

The Sky-Man

HENRY KETCHUM WEBSTER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHAS. W. ROSSER
COPYRIGHT 1910 BY THE CENTURY CO
COPYRIGHT 1910 BY THE SUCCESS CO

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, Hunter, Perry Hunter, turns to hatred. Cayley seeks solitude, where he perfects a flying machine. While soaring over the Arctic regions, he picks up a curious flying stick he had seen in the assassin's hand. Mounting again, he discovers a yacht anchored in the bay. Depending near the steamer, he meets a girl on an ice floe. He learns that 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 Planck and the surviving crew of his wrecked vessel 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 Fashaw, owner of the yacht, about the visit of the sky-man and shows him the stick left by Cayley. Fashaw declares that it is an Eskimo throwing-stick, used to shoot darts. Tom Fashaw 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 shows 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 Cayley 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. They confess their love for each other. Cayley, resolving to seek the ruffian and kill him, finds Roscoe's cave, but the enemy is not there. He picks up a familiar-looking locket and departs. Roscoe has taken advantage of Cayley's absence to force his way into where Jeanne is. Cayley returns, and a light ensues, in which Roscoe is killed.

CHAPTER XXII.—Continued.

The perception came to him as a memory, and in memory it seemed to be Jeanne's voice.

Now, unless his wits were wandering, he heard it again, and it called his name. He was half incredulous of its reality, even as he answered it. But the next moment, before he could extricate himself from his planes, or even attempt to get to his feet, he felt the pressure of her body, as she knelt over him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Signals.

There were a good many days after that—not days at all, really, but an interminable period of night—which were broken for Jeanne by no ray of hope whatever. She kept Philip and herself alive, from day to day, and this occupation left her hardly time enough to think whether there was anything to hope for or not.

Much of the time Philip was delirious; sometimes violently so, and yet she often had to leave him. When she did so, it was with no certainty at all that she would find him alive upon her return.

At last the conviction was forced upon her that Philip was actually on the road to recovery. His delirium became less violent and occurred at longer intervals. The frightful condition of his wounds began visibly to improve. Instinctively she resisted this conviction as long as she could, refusing almost passionately to begin to hope—for the return of hope brought an almost intolerable pain with it. Without hope there had been no fear, no apprehension—just as in a frozen limb there is no pain. But, as the possibility of his recovery became plainer, the slenderness of the thread by which his life was hanging became plainer, too. A thousand chances which she could not guard against might cut the thread and destroy the hope new-born.

He was able, at last, after a long sleep and a really hearty meal of sustaining food—which she hardly dared give him—to get up and walk out of their shelter to the star-vaunted beach. Fifty paces or so was all he was equal to; but at the end of the little promenade he expressed a disinclination to go back to the stuffy little shed which had been the scene of his long illness. The clean, wide, boundless air was bringing back the zest for life to him. So Jeanne brought out from the hut a great bundle of furs and made a nest of them on the beach, and there he lay back and she sat down beside him.

"Do you remember, Jeanne," he said, "the first time we sat out like this, there on the ice-floe beside the Aurora, and I told you how I had learned to fly?"

She locked her hand into his before she answered.

"I couldn't believe that night that I wasn't dreaming," she said softly.

"Nor I, either," he told her; "and, somehow, I can't believe it now—not fully;—not this part of it, anyway."

He had lifted the hand that was

locked into his and pressed it to his lips before he spoke. There was a silence after that. Then, with a little effort, the girl spoke.

"Philip, do you remember my saying what a contempt you must have for the world that didn't know how to fly? Do you remember that, and the answer you made to it?"

He nodded.

"Philip, is that still there? Your contempt, I mean, for the world?"

"I don't believe," he said, "that you can even ask that seriously—you, who gave me first my soul back again and then, in these last weeks, my life. For it's been your life that has lived in me these last days—they must be a good many—just as it was your warmth and faith and fragrance that gave me back my soul, long ago." He paused a moment; then, when he went on his voice had a somewhat different quality. "But the other contempt, Jeanne, that still exists, or would exist if I gave it the chance, the world's contempt for me. Not even your faith could shake that."

She had been half-reclining beside him, but now she sat erect purposefully, like one who has taken a resolution.

"I'm not so sure of that," she said, in a matter-of-fact tone, though there was an undercurrent of excitement in it. "Philip, I have been trying to solve a puzzle since you were ill. I hoped I could solve it by myself. If I were intelligent enough I'm sure I could; but I'll have to ask you to help me. It's a string of letters written around a picture, in a locket."

"A locket of yours?" he asked, surprised.

"Never mind about that just now," she spoke hastily and the undercurrent of excitement was growing stronger in her voice.

"Do you want me to try it now?" he asked. "If you'll make a light and show me the thing I'll see what I can do."

"Perhaps you won't need that," she said. "I can remember the letters. They are divided up into words, but I'm sure they are not any foreign language; they are in a code of some sort."

She did not turn to look at him, but she felt him stir a little, with suddenly aroused attention, and heard his breath come a little quicker.

"The first letter was all by itself," she said, trying to keep her voice steady. It was N—. And then, in one word, came the letters p-b-j-n-e-q."

"That means 'A coward,'" he said. His voice was unsteady, and he clutched suddenly at her hand. She could feel that his was trembling, so she took it in both of hers and held it tight.

"It's a code," he said, "a boyish code of my own. I remember that for a long time after I invented it I believed it to be utterly insoluble; yet it was childishly simple. It consists simply of splitting the alphabet in two and using the last half for the first, and vice versa. It must have occurred to hundreds of boys, at one time and another, and yet—his voice faltered. "Yet, it's a little odd that you should have stumbled upon another example of it."

"The next word was o-r-g-e-n-i-r-q."

"That means 'betrayed,'" he said, almost instantly. "Was—was there any more?"

"One little word, three letters, 'u-v-z.' But I know already what they mean, Philip." There was a momentary silence, then she repeated the whole phrase—"A coward betrayed him." She was trembling all over now, herself. "I knew," she said, "I knew it was something like that." Then she dropped down beside him and clasped him tight in her arms.

"Philip, that was written around your picture, an old picture of you it must have been, which fell out of your pocket when I was undressing you that night after your fight with Roscoe. I recognized the locket it was enclosed in as Mr. Hunter's. I had often seen it on his watch fob, and it's engraved with his initials."

"It fell out of my pocket," said Philip, incredulously.

"Yes," she said, "that puzzled me, too, for awhile; and finally I figured it out. You must have found it—"

"That night in Roscoe's cave, when I was waiting for him. I had forgotten it until this moment."

"I knew it must be like that," she said, "something like that. And wasn't it . . .?" she began—

"Hunter's code as well as mine? Yes. We made it up together when we were boys," he said, "and we used it occasionally even after we left the Point. We wrote in it, both of us, as easily as in English; and read it the same way."

Her young arms still held him fast.

"Philip, he must have been sorry a long time—almost since it happened. It's an old, old picture of you, dear, and the ink of the letters is faded. He's carried it with him ever since, as a reminder of the wrong he did you, and of his cowardice in letting you suffer under it."

"I suppose it was that from the first."

"I don't believe he ever meant—"

"She let the sentence break off there, and there was a long, long silence.

"I suppose that's true," he said at last. "I suppose I might have saved him then, just as I might have saved him later, from Roscoe's dart. I can think of a hundred ways that it might have happened—the accusation against me, I mean—without his having any part in it." Then he said rather abruptly: "Fashaw told you the story, didn't he?"

She assented. "Most of it, that is. Perhaps not quite all he knew."

"I don't know it all myself," he told her, "that is, I have filled it in with guesses. I knew about the girl. Hunter was half mad about her, and she, I suppose, was in love with him. Anyway, he came to me one night—the last time I ever talked with him—raging with excitement. The girl's father had found out about him and meant, she said, to kill him, and perhaps, her, too. Anyhow, she had forbidden Hunter seeing her again. We took a drink or two, together, before I started, and I suppose he must have drunk himself half mad after that; for he started right on my trail and did what you know. I have always supposed, until just now, that he had used my name as his own with her, to screen himself from possible trouble. But that may not have been the case. He may simply have spoken of me as his friend."

"The girl was in love with him, and it would be natural for her to give her father my name instead of Hunter's, and make the accusation against me. I suppose he thought that I could, probably, clear myself easily enough, without involving him, and that the whole row might blow over without doing any irreparable damage to either of us. And then, when it didn't blow over—when it got worse and meant ruin for somebody—the fact that he hadn't spoken at first would have made it ten times harder to speak at last. I might have helped him. He sent word to me once, when I was under arrest, to ask if I would see him, and I refused. I was very . . ." His speech was punctuated now by longer and longer pauses, but still Jeanne waited—"Very sure of the correctness of my own attitude then. Correct is, perhaps, the exact word for it. I wouldn't turn a hand to save a man—a man who had been my friend, too—from living out the rest of his life in hell." He shuddered a little at that and she quickly laid her hand upon his lips.

"That was long ago," she said. "You can see now what a God, perhaps, would have seen and done then. And if you did wrong, then it's you who have suffered for it—you who have paid the penalty. You have paid for the thing you left undone as well as for the thing he did. But we must not talk about it any more, now. You're not strong enough. I ought not to have spoken of it at all, but, somehow, I couldn't wait any longer."

"Just this much more, Jeanne, and then we will let it go: You see now, don't you, dear, why I said I never could go back to the world, never clear myself of the old charge at Hunter's expense—Perry Hunter's expense—now that he is dead; and don't you see that that's as impossible now as it was when I first said it?"

It was with a half laugh and a half sob that she kissed him.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "what does the world matter? This is the world here. You and I. The space of this great bear-skin we are lying on. The past can't come between us, and what else is there that matters? Come, it's time for you to take another nap. Are you warm enough out here, or shall we go back to the hut?"

"I'm warm, soul and body, thanks to you," he said.

But it was Jeanne who went to sleep. Somehow, since that last ex-

planation a wonderful great, soft calm seemed to envelop her. She slept there like a child beside him, his hand still half-clasped in hers.

It was Philip's voice that awakened her. How long afterwards she did not know. He was sitting erect on the great bear-skin, and all she could see of him was the dim silhouette of his back against the sky.

"What is it?" she asked, drowsily. "Is anything the matter?"

He could hardly command his voice to answer.

"It's that aurora, over there," he said. "No, it's gone now. It may come back. It's right over there in the south—straight in front of you."

"But, my dear—my dear—" she persisted, "why should an aurora . . . Is it because of the one we saw the night you killed Roscoe? Is it that old nightmare that it brings back?" She was speaking quietly, her voice caressing him just as her hands were. She was like a mother trying to reassure a frightened child.

"No, it's not that," he said, uneasily. "I don't know—I think I may be going mad, perhaps. I know I wasn't dreaming. I thought so at first, but I know I'm not now." Then she felt his body stiffen, he dropped her hand and pointed out to the southern horizon.

"There," he said, "look there!" What she saw was simply a pencil of white light, pointing straight from the horizon to the zenith, and reaching an altitude of perhaps 20 degrees. Compared with the stupendous electrical displays that they were used to seeing in that winter sky, it was utterly insignificant, and from it she turned to search his face, in sudden alarm.

"No, no—look—look!" he commanded, his excitement mounting higher with each word.

She obeyed reluctantly, but at what she saw her body became suddenly rigid and she stared as one might stare who sees a spirit. For the faint pencil of white light swung on a pivot, dipped clear to the hori-



"Fashaw Told You the Story, Didn't He?"

zontal, rose again and completed its circuit to the other side.

She sat there beside him, breathless, almost lifeless with suspense while that pencil traced its course back and forth from horizon to horizon, stopped sometimes on the zenith, to turn back upon itself—sometimes continuing through unchecked. At last her breath burst forth from her in a great sob. She turned and clung to him wildly.

"Philip," she said, "it can't be that—it can't be that!"

"Tell me—tell me what it looks like—what you think you see?"

She stayed just where she was, clinging to him, cowering to him, as if something terrified her, her face pressed down against his shoulder.

"Signals," she gasped out. "From a light—from a search-light."

He drew a long deep breath or two, and his good arm tightened about her.

"Well," he said, his voice breaking in a shaky laugh, "if we are mad, we are mad together, Jeanne, dear, and with the same madness; and if we are dreaming, we are living in the same dream. Did you read what it said? Oh, no, of course you couldn't—but I did. It's the old army wig-wag, and it has been saying all sorts of things. Spelling out your name most of the time. What it just said was, 'Courage. They are coming.'"

CHAPTER XXIV.

Unwinding.

For awhile she stayed just where she was, her head cradled against his shoulder, but, presently, she stood erect once more, pulled off one of her heavy gauntlets, and with her bare

palm pressed the tears out of her eyes.

"You aren't strong enough yet to be used as the support for a really good cry." Her voice was shaky and her speech uneven. There were still some little half-suppressed sobs in it. But she turned her face again towards the southern horizon. "If that's the army wig-wag I ought to be able to read it. Tom taught it to me years ago. Perhaps—perhaps it is he who is signaling now."

"Was there a search-light on the Aurora?" Philip asked. "I didn't notice when I saw her." He tried to make the question sound casual, but his voice was hardly steadier than hers.

"Oh, yes," she said. "It was one of the things we laughed at Uncle Jerry for insisting upon, but he insisted just the same. It's a very powerful light, Philip," she said suddenly, after a little silence, "is it not plain possible, that that we see over there? You know you said, and father said in his journal, that there was no possibility of a relief in the winter. Philip—Philip, isn't it madness—is it the ice madness?"

But before he could answer they heard a rifle-shot ring out in the still air.

"No," he cried, "the long wait is over. Thank God they are here. Fire, Jeanne! Fire the revolver! Let them know they are in time." His lips trembled and tears glistened in his eyes.

It was lying under her hand. There were only three cartridges left, but she fired them all into the air. Then, almost before the echo from the cliff behind them had died away, they heard a dim hall in a human voice—a voice that broke sharply as if the shout had ended in a sob.

"It's Tom," she said.

"Call out! It's your voice he'll want to hear!" But it was a moment before she could command it. She called his name twice, and then a third time, with a different inflection, for a long, leaping flicker of firelight had revealed a little knot of figures rounding one of the great ice-crags that covered the frozen harbor. One figure, a little in advance of the others, dashed forward at a run. Jeanne sprang to meet him.

For a little while Cayley stood hesitating before the fire, just where Jeanne, in her impulsive rush toward their rescuers, had left him, then slowly, he followed her.

The party on the ice was moving landward again. Even at Philip's slow pace, the distance between them was narrowing. Jeanne and young Fashaw were coming on ahead. He saw her stop suddenly and throw an arm around the man's neck. She was laughing and crying all at once, and there were tears in the man's eyes, too. Philip expected that. He knew that Fashaw loved her. His memory of that fact was all that redeemed his memory of their encounter on the Aurora's deck.

But, what he did not expect, was to see Fashaw suddenly release himself from the girl's embrace and come straight toward him. That was not the most surprising thing—not that, nor the hand which Fashaw was holding out to him. It was the look in the young man's face.

There was a powerful emotion working there, but no sign of any conflict, no resistance, no reluctance. It was the face of a man humble in the presence of a miracle. He stripped off his gauntlet and gripped Cayley's hand. It was a moment before he could speak.

"It's only just now," he said, "now that I see you here together, that I find it hard to believe. Because I've known all along that you were here with her, keeping her alive until we could get back to her. I've been the only one who has had any hope at all, and with me it's been a certainty rather than a hope. It's as if I had seen you here, together. I've seen you so a thousand times, but now, that I do actually, with my own eyes, it's hard to . . ." His voice broke there. There was a moment of silence, then he went on: "You must try to forgive us, Cayley—me, in particular, for I'm the one who needs it most. We know the truth of that old story now. No, it wasn't Jeanne who told, it was poor Hunter himself, in a letter. He had written it long ago, and it was among his papers. I want you to read it sometime. I think, perhaps, when you do you will be able to forgive him, too."

"That's done already," said Philip. "No, not long ago—within the last few hours. Come, shall we go back to the fire? I suppose we had better wait for another moonrise before we try to get to the Aurora."

It was six months later, a blazing blue July day, when the gunboat Yorktown lifted North Head, the northern portal of the Golden Gate. Tom Fashaw and his father had gone to the bridge, but Philip and Jeanne, the other two passengers, remained unmoved by the announcement, seated as far apart as possible, the ensign, limp in the following breeze, fluttering just over their heads.

Looking up, they saw one of the junior officers standing close beside them. He was a dark-haired, dark-eyed, good-looking youngster, whose frank adoration of Jeanne ever since they had come aboard had amused the Fashaws and secretly pleased and touched Philip, although he pretended to be amused, too.

They both rose and lounged back against the rail as he came up.

"Glad to be nearly home, Mr. Caldwell?" said Jeanne. "You navy people regard any port in the States as home, don't you?"

"Oh, I'd be glad enough of a month's shore leave," he said, "if it weren't this particular voyage. I mean—if it didn't mean that we are going to lose you."

She gave him a friendly little smile, but made no other answer. He turned to Philip.

"I'll have to confess," he said, "to the rudest sort of inquisitive curiosity about the strange-looking bundle you brought aboard with you from the Aurora. It looks like some primitive Eskimo's attempt to build a flying-machine."

"It is something like that," said Philip. "If you'll have it brought up here on deck I'll open it out to you."

The young fellow's pleasure was almost boyish. "I'll have it brought at once," he said.

The breeze was straight behind them and just about strong enough to compensate for the speed of the vessel, and the air on deck was quite still. With the boy's puzzled assistance Philip spread his wings for the first time since that night when he had dived off the cliff-head to go in pursuit of Roscoe. The recollection was almost painfully vivid, and as he looked into Jeanne's face he saw the same memory mirrored there.

But young Caldwell soon brought them back to the present. He was no longer embarrassed or shy, deferential. Aerial navigation was, apparently, a subject he knew all about. He criticized the shape of the planes, the material they were made of, the curve of this, the dip of that—all in the tone of an expert—and by way of summing up, he said:

"It's rather pitiful, isn't it? In a way any primitive thing always affects me—like old locomotives they have in museums. Somebody, probably, believed once that that would fly. I hope he didn't believe it seriously enough to give it a real trial."

"You don't think it would work, then?" asked Philip.

"The young man laughed. "Dear me, no," he said. "It couldn't work."

"At any rate," said Philip, "it's an amusing curiosity."

"Oh, yes; indeed, yes," the young man assented, cordially. "I wish it were mine. Only I wouldn't try to fly with it."

His duties called him away then rather suddenly, and Philip was left



"He Was a Dark-Haired, Dark-eyed Handsome Young Man."

to furl his wings alone. From the process he looked up into Jeanne's face.

"Why, Jeanne!" Her eyes were bright, bright with unshed tears, and there was a little flush of bright color in her cheeks.

"Oh, I know," she said, with an unsteady laugh, "it's absurd to be indignant, but I wished—oh, how I wished, when he was so patronizing and so sure, that you might have slipped your arms into their places and gone curving, circling up, all gold and gleaming, into the air. I knew you wouldn't, but I hoped you would."

"Jeanne, dear," he said, "you'll remember that always—my fight, I mean. But, sometimes you'll get to wondering if it isn't the memory of a dream. And then you'll go and find these old wings in an attic, somewhere, and stroke them with your hands, the way you did that night when I furl them first upon the ice-floe beside you."

She looked at him quickly, wide-eyed.

"What do you mean, Philip? Not that—not that I'm never to see you fly again?"

He nodded.

"Somehow, up there, with all the world below me, it never seemed real. Even you never seemed real, who were the only real thing in all the world. The earth was only a spinning ball, and there were no such things as men. I wasn't a man myself, up there, not even—even after you had brought me back to life and given me a soul again. Somehow, to be a man one has to wear the shackles of mankind. I can't explain it better than that, but I know it's true."

For a long time she searched his face in silence.

"You used to seem a spirit rather than a man to me," she said, "when I would lie watching you soaring there above me. And now—now it's I who brought you down."

"Do you remember how I told you once that a man like your father was worth a whole Paradise of angels? Well, I want to be a man, Jeanne, as near as possible such a man as he was. And I want to walk beside you always."

A shift of wind from astern overtook them and the great ensign flapped forward, screening them for a moment where they stood, from the view of the rest of the deck. With a sudden passion of understanding she clasped him close and kissed him.

THE END.

Herring Always in Lead.

Herrings form the greatest harvest of the ocean. More herrings are eaten than any other fish.