going to send you boys out on a scouting trip," he announced.

"Three rousing cheers!" exclaimed Mark, and then flushed as the commander raised his eyebrows at the interruption.

“The *Ice Bird* will head directly south,” went on Captain Raymond, “and the *Albatross* will go in a southeast direction. I don’t want either party to go more than a couple of hundred miles, and I’m not keen about your going even that far.

“What I want you to do is to fly as low as you think advisable, so that you can scan the surface of the ice fields and locate suitable places for storing goods and supplies. I plan to have these not more than twenty-five miles apart, so that, wherever the party finds itself, a cache of food will not be far away. Choose places where the ice appears to be especially deep and heavy so as to lessen the chances of its breaking up. You can make a rude chart of such places, so that the sledges will have no trouble in finding them. I’m going to have a complete string of such food depots all the way to the Pole. We may meet disaster from other causes, but I’m determined that it shan’t be from starvation.”

There was a murmur of approval from the eager listeners.

“There will be not only food, but fuel, oil, and spare parts for planes and sledges in each cache,” continued the captain, “and the exact location will be drilled into the mind of each member of the expedition so that if he becomes separated from the others he will know where to head for food and shelter. Take your time and make sure that in each case you choose the best location possible. If you’re able to get back to-day, so much the better; but we’ll not worry as long as you get back by to-morrow night.”

“Do you want us to devote ourselves to this one thing exclusively?” asked Hapworth.

“Yes,” replied the captain. “Of course, make a note of anything of importance you come across, ice barriers, mountain ranges, spaces of clear water and so on. But let that be purely incidental. Keep your mind especially on locating places for food and supply depots. I guess that’s all. Go to it.”

The aviators “went to it” with enthusiasm. Provisions and fuel were loaded on the planes in case they should have to make forced landings, the machines were carefully inspected, and amid the cheers of those left behind the flyers departed on their quest.

For a mile or so the two planes kept nearly side by side. Then their courses gradually diverged, the *Ice Bird* keeping directly south while the *Albatross* veered to the southeast. Soon each had disappeared from the sight of the other.

Ted Scott and his mates put themselves to their task with enthusiasm. All were equipped with the latest make of field glasses, and for hours they kept their vision turned below, searching at given intervals for the best possible sites.

About noon they had come to a point where the coast curved inward sharply and they had a glimpse of the sea.

Far out Ted discerned a bobbing object. It needed no second glance to tell him that it was a ship.

“The *Penguin!*” he gasped, but almost instantly routed the suggestion as absurd.

They had left the *Penguin* many miles behind, surrounded by heavy fields of ice.

Then what ship was this?

CHAPTER XVII

THE STRANGE SHIP

“Look at that, fellows!” exclaimed Ted Scott with a catch in his breath, pointing to the lonely voyager in those desolate seas.

The young aviator’s companions stared as though they could not believe their senses.

“A mirage, maybe!” exclaimed Mark.

“Mirage nothing!” objected Jack. “That’s a real ship.”

“The *Gray Cloud*, for a thousand dollars!” declared Ted. “At any rate, what’s the use of conjecturing? I’m going to find out, pronto!”

The ship was like a child’s toy out on the water. For some time, although the *Ice Bird* flew toward it steadily, it did not appear to increase appreciably in size. The flyers realized that it was the peculiar clarity of the atmosphere which made it possible to discern objects sharply at an extraordinary distance.

The ship grew steadily, if slowly, in size, however, and Ted Scott kept on his course until he was directly above it. He could discern figures on the deck crowding toward the stern and gesticulating aloft, evidently in a great degree of excitement.

He spiraled down slowly in the rear of the vessel until he could hear the roar of the waves and even feel a touch of the spray. It was daring airmanship, and his companions held their breaths until the feat was successfully accomplished and the *Ice Bird* was sweeping skyward again with the grace of a sea gull.

Ted Scott was extremely thoughtful. He had read the name of the strange steamer standing out clearly in gold letters at the stern. It was the *Gray Cloud*!

The discovery did not so much surprise Ted as confirm his suspicions. The radio message they had received on shipboard had put him on the alert. It was altogether unlikely that a third expedition, American or foreign, should have started out. And the name emblazoned on the stern had set all doubts at rest.

The *Gray Cloud* had arrived.

“You see that I was right, fellows,” he remarked. “Hollister has arrived. Now it remains to be seen if he can steal our thunder.”

“He’s made a mighty fast voyage,” observed Jack.

“Perhaps he had better weather than we did,” put in Mark. “At any rate, we know now that we have rivals on the Antarctic continent.”

“Well, there may be glory enough for all,” said Ted. “He has a right to his chance, and if he can add something to the general store of knowledge, I shall

be glad. It does seem, though, as though there was something a bit unsportsmanlike and underhanded about keeping the thing secret. Scientific men don't usually act that way. At any rate, Captain Raymond ought to get the news at once."

It might have been the intense cold or possibly the altitude at which they were traveling, but a startled glance at his compass told Ted that something was wrong. It was behaving curiously, as though some queer magnetic current were throwing it out of order.

He had known from the records of previous explorers that that invaluable instrument under most conditions sometimes proved unreliable in the vicinity of the poles. Now he was having an ocular demonstration of it, and it gave him an unpleasant shock.

He glanced at its eccentric gyrations and frowned. Here was a serious complication. How was he to find his way back to camp without the aid of the compass, in this land of ice and snow where there were no familiar landmarks to guide him?

He flew back over the ice-dotted waters until he found himself once more over the gleaming peaks and snow-filled gorges of a mountain range. The glittering sameness of the landscape was confusing and bewildering. He hoped that the course he was following would bring him in sight of the camp, but at the same time he was possessed by the disconcerting conviction that the landscape would appear much the same to him if he were flying in a diametrically opposite direction.

"What's the trouble, Ted?" asked Mark Lawson, as he noted his comrade's worried face.

"The compass has gone wrong," replied Ted. "It's got all mixed up on which is north and south, east and west. It's playing no favorites, so it's trying them all, on the theory I suppose that sometimes it may be right."

"Gee!" exclaimed Jack Forrest. "That's no joke. If the good old compass goes back on us, what have we got to trust?"

"It may be some peculiar magnetic current that will switch off after it's had its laugh at us," replied Ted. "If it doesn't, we're out of luck. I hope the crew of the *Albatross* aren't having the same trouble."

"To make it worse, there's a bit of a fog creeping up," pointed out Mark, a fact that Ted had already noted with concern.

"I see it," Ted replied. "And if it promises to get heavier, I'm going to come down until it lifts."

But this plan was more easily conceived than carried out. Although the aviators searched keenly for a suitable landing place, sometimes flying dangerously close to mountain crags, they could discover no place to come down that did not promise sure disaster for the plane. And every moment the

fog was growing thicker!

Then, all at once, Ted saw the place he was looking for. It was not an ideal landing place, but it might serve.

“It *must* serve,” Ted told himself grimly.

The place was a broad plateau, fairly level in appearance, between two mountain peaks. There were hummocks here and there that Ted took to be stunted shrubs and bushes, snow-covered, but he must trust to skill and luck to steer a safe course among them.

The *Ice Bird* spiraled down between the twin mountain peaks, the roar of her engine being echoed back in a deafening clamor of sound.

“Let’s hope there’s a heavy crust of ice over the snow,” Ted muttered to himself. “If we sink into it, the *Ice Bird* will do a somersault, sure.”

There was a crisp, crunching sound as the runners met the ice. With immense relief, Ted realized that the crust was heavy enough to hold.

His relief was short-lived, however. He saw immediately that he had another and greater danger to face. The slippery ice offered practically no resistance to the speed of the plane. The *Ice Bird* was darting along straight for one side of the mountain.

Ted’s mind worked like lightning. To make a swift turn in such a narrow space spelled peril. Yet to keep straight ahead was unthinkable, suicidal.

Swiftly he made the only decision possible. At the last moment, when contact with the cliff appeared inevitable, he wrenched the plane about.

The right wing almost grazed the mountain side, the left wing nearly touched the ground. The plane teetered crazily on one runner, bent to a sickening angle, then swept on gallantly into the open space.

It took two more turns in that circumscribed area to bring the plane to a standstill. But the tricky maneuver was accomplished with consummate skill.

The sudden cessation of the motors left an almost oppressive silence. The young men climbed wearily to the ground and looked about them without enthusiasm. The twin mountains, rising one on each side of them, their peaks lost in the cloud and fog, would have been impressive if their tops had been touched to rainbow tints by the Antarctic sun, but even then it was doubtful whether the aviators would have been in a mood to enjoy the spectacle. They were tired, anxious, and ravenously hungry.

“Let’s get out some chow first and talk later,” suggested Mark. “Come on, Jack, haul out those provisions, or I’ll start chewing the leather in my boots.”

Jack brought out the food and the airmen sat about on the snow, eating heartily and drinking hot coffee from the thermos bottle.

“Funny what food can do to your spirits,” Ted Scott observed, after five minutes of this pleasant exercise. “A short time ago the world had me licked. Now I feel as if I could lick the world.”

“We may be called upon to try it,” put in Mark prophetically. “If I read the facts correctly, Ted, we’re lost in the great Antarctic, a good many miles from camp.”

“Not a very cheering situation,” admitted Ted between bites. “But we have plenty of food—which is something—and enough gas to keep us moving for some time yet. It’s just a temporary setback. Perhaps the old compass will come to us with its tail between its legs and promise never to be bad no mo’.”

“We’ve gathered one important bit of news for Captain Raymond to-day, anyway,” observed Mark, referring to their discovery of the strange vessel off the coast.

“If we ever get back to tell it to him,” put in Jack lugubriously.

“And he won’t be especially tickled when he hears it,” predicted Mark. “He and Hollister aren’t exactly like David and Jonathan. Guess they had a bad quarrel in Washington. Did you ever hear the ins and outs of that, Ted?”

“Some of it,” replied Ted. “Enough to make me know that Captain Raymond was wholly in the right. But we have more pressing and important things to think of just now than the arrival in the Antarctic of Gustavus Hollister.”

He stood up as he spoke and surveyed the landscape. The fog was lifting and the mountain tops could be faintly seen. Ted pointed to the taller of the two peaks.

“I believe we could find a way to climb up there if we tried,” he declared. “If the fog is all gone by the time we get there, we ought, with the aid of those powerful glasses of ours, to see a good many miles in every direction. We may be nearer to the camp than we think and we may catch a glimpse of it.”

“All that you say may be very true,” remarked Jack dubiously. “But how do we know we can get up there?”

“That’s for us to find out. Few things are impossible, if you tackle them aright. Come along.”

On closer scrutiny the young aviators found the mountain not so inaccessible as it had seemed when they were farther off. They took the rope from the plane and tied it about their waists so as to form a human chain. Then, slowly and laboriously, they started on the long upward climb.

The first part of the ascent was comparatively easy, for they discovered a curious natural stairway carved out of ice. At the end of this the real climb began.

They passed up steep, ice-laden slopes, slipping, recovering, and struggling on again.

They came to the top at last and scrambled out upon a polished mass of rock which had been swept clean of snow by the wind. There they gazed upon a prospect so sublime in its awe-inspiring austerity that they could only stare in

speechless admiration.

Suddenly Ted heard above his head a whirring as of gigantic wings. He looked up, startled. At the same time a cry of warning broke from Mark Lawson.

“Look out, Ted! Duck!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WINGED ENEMY

As Ted Scott looked up, it seemed to him as though the air were alive with wings. There was a shadow between him and the sky as a huge bird swooped down upon him, webbed feet spread, murderous beak thrust forward.

Instinctively Ted stepped back, flinging an arm before his face. The creature missed him and rushed past, its wings beating the air in the effort to check itself.

It wheeled in mid-air and returned to the attack, swooping down again and again with fearful shrieks. The young men tried to beat it off, but they were hampered by the necessity of shielding themselves from the sharp scissors-like beak.

The thing was a nightmare creature, something that it seemed one could not evade, a relentless, pursuing fate.

Again and again it swept to the attack, while the aviators beat at it futilely. Their heavy clothing protected them from the horny beak, though their garb was slashed in places. They were breathing hard. They were weary after their long climb and it became increasingly hard to ward off the persistent assaults of their weird adversary.

“Better get out of this,” advised Jack. “The bird probably has a nest near here, and it won’t let up till we get out. Look out, Mark!”

The ejaculation was prompted by the sight of Mark tripping as he backed off from a savage onslaught. He tried hard to regain his balance, but went down, his head striking against a rock.

The fall knocked the breath out of him. As he lay there, half stunned, the huge bird fluttered downward and settled on his chest.

With a thrill of horror Ted realized that Mark’s eyes were unprotected!

In an instant his hunting knife was in his hand. He leaped forward and drove the heavy blade deep into the creature’s breast.

There was a horrible scream and the bird toppled over from Mark’s breast, waved its feet about wildly for a few moments and then lay still.

“I hated to do it, but I had no choice,” said Ted to Jack. “In another minute Mark would have been minus one perfectly good eye, and maybe two.”

At that moment Mark opened the eyes in question and looked about him dazedly. His attention focused on Ted as the latter wiped his knife on the sleeve of his coat and thrust the weapon in his belt.

“What happened?” he asked.

Jack described Ted's quick action and pointed to the stiffening body of the bird.

"Queer looking bird, isn't it?" he asked. "Ted and I were wondering whether it had a name."

"I've seen a picture of that bird somewhere," said Ted musingly. "I know! It's one of those funny things they call an auk—a giant auk."

"Sounds like an exclamation to me," remarked Mark, ruefully rubbing the back of his head. "Like something you say when you sit down on a tack."

"It's an auk, all right," pronounced Jack, turning the dead body of the bird with his foot. "I remember seeing pictures of his friends and family in a natural history book we have at home, webbed feet, long beak, and all."

"I thought that auks were supposed to be extinct," observed Mark.

"Some species are," returned Ted. "But evidently not the group this fellow belonged to. And if all the rest are like him, I don't want anything more to do with them."

"He sure is a husky specimen. Probably he's got his nest somewhere around here. If so, one of the eggs would be interesting for some of the zoölogical sharps of our party."

But search as they would, they could find neither nest nor eggs to substantiate their theory, and were finally forced to the conviction that the auk—if such it was—had been caught out of its usual habitat and had been startled by the advent of unexpected visitors into an outburst of unnatural fury.

"I can't understand what it was doing up here," mused Ted. "I thought that birds of this sort built their nests somewhere near the water. An auk lives as much in the water as on land, anyway. See its webbed feet. Made for swimming."

"That's what," agreed Mark. "As for it's being out of its natural habitat, I suppose the bird could explain that if it were able to speak."

"Which it never will." Ted tied the feet of the bird together and slung it over his shoulder. "We'll take it back to the camp, anyway, and let the scientists argue over it."

"You talk as though getting back to the camp were a certainty," said Jack, "whereas we're lost in the great Antarctic with only a dead auk for company."

"Wait a minute," cried Ted. "I have an idea. I said this sort of bird was usually found near the water, didn't I? Well, Mark, please lend me your glasses."

Without a word Mark handed them over. Ted held them to his eyes and swept the vast panorama of peaks and valleys. Abruptly he gave an exclamation and beckoned to Mark and Jack.

"I knew we wouldn't catch this fellow far from the water!" he exulted. "There it is. See that long stretch of blue? And I shouldn't wonder if that speck

out there turned out to be the *Penguin*. We can't see the camp because of the mountains in the way."

Ted's comrades strained their eyes and concluded that their pilot was right.

They were in a fever of eagerness to be on their way again. The polar chill was creeping through their heavy layers of clothing. With the cold immense fatigue assailed them. A fire, relaxation, companionship, seemed to them the most desirable things in life.

The journey down the mountain slope was not as difficult as they had anticipated. Buoyed up by hope and the prospect of speedy relief from the present situation, they laughed at difficulties that would otherwise have seemed insurmountable and managed to get to the plateau without breaking a neck in the process.

They found the *Ice Bird* as they had left her. Ted stowed the slain auk in the tail of the fuselage and climbed into the pilot's seat. Jack gave a sharp whirl to the propeller and jumped into his seat as the engine coughed a warning.

The snow sped by beneath the runners, and the first onslaught of rushing, biting wind tore down upon them. Ted coaxed the plane to a considerable altitude, but noted with anxiety that it did not lift as buoyantly as usual. Was it the bitter cold that was interfering with the usual functioning of the engines?

There was nothing to do, however, but keep on and trust they would keep going until they reached camp. The compass was still working erratically, but he did not need that just now, for he was becoming more and more certain that the speck he had seen on the water was the *Penguin* at anchor. With that as his guide, he could find the camp without difficulty.

They were only a few miles from their goal when the engines began to falter.

Ted jerked at the stick and the plane gained altitude. If the engine died altogether, he could volplane to the earth, trusting to luck that he could land somewhere near the camp.

He had not yet reached the desired height when that which he had dreaded came to pass. The noise of the engine stopped altogether, giving place to an abysmal silence. The engine had gone dead!

With an odd feeling at the pit of his stomach, Ted Scott turned the nose of the plane downward.

Skilfully he controlled the movement, turning it into a succession of swoops and glides, coaxing, encouraging, revealing by each motion his superb airmanship.

There was one mountain ridge to be passed before he reached the great ice field beyond. As the plane volplaned downward, that ridge became a monumental danger. It seemed to rise as the plane came down until it

completely dominated the landscape.

"I'll never make it," Ted muttered, his eyes narrowed, his hand tense on the stick. "I can't clear it!"

As he neared the ridge he saw that he was below its top. Collision seemed a certainty.

Then he saw something that filled him with a swift though desperate hope.

A narrow crevasse showed itself in the solid rock of the mountain. It was fearfully narrow. Could he go through it without striking the sides?

"I *must*," Ted told himself, gritting his teeth.

The plane fluttered like a wounded bird toward the opening in the mountain. It seemed as if the wings would be crushed against the projecting, jagged rocks.

With any other pilot they probably would have been. But Ted Scott, the great flyer, was at the controls.

With uncanny skill Ted maneuvered, turning here, dodging there, while his white-faced companions held their breaths.

The *Ice Bird* seemed likely to drop to the depths of the crevasse. Only by a miracle of craftsmanship did Ted hold her to her work. A cry of triumph broke from his lips when he passed the last jagged rock and brought her out into the open spaces beyond.

Beneath them lay a glittering field of ice and snow. There was no possibility of choosing a landing. They must come down where they could.

With a smothered plump the *Ice Bird* landed. A shower of snow swept up about them, peppering them with shining crystals. The plane sank down in what seemed to be a bottomless feather bed. It quivered and lay still.

With their hearts thumping from the narrow escape, the young aviators jumped from the fuselage and shook themselves like overgrown terriers while the snow flew in a feathery shower from their laden clothing.

"Half-buried in snow but lucky to be alive at all!" exclaimed Ted.

"You bet!" ejaculated Mark. "And if the best aviator on earth hadn't been at the controls, we'd have been as dead as doornails. Gee, Ted, you're a wonder!"

"When I see Ted at work I wonder where we get any license to call ourselves airmen at all," said Jack to Mark.

They found to their gratification that the ice crust, which had not been heavy enough to bear the weight of the plane, held them up personally without difficulty.

Ted's anxious scrutiny of the *Ice Bird* yielded him little information as to the possible injury done her by her abrupt plunge into the snow.

Her wings were half-buried, but from what Ted could see of them they seemed to have suffered little damage.

“Strained the supports and struts, probably,” he commented, “but a few hours in the machine shop will fix that.”

“We’re lucky to get off with whole skins,” averred Jack, and there was no dissent from his opinion.

It was evident that they could not remove the *Ice Bird* from her feather bed of snow without help from the wrecking crew at the camp. Reluctantly they started off over the ice, Ted first removing the dead bird from the fuselage and stringing it over his shoulders as before.

“Just to show that our time has not been wasted,” he remarked, with a wry smile.

They had not gone far before they saw a dark moving splotch on the ice that approached them with considerable rapidity.

“It’s a dog sledge,” Ted decided. “Wonder if it’s been sent out after us.”

“At any rate, we’ll get a hitch back to camp,” said Mark. “Jiminy, but I’m weary!”

As the sledge came closer Ted recognized the lead dog as Tanuk, the great husky. The dog evidently recognized Ted Scott, for he led his fellow huskies a fast pace, the bells on the harness jingling merrily.

“Hi there, Tanuk! Hi there, old pal! How’s the old boy?”

CHAPTER XIX

JAZZ

When the sledge came to a standstill, Ted Scott dropped his hand on the head of the great lead dog. Tanuk fawned upon him, whining his love, while his tongue lolled out in a canine grin of greeting.

The scent of the dead bird, slung to Ted's shoulders, assailed Tanuk's quivering nostrils. He sniffed the air longingly, but was far too polite to ask openly for a bite of the fresh meat.

"I'd like to give it to you, old pal," Ted said regretfully, "but it has to be turned over to the biologists, zoölogists, and other ologists so that they can turn their microscopes on this sample of bird life in the Antarctic. So I can't give it to you, Tanuk. Sorry."

Aboard the sledge were Walter Hapworth, Roy Benedict, and Captain Raymond himself. Their relief and delight at the meeting were unfeigned.

"We sighted your plane a long way off," explained Mr. Hapworth, as he clapped Ted on the shoulder. "When your engine went dead and we saw you going down, we became frightened. You can't begin to guess how happy we are to find you uninjured."

"And with something as big as an eagle on Ted's shoulder," remarked Roy Benedict. "What is it, Ted, bird, beast, or hybrid?"

"That's what we want to find out," replied Ted. "Whatever it is, it put up a peach of a scrap while it lasted."

"Looks like an auk." Captain Raymond examined the bird with interest, lifting it from Ted's shoulder and resting it in the snow within tantalizing reach of Tanuk's quivering nose. "I imagine it would be included in the auk family, although it is a species new to me, with smaller webbed feet, longer wings and stronger beak. Professor Emerich will be glad to see this."

Mr. Hapworth and Roy Benedict were more interested in the accident to the *Ice Bird* than in the peculiarities of the auk. Ted explained the adventures of himself and his companions as briefly as possible, while his auditors listened with absorbed interest.

"Our compass went flooey, too," Roy remarked. "But we were fairly close to camp and made our way back without difficulty. The *Albatross* is safe in its hangar."

"Wish the same were true of the *Ice Bird*," said Ted ruefully.

He told them then of the discovery of the *Gray Cloud*.

Captain Raymond looked grave at this and asked various questions as to its

exact position, which Ted answered to the best of his ability.

"I'm very glad to know of this," observed the captain thoughtfully. "It's just as well to be forewarned. We have a good few weeks start of him, at any rate. By the time he lands and makes camp we'll have achieved a lot. We'll take pains to see that he doesn't make up the difference."

Now that reinforcements had arrived, Ted would have liked to direct the salvaging of the *Ice Bird* in person. The captain, however, would not hear of this, urging the need of rest and refreshment for the young aviators who had spent so many weary hours in the air.

"I will send men from the camp to dig out the plane and bring it in," he said. "After you've had a good hot meal we'll look over the diagrams of the sites you've picked out to-day for food and supply depots."

In the mess house at last, with steaming plates of Svensen's excellent ragout before them, the aroma mingling with the fragrance of freshly made coffee in thick, white cups, the young men unloosed their belts and gave free rein to their appetites.

They ate ravenously. Captain Raymond sat across the board from them, but did not bother them with questions until the first keen edge of their hunger was dulled.

Ted drew from his pocket the record of the observations that he had made during the trip and pushed them across the table to Captain Raymond.

"I hope you will find them satisfactory, sir," he remarked. "I'm only sorry I couldn't have gotten them to you sooner."

"Plenty of time," murmured the captain, as he bent over Ted's findings. "If the weather permits, we'll try to lay down a cache or two to-morrow. With Gustavus Hollister in the vicinity, we'll have to be up and doing."

His last words were cut short by a sudden blast of sound.

Ted and his companions whirled about, surprised, to find Bill Twombly grinning at them.

"Jazz!" cried Bill, cavorting like a colt. "American jazz, right in the midst of the great frozen spaces. Score one for the radio! Doesn't it make this place seem like home?"

Saxophones blared, violins raced each other up and down a crazy chromatic scale, drums beat a jungle rhythm. In imagination, the young men saw a crowded floor, dazzling lights, shimmering dresses, gay young couples weaving in and out in the mazes of the dance—all the lighter trappings of civilization magically transported to these snowy regions where civilization had not yet set foot.

The wonder of it! It was bizarre, almost unbelievable. There was a choke in their throats.

To the constriction in their throats was added a bit of moisture in the eyes

as the orchestra abandoned its jungle fantasies and swung into the strains of “Home, Sweet Home.”

For nearly two hours, all else forgotten, they listened to the various offerings of the radio. Then, when it came to the slumber music, they roused themselves from their trance.

“I don’t need any slumber music to soothe me to rest,” remarked Jack, with a frightful yawn. “I’m so tired I could rest comfortably in a snowdrift.”

“And wake up in heaven,” supplemented Ted dryly.

“That’s a compliment I don’t deserve,” laughed Jack. “If you could only guarantee that, I might be tempted to try it.”

“Guess we’d all better go to bed,” judged Ted. “We’ll have plenty of work to-morrow fixing up the *Ice Bird*.”

CHAPTER XX

TOWARD THE END OF THE EARTH

Ted Scott's prediction of hard work on the *Ice Bird* proved correct. The mishap to the engine had come from the effects of the extreme cold on the oil feed, and steps were taken to lessen the likelihood of that in the future. Some of the struts were broken and others strained, but these were repaired in a few hours of work.

The magnetic compass had proved unreliable in those latitudes, and a Bumstead sun compass was substituted, in which Captain Raymond had great faith.

During the next two weeks, results of great importance were achieved by the expedition. The two planes repeated their scouting trips, establishing depots ever nearer and nearer to the South Pole. Sledge parties were sent off in various directions, mapping and surveying the mountain ranges and examining their geological formations. Soundings were taken in the various streaks of open water to ascertain the depth and character of the Antarctic seas. The meteorologists were engrossed in their studies of wind and weather, taking their observations by day and writing out their mathematical calculations by night. Plane and sledge parties were working in perfect harmony, and all the members of the expedition were as busy as beavers.

But much as he rejoiced in the substantial fruits that were being gathered by the party, Ted Scott was chafing at the bit. He was eager to reach the Pole, anxious that he and whatever companions he might have with him should be the first that had ever crossed it in an airplane.

Almost daily the expedition was getting nearer to that coveted goal, but its progress seemed to Ted intolerably slow. With the dogs and the supplies they had to carry, the party did not average many miles a day, not nearly as many as the aviators in their planes could make in twenty minutes.

He was tempted many times to broach the matter to Captain Raymond, but did not want to appear presumptuous.

He experienced great relief, therefore, when the captain himself introduced the subject.

"I know how impatient you must have felt, Ted," he said one morning, "at the delay in an airplane flight to the Pole. Up to now, however, you've been indispensable to me in locating depots and coöperating with the sledge parties. But that work now is pretty far advanced, and as long as I have one of the planes on hand I can spare the other for a little while. So, if you're ready, you

can start.”

“Ready!” exclaimed Ted. “The *Ice Bird* can start in half an hour. Supplies, fuel, oil are all on board. Gee, I’m pleased that I have your permission.”

“Go to it, then,” replied the captain, smiling. “Luck go with you!”

Mark Lawson and Jack Forrest were as delighted as the young pilot himself.

“Let’s hustle and get off before the captain has a chance to change his mind,” counseled Mark.

There was no hitch, and a few minutes later, with the cheers of the whole party ringing in his ears, Ted Scott lifted the *Ice Bird* into the skies. He and his companions were in the highest of spirits.

“Now for the South Pole!” cried Ted, as he shot upward for higher altitude.

“I’m going to bring a splinter of it back for a keepsake,” asserted the grinning Jack.

The weather conditions at the start could have been far worse, Ted thought, despite the absence of the sun. Although the temperature was many degrees below zero, there was not much wind, and their heavy clothing kept them from any feeling of discomfort.

Down toward the tip of the earth the *Ice Bird* sped like an arrow. She was making over a hundred miles an hour, and Ted reckoned that with any kind of luck they could make their goal within three hours.

An hour passed—then two—and the young pilot’s hand on the stick gripped it tight in growing excitement.

“Let’s hope that Hollister hasn’t beaten us to it,” remarked Jack.

“That’s what I’ve been afraid of all the time,” replied Ted. “That’s one thing that’s made me so impatient. But I have a hunch that we’ll be the first.”

Then, abruptly, Ted Scott found himself flying in a mass of falling snowflakes. The snow was so heavy that it formed almost a solid sheet before him. It covered the plane. It clung to the eyeholes of his mask, almost blinding him.

With an impatient gesture Ted tore off the mask. Instantly the icy wind flayed his face, seeming to penetrate the flesh to the bone.

Ted replaced the mask, scowling thoughtfully. At any other time he would have turned the plane at once and headed for camp. But now the Pole was only a tantalizingly short distance away. Once the *Ice Bird* had reached its goal, there would still be time to return to headquarters.

A glance at his instruments thrilled the young aviator with fierce excitement. In ten minutes, if his calculations were correct, he would reach the South Pole!

Five minutes, six, eight, nine——

A cheer burst from Ted’s lips and was frantically echoed by his

companions. What he had thought of, dreamed of, longed for, for months had been achieved!

He had reached the South Pole! He was hovering over it—had passed it—was circling about it!

His heart bounded with wild exultation and seemed as though it would leap from his body.

The elation of achievement was in his veins. His, the incredible good fortune to do what no man had done from the beginning of time—fly over the South Pole! As he stared at the delicate, quivering indicator that proclaimed his triumph he felt curiously humble. What had he ever done to deserve such glory?

The *Ice Bird* sailed over the imaginary point at the end of the earth's axis, turned about, and plowed on toward the camp in the teeth of the blizzard.

A fierce gust of wind caught the plane and half whirled her about. Ted's thoughts were jerked abruptly from glory to necessity.

He did a smart right-about-face, handling the plane with the hand of the master he was. As the *Ice Bird* struggled to hold her own against the storm, she was caught by a terrific blast and flung about like a ship caught in a whirlpool.

There was a grinding snap.

The *Ice Bird* had broken a wing!

CHAPTER XXI

LOST IN THE BLIZZARD

Ted Scott's startled glance darted quickly in the direction of the ominous sound.

He saw that a deep crack extended into the wing, not enough for the moment to put it wholly out of commission, but enough to cripple it.

Ted made no attempt to disguise from himself the danger of the situation. The damaged wing destroyed the proper balance of the plane. The wind tore and beat at the *Ice Bird* and whirled her about until the pilot had all he could do to keep her from turning turtle.

As a spent and panting horse might respond to words of encouragement whispered into his ear, so the gallant plane tried to answer to the touch of the young aviator's expert hands on the controls. Wounded, drunken, laboring, it struggled on, battling against tremendous odds.

The wings and fuselage were covered with snow, the clothing of the flyers was white with it. It was no longer just snow, but a dense, impenetrable, white shroud, shutting them off from the world, wrapping them in fearful isolation.

Jack Forrest leaned over and touched Ted on the shoulder. Ted followed the direction of the pointing hand, but could see nothing.

The next moment he heard above the clamor of the storm, the rushing of the wind, and the noise of his own motors a new sound—the beating of the motors of a second airplane, laboring like the *Ice Bird* through the tempest.

Ted grew tense as he realized how close the plane might be to his own. Impatiently he rubbed the snow out of his eyes, and yet could see nothing but snow.

He called his other senses to his aid, since sight had failed him. But the noises of the storm clamored at his eardrums, the throbbing of the strange motors mingled with the *Ice Bird's* roar.

He could not tell where the other plane was. If he could only see!

Straight out of the snow cloud it loomed, almost in the path of the *Ice Bird*, the sound of its engine like the buzzing of a gigantic wasp.

Ted saw that a head on collision could not be avoided unless he acted quickly. Praying that the pilot of the second plane might not decide on tactics similar to his own, Ted Scott threw the *Ice Bird* into a nose dive.

The action was beautifully timed. The *Ice Bird* took the dip with the grace of a high diver, ducking clear of the stranger plane and missing it only by inches.

Ted's troubles, however, were not yet over. A straight nose dive is a ticklish maneuver in clear weather and with an uncrippled plane. The *Ice Bird*, with its damaged wing and driven by the freakish wind, did not take kindly to such handling.

The breath-taking, downward rush continued. The plane tilted sickeningly, threatening to turn turtle with each fierce buffet of the wind.

They must be perilously near the ice field. At any moment the crash might come.

"If the blizzard would let up—only for a minute!" breathed Ted.

If the thought was half prayer, it was answered in an almost miraculous fashion. The *Ice Bird* entered one of those strata of calm that are referred to by aviators as "air harbors." The wind temporarily abated, the snow curtain lifted to show Ted that he was within a few hundred feet of the surface.

The young aviator took instant advantage of the brief lull to coax the plane into a horizontal position. The engines labored gallantly, the *Ice Bird* made a supreme effort, righted herself and hobbled on.

The next moment a gust came, fiercer than any before. The snow once more swirled about the plane in a blinding cloud. She faltered and kept on uncertainly in a wabbling course, her engines panting.

"She can't keep going," Ted muttered to himself. "I'll have to take a chance of landing till the storm lets up."

The brief lifting of the snow cloud had served to show the young aviator that they were directly above a fairly level field of ice.

Whether it was strong enough to permit of a safe landing he could only guess. But he must risk it, or face the possibility of a forced descent at some point where disaster would be a certainty.

The runners struck the ice fairly, but as the weight of the *Ice Bird* made itself felt there came a terrible, rending, cracking sound, as though the ice beneath was breaking up into small particles. The noise was followed by a writhing undulation of the entire ice pack.

"Jumping Jupiter! what is it?" cried Mark.

"Probably a floe broken off from the pack," surmised Ted. "If I'm right, we'll have a sweet time making a take-off. But let's get down to brass tacks and mend that broken wing."

This was no easy task, hampered as the young aviators were by snow and wind and the biting cold. But they worked doggedly, and at last managed to do a rough job of repair work that they hoped would carry them through.

"All ready to go and no place for a take-off," remarked Jack, trying in vain to pierce the dense curtain of snow. "Yet we can't stay here. What do you suggest, Ted?"

"That we do some scouting," answered Ted promptly, "take our bearings,

and find out what kind of place we've been marooned on. From all we can see, this floe may be anywhere from a few hundred feet to a few miles square. If the latter, it's all right. If not, we're out of luck. I tell you what let's do. We'll start out in three different directions, taking care to keep the location of the plane in mind, and return in less than half an hour with our reports."

Jack and Mark agreed to this, and all started off, waving good-byes. Almost instantly they were swallowed up in the whirling snow.

As the *Ice Bird* vanished from sight, Ted Scott was seized with a queer misgiving. It was as though, in leaving the plane, he had severed the last link that bound him to civilization.

He shook off the disturbing thought and continued to force his way through the snow, feeling for obstructions with his feet.

He had been aware for some time that he had been climbing steadily when suddenly his feet slipped out from under him and he fell prone. Clutching, scrambling, trying vainly to save himself, he plunged through empty space!

His sensations were horrible. He had stepped off into a snow-lined abyss. He might end in the icy water. He might——

With a thump Ted came to earth, or rather, snow. He had struck a giant snowdrift. Although he sank for several feet into the clinging stuff before his fall ended, the shock of the impact knocked the breath from his body.

The snow on the edges of the hole he had made closed in on him in a smothering, fleecy blanket. He strove to push it back, but his hands were strangely powerless. He felt like a man recovering from a serious illness or in the grip of a nightmare. What was the matter with him?

The snow pressed lightly, almost caressingly, upon Ted's face and body. A delicious drowsiness stole over him, a sense of warmth and well being.

The insidious content stirred Ted Scott to a sense of imminent danger. If he were ever to bestir himself, now was the time. Otherwise, there would be another heap of unidentified bones in the desolate wastes of the Antarctic solitudes.

Slowly, painfully, Ted raised himself to his knees. The weight of snow upon his head and shoulders was growing heavier. He tried to shake it off, but it clung to him wetly.

With infinite effort he worked toward the surface until his head was through the hole. It was almost too much trouble in his weakened state to free his face, his eyes, of the clinging particles of snow, but at last he accomplished it.

Again the deadly lethargy was stealing over him. Definitely, Ted Scott called upon his will to aid him in the unequal fight. He pulled himself out of the hole and brushed the packed snow from his clothing. Then, having got his second wind, he stumbled ahead once more, still hoping to find a suitable place

for the take-off.

He found none, however, and at last turned back, hoping his comrades had had better luck.

Then he found to his utter surprise and horror that he had no idea of the position of the plane. That fall and the subsequent struggle had completely routed his sense of direction.

He was lost in blizzard land!

His senses rocked under the force of the conviction.

“Any direction I take might be right, but would probably be wrong,” he thought bitterly. “But one thing is certain. I don’t dare stand still.”

As he stood there, trying to decide on some clear course of action, he was startled by an unexpected sound—the sound of a human voice.

For a moment Ted Scott thought that his imagination must be playing him tricks. He had heard what he wanted to hear, that was all.

No! There it was again! A cry so thin and eerie that it might have been the voice of some spirit of the storm.

“He-elp! Oh, he-elp!”

CHAPTER XXII

THE WEIRD CRY

Ted Scott's feet turned in the direction of the call. He cupped his hands about his mouth and shouted:

"Hello there! Where are you?"

"Help!" came the voice again. Ted thought it sounded closer. "Oh, he-elp!"

The cry was so faint, so weird, so inhuman, coming as it did from the heart of the blizzard, that Ted felt the hair creep at the base of his scalp.

Still he pressed forward, feeling his way cautiously, calling out at every few steps.

Presently he stumbled over something and stretched at full length into the snow.

He got to his feet and turned to see what had tripped him.

To his boundless amazement he found that it was the wing of an almost buried airplane!

Ted could not believe the evidence of his eyes alone. He went over and touched the plane and found it real. He saw that the falling plane had dug a great hole in the snow—a hole that was rapidly filling up now, as the mass of snow fell ceaselessly from a leaden and invisible sky.

"Some tragedy here!" Ted touched the wing of the broken plane gently. To the young aviator this was no mere mass of twisted metal, but the pitiful wreck of a gallant thing that had fought a good fight and lost.

"Help! Oh, he-elp!"

Ted started. The ruined plane solved the mystery of the cry for help. The pilot was undoubtedly injured and in dire need of aid.

"Coming!" cried Ted. "Will be right with you. I——"

The sentence ended abruptly as his feet went out from under him and he slid helplessly along a glassy slope.

He came to a stop on his hands and knees about twenty feet from where he had started and found himself beside another figure in the snow.

"Hello!" he cried. "Hope you're not badly hurt."

The man spoke faintly, pantingly.

"I—I'm almost dead. I'm so numb I can't feel anything."

Something in the voice, weak though it was, touched a chord in Ted's memory. He brushed the snow from his eyes and leaned closer to look into the man's face. As he did so, his own face grew grim.

"Gustavus Hollister!" he said softly. "So we meet again."

The prostrate man made a supreme effort and sat up. He gripped Ted's jacket, clung to it, trembling. His eyes were wild as they stared into Ted's.

"I don't know who you are. I don't care," he babbled. "Only you've got to save me. You—you can't leave me here—to die, like—the other."

Ted was thinking rapidly. Gustavus Hollister had not piloted the wrecked plane; he had neither the knowledge nor the grit. Where then was the pilot? Hollister had just spoken of "the other." What did he mean?

As the scientist slumped back on the snow with a groan of misery, Ted put an arm beneath his shoulders, supporting him.

Hollister stared up at him with half-mad eyes in which was not the slightest recognition.

"Don't you know me?" asked Ted.

The explorer shook his head, mumbling weakly. Ted bent over to catch the words.

"Seen you somewhere—don't know where. Doesn't matter. Get me away from here before I die—like the other!" He sat up suddenly and let out a demoniac shriek that made Ted's flesh creep.

"I won't die!" he yelled, tearing with crazed fingers at his fur cap. "You've got to save me! You've got to! If you don't, I'll kill you!"

The eyes that glared furiously at Ted Scott were completely mad now. The older man reached claw-like fingers out to him, then sank back with a moan of weakness. He began to cry like a little whimpering child.

Ted employed the moment of comparative calm by making a swift examination of the man's body. His deft fingers felt hands and legs and ribs. Nothing seemed to be broken, though of course he might have suffered severe internal injuries.

Ted was appalled by the problem that confronted him. Gustavus Hollister was either mad or on the verge of madness. How could he, Ted Scott, hope to rescue a crazy man from the tragic situation into which fate had flung them both?

There was a chance that the scientist might be humored, coaxed into docility. Even at that, he would be of considerably less help than a child.

"Look here," said Ted. "I came across the wreck of a plane a short way back. Was it yours?"

"Yes," replied Hollister dazedly. "It was ours. We were up in the air for hours that seemed like days. The gas gave out—we had to land. The wind caught us—dashed us down—" his voice died off and he stared vacantly into space, his body shaken by tremors.

"Were there others in the plane?" Ted asked gently. "What happened to them?"

The wild look grew in Hollister's eyes again. He covered his face with his

hands and sat there, shaking horribly.

“He was killed—the pilot,” he faltered. “He—lies over there,” pointing with a trembling hand. “He was brave—he stayed with the plane. I undid my belt and jumped. But I guess—he went down with the plane.”

Ted Scott thought of the nearly submerged plane and felt pity surge up in him. Poor fellow! Brave heart! There was no hope for him now. Another tragedy added to the innumerable ones that mark the history of polar exploration!

CHAPTER XXIII

A TERRIBLE JOURNEY

Ted Scott stumbled to his feet and made his way to the wrecked plane. He tried to clear away the snow that nearly covered it. He reached the pilot's seat, but it was empty. Fragments of the belt that had held the aviator showed that it must have been broken by the shock of falling.

The man had been thrown out. But where? His body could not be very far away.

Ted went round the plane in ever widening circles. If there was a spark of life left in the luckless pilot, he wanted a chance to revive it.

He had not gone very far before his foot struck against an obstruction. Digging with his hands as a terrier does with its paws, Ted soon uncovered the body of a man.

It required only a short examination to assure Ted that the poor fellow was quite dead. He had probably struck his head when he had fallen from the plane, had lain there unconscious and quietly frozen to death.

Ted replaced the snow. After all, now that the worst was over, it seemed a kindly shroud. The face of the dead man was quite peaceful, as though Death had stolen up on silent feet, unnoted and unfeared.

Sadly Ted returned to Hollister.

"You were right," he said. "There is nothing any one can do for your companion. Poor fellow. I'm not sure but that he has all the best of it."

Ted realized his mistake as Hollister started up, staring in a desperation of fear.

"What do you mean? Are you going to leave me here to die?"

"Of course not," returned Ted. "If you can help yourself at all, we may save ourselves yet. But I warn you it will be tough going."

He put an arm beneath the shoulders of the older man and half-pulled, half-lifted him to his feet. Hollister groaned at the pain and weakness in his limbs and slumped his full weight upon Ted's shoulders.

"Look here, you'll have to do better than that," urged Ted. "If you will make an effort, I think you can partially hold yourself up. That's better. You'll feel more fit once you get going."

Then began a nightmare experience that Ted Scott was ever after to remember with a thrill of dread.

Hollister was not much better than a dead weight, to be pulled and dragged over that interminable waste of snow. Sometimes he tried to help himself, but

soon tired and hung upon Ted, at times whimpering and pleading like a little child, then threatening and raving like a madman.

It was in one of these intervals that Ted began to fear for his own sanity. His strength was deserting him. He was beginning to get numbed with cold. As Hollister sagged against him, Ted stumbled and sank to his knees.

Hollister, floundering beside him, turned to him a face that was a mask of uncontrollable fury.

“You promised to save me! This is the way you do it! You knocked me down! You’re trying to kill me! But I’ll fool you! I’ll kill you first!”

Ted ducked out of reach of the claw-like fingers, but Hollister was on him with a yell of rage like that of a wild animal. Ted felt the madman’s hands grip about his throat with fiendish strength.

As the young aviator struggled to throw off the stranglehold, he realized with a thrill of horror that the ground was moving under him. At the same time a spout of water shot high into the air and fell upon the struggling men, drenching them.

Ted flung off Hollister’s clutching hands and jumped to his feet, staring wildly about him.

Abruptly the truth came home to Ted. A narrow ribbon of water showed between the edge of the ice pack and the moving mass under his feet. That mass was not part of the ice pack. It was the broad back of a monster whale!

The creature had come up in that open space to breathe.

It would be a simple matter to jump the distance to the edge of the ice pack, but with every second he delayed the distance increased.

And there was the madman, Hollister, who was even then struggling to his knees, his eyes fixed murderously on his would-be rescuer, his tense hands ready to choke the life out of the only friend he had near him.

For a moment Ted was tempted to leave Hollister to his fate. What obligation had he, Ted Scott, to save the man’s life at the almost certain loss of his own?

These thoughts passed through his mind with the speed of lightning. He glanced at the ribbon of water. It was appreciably wider. At any instant the whale might descend!

Hollister struggled to his feet and threw himself on Ted. The young aviator made his decision. With desperate strength he wrenched those gripping fingers from his throat.

“Let go, you fool!” he commanded. “Don’t you know I’m trying to save your life?”

As Hollister paid no heed, Ted hauled off and brought his right fist in contact with the scientist’s jaw.

Hollister grunted. His eyes closed, his body sagged.

“No time for politeness,” muttered Ted.

He slung Hollister’s inert body over his shoulders like a sack of wheat, crouched and tensed his muscles for the spring. As he did so, the mass beneath his feet began to sink.

Ted sprang for the ice pack, praying that he might make it.

His feet struck the edge, clung there for a moment, clung, slipped——

“I’m lost,” thought Ted desperately, and flung himself forward.

Hollister catapulted over his head. Flat on his face, Ted scratched and clawed at the ice. After what seemed an age of torturing uncertainty, when the icy waters reached up hungrily for him, he began to draw himself up inch by inch until his whole body was supported by the ice pack. He had won!

How long he lay there with Hollister unconscious beside him, Ted Scott never clearly remembered.

The instinct for life must have been very strong in him, for though he had no definite recollection of having done so, he must have forced himself to his feet, must even have roused Hollister to the desperate need of action.

Through hours of misery, when he was more dead than alive, he stumbled along through the blinding blizzard, dragging the weeping, raving Hollister with him.

At last he reached the limit of his strength. He stumbled and fell prone upon his face and lay there for a long time. The weak fingers of his companion plucked at him, the whimpering voice of Hollister was in his ear, but Ted Scott neither felt nor heard. He welcomed the sensation of infinite peace, of infinite comfort that stole over him. With a sigh he settled his head in the soft pillow of snow.

When Ted Scott next opened his eyes, it was to find his whole body in a torment of pain. Mark Lawson was bending over him, trying to force hot coffee down his throat.

“That’s right, Ted, try to drink this and you’ll feel better.”

“I couldn’t feel worse,” muttered Ted dazedly, and gulped down the coffee.

When the pain in his hands and feet had subsided and the coffee had done its work, the young aviator recovered sufficiently to betray some curiosity as to his surroundings and the fact that he still lived.

“Where’s Hollister?” he asked.

“He’s gone off to sleep, and a good job if he doesn’t wake up for a long time,” grumbled Jack. “He’s been raving like a madman, threatening to shove us all off the landscape. But say, what did you say his name was?”

“Gustavus Hollister,” replied Ted, and smiled faintly as he saw the amazement in the faces of his companions.

“The head of the *Gray Cloud* expedition!” exclaimed Mark Lawson.

“That’s twice you’ve saved his life,” cried Jack. “Once from the fire and

once from the ice. Look out for the next time, Ted. Your luck can't always last. Three times and out!"

"I'm not worrying about that," replied Ted, and went on to explain the incidents that led to the discovery of the wrecked plane and its luckless occupants and the nightmare adventure that had followed.

In return, Mark and Jack described their activities during the absence of their comrade.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE ICE KING'S GRIP

"Mark found a place that looks like a fairly good field for a take-off," said Jack Forrest, in relating his and Mark Lawson's doings to their chief. "When he reported, I went back with him to give the place the once-over. When we got back and found that you had not turned up, Ted, I tell you we were worried. We started out to search for you, getting more and more scared all the time. We'd just about given you up for lost when we stumbled upon you and this madman half-covered with snow. Another half hour, old boy, and it would have been too late."

"Those born to be hanged will never be frozen," retorted Ted Scott, grinning. "Let's go and see this take-off place you're bragging about."

"Perhaps you'd better wait until you're a little stronger," suggested Mark anxiously.

"I'm all right," protested Ted. "Every minute counts, and we'll freeze if we stay here much longer. Besides, I'm anxious to get Hollister where he'll have medical attention. He seems to be in a pretty bad way."

The thermometer was thirty degrees below zero and was steadily dropping. There was a slight lull in the wind, however, and the young aviator was anxious to take advantage of this to get up into the air.

The fairly level space that Jack and Mark had found was not very far from the thinner ice where the plane had originally come to rest. It looked all right to Ted for a take-off, and he urged instant action.

By their united strength, they pushed and pulled the *Ice Bird* to the designated spot.

It was no easy matter to get Gustavus Hollister aboard the plane. At first he blustered and raved and flatly refused to board it.

"I know you," he said, with a sly look. "You want to get up in the air and drop me overboard."

However, as they continued their preparations for an immediate flight, Hollister was consumed by a craven fear of being left behind. At the last minute he scrambled into the plane and relapsed into a cunning, sullen silence.

"Better watch that bird," cautioned Mark, as he pulled the goggles over his eyes. "He's planning some mischief. You can tell by the look of him."

The *Ice Bird*, as though refreshed by her long rest, made a pretty take-off from the improvised flying field. Her engines hummed rhythmically, the hasty repair work on her damaged wing held.

Ted Scott's brow furrowed with anxious creases as he watched the gas indicator. His supply of gasoline was running dangerously low. The long hours of battling with the blizzard had taxed it heavily.

They had scarcely reached the upper stretches of the air when the gale began to blow with redoubled fury.

It howled like a demon about the plane. It tore at the damaged wing until the aviators feared for their hasty and temporary repairs. To make it worse, it was blowing now right in the teeth of the plane.

It was impossible to make head against it, and Ted had to abandon all hope of keeping on his course and devote all his efforts to saving the *Ice Bird* from total wreck.

Outwardly, the young aviator was like steel. It was impossible to judge from his appearance that he was consumed with anxiety as he glanced from time to time at the gas indicator which told him how low his gasoline supply was becoming.

He would have had enough to reach camp had he been able to make a bee line for it. But now it was being wasted in this desperate struggle with the elements.

For hours the battle continued. A sharp cough of the engine knocked at Ted's heart like the knell of doom. It was followed by others in rapid succession. His gasoline was nearly gone!

There was no help for it. He must land or smash!

He picked out a solid looking ice pack and spiraled downward. It required the most consummate craftsmanship to make a landing in that gale. It was the most difficult descent the daring aviator had ever attempted. It was made the more difficult as he came down through the swirling snow and recognized the fact that the landing place he had selected had broken off from the ice pack and was now merely a gigantic floe.

Ted Scott jockeyed for position, and as the runners struck the ice he whirled the plane about just in time to prevent it from skidding off into the sea.

Around and around the small floating field he guided the plane, while the ice cracked and snapped and rolled beneath him. Again and again he avoided disaster by the smallest possible margin until the *Ice Bird* came to rest in the center of the floe.

It was time! There was scarcely a pint of gasoline left. He could not have kept aloft for two minutes more.

"Good for you, Ted!" cried Mark, as the three young aviators jumped from the plane. "I never thought you'd make it."

"I was holding my breath myself," replied Ted Scott.

He turned just in time to see Gustavus Hollister lower himself from the plane and scuttle over the ice like a frightened rabbit.

“Stop!” shouted Ted frantically. “Wait!”

The madman paused just long enough to shake his fist at Ted, then he poised for a moment on the edge of the ice floe and then with a wild scream plunged into the icy water!

CHAPTER XXV

AGONY—AND VICTORY

With shouts of alarm, the three young aviators rushed to the spot where Gustavus Hollister had disappeared.

They reached it as the crazed man was coming up for the second time. He was making no attempt to swim and his glassy eyes showed them that the shock of submergence in the frigid waters had robbed him of consciousness.

Ted Scott threw himself flat on the ice, and his comrades held his legs as he reached out and grasped the drowning man by his shoulder. He drew him close to the edge of the floe, and with the aid of his companions pulled him out of the water.

They laid him over a projecting hummock and worked over him until they had got the water out of him. Jack hurried off to the plane and got some extra garments, towels, and blankets. They stripped off Hollister's dripping clothes, rubbed him vigorously, and replaced his wet garb by dry. They forced some hot coffee down his throat and rolled him in blankets. Then they straightened up and looked at each other.

"If this isn't the limit!" breathed Jack Forrest.

"What else can happen to us?" exclaimed Mark.

The answer came startlingly. There was a horrid snap and crashing of the ice. The flyers turned to see the *Ice Bird* sinking into the water. The ice had parted directly beneath her. As the plane sank into the gap thus opened there was a tremendous convulsion of the ice field and the edges of the crack came together again, crushing the *Ice Bird* into fragments and forcing its remnants out of sight into the waters below.

The destruction was complete. One moment the gallant plane had been standing there, quivering to go. The next it had vanished from human sight forever!

It was a crushing, heart-rending blow to the young aviators, thus marooned in the Antarctic wastes. It stabbed their hearts as with a knife. They stared at each other with faces ashen white and hearts that tasted the bitterness of death.

They opened their lips as though to speak, but no words came. Their tongues were paralyzed.

Mark Lawson and Jack Forrest slumped down on the ice and covered their faces with their hands.

Ted Scott was the first to recover himself.

"Hard luck, fellows, but we've got to buck up and meet it," he muttered

thickly. “The *Ice Bird’s* gone”—his voice shook, for he loved the plane—“and there’s no denying that we’re in an awful fix. But we’ve been in hard places before and pulled through, and not one of us is going to quit. We’ll map out the course to camp and try to make it over the ice. Our compass——”

He stopped abruptly. The compass had been carried down with the other belongings of the *Ice Bird!*

He looked up at the sky. No help from that. The whirling snow was like a thick white blanket over their heads. They could not see twenty feet in an upward direction.

But Ted Scott was made of stuff that would not admit defeat.

“Can’t see the sun just now,” he said, trying to infuse cheeriness into his voice. “But this blizzard can’t last forever, and when the sun does come out it’ll put us on our course. Come now, fellows, shake a leg! Snap out of it! We’ll have to trust for a while to our sense of direction. But we’ve got to get going and I don’t mean maybe. Hustle now!”

His vim and energy were contagious, and Mark and Jack shook themselves out of the stupor of despair.

“We’ve got no food,” groaned Mark.

“All the less to carry,” said Ted cheerily. “We’ve got the thermos bottle nearly full of coffee, and we’ll ration that out.”

“No fuel, and no chance of finding any,” pondered Jack gloomily. “We’ll freeze to death when we stop for rest.”

“We’ll huddle together to keep warm,” replied Ted indomitably. “No grouching now! Get a move on. The first thing to do is to get off this floating floe and on to the solid ice field.”

He went over to Hollister and shook him.

“Come along,” he said not ungently. “Our plane has gone and we’ve got to go on foot. We can’t carry you, and you’ve got to walk with the rest of us.”

The explorer looked at Ted dazedly but made no reply. By the aid of the others Ted unwrapped the blanket and got him to his feet.

Mark and Jack supported him on either side, and with Ted in the lead the party moved on.

They circled the ice floe until they found a place where only a foot or so of water separated it from the solid ice pack. They crossed this, and with firmer footing felt a slight upspringing of hope.

The blizzard still raged, and Ted, as leader, had to trust simply to his sense of direction. This was developed in him to a remarkable degree and had more than once stood him in good stead under normal circumstances. But this situation was absolutely abnormal. How far would the instinct of a homing pigeon persist if it were buffeted by gales, whirled in a blizzard, weak and faint and dazed by hunger?

Although Ted Scott put on a bright face for its effect on his companions, he did not delude himself as to the dreadfulness of the situation.

He was lost! Lost in blizzard land! Lost in vast spaces that spread about him for thousands of miles! Lost without food or fuel! Lost with a crazy man, whom he and his companions had to wheedle, cajole and threaten to keep him moving at all! Lost without a compass in the Antarctic!

Then followed three days of torture, of agony of mind and body that none of the party could ever remember afterward without a shudder.

All that first day they plodded along, stumbling, slipping, compelled at times to make long detours to avoid the piled up ice hummocks or the gaps that opened up at intervals through the ice. At times Ted changed places with Mark or Jack in the task of helping Hollister along.

The crazed man was at times violent, at others merely stubborn and apathetic. Sometimes all three had to struggle with him to subdue him and keep him moving. The brain storms grew less frequent as the man became weaker, but the apathy increased. If they took their hands from him for a moment, he simply slumped down on the ice and it took hard work to get him to his feet again. And all the time his insane babblings and mutterings tore at their nerves, already worn to shreds.

Frequently they had to stop to rest. Then it seemed almost impossible to rise and continue their journey.

Hunger gnawed at their vitals. They tightened their belts and tried vainly enough to ignore it. The snow slaked their thirst, but they did not dare to take too much of it.

They found partial shelter in the lee of a hummock that cut off much of the wind. Ted doled out to each a small portion of the precious coffee, and they stretched themselves out with only the one blanket that had been wrapped around Hollister for a covering. They wedged themselves together as closely as they could, so that the combined warmth of their bodies barely kept them from freezing.

On the second day their dreary journey was resumed. The snow had ceased falling, but the wind was still as bitter as ever and beat the particles of ice and snow into their faces until their eyelids were cemented together and they had to pull them apart with their hands.

Ted could see the sky now, and through the leaden space could guess at the position of the sun. But he could only guess, and he was not at all certain of his calculations. He weighed the probabilities and picked out his course to the best of his ability.

But what if they were going in the direction of the camp? It might be many days before they reached it—weeks, perhaps, at their present rate of progress. For they were going ever and ever more slowly as their strength decreased.

Their feet were lagging and felt like lead. They had to stop to rest more and more frequently. There would come a time when from one of those resting places someone of the party would not get up—could not get up. That would spell the end. They could not carry him. They would not leave him.

Still they staggered on, on and on over those desolate fields of ice that seemed never ending. When at last they must rest, they simply fell in the lee of an ice hill, hardly able to move hand or foot.

Their hunger was fearful. For nearly two days they had eaten nothing. Even the coffee was now exhausted. They took off their leather belts and chewed on them, vainly trying to ease their pangs.

On the third day they were nearly at the end. Hollister no longer made even a pretense of walking. If they lifted him to his feet, he simply hung on them in dead weight and refused to move. They finally had to pull him along, one holding each arm, his limp legs dragging behind helplessly.

Under such circumstances they were simply crawling. They were getting light headed with hunger. Hollister kept up his babbling and it grew contagious. Ted noted with a sinking of the heart that Mark and Jack were beginning to mutter incoherent phrases.

They were staggering now like drunken men. They fell frequently. The soles of their boots were cut into bits by the sharp ice, and their trail was beginning to be marked by trickles of blood.

There was a humming above Ted's head. He rallied his fading senses and listened. His dimmed eyes looked up and saw nothing. Was he too going crazy?

The humming grew louder. It deepened into a roar. Now Ted's bloodshot eyes could see what looked like a great bird standing out against the sky.

"The *Albatross!*" he cried. "Look, fellows! The *Albatross!* They're searching for us. Grab this blanket, quick! Wave it! Make them see us!"

They waved frantically. Almost instantly they saw that the plane was preparing to descend. The flyers had seen them. They were saved!

The plane swooped down and landed. Men leaped from it and rushed toward them. Walter Hapworth, Bill Twombly and Roy Benedict surrounded them, hugged them, and, as they looked at the haggard, cadaverous faces and sunken eyes and bleeding feet, actually wept over them, blubbering like babies.

"Whoever says I'm crying is a liar," roared Bill Twombly, as he dashed the tears from his eyes. "But, oh, Ted, old boy—" he choked.

It was the work of only a few minutes to ensconce the rescued quartet in the *Albatross*. There Hapworth, Bill and Roy ministered to them, doling out hot broth to them in carefully limited quantities, despite their eager demands for more.

Then the *Albatross* took wing and in a couple of hours arrived at the spot

where Captain Raymond had pitched his expedition.

The joy with which they were received verged on delirium. They had almost been given up for lost, and for days the *Albatross* had been sweeping over the ice fields in search of them, with hope ever growing lower and lower.

The rescued ones were delivered over to the camp doctors, who promptly put them to bed and forbade all questioning until they should have fully recovered from their terrible experience.

It had been a fearful strain, but the youth and vitality of the young aviators enabled them to be around again in two or three days. Hollister, however, was in a much more serious condition, and for a week the doctors battled for his life.

Ted Scott's exploit in having flown over the South Pole for the first time in the history of the world was promptly radioed to America and enshrined him still more deeply in the affection and idolatry of his own people.

In the meantime, the work of the expedition went on with brilliant results that even surpassed the hopes of its organizers. Ted participated in this with his usual daring and resourcefulness and won the plaudits of all.

Word came by radio that the *Gray Cloud* crew, believing its commander lost, had returned to New Zealand with practically nothing accomplished in the way of Antarctic research. The trip had been a failure, and all the glory of the year's work centered on the Raymond expedition.

One day Captain Raymond touched Ted on the shoulder.

"Hollister is in his right mind now and on the way to complete recovery," the captain said. "I've been telling him a few things, and he wants to talk to you."

Ted made his way at once to the hospital hut. Hollister was sitting up in bed, supported by pillows.

He extended his emaciated hand and Ted took it cordially.

"I'm glad to hear that you're so much better," said the young aviator, as he seated himself at the side of the bed.

"Thank you," replied Hollister. "I learn that it is only through you that I am here at all. Mr. Scott, I can't tell you how grateful I am to you and how humiliated I feel. I've been mean, malignant——"

"There, there," interrupted Ted, holding up his hand. "Just forget it. We all do things sometimes that we're sorry for. I've wiped it right off my mind."

"But my behavior was disgraceful," persisted Hollister. "It was a wretched feeling of envy that made me try to keep you out of this expedition. And here I learn that you saved my life twice. My wife's, too, at the time of the fire. I feel like a yellow dog. I feel——" He stopped, his features working.

"Can you ever forgive me?" Hollister continued. "I'm——"

Ted stopped him.

“I forgive you freely and with all my heart. Now let’s talk about something else.”

They chatted pleasantly for a few minutes more, and then Ted left him.

At the end of another month, the Raymond expedition, with a glorious record of achievement, returned to the United States. There Ted Scott found himself once more showered with honor and applause. But none of this celebrity was as precious, to him as were the kisses of Charity and the bear embrace of Eben in the old hotel at Bromville.

“So you’re once more in the limelight, Ted,” remarked Walter Hapworth, as the two friends lounged on the hotel veranda. “Mapper of mountains, sounder of seas, discoverer of uncharted lands, conqueror of the South Pole!”

Ted Scott grinned.

“You’ve left out the one thing that gave me the greatest satisfaction of all,” he said.

“What is that?” asked Hapworth.

“Saving Gustavus Hollister.”

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Lost at the South Pole, or, Ted Scott in Blizzard Land* by Franklin W. Dixon [John W. Duffield]]