

The Sky-Man

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She Clasped Her Young Arms About His Neck.

SYNOPSIS.

Philip Cayley, accused of a crime of which he is not guilty, resigns from the army in disgrace and his affection for his friend, Lieut. Perry Hunter, turns to hatred. Cayley seeks solitude, where he perfects a flying machine. While soaring over the Arctic regions, he picks up a curiously shaped stick he had seen in the assassin's hand. Mounting again, he discovers a yacht anchored in the bay. Descending near the steamer, he meets a girl on an ice floe, about his affection for the girl's name is Jeanne Fielding and that the yacht has come north to seek signs of her father, Captain Fielding, an arctic explorer. A party from the yacht is making search ashore. After Cayley departs Jeanne finds that he had dropped a curiously shaped stick. Captain Black and the surviving crew of his wrecked whaler are in hiding on the coast. A giant ruffian named Roscoe, had murdered Fielding and his two companions, after the explorer had revealed the location of an enormous ledge of pure gold. Roscoe then took command of the party. It develops that the ruffian had committed the murder witnessed by Cayley. Roscoe plans to capture the yacht and escape with a big load of gold. Jeanne tells Fanshaw, owner of the yacht, about the stick left by Cayley. Fanshaw declares that it is an Eskimo throwing stick, used to shoot darts. Tom Fanshaw returns from the searching party with a sprained ankle. Perry Hunter is found murdered and Cayley is accused of the crime but Jeanne believes him innocent. A relief party goes to find the searchers. Tom professes his love for Jeanne. She rows ashore and enters an abandoned hut, and there finds her father's diary, which discloses the explorer's suspicion of Roscoe. The ruffian returns to the hut and sees Jeanne. He is intent on murder, when the sky-man swoops down and the ruffian flees. Jeanne gives her father's diary to read. The yacht disappears and Roscoe's plans to capture it are revealed. Jeanne's only hope is in Cayley. The seriousness of their situation becomes apparent to Jeanne and the sky-man. Cayley kills a polar bear. Next he finds a clue to the hiding place of the stores. Roscoe is about to attack the girl when he is sent fleeing in terror by the sight of the sky-man swooping down. Measures are taken to fortify the hut. Cayley kills a wounded polar bear and receives the first intimation that Roscoe possesses firearms. A fissure in the ice yields up Hunter's body and Roscoe, finding it, removes the dead man's rifle. He discovers that Cayley is a human being and not a spirit. The ruffian is baffled in his plan to murder Cayley when the latter and Jeanne take refuge in the cave where a furious storm keeps them imprisoned.

CHAPTER XX.—Continued.

He made his dive as shallow as possible, and in the sheer exuberance of delight at being once more a-wing, he beat his way aloft again by main strength, towering like a falcon. All his old power was here unimpaired, yet every sensation it brought him was heightened and made thrilling by long disuse. By means of those great, obedient wings of his he played upon the capricious, vagrant air with the superb insolence of mastery. Every trick of flight was at his command, the flashing dive of the piratical frigate bird, the corkscrew spiral of the tern, the plummet-like pounce of the hawk, and, at last, the majestic, soaring



his eyes, as he hovered, seeking the exact spot to alight, certainly made out a dark object lying there upon the snow. His heart felt like lead as he dropped close beside it, and scrambled clear of his wings.

It was Jeanne; and for a moment he thought she was dead. She seemed as white and cold as the snow itself. And yet she was not dead, not even frozen. The hands he chafed so frantically were inert, but not rigid; and, as he drew her up in his arms and pressed his head down against her breast, he could hear, very faintly and slowly, the beating of her heart.

He picked her up in his arms and carried her into the pilot house. The air here was still warmer than that out of doors, but it was no longer exhausted and poisonous.

He laid her down for long enough to light the lamp, to throw off his stiff leather jacket and to get a little brandy out of the keg. This he mixed with a little water and, with the aid of a small ivory spoon, he succeeded in getting a little of it between her lips.

He took off her heavy seal coat, and the woolen jacket she wore under it, and, as well as he could, loosened the other clothing about her waist. Last of all, he gathered her up in his arms again, wrapped the great sheep-skin bag about them both and, with the brandy and water within arm's reach, settled down to attempt to get some of the warmth and vitality of his own body into hers.

She was not fully unconscious now, for the next time he offered her brandy she swallowed it. Her eyelids were fluttering a little, too, and presently she sighed.

He was thrilling all over with a tremendous sense of power. He felt he could have brought her back from the very dead. His arteries seemed to be running with electricity, not blood.

Her lips were moving now, and he bent close to catch the whisper that barely succeeded in passing them.

"Don't—bring me back—Phillip. It's—so much—easier to go—this way."

His only reply to that was to hold her a little closer.

She did not resist when he held the drink to her lips again; but, after she had taken two or three sips of it, she said:

"I shan't need any more. I'm getting quite beautifully warm again."

He knew it was true. She no longer felt lifeless in his arms, though she still lay there quite relaxed. He knew he could let her go now, safely enough. And yet he held her fast.

"I thought you were dead when I saw you lying there on the snow," he said at last, not very steadily. "If you had been, it would have been my own doing."

She contradicted him with a sharp negating gesture.

"You left me well enough wrapped up to have resisted the cold for any length of time. Besides, if I'd wanted to I could have come back in here. But—but, Phillip—Oh, it seems a dreadful thing to confess, now you are here with me—I didn't want to. I just lay down on the snow, thinking I could go to sleep and—and that would be the end—such an easy end!"

She felt him shudder all over as she said it, and she clasped his shoulders and held them tight, in a desire to reassure and comfort him.

"Did you mean to do that. . . . Was that why you asked me to fly away for a while?"

"No! No! It was something I saw while you were gone, something that terrified me. Phillip, do you remember how many of the people of the Phoenix died of what father called the ice madness?"

He nodded gravely.

"Well, what I saw made me think that I was going that way, too. Phillip, I was watching the moon go down, and gradually it spread out into three, quite far apart, and then they changed into strange colors, and stranger shapes, and began to dance like witches."

He laughed, but the laugh had something very like a sob mixed up in it.

"Your poor child! No wonder it frightened you. But that's the orthodox way for the moon to set in the arctic. It's part of the same refraction that plays such strange tricks with the daylight colors. No, you're a long way from ice madness, Jeanne."

"But that wasn't all I saw, Phillip. It wasn't the worst, I saw a ship against the moon, only it seemed too high above the horizon, somehow. That's the crowning impossibility. And then the moons began to dance, that wicked, witch-like dance of mockery. So I lay down in the snow and hid my face in my arms . . . to go to sleep. It seemed so easy and, somehow, seemed right, too; not wicked any way."

She felt him shuddering again, and his clasping arms strained her so close they almost hurt.

"Thank God, I came in time!" she heard him whisper.

"But you did come in time," she reminded him, for she could still feel him shuddering with the horror of the thing. "You brought me back, and I'm not even afraid any more." She paused, and there was a little silence. Then she added: "And I'm quite warm now."

His arms slackened for a moment, and then once more they clasped her close.

"I—I—don't want to let you go," he said, and his voice had a note in it which she had never heard before. "Jeanne—Jeanne, dear, can you forgive me—forgive me that it's true? For give me for telling you? I have the whole world in my arms when I hold you like this. And life and death and promises, and past deeds, and right and wrong, are all swallowed up, just in the love of you. God forgive me, Jeanne; it's true!" Then he unclasped his arms. "Can't you forgive, too?"

She caught her breath in a great sob. Turning a little, she clasped her own young arms around his neck and held him tight.

It was a long time after that before either of them spoke. Finally, Jeanne asked a question.

"But, why—" her voice broke in an unsteady little laugh, "but why do you ask to be forgiven? You told me the very first day, the day we found the yacht had gone, that you—loved me. That's why I allowed you to stay."

"Yes, but there's an infinity of ways of loving, Jeanne, dear. I had a right to love the soul of you, for that was what had given me my own soul back and my power of loving. But we set out to live through this winter in the hope of a rescue, the hope that when another day came it would bring a ship to take you back into your own real world. I couldn't go back with you, you know, I a man with a stain upon him. Since that was so, I hadn't any right to love you this—other way. I wonder if you understand, even now. I love all of you; from the crown of glory you wear, down to the print your boot has left in the snow. I love your lashes, your wistful lips. The touch of anything that is warm with your hands can thrill me. And as for the hands themselves—oh, I can't make you understand."

"Yes," she said very softly, "I understand, now."

"And yet," he began after awhile, "I haven't any right, when I must give you up some day . . ."

She laid her fingers on his lips.

"We'll not talk of rights," she said. "Not now, not tonight. But there's something more to say. Phillip, it wasn't the sight of the ship there against the moon that made me think I wanted it all to end. That was the excuse I made to myself, but it was only an excuse. The real despair came when I saw you flying, saw how gloriously free you were up there, and thought it wasn't love that kept you here beside me, but only pity—Well, a sort of love, perhaps, but not what I wanted, not what I felt for you. I'd seen you draw away when I touched you."

She heard a sound in his throat that might have been a sob, though it seemed meant for a laugh, and she felt his arms tighten about her with a sudden passion that almost hurt. So she said no more, just kissed him and lay still.

It was a good while after that that she made a move to release herself.

"Let me go now," she said, "and I'll get you some supper, or breakfast, or whatever we decide to call it—only you'll have to go down into the ice cave to get some more supplies. We've nothing much left up here."

She dropped down on a heap of bear-skins before the open door, and sat gazing out at the black velvety patch of sky which capped the snow tunnel. Even when she heard Cayley coming back up the ice chimney she did not immediately turn to look at him. It was, in a way, a sort of luxury not to; to think that if she waited she would presently hear his step come nearer and feel his hands upon her shoulders.

CHAPTER XXI.

A Sortie.

But that did not happen, and a sudden instinct that something must have gone wrong reached her, with almost the force of a spoken word.

"What is it? What's happened, Phillip?" she asked, as she turned.

He did not answer at once. He was bending over the hole formed by the top of the ice chimney and rather deliberately replacing the wooden cover upon it. When he did straighten up at last, and she saw his face, she knew her instinct had not lied to her.

"It's rather a queer thing for us to have forgotten," he said, "after all these weeks when we lived in terror of him, and after the last thing he did to us. But we had forgotten him—Roscoe, you know—and now he has stolen a march on us."

She looked at him in a sort of wonder.

"It is true," she said, "we had forgotten. Those days when we lived in the hut seemed almost as far away from us here as the rest of the world seemed then. . . . She made a little pause there, then roused herself. "What is it that he has done, Phillip?"

"He has found our stores down below here. He has taken everything—made a perfectly clean sweep."

There was a little silence after that. Before she spoke again she came over to him and kissed him. There was a grave sort of smile on her face when she said:

"Well, is there anything we must do?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "That move of his doesn't end the game. It only begins a new one. Really, I think, the odds are more in our favor this time than they were before, only this time we shall have to move quickly. I would have followed him up at once, without coming back here, only I didn't have—" He stopped rather short.

"Of course," she said, "you hadn't the revolver."

"That wasn't what I wanted; I wanted my wings. Now I've got back to them I must start at once."

She uttered a little cry of protest at that.

"Can't you—can't you wait a little—a few hours? Life has only just begun for me—for us—with what you told me just now."

He let a moment go by in thoughtful silence, before he answered.

"No," he said, at last, "it's got to be settled now, before another moonrise. The light is all in his favor, the darkness in mine. If I can find him now, I think I can kill him. Now I think it over, it seems to me likely he doesn't suspect we are alive at



Stealthily Made His Way Toward the Cave.

all. The Walrus people never discovered the ice chimney nor the pilot house. That's perfectly clear. If they had they would have rifled it long ago.

"When I—finish, I'll come back to you. I don't think I shall be gone very long. You aren't to be afraid for me, and you can trust me to be careful. I know I have your life in my hands as well as my own. Your part is harder than mine; I quite understand that. You must be keeping watch every second. If he eludes me and comes here, you must shoot him, without word or warning. Shoot to kill!"

"But I shan't have the revolver!"

There was an electric moment of silence between them, while she gazed into his face, horrified at the meaning she read there.

"You didn't mean that! Phillip, Phillip—you can't mean that. And leave you to face that monster unarmed."

"I shall have the only weapon that will be of any service to me, my knife. It's got to be done at close quarters. I couldn't possibly shoot him from the air. But if I can alight near him and come up within striking distance he will have no chance with me, not with all his strength."

"No," she said, resolutely, "I won't let you go. Not that way."

"Listen, Jeanne. If I can find him, I can kill him. Do you know what the movements of ordinary men, even unusually quick men, look like to me? Like the motions of marionettes. The only chance Roscoe has against me is of picking me off at long range with his rifle. He could do that whether I had a revolver or not. And if he did, if he killed me and I had the revolver, then—well, then he would come here and find you—defenseless. Don't you see? I couldn't take the revolver. I should be unnerved with terror from the moment I left you."

With a sob she clasped her arms about his neck and held him tight. Then, in tragic submission, they dropped away.

Without saying anything more, Cayley blew out the candle, opened the door into the tunnel and took up his furred wings. With trembling hands she helped him spread them and draw them taut.

As he adjusted the straps across his shoulders, he felt her hands again, upon his head, felt them clasp behind his neck.

"Goodby," she said.

He was trembling all over, as her hands were, but it was not with fear. "I shall come back safe," he said. "Nothing can harm me tonight."

He pulled her up close in his enfolding arms and kissed her mouth. In an instant he turned and dived off the cliff-head into the night.

He headed up into the wind, and hung for a moment soaring upon a fairly steady current of air that poured along parallel to the cliff.

When he reached the glacier he checked his speed a little and slanted down to an altitude of not more than two or three hundred feet

above the crest. He hardly expected a glimpse of Roscoe so soon, having no reason to think he would be here, but he began scanning the earth's surface closely with the idea of accustoming his eyes to the light and the distance. Yet it was not his eyes, but his sensitive nostrils which gave him his first hint of the probable whereabouts of the man he was looking for.

The frozen air which he had been drawing deep into his lungs was odorless, save for the faintly acrid suggestion of ozone about it—a thing, by the way, which he was puzzled to account for, unless it presaged some titanic electrical display in the sky.

But the odor which now invaded his fastidious nostrils automatically checked his flight. He tilted back his planes and his momentum sent him towering almost vertically aloft. He did not analyze it—not that first instant, but his sensation was the same one that makes a dog suddenly throw up its head and snarl, bristling.

It was within 20 feet of the level of the ice before his little mirror of concave silver caught the gleam of red that he was looking for.

He threw his head back sharply and gazed at it. He could not see the fire itself—that must be hidden behind the great rock which almost blocked the entrance to what must be the cave.

The gleam he had caught in his mirror had been reflected in turn from the gleaming surface of a mass of ice a little farther out.

He slanted away again, searching now for a level place to alight, found it within 100 yards of the cave-mouth, circled once completely round, to make sure that he could not be surprised in the act of getting clear of his wings, and a moment later came down soundlessly, except with a faint sither of his planes, upon the ice.

He bounded almost instantly to his feet, slipped his knife out of his belt and held the hilt of it between his teeth while he furled his planes. That done, he deposited the bundle in the angle of a projecting rock, and stealthily made his way toward the cave-mouth.

At the very edge of the shelter afforded by the rock he paused for an instant; then, with every nerve tuned to the highest pitch—with every muscle in a state of supple relaxation, yet instantly ready for any demand that might be made upon it—he stepped round the corner and into the mouth of the cave.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Distilled waters run deep.

