A Mystery Story for Boys

Riddle of the Storm

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RIDDLE OF THE STORM

CHAPTER I
THE GRAY STREAK

Curlie Carson's eyes widened first with surprise, then with downright terror. His ears were filled with the thunder of a powerful motor. Yes, he heard that. But what did he see? That was more important. A powerfully built monoplane with wide-spreading wings was speedily approaching. Even through the swirl of snow all about him he could see that the plane was painted a solid gray.

"The 'Gray Streak'!" he murmured.

Could it be? What tales he had heard of this mysterious plane! During his three weeks of service on the *Mackenzie River Air Route* in northern Canada, extravagant tales had reached his ears. "This gray plane bears no identification mark, no name, no letters, no numbers. It swoops down upon some lone cabin, robs the owner of food and blankets, and is away. It is a phantom ship, a Flying Dutchman of the air. No pilot at the stick!" What had he not heard?

But now—now it was directly over him. Cold terror gripped his heart. A part, at least, of the reports was confirmed; the plane carried no insignia. No name, no letter, no number gave it identification. And these were required by law.

"The 'Gray Streak'," he murmured again.

His fear increased. The plane was flying low along the river. He was standing close to his own plane, the one entrusted to his care by the *Midwest Airways*. It was a superb creation, and almost new. Suppose this stranger, the man of mystery, outlaw perhaps, should drop to the smooth surface of the river's ice and compel him to exchange planes!

"Suppose only that he should descend to rob me of my cargo!" His heart raced.

It was a valuable cargo and had come a long way by air.

While these terrifying possibilities were passing through his mind, the plane moved steadily onward. He was able to study every detail: her skids, her wings, her cabin, her motor.

The drumming of her motor did not diminish.

“They are passing!” he whispered. “Thank God, they are going on. I—”

His words were checked at sight of some white object that, whirling with the wind, seemed at first a very large snowflake.

“But no. It—it’s—”

He was about to dive forward in pursuit of it when an inner impulse born of caution caused him to halt.

Dividing his attention between the vanishing plane and the fluttering object, he stood for a space of seconds motionless. Then, as the snow-fog closed in upon the plane, he dashed forward to retrieve a small square of cloth.

“A handkerchief!” He was frankly disappointed.

“But—a woman’s handkerchief.” His interest quickened. One did not associate a woman with this mystery plane.

“Perhaps, after all, it’s a boy’s,” he told himself. “But a boy? One—”

His eyes had caught a mark in the corner. There were words written there, very small words.

Hurrying to his airplane, he climbed into the cabin; then, switching on a powerful electric torch, he studied the words.

“I am a captive,” he read.

And beneath this was a name: “D’Arcy Arden.”

“D’Arcy,” he murmured. “What a strange name! Would it be a boy or a girl?”

For a long time he sat staring at that square of white, trying at the same time to patch together the rumors that had come to him regarding this mystery ship of the air.

“No use,” he told himself. “Can’t make head nor tail of it.”

The truth was that until that hour no aviator of this northern country had laid eyes on this gray phantom. They had one and all agreed that it did not exist, that it was the creation of an over-wrought imagination; that some mineral-hunting plane on a special mission had passed over here and there and had created the illusion.

“But now,” he assured himself, “I have seen it. I will vouch for it. And here,” he held the square of white up to the light, “here is the proof!

“But why is that plane here? Where is it going? Why is that person a captive? What type of outlaw rides in that cockpit? All that is the riddle of this storm, a riddle I am bound to aid in solving. But now—”

His ears caught the beat of snow on the cabin window. “Now there is nothing left but to eat, sleep a bit, and wait out the storm.

“Get a bite to eat,” he told himself. “Something hot. Fellow has to keep himself fit on a job like this, when you—”

He did not finish. A sudden thought breaking in upon him had startled him. He had believed himself safe from the peril that had threatened. But was he? What if the plane turned about and came back?

He opened the cabin door. The throb of a motor smote his ear, and once more sent tremors of fear coursing up his spine.

Once more consternation seized him. What was to be done? He couldn’t lose his plane. He must not!

“Only three weeks,” he said aloud, “and then!”

It had been a glorious three weeks. Rising off the field at Edmonton. Greeting the dawn. Skimming through the clouds. Sailing over a great white world, ever new. This was his task as a northern pilot.

“So safe, too,” he had said more than once. “The river’s ice, a perfect landing field, always beneath you.”

No, he could not lose his plane. Reaching up to a niche at the top of the low cabin, he took down a powerful yew bow and a handful of arrows. The arrows were of ash, light and strong. They were perfectly feathered. Their points were of razor-edged steel. “Might help in an emergency,” he told himself. “And this D’Arcy person might be able to do a little if I could free him. Even if it were a woman, she might help; you never can tell.”

The pulsating beat of motors grew louder.

“If I lose my plane it means we lose the mail contract. I won’t!” He set his lips tight. “I must not!”

Gripping his bow, he stepped out of the cabin.

The next moment his face broadened in a grin.

“Fooled myself!” he exclaimed.

The plane that loomed out from the snow-fog for a space of seconds, only to lose itself again, was not gray. It was blue, with streaks of white. It bore on its wings the letters E F—R A C.

“Speed Samson,” he murmured. “He’s going through. He trusts his motors.”

A frown overspread his usually cheerful face. The frown had a meaning. He admired Speed. Speed was a wonderful pilot with thousands of hours of flying to his credit. Yet Speed had, only three days before, disappointed him. Perhaps disappointed is not the word. However that may be, this is what had happened. Curlie had said,

“You have to learn to trust God in a very real way when you fly in the North, don’t you?” He had not meant to preach; but Speed had said rather shortly:

“I trust my motors!”

“He trusts his motors,” the boy repeated. “‘Trust God and keep your powder dry.’ Some one has said that. Up here you have to trust God and keep your

motors right. But I for one am not going to trust to my motors alone. God made the iron and steel, the copper and all that goes into my machine. He made the gas and oil, too. And He made my brain, and I'll use it to the best of my ability. This is not safe flying weather. And orders are, 'Always play safe.'"

Having thought this through, he returned to his cabin.

"Danger is all over," he told himself. "But this D'Arcy person? How I'd like to help! Wonder if I will in the end?"

"Hot chocolate," he murmured to himself. "A cold chicken sandwich and a big pot of beans, warmed over the alcohol stove. Boy! A fellow sure does get an appetite up here!"

An hour later, wrapped in his eight foot square eiderdown robe, he lay on the floor of the narrow cabin prepared for sleep.

Sleep did not come at once. There were many troubles of the day that must first be put to rest. He thought of his motor, going over it piece by piece. In this land of the North much depends upon the pilot's care of his motor. Curlie was not neglectful. Even in his hours of repose his thoughts were upon his task.

That his was a position of grave responsibility he knew right well. Until his coming into this land he had thought of aviation as a pleasant luxury, mostly to be indulged in by the rich and the near-rich; a necessity in war, a luxury in time of peace. But in this far-flung land of snow the airplane has come to be a thing of great service. Journeys that required three months of hard mushing after dog teams; of sleeping in rough, uninhabited cabins at night; of facing cold, hunger and darkness, are now accomplished with great comfort in three days. In this land the airplane has made a village a thousand miles from Edmonton one of that city's suburbs. Curlie had not been slow to sense all this.

"And there's gold," he told himself. "'Gold hunters of the air.' That's what Johnny Thompson called them. I wonder how it's done."

Yes, Curlie had seen Johnny Thompson. You remember Johnny. He had been Curlie's pal in more than one strange land and with him had participated in many a mysterious and thrilling adventure.

He had not come upon Johnny this time by accident. Neither was Curlie's

presence in northern Canada an accident. He was here because he had a friend, and that friend was Johnny Thompson.

Curlie, like many another young fellow, had bumped squarely into the regretted "depression" that, sweeping like a tidal wave over the land, had left many a man high and dry, with no home and no place to eat. Having been in the air mail service in America, he was dropped when demand slackened and fewer men were needed. Men who had more flying hours to their credit had been retained.

In time of depression one must often rely upon his friends. Little groups of true friends, drawn closer together by the winds of adversity, stand back to back, fighting the battle together.

So it happened that Johnny, finding himself in the North and learning of a temporary vacancy, spoke a good word for his friend Curlie Carson.

"And now," thought Curlie, "here I am. And here I stay until my last dollar is spent. A land where airplanes are a real necessity, that's the land for me!

"'Gold hunters of the air,'" he repeated once more. "Wonder how they do it? Perhaps I'll learn that business. Sounds thrilling. And gold! Man! It might make a fellow rich!

"But I wonder—"

He had asked Johnny how it was done, this gold hunting in the air. Johnny had said,

"How much time you got to spare?"

"Two minutes. Must get back to my motor," Curlie had replied.

"Not enough by two hours," had been Johnny's laughing rejoinder. "Drop in and stay all night on your next trip and I'll tell you all about it.

"And by the way!" he had exclaimed. "Be sure not to pass us up on that next trip. May have something mighty important to send down by you. New stuff; that is, new to us. Worth about a million dollars an ounce. How does that strike you between the ears?"

“Million an ounce,” Curlie murmured sleepily. “Million dollars an ounce! Wonder what that could be?”

* * * * * * * *

Curiously enough, at the very hour in which Curlie had decided to sleep out a storm, Johnny Thompson, many miles away in a place where the storm had not yet struck, was telling some one else, an old-time friend of Curlie’s as well as his, some things about gold hunting in the air. He was talking in no uncertain terms, and the facts he revealed were as much a surprise to the listener as they might have been to Curlie.

He had left his camp early that morning, had Johnny. It was well into the afternoon when, as a sudden smile spread over his close-knit, winter-hardened face, he sighted the person he had hoped to meet.

A slim girl in her teens, this girl handled her dogs extremely well for a novice who had been in the North only three short weeks.

“Bravo!” Johnny fairly shouted, as she rushed ahead to seize her leader and throw him back on his haunches. “She picks things up quickly. Many a girl would have allowed her team to come straight on to mine. Then our teams would have mixed, her team against mine, like two football teams on a gridiron. Best team wins. What a rumpus that would have been! Bad business. Dogs all crippled up, like as not.”

Swinging his own dogs off the trail, he issued a sharp command which they instantly obeyed by throwing themselves upon the hard-packed snow in a position of repose. Dog teams in the North were not new to Johnny, though this was his first trip into the far northwest of Canada.

The girl, who stood silent and expectant beside her team, was Joyce Mills. Johnny had learned of her presence in the North quite by accident. For months he had not heard from her nor from her father, Newton Mills, the retired city detective. You will remember Joyce and her father well enough if you have read *The Arrow of Fire* and *The Gray Shadow*. A brave, resourceful, independent girl, this Joyce Mills. And her father, before a nervous breakdown, had been one of the most feared detectives on the New York force. Now, here they were in the North. Strange, do you say? In this day nothing is strange. “Foot loose and fancy free,” that’s the phrase. We go where we will, we Americans.

Joyce had not known Johnny was in the North. And now here they stood face to face.

“Jo—Johnny Thompson!” she breathed, her eyes widening as he approached.

“Johnny!” she cried aloud. “When did you get here?”

Johnny grinned broadly. “Three weeks ago to-day, same as you.”

“Three—three weeks. And you knew I was here!” Her eyes reproved him.

“Not until yesterday,” he explained. “Of course I knew there was a lady in your outfit. Yesterday an Indian told me who you were.”

“An Indian. I haven’t talked to one. How did he know my name?”

“He didn’t. He knew you. That was still better. There may be two Joyce Mills in the world. There is only one you.”

“Knew me!” A puzzled look overspread the girl’s face. “I don’t understand.”

“You wouldn’t unless you knew Indians. In their own way they are clever beyond belief; some of them at least. They see everything, can imitate every action, your smile, your gestures, your walk, everything. They can describe the fillings in your teeth, the shape of your fingers and every bit of toggery you wear. This man had not been speaking three minutes before I knew it must be you.”

“Indians,” she murmured as Johnny came closer to her sled. “Are they as clever as that?”

“They sure are!”

“But, Johnny!” she exclaimed. “What are you doing here? And how does it happen that we arrived on the same day?”

“I am doing,” said Johnny slowly, “just what your outfit is doing, searching for mineral, gold, silver, platinum, radium.

“As for that other question—” His words came with great hesitation. “That—

that’s a deep secret. I wonder if you know the answer yourself. No. I am sure you don’t, nor your father either. You are square shooters, you are. Your father is the straightest detective that ever guarded the streets of New York. He wouldn’t be in on a thing like that, not if he knew it.”

“Johnny!” the girl cried out in alarm. “What are you saying? Are you telling me that in our camp some one is unfair, dishonest? How could they be? We are searching for mineral in a wild, open country that belongs to no one save the Provincial Government. How could we be dishonest?”

“And yet,” Johnny said as he sat down upon the sled, “a very mean trick, yes, a dishonest, dishonorable one has been played by—. Not by your father,” he hastened to explain, “but by at least one of the young men with whom he is associated.

“Sit down and I will tell you.”

The girl sank to a place beside him.

“Listen.” His tone grew impressive. “You have seen those enlarged photographs?”

“You mean the ones taken from the air, showing the surface of rocks, the sides of ledges, the ones our men work by? The ones they study and find signs that save them months of travel?”

“Yes.”

“I have seen them many times.”

“Then you know,” the boy went on, “that they are invaluable as an aid in the search for mineral, that an expert mineralogist like your father can sit down before those photographs and can, after studying them carefully, tell where mineral is likely to be found.

“Of course,” his voice dropped a little, “of course, a skilled observer may fly over the territory and tell something of the rock formation from mere eye observations. But photographs are much better.

“Did it ever occur to you,” he demanded suddenly, “to ask yourself the question:

‘Where did those photographs come from? Who took them?’”

Joyce started. “N—no, it didn’t.”

“I’ll tell you. But first let me assure you that the taking of such pictures is difficult, tiresome and often dangerous work. It requires a great deal of time. Those prints are only a hundred or so selected from more than a thousand. To take those pictures required many days of soaring in a powerful airplane, close to the surface of the earth. For such work an airplane is expensive. Those pictures cost a pretty large sum of money. They were the property of two men, an aged prospector and a young man. They invested their joint fortunes in the undertaking, hoping for large returns. They had made one enlargement from each film when all the films were stolen.”

“Stolen!”

“Stolen.”

“By whom?”

“I leave you to guess.”

The expressions that flitted across the girl’s face, as clouds pass over a landscape, were strange to see. Despair, distrust, sorrow, hope, then despair again—all these.

“My father,” she murmured at last, “my poor father.”

“He knows nothing of it. That goes without saying,” Johnny hastened to assure her.

“But—but it’s not that.” She seemed undecided. There was a strange hoarseness in her voice as she turned her face to his.

“Johnny, you know my father.”

“Yes,” he replied simply, “I know.”

He spoke the truth, as you will know if you have read that other book, *The Arrow of Fire*. Johnny did know Newton Mills. He knew that he had been one of

the finest detectives the city of New York had ever known. He knew, too, that after many years of service he had fallen as a last sacrifice to the battle against crime. Johnny had done much to reclaim him.

“You know,” Joyce went on, “that he can never again fill a post on a city detective force. His nerves are too far gone for that. We are poor. The depression reached us. We were in despair. Then this opportunity came. He may never have told you, but he was in the Yukon gold rush. He found no gold, but instead, a lifetime hobby—the study of minerals. These studies have fitted him for the work he is now doing. This opening came. He took it. I came to be with him.”

She said “with him” softly, did this slim, dark-haired girl. She loved her father.

“And now,” her tone changed, “now it’s all over.” There was no bitterness in her voice, only weariness, the long, long weariness of one who has battled long for a great and noble cause, only to feel that defeat lies directly ahead.

“I can’t see it that way.” Johnny spoke calmly. “The work can go on. If something really comes of it, your father will receive his full share.”

“But who would want a share of anything obtained by dishonest means?” The girl’s cheek flushed.

“Well,” Johnny replied quietly, “in the first place, I doubt if all three of the young men working with your father know of the theft.”

“I am sure they don’t!” the girl exclaimed, ready to weep. “It doesn’t seem possible that one of them could do such a thing. They seem so honorable. They have been so very kind to me.”

“And yet, here are the facts staring us in the face,” Johnny continued. “If you had our set of pictures to compare with those your people are using, you would find them identical. And they were taken by Scott Ramsey who is one of the partners in our camp, a real gold hunter of the air.”

“And one of our men is a thief!” the girl spoke slowly. “Who would believe that?”

“Your task,” Johnny added gently, “is to find the thief. You are the daughter of a detective. Often you have helped your father in his work. This should be easy.”

“I will.” The girl stood up. “I will find him. And when I have, what shall I do?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?” She stared unbelievingly.

“Exactly that. Can’t you see?” He, too, sprang to his feet. “As long as we know what they are doing, they are in a way working for us. If they make a strike, find gold or other rich mineral deposits, we will share with them.”

“You would take—”

“No. We couldn’t take the claims they file on; at least we would not. They should have their share. I am sure the men of our camp will deal fairly, even generously with them.

“But this is the way it works.” He was explaining quietly now. “If they make a strike, find gold or radium, they will rush outside in an airplane and bring in friends to file on the land. There will be room for many, many claims. When they have a broad stretch of ore-bearing territory staked, they will sell out to some rich company.

“But you see,” he added, “if they make a strike we will know it at once. Nothing prevents us from moving over and filing on the most promising spots; in fact, it’s the fair thing to do since they are working with our pictures.”

“I see.” The girl spoke slowly. A new light of hope shone in her eyes.

“But, Johnny,” she asked suddenly, “how will you know when they make a strike, if they do? You wouldn’t expect me to—”

“No, we wouldn’t expect you to let us know. But we have a way—the Moccasin Telegraph.”

“Moccasin Telegraph? What’s that?”

“You will learn much about that before you are here long.” His eyes were smiling mysteriously.

“And be assured of one thing,” he added. “Whatever comes of it, your father will

have his fair share."

"Sha—shall I tell him?"

"I think not. His work calls for all his energy. It might disturb him. This is your case. Work it out. Find the man."

"I shall find him if—if there is such a one."

"If? What do you mean? The evidence is conclusive."

"I find it hard to believe."

"It is true." His tone changed. "I must be going. It's a long way to our camp." He put out a hand. She gripped it quite frankly.

"What brought you this far?" she asked.

"Thought I might see you. No ladies in our camp. Only a Chinaman for a cook. Fellow gets lonesome."

"Shall you come again?"

"I think not. It's not safe. Feeling runs high in this land. Our crowds might mix in the wrong way. That would be bad."

"Well, so long, then."

"So long!"

A moment later Johnny and his team vanished behind the cliff, leaving a very much puzzled girl alone with her thoughts. And they were long, long thoughts, I assure you.

CHAPTER II
IN SWIFT PURSUIT

When he fell asleep in his airplane, Curlie Carson was many miles from any human habitation, in the heart of a polar wilderness. In that wilderness foxes barked and gaunt wolves howled. An Arctic gale sent snow rattling against his window. And yet he slept like a child in a trundle bed. A few hours of rest, and then he would, granted the storm had ended, greet the dawn high in air.

Mid-afternoon next day found him circling above the shore of Great Slave Lake for a landing.

“Gas cache here,” he told himself. “Just gas up and be away to Fort Resolution. Far as Speed got, I’m sure, with all his flying in the storm. My record’s as good as his. Contract’s safe enough yet.”

Ah yes, the contract. How they all worked for that, the mail contract from Edmonton to the Arctic! A three year contract, it was to be given to the company that made the best flying record this season. At present Curlie’s own company, Midwestern Airways, was a few notches ahead. But one bad break, and the Trans-Canadian, the rival company, would beat them. Only three weeks remained.

“It’s a race, a race for a grand prize,” he told himself. “And we must win!”

Up to this moment the boy had a right to be proud of his own record. The youngest pilot on the route, only a substitute for a disabled pilot of more mature years, he had exceeded them all in miles flown and service rendered in this wild northland. For all this, his thoughts at this moment were humble ones. Full well he knew the treachery of the skies.

His skis bumped. They bumped again three, four times, and his plane went gliding over the snow. With consummate skill he brought the great bird to rest exactly opposite three steel drums resting on a high bank at the lake's edge.

Many gas caches such as this had been established during the season of open water when river and lake steamers might operate.

With a rubber hose for siphoning in his hand, the boy climbed the steep bank. But what was this? In a sheltered spot he came upon a footprint in the snow. Consternation seized him. Had some one been there before him? This was his company's gasoline. None other had a right to it.

"Some trapper passing this way," he reassured himself.

His hopes were short-lived. One kick at each hollow-sounding drum and he knew they had been robbed.

Who was the guilty one? Speed? No, Speed was an honorable man! The Gray Streak, phantom of the air? That was the answer.

"This must be stopped!" he told himself stoutly. "Not enough gas to reach the next port. And some unfortunate one may be waiting at this moment for my plane to carry him to the hospital. They can't realize what it means."

Down deep in his heart he was convinced that they, the pilots of the Gray Streak, did know what it meant. They were outlaws, fugitives from justice, and did not care.

"When they are caught there will be a fight. Well, then, welcome the day! The airways of the North must be kept open to those who have at heart the highest good of all."

Having made this declaration of war, that in time was to lead him over a vast wilderness into many perils, he slid down the bank to climb into the cockpit, prepared to make the most of his scant supply of gas.

Three hours later, just as dusk was approaching, he was circling once more. Less than a gallon of gas remained in his tank. Fort Resolution was twenty miles away. Night was coming on.

“That means a day lost, a bad record, a black mark, a long loss in the contest!” he exclaimed almost savagely. “And all because some one cares nothing for the welfare of others. Truly the running down of such men is a task worthy of any man’s steel.”

Scarcely had his plane come to rest than fresh perils threatened. There came a strange sound from the bank of the lake.

“What can it be?” His heart skipped a beat. Instinctively he put out a hand for a stout yew bow and a quiver of arrows that always hung beside his cabin door, for like his friend Johnny, Curlie, as you will recall, was an expert bowman.

In ever increasing volume there came to his ears the sound of cracking and crashing.

“Sounds like a forest fire,” he told himself. “But there is no fire. Like a thousand range cattle. But there are no cattle. What can it be?”

Soon enough he was to know. From the brush that grew by the shore bounded a brown mass with four short legs and a tossing head.

“Buffaloes!” He was amazed. His amazement grew. Three, six, nine, twenty, fifty, a hundred of these ponderous creatures landed upon the ice, then came plunging toward him. In a space of seconds, hundreds more joined them in wild stampede.

“They are mad with fear!” He was all but in a panic himself. “What am I to do? The plane will be wrecked. It will be laid up for weeks; the contest lost, everything lost!”

He broke off short. The thread of an old prairie-buffalo story had entered his mind.

“These are woods-buffaloes,” he told himself. “But buffaloes must be the same everywhere. I can but try.”

Gripping his bow, he stepped boldly out from his plane and walked like some young David to meet the onrushing throng. He was a full thirty yards from his plane, the foremost buffalo scarcely more than that from him, when with heart pounding painfully against his ribs, but with fingers that perfectly obeyed his

will, he paused to set a steel pointed arrow against his bowstring. Then he took one long breath before the test which must mean victory or defeat.

Somewhere in a book of frontier-day tales, he had read an account of the remarkable manner in which the Red Man, when in danger of being trampled to death by a thousand stampeding buffaloes, had saved his life. He was now prepared to put this practice to the test. It seemed a desperate measure—just how desperate he had not time to judge.

Gripping his bow that was capable of burying an arrow in the heart of any wild creature, he stood quite still until the foremost buffalo, a powerful beast with gleaming horns, was within ten paces of him. Then, quickly bending his bow, he let fly.

No effect. The buffalo came straight on. The thundering herd was behind him. Already the cloud of snow that rose before them was obscuring his vision. Still there was time for retreat to the plane. Once in the cabin, he would be safe from the murderous tramp of their axe-like hoofs. But the plane! It would be wrecked.

He did not retreat. Standing his ground, with incredible rapidity he fired a second arrow and a third.

The very breath of the foremost buffalo was upon his cheek when with a clatter and a thud it fell at his feet.

And now the real test of the Red Man’s ancient plan of action was at hand. No longer was there opportunity for retreat. The herd was upon him. Through the cloud of snow he saw it but dimly. The sound of clashing horns and cracking hoofs was deafening. Casting himself flat in the snow, directly back of the fallen monarch of the forest, he awaited the outcome.

Without knowing why, he began to count. Perhaps he was counting his own wild heartbeats. “One, two, three, four, five.” Would it work? “Six, seven, eight, nine, ten.” Would he be trampled by those hoofs? “Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen.” No time to think of that now.

He felt rather than saw, so dense was the cloud of fine snow, that the herd had divided, that the buffaloes were passing in two columns, one to the right, the other to the left of their fallen leader. They were following the manner of their kind as recorded in that story of other days.

“Thank—thank God!” he breathed.

His plane now was, he hoped, quite safe. It was headed toward the herd. Divided, they would pass to right and left of it. They would divide for a fallen comrade. Would they have done the same for an airplane? Who could tell?

Lying there alone while the onrushing herd whirled by, Curlie realized as never before what a joyous thing it was just to live, what a priceless possession the great Father had bestowed upon him when He breathed the breath of life into his lungs.

The sound of horns and hoofs was fading away. The last member of the herd had passed, or he thought it had.

Rising stiffly, he put out his hand for his bow. The snow was settling. At his feet lay a dark mass, the dead buffalo. At his back loomed a gray bulk, his plane, apparently unharmed.

His thoughts regarding the buffalo were sober ones. These buffaloes, he realized, now that there was time to think of it, were not in every sense of the word wild buffaloes. They ranged a wide preserve. They were watched over by buffalo rangers. They might not be killed except in a grave emergency. One who did kill a woods-buffalo was liable to a term in prison.

“But this,” he assured himself, “was a grave emergency.”

But what was this? Even as he stood there thinking there came the crack of hoofs once more. A lone buffalo was passing. A youngster, half-grown and almost spent, he limped painfully after his fast disappearing companions.

And after him came gray streaks in the failing light. Once more the boy’s bow sang. A gray form plunged to the snow and went rolling over and over. A second followed the first. He, too, had felt the sting of the boy’s arrow. And now they were gone, all gone. The tumult died to a murmur, then silently ceased to be.

“Wolves,” the boy grumbled, as he touched a gray form at his feet, “the scourge of the North, killers of all that is good, beautiful and useful among living things. I did what I could for that poor, limping young buffalo. Here’s hoping it was enough. If it was, it evens matters up.” He looked at the fallen buffalo.

“Too bad,” he murmured, “but there was no other way. That plane means more, a hundred times, to human kind than does a buffalo. It has saved human lives, by transporting them to hospitals. It will save others and, please God, I shall have a part.”

Having in this manner adjusted his thoughts and feelings regarding his immediate surroundings, he considered the future.

Prospects were not bright. “No gas,” he told himself. “It’s a march down the river in the dark for me.

“Oh, well. Munch a chocolate bar and some crackers. Hate to leave the old plane. Whew! How good the old feather robe would feel!” He stretched his weary muscles.

“Wolves down the river at night. But I’d fix ’em!” He patted his bow.

A brief inspection of his plane told him that all was well. “A fortunate escape. And now, eats.”

He took his time about his meal. The moon would be higher later in the night. Plenty of time anyway. No one would start back with him to bring a dog sled load of gasoline to his plane before dawn.

He was just pushing away the warm robe he had drawn over his knees when a curious sound reached his ears, a clank-clank like the moving of gears.

“How strange!” he exclaimed. “Up here close to the Arctic Circle. What a night! Will wonders never cease?”

A low dark bulk came gliding over the ice. The clank-clank grew louder.

“It’s a tractor!” he told himself, only half believing. “But here! Hundreds of miles beyond the end of steel! Who would believe it?” He was forced to believe, for, before he could realize it, the thing was upon him.

Suddenly the clatter and clank ceased. “Hello there!” came in a cheery voice. “What you camping here for? Resolution is just around the corner.

“Oh, it’s you, Curlie Carson?”

The newcomer had dismounted and approached on foot.

“And you, Doctor LeBeau!” came from the boy. “I’m surely glad to see you.

“But that thing—” he pointed at the tractor. “What do you do with that?”

“Many things, my boy. Very useful. Snake out logs. Launch boats. Plenty of work. Just now I am coming from moving an Indian family to their new home seven miles away. Cabin was twelve feet square. Just slid skids under it, hitched on and moved ’em, house, furniture, bag, baggage and babies. Not so bad!” He laughed a merry laugh.

“But answer me. What you doing here?”

“Out of gas.”

“Out of gas!” The doctor whistled. “Thought you were Old Man Preparedness himself.”

“So did I. But when your gas cache has been robbed? What then?”

“Robbed?”

Curlie told him the story of the outlaw plane and the missing gas.

“That’s bad!” exclaimed the doctor. “Have to put a stop to that! Dangerous people who would leave some poor aviator to starve hundred miles from anywhere. Go after him!”

“I will if there’s a chance.”

“But now? Want a tow to town?”

Curlie looked at the tiny tractor, the smallest made, then at his great airplane. He laughed. “Seems a bit odd. Guess you could do it, though.”

“Sure could. Safest way, too. Could give you my gas. Not safe flying at night, though.

“Tell you what!” The doctor’s tone was kindly. “You roll up in your feather robe there in the cabin. I’ll tow you in. You’ll wake up in Resolution. You look like

you needed sleep."

"I'm asleep standing up just now! But you?"

"I'm O.K. We sleep all hours up here. Besides, you fellows have done a lot for us; brought the world to our door, that's what you've done. Just as well do a little something for you."

So it happened that Curlie arrived at Fort Resolution during the wee small hours of the night. After sleeping straight through until morning, he was as ready as ever for that which a fresh day might bring.

That day passed uneventfully. The dawn of the second day found Curlie once more in the air. He was headed south.

All the glories of the great white wilderness lay beneath him. The glory of the perfect day, sky filled with drifting clouds, air with a tang all its own. But none of these things held the boy's attention.

His thoughts were divided between his immediate task, the piloting of his plane, and that which lay in the immediate past and the probable future.

At Resolution he had met Speed Samson, his rival. Great had been the other pilot's astonishment when told of Curlie's adventure with the "Gray Streak."

"So it's true after all!" Speed had exclaimed. "There *is* a plane running wild in this wilderness. The pilot's living off other men's food caches, like as not, and using others' gas."

"Yes," Curlie replied. "What are we going to do about it?"

"Wait for orders."

"Yes, I suppose so," the boy agreed slowly. By nature he was a person of action. "But suppose we come upon that 'Gray Streak' before orders reach us?"

"Pass 'em up. Let 'em go. That's me. My record, the record of my company, the mail contract's at stake.

"And," he added, meaning to be truly generous, "much as I want to win that

award for our company, I'd advise you to do the same."

"It would count in your favor if you drove such a menace from the air or brought them to justice," Curlie said thoughtfully.

"If! Pretty big IF, boy. And if you fail, you may be in the sticks somewhere with busted landing gear, out of the running. See?" Curlie did see. And for the time being this seemed good counsel. Long and sober thinking had left the matter unsettled in his mind.

One item that weighed heavily on the safety side was the fact that he carried in his plane that which was to prove of great value to his friend Johnny Thompson and all the world as well—pitchblende.

The venerable giant of a prospector, Sandy MacDonald, with whom Johnny Thompson worked, had prepared his samples sooner than Johnny had thought he might. He had sent those bits of rocks, that gave promise of producing mineral worth a million dollars an ounce, over to Resolution. They were now in the fuselage of Curlie's plane.

"Guard them well," had been the prospector's last word of admonition. "Those samples are pitchblende. From pitchblende comes radium. And radium has been a boon to mankind. Through its mysterious rays of light it has cured thousands of that most dreaded of diseases, cancer. If we can but discover a cheaper supply, we will be benefactors of the whole race. Take them to Edmonton. There's a laboratory there. If they are not equipped to analyze them, they'll send them on. In time you'll bring us the result. And may God speed your flight!"

"May God speed your flight." Curlie seemed to hear those words now and to feel the gentle touch of a powerful hand on his shoulder.

"This is important," he told himself. "I must not fail him. The pay is small. The reward may be very great. We—"

His hands gripped the wheel tightly. A great white cloud lay directly before him. Out of that cloud had come a plane. The air was clear, the plane not far distant. His eyes could not deceive him.

"Jerry!" he shouted to the mechanic at his side. (He had taken Jerry on at Resolution.) "Jerry, that's the 'Gray Streak'!"

“Absolutely!” Jerry straightened up in his place.

The young pilot’s mind became a battle field of conflicting emotions. Safety, sure reward, the good of his company, his own personal glory seemed to lie upon the side of his nature that whispered: “Keep straight on. Let them go their way.”

“And there is the pitchblende, the radium,” he said aloud.

At the same time he appeared to hear a voice say, “Times come in our lives when the good of scores, hundreds, perhaps thousands we have never seen, may never see, drives from our minds that which seems good for us and those best known to us. When that time comes we must act for the good of all.”

“Who said that?” he asked himself. He could not answer. Somewhere in the past it had been stowed away in the recesses of his mind. Now here it was. It was as if God had spoken.

“Jerry,” he shouted, “we’ve got to go after them! Follow them to the end. Find their hide-out. Bring them to justice!”

“Absolutely!” Jerry turned his face about to display a broad grin. “Absolutely, son!”

CHAPTER III
TRAILING THE GRAY STREAK

Still endeavoring to think through the things which Johnny Thompson had revealed to her, Joyce Mills rode home beneath the great, golden Arctic moon.

More than once she murmured: “One of them is a thief. But how could he be?”

Three weeks spent in the company of very few persons in the lonely land of the North reveals much. In three weeks, under such conditions, he is a sly person indeed who does not reveal his true nature. Joyce had believed that by this time she knew the young men of her camp as well as she did Johnny Thompson, Drew Lane, or any other person with whom she had been closely associated.

“How hard it is to judge people!” She sighed deeply. To discover that we have been deceived in a friend is always a shock.

“I cannot doubt Johnny’s word,” she assured herself. “And yet—”

She could form no real answer to the questions that came unbidden to her mind.

“I will watch,” she told herself, “watch and wait. ‘Be sure your sin will find you out.’ I read that somewhere and I believe it is true. If there is a thief in our camp he will steal again, perhaps many times. In the end, his sin will find him out.”

With these matters settled in her mind, she whistled sharply to her dogs and sent them spinning away with redoubled speed toward the three rude cabins that were a prospector’s camp and her present home.

Arrived there, she unharnessed her dogs and chained them to their places before their kennels; then she went in to prepare supper.

She was not the only cook in this outfit. They all took a hand. Supper fell to her lot. Since the days were still short everyone worked till dark, searching rocky ridges and river banks for elusive signs of wealth and then walking home over long miles after dark.

She was engaged in the mixing of baking powder biscuits when there came a sound of sudden commotion outside. Flinging open the door, she all but ran into Jim Baley, one of the three young prospectors in her outfit, who was just home from work. Jim, however, was not the cause of the commotion. The sounds of trouble came from the kennels. Dogs were howling and snarling. Mingled with this was a sinister snap-snap of jaws.

“Wolves! Timber wolves!” Jim exclaimed, seizing an axe. “Big as men, they are. Savage brutes. They’ll kill the dogs and eat ’em, like they was rats.”

He was about to leap away to the battle when the girl held him back.

“Jim, you’ll be killed!”

“I’ll not. Besides, what of it? You can’t let the defenseless be murdered. In a country like this dogs are your best friends. They’re chained. Can’t you see?”

Feeling the grip on his arm loosen, he sprang away into the dark.

Standing there erect, motionless, she tried to look away into the blackness of the night. At the same time a warm feeling crept in about the portals of her heart as she whispered to herself:

“It can’t be Jim! Oh, no! It can’t be Jim!” She was thinking of the thief, the one who had stolen those priceless films.

An instant later she, too, seized an axe and raced away to the defense of her four-footed friends.

* * * * * * * *

The mysterious gray plane which Curlie Carson, with characteristic promptness of decision, had resolved to follow, sailed straight away into the east.

Jerry, the one who sat beside him, was, Curlie thought, a strange fellow in many

ways. He was a mechanic, and a good one. Self educated, he thought all day long of bolts and nuts, pliers, wrenches, spark plugs, valves and all else that goes to make up an airplane motor. He was, apparently, quite fond of his youthful pilot. His answer to any suggested course of action was always the same, “Absolutely.”

“Will he stick in a pinch?” the boy asked himself. “If need be, will he fight?” He believed so.

It certainly seemed strange to be sailing away into a totally unknown land, following an airplane that carried a captive, and who could say what other manner of men?

“Are they kidnappers?” he asked himself, “escaped convicts, foreign exiles?” To these questions he could form no answer. One thing he did know; they were robbers. They stole that which in this barren land might mean life or death to many: gasoline.

A thought struck him. Instinctively he slowed his plane a bit. “What if they turn on me?”

What, indeed? They were flying over a barren land. The land beneath them rose in rounded ridges of solid rock. No landing there. Not a chance. True, here and there he made out an oval of dead white which he knew to be the frozen surface of the lake.

“Whose plane is the faster?” This he could not know.

“Keep plenty of distance between,” he told himself. “All I can do is locate their base. After that we can invite the red-coated Mounties to take a hand. They’ll bring the thing to an end quick enough. They say a Mountie always gets his man, and I guess it’s true.”

One fact comforted him. He had, but an hour before, taken on a good supply of gas. Because he was traveling light, he was able to carry it with ease. “They may be as well supplied as we are,” he told himself. “But the odds are against them. If I can force them to land, short of gas, where there is no supply of fuel, they are done. All I have to do is turn back for aid. We’ll mop ’em up. And the mystery will be solved, and this wild land will be free of a great menace.”

He had now thought the thing through—at least as far as his limited knowledge would carry him. The thunder of his motor grew monotonous. His mind turned to other things.

“Pitchblende. Radium!” he said aloud. “What a thing to dream of!” He was thinking of the samples entrusted to his care by Sandy MacDonald, of Johnny’s camp. “They say it gives off heat and light; that if you carry it in a tube in your pocket it will burn you, but not the pocket. How odd! One of nature’s unsolved mysteries,” he repeated. “I wonder why men spend so much time reading of gruesome murder mysteries when nature offers them a thousand unsolved riddles many times more interesting?”

Once more his attention was claimed by the outlaw plane. It had changed its course. Heading straight into the wind, it was sailing north.

“Storm ahead,” he told himself. “Sure to lose ’em unless—” There was just one chance. “Unless they run out of gas before we reach a snow cloud.

“One thing sure,” he told himself, “they’ll not lead me into a storm. Too dangerous. Safety first, that’s the order. Can’t find a landing in this desolate white world without the light to guide you.

“And yet—” His brow wrinkled. “Storms up here sometimes take on a terrific velocity. What if I run into one that is faster than my plane? No getting out then.

“Oh, well,” he philosophized, “it’s a chance you take when you agree to fly in the North, especially if you volunteer to chase an outlaw of the air.

“Outlaw of the air.” At once his mind was rife with speculation regarding this mystery ship.

“From time to time,” he told himself, “planes are stolen from their hangars just as autos are taken from garages. Not very common; but it happens. Suppose a super-criminal wishes to escape justice by fleeing from the United States? Suppose he can employ an aviator who is a thief, or even bribe him to carry him into this land of empty spaces? Who would know where to look for either the man or the plane?

“On the other hand, Russia is not far away, just across Alaska. Plenty of gas stations on the Yukon. It’s only a short quarter of an hour in a plane across

Bering Straits. Plenty of reasons why some bold Russian aviator might be hovering about up here. Might be a voluntary exile. Might have Russian treasure to sell, jewels, diamonds, rubies and all that from the old days. Might be preparing to spread propaganda against the so-called ‘capitalistic nations.’

“But then,” he chuckled to himself, “a person always thinks of the most improbable solution of a mystery first. Those fellows up ahead may be just some rich young fellows from Canada or the United States bumming around up here, having what they’d call ‘one whale of a time’ at the expense of the rest of us. There are plenty of fellows who’d do just that if opportunity offered.

“And if that’s the answer,” he set his lips tight, “here’s where I teach them a lesson. No matter how rich a fellow is, he’s bound to consider the rights of others; and any fellow who takes gas from another’s cache in a land like this is not worthy of any consideration.”

He put out a hand. His motor thundered a little louder.

Then a look of consternation overspread his face.

“Jerry!” he shouted. “We’re headed square into a monstrous storm!”

“Absolutely.”

“We’d better turn back.”

“Absolutely.”

“May be too late,” the young aviator told himself. “But one can only do one’s best.”

Having cut a wide circle, he looked back. The outlaw plane had vanished. It had flown squarely into a bank of the deepest clouds. They were the darkest gray Curlie had ever seen. And that bank was an Arctic gale at its worst.

“May be the end of ’em,” he grumbled. And for the life of him, he could not help feeling sorry.

“May be the end of us, too.” He took a good grip on himself. “I’ll do my level best! No one could do more.”

CHAPTER IV
PITCHBLENDE

The fight waged at Joyce Mills' camp with the gray shadows that were timber wolves was short and furious. A great gaunt giant of the forest, large as a man and quick as a tiger, who had been ready the instant before to engage in an uneven battle with Joyce's dog leader, Dannie, saw Jim Baley approaching on the run and turned to leap at him.

Jim was no child. Born and reared in the rough timber-grown hills of Kentucky, he was as slim and active as a blacksnake. For him an axe was not alone an axe. It was a weapon.

As the gray beast leaped for his throat, he gripped the axe handle, one hand at each end, and swung it high. It caught the wolf squarely under the chin. That same instant Jim's heavy boot shot forward in a vicious kick.

With a savage snarl the beast fell groveling in the snow. Before he could regain his feet he was dealt a blow on the head that left him quite out of the combat.

Seeing their leader lying motionless before them, the five wolves that remained turned to go slinking away.

"Cowards! Cowards!" Jim shouted. "A sorry lot, you are! Wouldn't even attack a dog unless he's chained. You—"

He turned to find Joyce at his side. In her hand she still gripped an axe.

"So you thought you'd take a hand?" he grinned. "Well, 'tain't necessary. They've left. Right smart glad I am to see your spunk. You'll need it in this land."

Bending down, he scooped a handful of snow to rub it across the back of his left hand. It came away red.

“You’re hurt!” Joyce’s words came quick.

“Nothing much. Take a heap more’n that to kill a tough timberjack like me. Scratched me with his claws, the ornery beast!”

“We’d better tend to it anyway.”

“All right.”

“Bounty on him,” Jim added, poking his foot at the dead wolf. “Twenty dollars or more. Right enough, too. Destroyer he is. Kills everything from pretty white ptarmigan to the lambs people try to raise further south.”

Back at the cook-shack Joyce bathed his wounded hand, applied iodine, then bound it up. And all the time she was thinking to herself, “It can’t be Jim. True courage and a feeling for others, even dumb animals, does not go with a dishonest heart.”

But if Jim had not stolen the films that had cost so much and might mean a fortune to some one, who had? Ah, well, there was time enough to think of that. Now she must finish preparing supper. The others would be in very soon.

* * * * * * * *

In the meantime there was cause for excitement in Johnny Thompson’s camp. Scarcely had Johnny arrived when Sandy MacDonald, a bearded giant of a prospector, came tramping in. Over his back he carried a load that would have broken the back of a slighter man.

“That,” he declared as he dropped the sack with a heavy sigh, “is more pitchblende. It looks better than the last.”

“Tell us more about this pitchblende,” Johnny begged.

“Pitchblende,” explained Sandy, as he dropped heavily into a chair, “is the ore from which we take uranium.

“And from uranium we get radium.”

Radium—Johnny knew in a general way what radium was. He knew little of its value.

“Radium,” Sandy reminded Johnny with a benevolent smile, “is at present worth about a million dollars an ounce.”

“How—how do you get it from that stuff?” Johnny pointed at the bag.

“It’s a slow process,” said the aged prospector a trifle wearily. “You crush the ore fine, then you leach it in acid. After two or three leachings you get a fair amount of uranium. Then you separate the radium from other elements. And if you’ve a ton of ore you’ll get, if you’re lucky, as much radium as you can tuck under your thumb nail.”

“That is,” he went on to explain, “if it’s ore as rich as has been found thus far. Of course mineralogists are always hoping to find richer deposits. And when some one does make the discovery, even if it’s on the North Pole, men will go after it. And the man that finds it will be rich beyond his wildest dreams; what’s more, he will be classed as one of the world’s greatest benefactors. What better could he ask?”

“What indeed?” murmured Scott Ramsey, his young partner.

“This stuff,” said Sandy, touching the sack with his moccasined foot, “must go where the other samples have gone, to Edmonton.”

“Be a week before the next mail plane goes south,” said Johnny.

“That just gives us time for a cup of coffee.” Sandy smiled a broad smile. “What do you say we have it now?”

They were an interesting group. Sandy, cumbersome, hearty, powerful even in his old age, ever a prospector, never very prosperous, he had wended his long way across the world always in a valley of golden dreams. Scott Ramsey, blonde-haired and still youthful, with an air of business about him, seemed to say with every move: “This is an adventure, but it must be more. It must be a financial success.” And so it must. He had led Sandy to invest his all, a tidy little cabin in Edmonton and a wee bank account, in this venture.

Johnny Thompson had been included in the party because of his familiarity with the North. He it was who selected and managed dog teams, built camps and purchased supplies. Joe Lee, the silent, soft-footed Chinaman, was the cook. Johnny was all else that goes toward making a prospector's camp a place that may be called "Home."

So, satisfied with their lot, glorying in the abundant health God had given them, dreaming golden dreams of the morrow, they sat down to their meal of pilot biscuits, caribou steak, potatoes, pie and coffee with the feeling that the world was theirs for the asking.

One question troubled Johnny a little: the affair of the afternoon, his talk with Joyce Mills. Should he tell his companions of it?

After due consideration, he decided to keep silent. "Who knows but we may have made our great strike?" he reasoned to himself. "Pitchblende, radium. Who knows? If we win, if they lose, nothing will come of it."

Then a thought struck him. This was to be a race for treasure. Who would win that race? Sandy and his group, or the others? Only time would tell.

"We must do our best." He spoke aloud without really meaning to.

"Yes indeed!" agreed Sandy heartily. "So we must, son. And so we will!"

* * * * * * * *

Strange to say, at this very moment Joyce Mills sat in the small cabin allotted to her father, dreaming dreams and thinking of the revelation that had come to her from Johnny's lips on that very afternoon.

"One of them is a thief," she repeated to herself. "It does not seem possible!" And indeed it did not. Never in all her life had she come upon young men so frank, so kind and so generous, so whole-heartedly serious about their work, and yet so joyous, as the three who at that moment were sending out from the other cabin, to the accompaniment of Jim's banjo, the hilarious notes of an old backwoods song.

"It can't be, yet it must be," she told herself.

Then her brow clouded. If they should find gold; if those others came to file claims, as they undoubtedly would do, there would be trouble.

“A fight. A terrible fight,” she said aloud.

And yet, how were those others to know when a strike was made? If necessity required, would she tell them? To this question she could form no answer.

“Moccasin Telegraph,” she murmured. “Those were the very words Johnny used. I wonder what he meant?”

Having thought this thing through as far as her mind would carry her, she allowed mental pictures of her father’s three young partners to drift before her mind’s eye. Jim, tall and slim, with a Kentucky mountaineer’s drooping shoulders and drawling voice; Clyde, big and strong, a little loud, full of fun and ready for the best or the worst of any adventure; and Lloyd, a Canadian, quiet, soft-spoken, apparently very well educated. These were the three.

“And one is—

“No, I won’t say it!” she told herself stoutly. “It may not be true. And if it’s not, I must prove it.”

Having put this subject to rest, she allowed her mind to drift back over the days that had just passed.

She had come all the way from Edmonton, eight hundred miles, in an airplane, her first journey through the air. What a thrilling experience that had been!

As she sat there listening to the roar of the fire, its roar became the thunder of their motor as they went racing across the landing field at Edmonton.

The snow had been soft and sticky that day. It clung to the airplane’s eight-foot skis. Three times they crossed that broad expanse of whiteness. Then came a redoubled roar from the motor, and some one said:

“Up!”

To her surprise, she found that passing through the air was not different from skiing across the snow. Seated beside her father, with his three young partners

reposing on a pile of canvas bags before them, she had watched through the narrow window while the houses grew small and then began to pass from sight.

They appeared to be moving very slowly, yet reason told her they were doing better than a hundred miles an hour. The city vanished, and broad stretches of farm land lay beneath them.

“It’s not exciting at all!” she shouted in her father’s ear. “Just like riding in a bobsled.”

Yet this was not entirely true. She did experience a thrill as they passed from the land of broad farms to the world of great silent forests where a lonely river wound its white and silent way.

“We are pioneers!” she whispered to herself. “Adventurers entering an unknown land!” And so they were. When at last they landed on the white surface of Great Slave Lake, they found themselves a full hundred miles from the nearest settlement. And beyond them, hundreds of miles to the north, the east, the south, was a great, white, empty wilderness. Here there was no one.

“What a store of wealth must be hidden yonder!” her father had exclaimed. “There are lakes no eyes have seen. Magnificent waterfalls tumble over rocks that may be loaded with silver, copper and platinum. Those waters may fall on sands of yellow gold. Yet no one has heard the rush of that water. No eyes have been gladdened by the gleam of the rainbow in its spray.”

He had been jubilant, happy as a boy. And Joyce had been happy with him.

Yet, even now as she thought of it, her brow wrinkled. All this was very well. They were comfortably housed and well fed in a land of real enchantment. Yet all this must have an end. The three young men were financing it. There was a limit to their resources. Her father, the expert mineralogist of the group, was to receive his pay from the profits of the enterprise. When the strike was made they were to share alike, an even quarter to each man. “But if there is no strike!” She shuddered. “We must win!” she told herself, rising and walking the floor. “We must!”

Strangely enough, at that moment in his far off camp Johnny Thompson, her trusted pal of other days, was declaring stoutly:

“We will win!”

Would they? And if not both, which party would win?

CHAPTER V
RACING THE STORM

While Johnny Thompson with his friends in one camp and Joyce Mills with her companions in another were seated comfortably about their fires listening to the singing of the wind that foretold an approaching storm, Curlie Carson, who had at one time played so important a part in their lives and might, for all they knew, yet play a stellar role in the drama of the North into which their lives had been cast, was passing through one of the unique experiences of his not uneventful life.

Having watched the gray outlaw plane lose itself in the solid bank of clouds that was a storm bearing down upon the land of eternal ice, he had, as we have seen, chosen the safer part and, turning, had raced away.

He had chosen what appeared to be the safest way. In this he was influenced by the recollection that he bore in the fusilage of his plane the samples of pitchblende that might mean a bright future for his old pal Johnny and his companions. But was the way he had chosen really a safe one? He was soon enough to know.

Even as he turned, the vast gliding monster that was a storm appeared to reach out a shrouded arm to grasp him, as if enraged by the sight of a victim escaping from its grasp.

Snow-fog gathered about him. Particles of sleet rattled like bird-shot against his fusilage.

Setting his teeth hard, he tilted the plane upward; but all in vain. The shrouded arm followed.

Abandoning these tactics, he righted his plane to shoot straight away toward the south. A hundred, a hundred and twenty-five, a hundred and forty miles an hour he sped on. But the storm rode on his tail. It set his struts singing. It fogged the glass before him. It set up a chill that no insulation could keep out, no heat from the exhaust dispel.

“I’ll beat it!” he told himself grimly. “I must! It will last for hours. No one could land safely in such a storm. And one may not stay up forever.”

Strangely enough, even in such a time of stress his mind went on little holidays, moments long, to wonder about many things. The “Gray Streak”? What could have happened to her? Had she gone right on through the storm and, coming out into the uncertain light of waning day, had she landed safely on the frozen surface of some lake or had she cracked up? If she had cracked up, would the wreck be discovered? If it were, what would it reveal? Once more he thought of master criminals, of Russian exiles and sporting young highbloods; but he found no answer.

At other times he thought of Johnny Thompson and his problems. Johnny had told him of the stolen films that might mean so much to the mineral hunting world. What would come of all this? Would the thief be discovered? Would the swift and sure punishment that belongs to this northland be meted out to him? Would the rival camps come together at last? And would there follow a bloody combat? For the sake of Joyce Mills and her heroic father, he hoped not.

So, with his mind one moment filled with the strain of battle, the next relieved by restful speculation, he raced the storm.

The brief Arctic day came to its close. He tried to imagine his friends seated by their fire, but succeeded only in bringing to his own consciousness a desire for warmth and food.

“Better the storm than that,” he told himself. At once his mind was filled with grim pictures of the gray specter that now followed him into the night. It was a monster spider weaving a web as great as the universe itself and at the same time reaching out one hairy leg to seize him. It was an octopus in a fathomless sea extending a tentacle to grasp him.

“It will end,” he told himself. “All storms have an ending.”

This, he knew to be a half truth. Arctic gales blow days and nights through. He could not last. His supply of gas must become exhausted. And then? Grim rocks of the “Barrens” awaited them.

“Why did we follow them?” he thought.

Then, for the first time in all this storm he thought of Jerry. He turned to speak to him. To his great surprise he found him fast asleep.

Fear seized him. Jerry might not be sleeping. The cold might have overcome him. He prodded him vigorously. Jerry opened one eye.

“Jerry!” he shouted. “We’re in one whale of a storm!”

“Absolutely.” Jerry closed the eye and once more lay back in his corner.

“Well,” Curlie thought, “there’s courage for you, and confidence aplenty. If he believes I can bring him through safely, I can!”

From that time on he felt fresh confidence. How else could he feel about it when Jerry, a veteran of the flying corps of the North, could sleep through it all?

“And yet we are in the air. The storm is still with us. I must not grow over-confident,” he told himself grimly.

One more resolve came to him in this hour of stress. “If that gray phantom of the air outrides the storm, and if it is my lot to sight her once more I shall give chase just as I did this day.”

At that he thought of the small square of white cloth with the name D’Arcy Arden etched in one corner.

“Who can that person be? And why a captive?”

But again the storm claimed his attention. It had now taken the form of a gray ghost of the night. Slowly, but surely, it was wrapping its mantle about him.

“Nothing to do but fly into the south,” he told himself as grim determination took possession of his soul.

This, he found soon enough, was to prove a difficult task. The glass before him clouded. The gray ghost's mantle was hiding him from earth and sky. His going grew heavy. Sleet was piling, fold over fold, upon his plane.

"It won't be long now," he thought to himself with a groan.

Then, with a suddenness that was startling, the gray ghost's mantle slipped away, leaving before him a gorgeous moon riding high over an earth that seemed to sleep.

"Peace!" he said. "This is a place of peace." Then realizing how strange that remark would seem to one who heard it, he laughed aloud.

To one who first flies over the Arctic wastes of the far Northwest, the landscape seems as unmarked as the sweeping blue of a landless sea. No cities, no villages, no roads, no railways, no farmhouses, not so much as a cabin is there to guide him in his skyway wanderings. As time passes, as he flies the same route again and again, that which lies beneath him becomes familiar. There is the river. Here it forms as an S. There it winds like a serpent. Here it is thickly bordered by trees, there lined only by low-growing willows. There are the lakes. Here four of them form the eyes, nose and mouth of a human face. Here a single large lake with a broad river entering at a narrow end resembles an elephant with a prodigiously long trunk. A hundred forms two thousand feet below mark the lone birdman's way until at last he knows his route as the plowman knows his homeward road, the seaman his shore or the Red Man his trail.

It was even so with Curlie. He had not traveled the northern route long, but certain spots had become well marked by his keen eye.

"Jerry!" he shouted aloud. "Jerry! We have won!"

"Absolutely," Jerry agreed sleepily.

"Sure we have! Look! We have outridden the storm. And see! There are the circles of willows that border Lake Athabaska. And away over yonder is a feeble light. That's at Fort Chipewyan. Be there in twenty minutes!"

"Absolutely." Jerry straightened up in his place.

"Pork chops at the Chink's, Jerry," the boy went on. "Pork chops with fried

potatoes and coffee and half an apple pie. What say?”

“Absolutely, son. Absolutely.”

“And after that, old sleepy head, you’ll work three hours on the motors.”

“Absolutely, son! Make it four! Can’t be too sure about the blasted motor. You really can’t.”

As the skis bumped, and then bumped again on the icy surface that was the landing field at Fort Chipewyan, Curlie’s eyes strayed toward the golden moon as a voice seemed to whisper: “Somewhere beyond the sky there is a power that guides and guards our ways.”

All of which has nothing whatever to do with the manner in which he and Jerry stowed away the Chinaman’s pork chops and fried potatoes while Sam Kusik, the Russian Jew trader, and Tommy Wooden, the postmaster of this far-flung outpost, plied them with questions regarding the radium strike that had been reported, and the gray outlaw plane that had stirred wild rumors in many quarters.

“We saw the plane.” Curlie laughed at their surprise and awe. “We chased it into a storm. Did it crack up? Who knows? I doubt it. No such luck. An honest man meets misfortune many times; a rogue but once, and that when his time comes. Their time will come. And we’ll do what we can to hasten it. What say, Jerry?”

“Absolutely.” Jerry gulped down a draught of hot coffee. “Absolutely, son. Absolutely.”

CHAPTER VI
A SHOT IN THE NIGHT

The storm, which had so successfully defeated Curlie Carson in his effort to follow the outlaw of the air, was but a narrow finger reaching out from the vast, wind-blown ice pack that is the Arctic Sea. It did not extend as far to the west as the spot on Great Slave Lake on which the cabin occupied by Joyce Mills and her father was located. So it happened that even while Curlie raced the storm for his very life, Joyce sat comfortably by the great barrel of a stove that radiated heat aplenty and dreamed of other days when she, with her friends, Johnny Thompson and Curlie Carson and the young detective, Drew Lane, were engaged in deeds of adventure.

“I only wish Drew were here now!” she sighed. “He would help me solve this mystery of the stolen films.”

That the films were to prove of inestimable value in the task of hunting out rich mineral-bearing ore, she did not for a moment doubt. Only that evening as he sat poring over the pictures of some rocks laid bare by wind and rain, her father had told her with the greatest enthusiasm that he had on that very day successfully located the spot marked on the pictures and that it gave every promise of being a lead to rich ore-bearing rock.

“Only think!” he had exclaimed. “When I was a young man, when we went over the Yukon Trail, we carried all we would need for two years, on our backs and on sleds. And no dogs, mind you! Not a dog!

“And when we arrived in the North all that vast, uncharted wilderness was before us. We had not a single lead. Little wonder that we returned after two years of terrible privation, empty-handed and heavy-hearted.

“And now look!” He patted the pictures lovingly. “The airplanes give us these. We have only to study them and follow their indications.

“Not alone that, but the airplane carries us a thousand miles far above impassable trails and leaves us with picks, shovels, and food in abundance to work out our own salvation. Is it not all very wonderful?”

Ah, yes, it was wonderful. Yet this conscientious girl, as she sat by the fire thinking things through, was distinctly unhappy.

“If only we had come into possession of the pictures in an honorable manner!” she thought, with a sigh.

“Why don’t I confide in one of father’s partners?” she asked herself. “But which one?”

That indeed was the question. Going at it in blind fashion, as she must, she would with the usual bad luck of such a venture, ask advice of the very one who had stolen the films.

“And he would only lead me away on a false scent,” she told herself. “No, no! I shall say nothing. Watchful waiting, that’s the thing.” With that she sprang to her feet. She felt in need of a touch of the cold night air. Its tingle sent her blood racing. Beneath the stars she could think clearly.

She had ever been a person of action, had this slim, dark-haired girl. In college it had been basketball, tennis and hockey. Here she was limited to following-the dog team and taking long walks by herself. Drawing on her parka and seizing a stout stick, she marched away into the moonlight.

“How still it is!” she said to herself. “And how wonderful! The moon and the stars seem near. God seems near. It is good to be alone with Him.”

So, sometimes communing with herself and sometimes with the stars, she wandered farther than she intended.

She had rounded a clump of spruce trees when suddenly the silence was broken by a terrific snort, and a great dark bulk came charging down upon her from the hill above.

Now her gymnasium training, together with the cool nerve inherited from her father, stood her in good stead. Leaping to a tree, she seized the lowest branch and swung herself up.

Not a second too soon. The irate monster passed directly beneath her.

As he passed, she fancied she smelled fire, shot from his nostrils. “What creature in these wilds could be like that?” she asked herself. “He’s not a bear, nor a moose. He’s too large for any other creature.”

Here, surely, was a conundrum. It was not long in solving. As the creature turned about for one more vain charge she saw him clearly in the moonlight.

“A buffalo!” she exclaimed. “A buffalo in this frozen land! How—how impossible!” That he was indeed a buffalo and a very real one, the beast proceeded to demonstrate by pawing and bellowing beneath her tree.

“He’ll keep me here all night. I’ll freeze!” she thought, half in despair. “This morning it was forty below, and to-night it is just as cold.”

At last, taking a stronger grip on her nerves, she climbed a little higher, selected a stout branch and settled down upon it to think things through.

She was, she knew, more than a mile from camp. No amount of calling would bring aid. In time her father would miss her and there would be a search. But in the North people remain up at all hours. Her friends might not think of retiring for three hours. Her time was her own. They would not think it strange that she was not there.

“In the meantime I shall freeze,” she told herself. In spite of her best efforts at self-control, a touch of the tragic crept into her voice. Already her feet, clad only in wool stockings and moose-hide moccasins, were beginning to feel uncomfortable.

“Stop feeling after a while.” She shuddered. “Then they will be frozen.

“Moccasin Telegraph,” she murmured. “If Johnny had told me his secret perhaps I could now flash a message to our camp.”

In the meantime the buffalo, having ceased roaring and pawing, had settled

down to what promised to be a long wait. With head hanging low, he appeared to fall fast asleep.

“Shamming,” she whispered.

But was he? Everyone knows that four-footed creatures often sleep standing up.

Joyce was not a person of great patience. She was all for action.

“I won’t freeze!” she declared stoutly. “I’ll jump down and try to out-dodge him. I’ll take to the trees.”

Having resolved on this, she studied possible landing spots. In the end she chose, one might think, the most perilous of all.

“I’ll climb up a little higher, and then I’ll drop square on his back. He’ll be so startled he’ll run away.”

No sooner resolved than done. From a perch ten feet above, she suddenly descended upon the buffalo’s back.

The result exceeded her expectations. The great beast lurched forward, it seemed, the very second she landed. She was pitched backward and landed full length in the snow.

Her landing place was soft, a bank of snow blown in among the branches of a fallen tree. She was not injured. The breath had been knocked from her; that was all. And this was fortunate. It gave her time to think.

Having thought, she lay quite still. She was, she believed, quite covered with snow. The buffalo, who was snorting and bellowing in an alarming fashion, would find her only by stepping on her.

“The branches will keep him back. I am safe.” She whispered, scarcely daring to breathe.

A moment passed; another and another. Still the snorting and roaring continued.

Then a curious thing happened. A rifle shot rang out in the night. The buffalo went crashing away through the bush. Then followed a silence.

“A rifle,” she whispered to herself. “There is no rifle in our camp.”

She was delivered from one peril, only to be threatened by another. She was far from camp, and there were strangers about.

Five minutes more she lay there. Then, feeling the drowsy sleep of the North coming upon her, she cast aside the snow, to leap to her feet and go speeding away toward the camp.

Ten minutes later she burst into camp, exclaiming:

“A buffalo treed me! I jumped on his back. A stranger shot at him.”

Such a speech called for an explanation. It was given over a hot cup of chocolate.

“Oh, yes, there are buffaloes up here,” Jim drawled in the middle of the talk. “Right smart of ’em. Woods-buffaloes, they are. There’s a preserve down south of here. Feller at Fort Chipewyan told me about ’em. He was what they call a buffalo ranger. They’re protected, these buffaloes. You can’t shoot ’em. Probably this one was a cranky old boy who couldn’t stand his relatives.”

“He couldn’t stand me, either,” Joyce laughed. “Here’s hoping I never see him again.”

Vain hope!

“But the man? The rifle?”

“Probably some Indian,” replied her father. “We’ll look into that in the morning.”

They did not. A short, fierce wind-storm that night blotted out all evidence of the girl’s adventure.

CHAPTER VII
THE WINGED MESSENGER

Curlie and Jerry were away with the dawn. As they rose from the glistening white of the landing field to the transparent blue of the sky, Curlie's heart sang with joy. It was great, this rising aloft to greet the sun. With a safe landing place, the frozen river, ever beneath him, with a dependable mechanic beside him and the long, long lane of air before him, who could ask for more? Once Curlie did wrinkle his brow. He was thinking of the mysterious gray ship he had followed into the storm.

"If that keeps up," he told himself, "the sky will no more be safe. It will be full of lurking dangers as was the Spanish Main when pirates and buccaneers lurked in every cove."

With all his thinking he could not solve the mystery of the nameless and numberless plane. Instead, from out the air there leaped a fresh mystery. A simple thing in the beginning it was too—only a bird in flight.

Birds are common enough in the Arctic. Even in mid-winter ravens croak from the tree-tops, pelicans stand upon icy rocks watching for fish and screaming jays cut a path of blue across the wintry sky.

But this bird was neither raven, pelican nor jay. Curlie knew that at a glance. Having long watched the flight of birds, he could distinguish the darting course of one, the soaring flight of another and the steady flap-flap of a third. This bird, he knew at a glance, was a pigeon.

"A pigeon in such a place!" He fairly gasped with astonishment.

Then a thought struck him squarely between the eyes. "It's a carrier-pigeon!

Here may be a clue. I'll follow him."

Fortunately the course taken by the bird was almost the same as that he must follow to reach his next stopping place, Fort McMurray, the headquarters of steel. At this place he would unload his cargo of furs and mineral samples entrusted to his care, then wire for further orders.

"Who would turn a pigeon loose in this bleak land?" he asked himself. "Only some one in desperate circumstances or a man without a heart." At once he thought of the mysterious one who piloted the strange gray plane.

"He's heartless enough," he assured himself. "Holding some one, a woman or a boy, captive! He'd do anything. There'll be a message tied to the bird's foot. I'm sure of that. All I have to do is follow him to his destination. Might bump right into the man's confederates. Then the mystery would be solved at once."

But what was the bird's destination? How was Curlie to know that? "It may be Edmonton; probably is," he told himself hopelessly. "I can't follow him there, not just now. Already I am hours behind my schedule. Little more and I'll be joining the ranks of the unemployed."

Even as he said this, as if to make an end to this dilemma, the pigeon wavered in his flight, sank earthward, and began to circle.

"Going to alight," Curlie shouted to Jerry.

"Absolutely."

"I'm going to land with him. There's a cabin down there by the river. Seen it many times. Who lives there?"

"Don't know."

"May be a partner to that man of the 'Gray Streak.'"

"Absolutely."

"We'll see about it."

"Absolutely, son. Absolutely."

Graceful as the bird itself, the plane sank lower and lower, went bump, bump, bump three times, and glided away on an unmarked field of glistening snow.

Ten minutes after this landing they were approaching the cabin. The carrier pigeon was nowhere to be seen.

Had it not been for three dogs skulking at the back of the cabin, and a few fresh moccasin tracks in the snow before the door, the place would have seemed deserted.

“Strange the fellow don’t come out to meet us,” Curlie grumbled, as no one appeared to greet them.

It *was* strange. In the North the airplane has come to be what coastwise steamers are to fishing villages along a rockbound coast, or the slow-going local passenger train is to mountain towns. It brings the mail, reports news of the outside world, and delivers such necessities as the land itself does not supply. At the first sound of drumming motors the cabin dwellers flock forth to greet their soaring friend.

Not so, here. The place was as still as it might have been had its last occupant passed away.

Curlie knocked loudly on the door. No response. He knocked again, more loudly.

“Asleep or drunk,” he muttered. He gave the door a lusty kick. It flew open. At the same instant a short, scrawny, red-faced man sprang from a bunk in the corner.

“Sorry,” apologized Curlie. “A pigeon soared down here. Seen it?”

“And if I have?” The man’s tone was defiant.

“We want to see it.”

“Your pigeon, I suppose? Flyin’ ’ere in this ’ere blasted frozen wilderness.” The man took a step backward toward the corner. A heavy rifle rested there.

Jerry might be slow at times. Not always.

“As you are!” he commanded. At the same time his hand dropped to his hip.

A queer, cowed look came over the cabin-dweller’s face.

“Oh, all right. ’Ave your own way!” he grumbled. “W’at d’ y’ want?”

“The pigeon.”

The man’s face worked strangely. He was like a man about to go into a convulsion. Reading these signs of distress, Curlie spoke more gently.

“We think he carried a message. We—”

“You think!” the little man broke in. “I know. He does! An’ ’at message you’ll ’ave, an’ welcome! But not ’im!”

“All right. The message,” agreed Curlie.

The little man disappeared into a narrow room at the back, only to reappear with a small billet enclosed in thin oil-cloth.

“There, y’ ’ave it!” He seemed greatly relieved. “There’s the message!”

With trembling fingers, Curlie unrolled the bit of cloth. He spread the message on the table and dropped into a chair before it.

For a long time he sat staring at it; yet it would not have required a mind-reader to tell that he made nothing of it. And indeed, how could he? The message, more than a hundred words long, was so written that not one word made any manner of sense with any other that preceded or followed it.

“That,” he said to Jerry, “is worse than a cross-word puzzle.

“The worst of it is,” he added after a moment’s contemplation, “we don’t know who sent it, nor whether we have the least right to interfere with it.

“You see,” he explained, “there are Government posts right up to the shore of the Arctic. The heads of the posts may be trying pigeons as messengers. Then, too, some lone trapper may have carried that bird a thousand miles into the wilderness with the intention of using him in case of distress. This may be a

distress message."

"Written in code?" Jerry lifted his eyebrows.

"Don't seem probable. But the Government message would be in code.

"I think," Curlie added after further thought, "that we'll make a copy of it and send the bird on his way."

"How do you know you will?" The cabin-dweller was again on his feet. There was a dangerous glint in his eye.

Curlie tried in vain to read the meaning in his expression. Was he, after all, a confederate of those outlaws who had taken to riding the sky in a plane fueled at another's expense?

"I believe you are in with them!" he exclaimed angrily.

"What d' y' mean, in with 'em?" the little man demanded hotly.

"The 'Gray Streak,' outlaw of the air."

Instantly the look on the man's face changed. "Before Gawd, I know less 'n you about this 'ere ghost of the air!"

"Then," said Curlie, as his face cleared, "here is the message. It's up to you. The bird came to your cabin, not to ours."

He handed over the carefully wrapped billet, arose and led the way out of the cabin. He then climbed into the plane with Jerry following, turned his motor over, set it throbbing, and flew away.

If Jerry marveled at all this, he ventured not one question.

CHAPTER VIII
WHITE FOXES

One feature of the North fascinated Joyce Mills more than any other—the dog teams. Her outfit had engaged two of these teams at Fort Resolution. Wonderful dogs they were, too. Long, rangy, muscular fellows, they stood to her waist. And how they could travel!

“All right, boys! Mush!” she would cry. And away they would fly.

On days when one of these teams was not in use, she would go for a long drive into the great unknown. It made little difference what direction she took, for all this world about her was new.

Often, because the dogs traveled best when following a scent, she allowed them to choose their own course. Invariably they took up some trail. At times it was only the tracks of a man on skis or snowshoes, at others it was the mark of some dog sled. Whatever it might be, though the trail was windblown and three days old, they followed it with unerring steps.

On the day when Curlie Carson took up the flight of the pigeon, she started on one of these dog team jaunts. Once more she allowed the team to take its course. This day the leader chose the tracks of a man on snowshoes.

“One of our men,” she told herself. “Be just time to come up with him before sunset. He’ll enjoy a ride home.”

As we have said, Joyce was no weakling. While training her mind, she had developed her body as well. This day she rode only a part of the way.

Trotting after a dog team rouses the drowsy blood and sends it coursing through

the veins. It stimulates thoughts. This girl's thoughts on that day were long, long thoughts. At times she dreamed of gold, placer gold, great moose-hide sacks bulging with nuggets. She knew that Lloyd, the young Canadian of their outfit, had studied the aerial photographs that were taken a hundred miles from the camp, and then had gone into a brown study.

"Looks like quartz, gold, up there," she had heard him murmur. "Why not placer gold in the streams farther down?" He had disappeared on a strange mission early next morning. When he returned late that evening, if he had anything to report he had made no mention of it. A strange, silent fellow, this Canadian.

"Gold," she said aloud. "Gold. What will it not buy? Comfort; ease; education; a home. Some even believe it will buy friends. But not true friends, I am sure of that."

Gold! Would they find it? And if they did, what then? A frown gathered like a storm cloud on her brow. She had thought again of Johnny's strange revelation. "One of your men is a thief," she seemed to hear him say.

"I'll find the thief!" she told herself with renewed determination.

"But if we make a rich strike before I find him?" She shuddered at thought of the terrible possibilities involved.

Then, shaking herself free from all these brooding thoughts, she shouted: "*Ye! Ye! Ye!*" to send her dogs spinning away at a reckless speed.

Since the land here was rocky and uneven, this resulted in a spill. Coming to the top of a ridge, the dogs rushed pell mell down the other side and landed all in a heap in a bunch of willows at the bottom.

Joyce was recovering from this spill and her dogs were sitting about her grinning when upon looking up she beheld, not ten paces away, the man she had been following.

She caught her breath in surprise. He was not Jim, nor Clyde, nor Lloyd. Nor was it her father. It was a man she had never seen before.

"Where did you come from?" she wanted to ask, but did not. It gave her a shock to know that she had taken up this man's trail not half a mile from her cabin and,

having followed him for miles, was now alone with him in the great white world.

He was strange, too, and had, she thought, an evil face. “But I must not judge too soon,” she told herself.

The man was short with broad shoulders. He had a dark face that might be French, Indian or half-breed.

“Hello!” he said rather gruffly. “You follow? What want?”

She looked at him, nonplussed. What indeed did she want? Nothing.

She told him so. Plainly he did not believe her.

“My name,” he said stolidly, “Pierre Andres. Trapper, me.” He jingled a bundle of traps hanging from his arm. “You want white fox skin? All right. I geeve heem you.”

“No! No!” she persisted stoutly. “I want nothing. I am looking for some one.”

“Some one look for gold.” He placed a hand above his eyes. “Allee time look. No find. Eh?” He tried to smile, and his face became uglier than before. “Oh, you find. Bye and bye. Not know mine.” He chuckled deep down in his throat.

“See! Look!” he exclaimed suddenly. He made a motion as if to drop on all fours. “Buffalo.” He sent out a curious snort. “You!” He made a face. “’Fraid, you. Up tree. Then, boom! Buffalo gone! Is it not so?

“And now I gotta say good-bye.”

“Good—good-bye.” The words stuck in her throat. Speaking to her dogs, she sent them spinning back over the trail.

Her mind was in a whirl. Who was this man? What had he been doing about their camp? Had he been near when she was treed by the buffalo? Had he fired that shot?

She thought, of his traps. “Hope he hasn’t set any near our cabin.”

Only the night before, while out for a stroll in the moonlight, she had made a

delightful discovery. Three beautiful white foxes had their home beneath the cliff back of their cabin. She had surprised them at their play. She did not want one of their skins for a decoration.

But now, while she was wondering whether this man had any connection with Johnny's half-mythical Moccasin Telegraph, her dogs suddenly took a turn to the right, speeding away on a fresh trail.

Seeing that this trail, cutting her old one at an acute angle, led toward camp and hoping once more that it might lead her to one of her party, she allowed the dogs to pick their own way.

This time she was not disappointed. They had not gone half a mile before she sighted, standing out dark against the sky, a lone figure at the crest of a ridge.

"It's Lloyd Hill," she told herself with a thrill of joy. She had recognized him on the instant. His was a military bearing not often found in the North. At this moment he stood rigidly erect, looking away toward the west as a commanding general might while surveying some vast smoking battlefield.

She was obliged to cross a narrow valley to reach him. This gave her time for reflection. Lloyd Hill was not like the other men of her camp. He was more reserved. He was, as her father expressed it, "a good listener." He talked little. When he did speak his English was perfect. Jim spoke with the mellow drawl of the southern mountains; Clyde with the breezy tongue of the west. Lloyd impressed her as coming from a fine family; yet he never spoke of his family. A silent, rather slender, dark-eyed fellow, he was ever alert, yet never in a hurry.

"Always seems to be all there," her father had said. "But how tense he is. If you fired off a gun when he wasn't looking, he'd jump three feet from the ground!" This was more true than he knew, and for good reasons.

With these thoughts passing through her mind and with one half-asked question lurking back of all, "Who stole those films for the pictures we are using?" she crossed the intervening space to climb the ridge.

All this time, though she was sure he knew she was coming, he did not so much as turn his head. Only when she had reached his side did he speak. With one arm outstretched he said:

“Do you see that?”

“See what?” She turned a puzzled face up to his. “I see the frozen bed of a stream. There are rapids and a waterfall over there, too swift to freeze. And I think I see a pelican waiting for a fish.”

“But off to the right?”

“Hills, rocks, snow.”

“Ah, yes. But once that stream flowed there. If you look closely you will see that the narrow banks of a rapid stream are still suggested there. Yes, that’s where it ran.”

“What changed its course?”

He shrugged. “Jam of logs and drifting ice in the spring, perhaps. Anyway, it happened. See this.”

He dropped something in her hand. It was a fine yellow crescent.

“That,” he said with a sudden intake of breath, “is gold. Free gold, they call it. Found it many miles up from here in the rocks. Gold up there. But not enough for quartz mining. Too far from everywhere.

“But that,” he pointed again to the ancient bed of the stream, “looks promising. There are rapids and falls in it, just as there are in this new channel. And at the foot of the falls there may be golden sands, worn away from the rocks and carried down there.”

He broke off abruptly. “Jump in! Let’s get back to camp.”

On the return journey she insisted upon his riding part of the way. Scarcely a word was said during all that long twilight ride. She liked him all the better for this.

“I wonder if there really could be gold?” she thought to herself. “Much gold. Anyway, the ground is frozen. How could he prospect there now?”

As if reading her thoughts, he said:

“There’s a steam-thawer over at Fort Resolution. The doctor’s got a tractor. We could haul it over and thaw that ground out in a hurry.”

To the girl’s great surprise, during the evening he said nothing to his partners about this recent discovery. “I wonder why?” she said to herself. “Well, since he does not speak of it, neither shall I.”

“Punch Dickinson will be dropping down here with the plane to-morrow morning,” Clyde Hawke said. “I asked him to come when I saw him last.”

“That’s right!” Lloyd Hill leaped from his chair. “Just in time. I’ll ride over with him.” All eyes were turned on him for an explanation.

“Found some encouraging dirt back in the hills,” he said simply. “Need a thawer. One there. I’ll bring it over.”

If they expected more details they did not get them.

“Since you’re going,” Newton Mills said after a moment, as he dragged a bag from a corner, “you might take this along and see what you can do about getting it down to Edmonton for an analysis.”

“What is it?” Jim asked.

“Pitchblende.”

“Pitchblende, radio-active rock. Last price quoted on radium was a million dollars an ounce,” Jim drawled. “Be great if we’d discover a pound or two laying around loose up here somewhere!”

“Wouldn’t it!” laughed Clyde.

Though she understood little of this talk and was unable to tell what was said in jest and what in earnest, Joyce was thrilled by this new discovery.

“It will go to Edmonton,” she told herself. “Be some time before we can get the report, know the truth. In the meantime we may dream, and half the joy of life comes from dreaming.”

Before retiring she slipped on her faun-skin parka and stole out into the crisp air

of night. She climbed the ridge that lay between their camp and the rocky cliff. Then she turned to look back.

She caught her breath. How wonderful it was! The moon, a ball of pale gold, hung high overhead. The whole empty white world, clean as fresh laundered linen, lay before her.

But she had not come for this. Creeping farther up the ridge where some scrub spruce trees grew, she moved stealthily forward into the shadows, at last parting the branches noiselessly and looking into the space beyond.

“Ah, yes,” she breathed, “there they are.”

Three white foxes, two old ones and one half-grown cub, were sporting in the moonlight. How beautiful they were! And how they did romp! “No kittens could be half as cute,” she told herself.

Now they formed a circle and chased one another’s tails round and round. Now they piled into a heap and rolled about like balls of snow. And now, sitting in a row like choir boys, they sang their night song.

“*Yap—yap—yap!*”

In the midst of this Joyce thought of the stranger she had followed that day, and shuddered, she hardly knew why.

All this was forgotten as, half an hour later, she crept beneath her downy feather robe and fell asleep, dreaming dreams in which gold and radium were sadly mixed with Indians and traps, white foxes, wild buffaloes and moonlit night.

CHAPTER IX
EAGLE EYES

There are some who believe that, should one be so fortunate as to reach Edmonton in Alberta, Canada, he would be at an outpost of civilization. Nothing could be more false. Edmonton is not an outpost. It is a city.

There are those again who believe that all cities are alike. They, too, are mistaken. The city of Edmonton is not like any other city in the world.

No one knew this better than Curlie Carson. He was not a stranger to other cities. Chicago, New York City he knew. Belize, in British Honduras, had seen him on her streets. Paris he loved for her beauty. Yet none of these thrilled him more than did Edmonton. On his days off, between flights, nothing suited him quite so well as sitting in the narrow lobby of his own hotel, the old Prince George, listening to the scraps of conversation that drifted unbidden to his ears. For, while not an outpost, Edmonton is the gateway to a thousand outposts. All the vast Northwest lies beyond it.

And down from this Northwest, even in these conventional days when all men appear to think alike, talk alike, and dress alike, men still drift into Edmonton who are unique. They dress in strange ways and speak of affairs that are far from the minds of the commonplace men of the street.

They drift into Edmonton, and then an invisible bond draws them one and all to the Prince George. There in the lobby they sit and talk of timber drives along some unknown river, of mineral in the Rockies, of musk ox, of reindeer on the tundra, of fish in Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes, of fur from the far flung barrens, of petroleum and of tar-sands, of gold outcroppings, and a hundred other curious industries and discoveries.

“The thrill one gets from it!” Curlie said to Jerry that evening, after they had followed the carrier pigeon to the lone cabin and had left it there, to continue their flight to McMurray and then to Edmonton. “The thrill comes from knowing that every man of them is sure that he is going to make his fortune at once, or at least after the break-up in the spring.”

“That,” said Jerry, “is the pioneer spirit. It is not dead. It still lives here.”

“Yes!” exclaimed Curlie. “And I am glad it does! How wonderful it is to live in a land where men still dream!”

“Ah, yes.” Jerry settled back and closed his eyes as if he, too, would dream.

Curlie was in no mood for dreaming. The incident of the carrier pigeon was too fresh in his mind for that.

Drawing a slip of paper from his pocket, he began studying it. “I’d give a pretty penny to be able to read it,” he grumbled to himself after a time. He was looking at his copy of the code message he had taken from the carrier pigeon. So absorbed did he become that he did not notice that a tall, dark-haired man moved across the room to take a chair directly behind him. The man had small, piercing eyes. He wore no beard, yet the very blueness of his chin suggested that he might recently have had a beard. His eyes, as they fell upon the paper in Curlie’s hand, became strangely fixed.

Curlie did not read the message. Indeed, as we have said, since no two words of it made sense as they stood, how could he? It was one of those messages that impart information only after they are rearranged. It is possible that every fifth word, plucked from the rest and set in order, would make a sentence. Then again, it might be every third or every sixth word. Or perhaps the first and fourth, then the fifth and eighth words might be combined with the ninth and twelfth, and so on. The thing had so many possibilities that Curlie gave it up very soon and, folding the paper, put it back into his pocket.

Perhaps this was just as well, for the man of the eagle eye, if one were to judge by the tense look on his face, even from his point of disadvantage was making progress at deciphering the message.

“Curlie,” said Jerry starting up from his reverie, “why did you allow that little fellow back in the cabin to keep the carrier pigeon?”

“I—I don’t know.” Curlie seemed confused.

“What? You do a thing and don’t know the reason?”

“Sometimes I do.” Curlie spoke slowly. “There are times when I seem to be guided by instinct, or shall we say led by a spirit that is not myself, that is higher and wiser than I. At least,” he half apologized, “I like to think of it that way. Probably it’s all wrong.

“But I say, Jerry!” He sat up quickly. The eagle-eyed one started suddenly, then rising, glided silently away. “I say, Jerry old boy, that chap in the cabin was a world war veteran. A real one from Canada, or perhaps Ireland. He’s one of those scrawny little fellows so small and so quick that a shell couldn’t get them, nor a bullet either. Served through it all, then came back here to live on the birds and fish he can get with a light rifle and a gill-net. You can’t be rough with a chap like that, you really can’t.”

“No,” murmured Jerry. “Not even if he committed murder. But, Curlie, do you think he’s in with the crowd that’s flying wild up here and burning up our gas?”

“That,” said Curlie, “remains to be found out.”

“But, Jerry!” He leaned far forward. “There’s something about that little trapper and the carrier pigeon that we don’t know. I’m going to keep an eye on that little fellow and his cabin. There’s something worth knowing there. And in the end I’ll know it.”

CHAPTER X
THE VOICE OF THE WILDERNESS

Strange to say, at about the time Curlie and Jerry spoke of the pigeon that seemed so out of place in this frozen land, others in the cabin on the shore of far-off Great Slave Lake were speaking of this same bird. This did not come to pass, however, until a certain mysterious individual, seated beside the fire in Johnny Thompson's cabin, had maintained complete silence for the space of two full hours. This person, who had the straight black hair of an Indian and the sharp, hawk-like features of a certain type of white man, was known far and wide as "The Voice of the Wilderness," or more briefly as "The Voice." The Voice spoke only when the Spirit moved him. And woe be to that one who attempted to break in upon his periods of silence.

Johnny knew him. Sandy MacDonald knew him. They knew his ways; knew, too, that at times he was able to render valuable service to those who respected his silence.

When, therefore, as the twilight faded, he appeared at their door, they greeted him with a hearty "B'Jo" (a corruption of the French *bon jour*), made a place for him by the fire, poured him a cup of black coffee, and left him to his silence.

That did not mean, however, that the others might not speak. On this night it was Sandy MacDonald who talked. And when Sandy elected to speak something was said, for Sandy was wise in many lores and was no mean philosopher besides.

Appearing to sense the fact that The Voice there in the corner would maintain a long silence, he drew on his fur parka and invited Johnny to join him in a stroll in the moonlight along the shore before the cabin. As they walked along the snow-whitened shores at a spot where, other than themselves, no one lived, he

said as a look of contentment overspread his face:

“Johnny, for me this is the place of peace.”

“This place?” Johnny looked at him in surprise.

“Yes. I have been here before. Must have been ten years back. I was prospecting then with a pack on my back. No, I didn’t build the cabin. Some other dreamer had been here before me.

“It was late winter when I arrived. I lingered through spring and summer. Why? I couldn’t tell you that. Perhaps I was getting acquainted with nature and with God.

“You know, Johnny,” his voice was low and mellow, “for each of us there is a place of peace. Once there was a man who was asked to define peace. He led the one who asked to a waterfall. There in bubbling, tumbling confusion a tumultuous cataract made its way to the rocks below.

“‘Peace!’ his friend cried. ‘Do you call this peace?’

“‘No,’ replied the philosopher, ‘Not this. But look! Above the falls, poised over that rushing confusion, swaying there on a slender branch, is a tiny bird. And if you will watch closely, though because of the thundering waters you cannot hear him, you will see that he is singing his little song to the tune of the rushing water. He has found peace.’

“And so it was for him,” the aged prospector added, after looking away at the stars. “There are men like that, thousands of them. Go into some great steel mill where is constant din and confusion. Look far up to a narrow cage. A man stands manipulating levers. Climb up there and ask him: ‘Where is your place of peace?’

“If he knows the answer it will be: ‘Here.’

“You’ll find the same thing in a great city, Johnny. Go into some department store where the rush is greatest; in the wheat pit where men are shouting loudest; it’s all the same. You’ll find men there who’ll say: ‘This is the place of peace.’

“But for me—” His tone dropped once more. “As for me, this is the place of

peace. Do you know that at the back of the cabin only a few low trees grow?"

Johnny nodded.

"It's no clearing. No axe has been put to any tree. When God and the birds planted these low forests they left this place for me.

"Spring and summer," he mused, "they are marvelous here. The wild ducks come to lay their eggs and rear their young. There's an egg or two extra for me. There are ptarmigan in the low hills and fish aplenty. A light rifle and a gill-net, that's all you need for living well.

"At night you hear the bull moose calling to his mate. One stormy day you see the caribou passing by your cabin, a line many miles long, straking away toward the north.

"When the notion seizes you, you drop into your canoe and paddle away. You enter a broad bay and you say to yourself, 'There must be a prosperous village deep in the heart of this bay. There the saw mills are humming and the merchants are measuring out goods over the counter. There I will find a bed and a meal such as only good Molly McGregor can provide.'

"But you are deceiving yourself. There is no village, no saw mill, no store, no bed save that of spruce boughs, and no meal save that which nature will provide.

"In all this broad bay there is no village, nor even an inhabited cabin. This is God's country and His alone.

"His and mine!" he added reverently. "That is why I love it. That is why, for me, it is the place of peace.

"And, Johnny," he went on after a time, "sometimes I'd leave the lake and go wandering away into the heart of the forest, following a trail not made by man but by wild creatures of the North; moose, caribou, deer and bear had been there. And then I, smaller than them all, walked there unafraid. It made me feel strong, Johnny; made me think I was truly a child of the Great Father.

"The path was soft under my feet, all padded with moss, Johnny. The air was cool and damp. And such a stillness as there was, until some little bird began his faint, melodious song.

“And then a noisy old raven who was raising his black brood in a tree near-by would spy me. And, ah! how he would tear the air into shreds with his senseless warning!

“I’d hide myself away and squawk like a young raven who’d been captured. Then I’d throw myself on my back and look up as the angry black-coated one would come over shouting at me. I’d shout back and laugh, laugh at him and at the sun and everything that is good and clean and new. I’d imagine I was a boy again, Johnny, just a boy. Yes, Johnny, this is the place of peace, the place I can call home.

“But come!” He shook himself as if to bring himself back to the present. “Come, let us go inside. The silence may be broken. The Voice may speak. It will pay well to listen. Indeed it will.” And once again he told the truth.

CHAPTER XI
THE CLUE

The room Curlie Carson occupied while he stayed at the Prince George at Edmonton was on the second floor. It was reached by a very narrow elevator. There were probably stairways leading up. Curlie had never taken the trouble to look into that.

On this particular night, after he had tried in vain to study out the mysterious message, he retired early. He fell asleep the moment his head struck his pillow.

Since it was one of those silent nights of intense cold, he left his window open only a crack.

Late in the night he awoke with a feeling that a sudden draft of air had blown across his face.

“Wind’s coming up.” He shuddered with cold as he crept from his bed with the intention of shutting the window. Still not fully awake, he found himself bewildered by the facts that presented themselves to his mind. The wind had not risen. There was no draft. Yet the room was icy cold.

“As if the window had been wide open,” he thought.

Throwing up the shade, he looked out. At the back of the hotel was a narrow court and an alley. Down that alley a man was walking. He was tall and seemed rather gaunt.

“Probably some watchman been in for coffee,” he told himself.

Just then the man turned his head. He looked back and up. Then it seemed to the

boy that he resisted with difficulty an impulse to bolt down the alley.

“Been into something,” Curlie decided. “None of my business, though.”

Having drawn the shade once more, he turned about and would have been under the covers in another ten seconds had not his bare foot come into contact with something soft and furry.

A surprised downward glance revealed a large mitten lying close to the window.

“That,” he whispered excitedly, “is not my mitten. No one’s been here but Jerry. It’s not his either. How—”

He broke off. Fully awake now, he was beginning to put facts together. He had awakened with a sense of cold. The room was frigid; yet the window was open only a crack. No gale was blowing. And now here was a mitten belonging to no one he knew. And it lay by the window.

“Some one has been in this room,” he told himself. “He lost his mitten. I’ve been robbed!” A thrill shot up his spine. “But in Edmonton of all places! The police are speedy and successful in their work. If I’ve been robbed I’ll—”

Once more he broke off. He had not been robbed; at least his most valuable possessions, his purse and his watch, had not been taken.

“The mystery deepens.” He searched his mind for some motive and found it at once.

“The paper, the copy of that message taken from the pigeon!” he exclaimed breathlessly.

He thrust nervous fingers into his inner coat pocket.

“Right at last. It *is* gone!

“And now,” he thought, sitting down upon his bed, “what’s next?

“I might call the office and tell them what has happened. They would call the police. There would be an investigation. The police would ask questions. I had been robbed? What of? A paper? What paper? A message? What message? How

did you come by it? How indeed? And how much right had I to copy a message taken from a carrier pigeon?”

To this last question he could form no adequate answer.

At once his mind was in a whirl. He was from the United States. Having read all his life of the efficiency of the Mounted Police (and to a boy all Canadian officers are “Mounties”), he held those officers in great awe.

“I’ll not notify the office.” He crept back into bed. “I’ll handle this affair myself.”

Holding the mitten up before him, he examined it closely. It was a large mitten made of long-haired fur. The fur was on the outside. It was gray. First impressions made him believe it was wolf’s fur. A more careful examination caused him to doubt it. “Some foreign fur, perhaps,” he concluded.

“This mitten,” he told himself, “is a clue. Find the other mitten in some one’s pocket. That’s the man.

“This mitten,” he began enlarging on the idea, “this mitten is from Siberia. The man is a Russian. For some reason, not known to us, he and his friends of the flying ‘Gray Streak’ have entered this land by crossing Bering Straits and Alaska. They have treasure. They are negotiating some secret treaty. They—there’s no knowing their mission. But this is the man to find.

“All of which,” he told himself soberly a moment later, “is probably entirely wrong. But who flies the ‘Gray Streak’? Who sent that message? Who stole my copy? These are questions I mean to answer if I can.”

At that he fell asleep.

Next morning, somewhat to his surprise, he found the gray mitten still lying by his bed. And the mysterious message was still missing.

CHAPTER XII
THE VOICE SPEAKS

The tiny clock that ticked away cheerfully in the corner of the cabin indicated that a full hour had gone by, and Johnny and Sandy sat by the fire awaiting the moving of the spirit that was to restore animation to the motionless figure lumped over in the chair.

To Johnny, who was accustomed to action and plenty of it, this seemed a strange procedure. A bit spooky it was, too. Night lay silent over all. Only the dull glow of a half-dead fire lighted the room. From time to time a log, burned to glowing charcoal, would break and fall. For a moment after, strangely grotesque shadows would dance upon the wall. Then they, too, would lapse into inactivity.

At last the figure in the corner stirred. A bony hand outstretched seemed to beckon. Sandy knew the meaning of this. All the time the great coffee pot had stood just close enough to the fire to simmer low. Now he poured a steaming cup and passed it to the outstretched hand.

“See!” came in a hollow, cracked voice after the cup had been drained. “See many strange things, me.”

“Ah!” Johnny thought to himself, not daring to stir, “The oracle speaks.”

“See Devil Bird,” the Voice went on. “See two Devil Birds.”

“He means airplanes,” Johnny told himself. “Devil Birds belong to Indian legends. Airplanes are like them.”

“One Devil Bird,” the Voice droned on, “gray like clouds on a day of slow rain. No marks. No, none. No white man’s writing.”

“The gray outlaw,” Johnny breathed.

Sandy placed a hand on his arm for silence.

“Other Devil Bird plenty marks,” the Voice went on. “This one follow gray like a cloud Devil Bird. Go fast. Both, very, very fast. One go. One follow.”

“That will be Curlie chasing the ‘Gray Streak.’” Johnny’s lips barely moved. “How does it end?”

“See storm,” the Voice continued. “Gray storm. Plenty wind. Plenty cold. Plenty snow. Gray Devil Bird not stop. Lost in cloud. Other Devil Bird turn back. Run. Run very fast. Storm follow very fast.”

Johnny sat forward, scarcely daring to breathe.

“One hour, two hour, three, four, big race, cloud chase Devil Bird. Devil Bird fly fast.

“Bye-um-bye,” the Voice lost his animation, “bye-um-bye all right. Fort Chipewyan. All right.”

“Curlie is safe. But what about the ‘Gray Streak’?” Johnny was about to ask the question aloud when the pressure of Sandy’s arm stopped him.

For some time after that the Voice was silent. Sandy cast some bits of dry sprucewood on the fire. It flared up and for a time the place was as bright as day. When it had died down the Voice spoke again.

“See girl, white man’s girl. White man, too, much white hair. See three white man, not too old.”

“That,” thought Johnny, “will be the party who are trying to beat us in the discovery of minerals by using the films stolen from Sandy and his partner.” He frowned. It hurt him to feel that his one-time pals, Joyce Mills and her father, now belonged to a rival camp. That this was due to no fault of theirs he realized clearly.

As he closed his eyes now he seemed to see the girl, Joyce Mills, as he had seen her on that day when, after their final battle with a great city’s crime, she had

asked:

“When do we go back?”

They had stood then on a rickety little dock before a deserted cabin on the shore of Lake Huron.

How well he recalled his own answer: “We don’t go back. We go on into the silent North, perhaps. It may be that we shall find a land where men are just and merciful and kind.”

“I said that,” he told himself. As he looked back upon it now, that remark seemed near to prophecy, for were they not now in the far North?

“There is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough-hew them though we may,” he thought to himself.

Ah, yes, they were in the North. Yet, how different it all was from what he had dreamed! He had dreamed of working by her father’s side, of sharing with him and with the girl who held a central place in both their hearts the joys and the privations of a strange new land.

“And now this!” he thought grimly.

But the Voice spoke once more. “See girl. See dog team. See much danger.”

Once more Johnny leaned forward.

“See—see—” The Voice grew faint. “See dim. See not at all.”

Johnny started to his feet. Sandy pulled him back. Once more the fire flared up, then again died away.

“See bird.” The Voice rose high. “Strange bird. Not Devil Bird. Bird, how you say? Like raven. So big. No croaks. No black. Gray like clouds when sun not yet up. Fly, fly fast, that bird. Fly far. Not sing, that bird. White man keep in box. White man let him out, say: ‘Fly away! Fly straight!’ Fly far, that one.”

“Must be a carrier pigeon,” Johnny thought to himself. “But who would have a pigeon in such a land?”

Two minutes of silence. Sandy cast more tinder on the fire. The light flared up. Johnny started and stared. The figure was no longer in the corner. He fully expected the Voice to drone on. It did not. The Voice had slipped silently from the room, into the night.

A few moments later, as Johnny stood looking away at the glimmering field of white that was the frozen lake, he murmured two words:

“Moccasin Telegraph.” Then he turned back into the house.

And that is how it came about that Johnny and Sandy sat for an hour before their fire telling one another all they knew about carrier pigeons and speculating on their possible use in this frozen land.

“I read,” said Johnny, “an article in some paper telling of the manner in which blackmailers used carrier pigeons. They sent a pigeon with a demand for money to some wealthy man. The money was to be attached to the bird’s leg and the bird was to be freed. Detectives in airplanes tried following the pigeons.”

“Think they could?” asked Sandy.

“Who knows?” For a time after that they were silent. At last Sandy yawned as he rumbled, “Time for three winks.”

Johnny did not get his three winks until he had put many thoughts of airplanes, carrier pigeons, gold, radium and old-time friends to rest. But at last sleep came, and before he knew it there was a new day.

CHAPTER XII
CURLIE SLEEPS ON THE RIVER

Time passed, as time has a way of doing. There was much to be accomplished and Curlie Carson's slim shoulders bore their full share of the burden.

Always in the back of his mind as he labored one thought remained to urge him on. He was working not for himself alone but for the glory of his company. The men who toiled with him and those in the office in far away Winnipeg were, he knew right well, worthy of his most loyal endeavors.

"Loyalty. That's the great word," John Mansfield, the President of the Company, had said to him. "Loyalty to a proper cause or a deserving group of human beings; that is the greatest driving power this old world will ever know."

Curlie believed he spoke the truth. He rejoiced in the knowledge that, come what might, his loyalty and his most earnest endeavor would never be overlooked, discounted or disregarded.

So Curlie worked untiringly as millions have done before and other millions will do in the years that are to come.

All one's life may not be spent in the unravelling of mysteries and hunting adventure. This Curlie knew full well. His work? Was there adventure in that? Very little. Piloting a six-passenger airplane over the Mackenzie River route is about as exciting as driving a bus in New York. Curlie carried a load of freight, beef, eggs, coffee, calico and a score of other items from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan. He answered an emergency call from Resolution. A Catholic Sister was rushed to the hospital at Edmonton.

At Edmonton he took on two cases of eggs, a case of oranges, a package of

phonograph records, one missionary and two “Udson’s Bay’s Men” (as the native Canadians call them), and sailed away straight for the shore of the Arctic Ocean. He was there on the second day and, after a night’s sleep, was ready for the return journey.

It was during this return journey that one or two questions that had been puzzling him were, in a way, answered.

At Fort Chipewyan he lay over for a few hours to await the passing of a snowstorm. He did not tarry long enough. The storm was traveling south. It was making but fifty miles an hour. He was doing better than a hundred. He had not been in the air an hour when he realized that he could not reach McMurray without running into that storm.

“That means I can’t see to land,” he grumbled to himself. Jerry was not with him. “Have to sleep on the river.”

Sleeping on the river is not as bad as it sounds. Here and there along the river, trappers’ cabins are to be found. The inhabitants of these cabins are for the most part known to the pilots. And any weary bird-man is sure of a hearty welcome there. The coffee pot is ever on the fire and a pan of beans rich in bacon fat ready for warming. There is an extra bunk in the corner to which the stranger is welcome. But, for the most part, the pilot prefers rolling up in his eight-foot-square eiderdown robe and sleeping on the floor of his cabin. This is what is known as “sleeping on the river.”

It may appear strange that out of the three possible cabins on this section of the river Curlie chose to come to earth before the one occupied by the rough and ready little world war hermit who had in so strange a manner defied him when a pigeon had been tracked to his window.

“Oh, it’s you, me lad!” the scrawny little man exclaimed, as Curlie climbed from the cockpit. “Sure it’s sorry vittals I be ’avin’, but such as they be, y’ are welcome.”

“Ptarmigan!” exclaimed Curlie. “Nothing better than that!” A brace of these birds hung by the cabin door.

“And can y’ eat ’em?”

“Sure. Why not? They’re fine.”

“Every man to ’is taste. Sure I’ve fed ’em to me dorgs until they’ve grown feathers, they ’ave. But it’s the birds ye shall ’ave, roasted with bacon fat fer seasonin’.”

Curlie could not complain of his birds, nor of the coffee he drank.

“That,” he said, “is the best coffee I’ve had for a month!”

“An’ I wouldn’t doubt it!” exclaimed the little man. “Learned ’ow t’ brew it from a bloomin’ Australian bushman in th’ bloody war; right in th’ trenches.

“Ye see,” he went on, warmed by his own beverage and cheered by kind words, “I were in th’ signal service. Bein’ small, I was set to carin’ fer pigeons an’ sendin’ ’em away with messages a-hangin’ from their laigs or their necks.

“And y’ know, son, ’avin’ ’em always with ye like yer bloomin’ dorgs, makes ’em seem like yer bloomin’ pals. D’ ye understand that?”

“Yes,” Curlie replied, “I understand.”

“An’ ye know, son, if it weren’t fer ’avin’ one of them pigeons under me arm in a cage made of wood, I’d not be trappin’ foxes now.”

“No?” Curlie sat up. “Tell me about it.”

He did tell Curlie. And for Curlie that story held a special interest. It was no great story as stories go; just the account of one little underfed Irish boy soldier lost in a forest in No Man’s Land, with a leg half torn away by a shell, and a plain, drab carrier pigeon kept safe by the boy’s shielding body. The boy scribbled a note to his pals in camp, then released the pigeon that he might bear the message home.

“They found ’im safe,” he ended quite undramatically. “They found th’ message an’ after that th’ ’eathen enemy’s guns was silenced, an’ then they found me, too.

“’T’ain’t much of a story, son. But ye’ll not be thinkin’ me soft when I tell ye as ’ow them carryin’ pigeons seems like the truest friends I ever had.”

“No,” said Curlie huskily, “I surely will not.”

Before Curlie left the cabin next morning he heard a sound that bore a suspicious resemblance to the coo-coos he was accustomed to hear on his uncle’s farm when the pigeons were waking to greet the sunshine.

“I believe this little chap kept that bird for a pal,” he told himself. “And he might have done worse than that—a whole lot worse, yes, a whole lot worse.”

CHAPTER XIV
DREW LANE ON THE WING

During that week there had been no cessation of activities in the two camps where the search for rich mineral was in progress. Since it had been found that the report on the radium-bearing pitchblende must be delayed for some time, there was nothing for it but to go out in search of other prospects.

The entire group at Joyce's camp, her father, Jim, Lloyd and Clyde, worked like beavers. Lloyd had gone to get the thawer. He had returned in four days.

"I miss him more than I dreamed I would," Joyce had told herself on one of these days. "He seems to confide in me. And that, I guess, is the sort of friend a girl needs."

Indeed, for a quiet man he had told her much. On that evening before he flew away to Fort Resolution, he had spoken of his life, his struggles, his hopes, his fears. He had entered the world war as a boy soldier, only sixteen. He had carried stretchers through it all, had brought many a poor wounded soldier to safety. In time he, too, had been dropped by a shell. His recovery had been slow. But he had come back.

"And now," he told her earnestly, "I must make good; for my mother's sake I must! She is the grandest of women; gave me as a boy to her country without a murmur, and allowed them to keep me four years. Four years. You don't know what that means—to a mother."

Ah, yes, Joyce had missed Lloyd. But now he was back. They were all back. Lloyd's steam-thawer had been going for three days. What success had come to him? Would there be gold on that ancient river bed?

She was thinking of all this as she stood bare-headed in the starlight on a glorious Arctic night. Then the night claimed her. The moon was not up. But the stars! Every one of them seemed a spark of fire fallen upon a curtain of midnight blue velvet.

“They burn, but they do not consume,” she thought, as she moved slowly up the hill toward the place where the white foxes played. “Stars are like our love for our fellow men and God. They light the world, but do not destroy.”

She had come close to her watching place at the back of a cluster of scrub spruce trees, when a voice close beside her drawled:

“What are you all doing up here by your lonesome?”

It was Jim, the Kentucky mountain boy. Her first impulse was one of anger. Why should he intrude upon her privacy? This lasted but for a space of seconds. The night, the stars, the yellow lights from the cabins below, together with Jim’s appealing southern drawl, changed her impatience.

The rebuke that came to her lips remained unuttered. Instead, she held up a hand for silence, then pointed toward the clump of trees. Then together they crept forward.

“There! There they are!” she whispered low.

“Foxes!” he whispered back. “Cunnin’ little critters!”

After that for ten minutes, with the golden firmament swinging overhead and the foxes frisking in the starlight, they watched in silence.

The foxes were more playful than ever. Joyce had hung some pieces of caribou fat and shreds of white fish out for the snow-buntings and bluejays. Some of these bits were within reach of the foxes when they stood on their hind feet and clawed upward. Others were hung higher. The lower ones soon vanished. It was truly wonderful to see the antics they went through in their attempts to reach the others. They leaped, they clawed. They did everything but stand upon one another’s shoulders. When none of these availed, they sat on their haunches and, pointing noses at the tempting morsels, sang their white fox song.

“As if that would do any good!” Joyce chuckled.

“Singin’ for their supper,” drawled Jim.

One thing puzzled Joyce. To-night there were only two foxes. Always before there had been three. The small one was not there. Where could he be?

“Perhaps he overslept,” she told herself. But she was a trifle worried. These little wild playmates had become very dear to her heart.

Frightened, suddenly, by the slamming of a door down below in one of the cabins, the two foxes scampered into their holes, leaving Joyce and Jim alone with the night.

“They’ve gone in for the youngster, I guess,” Joyce laughed.

“The youngster?”

“Always before there have been three. The other was only a cub, or would you say a kitten? He is the cutest thing you ever saw.”

After that, having turned about to seat themselves on the hard packed snow and to gaze away toward the great white world and the blue dome above it, they communed in silence.

A faint glow appeared on the margin of that sea of white. The arc of a golden circle appeared. Moving in solemn majesty, the moon rose to clothe their world in purple shadows.

“This,” whispered the girl, “is moonlight in the great white world.”

“Do you know,” said Jim, and there was a deep seriousness in his tone, “a time like this makes me certain that thar’s more to life than that thar we see. We don’t live to fret and fuss a little, to hunt gold and find it and be rich fer a little spell, or not to find it and be poor as p’ison. We don’t just shuffle off. That’s not the end of it.

“Look at those stars, that moon. Don’t they tell you things?”

“Yes.” Her voice was low, musical. “Yes, Jim, they do.”

“Do you know,” he went on after a moment, “we mounting folks is ignorant

folks, I reckon. Not much larnin' amongst us. But we sit a heap. And we think a heap. And when we see a thing or get told something we just naturally gotta try to think it plumb through to the end.

"Do you know?" He was looking away once more. "When I look away at them thar stars, hit reminds me a heap of my old Kentucky home away up on Poundin' Mill Creek that flows into Clover Fork of the Cumberland River.

"Way back yonder—" His voice was like the low strum-strum of a banjo. "Back yonder's a cabin whar I've set many's the night, listenin' to the tree toads sing and some old bull frog croakin', and seem' the lightnin' bugs streakin' across the air. Then I'd see the mountings all settin' in a row like a lotta plumb big folks settin' by the hearth a-whisperin'. And I'd see the stars a-comin' down close to listen. And it was plumb pretty, Miss Joyce. Plumb pretty. Mighty nigh the prettiest picture I most ever seed.

"But, Miss Joyce," he leaned forward, "'t'ain't no prettier nor this here up here. And, you know," he hesitated, "you know, somehow you sort of fit into it all. Plumb queer now, ain't it?"

"Yes, Jim, it is." Joyce felt a strange thrill run through her being. It was strange that she, a girl who had spent all her life in a great city, should fit into a picture such as this. She was grateful for the compliment.

After that, for a long time, they sat in silence, listening to the faint, all but inaudible sounds of an Arctic night and watching the world that seemed so new, so fresh, so ready for those who were good and kind and true. Can souls speak, though no words be uttered? Who knows? Joyce wondered, but did not speak.

It often happens that we go from joy to sorrow in a single hour. So it was with Joyce. Her hour with Jim had been one of transfiguration. To go from communion with a human companion to seek a four-footed friend might seem the imperfect ending of a perfect hour. But who can understand the heart of a girl?

Joyce was still wondering about the half-grown white fox. Why had he not come out to play?

She was not long in finding the answer. As they stepped into the moonlit playground of her little white friends, Jim's keen eyes discovered a dark object.

It was a steel trap. And in the trap was the baby white fox, quite dead.

“Who could have done that!” Joyce exclaimed, all but in tears.

“Some trapper.”

“But there are no trappers here; that is, I have seen only one.” She recalled the stranger she had followed by mistake.

“We’ll leave him a message,” said Jim.

Springing the jaws of the trap, he caught it by its chains, then crashed it so violently against the rocks that it flew in bits.

“No right to set it so close to our camp!” he grumbled, throwing it down.

“They say that Indians read signs. Well, there’s my sign.” Selecting an untouched circle of snow, he placed there an imprint of his large moccasin.

“And this,” said Joyce, placing her foot close to his, “is mine.”

At that, without another word, they turned to make their way down the hill.

It was when he was about to leave her at her cabin door that Jim spoke again.

“Thar’s somethin’ been on my mind for a long time, Miss Joyce. I—”

“The stolen films,” flashed through the girl’s mind. “It was Jim. He stole them. He wants to confess. But I can’t let him now—”

“Please, Jim,” she broke in hurriedly, “not to-night. Tell me some other time, but not now.”

“All right, Miss Joyce.” And he was gone into the night.

Joyce stood there alone, allowing the cool night air to fan her hot temples. She was troubled. Had she done wrong? Should she have allowed the mountain boy to make his confession?

“I couldn’t,” she told herself at last. “This has been a golden hour. How could I have it ruined? Another time will do as well.” At that she turned and entered the

cabin.

* * * * * * * *

Strangely enough, at this very hour in their far away cabin, another group was discussing the stolen films.

After long thought Johnny had decided that it was his duty to tell the men of his camp the story of the stolen films and of the men who at that moment were using their hard-earned leads for profit.

“Old Timer,” Scott Ramsey was saying to Sandy, as they sat beside the roaring fire, “do you think it would be too hard on those fellows to move right in and file on their land the moment they make a strike?”

“Not one whit!” Sandy’s chair came down with a bang. “Trouble nowadays is, too many folks have vague ideas of what’s honest and what isn’t. Get wrong notions, lots of them, when they’re in school. Steal ten dollars, that’s wrong; but snitch another chap’s toy pistol, that’s sport. That’s the way they look at it. It’s all wrong.

“Lots of young football fellows think it’s being bright to carry home souvenirs, napkins, salt-shakers, silver from a restaurant. It’s wrong! Hew to the line, I say.

“If those young fellows think it was a sporting proposition to filch those negatives and make prints from them and then come up here with them to hunt gold, they’re wrong.

“But say!” he demanded suddenly, “how’d they get them?”

“That,” replied Ramsey slowly, “is just what I don’t know.

“You see,” he went on thoughtfully, “after I’d taken the airplane trip and snapped the pictures and had them developed and enlarged, I was low on funds. I showed the pictures to a geologist and he said the thing looked good.

“While I was searching for a partner with money, I asked permission to store those films in a vault, the vault of the people I had worked for in Winnipeg.

“When I found you in Edmonton, I had the pictures, but not the films. One set of

pictures was enough. The films, I thought, were safe."

"But how did you find out they had the films?" Sandy asked, turning to Johnny.

"I ran onto a photographer I knew in Edmonton. Always did like to be around where you smelled developer and hypo, so I stuck around. He showed me some defective enlargements he was about to throw away. I knew right away that they were the same as some we were planning to use. After that it was a fairly simple matter to trace the men who had engaged him to make the enlargements. The thing that surprised me most was that two of my best friends, an old man and his daughter, are working with those three young men."

"You can't get information through them?" Scott asked.

"I can, but I won't," said Johnny.

"Right enough!" exclaimed Sandy. "I honor you for it."

"The thing I can't understand," said Sandy after a time, "is, how did they get hold of those films if they were in a vault?"

"That *would* bear looking into," agreed Ramsey. "I'll write a letter to-night. Old Benny Brooks is still with the company, or was the last I knew. I'll write and ask him." He did. But even in the days of the airplane, mail is a trifle slow in the North. And in the meantime the search for that elusive wealth that lies hidden in the rocks and beneath the snow went on.

* * * * * * * *

It was about this time that Curlie Carson, on returning from his trip to the mouth of the Mackenzie River, received a telegram that set his head whirling.

"*Am on my way by fast plane. Big business.*" This is the way the message ran. It was signed "*Drew Lane*."

This telegram, together with a paragraph in a back number of the Edmonton daily paper, gave him what appeared to be a solution of the mystery which the "Gray Streak" had created. The article was captioned:

"Mail plane stolen from Chicago Airport."

In brief, this new story told of the theft of a powerful biplane from beneath the very nose of her pilot. Having taken on his load of air mail, this pilot had stepped into the office to discuss his routing with his chief. Then, according to the story, the look-out in the tower, who checked the numbers of all planes coming and going, had seen some one resembling the pilot enter the plane and take off.

“The strangest part of the whole affair,” the story went on to say, “is that, after a somewhat prolonged conversation, the real pilot returned to the spot where his plane had stood, and it was gone. It is assumed by the police that the man who stole the plane, having studied the dress and mannerisms of the pilot, had been able to imitate him so perfectly that the look-out, who knew him well, had not discovered the fraud.

“In the meantime,” the article concluded, “Where is the stolen biplane? And where is the half-ton of mail, some of which is reported to be of great value, that was the airplane’s cargo?”

“Where indeed?” Curlie said after reading the article through twice. “Unless here in the wilds of the Northwest? Where else in the world could a great biplane be hidden? And where else could they refuel without being caught?

“Let me see.” He scratched his head. “It was six days ago that I wrote Drew Lane telling him of the mysterious ‘Gray Streak.’ Plenty of time for him to get his keen mind at work on that Chicago airplane case, to arrive at some very natural conclusions, and then to get himself assigned to the task of hunting down this ‘Gray Streak.’

“So,” he drawled slowly, “I am to have some assistance in the solution of this great mystery.”

Was he glad Drew Lane was on his way north? Ah, yes, to be sure he was. Who would not be? Drew Lane was the sort of chap any one would be glad to greet once again. But was Curlie glad that some one else was likely to beat his time in solving a great mystery? Of this he could not be sure.

“And yet,” he told himself after a few moments of sober thought, “at such a time as this, when the rightful possessions of many are endangered, when the efficiency of the air service that has done so much for this barren land is threatened, it is one’s duty to set his personal hopes aside and to welcome the aid of any who may assist in bringing the malefactors to justice. So, welcome, Drew

Lane, old top! Our arms are open wide.

“And one thing is sure,” he added after a moment’s reflection, “there never was a truer sport, a braver cop, nor a better pal than Drew Lane!

“Brave! Why he’d drop right down upon them from the air if need be.”

How near this last came to being prophecy, he was, in time, to know.

CHAPTER XV
OVER THE RAPIDS

On the day following her experience with Jim and the foxes, Joyce Mills once more took to the trail with her dog team. And a dangerous trail it proved to be.

She wanted time to think. And what better opportunity could be afforded? Well tucked in, half buried in caribou robes, with the wind at her back and her toboggan sled gliding over the snow, and with Dannie, the leader, choosing his own course, her mind had little to do but wander at will.

Her thoughts were for the moment on that strange brownish-black rock her father called pitchblende. He had found samples and had sent them south on the airplane.

“Will they contain radium?” she asked herself. “Much radium?”

Her father had told her a little about the wonders of radium. “A grain,” he had said, “one thirty-second part of an ounce, is worth more than thirty thousand dollars. In a year all the operators in the world produced less than nine grams. Yet a single half gram owned by a great hospital has sent many a poor soul, stricken with the deadly cancer disease, back to his loved ones in perfect health. The healing qualities of radium is one of God’s great gifts to man. Think what it would mean to find a fresh and richer supply of this life-restoring mineral?”

She had thought, and had thrilled to the very core of her being.

So she dreamed on and on and, like many another, all unaware of impending danger, enjoyed the drowsy comfort of the passing hour.

Suddenly she was shocked from her dreaming, for her dog team, breaking away

from a leisurely trot, sprang away across the snow like a pack of hounds in full cry.

Her first thought was, “They are after a snowshoe rabbit. But Dannie! I hoped he was better trained than that.”

So he was. Next instant she knew the cause of this terrific speed and her cheek blanched. The outlaw buffalo, the very one who had before brought her into great peril, was upon their trail. With a mad bellow, with white frost pouring from his nostrils like smoke, he charged straight on.

They were on the lake’s ice. No trees to climb here. Speed was their only chance. How fast was a buffalo? Could he outrun a dog team? She was to know.

The team’s speed for the moment saved her. As the buffalo charged down a treeless slope, he fell behind them. One instant more, and he was on their trail.

“What if the sled tips and I am thrown out?” she asked herself with a shudder.

But the thought of what might happen was crowded out by that which was happening. The buffalo was gaining. There could be no question about it.

“He has shortened the distance between us by ten yards,” she told herself.

She caught the gleam of his terrifying horns, heard his deep, guttural bellow; then, dragging her eyes away, she shouted bravely:

“Now! Dannie! Now! *Ye! Ye! Ye!* Now, Grover! Now, Ginger! *Now! Now! Now! Ye! Ye! Ye!*”

The splendid creatures responded to her call that was half plea, half command, by a fresh burst of speed. But was it enough? She dared not look back. They sped on across the white waste.

Moments passed, agonizing moments they were. Urging her dogs to their utmost, she still refrained from looking behind. If she looked her heart might fail her.

“The way out!” she repeated to herself over and over. “What can be the way out?”

What indeed? She might, if there was time, call upon her dogs to pause in their mad rush. They might face about and trust their fates to a battle. That these fine fellows would fight she did not question.

“But what chance?” Her voice was choked with a dry sob. “Hindered by the harness, they could never win.”

Dark to the left on the horizon a clump of tamarack showed.

“Too late! We’ll never make it. We—”

Then suddenly, as upon that other occasion, a curious thing happened; a rifle cracked.

This time the result was different. It was as if an avenging God had said: “It is enough.” The girl heard a dull thud and, looking fearfully about, saw the outlaw buffalo lying upon the snow. A bullet had brought his mad career to an end.

Instinctively the dogs slowed down. The girl’s eyes searched the low hills for her benefactor. He was nowhere to be seen.

A moment passed into eternity; another and yet another. In all that great white world not a living creature moved.

Seized by a strange new fear, she spoke to her dogs and once more they sped away. Ten minutes later they were back on the trail they had followed in the beginning. And this, she discovered by a study of snowshoe prints, was the trail of her father and his companion.

Once more she settled back in peace. But not for long. This was to be a day of days in her life.

* * * * * * * *

Drew Lane followed hot on the trail of his message. Curlie Carson was warming up his plane for one more journey in the land of great white silence when a small, fast monoplane circled above the field for a landing.

This little ship of the air caught Curlie’s eye at once. And why not? It was painted a vivid red.

“In the name of all that’s good!” he cried, when he saw Drew Lane spring with his pilot from the cockpit. “You don’t expect to do detective work up here in that fire wagon, do you?”

Drew laughed as he gripped Curlie’s hand. “What does color matter? It’s speed that counts. She’s the fastest thing in the air. Let me get sight of those robbers in that lumbering old mail truck and you’ll see something pretty. The Red Knight of Germany won’t be in it with me.

“But tell me.” He sobered. “You’ve seen this gray outlaw of the air. Do you think it could be the plane that was stolen in Chicago?”

“Y—e—s,” Curlie said slowly. “It could be. Same type of plane and all that. But —”

“But what?”

“Nothing. At least not a thing that’s tangible. Just a fancy, I suppose. I found a mitten in my room. It was made from the pelt of a Siberian wolf-hound.”

“For John’s sake!” Drew Lane stared. “What’s that to do with an outlaw plane?”

Curlie told him of the carrier pigeon, of the copied message, and of the theft in the night.

“That,” agreed Drew when he had ended, “may have a bearing. At least we’ll not forget it. But, as for me, I stick to the theory that this outlaw is driving the stolen mail plane. There were valuable papers on board, being transferred from one city to another. Owners have offered a large reward. And say!” he exclaimed, “why couldn’t those fellows be trying to collect the reward through carrier pigeons?”

“Wrong end to,” Curlie objected. “If they were doing that the pigeons would be sent in a crate to the persons paying the reward. Then the plan would be to have them released with the reward in thousand dollar bills attached to them.”

“That’s right. Well, we’ll see.”

Drew then changed the subject. “You’re off for the North?”

“In an hour.”

“I’ll trail you.”

“How far?”

“Until I get a hunch to sail away on my own.”

“Which won’t be long,” Curlie grinned, and then led him away for a cup of coffee.

* * * * * * * *

In the meantime, strange and terrible things were happening to Joyce and her friends. With her team she had left the lake and had traveled two miles into the low hills when, on rounding the point of a ridge, she sighted her father.

Quite close at hand, he was bending over a rocky ledge that hung above a rushing cataract. “A dangerous position,” she told herself. “One step and—”

To her great consternation, at that instant she saw him throw up a hand—then plunge downward.

There is a section to the north and east of Great Slave Lake where the surface of the land is one heap of gigantic rocks. The land falls off to the west so rapidly that the streams are little more than cascades playing continually over giant stairways. It was into one of these unnatural streams that her father had fallen.

Even as Joyce stood looking, too terrified to move, Clyde Hawke, a powerful swimmer, plunged in after her father. So swift was the water, however, that he was three yards behind in the mad race for life.

Never very strong, Newton Mills, now prematurely old, offered little resistance to the wild torrent that appeared determined to carry him to destruction. One fortunate instance, for the moment, saved him. An overhanging snag caught at his stout jacket. It held for a space of seconds. Before the stout canvas gave way, he had secured a tight grip on the snag. Ten seconds more, and the brave young westerner, swimming with one hand, had gripped the older man by the arm and was struggling to bring him ashore.

The battle seemed all but won when, without warning, the snag gave way to cast them once more upon the mercy of the torrent.

To Joyce, who had made her way to the brink of the stream and stood ready to lend a hand, all seemed lost.

The last vestige of hope left her when, with a cry of horror, she saw them, tight in one another's grip, disappear beneath the ice of the pool that lay beyond the rapids.

"They're gone! Gone!" she sobbed.

But what was this? Beyond the narrow stretch of ice was a second chain of rapids less precipitous than the first. Poised on a rock at the very center of the rapids, she had seen a lone pelican waiting for fish. Now, as if disturbed, he rose and went flapping away.

"Can it be—"

Plunging headlong over rocks and treacherous ice, she made her way to this second space of open water. She was just in time to lean far over and grip Clyde by the collar of his coat. Then, securing a hold upon a stout willow bush, she clung with the grip of death. Not one life, but two, depended upon her strength and endurance. Clyde Hawke still retained his grip upon her father. Together they had passed beneath the ice and had come out on the other side.

Ten minutes of heart-breaking battle with the elements, and they had won. Or had they? True, her father lay upon the snow beside the exhausted youth who had risked his life to save him; but he neither moved nor spoke. Was he dead? She could not be sure.

Time restored strength to the plucky Clyde Hawke. Then together they carried Newton Mills to a sheltered crevice among the rocks. After gathering dry twigs and branches, they built a roaring fire.

"It's the only thing that will save him," Clyde explained. "Home is too far away."

Joyce removed her warm fur parka. Then she walked a short distance up the hill. When she returned Clyde had stripped off her father's clothing and, after chafing his limbs, had dressed him in her parka. As she came up her father's eyes opened and he murmured hoarsely: "That was close, awful close!" Then his eyelids fell.

With the hatchet from his belt Clyde cut off spruce branches and built them a shelter. Sheltered by the three walls of boughs and warmed by the fire, they soon were as comfortable as they might have been in the cabin.

When her splendid mind had regained its full powers, Joyce sprang up and cried:

“The dog team!”

She had left the dogs, she hardly knew where. And the toboggan sled was lined with caribou-skin robes.

“I will go for them.” She stood up. “As soon as you are dry enough to be safe, we can take him home in the sled.”

“When you’re back I’ll be O.K.,” Clyde said simply.

A hurried search showed her the dogs curled up in a low run where the sled had tangled in the willows. “Good old pups!” she murmured, as she gulped down a sob.

Two hours after dark they arrived at camp from an expedition that had threatened to be the most disastrous in the entire history of the enterprise. Newton Mills was still unconscious. Would he recover? Who could say?

By great good fortune they found Punch Dickinson there with his plane. He had arrived late and was prepared to stay all night. Although night flying is, as a rule, off the program of Arctic flyers, he agreed in this extremity to go to Resolution for the doctor.

A little more than two hours later, there came the thunder of the motor and Punch was back with medical aid.

“It’s the shock and exposure,” was the doctor’s verdict. “With care he should pull through.”

“He’ll get the care right enough,” said Jim Baley. “He ain’t one of them sorry old men. He’s a king. That’s what he is. We’ll stick with him if we don’t never find narry a bit of radium nor gold.”

“Come to think of it,” Punch Dickinson started up from his place by the fire,

“I’ve a message for you. Report on your pitchblende I guess.”

He drew two envelopes from his pocket.

“Curious thing happened.” He seemed ill at ease. “You know two bags of samples went down; both of them pitchblende? Well, some way the tags were torn off and there’s no way of telling which sample belongs to which outfit. I—I’m sorry it came out that way. But up here I guess you’re all friends in the same game. Luck for one is luck for all.”

“Luck for one, luck for all?” Joyce wondered as her mind went over the words.

“What’s to be done?”

Clyde, the westerner, scratched his head. “Guess we get first look,” smiled Lloyd Hill, putting out a hand for the envelopes.

“Seems that it might be a case of sending down more samples,” he murmured as he tore open the first envelope.

“I’m sorry some one blundered,” Punch apologized. “I know how hard it is to get samples. I—”

“Just a minute.” Lloyd Hill held up a hand. “Looks as if it hasn’t made any difference. The reports are almost identical; same amount of copper, same nickel, same cobalt and—”

“Radium! Radium!”

Instantly the word was on every tongue. “Just a trace,” said Lloyd reluctantly. “Not enough to make the slightest difference. In other words, we lose, all of us; the other fellows, too.”

“Oh!” The cry that escaped the girl’s lips was a cry of pain. Her father had hoped much from his radium rock. She had hoped, too. She had dreamed. Johnny Thompson had dreamed. They were all friends together. And all had lost.

“And now this!” she whispered as she turned to hide a tear that would not stay. “Now father is desperately ill. If he recovers I must tell him this. And we hoped so much!” Truly this was her darkest hour.

The air of the cabin suddenly seemed oppressive. Throwing on a coat, she wandered out into the night. As she stood there bathing her hot temples in the cool night air, a figure moved silently toward her.

“You find gold? Mebby yes? Mebby no?”

It was the Indian, he of the traps. He had found his broken trap, she felt sure of that. As she looked he seemed to leer at her in a mocking manner. Then he passed on into the night.

The look on that man’s face disturbed her. Many things troubled her. She was tired, needed rest.

“I must sleep,” she told herself.

The doctor was to remain, at least for the night. Her father was in good hands. Creeping away to her small room, she disrobed in the dark and was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVI
PAWNS

Johnny Thompson and Scott Ramsey were disheartened by the news that Sandy's pitchblende was of no value.

"It's the end of one glorious dream." Ramsey stared into space.

"Yes," Johnny agreed, "that's gone."

"Not a bit of it!" Sandy's keen old eyes snapped. "There's pitchblende in these rocky old ledges such as the world has never known.

"Look here. Do you know that in 1922 a pocket of several hundred pounds of remarkably rich pitchblende was mined in the Belgian Congo, that it yielded two or three million dollars worth of radium, and that this discovery actually caused a drop in the price of radium? If they can do that in South Africa, we can do it in northern Canada!" He banged the table with his huge fist.

"And now look at this!" He drew forth an enlarged photograph to spread it on the table. To the average person this would have seemed a snap-shot that had gone wrong. It showed only dull stretches of rock, intermixed with rough ledges and narrow stretches of snow.

"See that!" Sandy's long finger trembled as he pointed. "Taken sixty miles from here, this was. Looks like the real thing to me. Pitchblende. Radium." He said these last words almost reverently.

"There's no stopping him," Johnny told himself. "All the same, if he'll permit me, I'll go out and look those ledges over for him. With the specimens we have now, it would not be hard to gather others. Only an analysis could give the final

touch to such a find anyway. I'll suggest it when the right time comes."

Scott and Sandy were ardent chess fans. As Sandy was spreading his men over the board a little later, he looked up at Johnny.

"Ever play chess?" he demanded.

"A little."

"You should. You should play much. Tell you why." He allowed his powerful hand to rest upon the board. Between his thumb and finger was the smallest man of all, a pawn. "Chess," he went on, "makes you think. And thinking is always good for your soul. That's why the study of mathematics is worth while.

"But there's a more important reason why you should play chess." His expressive eyes gleamed. "Chess is the game of life. Oh, yes, it's the game of war, too; but life for most of us is one long battle, so it's the game of life, too.

"See that little fellow?" He held up the pawn.

Johnny nodded.

"That's you and me. All my life I've been a pawn. Nothing much to be ashamed of. Out of every hundred people born in the world, ninety-nine are pawns and always will be. So you've plenty of company.

"A pawn," he went on, "is very much handicapped in his movements. If he chooses, at the beginning of the game he may move forward two squares. After that he must cover only one square at a time, and that straight ahead.

"Knights, bishops, castles, queen, these have far greater freedom of movement. These, in life, are the highly successful ones, the great scientists and other scholars, successful lawyers, merchant princes.

"But you and I, Johnny—" He put the pawn on its spot. Very carefully placing it in the exact center, he went on: "You and I are like this little round-headed pawn.

"Oh, yes, he has one other chance; he may move to one side as well as forward, but only to destroy some other pawn who happens to be on the spot at the wrong time."

“Poor old pawn,” Johnny sighed.

“Not so fast!” the canny old man exclaimed. “The pawn moves forward slowly. He is insignificant, his movements unimportant. Often he is neither noticed nor missed. But there may come a time in this battle of the board, as in the battle of life, when knights and bishops, castles and queens have fallen, when the poor little pawn in a single move takes on a position of tremendous importance. All the time, with his snail-like pace, he has been coming closer and closer to the king-row. When the time comes, when he is prepared to glide across that last black line into the king-row, if there is no knight, bishop or queen to stop him, then he may look back from the king-row and say: ‘I am about to make a wish. My wish must be granted, for I have made my long and laborious way to the king-row. Now I wish to be a knight. I wish to be a bishop. I demand the right to become a queen.’ And behold, his wish must be granted!

“And that, too!” he exclaimed in a booming voice, “That, too, is life! All these long years I have been a pawn. Now, very soon, with God’s help and for the good of my fellow men, I shall step over into the king-row. Then I shall choose what I am to be, knight, bishop or queen.

“And you, too, my good friends,” he placed one hand on Scott’s shoulder, the other on Johnny’s, “you shall go into the king-row with me.

“But mind you,” his tone became solemn, “when a man becomes a knight or a bishop in this life we are living now, he assumes as great a responsibility as did knight or bishop in those brave days of good King Arthur and his Round Table.

“Come, Scott, boy.” His tone changed. “The men are placed. Who wins to-night?”

Johnny smiled as the two settled down to their game. His smile was very friendly. He was coming to love this brave old prospector more and more.

“He believes in himself and in God,” he told himself.

“‘Trust thyself. Every heart vibrates to that iron chord.’” Where had he heard that? He could not recall. He liked it all the same.

“It’s like Sandy,” he told himself. “He did not say, ‘Let those fellows who stole our films find gold or radium, then we’ll step in and get our share.’ He said,

‘We’ll go out and find it.’ And by all that’s good, we will!”

No Knight of the Round Table ever went forth with higher resolve than did Johnny as he ventured forth on the long trail that would take him to those rocky ledges that showed so plainly on the enlarged photograph. And no knight of any land faced more dangers nor dreamed of higher adventures than did he. Nor were his dreams to be in vain.

CHAPTER XVII
“HERE’S HOPING”

The news of the arrival of Chicago’s best known detective, Drew Lane, in the northern wilds spread over the land as oil spreads over water. Mail planes speeding on their courses dropped the surprising news. Gold-hunting planes picked it up and carried it on. Dog teams creeping over the white surface of the earth did their bit. Every trader, every trapper and every Indian passed the word along. Above and beyond all this was some mysterious means of communication which no one appeared to understand but which none doubted. This carried the news to every corner. And from each corner the word came echoing back: “Drew Lane is here. He rides in a bright red plane. The ‘Gray Streak’ may well tremble now!”

Some there were who doubted Drew Lane’s power. Not least among these were certain members of the Mounted Police. “All very well for Chicago,” they laughed, “a young chap like that. Plenty of nerve, no doubt. But what does he know about the North? Leave it to the Mounties. In the end, we get our man!”

“In the end.” Ah, yes! But there were those who shook grave heads at this. Rumors were not lacking that told of the bold, evil doings of the “Gray Streak.” Some of these, to be sure, went unconfirmed. Yet when a starved trapper with a starved dog team came in from the Barrens to tell of a cabin pillaged to the last cupful of flour, the last bacon rind, they said:

“It is time this was stopped!”

But who was to stop it? As for Curlie Carson, his answer was: “Drew Lane.” And yet, in the back of his head was a great desire. He hoped that for the glory of the Company that had trusted him with a powerful and valuable plane in this

land of many hazards, he might help to bring the “Gray Streak” to justice.

Even Joyce Mills, busily engaged as she was in the business of bringing her father back to life, and puzzled as she ever was with the problem of the stolen films, found time to listen and thrill at the tale of the arrival of her one-time pal and all-the-time friend, Drew Lane, and to lend an ear to the stories that came floating in from all quarters.

“He’ll get them,” she told her father. “I am sure he will.”

In her more sober moments she puzzled as ever about the stolen films. Matters were coming to a head in their mining camp. Hope ran high.

“But one is a thief,” she whispered more than once. “Jim, Clyde, Lloyd, which could it be? Jim is so religious, so kind and so—so—How could he? Clyde saved my father’s life. How could I doubt him? And Lloyd went all through that terrible war as a boy soldier. He might have gone home from the horror of it all simply by saying the word, yet he never said that word. How can one doubt a man like that?”

So the days passed. Her father’s condition improved. The work at their camp progressed.

From the other camp Johnny Thompson went in search of pitchblende, only to return empty-handed. Nothing daunted, he prepared for a second journey.

In the meantime, with his pilot, Don Burns, one of America’s finest, Drew Lane scoured the country for signs of the “Gray Streak.” Starting at Edmonton, he soared in ever widening circles until his ship of flaming red was known to every Indian child from Fort McMurray to Lake Athabasca and beyond where Great Slave River winds its white wintry way into the lake that bears its name.

From time to time he came to earth for food, fuel and sleep. All the resources of the land were at his command. The poorest trapper was ready enough to share with him his last batch of sourdough pancakes. But information? Ah! That was quite a different matter.

“Where is the ‘Gray Streak’?”

“Where indeed, Monsieur?” So spoke the half-caste French-Canadian. So spoke

they all. “He is there, somewhere; not here. He has been seen on the Porcupine, at Great Bear Lake, over the Barrens. But not here, sir. Thank God, not here!”

“And all the time,” thought Curlie Carson, as the days passed, “that D’Arcy Arden person is being carried about as a captive. Or, can that be true? Could a girl stand such a life? Or even a woman, or a boy? Think of the mental strain!”

“Drew,” he said one day as they met at the Chink’s at Fort Chipewyan, “if you ever come up to them, be careful. Think of that captive. If there is shooting to be done, watch the course of your bullets.”

“I’ll watch,” Drew replied quietly.

That Drew had watched the course of many bullets Curlie Carson, yes, and most of the world besides, knew right well, for Drew Lane had not hesitated to arrest the higher-ups in one of the greatest crime rings a city has ever known.

“This,” Curlie laughed, “should be a mere vacation for you.”

“Hardly a vacation,” Drew replied soberly. “No work, especially work that concerns the safety and welfare of many people, can ever be a vacation. Do you know, Curlie,” his tone became deeply serious, “it’s just because this case is different and quite new, and because its dramatic moments are to come in a land strange to me, that I fear it.”

“Fear it, did you say?” Curlie stared.

“Fear of failure is not considered a weakness,” Drew answered quietly. “Fear of failure properly applied puts one on his guard, leads him on to do his best.”

“But you will succeed!” Curlie spoke with conviction.

“Here’s hoping!”

They parted at this, but Curlie was to recall those two words, “Here’s hoping,” and that not twenty-four hours later.

CHAPTER XVIII
FLUTTERING FROM THE CLOUDS

And then the most astounding thing happened.

At Fort Smith, which lies on the way north from Chipewyan, Curlie received a message instructing him to proceed without delay to Resolution.

In defending his dogs from an infuriated bull moose a trapper had been badly injured. It was necessary to carry him at once to the hospital at Edmonton.

“No pursuit of the ‘Gray Streak’ this trip,” said Curlie as he hurriedly gulped down his coffee and prepared for flight.

“Absolutely not,” agreed Jerry.

The thing they saw enacted that day will never seem completely real to Curlie. “More like a moving picture drama,” he has said many times.

The day was one of mixed weather. One hour the sky was clear. The next it was filled with scudding clouds. There were times in between when it was half sky and half clouds.

It happened during one of these clearing spells. Their plane was bumping along like a bob-sled over the clouds, with the sky clearing, and fine chances of reaching Resolution in time for dinner when suddenly Jerry nudged Curlie, then pointed silently to the edge of a silver-lined cloud.

There, Curlie made out clearly enough, just emerging was the “Gray Streak.”

“Of all the luck!” Curlie groaned.

But what was that glint of red in the distance? For the first time in his life Curlie thought he knew how a gray-backed old pike must feel when some red lure is drawn through the water at a distance.

“Is it Drew Lane?” he asked himself. “Or is it some strange trick played on me by the sun?”

Now he thought he saw it. And now it was gone. A small cloud appeared to hide it. The cloud moved on. It was not there, that red speck. But yes, there it was, a little larger. Or was it?

Between keeping an eye on his own instruments and that elusive spot of red, he completely lost sight of the “Gray Streak” until once more Jerry nudged and pointed.

Curlie looked, then groaned aloud

“Going to land! What rotten, rotten luck!”

“Absolutely!”

It was true that the “Gray Streak” was circling for a landing, equally true that Curlie had sworn to do all within his power to bring that outlaw’s career to an end. And yet, he did not swerve one inch from his course. How could he? He had orders. This time they must be obeyed to the letter. A man’s life depended upon it.

And then came the moving picture drama which was after all not drama at all, but life—life so pulsating and real that Curlie was to start from his sleep with a cry of surprise and pain on many a night thereafter.

The “Gray Streak” had been sighted at a position some five miles before them. It was landing almost directly beneath the airway they followed. Indeed, it was coming to rest on the surface of the river.

The red spot Curlie had seen, or thought he had, was off at right angles to their course. A large cloud had blotted out that spot until Curlie was all but directly over the “Gray Streak,” which by this time had come to rest on the river, when there emerged from that cloud a large red spot which could no longer be mistaken for other than Drew Lane’s red racer of the air.

“What luck!” Curlie fairly shouted. “What luck for good old Drew Lane! He will —”

He broke off to stare. He was close enough now to make out a human figure clinging to the upper surface of the red plane.

“Drew!” His breath came quick. “It can’t be the pilot. It must be Drew. But why —why would—”

Again he gasped. The figure that at this distance seemed so tiny, slipped from the plane to shoot downward.

Ten seconds of suspense, then a sigh of relief. A parachute had unfolded. Together the figure and the parachute drifted into a cloud.

“Going after them single handed,” was Curlie’s conclusion. “Good old Drew! He hunts alone. And, like the Mounties, he gets his man. He—”

At that instant, for the first time in all his flying career, Curlie Carson all but lost control of his plane. A dip, a side twist, three wild heartbeats, and he was himself again and his plane went thundering on.

Yes, he had all but gone into a tailspin, and that with his motor thundering at its best. But who could blame him? The parachute he had seen a few seconds before, bearing his good friend Drew Lane safely toward the earth, had suddenly come fluttering out of the clouds. Borne on by the wind, it drifted aimlessly. Drew Lane had vanished.

“It’s the end!” Curlie thought, with a gulp.

Filled with rage, once his plane had righted itself, he felt himself consumed by a desire to disregard all orders; to drop to earth and engage the “Gray Streak” in a battle to the death.

But, guided by a more sober counsel, he thundered straight on toward Resolution. Duty had called. He must obey.

CHAPTER XIX
A THREE DAYS' QUEST

Before the parachute, from which Drew Lane had so mysteriously dropped, had floated out from the cloud, the Red Racer, still manned by Drew's pilot, had passed into another cloud.

"He does not know," Curlie told himself. "He believes that Drew made a safe landing and will believe it until some one has told him the truth."

It came to him that it was his duty to hunt out the Red Racer and break the sad news.

"But what would be the good? One does not fall thousands of feet and survive. My first duty is to the living."

He flew into Resolution, drank a scalding cup of black tea, took on his emergency passenger, and then flew straight back to Fort McMurray. There Punch Dickinson, who had come to relieve him, took over his task and he was free.

"Free to think!" he told himself bitterly.

And such thoughts as they were! He lived over again trying days in a great city when Drew Lane had played the part of a true friend to him, saw again his quiet smile, seemed to hear his voice. And then, as he closed his eyes he saw a thing like a white sheet flutter from the clouds to go drifting away on an all but endless journey, and heard once again the thunder of motors.

For a long time he tossed aimlessly about in his bed. Then a great resolve to control his mind won for him rest.

Morning found him with the time and the great desire to follow the “Gray Streak” to the bleakest shore of the Arctic, if need be.

He called the office and obtained permission to use his plane in this pursuit for three days.

“At the end of that time you must report for duty at McMurray,” came over the wire. “Take no chances that will cause you to break this trust.”

He gave his word; then, with Jerry at his side, he flew away into the morning.

If the news of the arrival of Drew Lane in this land spread rapidly, the story of his departure into a cloud spread with no less rapidity. It reached Johnny Thompson’s camp just as he was preparing to venture forth on another search for radio-active pitchblende. Like his good friend Curlie, he set his lips tight in a determination to do his utmost in avenging the death of a friend.

“He planned to drop down and face them single-handed,” he said to Sandy. “Somehow they must have found out his plans. They weakened the parachute ropes or his belt, so they would give way under his weight.”

Was this the solution? Who could say? There were many who believed it. For had not Drew Lane taken off at Edmonton airport? And had not Curlie Carson been robbed of a code message in his hotel in that very city? Who could say how many accomplices the “Gray Streak” might have in this frontier?

And after all, who was the outlaw pilot of this “Gray Streak”? There were those who believed the plane to be manned by Russians bent on raising a revolution in Canada and annexing this Dominion to Russia. “What could be more logical?” they argued. “Like the Russians, we are northern people. Our problems are their problems. How could they doubt that we would join them were the opportunity really given?”

In support of this theory, there was the gray mitten fashioned out of the pelt of a Siberian wolf-hound. It had been found in Curlie’s room. The thief had lost it.

“And yet,” another pointed out, “there are thousands of gray wolf-hounds in the United States and Canada. Their pelts are made into mittens. Such mittens may be bought and are worn in Winnipeg.”

“It’s that Chicago mail plane.” This was Curlie’s opinion. “That city is making life hard for dangerous criminals. The biggest of them all is out on bail. He is likely to be sentenced to three years in prison. What could be more logical than that he, or some one like him, should seize a plane to fly to the security that is found in wide open spaces?”

Some there were who believed that the “Gray Streak” was manned by reckless youths. This number diminished as charges piled up against this pirate of the air.

The news of Drew Lane’s disappearance brought sorrow into the camp of Joyce Mills and her father.

“He was a true friend,” Joyce said sadly.

“He was indeed!” her father agreed.

One ray of hope cheered their lonely path. The gleam of gold along their trail seemed to grow brighter day by day.

Thus matters stood as Curlie Carson, with Jerry at his side, sailed away in the light of the morning sun, bound on his three days’ search for the “Gray Streak.”

CHAPTER XX
THE HUNCHBACK BOWMAN

Three days, coming to earth only for fuel and sleep, Curlie and Jerry skimmed the far horizon searching for some sign of the “Gray Streak.” The days were fair. Beneath them lay the earth, a blanket of white broken only by streaks of black where spruce and tamarack followed a narrow stream. Beyond, to the north, south, east and west, lay the gray rim of the horizon. Three times Curlie’s heart leaped at sight of a plane on that horizon. Each time he met with disappointment. A commercial plane bringing trappers in from the Barrens and two mineral hunters, they brought him no news of the ship he sought.

And then, on the third day at a time when he was feeling the urge of duty to turn back, the “Gray Streak” hove in sight.

What to do? To follow? To turn back? The thing must be decided on the instant. Official orders said, “Turn back.” Romance, adventure, the desire to avenge a fallen comrade, the common good of all those who had come to dwell in the North, urged him on.

Duty whispered.

The call of romance rang in his ears. Romance won.

“Jerry, we’re going after them.”

“Absolutely, son.” Jerry’s grin was good to see.

Three hours later Curlie found himself following the lead of that mysterious ship. Grave doubts had by this time entered his mind.

“How is this to end?” He asked this question many times. Many times, too, he told himself it was his duty to turn back, that a cargo of freight for the north awaited him, that each mile on this mad adventure was counting against him as a pilot with a blameless record; yet something still urged him on.

A hundred, two, three, four hundred miles they flew.

Then like a flash it came to him that he was being led away into a land where no man was.

“They hope I will run out of gas and be obliged to land where there is no fuel supply. And then?”

He shuddered at thought of that which might follow. Save for his bow and arrow, neither he nor Jerry was armed. “And if they did not attack us, we would be in a fair way to starve before we could beat our way back across this rocky wilderness.”

* * * * * * * *

At this same moment Johnny Thompson was enjoying adventures all his own.

With his dog team on his second journey in search of pitchblende he had traveled fifty miles, and the day was still young. That was because he had started at two o’clock in the morning. In this north country where at one time of the year there is no night at all and in another there is no day, men forget the conventions of life. Instead of three meals a day, they may eat five, or two, or only one. If a journey is to be made, they start when they are ready. Johnny had been ready at two in the morning.

He was fond of night travel. Then the moon casts ghostly shadows. The stars burn like candles. All living things are afoot. White foxes are barking on the crests of rocky ridges. Wolves follow a traveler for hours. He did not mind the wolves. Like Curlie, he was an archer. His powerful bow, a curious affair made of wood, rawhide and some secret glue, presented to him by an Indian, was ever at hand.

Now and then a dark bulk that was a caribou loomed in the distance.

“If I could pick off one of those I could make my journey twice as long,” he told

himself.

He thought of the mineral he had come to seek, pitchblende. More illusive than gold and many times more precious, radium, the product of pitchblende, had somehow gotten into his blood.

Sandy possessed several books and pamphlets on radium. During his spare time Johnny had delved into these and had been fascinated by the story of radium. He had learned that while radium is worth sixteen million dollars a pound, a quantity worth twenty cents mixed with phosphorescent zinc will so illuminate a watch dial that time may be read from it on the darkest night.

Sandy had shown him a spinthariscope. In this curious instrument he had witnessed the flash of light that comes from a single atom of radium.

“And think!” Sandy had lowered his tone impressively. “Should this instrument be left in a dark chamber for a thousand years, that tiny atom would still give off light!”

As he traveled he paused now and then to chip off a bit of rock with his hammer, only to cast it away. He would do this to-day, to-morrow and the next day. Then, unless he obtained an extra food supply, he must turn back.

Yet in three days he could travel far. Beside some ancient river bed, on the rocks above a cataract that even winter could not conquer, at the crest of some mountain-like ridge, he might come upon the brownish-black, velvet-like quartz that would spell riches for old Sandy, Scott and himself. Always he thought first of his brawny, gray-haired friend.

“He is past seventy,” he told himself. “A prince of a man. Always lived for others. Ever a prospector, this is his last great adventure. It must be a real one. It surely must!”

His mind returned often to the strange tales Curlie had told him, tales of the “Gray Streak.”

“What if they were to swoop down upon me here on this river?” he said to himself with a shudder.

Once more he thought of pitchblende. “I’ll have some that shines like a candle in

the dark before I turn back."

Before he turned back? How little he knew of that which would happen before he turned his face toward camp!

Two things happened in quick succession. A caribou appeared on a ridge not fifty yards from his sled. A quick, fleeting arrow, and his food supply was supplemented by two hundred pounds of rich, juicy meat. Part of this he would hide in a scrub spruce tree, ready for use on his return. The rest would feed his dogs and himself for three days. And there was other food on his sled.

It was while he was preparing this meat that a truly curious thing happened. On a ridge a quarter of a mile from where he stood appeared a lone traveler. He drove a dog team. And such a team as it was! Up until that moment the boy had not believed that dogs could go so fast.

"Like the wind!" he exclaimed. "As if they had wings and raced an airplane."

The driver was stranger still. He was short and broad. As one looked at him from a distance it seemed that a pair of very broad shoulders had been set upon a pair of long legs, and a head placed atop it all. Yet those legs were powerful and fast. This strange being followed the team with ease.

"The hunchback bowman." Johnny's lips parted with wonder, and a thrill ran through his being. The bow and his sled had been made by a hunchback, an Indian. But this Indian had lived hundreds of miles away. "The hunchback bowman," he repeated, then turned to the task of the hour.

CHAPTER XXI
BOWLED OVER LIKE A TENPIN

As Curlie sped on his way after the “Gray Streak,” which was leading him farther and farther into the great unknown that is the Arctic wilderness, he came to a sudden resolve.

“I’ll turn back! Fifteen minutes more, and then if we do not arrive at their base, if they are not forced down for want of gas, I will head for Fort Chipewyan,” he told himself.

Then nature took a hand. Out of the north a whirling avalanche of snow came tearing down upon them.

Just as the last trace of land was blotted out by this winding sheet of white, the boy made out a broad, level expanse which he knew to be a lake.

“Be over it in five minutes,” he shouted to Jerry. “Got to land there, make or break.”

“Absolutely.” Jerry’s grin was still there.

At that moment, as if angered at thought of losing its prey, the gray storm leaped at them. Throwing its feathery arms about the plane, it tossed them high. Curlie gasped. His indicator showed a speed of one hundred and sixty-five miles an hour as his ship, quite out of control, shot aloft.

Cross currents ripping from both sides tossed the plane as a kitten tosses a ball. Feeling his safety belt loosen, the young pilot dug in his toes and stayed with the ship.

As sudden as their entrance into the cloud came their departure. Tossed forth like dust from a cart wheel, the boy found his plane tilting at an angle of forty-five degrees.

With a quick intake of breath, he righted the plane and headed her downward.

Five minutes later, from out a mass of white they approached a second mass that somehow seemed solid. And so it was. They hit the lake with a force that set their teeth rattling. For a space of seconds it seemed that their ship might go on her nose. But, like some bird lighting on a limb, she tilted twice, then shot away on an even keel.

“Good old ship!” the boy murmured.

There was still call for care. A massive wall of stone, the bold shore of the lake, loomed before them. With a deft turn, the boy brought his plane about and set her skirting that shore. A moment more and they came to rest not a stone’s throw from that protecting cliff.

But what now? As he climbed down from his place Curlie saw at the edge of a clump of willows and scrub spruce, where the shore was less abrupt, a small cabin built of logs.

It was a new cabin. The hewn ends of the logs were still white. Smoke curled from the chimney.

“Jerry,” said Curlie, “do you suppose that some strange chance has led us to the very door of the cabin occupied by those mysterious rascals?”

For once Jerry’s ready answer did not come. Quite as much mystified as his pilot, he merely shook his head and stared.

At that moment Curlie’s ears caught a strange sound, the curious whining, yelping sound of a creature in distress. But what kind of creature?

“Can’t be a dog,” he told himself. “Don’t sound right.” He had never heard such a sound in his life.

As he stood there puzzling over this fresh mystery, the door of the cabin flew open. A man stood in the door, a broad-shouldered, powerful man. And in his

hand he gripped an axe.

He did not look at the two standing there. Perhaps he did not know they were there at all. Or did he? Their motor had been shut off far down the lake. He might not have heard it.

However that might be, he did not bestow so much as one glance upon them. Instead, for a space of ten seconds, he looked down through the scrub timber that lined the lake's shore, then strode resolutely some fifty paces away. And now for the first time Curlie noted that some creature was moving there.

With the snow whirling and eddying about him, it was impossible for the boy to distinguish objects plainly. As he stood there watching that strange, powerfully built man walk from his cabin toward the moving object at the edge of the scrub forest, many questions raced through his mind.

Who was this man? Was this truly the hiding place of the mysterious pilot and his band? If so, what then?

At this point he thrust a hand inside the cabin to draw forth his bow and his quiver of razor-pointed arrows.

"Safety first," he whispered to Jerry.

"Absolutely."

Again his mind was filled with questions. What creature was this moving there in the snow-fog? Was it a human being? He doubted this. Had it been he who had produced those strange cries of distress? He could not know.

And now, as the man, axe in hand, approached, the mysterious creature reared himself to his full height. Curlie caught his breath. He was taller than the man. When he lunged forward, as if to seize the man, something appeared to hold him back. All but losing his balance, he leaned far forward.

The man struck at him. The stroke fell short. The next instant, recovering his poise, the creature struck out with surprising speed.

Appearing to have been injured by this sudden blow, the man stumbled backward. But the next instant Curlie caught the gleam of the axe and the

creature went down.

“It’s a bear. What a lucky stroke!” he said to Jerry.

But wait. The battle was not over; in fact it had hardly begun. Looming high over the man, a great bulk had appeared from out the low forest. Without the least warning it launched itself upon the man. They went down in a heap and for a space of seconds a wild whirl of snow hid them.

“Come on!” Curlie shouted, gripping his bow. “That’s a barren-ground grizzly! The other was a cub. She’ll get him. We must do what we can!”

He was at the scene of battle in a twinkling. For half a minute it was impossible to distinguish the man from his assailant.

Then the bear threw up her head.

Curlie let fly an arrow. At short range, it passed quite through the beast’s great neck.

With a roar of rage and pain, the monster turned about to sniff the air. Then, as the hair rose on her back like a mane, she reared herself to a towering height.

Cold perspiration started out on the boy’s temples. His antagonist was truly immense. Yet grizzlies had been killed with bow and arrow. A second arrow found its mark. Backing off, he sent a third speeding.

Then the creature charged. One more arrow, and he sprang for a tree. Not a second too soon. She went crashing by him, and then collapsed in a heap on the snow.

Jerry had vanished. But now he appeared again.

“Well,” Curlie stammered, “we killed the bear.”

“Absolutely.” Once more Jerry smiled. “I’d have helped if I could.”

At once they turned their attention to the stranger. He was sitting up in the snow. His face, his jacket, the snow about him were red with blood.

“Wh—where did you come from?” he asked unsteadily.

“Sent from the sky,” was the boy’s quick reply.

“You—you saved my life.”

“Perhaps,” Curlie answered laconically. “We’ll get you to the house, then see how much of you is saved.”

Together he and Jerry assisted him to the cabin. And all the time the young aviator was asking himself, “Who is this man? Why is he alone in this vast wilderness four hundred miles from anywhere? Is he truly a member of that gang? Will they come here? And if they do?”

In the hours that followed there was little time to think of these things. The stranger had been clawed and bitten by the bear in a most alarming manner. Jerry, who until now had appeared pure mechanic, displayed astonishing ability in another line. Bringing his first-aid kit from the plane and supplementing it with materials taken from a medicine chest in the corner of the cabin, he displayed great skill in dressing the man’s wounds.

Through it all the man uttered not one word. This is not to be wondered at. He was in great pain. Once for a short time he lost consciousness. When revived he turned over with a groan to utter a single word:

“Nelson.”

While Jerry engaged with his task, Curlie examined the food supply. In a grub box he found flour, sugar, bacon and a miscellaneous assortment of cans. Under the eaves hung a generous cut of fresh caribou meat.

He put some of this meat to broil over the coals. He brewed a can of strong coffee. When Jerry had completed the dressing of the man’s wounds, he offered the man a cup of this coffee. He gulped it down eagerly; then, to their astonishment, he turned over with his face to the wall and fell fast asleep.

“He’ll do well enough now,” said Jerry.

“But we must get him out to a doctor at once. Complications may set in.”

“Absolutely.”

“What say we eat?”

“Righto!”

Five minutes later they were munching fresh caribou steak and cold biscuits. But in Curlie’s mind a score of questions still circled round and round.

* * * * * * * *

It was on this same day that Johnny Thompson, who had followed the dog team far into the wilderness in search of radio-active rock, met with some of the most startling adventures of his eventful life.

Two hours after sun-up he had paused to build a small fire and had prepared himself a breakfast of beans warmed in a pan, bacon and pilot bread. The dogs, who lay contentedly on the snow, knew that their turn to eat would come when the day’s work was done. Dogs on the trail are fed but once a day.

His breakfast over, he had driven in a leisurely manner up a small stream, across a narrow lake, around a series of rushing cascades, and then across a second small lake.

He was beginning to feel the strain of long continuous travel, his dogs were lagging, when he came to a third lake much larger than the others. There he met with what to him seemed extreme good fortune. He had started upon the journey prepared to spend his nights rolled up in his feather robe, sleeping beneath the cold white gleam of the stars. But here, nestling among the scrub spruce trees, was a cabin. True, it was but a narrow shelter built of logs, but its roof of heavily painted canvas was still intact, its door still hung upon its hinges, and there was a rough chimney of stones with a crude fireplace at its base.

“What could be sweeter?” he said to his dog leader, Ginger. “What, indeed? A floor to sleep on, a place for a fire and shelter from the wind. Going to storm, too.” He stepped outside to sniff the air. “Yep, sure is!”

A hasty examination showed him a lean-to against the upper end of the cabin. Beneath this were tiers of ten gallon tins piled high.

“Empty.” He kicked one.

“No. Full. Gas. Some aerial mining company’s base. Well, I won’t disturb them. My craft don’t burn that kind of fuel.”

Digging into his pack he drew forth a large piece of juicy caribou meat. “Guess this will be better than gas.” His dogs crowded around him. He cut off bits of meat and threw them up to be caught by the hungry travelers.

Having looked after his four-footed friends, he set about the business of making the cabin comfortable for the night. Had he known who was to enjoy these comforts, his steps might have lagged. As it was, he toiled lustily. Finding an axe, he cut down scrub spruce trees and chopped them into fire wood. Having piled one corner high with fuel, he filled a large kettle with ice hacked from the surface of the lake and set it on the fire to thaw.

He was preparing to plan his own dinner when a curious sound for so desolate a region struck upon his ear, the drone of an airplane motor.

“Now, who—”

He dashed to the door. Finding that the plane was out of sight beyond the bend, he ran out upon the ice. The next moment a large plane, gliding upon its skis, came toward him. Having judged its course and concluded that it would pass several paces before him, he stood quite still.

To his surprise and consternation he saw the plane take a sudden swerve. Before he could escape it was upon him. He leaped to one side just in time to miss the still revolving propeller, but was struck on the head by a strut and bowled over like a tenpin to lie there quite motionless upon the snow.

CHAPTER XXII
GREAT GOOD FORTUNE

Which is most to be desired, thrilling adventure or great good fortune? Individuals will ever answer this question in their own way. The soldier of fortune, going from war to war throughout a long lifetime, seeks only adventure. Men of great wealth, shuddering at thought of anything approaching true adventure, lock themselves up in their caged offices to count their gold.

However we are to answer this question, it is necessary to state that while Johnny Thompson and Curlie Carson were passing through thrilling adventures, their good friend Joyce Mills was enjoying a taste of great good fortune.

The days following her father's narrow escape from the rushing river were trying ones. Yet they were days of hope. Her father's recovery, though slow, seemed sure. He was a man of splendid vitality. Overtaxing labors had partially shattered his nerves. But all his life he had fought hard battles. This was but one more battle, and he fought it nobly.

At the end of ten days he was able to be about the cabin a little and to sit for long hours dreaming by the fire. Then it was that for the first time Joyce told him the disappointing news of the test that had showed plenty of copper and nickel, but no worth-while amount of radium in his pitchblende samples.

"I am so disappointed." Joyce's tone was very sober. "It was my hope that we might truly do this suffering world a great service."

"With radium?"

"Yes."

“Never you mind.” He placed a hand gently on her arm. “We will do it yet. If we find only gold, we will use it to buy radium for some little hospital in some needy section of our great city.”

“Does the world need more gold?”

“Perhaps not. But with gold we may purchase the things we and our fellow men need. ‘Ours not to reason why,’” he repeated with a strange smile.

It was on that very evening that Lloyd Hill, the Canadian youth with the alert and restless eyes, came to the Mills’ cabin. He seemed in an uncommon state of excitement.

“Joyce,” he said, coming to the point straight off, “will you do me a favor?”

“Always. Anywhere.” She laughed a strange laugh.

“I’ve something to share; at least I hope I have. That is, I mean there is a great joy or great disappointment due. Whatever it may be, I want to share it—with you.”

“Wh—when?”

“To-morrow.”

“Oh, all right.”

“To-morrow. Will you drive out to my diggin’s? I’m going out early. Been thawing frozen ground all day. Stuff it with dry moss. Won’t freeze, not much. To-morrow—well, it’s my big moment.”

“I—I’ll come.” Her voice was hoarse with suppressed emotion. She had caught it from him.

“Be there at nine.”

“At nine,” she repeated after him. Then he was gone.

She slept badly that night. Sometimes she fancied she heard a voice saying, “You find gold? Mebby yes. Mebby no.” At other times she thought of her

companions. She had not quite forgotten that all their efforts to find gold, silver, radium were guided by films that rightly belonged to another. No longer could she believe that one of these men had committed the theft. She thought of Lloyd Hill's faultless world war record. She recalled the time Jim had saved her dogs, and that night he had talked so earnestly of religion. Most vivid of all was the memory of that hour when her father's life had hung in the balance and Clyde Hawke had snatched him from the grave.

"They couldn't have done it!" she told herself stoutly. "And yet—"

She woke from a period of belated slumber just in time to swallow a cup of steaming coffee, hitch her dogs and go speeding away across the snow.

When she arrived at the scene of the diggings the young prospector was nowhere to be seen.

"He's here somewhere," she told old Dannie, the dog leader, as she turned him about and tied him to the sled.

Having passed a mound of dark earth, she approached a crude windlass when a voice coming apparently from the very earth called:

"Is that you?"

"Where are you?" she called back.

"Where a miner should be. In the mud. Come to the windlass and look down."

She obeyed. He was, as he explained, "drifting" along the old bed of the river, cutting a passage toward the rocks that had formed the falls.

"Give me a hand!" he exclaimed. "Twist the windlass. Now! Up she goes! Dump that anywhere, and lower the bucket."

The excitement of the hour being still upon him, it did not occur to him that the task he had set for her was little fitted to her slight form. As for the girl, catching his enthusiasm, she toiled on for an hour without apparent effort. Again and again the bucket rose; again and again her aching muscles responded to the call.

"It's gold," she told herself. "It must be! This time we must win!"

“Dump this bucket to one side, and the next and the next,” he shouted up at last as, feeling her strength oozing away, she stood for a moment easing her aching back. His next words, running through her being like an electric current, gave her strength she had not known before. “These,” he explained, “may be pay-dirt. We should be nearing the pocket.”

Again the windlass creaked and groaned. Again her sore muscles responded to her iron will. One, two, three, four, five, six buckets were added to the fresh pile of earth.

Then, for a time there was silence below. The cry, “Ready! Up she goes!” was slow in coming. It failed to come at all. Instead, there was a low shout of triumph, then a call:

“Catch!”

Before her some shining object rose in air. With a deft hand she caught it. Then her turn came.

“It’s gold!” Her tone, in which were mingled hope, disbelief and unbounded joy, called forth a roar of mirth from below.

“Gold,” he agreed. “Only one sizeable nugget, but gold all the same.”

“Gold!” she cried once more.

At that moment she seemed to hear a voice say: “You find gold? Mebby yes. Mebby no.”

Did she see something stir beyond the low ridge to the right? She thought she had. Dannie appeared to agree, for suddenly he rose to his feet and growled.

“Gold!” She spoke more softly now. “How much gold?”

The young Canadian did not answer. Perhaps he had not heard. With hands that trembled he once more gripped his shovel to fill his bucket with thawed earth, that by this time ran heavy to coarse gravel. And from each shovel-full came more than a suggestion of that yellow sand that is gold.

“Gold!” the girl murmured again, this time very soberly. “Whose gold?”

CHAPTER XXIII
WHITHER AWAY?

What had caused the plane that had struck Johnny Thompson to swerve in its course? Some secret device for changing its course? An unevenness on the surface of the frozen lake? Johnny will never know. Some things, however, he did learn soon after he came to. One of these was that for some unknown reason he had been made a prisoner. He found himself in the narrow confines of an airplane cabin. And in the cabin, quite close to him, was a boy some two or three years his junior. The boy was dressed in a parka of caribou skins, coarse trousers and moccasins.

“Something,” Johnny told himself, “is terribly wrong.” In an effort to sit up, he attempted to move his feet. He found it impossible to move them separately. They were bound together.

“Say!” he whispered hoarsely. “What’s the idea? And who are you?”

“My name,” the other replied quietly, “is D’Arcy Arden. What’s the idea, do you ask? You may answer that. My feet are bound together the same as yours. Looks like we were in the same boat, or perhaps you might say, same plane.” In spite of his predicament, the boy managed a chuckle. In this he was joined by Johnny who immediately felt better in spite of his aching head.

“D’Arcy Arden,” he repeated half aloud. “Where have I heard that name?” He had heard that name; seen it, too. He shut his eyes and at once the image of a square of white cloth with D’Arcy Arden written upon it appeared.

“Your name on a handkerchief,” he said to the other boy.

“My handkerchief!” The boy’s eager blue eyes fairly shone. He tossed his

blonde hair back to stare at Johnny. “Did some one really find it? And will he rescue me?”

“Some one found it,” Johnny replied slowly. “Curlie Carson, an aviator. Afraid it won’t do you much good, though. He was down in a storm when you passed. Couldn’t follow, of course. Lost all track of this ‘Gray Streak,’ as he calls it. Where is he now? Hundreds of miles away, I suppose.”

Little he knew about that.

“But tell me,” Johnny commanded in an awed whisper. “What sort of outlaws are these that they come into a country without a mark on their plane, burning the gas of honest people without so much as a by-your-leave, and carrying off everyone who comes near them?”

The young boy’s face broadened into a grin. “Again I must, what would you Americans say? ‘Pass the buck.’ I don’t know, at least not much. You have seen them?”

“No.”

“No?”

“Only their plane. They bowled me over as they landed, then apparently picked me up and chucked me in here.”

“They were kind to you in one way,” said D’Arcy. “They gave you your feather robe. Mind sharing it? I’ve been frozen stiff for days.”

Johnny had been too greatly concerned about the troubles he had suddenly fallen heir to to think about comfort. But another’s comfort; that was different. At once his hands were busy untying the thong that bound his eight-foot-square robe into a roll.

Ten minutes of tugging, twisting, tucking in, and they were lying side by side rejoicing in the warmth that comes even in the Arctic wilds.

“Now,” said Johnny, “tell me what you know. Are they bank robbers from the States?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Rich men’s sons on what they’d call a lark?”

“Oh, my no!”

“Foreigners who are trying to enter this country or the United States without passports?”

“Perhaps. They are foreigners; great husky fellows with tall fur hats and great bearskin coats. They speak hardly a word of English. But if all they wish is to enter a country, why all this secret wandering in the air? Why not enter and have it over with?”

“But you?” Johnny asked.

“My father’s a buffalo ranger down on the preserve. You know we have woods-buffalo in a preserve south of Great Slave Lake, just as you have them in Yellowstone Park. I was looking for some strays when they landed on the river. And they nabbed me.”

“But why?”

“Who knows? ’Fraid I’d get some one on their trail perhaps. I think they’ll use me for ransom, or a decoy sometime, maybe. Who could tell that? All I know is I’m here. Very little to eat. Freezing at night. Flying here, there, everywhere.”

“Have—have they a base?”

“I don’t know. Never been out of this cabin. They—”

“Listen!” Johnny laid a hand on his arm. “Some one climbing into the cockpit.”

At once the motors thundered. “Warming up.” D’Arcy formed the words with his lips, then made the motion of soaring with his hand. Johnny understood. They were leaving.

A glance out of the narrow window told him the weather had cleared.

“Took gas here,” he told himself. “Warmed themselves by my fire, ate my

dinner; now we are away." His heart was filled with impotent rage. "Probably leave my dogs to starve, or wander into the wilds!"

In this last he was wrong. Five minutes later the door was thrown open and a dog tumbled in. He was followed by four others. Then the door was slammed shut.

In their joy at finding him again the dogs nearly ate Johnny up.

"Good dogs!" The boy's tone was husky. "Lie down, that's a good fellow! Lie down."

He watched eagerly until the last dog came tumbling in and the door slammed shut. Then his face fell.

"Ginger," he murmured dejectedly. "They must have done him in. He was my pal. They'd never get him alive. Poor old Ginger!"

"Was he your leader?" There was true understanding in the other boy's tone. Born and bred in the North, he knew what a good dog leader meant.

"He was more than a leader," Johnny said huskily. "For two years, ever since I was in Alaska, he was my companion and pal. But now—"

"Don't be so sure they killed him," said D'Arcy. "I haven't heard a howl from any dog. Plenty of barking, though. He may have slipped his collar."

"And gone back over the trail!" Johnny exclaimed. "There's hope in that. If he makes his way back to our camp, then Sandy will know that something has happened to me. And he'll never rest until he finds me. In his younger days Sandy was a Mountie. You know what they're like!"

"They get their man."

"Yes, and Sandy will get his."

"Who's Sandy?"

"He's the man I'm with. We're looking for pitchblende with radium in it."

"Pitchblende? Radium?"

“Tell you more later. Look! We’re off!”

They were indeed gliding over the ice. Faster and faster they went until with a graceful swoop they rose above the scrub forest and were away.

“It’s a shame!” Johnny exclaimed. “It’s a shame that a thing so marvelous as an airplane should fall into the hands of such black rascals!”

“Whither away?” he murmured as their speed increased. He could form no answer.

CHAPTER XXIV
A FACE AT THE WINDOW

The mysterious gray airplane bearing Johnny Thompson and D'Arcy Arden to some unknown destination had not been gone from the abandoned mining camp a half hour when a curious figure appeared upon the scene. His was the height of a boy of ten, the breadth of a giant. His prodigious arms, when hanging straight down, touched the snow. His face was all but hidden by a coarse black beard. A pair of red lips, a huge nose and two bead-like eyes gave character to his face. For all his physical appearance, he might have been a baboon dressed like an Eskimo. He was not. He was a hunchback Indian.

No sooner had he arrived upon the scene than he appeared to understand that something was radically wrong.

And, indeed, evidence was not lacking. In a spot of clean snow, stripped of its load and turned upside down, was Johnny's sled. Close at hand the snow was trampled as if from a battle. In the trampled spot were footprints of a dog and a man.

The Indian searched the entire locality carefully. The cabin, the sled, the scrub forest, all fell under the scrutiny of his beady eye. He was looking, if truth were known, for a dead dog. He found none.

With a grunt he turned to his own team. A second's hesitation, and he returned to the abandoned sled. Having righted it, he spied something half buried in the snow.

He picked it up. Instantly his eyes lighted with a strange mixture of joy and astonishment as they gazed upon that object. It was a bow, Johnny's bow. And that bow had been given to Johnny at a spot hundreds of miles away by a

hunchback bowman.

This discovery appeared to alter the Indian's entire course of action. Beginning again, he went over the ground with painstaking care. He searched the cabin, the forest, the ice covered lake. Finally he followed the course taken by the plane as it glided over the ice before its take-off.

When all this had been done, he lifted his face to the sky as if in prayer; then speaking to his dogs, one of the fastest teams known to this white world, he set them upon a course they were to follow not alone until darkness fell but on and on through the night.

Whatever this person's purpose might be, he could but have appeared as a heroic figure as, steadily following his untiring team, he traced what to all appearance was a blind trail on through the night.

Scarcely less heroic was a lone gray figure, traveling in the opposite direction. With unerring instinct this gray form followed back over the trail Johnny and his team had traveled. This lone gray figure was only that of a dog; but even a dog, with a purpose, may become a hero.

* * * * * * * *

Once more in Johnny Thompson's mind, as he felt the strange gray plane whose pilot he had not so much as seen go thundering on, many questions whirled round and round. Why, why was he a captive? Why was D'Arcy Arden here? Who were these great, dark, whiskered men who flew an unmarked plane over these northern wastes?

"One would not think it possible for strangers to live so long and travel so far in such a land without supplies of their own," he told himself. "Yet in no other land could it be done so easily. In summer it is necessary for dwellers in this land to bring in supplies of gasoline and food for winter's use. These supplies brought in by steamboat are often left in unguarded spots. Up until now, men in this land have been honest. It is the only way man can survive in such an unfriendly land. But now, if this continues, no man will be safe from cold and hunger."

Having thought this thing through, he renewed his resolve to do all within his power to bring this unbearable situation to an end.

“But what’s to be done?” He was obliged to smile at himself as he realized how helpless he was. With his ankles tied together he was speeding he knew not where in a plane he had seen only from the outside, and which was piloted by men whose very names were unknown to him.

“I may help yet,” he told himself. “Stranger things have happened.”

As he looked down upon the world that glided beneath him, he saw that the shadow gliding across the blanket of white, their shadow, was far to their right.

“Long shadows,” he shouted to D’Arcy.

The boy heard him above the thunder of motors. “Yes,” he nodded. “Soon be night. And then?” He held his hands before him in a gesture of questioning and uncertainty.

In that gesture one might have read, “Where are we going? Where will we land? Do these people have a base? Will they take us there?”

Would they? Curlie Carson had been forced down by a storm. The pilots of the mystery plane had taken a chance and had flown on and out of the storm. Had Curlie come by mere chance upon their base? Was the powerful man, whose life he had saved, an accomplice of the mystery flyers? Let us see.

At the moment Johnny was watching the distant gliding shadow, Curlie sat before a fire that roared up the mouth of a crudely built chimney while, propped up comfortably in a chair, the injured cabin dweller sat beside him.

“We’ve done what we could for you,” Curlie was saying. “The very best we could, but it’s not enough. We’ll have to take you out to a doctor. Complications may set in. Some of those wounds are deep.”

“I know.” The man spoke with a slightly foreign accent, but his choice of English words was good. “You have been very kind. You saved my life. No doubt of it.

“That bear,” his voice rose, “was a thief. Two thieves they were, she and the cub. In a land like this you have to depend upon fresh meat, caribou, rabbit, ptarmigan, fish.

“The trees are short—you know how they are, ten inches across the bottom of the trunk, but tapering off like a top, not ten feet tall. I hung my meat in trees and my fish on racks. Those bears clawed it down and ate it.

“I set a bear trap. I caught the cub in the trap, you saw. I thought the big one was not about. She was. You know. And she—she nearly got me. If it had not been for you, I—

“Say!” He broke off. “Who sent you here? Why did you come?”

“No one sent us,” Curlie replied quietly. “Yes, perhaps some one did. I believe it was God. He does things that way.”

“God? Yes, perhaps.”

“It looked very much like a wild goose chase,” Curlie went on. “We were following a mysterious gray plane. The plane is absolutely without marks. It flies everywhere on gas that belongs to others. It’s a menace. Ever heard of it?” He looked the man squarely in the eyes. But if this man experienced any emotion he did not betray it.

“Heard a plane once or twice,” he said slowly, “flying high. Thought they were gold seekers, out taking pictures.

“You know what lake this is, of course?”

Curlie shook his head.

“Lake Dubawnt. It’s practically unexplored. Some natives here, Caribou Eskimo. Wild as deer. Seen ’em several times. Never came up to them. Might not be safe. Might send you a shower of arrows.

“It’s a big lake. Half as large as Lake Ontario. No one comes here. It’s a thousand miles from Edmonton. And a thousand miles with dog team or canoe is a long way.”

“But by airplane?”

“Oh, yes.”

“And you live here all the year alone?” Curlie’s tone took on an eager note.

“Alone? Oh, no. Not alone.” The man’s voice trailed off into nothingness. Then, turning his face toward the fire, he sat a long time looking into the flames. He appeared to be reading them. After a time he said,

“God sent them? Well, I shouldn’t wonder. God seems to have a hand in many affairs. I’ll be thinking more of Him after this; natural enough that I should.”

And so the twilight faded into darkness and little white foxes came out to bark on the crest of the hill above the fringe of scrub trees. Far away a white Arctic wolf prowled in search of sleeping ptarmigan.

* * * * * * * *

Just as those evening shadows deepened into darkness the gray plane that carried Johnny Thompson and his new found friend to some unknown destination dropped down from the sky to alight upon the frozen surface of a broad lake. What lake? This Johnny could not tell. No one came forward to inform him. He was not invited to dismount from the plane and relieve his stiffened muscles. Half a loaf of hard bread and a bottle of water were thrust in at the door. Then they were left, he and D’Arcy, to darkness and silence.

By propping himself on an elbow Johnny was able to look through the narrow windows. To the left was a glistening expanse of white. On the right was a narrow fringe of low trees skirting a hill, and at the edge of the trees a cabin. A light shone cheerily from the cabin’s one small window. From time to time this light appeared to flare up. This, Johnny knew, was but the increase of illumination that came to the interior of the cabin when the log fire flamed high.

“Going to be tough, sleeping here with all these dogs,” said D’Arcy.

“Not so bad.” Johnny’s tone was cheerful in spite of his misadventures. “They mind me pretty well. I’ll make them stack up together down by our feet. They’ll keep one another warm.

“The thing that troubles me most,” he went on after a time, “is that this ends my search.”

“Search?”

“For pitchblende. Radio-active rock, you know.” Johnny’s tone was thoughtful. “It’s not so much for myself. I’m young. Lots more chances for me. But Sandy, he’s old. His last great adventure.

“And then, think what it would mean to find pitchblende that would yield a large per cent of radium!

“It’s an awfully long process, this getting radium from pitchblende. You crush the ore fine, then leach it out with acid. Leach it three or four times, and you get a small quantity of uranium. But uranium is not radium. It only contains radium. Another long process, and you get the radium clear. But how much? Much as would rest on the head of a pin, probably.

“In a whole year all the radium workers in the world produced only eight and a half grains, about a fourth of an ounce. Some figures are staggering because of their bigness. Radium figures are shockingly small.

“And yet,” the boy’s tone became deeply serious, “a single half gram of radium, one sixty-fourth of an ounce, has been used to work remarkable cures. Men who seemed doomed to an early and terrible death have been cured and sent back to their happy families, all because of radium.

“And if you want large figures, here they are. One gram of radium is worth about $35,000. One ounce $1,000,000. One pound (if there were such a thing in the world) $16,000,000. And no discount for large orders.”

“I’d like to have a pound in my pocket right now,” D’Arcy chuckled.

“You might regret it.”

“Regret it?”

“If you left it there long enough though you had it securely packed in a tube, it would burn.”

“My pocket.”

“Not your pocket. But it would burn *you*.

“It’s the strangest element this old earth knows.”

Having thus disposed of this interesting subject, the two boys munched their bread, drank their water, put the dogs in their places and, rolling up in Johnny's feather robe, prepared to make the best of a bad situation by sleeping the night through.

Despite his strange surroundings and the extraordinary position in which he found himself, Johnny slept soundly.

He was awakened, he knew not at what hour, by the low growl of a dog.

"Down Tige!" he commanded in a low voice. "Be still!"

The dog lay down in his place.

"What could have disturbed him?" Johnny asked himself.

The moon at that moment was under a cloud. The interior of the cabin was dark. He caught the sound of light tapping. It came from the window on his right. Strain his eyes as he might, he could see nothing.

Then suddenly the moon, creeping from behind the cloud, flooded all with yellow light.

Involuntarily the boy shrank into the shadows. There was a face at the window. And scarcely could one have imagined an uglier face; a great nose, red lips and beady eyes framed in shaggy hair.

But suddenly the boy leaned eagerly forward. His eyes lighted with a strange fire. Then in a whisper curiously like a cry of triumph, he exclaimed:

"The hunchback bowman!"

CHAPTER XXV
A POCKETFUL OF GOLD

In the meantime Lloyd Hill had climbed from his hole beneath the frozen crust of earth to stare at his slender companion, Joyce Mills, in genuine dismay.

“That is no task for a girl!” he exclaimed. “I was too eager. I—I wanted to share it with you!”

Truly the girl’s appearance would never have done in a parlor setting. She had thrown off her fur parka. Her heavy wool dress was smeared from waist to hem with sandy mud. Her moccasins were a wreck. Her hands were red and blistered. She had been turning the windlass and dumping pay-dirt for three solid hours.

“No! No!” she protested gamely. “Why, it has been marvelous! I—I wouldn’t have missed it for anything. Truly I wouldn’t!”

“Well, then,” replied Lloyd, in a calmer voice, “now that the worst is over, I suggest that you put on your parka and prepare to rock this thing back and forth for an hour while we pan our pay-dirt and see how much gold we really have.”

“There is some,” she replied excitedly as her head disappeared inside her parka. “I saw it gleaming among the pebbles.”

“Oh, yes, there is some.”

* * * * * * * *

Strange as it may seem, at this moment Scott Ramsey, in that other prospector’s camp seventy miles away, was bursting through the door with a shout:

“They’ve found it! Gold!”

Sandy MacDonald, who had been stirring up a batch of sourdough flapjacks, turned about to stare. “Found gold? Where?”

“Those fellows who have been using our pictures. They’ve found gold in an old creek bed.”

“When?”

“Two, three hours ago.”

“Then the Moccasin Telegraph works?”

“Sure it works. And now—”

“Seems a shame to claim a share.”

“It does. But it’s only just. We must not let foolish sentiment stop us. We must think of our rights.”

“Scott,” said Sandy thoughtfully, “did you ever receive an answer to that letter you wrote to your friend in Winnipeg asking about those films?”

“Never did.”

“It should be here by now.”

“Yes. But it hasn’t arrived, not yet.”

* * * * * * * *

Lloyd Hill’s method of extracting gold from pay-dirt was simple, but effective. He had arranged a board trough a foot wide, six inches deep and ten feet long in such a manner that it might be shaken backward and forward. Since the trough was tilted slightly, any substance within it would move slowly toward the lower end.

At that end was a pocket half filled with quick-silver.

He shoveled pay-dirt into the trough. As the girl rocked the trough backward and

forward he poured upon it warm water from his steam thawer. As the mass of soft earth moved downward, heavy particles went to the bottom, then into the mercury pocket. The mercury collected the gold to itself. The lighter rocks were crowded out and passed on.

“Won’t get it all,” Lloyd explained as he shoveled. “Not near all. But, if it’s any good we’ll thaw it out and work it over again in the spring.”

For an hour after that they worked in silence. Only once did the young man lift his face to the wind, to mutter:

“Going to storm.”

Already the wind was rising. Joyce felt bits of snow cut her cheeks.

“No matter,” she murmured. “It’s not so far back. And you couldn’t lose old Dannie. Good old Dannie! He knows the way.”

Then a thought struck her. She seemed to be hearing Johnny Thompson say: “If you make a strike, we’ll know it. Moccasin Telegraph.”

“Does he know?” she asked herself. “If he knows, will he come, he and the others?”

Once more she felt the sting of snow on her cheek, and shuddered.

But had they made a strike after all? They would soon know!

Pausing to rest his weary muscles, the young Canadian allowed the pay-dirt to drift off the rocker until nothing remained save that which was in the pocket.

“Now—” His voice was a trifle unsteady. “Now we shall see!”

Thrusting in his hand, he stirred the mass in the pocket. And as he stirred the tense muscles of his face relaxed into a smile.

“Joyce, my child!” he cried, seizing her and sending her whirling round and round. “We win! There is gold! Gold aplenty!”

“Four pounds if an ounce!” he exclaimed a little later when the work was done.

“And this is only the beginning!

“Night’s coming.” He looked away toward the west. “Night and storm. No one will disturb these diggings. Hop into the sled and we will be going.”

Wearily, with every muscle in her body crying for rest, but with a heart pounding with joy, the girl dropped to her place in the toboggan sled and allowed her companion to tuck the soft caribou-skin robe about her.

“Joyce,” he murmured, “you’ve been a great pal to me this day! Settle down for an hour of rest. You shan’t set a foot on the snow until we reach your cabin door.”

“We have won!” he exclaimed, as he gripped the handle bars.

“God has helped us,” was her answer.

“Yes. We trusted God and did our best.”

What a moment for shadows! Yet shadows came unbidden. One floated at this moment before the girl’s eyes. “Those films were stolen,” she seemed to hear a voice saying.

“Oh, please!” she pleaded half aloud. “We will do what is right. All will be well in the end.”

Too weary for further thought, she closed her eyes and gave herself over to the pure joy that comes with gliding across the snow in a toboggan sled behind a swift and eager team, the Arctic’s best.

Three hours later Joyce was seated alone by the fire. The hour was late. There came a sound at the door. Having turned about, expecting her father, she was a little startled to see instead the mysterious stranger she had, under unusual circumstances, met before.

Twice this man had, she believed, saved her from the mad buffalo. Now, without a word, he closed the door to make his way to the seat before the hearth. Presently he raised a hand to point to the coffee pot.

From all this you will be led to believe that this stranger was none other than the

one so well known to many of the inhabitants of the land as “The Voice.” And so he was.

Joyce Mills had been about the world a great deal. She was not easily frightened. The man did not disturb her. Understanding his gesture, she replenished the fire and in due time poured out a cup of black coffee. He drank it scalding hot. Once again he sat as in a trance. Once more he demanded coffee and got it. Then he spoke:

“You find gold.” It was not a question, but a statement. How could she deny it? And yet, how did he know? They had told no one and the discovery was only a few hours old. Without a word, she stared at him.

But more was to come.

“See. See young man, big, strong, brave. Fly red devil bird, fly, that one. See that one drop down, down, down!”

The girl closed her eyes. He was speaking, she knew all too well, of Drew Lane.

“But not dead.” The man’s voice rose to a high pitch. “Not dead, that one.”

“Yes, yes! He is dead!” came her quick reply.

“No!” The man was angry. Half rising from his chair, he fixed her with his eagle eye.

“No. He not dead!” He sank back into the chair.

Sensing somehow that whether he spoke truth or falsehood, this man’s word was not to be disputed, she held her peace.

After a time he spoke again. This time his story was long and rambling. It told of two boys made prisoner and kept in the cabin of an airplane. His description of the older of these boys fitted Johnny Thompson so well that Joyce could not mistake it.

“More romance,” she told herself, “but let him talk.”

The man rambled on. He spoke of the “Gray Streak,” of a hunchbacked Indian,

of swift dog teams and of a curious cavern beneath the snow-covered earth.

She listened. But all the time she was thinking: “I wish this dreamer would go away. I wish father were here.”

In time both her wishes were granted.

With her father came the fortunate young gold hunter, Lloyd Hill.

“Do you know who that is?” Lloyd exclaimed before she had half finished telling of her visitor. “He is known as the Voice. Everyone who lives in this land believes he speaks the truth. I have never known a case in which he erred.”

“But he said Drew Lane was not dead.”

“And who will prove he has not spoken the truth?”

“He said Johnny Thompson was a prisoner in the ‘Gray Streak.’”

“And so he may be.”

Joyce lost her power of speech. If all that the Voice had said were true, this was indeed a strange world.

“Time will tell.” She settled on this conviction. “But if it is all true! If it is!

“But how could he know all this? Surely he cannot be in many places at the same time?”

“Moccasin Telegraph.”

“What *is* Moccasin Telegraph?” Her tone was eager, commanding.

“That is a question no one can answer; at least no white man. A question no red man is willing to answer. We only know that they know. Time and again in this great white wilderness catastrophes have befallen men. A trapper has been killed by an enraged bull moose. A hunter has been shot by his own gun. A plane has crashed. Each time, within an hour or two, some Indian hundreds of miles away has described the tragedy in detail. How do we explain it? How could we? We do not try. We say Moccasin Telegraph, and leave it at that.”

“It—why, that is uncanny!”

Seeing that the whole affair was getting on her nerves, Lloyd wisely changed the subject.

Yet, two hours later, before she fell asleep, the girl found herself puzzling over these things.

“Johnny Thompson a prisoner in the cabin of the ‘Gray Streak,’” she whispered to herself. “And the ‘Gray Streak,’ where is it? The ‘Riddle of the Storm,’ Curlie Carson called it. What a riddle!

“And Drew Lane? His is a riddle of the clouds.

“What a world this is! Long ago Johnny Thompson said we could come here to find peace. Have we found it? Truly this world knows no valley of contentment.”

CHAPTER XXVI
WALLS OF LIGHT

The hunchback bowman stood tapping upon the airplane cabin in which Johnny Thompson had been made prisoner. How had he traveled over all those weary miles? How had he known the way? Had the airplane left a path across the sky for his eyes?

Who will answer? For that matter, who will answer a hundred questions that might well be asked concerning the strange natives of the North? How do they follow trails that are wind-blown, no trails at all, over miles of darkness and storm? How do they in the midst of fog, without sun, moon or stars to guide them, steer frail craft over dark waters to land on unlighted shores before their wigwam doors? How can they know what happens a hundred miles away at the very hour at which it happens? To all these questions there is no answer. Ask them. They will reply, “We cannot tell.” Do they speak the truth? Who can say?

The bowman was here. How? What matter this? He was here. He was Johnny’s undying friend. Once he had saved the boy’s life. His hand it had been that, with so much skill, had fashioned the bow taken by him from the snow hours before. The lost bow, the overturned sled had spoken to him. They had said, “Your friend, Johnny Thompson, is in distress.”

He had replied, “I will go to his aid.” Now he tapped upon the glass and beckoned.

For answer, Johnny threw back his robe, disclosing the stout steel manacles on his ankles.

The hunchback’s reaction was startling. Wrenching open the door with his powerful hands, he prepared to drag Johnny from the cabin to his sled.

With a sigh Johnny told him that the other boy must go too. The Indian understood. Swiftly, silently he lifted the second boy and carried him to the sled. Then, dragging forth Johnny's robe, he wrapped it about them.

At a barely audible call from Johnny, the five dogs came bounding from the cabin. Then they were away.

The Indian made no effort to hitch Johnny's dogs to the sled. There was no need. His own tireless team was still fit for the trail. In the North both dogs and men are accustomed to long hours of rest and long days of toil.

So, with no sound coming from the darkened cabin where, relying on their false security, the mysterious ones slept on, the sled glided away into the night.

For an hour they followed the shore of the lake. Then turning sharply to the left, they climbed a steep hill to go gliding along a ridge. Mile after mile of glistening white had passed beneath their runners when at last they went tobogganing down a steep incline to tumble all in a heap at the bottom. And that bottom was the frozen surface of still another lake.

Fifteen minutes more and, just as dawn was breaking, they found themselves facing a brown wall of rock. In the center of this wall was a narrow opening. Into this opening they were invited to crawl.

"D—do you think it's safe t—to go in there?" D'Arcy Arden looked up at Johnny. With their feet still bound together, they were obliged to crawl on hands and knees.

"Safest thing in the world." Johnny prepared to lead the way. "I have one rule for every land; do as the natives do. If a native says a thing is safe, you may be sure it is.

"Besides," he added as he crept forward, "this man is an old friend of mine. Think of the miles he traveled to save me!"

For all his confidence in his guide, Johnny was a little surprised at the place he entered. Not so much a cave as a passageway among a tumbled mass of jagged rocks, it led right, left, up, down until he was fairly dizzy. But at last they came into a rather large, low chamber.

To his surprise, Johnny found that in this chamber he could see plainly enough to find his way about. He was, however, too much worn down by excitement and lack of sleep to note this with any degree of interest or to ask questions about it. Having been assured by signs from his strange host that they were now quite safe and that he was prepared to guard the entrance, he curled up once more beneath his robe and, with D'Arcy at his side, fell asleep in a chamber which sunlight never entered, but where darkness never reigned supreme.

* * * * * * * *

At about the time Johnny and his companions reached the cave, Sandy MacDonald, the veteran prospector who had risen early that he might get a full day of prospecting, heard a scratching at the door of the cabin.

As he threw open the door Ginger, Johnny's gray leader, with a look upon his face that seemed almost human, sprang upon him.

"Ginger!" Sandy exclaimed. "Where's Johnny?"

For answer the dog turned and dashed through the door. He went a distance down the trail. Then, seeing he was not followed, turned back.

The aged prospector's astonishment knew no bounds. He had not expected Johnny back, had believed him safe in some cabin or camping beneath the stars. And here was his indispensable leader racing into the cabin and demanding attention.

"Something's happened! I get you!" Sandy said to the dog. "Just a cup of coffee, and I'll be with you."

The intelligent creature appeared to understand for, weary messenger that he was, he threw himself down beside the fire and fell fast asleep.

The instant the door opened, he was on his feet, ready to lead the way back over that long weary trail to the cabin he had left, and then on and on, who could tell how much farther? until they came upon his young master. Such is the humble devotion of a faithful dog.

"Ginger, old boy," the gray-bearded prospector rumbled, as he turned his team into the trail, "I figured I'd come onto that pitchblende today, regular velvety

black stuff and heavy, heavy as gold, the real stuff, and radium, radium aplenty. But when a pal of ours is in distress, that's a different matter. Success? Well now, that can wait until to-morrow." So they hit the long, long trail.

* * * * * * * *

But Curlie Carson and his mechanic Jerry—what had happened to them? They had slept the night through and with the dawning of a bright new day were eager to be on their way.

"I'd give a penny to know why that chap lives way up here back of beyond," Curlie said to Jerry, as they prepared to warm up their motor.

"Don't you know?"

"No. Do you?"

"Absolutely. He's a trapper. Scattered all over this country, these trappers are."

"Then he's not connected with the 'Gray Streak?'"

"Not a chance; nor is that little chap back there beyond Fort Chipewyan, the one with the carrier pigeon."

Curlie showed his disappointment at this fresh discovery. He had come a long way on a wild goose chase. He had hoped against hope that this cabin might furnish a clue to the solution of the mystery that gathered itself about that gray rover of the sky. Yet here was Jerry telling him there was not a chance.

"But why didn't he tell us he was a trapper?" he objected.

"These men of the North are silent fellers," Jerry said slowly. "You'll find that out. They live in the midst of silence. They're here because they love silence. People that like cities live in 'em and talk aplenty.

"One thing helps," Jerry added after a time. "Our record is still good. We've added a grand distance to our total year's flight and, this being an errand of mercy, counts extra special."

Curlie smiled as he thought what an accidental errand of mercy it had been.

“But not so much an accident after all,” he said half aloud. “God planned it, beyond a shadow of a doubt. And what God plans can never be called an accident.”

The baggage their passenger proposed to take with him was proof enough that he was a trapper. This was composed of bales of white fox skins.

“This,” he explained, “is only part of our catch. My partner left with the rest on our dog sled five days ago. It’s five hundred miles to Fort Chipewyan. You have to carry food for yourself and your dogs. We didn’t dare try it together. Too much of a load for so long a journey. I was to come down later. But now,” he smiled, “guess I’ll beat him out. That’s the glory of the air.”

“Yes,” Curlie agreed, “that’s the glory of the air.”

Even then his mind was but half occupied with the affairs of the moment. He was thinking of the mystery plane.

“What became of them?” he asked himself. “Did they make a forced landing? Could they have crashed? Did they reach their base? If so, where is it? Will I ever find it? And if I do?

“The riddle of the storm,” he murmured, “of two storms. When will it be solved?” For the first time he realized how fully this problem had taken possession of his thoughts.

“Such a riddle!” His tone became animated. “And its solution means so much to these far flung dwellers of the North.

“One thing comes first. That’s clear. We must get this wounded man to the doctor at Resolution!

“Oh, Jerry,” he called. “Is the motor O.K.?”

“Absolutely.”

“All right. Let’s go.”

The motor thundered. Curlie climbed aboard, looked back to see that his passenger was ready, then set the plane gliding over the snow. A moment later

the great bird rose with a graceful glide and soared toward the clouds.

* * * * * * * *

Johnny Thompson did not sleep long in the hunchback's curious cave. Everything was too strange for that. There were too many matters that needed thinking through.

He did not waken suddenly, nor all at once. For a time, only half awake, he lay there wondering. Who were these mysterious airmen? Why had they taken him prisoner? Would they follow the track of the hunchback's sled and attempt to recapture him? He sincerely hoped they would not.

"Could be but one end to that," he told himself. "They'd be shot through and through by my Indian friend's arrows." He had seen that Indian kill a grizzly bear with those arrows.

He thought of Ginger, his dog leader.

"Did he escape, or did they kill him?" He was bound to believe that his good pal of many a long trail was safe.

"And if he is," he whispered to himself, "if he is—" Suddenly he sat straight up, wide awake. A thought had struck him squarely between the eyes. "If Ginger is alive, he has gone back over the trail. He has told Sandy MacDonald that something is wrong. They will start back over the trail. They will follow until they come to the camp of those mysterious aviators. Then Sandy will be made prisoner. And Ginger! They will surely kill him this time.

"It must not happen! I must attempt to find that trail and head them off. There is not a moment to lose! I—"

He broke off to stare about him. His startled eyes, roving from corner to corner of the cave and from floor to ceiling, had, even in his excitement and anxiety, taken note of an astonishing fact. He was in a cave. There was no lamp. Not an oil lamp, not an electric torch was to be found; and yet the place was illumined. And outside it was still night.

"It's the walls," he told himself. "They are all alight.

“D’Arcy! D’Arcy Arden!” He put out a trembling hand to shake his companion into wakefulness. “D’Arcy! Wake up! We are surrounded by walls of light!”

CHAPTER XXVII
THE BLACK CUBE

“There! That’s the place!”

D’Arcy Arden pointed away over a well-marked track to the distant shores of a small lake. On the shore of the lake grew a few scrub trees, poplars, willows and spruce. Nestling among these was a cabin. From the chimney a thin coil of smoke rose skyward.

“Yes.” Johnny Thompson pulled him back. “And there’s the gray plane. They must be there. We must be careful, or they will see us.”

Creeping back to a spot where a low ridge shut out their view of the lake, they gathered in a circle for a council of war. War it was to be, too. Sandy MacDonald had decreed that two hours before.

“They have forfeited their right to freedom, those wild aviators have, whoever they may be!” he had declared stoutly. “They have taken gas from stations when no emergency existed and have not reported it. They have robbed trappers of their supplies. They have kidnapped two of you and carried you away into a desolate land where, for all we know, they meant to let you starve. Why? Let them tell us.

“Our duty its plain. We must, if we can, capture them, bring them to justice and return the plane to its owner if it has been stolen, which I doubt not.”

So, fired by the veteran’s words, they had prepared to march upon those intruders in a silent land.

They were four: Johnny Thompson, D’Arcy Arden, Sandy MacDonald and the

Hunchback Bowman. Three were armed with bows and arrows. These bows, as you have seen, were capable of killing a bear. Sandy was prepared, if need be, to do yeoman service with an axe.

You may wonder how it came about that they were together here, so close to the hiding place of the ones they sought. It is all quite simple. Without tarrying to discover the origin of the strange illumination in the mysterious cave of the hunchback, Johnny had set about the task of removing his fetters and those of D'Arcy. This, with the aid of the hunchback's extraordinary strength, he was successful in doing.

Finding himself once more on his feet, he had crept from the cave, harnessed his dogs and hitched them with those of the hunchback to the sled.

After seeing that they were all well armed with stout bows, he headed the double dog team back over the trail of the night before.

They would, he explained, follow this trail until they found themselves approaching the small lake on which the mystery plane had alighted. They would then circle the lake until they came upon the hunchback's trail leading to the camp. It was this last trail that old Ginger and the aged prospector would follow if, as he firmly believed, the old leader had escaped and Sandy MacDonald was on his way to the rescue.

"And if we are too late, if MacDonald has gone before us and been captured, we will storm their place and rescue him if it costs a life!" Johnny had said with fierce determination.

The hunchback, though he spoke scarcely a word of English, appeared to understand, for he grinned, showing all his white teeth, and brandished his bow in a threatening manner.

For once they had met with good fortune. They had not been camped half an hour on the trail made by the hunchback on the night of the rescue when Sandy MacDonald appeared at the top of a ridge. Then it was that the aged Scotchman completely lost control of his team. Old Ginger was in the lead. Once he sighted his young master, he led the team in a stampede that ended only when he leaped up to kiss Johnny's cheek, a kiss of which Johnny had no cause to be ashamed.

So now here they were, gathered in a narrow run, planning an attack.

“We might wait until night,” suggested Johnny.

“And in the meantime they’d be away in the plane, like as not,” objected the sturdy Scotchman. “Looks like the Lord had delivered them into our hands. We must take them.”

“But they may be desperate characters!”

“Beyond doubt they are. We must take them by surprise. We’ll do it this way.” Sandy MacDonald’s old eyes shone with fresh fire. “You three that are armed, you’ll creep up through the brush and take your position ready to cover the door. Then I’ll drive up with the dog team as any trapper might do. I’ll get them out into the open, without arms. You will cover their escape. And so we’ll win a bloodless battle.”

“Sounds all right,” said Johnny. “But here’s hoping nothing goes wrong!”

Their method of attack agreed upon, there remained but to put it into effect.

Testing their bows, then nocking their arrows, the young archers, together with the hunchback, crept forward. Over one ridge they climbed, down a narrow gully, over a second ridge where for a second, quite breathless, they feared detection, then down the ridge followed by a break for cover in the bushes.

“We—we made it,” D’Arcy puffed in a whisper.

“Yes, we did,” Johnny agreed. “But the worst is yet to come. Look to your bow. Set your arrow squarely. If you must shoot, shoot to kill. More than one honest person’s life depends upon it.”

They crept through the bushes to a point where they might command a view of the doorway to the cabin and the open space before it. Then, sinking down in the snow behind the black bulk of a spruce tree, they awaited the zero hour.

Johnny drew his watch from his pocket. A minute ticked itself into eternity, then another and yet another.

“Sandy does not come,” Johnny whispered. “What’s keeping him?”

A chill gripped his heart. What if their valiant old leader had been ambushed and

captured!

“We’d save him!” was his stout resolve. “We—”

He broke off. A chill, creeping up from his very toes, left him rooted to the spot. He had caught a sound of movement in the brush behind him. There could be no mistaking that.

“Sandy has been ambushed and captured. Now it is our turn. Will they fight?” Fresh courage flooded his being as, gripping his bow, he whirled about.

The next instant he all but dropped in his tracks. Framed in the green that was the spruce boughs, he beheld a face, the face of Drew Lane!

Starting back like one who sees a ghost, he stood there, rigid as marble.

The face smiled. He knew that smile. It was Drew Lane’s smile. No ghost this, but a living being.

“Drew Lane, as I live!”

“Right the first time.”

“And—and you did not fall from the parachute?”

Drew did not answer.

“Am I in time?”

“For the fight?”

“The fight.”

“Just in time. We—” Once again Johnny broke off. Had he caught the drone of an airplane motor?

He had. There was no questioning that. It grew louder.

“Are they gone?” he asked himself. “They can’t be.” One look around the tree assured him that the gray plane still rested on the ice by the cabin.

“A second plane.” His head whirled. Was there more than one mystery plane? A whole fleet of them perhaps?

“Or—” Hope rose high. “Or is this Curlie Carson coming to our rescue?”

Together the four of them stood at attention.

From his hiding place, not far from the cabin, Sandy MacDonald, too, had heard the drone of the plane. Truth was, his keen old ears had detected it first. This is why he had delayed appearing. He was, however, in a quandary. Like Johnny, he was in the dark regarding the person who flew this second plane. Was he a friend? Or foe? He could not know. And not knowing, he felt that their coup might be postponed. But his young comrades? Would they have the patience to wait? He could not tell. In the end, he decided to trust to their patience.

Johnny’s watch ticked away another minute. The second plane loomed larger and larger in the distance.

Suddenly from out the log cabin sprang two large, black-bearded men. One carried a curious package on his head. It seemed a dark leather case, a perfect cube some eighteen inches in diameter.

Having hurriedly placed this in the cabin of the plane, they leaped for the cockpit to set the motor in motion.

“Stop them!” Johnny sprang to his feet. “They are off!”

He was too late. The plane began to glide across the ice. Moving slowly at first, it gained in momentum.

At the same time the other plane was speeding toward them. Johnny was sure now that he made out the blue and yellow of Curlie Carson’s plane.

“So near!” he groaned. “And we lost them!”

He came out into the open. His companions followed him. Sandy MacDonald came up. Together they watched the gray plane rise from the ice and soar northward.

The other plane changed its course. It was to pass some distance from them.

“If that’s Curlie’s plane,” said Johnny, “he is not alone. His tank is well loaded with gas. He will chase them until they are ready to cry for quarter.”

It *was* Curlie. And every guess Johnny had made was a good one.

Arrived at Resolution with the disabled trapper, Curlie had told his story to Sergeant Jock Gordon of the Royal Mounted Police. Jock had gone into action. He had summoned his assistant and ordered him to prepare to accompany him at once into the wilds.

“We must follow the scent before it is cold.” he said to Curlie. “As an officer of the law, I have power to commandeer your plane. That’s what I’m doing now. How soon can we be off?”

“We’ll be ready in an hour.”

“Absolutely,” Jerry echoed.

So here they were hot on the tail of the gray plane which had spread consternation through the North.

The chase was not a long one. While Johnny Thompson and his companions listened and watched, they heard the motor of the mystery plane cough and rattle, then lapse into an appalling silence. Instantly the heavy plane went into a tailspin and plunged earthward.

From an altitude of some two thousand feet, it fell faster and faster. Johnny closed his eyes, but could not shut out the mental vision of that which must happen. This was a little world of rocky ridges. There could be but one outcome to such a landing.

In silence they watched the pursuing plane circle back, then slow down for a landing. In silence still, they gripped the hands of Curlie and Jerry as they alighted from the plane.

The look on Curlie’s face as his eyes fell upon the close knit features and sturdy form of the young detective, Drew Lane, was a wonderful thing to see.

“By all the signs that any man can know,” he said slowly, “you should be dead. With my own eyes I saw you pass into a cloud. You were dropping earthward in

a parachute. I saw the parachute flutter out of the cloud. You were gone. A fall of two thousand feet in such a spot must kill any mortal man; yet here you are! I—I am glad! But how does one do it?" He stared hard at the detective.

"Simple enough." Drew gave forth a low laugh. "When one knows how, there's really nothing to it. Been done several times. Two parachutes, that's the answer. When you release one, you open the other. The second one takes you safely to earth.

"It seems, however," he spoke slowly, "that it got me nothing, that trick. Thought I'd be able to slip up on them and take them single-handed.

"Trouble was I didn't know the land. Got myself lost right at the start. Had a mighty tough time of it, I have. Lost all trace of them. This is the first I've seen of them for days. And now I find them only to see them crack up.

"Well," he added philosophically, "that's the end of the 'Gray Streak.' Not a chance that they came down alive. Only thing that's left is to search the wreckage for clues, then give them an aviator's funeral, light a match and touch off their gas. What say we go?"

Eight hours later, gathered about the fire in the cabin that had but a few hours before been the base of strange outlaws, they were preparing to go through with an unusual ceremony—the opening of the black cube, which had been thrown from the wrecked plane and, strangely enough, had received not the slightest injury.

"Heavy!" said Jock Gordon, lifting it to the table. "Wonder what's in it. We'll see."

The next instant as one man they started back. They were met by a blaze of such varied light as they had never before beheld. They were looking upon a crown, the crown of a one-time powerful ruler. And not a jewel was missing.

"The crown of the Tzar of Russia, as I live!" exclaimed Sandy MacDonald.

"Do—do you think so?" Jock asked.

"Can't be a doubt of it. I've seen it pictured many times, even in colors. The radicals got it, when the Revolution came. And now, here it is!"

“Why?” It was Johnny who asked. He asked for all. He may as well have asked for the whole world. The question will perhaps never be answered. The two men who might have answered it were dead. Their funeral pyre had but a few hours before loomed toward the sky. A thousand questions might be asked about this strange pair, but none answered. The priceless crown alone remained. And that, since it had been smuggled into the country, must be turned over to the Canadian Government.

“Do you know, Sandy,” Johnny said as they sat by the fire an hour later, “I slept in the strangest place last night. It was a cave; perhaps you might only call it a rocky cavern.”

“What’s strange about that?” Sandy rumbled sleepily.

“It was all alight and yet there was no lamp. And it was night.”

“Light?” Sandy sprang to his feet.

“The walls appeared to be phosphorescent.”

“And was it warm, too?” The old man’s tone was eager.

“Yes. I believe it was.”

“Man!” cried Sandy, seizing his hand and gripping it till it hurt. “You’ve made the find of a lifetime!”

“A—a find?”

“Those walls are radio-active. It’s pitchblende, full of radium. It gives off light and heat. And man! How rich it must be! It’s such a find as the world has never known!”

Could this be true? Johnny’s head whirled. Had God in His strange ways of providence led him over a mysterious route to the goal he sought?

CHAPTER XXVIII
JOY COMETH

For a few hours, each wrapped in his feather robe, they slept on the floor before the fire. Then, all too eager for the final curtain on this little drama of the North, they were away.

As a representative of the Canadian Government, Jock Gordon took charge of the black cube and its precious contents. Curlie Carson agreed to carry him straight to Edmonton.

Since Drew Lane had proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that his mission in the North, in so far as it concerned the stolen air mail plane, was to be a fruitless one, he decided to return with Curlie to Edmonton. There he would make connections with his own pilot and fly home.

“When I attempted that double parachute stunt,” he said to Curlie, “I told the pilot to fly my Red Racer back to the airport, then keep his mouth shut. So he’s sure to be waiting there.”

“But where do you suppose that air mail plane is?” Johnny Thompson asked.

“Who can answer that? Perhaps in Cuba, or Mexico or Central America. A crook with plenty of money can travel far. But in the end we’ll get him.”

“We’ll take this boy along and drop him off at Fort Chipewyan,” said Curlie, turning to D’Arcy Arden.

The boy beamed his gratitude.

A few moments later the motor thundered and they were away.

When the party had in this manner been reduced to three, Johnny, Sandy and the hunchback bowman, Sandy exclaimed:

“Now, son! Lead me to this enchanted cave!”

An enchanted cave it proved to be. “It’s radium! Richest find ever made!” the prospector exclaimed the moment his eyes rested upon its walls. “Must be phosphorus and zinc blended with it in a peculiar manner. But it is rich in radium. I would stake my life on it.”

Just as they were preparing to leave the cave, they caught the sound of some one shouting. On reaching the exit they found Scott Ramsey waiting outside.

“You left no word,” he accused Sandy.

“The dog came with an emergency call. I could but answer,” Sandy rumbled.

“So you’re all safe!” Scott seemed relieved.

“Safe enough. And our young friend here has made a discovery such as is made only once in a generation.” He told of the find in the cavern they had just left.

“But look here!” Scott exclaimed when he had finished and they had rejoiced together.

He drew a letter from his pocket and read it aloud. It had come in answer to his enquiry regarding the films he had left in Winnipeg. It explained that the suite of offices to which the vault belonged had been sublet; that the vault had been cleared of all obsolete material, and that through some mistake the films had been sold with waste paper to a junk man.

“That means,” Johnny’s face lighted with a broad smile as he spoke, “that those people in that other camp bought them from the junk man.”

“As they had a perfect right to do,” supplemented Sandy.

“And that’s that!” Johnny did a wild whirl on the hard crusted snow.

“‘Joy cometh in the morning!’” he exclaimed. “For a long time I’ve been feeling mean about our plans to hop in and file on land close to those other prospectors

if they made a strike.

“I’ve insisted that one of them is a crook. Joyce Mills has stuck to it that they were the right sort, each and every one. And it seems she’s right. For if they bought the films, who can say they did not have the right to use them?”

“Who indeed?” Sandy’s face lighted with a smile that was good to see. “And who wants gold when he may mine radium?”

“Come on, Ginger!” Johnny set his leader on his feet. “We’re going to be the first to break the glad news to Joyce Mills.”

In this he was not disappointed. And the light that shone from the girl’s eyes as she was told that not one of her three champions had done wrong, was worth all the weary miles of travel that had led him to her camp.

Over a huge roast of venison the men of the two camps pledged fellowship, co-operation and mutual good will.

If there are those who would know more of the mysterious Moccasin Telegraph, let them journey to the far Northland and seek such knowledge there.

Johnny Thompson soon left Sandy and Scott to develop the radium strike, which was a rich one in very truth, to wander back to the white lights of a great city. There once more he came into contact with Drew Lane.

Together they undertook the unraveling of a mystery such as appears but once in a lifetime. If you wish to know its nature and to read of the many brilliant maneuvers that at last led to its solving, you must read our next book: *The Galloping Ghost*.

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