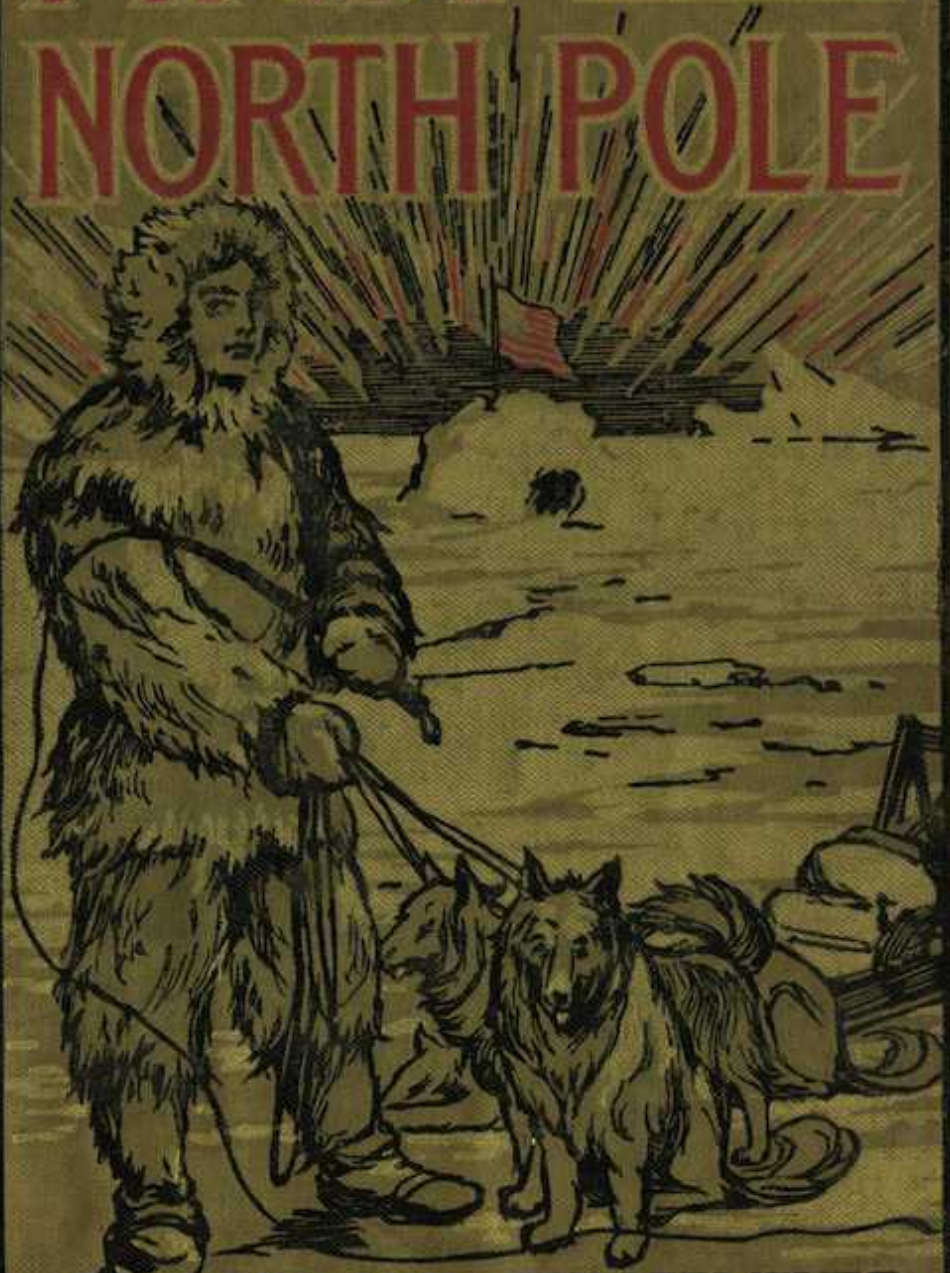
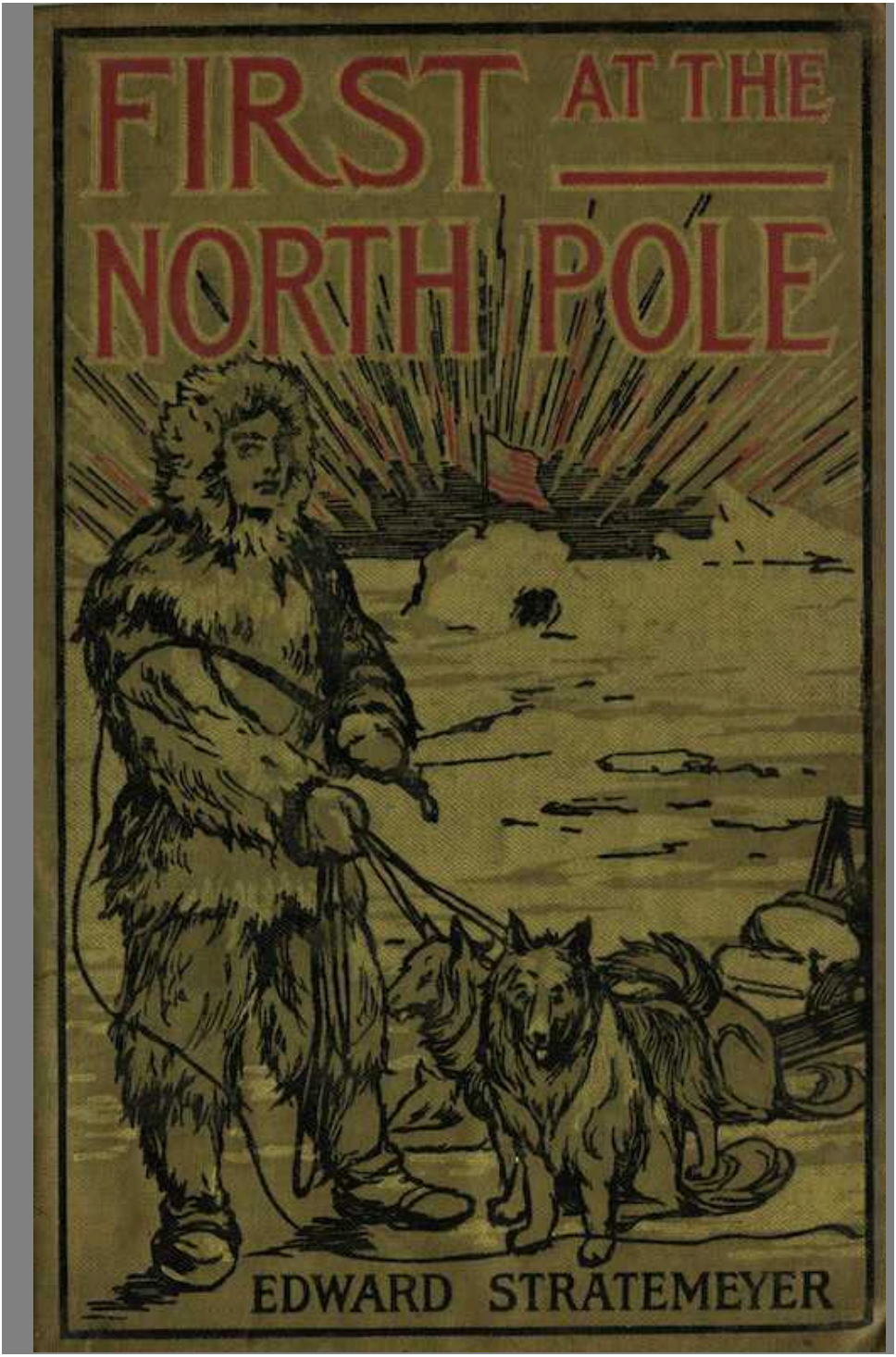
FIRST AT THE NORTH POLE



EDWARD STRATEMEYER


FIRST AT THE NORTH POLE
EDWARD STRATEMEYER

First at the North Pole
Edward Stratemeyer

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“And now, a cheer for the first boys at the North Pole!”

FIRST AT THE NORTH POLE

OR

TWO BOYS IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of
Oliver Bright's Search, Richard Dare's Venture,
The Last Cruise of the Spitfire, True to
Himself, Joe, the Surveyor,
Shorthand Tom, Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES NUTTALL

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First at the North Pole

PREFACE

"First at the North Pole," relates the particulars of a marvelous journey from our New England coast to that portion of our globe sometimes designated as "the top of the world."

Filled with such dreams as come to all explorers, Barwell Dawson fitted out the *Ice King* for a trip to the north. Because of what had happened, it was but natural that he should invite Andy and Chet to accompany him, and equally natural that they should hasten to accept the invitation.

The boys knew that they would have no easy time of it, yet they did not dream of the many perils that awaited the entire party. Once the staunch steamer was in danger of being crushed by an immense iceberg, in which event this chronicle would not have been written. Again, the boys and the others had a fierce fight with polar bears and with a savage walrus. When the ship was jammed hard and fast in the ice a start was made by the exploring party, accompanied by some Esquimaux and several dog sledges. All had heard of the marvelous achievements of Cook and Peary, and all were fired with a great ambition to go and do likewise. With the thermometer often at fifty degrees below zero, they pushed on steadily, facing death more than once. To add to their troubles they had sickness in camp, and snow-blindness, and once some Esquimaux, becoming scared, rebelled and tried to run off with their supplies. Then, when the North Pole was at last gained, it became the gravest kind of a problem how to return to civilization alive.

In penning this volume I have had a twofold purpose in mind: the first to show what pure grit and determination can do under the most trying of circumstances, and the second to give my readers an insight into Esquimaux life and habits, and to relate what great explorers like Franklin, Kane, Hall, DeLong, Nansen, Cook, and Peary have done to open up this weird and mysterious portion of our globe.

Edward Stratemeyer.

November 15, 1909.

CHAPTER I—ANDY AND HIS UNCLE

"What be you a-goin' to do today, Andy?"

"I'm going to try my luck over to the Storburgh camp, Uncle Si. I hardly think Mr. Storburgh will have an opening for me, but it won't hurt to ask him."

"Did you try Sam Hickley, as I told you to?" continued Josiah Graham, as he settled himself more comfortably before the open fireplace of the cabin.

"Yes, but he said he had all the men he wanted." Andy Graham gave something of a sigh. "Seems to me there are more lumbermen in this part of Maine than there is lumber."

"Humph! I guess you ain't tried very hard to git work," grumbled the old man, drawing up his bootless feet on the rungs of his chair, and spreading out his hands to the generous blaze before him. "Did you see them Plover brothers?"

"No, but Chet Greene did, day before yesterday, and they told him they were laying men off instead of taking 'em on."

"Humph! I guess thet Chet Greene don't want to work. He'd rather fool his time away in the woods, huntin' and fishin'."

"Chet is willing enough to work if he can get anything to do. And hunting pays, sometimes. Last week he got a fine deer and one of the rich hunters from Boston paid him a good price for it."

"Humph! Thet ain't as good as a stiddy, payin' job. I don't want you to be a-lazin' your time away in the woods,—I want you to grow up stiddy an' useful. Besides, we got to have money, if we want to live."

"Aren't you going to try to get work, Uncle Si?" asked the boy anxiously, as he gazed at the large and powerful-looking frame of the man before him.

"To be sure I'm a-goin' to go to work—soon as I'm fit. But I can't do nuthin with my feet an' my stomach goin' back on me, can I?"

"I thought your dyspepsia was about over—you've eaten so well the past week. And you've walked considerably lately. If you got something easy——"

"Now, don't you go to tellin' me what to do!" cried the old man, wrathfully. "I'm a sick man, that's what I am. I ain't able to work, an' it's up to you as a dootiful nevvy to git work an' support us both. Now you jest trot off to the Storburgh camp, an' don't you come home till you git work. An' after this, you better give up havin' anything to do with thet good-fer-nuthin, lazy Chet Greene."

The boy's eyes flashed for an instant and he was on the point of making a bitter reply to his relative. But then his mouth closed suddenly and he turned away. In silence he drew off his slippers, donned his big boots, and put on his overcoat and his winter cap. Then he pulled on his gloves, slung a game bag over his shoulder, and reached for a gun that stood behind a door.

“Wot you takin’ thet fer?” demanded Josiah Graham, with his eyes on the gun. “Didn’t I tell you to look fer a job?”

“That’s what I’m going to do,” was the reply. “But if I come across any game on the way I want the chance to bring it down.”

“Humph! I know how boys are! Rather loaf around the woods than work, any time.”

“Uncle Si, if you say another word——” began the youth, and then he stopped short, turned on his heel, and walked from the cabin, closing the door none too gently behind him.

It was certainly a trying situation, and as he stepped out into the snow Andy felt as if he never wanted to go back and never wanted to see his Uncle Si again.

“It’s his laziness, nothing else,” murmured the boy to himself, as he trudged off. “He’s as able to work as I am. He always was lazy—father said so. Oh, dear; I wish he had never come to Pine Run!”

Andy was a youth of seventeen, of medium height, but with well-developed chest and muscles. His face was a round one, and usually good to look at, although at present it was drawn down because of what had just occurred.

The boy was an orphan, the son of a man who in years gone by had bought and sold lumber throughout the northern section of Maine. His mother had been taken away when he was a small lad, and then he and his father had left town and come to live in the big cabin from which Andy was now trudging so rapidly. An old colored woman had come along, to do the cooking and other household work.

A log jam on the river had caused Mr. Graham’s death two years before this tale opens, and for a short time Andy had been left utterly alone, there being no near neighbors and no relatives to take care of the orphan. True, he had been offered a home by a lumber dealer of Bangor, but the man was such a harsh fellow that Andy shrank from going with him.

Then, one day, much to everybody’s surprise, Josiah Graham appeared on the scene and announced his intention to settle down and live with his nephew. Josiah was an older half-brother to Andy’s father, and the boy had often heard of him as a shiftless, lazy ne’er-do-well, who drifted from one town to another, seldom keeping a job longer than two or three weeks or a month. He did not drink, but he loved to smoke, and to tell stories of what he had done or was going to do.

“I’m a-goin’ to take Andy in hand an’ make a man of him,” he declared, shortly after his arrival. “A young feller like him needs a guardeen.” And then he had his trunk carted to the cabin and, without asking Andy’s permission, proceeded to settle down and make himself comfortable.

At first it looked as if matters might go along smoothly enough, for Josiah Graham managed to obtain a position as time-keeper at one of the lumber camps, where Andy was employed as a chopper. But soon the man’s laziness manifested itself, and when he did not do his work properly he was discharged.

“It was the boss’s fault, ’twasn’t mine,” he told Andy, but the youth knew better. Then he got into a quarrel with the negro woman who did the housework and told her to go away.

“’Twill be one less to feed,” he said to his nephew. “We can do our own work.” But he did not do a stroke extra, and it fell to Andy’s share to sweep, and wash dishes, and make his own bed. Uncle Si wanted him to make the other bed too, but he refused.

“If you want it made, you can make it yourself!” declared Andy, with spirit. “You are not working at the camp, while I am.” This led to a lively quarrel. After that Josiah Graham did make up the bed a few times, but usually when he crawled into it at night it was in the same mussed-up condition as when he had crawled out in the morning.

Another quarrel came over the question of money. The uncle wanted Andy to hand over all his earnings, but this the lad refused to do. Josiah Graham had already gotten possession of the fifteen hundred dollars left by Andy’s father, but this was lost in a wildcat speculation in lumber for which the old man was morally, if not legally, responsible. The youth felt that he must be cautious or his uncle might make him penniless.

“I’ll pay the bills and give you a dollar a week,” he told Josiah Graham. “That will buy those tablets you take for your dyspepsia. You had better give up smoking.”

“Smoking is good for the dyspepsy,” was the reply. “You give me the money an’ I’ll pay the bills,” and then, when Andy still refused, the uncle waited until pay-day and went to the lumber camp and collected his nephew’s wages. This brought on more trouble, and, because of this, Andy lost his position.

It was midwinter, and to get another job was by no means easy. The youth tramped from place to place, but without success. The money in the hands of Josiah Graham was running low, and he was constantly “nagging” Andy to go and do something. He was perfectly able to look for work himself, but was too indolent to make the effort. He preferred to sit in front of the blazing fire and give advice. Once or twice a week he would shuffle off to the village, two miles away, to sit behind the pot stove in the general store and listen to the news.

“The laziest man in the whole district,” declared the storekeeper. “It’s a pity he showed up to bother Andy Graham. I think the boy could have done better without him.” And this verdict was shared by many. But nobody dared to tell Josiah Graham, for fear of provoking a quarrel with the man.

As mentioned before, Andy’s father had left fifteen hundred dollars. He had also bequeathed to his son, when he should become of age, an interest in a large timber tract in upper Michigan. On his deathbed the father had secretly given his son some papers referring to the land, telling him to beware or some “lumber sharks” would get the better of him and take his property away. Andy now had these papers hidden in a box under his bed. He had not told his uncle of them, feeling that his relative was not capable of looking after his rights. Andy’s education was somewhat limited, yet he knew a great deal more than did Josiah Graham, who had been too lazy to attend school, even when he had the chance.

“I’ll keep the papers secret,” the lad told himself, “and some day, when I get the chance and have the money, I’ll go down to Bangor or Portland and get a lawyer to look into the matter for me. If I let Uncle Si have them he’ll allow the land sharks to cheat me out of everything.”

Andy’s father had been more or less of a hunter, and the boy took naturally to a rifle and a shotgun. He was a fair marksman, and the winter previous had laid low three deer and a great variety of small game. One of the deer had been brought down on a windy day and at long range, and of that

shot he was justly proud. The venison and other meat had come in handy at the cabin, and the deer skins and the horns of a buck had brought him in some money that was badly needed.

“If I can’t get a job, I’m going hunting for a few days,” said Andy half aloud, as he trudged through the snow. “It’s better than doing nothing, Uncle Si to the contrary. Maybe I can get Chet to go along. I don’t think he has anything else to do. Somehow or other, it seems to be awfully dull around here this winter. Maybe I would have done better if I had tried my luck down in one of the towns.”

Andy had to pass through the village of Pine Run, consisting of a general store, blacksmith shop, church, and a score of houses. As he approached the settlement he saw a horse and cutter coming toward him at a smart rate of speed. In the cutter sat a man of about thirty, dressed in a fine fur overcoat.

“Whoa!” called the man to his steed, as he approached the youth, and the horse soon came to a halt. “Say, can you tell me, is this the road to Moose Ridge?” he asked.

“It’s one of the roads,” answered Andy.

“Then there is another?”

“Yes, sir, just beyond that fringe of trees yonder.”

“Which is the best road?”

“What part of the Ridge do you want to go to?”

“Up to a place called the Blasted Pines.”

“Then you had better take the other road. You won’t get through this way.”

“You are sure of that? I don’t want to make any mistake.”

“Yes, I am sure. I’ve been up there hunting myself,” added Andy. He saw that the cutter contained a game bag and two gun cases.

“Is the hunting any good?”

“It was last year. I haven’t been up there this year. I got a fine big deer up there. Maybe I’ll get up there later—if I can’t find work.”

“Out of employment, eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, if you come up there perhaps we’ll meet again,” said the man, and started to turn the cutter back to the other road. “Much obliged for the information.”

“You’re welcome,” answered Andy. And then he watched the turnout swing around and dash away for the other road.

Little did he dream of the strange circumstances under which he was to meet this man again, or of what that encounter was to bring forth.

CHAPTER II—AT THE LUMBER CAMP

Leaving the village behind him, Andy struck out bravely for the Storburgh lumber camp, three miles up the river. The thermometer was low but there was no wind, and he did not mind the cold, for he had plenty of good red blood in his veins. All he was worried about was the question of getting work. He knew that he must have money, and that it could not very well be obtained without employment.

"If I were a fellow in a fairy story book I might find a bag of gold," he mused. "But as I'm only a Yankee lad, I guess I'll have to hustle around for all I get. Even if I went hunting and brought down a deer or two, or a moose, that wouldn't bring in enough. If I were a regular guide I might get a job with that gentleman in the cutter. He looked as if he had money to spend. He must be a stranger in these parts, or he wouldn't ask about the road to Moose Ridge."

It was nearly noon when Andy came in sight of the lumber camp. From a distance he heard the ringing sounds of the axes, and the shouts of the men to "stand from under" as a mighty monarch of the forest was about to fall. Skirting the "yard," he approached the building which was known as the office.

"Is Mr. Storburgh around?" he asked, of the young man in charge.

"He is not," was the reply, and the clerk scarcely looked up from the sheet upon which he was figuring.

"When will he be here?"

"I don't know—he's gone to New York."

"Do you know if he has an opening for a chopper, or on the teams?"

"No opening whatever. We laid off four men last week, and we're going to lay off four more this coming Saturday."

The clerk went on figuring, and in silence Andy withdrew. He had had a walk of nearly five miles for nothing. Was it any wonder that he was disheartened?

"It's the same story everywhere," he told himself, as he moved away slowly. "I might tramp to the Elroy place—that's six miles from here—but what's the use? I'll wear out boot-leather for nothing. I guess Uncle Si and I will have to pull up stakes or starve."

Not knowing what else to do, Andy walked along to where a number of men were at work. Just then the twelve o'clock whistle sounded, and the workers "knocked off" for their midday meal.

"Hello, Andy!" sung out a cheery voice, and, turning, the boy saw a brawny chopper named Bill Carrow approaching. Carrow had once worked with Mr. Graham, and knew the son fairly well.

"Hello," returned the youth. "Going to feed the inner man?" and he smiled.

“That’s what, son. How are you?” And the lumberman shook hands.

“Fairly well, but I’d feel better if I had a job.”

“Out of work, eh? That’s too bad. I don’t suppose there is any opening here.”

“The clerk said there wasn’t any—said they were discharging hands instead of taking ’em on.”

“That’s true. Business is bad—account of the panic last year, you know.” Bill Carrow paused a moment. “Had your dinner?”

“No, but I can wait until——”

“You ain’t going to wait. You come with me and I’ll fill you up. Your father did the same for me many a time. Come on.”

Andy was hungry, and could not resist this kindly invitation. Soon the pair were eating a plain but substantial dinner, which Carrow procured from the camp cook. It was disposed of in a corner of the mess cabin, apart from the other lumbermen. As they ate the lumberman asked the youth about himself and his uncle.

“That uncle of yours ought to be ashamed of himself, that’s my opinion of it,” said Bill Carrow. “If I was you, I’d not lift my finger to support him. He was the laziest young feller I ever knew, and it’s nothing but laziness now. He ought to be supporting you instead of you supporting him.”

“I can support myself—if he’d only leave me alone and not try to get my money away from me.”

“He squandered that money your father left—I know all about it. I’d make him go to work.”

“I can’t make him do anything.”

“The boys ought to go over and ride him on a rail, or tar and feather him. I guess that would wake him up.”

“Oh, I hope they don’t do that! He’s a bad man when he gets in a rage.” Andy did not want any more trouble than had already fallen to his portion.

“By the way, Andy, did a man named Hopton call on you lately?” asked Carrow, after a pause.

“Hopton? I never heard of him. Who is he?”

“Why, as near as I can learn, he is a real estate man—deals in timber and farm lands. He came here a week or so ago, thinking you had a job here. I told him where you lived, and I supposed he called on you.”

“I didn’t see him. What did he want?”

“He wouldn’t say—leastwise, I didn’t ask him, seeing’s it was none of my business. But he did ask me, confidential like—after he found out that I had known your father well—if your folks had any timber lands over in Michigan.”

“Oh!” Andy uttered the exclamation before he had time to think. “Did he—that is, did he ask about any land in particular?”

“No. I told him I didn’t think you owned any land anywhere. He looked satisfied at that and went away. But I thought he called on you.”

“Where was he from?”

“I don’t know. But they might tell you at the office. Have you got any land?”

It was an awkward question. Andy did not wish to tell a falsehood, nor did he wish to disclose the secret left by his parent. He bit off a mouthful of bread and pretended to choke upon it.

“Hi, look out, or you’ll choke to death!” cried Bill Carrow, slapping him on the back. Then Andy ran to the door and continued to cough, until the awkward question was forgotten. Other workmen came up, and the talk became general. Perhaps Carrow suspected that the boy did not wish to answer him, for he did not refer to the matter again.

After thanking his friend for the dinner, Andy walked back to the office. He found the clerk smoking a pipe and reading a Bangor newspaper, having finished his midday meal a few minutes previously.

“It’s no use,” he said, as Andy came in. “We can’t possibly take you on.”

“I came back to get a little information, if you’ll be kind enough to give it. Do you know a man named Hopton?”

“Why, yes. I suppose you mean A. Q. Hopton, the real estate dealer.”

“Does he deal in timber lands?”

“I think he does.”

“Where is he from?”

“He has an office in Portland, and another in Grand Rapids, Michigan.”

“Do you know where he is now?”

“No. He was here on business some days ago. Perhaps he went back to Portland.”

“Thank you.”

“Want to buy a few thousand acres of land?” and the clerk chuckled at his joke.

“No, I thought I could sell him a linen duster to keep the icicles off when he’s on the road,” answered Andy, with a grin. And then, as there seemed nothing more to say, he walked away, and was soon leaving the Storburgh lumber camp behind him.

What he had heard set him to thinking deeply. What did this A. Q. Hopton know about the lumber tract in Michigan? Was it valuable, and did it really belong to his father’s estate?

“I wish I knew more about such things,” mused Andy. “The last time I tried to read the papers over I couldn’t make head or tail of them. I guess it would take a smart lawyer to get to the bottom of it —and a lawyer would want a lot of money for the work. I wonder——” And then Andy came to a sudden halt.

Was it possible that Mr. A. Q. Hopton had called at the cabin during his absence and interviewed Uncle Si? And if so, how much had Uncle Si been able to tell the real estate dealer? Had the two gone on a hunt for the papers, and, if so, had they found the documents?

“If Uncle Si has gone into any kind of a deal on this without consulting me, I’ll—I’ll bring him to account for it!” cried the youth, vehemently. “After this he has got to leave my affairs alone. He lost that fifteen hundred dollars—he’s not going to lose that timber land, too.”

It occurred to Andy that the best thing he could do would be to get home at once and interview his uncle. For the time being he lost his interest in looking for work, and also lost his desire to go gunning.

“I’ve tramped far enough for one day, anyway,” he told himself. “I’ll just stop at the store for a few things, and then go straight home.”

It was a long walk to the village, and once there he was glad enough to rest while the storekeeper put up the few things he desired. These he paid for in cash, for he did not wish to risk a refusal should he ask for trust.

“Your uncle was here—got some tobacco,” said the storekeeper. “He said you would pay for it.”

“He’ll have to pay for it himself, Mr. Sands,” answered Andy, firmly.

“Yes? All right, Andy, just as you say.”

“I pay for what I buy, and he can do the same.”

“Well, I don’t blame you, my boy.” And the look of the storekeeper spoke volumes. He handed over some change that was due. “By the way, did you know there was a real estate dealer in town to see you?” he inquired.

“A Mr. Hopton?”

“That’s the man.”

“When?”

“To-day,—only a few hours ago. I was telling him where you lived when your uncle came along for the tobacco. They talked a while together, and then went off.”

“Towards our place?”

“Yes, they took that road. The real estate man had a sleigh, and your uncle got in with him.”

“What did Mr. Hopton want?”

“I don’t know exactly. I heard some words about papers, and your uncle said he had them. Mr. Hopton said something about three hundred dollars in cash—but I don’t know what it was.”

Andy’s heart leaped into his throat. Was it possible that his uncle had found the timber claim papers, and was going to let Mr. A. Q. Hopton have them for three hundred dollars?

“He sha’n’t do it—I’ll stop him—I must stop him!” the boy told himself, and catching up his bundles he left the general store, and struck out for home as fast as his tired limbs would carry him.

CHAPTER III—SOME PAPERS OF VALUE

Ever since his father had left him the papers Andy had thought they might be of considerable value, but now he was more convinced than ever of their importance.

“For all I know, that claim may be worth a fortune,” he reasoned. “Anyway, it’s worth something, or that man wouldn’t be so anxious to get the papers.”

The youth tried his best to increase his speed, but the snow was deep in spots, and his long journey to the Storburgh camp had tired him, so it took some time to get even within sight of the cabin that was his home. To the rear, under the shed, he saw a horse and cutter.

“He is there, that’s sure,” he told himself. “I wonder what they are doing?”

The path to the cabin wound in and out among some trees, so that those inside could not witness his approach unless they were on the watch. As the youth came closer a sudden thought struck him, and he darted behind some bushes, made a detour, and came up in the shed. Here there was a back door opening into a summer kitchen.

Placing his bundles on a shelf in the shed, Andy softly opened the door to the summer kitchen and entered the place. Here there was another door, opening into the general living room of the cabin. It was not well hung, and stood open several inches.

“Well, I know something about timber lands,” he heard his uncle saying. “If they are wuth anything, they are generally wuth considerable.”

“I am offering you more than this claim is worth,” was the reply from Mr. A. Q. Hopton. He was standing in front of the fire warming himself, while Josiah Graham was hunched up in his usual attitude in the easy chair. Both men were smoking cigars, the real estate man having stood treat.

“Wot makes you so anxious to git the papers?” went on Josiah Graham.

“My client simply wants to clear away this flaw, as I told you,” answered A. Q. Hopton, smoothly. “Of course he could go ahead and claim everything just as it is, and I don’t think you could do a thing, but he prefers to treat everybody right. Mr. Graham gave a hundred dollars for this claim, so when you get three hundred for it you are getting a big price.”

“Humph!” Josiah Graham fell back on his favorite exclamation. “If I—that is, if I let you have them papers, Andy may object.”

“How can he? You’re his guardian, aren’t you?”

“Sure I am, but——”

“Then you have a right to do as you please. You don’t want me to buy the papers from him, do you?”

“No! no! You give the money to me!” cried Josiah Graham, in alarm. “He don’t know the vally of a dollar, an’ I do. If he had thet three hundred dollars he’d squander it in no time.”

“Very well, give me the papers and I’ll write you out a check.”

“Can’t you give me cash? It ain’t no easy matter fer me to git a check cashed up here.” Josiah Graham did not add that he was afraid the check might be worthless, although that was in his mind.

“I don’t carry three hundred dollars in my clothes. I can give you fifty in cash though,” went on the real estate agent, as he saw the old man’s face fall. “And if you wish, I’ll get one of the lumber bosses up here to vouch for the check.”

“Humph! I suppose thet will have to do then. But—er—one thing more, Mr. Hopton——”

“What is that?”

Josiah Graham leaned forward anxiously.

“Don’t you let the boy know about this right away. You give me a chanct to tell him myself.”

“Just as you wish. You’re his guardian, and I’ll not interfere with you. Get the papers and I’ll give you the check and the cash right now.” And the real estate agent drew a pocketbook and a checkbook from his inside coat.

Andy had listened to the conversation with bated breath. So far as worldly experience went he was but a boy, yet he realized that, in some way, this Mr. A. Q. Hopton was trying to swindle him out of his inheritance, and that his Uncle Si was willing to aid the schemer just for the sake of getting possession of the three hundred dollars.

As his uncle arose to enter the room in which his nephew slept, the boy slipped into the cabin. Like a flash he darted to his bedroom, jumped inside, and shut and bolted the door after him.

“Hi there! What’s this?” cried the real estate dealer, in astonishment.

“It’s—it’s the boy, my nevvy!” gasped Josiah Graham. “He come in through the back door! He must have been a-listenin’ to our talk.”

“Is that so? That’s too bad.” The real estate agent was dazed by the sudden turn of affairs. “He had a gun with him.”

“Yes, he took it with him when he went for work.” Josiah Graham walked over to the door and tried it. “Andy, open that door.”

“I will not,” was the answer.

“Was you a-listenin’ to our talk?”

“I was.”

“Humph! Nice thing fer a boy to do!”

“I guess I had a right to listen,” was the cool answer. As he spoke, Andy was examining the box in which he had stored the papers. He found things much disarranged, showing that his uncle had gone through the contents during his absence. But the papers were there, and the sight of them caused him to breathe a sigh of relief.

“They sha’n’t have these papers, no matter what happens,” he said to himself, and stuffed the documents into an inside pocket.

“Open thet door!” commanded Josiah Graham, and his voice now sounded harsh and threatening.

“I guess you had better teach that boy manners,” was Mr. A. Q. Hopton’s comment.

“I’ll teach him sumthin’!” answered the old man. “Open thet door, I say, an’ come out here.”

“You want to get those papers,” said Andy. He was wondering what to do next.

“Well, ain’t I your guardeen, an’ ain’t I got a right to ’em?”

“The papers are mine, and I’m not going to give them up,” answered Andy, doggedly. “I don’t like that Mr. Hopton, and he’s not going to get the papers. I’m going to turn them over to a lawyer.”

At these words the real estate man was much disturbed.

“That boy is an imp,” he said, in a low voice. “I’d not let him talk to me that way if I were you.”

“I ain’t goin’ to,” answered Josiah Graham. “Andy, you open thet door, or I’ll bust it in!”

“Don’t you dare break down the door!” answered Andy, in increased alarm. “If you do—I’ll—I’ll—Well, remember, I’ve got my gun—and it’s loaded, too.”

“Don’t ye shoot! Don’t ye shoot!” yelled Uncle Si, in sudden terror, and he backed away several steps. “Don’t ye dare! Oh, was ever there sech a boy!”

“Do you think he’d dare to shoot?” asked the real estate dealer.

“I dunno. He’s got lots o’ spirit sometimes.”

“Maybe we had better try to reason with him.”

“All right.” Josiah Graham raised his voice. “Andy, this is all—er—foolishness. Come out o’ there.”

To this the youth did not answer. He was considering what he had best do next. He did not want to shoot anybody, and he was afraid that the two men would in some manner get the better of him and take away the papers.

“Andy, do ye hear me? Come out—I ain’t goin’ to hurt ye.”

“You’ll take those papers away from me.”

“He is going to sell me the papers, and at a good price,” broke in A. Q. Hopton.

“I don’t want to sell—to you,” answered Andy. He was moving around the bedroom rapidly, having decided on a course of action.

“I’m your guardeen, an’ I know wot’s best,” broke in Josiah Graham. “Open the door, an’ no more foolin’ about it.”

“I don’t recognize you as my guardian,” was Andy’s reply. As he spoke he tiptoed his way to the window and opened it. Then he threw out a small bundle, and his gun and game bag followed.

“I am your guardeen!” stormed Josiah Graham. “You open the door!”

Instead of answering, Andy pushed a chair to the window. In another instant he had mounted it, and then he crawled through the opening. He landed in a heap in the snow, and scrambled up immediately. With bundle, gun, the game bag in his possession, he ran back of the shed and then down the road leading to the village.

At that minute he did not know where he was going, or what he was going to do. He had the precious papers in his pocket, and his one idea was to keep these away from his uncle and Mr. A. Q. Hopton.

“I’ll not go back until I’ve stored the papers in a safe place,” he told himself, finally. “I wonder who would keep them for me without asking too many questions?”

Although the sun hung low in the west, it was still light, and reaching a turn in the road, Andy stopped to look back. Much to his chagrin, he saw that his flight had already been discovered.

“They are coming after me!” he murmured, as he saw the horse and cutter flash into view. His uncle and the real estate dealer were on the seat, and the latter was urging the horse into a run through the heavy snow.

Unfortunately for Andy, there was but one road in that vicinity, and that ended at the Graham cabin. On all sides were the pine woods, with their scrub timber and underbrush, still partly laden with the fall of snow of the week previous.

“If I stick to the road they’ll catch me sure, and if I leave it I’ll have to go right into the woods, and they’ll easily see my trail,” he reasoned.

He broke into a run, and thus managed to pass another bend of the highway. Behind him he heard the jingle of the sleighbells as the cutter drew closer. In a few minutes more his pursuers would be upon him.

“I’ll chance it in the woods,” he muttered, and, reaching a spot where the undergrowth was thick, he leaped between the bushes and then walked on to a clump of pines. He was barely under the pines when he heard the cutter dash past. The men were talking excitedly, but he could not make out what was being said.

As the jingle of the sleighbells grew more distant, another thought came to Andy’s mind, one that made him smile grimly in spite of the seriousness of the situation.

“Might as well return and get something to eat,” he told himself. “They won’t come back right away.”

It did not take him long to retrace his steps to the cabin. The cutter, with its occupants, had kept on towards the village, so he had the place entirely to himself. He quickly found something to eat and to drink, and made a substantial meal. Then he placed a few more of his belongings in his bundle.

“It won’t do for me to stay here as long as I have the papers with me,” he told himself. “I guess I’d better try to get to the old Smith cabin for tonight. Then I can make up my mind what to do in the morning.”

The Smith cabin was a deserted place nearly a mile away. To reach it, Andy had to tramp directly through the woods. But the youth did not mind this, for he had often been out hunting in the vicinity.

“I might get a shot at something,” he mused. “A rabbit or a couple of birds wouldn’t go bad for breakfast.”

He lost no time in striking out. Half the distance was covered when he saw a big rabbit directly in his path. He blazed away, and the game fell dead. Then he caught sight of a squirrel, and brought that down also.

“Now I’ll have something besides crackers and bacon when I’m hungry,” he told himself, with satisfaction.

Soon he came in sight of the old Smith place. Much to his surprise, smoke was curling from the chimney, and he saw the ruddy glare of an open fire within.

“Somebody is here,” he thought. “Some hunter most likely. Wonder who it can be.” And he strode forward to find out.

CHAPTER IV—CHET GREENE'S PAST

"Hello, Andy!"

"Hello, Chet! I never expected to find you here! This is a real pleasure!" And Andy rushed into the old cabin, threw down his luggage, and grasped another lad by the hand.

"And I never expected you to come here tonight," said Chetwood Greene, as a smile lit up his somewhat square face. "I thought I was booked to camp here alone. What brought you, hunting?"

"Not exactly. It's a long story, Chet. Say, I'm glad you have a fire. I'm half frozen from tramping through the woods. The snow was pretty deep in spots."

"I know all about it, for I have been out all day. Here, draw up to the blaze. I was just getting supper ready. You've got some game, I see. I had very little luck—three rabbits and a wild turkey. I looked for deer, but it was no use."

"You've got to go pretty well back for deer these days," answered Andy.

"Thought you were going to strike Storburgh for a job."

"So I did, but it's the same story everywhere."

"Too bad! Well, you are no worse off than myself. I'm sick of even asking for work. I've about made up my mind to try my luck at hunting. I guess I can bring down enough to live on, and that's better than starving."

Chetwood Greene, always called Chet for short, was about the same age as Andy, but a trifle taller. He had a square chin, and dark, piercing eyes, that fairly shot forth fire when Chet was provoked. He was a good fellow in the main, but he had a hasty temper that occasionally got him into much trouble. Andy liked him very much, and the two boys were more or less chums.

There was a mystery surrounding Chet which few folks in that district knew. Many supposed that both of his parents were dead. But the fact of the matter was that Chet's father disappeared when the lad was fourteen years old. Some thought him dead, while others imagined he had run away to escape punishment incidental to a large transaction in lumber. Some signatures were forged, and it was held that Tolney Greene was guilty. He protested his innocence, but failed to stand trial, running away "between two days," as it was termed. He was traced to New Bedford, and there it was reported that he had last been seen boarding a sailing vessel outward bound. What had become of him after that, nobody knew.

Mrs. Greene had believed her husband innocent, and it grieved her greatly to be thus deserted. She tried to bear up, however, but during the following winter contracted pneumonia, and died, leaving Chet alone in the world.

Nobody seemed to want anything to do with the lad—thinking him the son of a forger, and possibly a suicide. Some tried to talk to him, but when they mentioned the supposed guilt of his parent, he flew into a rage.

“My father wasn’t guilty, and you needn’t say so!” he stormed. “If you say it I’ll lick you!” And then he knocked one man flat. He was subdued after a while, but he refused utterly to live with those who offered him a home, saying he did not want to be an object of charity, and that he could get along alone. He took his belongings, and a little money left by his mother, and moved to another part of the State—close to where Andy resided. Here he lived with an old guide for a while, and then got employment at one of the lumber camps. The old guide had departed during the past year for the Adirondacks, and Chet was now living alone, in a cabin that had seen better days.

It had been no easy matter for Andy and Chet to become chums. At first when they met, at a lumber camp where both were employed, Chet was silent and morose. But little by little, warmed by Andy’s naturally sunny disposition, he “thawed out,” and told his story in all its details. He knew a few things that the general public did not know, and these he confided to Andy.

“My father went off on a whaler named the *Betsey Andrews*,” he once said. “He said he would come back some day and clear himself. The mate wrote to my mother that my father’s mind was affected a little, but he hoped he would be all right by the end of the trip.”

“Well, hasn’t the *Betsey Andrews* got back yet?” had been Andy’s question.

“No.”

“Where is she?”

“That’s the worst part of it—nobody knows.”

“Do you think she was lost?”

“I hope not—but I don’t know,” had been Chet’s somewhat sad answer. He lived in daily hope of hearing from his parent again.

Chet knew Andy’s story, of Josiah Graham’s meanness and laziness, and of the papers left by Andy’s father, and he now listened with deep interest to what his chum had to tell about the visit of Mr. A. Q. Hopton, and of the escape through the bedroom window.

“Now what do you make of the whole thing, Chet?” asked Andy, after he had finished his recital.

“It looks to me as if this real estate dealer was mighty anxious to get the papers,” was the answer. “And that means that the papers are valuable.”

“Just what I think.”

“Your uncle has no right to sell ’em for three hundred dollars, or any other amount,” pursued Chet. “I understand enough about law to know that he’s got to get a court order to sell property. To my way of thinking, he’d like to do this on the sly, and pocket the three hundred. He’s no good, even if he is your uncle.”

“He’s only my father’s half-brother, and he always was a poor stick. I wish I knew of some lawyer to go to.”

“Why not try Mr. Jennings, over at Lodgeport? I’ve heard he’s a good man, and smart, too.”

“I might try him. But it’s a twelve-mile tramp.”

“Never mind, I’ll go along, and we may be able to pick up some game on the way,” answered Chet.

The boys talked the matter over for two hours, during which time Chet prepared supper, and the two ate it. Then Andy fixed the fire for the night, and the boys turned in, tired out from their long tramps through the snow.

It took some time for Andy to get to sleep, for the events of the day had disturbed him greatly. But at last he dozed off, and neither he nor Chet awoke until it was daylight.

“Phew! but it’s cold!” cried Chet, as he put his head out of doors. “And it snowed a little last night, too.”

“Is it snowing now?” questioned Andy, anxiously. His mind was on the trip to Lodgeport. A heavy fall of snow might mean much delay.

“No, the storm is clearing away.”

“Then let us get breakfast and start.”

Both of the youths had been camping so often that they knew exactly what to do. The fire was stirred up, and fresh wood put on, and they prepared a couple of cups of coffee, and broiled two squirrels. They had bread and crackers, and a little cheese, and thus made quite a good breakfast.

The meal over, they lost no time in packing up, and placing the larger portion of their outfits in hiding in the old cabin. To carry them to Lodgeport would have been too much of a load.

“We can carry a little food and our guns,” said Chet. “If we can’t get back tonight, we can return tomorrow. I don’t believe anybody will come here during that time.”

“I hope I don’t meet Uncle Si—or Mr. Hopton,” said Andy.

“We can watch out and easily keep out of their way.”

To get to the road that led to Lodgeport, the two lads had to cross a heavy patch of timber. Here, under the pines, it was intensely cold, and they had to move along rapidly to keep their blood in circulation.

“Talk about Greenland’s icy mountains, I guess this is bad enough!” cried Chet, as he slapped his hands to keep them warm.

“We’ll soon be out in the sunlight again,” answered Andy. But he was mistaken, for by the time they reached the open country once more, the sun had gone under a fringe of light clouds, so it was as cold as ever.

At the end of four miles they passed through one of the lumber settlements, and then, leaving the wagon road, took to a trail running in the neighborhood of Moose Ridge.

“I met a man yesterday who was coming out to the Ridge to hunt,” said Andy. “Wonder if he’ll have any success.”

“Hunting is not as good as it might be,” answered his chum. “The best of the game was killed off at the very beginning of the season. Still, he may get some deer, or a moose, if he’s a good hunter.”

“I’d like to get a moose myself, Chet.”

“Oh, so would I. If you see one, kindly point him out to me.” And Chet’s usually serious face showed a grin.

“I will—after I have brought him down with my gun,” answered Andy, and then both laughed.

Less than fifteen minutes later they came on the trail of a deer. The marks were so fresh, both boys could not resist the temptation to go after the game. They plunged through some bushes, and Andy went headlong into a hollow.

“Wuow!” he spluttered, as the snow got into his ears and down his neck. “What a tumble!”

“Maybe you’re training for a circus,” cried Chet.

“Not out here—and in this cold. Help me up, will you?”

Chet gave his chum a hand, and slowly Andy came out of the hollow. He had dropped his firearm, but this was easily recovered from the snowdrift.

“I don’t want another such tumble,” said the unfortunate one, as he tried to get the snow out of his coat collar. “I’m cold enough already.”

Once more they went on, after the deer, but the game had evidently heard their voices and taken fright, for when they came to a long, open stretch, no living creature was in sight.

Another mile was covered in the direction of Lodgeport, and then they reached one end of the rock elevation locally termed Moose Ridge. Here there was a good-sized cliff, with smaller cliffs branching off in various directions.

“There used to be some good hunting around here,” said Chet, as, having climbed a small rise, they paused to catch their breath. “I once brought down a dandy buck over yonder.”

He had scarcely spoken, when from a distance ahead there sounded out the crack of a rifle, followed, a few moments later, by a second report.

“Somebody is out!” cried Andy. “Wonder if he hit what he was aiming at.”

“Maybe we’ll see. Come ahead.”

“I hope he isn’t shooting this way.”

“The reports came from the top of the big cliff.”

The two boys moved on, keeping their eyes on the alert for the possible appearance of the hunter who had fired the two shots.

“Look! look!” cried Andy, suddenly, and pointing over the top of a small tree that stood between them and the big cliff ahead.

“What did you see?”

“Maybe I was mistaken, but I thought I saw a man tumble off the cliff!”

“A man? Perhaps it was a deer, or a moose.”

“No, it looked like a man to me. Come on! If he fell to the bottom he may be killed!”

Andy set off as rapidly as the depth of the snow permitted, and Chet followed in his footsteps. Soon they rounded half a dozen trees and came in full view of the big cliff. Both uttered cries of horror, and with good reason.

Halfway down the edge of the cliff was a narrow ledge, and on this rested the body of a man,—a hunter, as was shown by his gun and game bag. He had tumbled from the top of the cliff, and the fall had rendered him unconscious. He lay half over the edge of the ledge, and was in imminent danger of falling still further and killing himself.

CHAPTER V—THE MAN ON THE LEDGE

“Is he dead?” questioned Chet, in a strained voice.

“I don’t know—but I don’t think so,” answered Andy. “He has certainly had a nasty tumble.”

“It looks to me as if he was going to tumble the rest of the way, unless he holds on.”

“Let us see if we can’t help him.”

Both youths stood their guns against a tree, and made their way to the bottom of the cliff. As they did this, they saw the man’s body shift slightly, and then came a low moan.

“He’s alive!” cried Andy. “Hi, there!” he shouted. “Look out for yourself, or you’ll get another tumble!”

To this, the man on the ledge did not answer. But the boys, listening intently, heard him moan again.

“I wonder if we can get at him?” mused Chet. “I don’t see any way up the cliff from here, do you?”

“Oh, we must find a way to get to him!” cried Andy.

“Maybe we can catch him if he falls. If we—Look out!”

Andy leaped to one side, and the next instant the man’s gun dropped down on the rocks and fell in the snow. The game bag followed. They now saw the man in his unconscious state turn partly over.

“He’ll fall sure, unless we help him,” said Chet. “But I don’t know what to do.”

“I have it,” returned his chum. “Come on.”

“Where to?”

“I’ll show you.”

Wondering what his friend had in mind to do, Chet followed Andy to where was located an ash sapling of fair size. It had been broken off about two feet above the ground—how, they could not tell.

“We can put that against the cliff, and use it as a ladder,” said Andy.

“Provided we can get it over, Andy.”

Both began to tug at the sapling, and at last got it free from the stump end. Then they fairly rushed with it to the bottom of the cliff.

“You hold the end, and I’ll raise it up,” said Chet, who was a little the stronger of the two. “We can put the top right against the man, and that will keep him from rolling down.”

“If it will reach that far.”

“I think it will.”

Their experience as lumbermen stood them in good stead, and while Andy kept the bottom of the ash sapling from slipping in the snow, his chum raised it slowly but steadily, until it stood upright. Then Chet let it go over against the cliff with care, so that the man might not be further injured. The little tree reached several feet above the man’s head.

“I’ll go up and see what I can do for him,” said Andy, throwing off his overcoat. “You steady the tree, Chet.”

“All right. But be careful.”

From early boyhood days Andy had been a good climber, and he went up the ash sapling with ease. The young tree was strong, so there was no danger of its breaking beneath his weight. Soon his feet touched the ledge, and he knelt down beside the hurt man.

“Why, I know him!” he called down to his chum. “He’s the man I told you about—the one who asked me about the road to Moose Ridge.”

“Pull him back, before he has a chance to slip,” ordered Chet, and this Andy did. The movement made the man groan, and presently he opened his eyes for an instant.

“Oh, what a fall!” he murmured, and then relapsed into unconsciousness again.

“We’ll have to get him down from here and try to do something for him,” announced Andy. “He has a bad cut behind his left ear. I can’t do anything for him up here—it’s too slippery.”

“Can’t you climb down the tree with him? I’ll hold it steady.”

“I’ll try it.”

Andy made his preparations with care, for what he proposed to attempt was difficult and dangerous. A tumble to the rocks at the foot of the cliff might mean broken limbs, if not worse.

With care he raised the unconscious form up and placed it over his shoulder. Then he turned around, and, inch by inch, felt his way out on the sapling.

“I’m coming!” he called. “Hold it, Chet, or we’ll both come down!”

“I’ll hold it,” was the confident reply.

Gripping the knees of the man with his left hand, Andy held on to the sapling with his right. Stepping and sliding, he came down slowly. The young tree bent and threatened once to slip to one side, but Chet braced it with all his strength. In a minute more Andy was down, and had stretched the man out on the snow. The boy was panting from his exertions.

“I suppose we ought to have a doctor for him,” said Chet, as he made an examination of the unfortunate one’s wounds. “But I don’t know of any around here.”

“Nor do I. We can’t leave him here,—he’ll freeze to death. Where do you suppose we ought to take him?”

“I don’t know of a single place within a mile,—and I don’t suppose we ought to carry him as far as that. He may be hurt inside, and if he is, it won’t do to move him too much.”

Much perplexed by the situation which confronted them, the two boys talked the matter over. It was so cold at the foot of the cliff that to remain there was out of the question. At last Chet suggested moving to a clump of pine trees, where they might fix up some sort of temporary shelter and build a fire. They picked up their guns and the belongings of the man, and Chet took the unfortunate over his shoulder. He groaned several times, but did not speak or open his eyes.

“He is certainly hurt quite seriously,” said Andy. “I hope he doesn’t die on our hands.”

“Do you know his name, or where he comes from?”

“No, but I guess we can find that out by looking in his pockets. He must have cards or a notebook, or something.”

“He looks as if he was well off. That gun is an A No. 1 piece.”

“Yes, and look at the fine clothing he is wearing.”

It was a hard walk, and they had to take turns in carrying the unconscious man. To add to the gloom of the situation, it now commenced to snow again.

Presently they reached a spot that looked good to them. There were a series of rocks to the northward, backed up by a thick growth of pines. At the foot of the rocks grew some brushwood.

Chet had calculated to spend some time hunting, and had with him a hatchet, with which to cut firewood. In a very few minutes he had cut out some of the brushwood, leaving a cleared space about eight feet square. Over the top of the cleared space he threw some saplings and pine branches, and then “wove in” pine branches around the sides. By this means he soon had a shelter ready, which, while it was by no means air-tight, was a great deal better than nothing. On the floor of the shelter he placed other pine branches, and there he and Andy made the suffering man as comfortable as possible. As soon as they had reached the spot, Andy had started up a fire, right in front of the opening, and this now gave out a warmth that was much appreciated.

With some warm water made from melted snow, the lads washed the wounds of the man, and then bound them up with strips torn from their shirts. They used other water for making coffee, and poured some of this down the man’s throat. They also rubbed his hands and wrists, doing what they could think of to revive him.

In the meantime the snow continued to come down, lightly at first, and then so thickly that the entire landscape around the shelter was blotted out.

“It’s going to be a corker of a storm,” announced Chet, as he gazed out.

“I can’t see a thing anywhere,” was Andy’s answer. “Wonder how long it will last.”

“Several hours, maybe.”

“I don’t see how we are going to get a doctor to come here while it is like this.”

“Better not try to find one. If you go out, you may lose your way.”

They replenished the fire, and cut a good stock of wood, and then sat down to watch the man. In one of his pockets they found a card-case.

“His name is Barwell Dawson,” announced Andy, “and he comes from Brooklyn.”

“What business is he in?”

“It doesn’t say.”

That the stranger was rich was quite evident. He wore a fine gold watch and chain, and an elegant diamond ring. In one pocket he had a wallet filled with bills of large denomination.

“He is one of your high-toned sportsmen,” announced Chet. “Some of ’em come up to Maine every fall to hunt.”

“It’s a wonder he didn’t have a guide, Chet.”

“Oh, some of ’em think they can do better without one.”

Suddenly the man opened his eyes wide, stared around for a moment, and then sat up. The change was so unexpected that the boys were amazed.

“Where—Who are you?” he stammered.

“You’ve had a bad fall—came down over the cliff,” answered Andy.

“What? Oh, yes, so I did. I—I——” The man felt of his head. “Why, I’m all bandaged up!”

“You got cut pretty badly,” said Chet. “We’re wondering if you broke any bones.”

“Yes?” The man gave a little groan. “I’m hurt, that’s sure. Oh!” And then he put his hand to his side.

“You had better keep quiet for a while,” said Andy, gently. “It won’t do you any good to stir around. We’d get a doctor, only it’s snowing so we’re afraid we might miss the trail.”

“Snowing? It wasn’t snowing when I fell.”

“That was nearly two hours ago.”

“And I’ve been knocked out all that time?” The man fell back on the pine boughs. “No wonder I feel so broken up.”

He closed his eyes, and the boys thought he was going to faint. Chet got some more coffee.

“Here, drink this, it will do you good,” he said, and placed the tin cup to the sufferer’s lips. The man gulped down the beverage, and it seemed to give him a little strength. Presently he sat up again.

“Did you two see me take the tumble?” he questioned, with a weak attempt at a smile.

“I saw you,” answered Andy. “You didn’t come all the way over the cliff. You struck a ledge and hung there, and we got you down and brought you here.”

“I see.”

“We were afraid some of your bones were broken,” put in Chet. “Are they?”

“I don’t know.” Slowly the man moved his arms and his legs. He winced a little.

“All right but my left ankle,” he announced. “I reckon that got a bad twist. Beats the Dutch, doesn’t it?” he added, with another attempt at a smile.

“It’s too bad,” returned Andy.

“No, you don’t understand. I mean my coming to Maine to do a little quiet hunting, and then to get knocked out like this. Why, I’ve hunted all over this globe,—the West, India, Africa, and even in the Arctic regions—and hardly got a scratch. I didn’t think anything could happen to me on a quiet little trip like this.”

CHAPTER VI—A WORLD-WIDE HUNTER

The two boys listened to the man's words with keen interest. He had hunted in the wild West, in India, Africa, and even in the Arctic regions! Surely he was a sportsman out of the ordinary.

"You're like old Tom Casey," said Andy. "He fought the forest fires here for years, and never got singed, and then went home one day and burnt his arm on a red-hot stove. I hope the ankle isn't bad."

"I can't tell about that until I stand on it. Give me a lift, will you?"

Both boys helped the man to his feet. He took a couple of steps, and was then glad enough to return to the pine couch.

"It's no use—I can't walk, yet," he murmured.

"Do you think you need a doctor?" asked Chet.

"Hardly—although I'd call him in if he was handy. I'm pretty tough, although I may not look it. Who are you?"

"My name is Chet Greene, and this is a friend of mine, Andy Graham."

"I am glad to know you, and very thankful for what you have done for me. I'll make it right with you when I'm able to get around. My name is Dawson—Barwell Dawson. I'm a traveler and hunter, and occasionally I write articles for the magazines—hunting articles mostly."

"Oh, are you the man who once wrote a little book about bears—how they really live and what they do, and all that?" cried Andy.

"Yes, I'm the same fellow."

"I've got that book at home—you once gave it to my father, when I was about eight years old."

"Is that so? I don't remember it."

"My father was up on the Penobscot, lumbering. He went out with you into the woods and you found a honey tree. You gave him the book for his little boy—that was me."

"Oh, yes, I remember it now!" cried Barwell Dawson. "So that was your father. How is he?"

"My father is dead," answered Andy, and his voice dropped a little.

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear it. And your mother?"

"She is dead, too."

"Then you are alone in the world? Do you live near?"

“I live two miles from Pine Run, with an uncle. It was I who told you how to get to Moose Ridge, when you were driving on the wrong road.”

“Oh, yes, I thought I had seen you somewhere.”

Here the conversation lapsed, for Barwell Dawson was still weak. He lay back and closed his eyes, and the boys did not disturb him.

It continued to snow, until the fresh fall covered the old to the depth of several inches. The boys kept the campfire going, and cooked such game as they had brought along.

“We are booked to stay here for a while, that’s certain,” observed Chet. “No Lodgeport today.”

After a while Barwell Dawson sat up again, and gladly partook of the food offered to him. His injuries consisted of a hard shaking up, a bruised ankle, and several cuts on his head.

“I am thankful that no bones are broken, and that I did not get killed,” he said, and then he requested them to give the details of the rescue from the ledge. The boys related their story, to which he listened closely.

“It was fine of you to get me down,” he declared. “Fine! I’ll have to reward you.”

“I don’t want any reward,” answered Andy, promptly.

“Nor do I,” added Chet.

“Well, you ought to let me do something for you,” persisted the one who had been rescued.

“You might tell us of some of your hunting adventures,” said Andy, with a smile. “I’d like to hear about hunting in the far West and other places.”

“So would I,” added Chet. “If I had the money, I’d like to do like you have done, travel all over the world and hunt.” And his eyes glistened with anticipation.

“What do you do now?”

“Nothing at present. We can’t get an opening at any of the lumber camps.”

“I understand business is very dull this season.”

After that Barwell Dawson asked for more particulars concerning the boys, and they told him how they were situated. He was surprised to learn that Chet was practically alone in the world.

“It is certainly hard luck,” he said, kindly. “You must let me do something for you.”

Then, after his ankle had been bathed in hot water, and bound up, the hunter and traveler told them of his trips to various portions of the globe, and how he had hunted deer and moose in one place, bears and mountain lions in another, and tigers and other wild beasts elsewhere. He had two very interested listeners.

“It must be great!” murmured Chet. “Oh, that would suit me down to the ground—to go out that way!”

“I have made one trip to the north,” continued Barwell Dawson, “and I am soon going to make another.”

“You mean to Canada?” queried Andy.

“Not exactly. I am going to Greenland, and then into the polar regions. I want to hunt seals, polar bears, and musk oxen.”

“You’ll be frozen to death!”

“Hardly,” answered the hunter. “On my previous trip I stood the cold very well, and this time I shall go much better prepared. Somehow, I like hunting in the Arctic Circle better than hunting anywhere else. Besides, I wish to—But never mind that now,” and Barwell Dawson broke off rather abruptly. Then he told a story of a hunt after polar bears that made Chet’s eyes water.

“That’s the stuff!” whispered Chet to Andy. “That beats a deer hunt all hollow!”

“Yes, provided the polar bear doesn’t eat you up.”

“Huh! I’d not be afraid. I don’t believe a polar bear is any more dangerous than a moose.”

“I saw a moose just before I had the tumble,” said Barwell Dawson. “I climbed up the cliff after him, but I couldn’t get very close. I took two shots at him, but he got away.”

“If we are going to be snowed up here we ought to try for some game,” said Chet. “Maybe I can stir up some rabbits, or something.”

It was decided that he should go out, leaving Andy to look after Mr. Dawson and the campfire.

“But don’t go far,” cautioned Andy. “The snow is coming down so thick that you may get lost.”

“Oh, I’ll take care of myself,” answered Chet.

He knew it would be a bad move to go out into the open, so he kept to the timber, blazing a tree here and there as he went along. He knew very little game would be stirring.

“If I get anything it will be more accident than anything else,” he reasoned. “No animal is going to stir out in this storm.”

He was just passing under a big spruce tree when, chancing to glance up, he saw a sight that quickened his pulse. On a limb close at hand were several wild turkeys, huddled together to keep warm.

With great caution he moved to one side, to get a good aim. Then, raising his gun, he blazed away. There was a whirr and a flutter, and two of the turkeys came down, one dead and the other wounded. Rushing forward, Chet caught the wounded bird by the neck, and soon put it out of its misery.

“That’s a good start,” he told himself, with much satisfaction. “I hope my luck continues.”

Placing the game in his bag, he went forward again, looking for more signs of birds, and also for signs of squirrels and rabbits.

It was growing dark, and Chet began to think it was time to turn back, when he saw some rabbits in a thick clump of bushes. He sprang in after them, and they leaped out into the snow and across a small opening. Then, before he could fire, they were out of sight again.

“You shan’t get away from me as easily as that,” the youth muttered to himself, and ran out into the opening. Here the snow was so thick he could see but little, yet he kept on, and soon reached more brushwood. He saw some branches close to the snow move, and blazed away in the dark.

His aim proved true, for when he came up he found one rabbit dead. Another had been wounded, as the blood on the snow showed. In all haste he made after the limping game. But the rabbit had considerable life left in it, and dove deep into the brushwood. But at last it had to give up, and Chet secured the additional game without much trouble.

It had grown dark rapidly, and in some anxiety the young hunter turned back, in an endeavor to retrace his steps. This was no easy matter, for the snow was coming down as thickly as ever, and he could scarcely see two yards ahead of him.

“It won’t do for me to get lost out here,” he reasoned. “If I don’t get back, Andy will be worried to death.”

Bending to meet the snow—for the wind was now blowing briskly, Chet pushed forward until another clump of trees was gained. Walking was becoming irksome, and he panted for breath. Under the trees he paused to get his bearings.

“I must be right,” he thought. Yet, try his best, he could not locate any of the trees he had blazed a short while before.

Any other lad might have become frightened at the prospect, but Chet was used to being alone, and he simply resolved to move forward with increased caution.

“If the worst comes, I can fire three shots in succession. Andy will know what that means,” he reasoned. On previous trips to the woods the boys had arranged that three shots meant, “I am lost. Where are you?” A single shot was to be the answer—repeated, of course, as often as necessary.

Another hundred feet were covered, and Chet was looking vainly for one of the blazed trees, when an unexpected sound broke upon his ears.

It was an unusual and uncanny noise, and he stopped short to listen. It came from a clump of spruces to his left.

“Now, what can that be?” he asked himself. “I never heard a noise like that before.”

He listened, and presently the sound was repeated. To him it seemed as if some unseen giant were in deep distress.

Chet was not superstitious, or he might have thought he heard a ghost. He knew there must be some rational reason for the unusual noise, and he resolved to investigate.

“Anybody there?” he cried, as he raised his gun in front of him, and tried to peer through the snow-laden air.

There was no answer, nor was the peculiar sound repeated. With cautious steps he advanced toward the clump of spruces. Underneath all was now as dark as night could make it.

Again he paused, something warning him to be extra cautious. His nerves were now at a high tension, for he felt something unusual was coming.

An instant later it came. Through the snow and darkness Chet caught a momentary gleam of a pair of eyes shining like two balls of fire. Then a bulky form shot out of the darkness, and bumped up against him, hurling him flat. Ere he could arise, the form leaped over him, and went limping off, puffing and snorting as it did so.

“A moose!” gasped Chet, as he felt in the snow for his gun. “And wounded! It must be the one Mr. Dawson tried to get!”

He thought the big beast was retreating, but soon found out otherwise. The moose was badly wounded, and ugly in the extreme. Around he wheeled, and then came straight for Chet. The lad could not locate his gun, and, feeling his peril, darted for the nearest tree and leaped high up among the branches.

CHAPTER VII—CHET AND THE MOOSE

“Phew! that was a narrow escape!”

Such were Chet’s words as he drew himself higher up into the tree. The big beast below had come up, and struck the tree a blow that made it shiver from top to bottom. Had he not been holding on tightly the boy would have been hurled down, and at the very feet of the moose.

The animal was full-grown, powerful, and with wide and heavy antlers. He had been wounded in one of the forelegs, but was still able to stand. Now he stood under the spruce, on three legs, gazing up at Chet speculatively.

“Like to smash me, wouldn’t you?” murmured the youth. “Well, I guess not—not if I know it!”

Chet wished with all his heart that he had his gun. But the weapon was out of sight under the snow, and the moose was standing over the spot.

What to do next, the lad did not know. The moose did not show any inclination to leave. He breathed heavily, as if his wound hurt him, but Chet was certain that there was still a good deal of fight in the creature.

“Perhaps he’ll keep me here all night,” thought the boy, dismally.

Presently an idea came to him to call for help. Andy might hear him, and come up with his gun.

“That shelter is a long way off, but it won’t do any harm to try it,” Chet reasoned, and expanding his chest, he let out a yell at the top of his lung power. He repeated the cry several times, and then listened with strained ears. No answer came back but the gentle sighing of the rising wind, as it swept through the woods.

“Huddled inside the shelter, I suppose, to keep warm,” Chet murmured, dismally. “I might yell my head off and it wouldn’t do a bit of good. I’ll have to try something else.”

What that something else was to be was not clear. He moved from one branch to another to investigate, then a thought struck him, and he resolved to act upon it.

With caution, so as not to attract the attention of the moose, he climbed far out on a branch of the spruce, and thus gained a grip on the wide-spreading limb of another tree. He swung himself to this, and crawling along and past the trunk of the second tree, moved to the end of a branch on the opposite side.

He was now a good twenty-five feet from where the moose was standing. Would it be wise to drop down in the snow and make a dash for liberty?

“If he catches me, he’ll kill me—he’s so ugly from that wound,” Chet told himself. “If it wasn’t so awful cold, I’d stay here till morning.”

Cautiously he lowered himself toward the snow below. He was on the point of dropping when he heard the moose move. The animal came on the rush, and in drawing up into the tree again, Chet had one foot scraped by the moose's antlers.

"No escape that way," he told himself, and lost no time in pulling himself still higher into the tree.

Thus far he had managed to keep warm, but now, as he sat down to rest, and to study the situation, he became colder and colder. Occasionally the wind drove in some of the snow, to add to his discomfort.

Presently Chet thought of another idea, and wondered why it had not occurred to him before. He knew that all wild animals dread fire. He resolved to make himself a torch, and try that on the moose.

Making sure that he had his matches, he got out his jackknife and cut off the driest branch that he could find. Then, holding it with care, he struck a match, shielding it from the wind as best he could, and lit the end of the branch. At first it did not ignite very well, but he "nursed" the tiny flame, and soon it blazed up into quite a torch.

"Now we'll see how you like this," Chet muttered, and started to climb to the lower branch once more.

With eyes that still blazed, the moose had watched the flaring up of the light. At first he was all curiosity, but as the flame grew larger he gave a snort of fear. Far back in the past he had felt the effects of a forest fire, and now he thought he saw another such conflagration starting up. As Chet swung down he turned and limped off, moving faster at every step.

"Hurrah! that did the trick!" cried the boy, in deep satisfaction, and then, as he saw the moose plowing off through the deepening snow, he jumped to the ground and rushed off to where he had dropped his gun. Perhaps he could lay the beast low after all.

As luck would have it, Chet did not have to look long for the firearm. The moose had kicked the snow from part of the barrel, and the glare of the torch lit upon this. In a trice the youth had the gun in his hand. The moose was disappearing in the snow and darkness, but taking hasty aim, he fired.

The animal went on, but Chet felt certain his shot had gone true. Hastily reloading, so that he might have both barrels ready in case he wanted them, he set off after the game as fast as the now heavy fall of snow would allow. He was a true sportsman, and made up his mind that now he had his firearm once again, the moose should not escape him.

As is well known, although a moose is one of the swiftest of wild animals on clear ground, or even on the rocks and in the woods, the creature is at a disadvantage in soft snow, because of its small legs and hoofs. Its weight causes it to sink to the very bottom of every hollow.

Chet had advanced less than two hundred feet when he saw the moose floundering in the snow behind some bushes over which it had leaped.

"Now I've got you!" cried the boy, and advancing fearlessly, he took careful aim and blazed away. The animal went down, thrashed around, sending the snow in all directions, and then lay still.

Not to be caught in any trap, Chet reloaded once more, and then came up with caution. But the big creature was dead, and the heart of the young hunter bounded with delight. It was an event to lay low such a monarch of the forest as this.

“As big a moose as I’ve seen brought in from these parts,” he mused. “Won’t Andy be surprised when he sees the game! But Mr. Dawson deserves some of the credit—he hit the moose first.”

What to do with his prize Chet did not know. To haul it to the temporary camp alone, and through such deep snow, was impossible. And if he left it where it was, some wolves or other wild beasts might get at it.

“I’ll kick the snow over it, and let it go at that,” he finally decided. “It’s time I got back. It’s so dark it won’t be long before I can’t see a thing.”

Sticking his torch in the snow, he made a mound over the game, and on top stuck a stick with his handkerchief tied to it. Then he retraced his steps to the clump of spruces, and searched once again for the blazes he had made on the trees.

At last, just as he was about to shoot off his gun as a signal of distress, he found one of the blazes, and a minute later discovered another. He now had the proper direction in mind, and set off as rapidly as his weary limbs and the ever-increasing depth of snow would permit.

“Hullo, Chet! Where are you?”

It was a call from Andy, sounding out just as the young hunter came in sight of the campfire. Andy was growing anxious, and had come forth from the shelter several times in an endeavor to locate his chum.

“Here I am,” was the answer. “Christopher, but I’m tired!”

“Any luck?”

“A little. How are those for wild turkeys?”

“Fine! Now we’ll have a good breakfast, anyway.”

“How is Mr. Dawson?”

“He says he feels pretty easy. But his ankle is badly swollen. Say, he’s a splendid man, and one of the greatest hunters you ever heard of, Chet. And he’s rich, too—he owns a ranch out West and a bungalow down on the Jersey coast, and a yacht, and I don’t know what all.”

“You can tell him I brought down the moose he wounded.”

“What!” And Andy’s eyes showed his astonishment.

“It’s true. The moose almost laid me low first, but I got the best of him after all.”

“Where is the animal?”

“About a quarter of a mile from here. I covered him with snow, and put a stick and my handkerchief over the spot.”

“Did he attack you?”

“He certainly did,” answered Chet.

Both boys entered the temporary shelter. Barwell Dawson was awake, and he and Andy listened with keen attention to the story Chet had to tell.

“It must have been the moose I hit,” said Barwell Dawson. “But I think he’s your game anyway, Chet.”

“Well, we can divide up,” answered the young hunter, modestly.

The tramp in the snow, and the excitement, had made Chet weary, and he was glad enough to lie down and go to sleep. During his absence, Andy had cut more pine boughs and piled them around the sides and on top of the shelter, so it was now fairly cozy, although not nearly as good as a cabin would have been.

In the morning Andy was the first to stir. He found the entrance to the shelter blocked by snow, and the campfire was all but out. The snow had stopped coming down, but the air seemed to be still full of it.

“We’ve got to get out of here, or we’ll be snowed in for certain,” he told Chet, and then kicked the snow aside and started up the fire, and commenced to get breakfast. They cooked one of the wild turkeys, and it proved delicious eating to the lads, although Mr. Dawson thought the meat a trifle strong.

The man who had had the tumble over the cliff declared that he felt quite like himself, aside from his ankle, which still pained him. The swelling of the member had gone down some, which was a good sign.

“I guess your uncle will wonder what has become of you,” said Chet to Andy. “I suppose he’ll hunt all over the village for you.”

“Let him hunt, Chet. I am not going back until I find out about that timber land, and about what sort of man that Hopton is. The more I think of it, the more I’m convinced that Mr. A. Q. Hopton is a swindler and is trying to swindle both Uncle Si and myself.”

“Well, it’s no credit to your uncle to stand in with him.”

“Of course it isn’t—and I’ll give Uncle Si a piece of my mind when I get the chance.”

“I don’t think you’re going to get to Lodgeport today.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter much. I don’t think there is any great hurry about this business. The matter has rested ever since father died.”

This talk took place outside the shelter, so Barwell Dawson did not hear it. Inside, the man dressed his ankle, while the boys cleared away the remains of the morning meal, and started the fire afresh with more pine sticks.

“We really ought to try to get out of here,” said Andy, after an hour had passed. “I think it will snow again by night, and it would be rough to be snow-bound in such a place as this.”

“I’d like to get out myself, but I am afraid I can’t walk,” said Barwell Dawson, with a sigh. “A bruised ankle is worse than a broken arm—when it comes to traveling,” he added, with a grim smile.

“Supposing we took turns at carrying you?” suggested Chet. “I think we could do it.”

“How far?”

“Well, we might try for a cabin that is about three-quarters of a mile from here. We’d be far more comfortable at the cabin than here,—and maybe you could get some liniment for your bruises.”

“Well, I’m willing to try it if you are,” answered Mr. Dawson, who did not like the temporary shelter any better than did the boys.

Preparations were accordingly made, and half an hour later the party of three set off. It was agreed that Chet should first do the carrying of the hurt one, and Andy brought up the rear with the guns, game bags, and other things.

CHAPTER VIII—A TALK OF IMPORTANCE

The cabin for which the little party was headed was one owned by a man named Upham Jeffer. This man was something of a hermit and scientist, and rarely showed himself in the settlements of that vicinity. But on two occasions Chet had done Professor Jeffer a good turn, and he was, therefore, hoping they would get a cordial reception.

But just now, the main question was, Could they reach the Jeffer place? The boys had the way fairly well fixed in their heads, but walking was hard and treacherous. On the level, the snow was at least a foot deep, while they ran the risk of going down in deep hollows filled by the wind.

“Anyway, I’m glad the wind is on our backs,” said Andy, as they trudged along. “If it was in our faces it would be awful.”

“You must take frequent rests,” came from Barwell Dawson. “There is no use in exhausting yourselves by hurrying.”

When about one-quarter of the distance had been covered, they rested, and then Chet and Andy exchanged loads. They had now some rough ground to cover, and of a sudden Andy went down in a hollow, taking the man he was carrying with him.

“Be careful!” cried Chet, in alarm.

Andy and Mr. Dawson rolled over and over, and landed in snow up to their necks. Fortunately the fall was a soft one, or both might have been seriously injured.

Chet threw down his load, and aided the pair to get out of the hollow. Andy came out with a neck full of snow, and his coat half off his back.

“Say, I don’t want any more of that!” he panted, digging the snow from one ear.

In a few minutes they went on again, Chet with the outfit taking the lead. Progress was slow, and all were glad to rest when the top of a small rise was gained.

“There is the Jeffer cabin,” said Chet, pointing it out.

“I don’t see any smoke,” added Andy. “What shall we do if Professor Jeffer isn’t at home?”

“Oh, I don’t think he’s away,” answered his chum. “But even so, I guess he’ll let us use the place—in such a snow as this.”

“We can pay him for the accommodations,” put in Barwell Dawson. “I’ll take care of that.”

It was nearly noon when they gained the cabin, rather a large structure, set in a grove of pines, and on the edge of a brook that was now covered with snow and ice. Chet, who was in advance, knocked loudly on the door.

At first there was no answer. Then a low voice asked who was there.

“It is I, Chet Greene, Professor.”

“Oh! Come in—if you can get the door open.”

Chet tried the door—to find it bolted. Then he heard a movement within, and the barrier was opened.

“Oh, I thought you were alone,” said the man within. He was tall and thin, and wore a heavy beard and big spectacles.

“No, Professor Jeffer. This is my friend, Andy Graham, and this is a gentleman who fell over Moose Ridge cliff and got hurt. Can we bring him in?”

“Why, yes, certainly, of course!” cried Upham Jeffer. “Hurt, eh? Where?”

“He has a bruised ankle, and some cuts on his head.”

“I see. Well, bring him in, and what remedies I have on hand shall be at his service. I’m a bit sick myself—been making some experiments with nitrogen that didn’t agree with me. You see, I reasoned out that if nitrogen could be dissolved by means of——”

“Where can I place the gentleman?” broke in Chet, who knew Upham Jeffer’s weakness for going off into scientific discussions.

“Oh, yes, of course, I forgot. Why, place him anywhere. Make yourselves at home.” The old scientist looked around rather helplessly. “There is my medicine closet. Use whatever you can find there.”

He was really a fine old man, but so wrapped up in his scientific experiments that he paid little attention to the world at large, or what was going on around him. He was very learned, but apt to be forgetful to the last degree. He lived alone, and it was reported that he had a goodly sum in the bank. Certainly he never seemed to want for funds, although his mode of living was far from extravagant.

Barwell Dawson was placed in an easy-chair in the living apartment, and the professor busied himself in getting out some medicine and a liniment which he said would do much good.

“Shall I start up the fire?” asked Andy, who saw that the blaze had been allowed to die down.

“Why, yes, of course! I forgot all about the fire,” answered Upham Jeffer. “You see, when I get interested in my experiments, I usually——” And then he stopped talking, being busy measuring some medicine in a glass.

Andy stirred up the fire, and brought in some wood from a pile in a near-by shed. In the meantime Chet introduced Barwell Dawson to the old scientist.

“Why, I know you, sir!” cried Mr. Dawson, as he looked closely at the professor. “Weren’t you once up north—with the Welber Exploring Expedition?”

“Why, yes, of course!” answered Professor Jeffer. “And you—it seems to me your face looks familiar. Why, yes, I have it now! You were up there at the same time, on a hunting trip.”

“You’ve struck it. I am glad to meet you again, Professor Jeffer.”

“I have forgotten your name, Mr.——”

“Dawson—Barwell Dawson.”

“Ah, yes, of course! I remember it well now! Strange how I should forget. But you know I am so wrapped up in my experiments that I—but let us stop talking and attend to this ankle of yours. We’ll wash it well with hot water, and pour on this liniment, and the swelling will soon go down. You see, the curative qualities of witch hazel, when combined with wintergreen and——” And then the professor stopped and went to work.

Inside of half an hour Barwell Dawson’s hurts had all been attended to, and he felt much better. The cuts on his head had stopped bleeding, and he insisted upon having the bandages removed.

“I’m not such a baby as you think,” he said. “I’ll be all right by tomorrow, watch and see. All I want is a good smoke to cure me,” and he lit his briar-root pipe.

“I’ll be glad to hear it,” answered Andy.

“Nevertheless, don’t imagine that I don’t appreciate what you two lads have done for me,” went on Mr. Dawson, earnestly. “It was a fine thing to do, and I’ll not forget it in a hurry.”

It had begun to snow again, and all three were glad that they had exchanged the temporary shelter in the woods for the large and comfortable cabin of the old professor. The cabin was well furnished, and on the walls hung horns and skins of various wild animals. There were a good-sized table and some chairs, and in one corner stood a bookcase with a hundred volumes or more. Opening out of the living room were a kitchen and two bedrooms. It was in the kitchen that Professor Jeffer had been conducting the experiments which had made him ill. A powerful odor filled the air of the apartment, and to get rid of it, Chet opened a window for a while.

“I should have had something open when I tried the experiment,” said the professor. “But I became so interested that I forgot. If you hadn’t come when you did, I don’t know what would have happened.”

“You want to be careful in the future, Professor,” said Barwell Dawson. “Science cannot afford to lose a man like you.” And this latter remark tickled the old scientist very much. He was really quite learned, and he was glad to have it known.

“If this snow keeps on, we’ll have to stay here all night,” said Andy to Chet.

“You are welcome to remain as long as the storm lasts,” answered Professor Jeffer, who overheard the remark. “I have a well-filled larder, and with what you have brought we can get along very well.”

“We have a moose about a mile from here—if only we could bring him here,” said Chet.

“I’m afraid your game will have to wait. If you went for it now, you’d surely get lost. It is snowing furiously.”

What the professor said about the storm was true. The snow was accompanied by a high wind, which whistled loudly around the cabin. All of the party were glad enough to gather in front of the big open fireplace, for that was the one spot that was thoroughly warm.

As they sat around, Chet told in detail his story of the moose, and then the boys listened while Barwell Dawson and Professor Jeffer related some things that had happened to them when they had met in the far north.

“I should like exceedingly to take another trip to the polar regions,” said the professor. “The other trip was too short for me. I did not gain half the knowledge I desired.”

“I am going up there again,” answered Barwell Dawson, quietly.

“Ah, indeed! When?”

“As soon as my ship is ready for me.”

“Your ship? Are you equipping a ship?” demanded Professor Jeffer, while the boys listened in astonishment.

“I am. I have not said much about it as yet, for I did not want to excite public comment. But I am fitting out a ship for polar exploration.” And Barwell Dawson smiled quietly, as if fitting out such an expedition were an everyday occurrence.

“Why, really, you—you astonish me!” cried the professor. “This is most extraordinary, sir. Are you, may I ask, fitting out this ship yourself?”

“I am footing the bill, yes.”

“It will cost a large amount of money.”

“I guess I can afford it. I am fairly well-to-do, and last year an uncle died and left me several hundred thousand dollars.”

“I see—very good.” Professor Jeffer rubbed his hands together. “It is a grand thing to be able to gratify one’s wish in this manner. Now, I have a little money, but not enough to fit out such an expedition as you mention. Still, I’d like very much to go north again.”

“Could you stand the trip?”

“Me? Why, sir, I am as strong as iron,—you can ask Captain Welber about it. I withstood the cold and the hardships long after some of the others succumbed. I am a little weak just now—the effects of that foolhardy experiment,—but by tomorrow I’ll be as well and strong as ever. Why, sir, I can tramp twenty or thirty miles a day with ease, and I can go forty-eight hours without food if it is necessary.”

“Are you anything of a hunter?”

“Yes. Since I came to Maine I have done considerable shooting.”

“Indeed he has,” broke in Chet. “I’ve been with him, and I know of three first-class shots that he made.”

“Any one who is to go with me must be a good shot, and must be able to withstand great hardships,” pursued Barwell Dawson.

“How long do you expect to be gone?” asked Professor Jeffer, with increased interest.

“I don’t know exactly—perhaps two years.”

“Two years—in the land of ice and snow!” cried Andy. “That’s a pretty long trip.”

“Yes, but I have planned to do a great deal,” answered Barwell Dawson. “As I stated before, I don’t want to say too much about it yet, for if I do, I’ll have all sorts of curiosity seekers at my heels. If some folks knew what I had in mind to do, they’d be crazy to be taken along.”

“Well, I presume I am one of the crazy ones,” returned Professor Jeffer.

“With you, Professor, it is different. You have been to the far north, and know what to expect,—and besides, you are learned, and your knowledge might prove valuable.”

“Ah! then you will agree that I shall go?” demanded the scientist, eagerly.

“That depends. I have not told you all yet. I am going to the far north to hunt, but I am likewise going for something else—something of greater importance.”

“And that is?” asked the professor, while the boys listened in wonder.

“I am going to try to reach the North Pole.”

CHAPTER IX—SOMETHING ABOUT THE NORTH POLE

It was with much amazement that Andy and Chet, as well as Professor Upham Jeffer, listened to the words of Barwell Dawson.

“Going to try to reach the North Pole!” repeated Andy.

“Yes.”

“It’s never been done—at least, not by anybody who came back alive,” said Chet.

“A grand project, nevertheless,” were Professor Jeffer’s words. “A truly grand project. But have you counted the cost?—I do not mean in money. It may cost you your life.”

“I shall be as careful in my plans as possible,” answered Barwell Dawson. His eyes lit up, and he arose to his feet. “I don’t mind telling you that to reach the North Pole has been my ambition ever since I first went hunting in the Arctic regions.”

“It has been the dream of many men,” said Professor Jeffer. “I once had the dream myself—I presume all those who go to the north have it.”

“It’s a good long journey from Maine,” said Andy.

“How do you expect to get there?” asked Chet. “You can’t take a ship that far, no matter how strongly she is built.”

“I shall do as the majority of North Pole explorers do,” was Barwell Dawson’s answer. “I shall sail as far north as the ship will go, then winter in the ice, and as soon as summer comes again, make a dash over the ice for the Pole with dogs, sledges, and Esquimaux.”

“It will assuredly be a grand trip,” said Professor Jeffer. “I envy you.”

“You would like to go with me?”

“Very much, sir. I have absolutely nothing to keep me here, being alone in the world.”

“Then, perhaps, it can be arranged.”

“I have here some books and maps relating to Polar discoveries,” continued the professor. “Perhaps you won’t mind pointing out on the maps what you hope to do.”

He brought from the bookcase several books and maps, and placed them on the table. The boys, who were sitting on the floor near the open fireplace, took them down and gazed at them with interest. Here was something that was surely new and novel.

“I have a larger map in my bedroom,” went on Professor Jeffer. “I’ll get that.”

While he was gone, the two boys and Mr. Dawson pored over the books and maps, and the hunter mentioned a place on one of the maps where he had once gone hunting.

“Here is the coast of Greenland,” he said, pointing it out. “I shall take my vessel up Baffin Bay as far as Cape York, and possibly to Etah,—and maybe further, if the ice will permit. There we shall have to spend the long Arctic night.”

“How long?” asked Andy.

“From October to February.”

“What, as long as that?” cried Chet. “Won’t there be any sun at all during that time?”

“No sunshine, but I think we can look for good moonlight, especially when the moon is full.”

“And how long is it going to take to get to the North Pole from Etah?” asked Andy. “That is, what do you calculate?”

“I haven’t any idea, excepting that I shall try to carry enough food to last for the entire summer. And I shall also do all the hunting possible, so long as there is any game in sight. I do not expect to find any in the vicinity of the Pole.”

“And what do you think is at the Pole?” questioned Chet.

“Ice and snow principally,” answered Barwell Dawson, smiling. “I do not look for anything out of the ordinary. It is only the honor of having been able to reach that point.”

“And a great honor it will be,” said Professor Jeffer, as he re-entered with another map.

“I suppose a whole lot of men have tried to reach the Pole,” said Chet.

“Yes, explorers from all over Europe as well as from America have tried their hand at it,” answered Barwell Dawson.

“One of the books I have here tells of the various American expeditions,” said Professor Jeffer, thumbing over a volume rapidly. “Ah, here it is. You ought to read it—it is very interesting.”

“I have read over the accounts many times,—trying to map out a route of my own,” said Barwell Dawson.

Then he told the boys of what had been done by various explorers to lift the mystery of the frozen north.

“One of the well-known Arctic explorers was Sir John Franklin, an Englishman,” said he. “Franklin was lost somewhere up north, and when he did not return, various expeditions were sent out for his relief. The first from America was that commanded by Lieutenant E. J. De Haven, of the United States Navy, in 1851. De Haven reached 78° N. He was followed, three years later, by Elisha Kent Kane, who sailed north by way of Smith Sound, and gained 80° 35’ N. lat.”

“How far was that from the Pole?” questioned Chet, whose knowledge of degrees and latitude was rather hazy.

“The highest degree is ninety, which is at the Pole,” explained the professor. “Roughly speaking, a degree of latitude is equal to seventy miles.”

“Then Kane was still nearly seven hundred miles from the Pole.”

“About six hundred and fifty.”

“After Kane,” continued Barwell Dawson, “Commodore John Rodgers commanded an expedition that went through Bering Strait and reached Herald Island, at 71° 18’ N. lat. Then, in 1860, Isaac L. Hayes reached Grinnell Land, at Cape Joseph Goode, and from 1860 to 1869 Charles F. Hall explored the Cumberland Gulf, and reached the Polar Sea northwest of Greenland, in 82° 11’ N.”

“That was crawling a little closer,” was Andy’s comment.

“After that, explorations were made by Lieutenant P. H. Ray, Lieutenant G. A. Doane, and Commander George W. De Long, all of the government service. The latter explored the Arctic Ocean to the coast of Asia. Then followed the International Polar Expedition, under Lieutenant, afterwards General, A. W. Greely, of the United States Army. This expedition reached a point north of 83° 24’.”

“What about Peary?” asked Chet. “I know he is a great polar explorer.”

“I was going to speak of him,” answered Barwell Dawson. “Commander Robert E. Peary is the greatest Polar explorer we have had. He has been at it since 1892, and during that time he has covered the entire northern portion of Greenland, the northern portion of Grinnell Land, and a goodly portion of the Arctic Ocean. On April 21, 1906, he managed to reach 87° 6’ N. lat.,—within less than two hundred miles of the Pole.”

“It’s a pity he couldn’t make the two hundred miles—after going so far,” was Andy’s comment.

“He is now fitting out another expedition,” said Professor Jeffer. “I believe he will keep at it until he gains the Pole.”

“There have been numerous other expeditions, under Walter Wellman, Robert Stein, A. P. Low, E. P. Baldwin, and some Canadian explorers,” continued Mr. Dawson, “but nobody has been able to equal Commander Peary’s record.”

“It’s a wonder that somebody doesn’t try to reach the Pole with an airship,” said Chet.

“One explorer intends to try that. A European explorer, Andree, once went up from Spitzbergen in a balloon, and he was never heard of again. It’s a dangerous piece of business, for one cannot tell where one is going to land, and to get much in the way of supplies in that forsaken portion of the globe is out of the question.”

“Maybe somebody will reach the Pole with an aeroplane,” suggested Andy.

“Not all the exploring has been done by the Americans,” resumed Barwell Dawson. “One of the greatest foreign explorers was Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, a Norwegian. He made a memorable voyage in a vessel named the *Fram*, and managed to reach 86° 14’ N. lat.”

“Almost as high as Commander Peary got,” cried Chet.

“Another explorer of note was the Duke of the Abruzzi, an Italian, who sailed for Franz Josef Land and wintered at Teplitz Bay, in 1899 and 1900. The Duke managed to reach 86° 33’ N. lat., thus

doing a trifle better than Nansen."

"Good for the Duke," said Chet.

"You certainly know a lot about the Pole," said Andy, admiringly. "You've got it on your fingers' ends."

"Ever since I took the question up seriously I have read everything I could find on the subject," answered Barwell Dawson. "I do not intend to go at this in a haphazard fashion. My ship is going to be fitted out with the best possible care,—reënforced throughout the entire hull to resist the ice pressure,—and I shall pick my crew from among the strongest and bravest fellows I can find. To take a weakling on board would be foolhardy, for he could never stand the cold."

"I suppose it is much colder than here in Maine," said Chet.

"Yes, although not always. Even in upper Greenland the weather is at times comparatively mild. The worst time is the Long Night, as it is termed. Then, it is not only bitterly cold, but darkness is apt to take the heart out of a fellow. Some men cannot stand the night at all, and nearly go crazy, but I have never been affected that way."

"Give me a good lamp and I shall not mind it," said Professor Jeffer. "I would spend the time in profitable reading, or in writing a book or magazine article."

"When you were up there hunting, did you sail along the Greenland coast?" asked Chet, suddenly.

"Of course."

"Did you ever meet any whalers?"

"Oh, yes, quite a number. Some of them go north quite a distance. They have to sail many miles to get the right kind of whales."

"Did you—did you ever meet a whaler named the *Betsey Andrews*?"

"The *Betsey Andrews*?" mused Barwell Dawson. "Where was she from?"

"From New Bedford, Captain Jacob Spark."

"Why, yes, I did. What do you know of her?"

"I don't know much, excepting that my father sailed on her some years ago, and the vessel has failed to come back—so far as I know."

"That's too bad. So far as I can remember, the ship was all right when I saw her. If I remember rightly, however, our captain said he thought she was pretty far north for a whaler."

"Do you think she was wrecked in a storm?"

"I don't know. We did have some pretty fierce storms just before I landed to go hunting. I know one storm came up right after a dense fog, and it nearly ran us into a tremendous iceberg.

“Maybe an iceberg sunk the *Betsey Andrews*,” said Chet, and his voice quivered a little in spite of his effort to control himself.

“Have you made inquiries about the whaler lately?” asked Professor Jeffer. “You know there is a regular record kept of all marine disasters.”

“I didn’t know where to go—or who to write to,” answered Chet. “I hated to bother strangers.”

“But you want to find your father, don’t you?” asked Barwell Dawson.

“Oh, very much!”

“Then we’ll have to look into this matter—when this storm clears away, and we are able to get out of here.”

After that the hunter questioned Chet about his parent, and the youth told him how his father had shipped aboard the whaler. He did not mention that Tolney Greene had disappeared under a cloud, as it did not seem necessary, and Chet wanted to avoid anything that was so unpleasant.

Following this, Barwell Dawson told more of his proposed trip north. Now that he had revealed what was on his mind, he was very enthusiastic, and he communicated a great deal of his enthusiasm to his listeners.

“You must take me along!” cried Professor Jeffer. “I will pay my way—that is, so far as I am able, —and I will promise not to be a hindrance. You’ll certainly want one scientist on your expedition, even though it is not what you might term a scientific expedition.”

“I will give the matter every consideration,” answered Barwell Dawson, “and if I can possibly arrange it, you shall become one of the party.”

“How many will there be?” asked Chet.

“Outside of the captain and the crew, I do not expect to carry more than five or six men. Of course, up in Greenland, I shall hire a number of Esquimaux, to do some hunting for me, and to manage the dogs and sledges.”

Chet said no more just then. But he was wondering if it would aid him to find his father if he should join this expedition to the frozen north.

“I’d be willing to suffer anything—if only I could learn where dad was,” he told Andy, afterwards.

CHAPTER X—BRINGING IN SOME GAME

The snowstorm proved such a heavy one that for three days the party at Professor Jeffer's cabin were completely stormbound. Once Andy and Chet went out—in an endeavor to bring the dead moose in, but were unable to accomplish their object.

During the time spent at the cabin, the boys became very well acquainted with Barwell Dawson, and found the hunter and explorer a person very much to their liking. Although he was rich and well educated, he did not act as if he considered himself above them. He took a lively interest in all they had to tell, and knew how to "draw them out," so that, almost before he knew it, Andy had related the details of his troubles with his shiftless Uncle Si and with the mysterious Mr. A. Q. Hopton.

"More than likely that fellow, Hopton, will bear close watching," said Barwell Dawson. "If he is a sharper—and it looks as if he might be—he will try to swindle both you and your uncle. It was very unwise for your uncle to try to do business with him without seeing a lawyer."

"Uncle Si wanted to get the money without my knowing it," answered Andy, bitterly. He was glad to open his heart to somebody who could understand him.

"I believe you—and that is not to your uncle's credit. You say he is shiftless and lazy?"

"Very—and everybody around here knows it."

"Then he is not fit to be your guardian."

"I don't believe he is, legally. He just said he was going to be, that's all."

"Well, that doesn't make him so," answered the hunter, with a grim smile.

With Andy he went over the papers the boy had brought from home. They seemed to prove that the lad's father owned a divided interest in a large tract of timber in the upper portion of Michigan. The papers had evidently been drawn up by somebody who knew very little about legal matters, and the phraseology was highly perplexing. After poring over them for an hour, and asking Professor Jeffer's advice, Barwell Dawson shook his head slowly.

"I think it is an honest claim, and in your father's favor," he said. "But it will take a skillful lawyer to unravel it. Certainly your father bought something, and paid for it, for here are the words, 'one thousand dollars, the receipt of which from Andrew S. Graham is hereby admitted.' The writer meant 'acknowledged,' but I guess 'admitted' is good enough."

"I was going to take it to a lawyer in Lodgeport."

"Is he a reliable man, Andy?"

"I don't know—I suppose so."

"Well, supposing you let me look into this matter with you? I am in no hurry to get away from these parts, and I feel that you ought to let me do something in return for what you and Chet did for me."

“I’ll be very glad to have your help, Mr. Dawson—if you can spare the time.”

“I hope the claim proves of value—for I take you to be the kind of a lad who deserves to get along,” said Barwell Dawson, smiling.

During the time spent in the cabin, Barwell Dawson and Professor Jeffer discussed the trip to the far north in many details, and the hunter even traced out an imaginary route on one of the scientist’s maps. Both men were equally enthusiastic, and after Mr. Dawson had asked the professor some more questions about himself, he at last consented that the latter should become one of the exploring party.

“But remember,” he said, impressively; “if you suffer great hardships or lose your life, nobody must blame me.”

“Trust me; no one will be blamed but myself,” answered Professor Jeffer, with equal gravity. Then his face beamed. “It will be a wonderful trip, wonderful! And we shall see so many new things,—make so many interesting discoveries! I shall take along a set of the best instruments available, and make all sorts of observations. Such a record alone will be worth all it costs to get it.”

“I do not doubt it, Professor.”

“And then the fame—think of it, the fame! Why, sir, if we succeed in gaining the North Pole,—or even if we succeed in going above Commander Peary’s highest mark, latitude 87° 6’,—it will be something for the entire civilized world to know.”

“True.”

“From today on I shall go into the hardest kind of training,” continued Professor Jeffer. “I shall fit myself to withstand the most intense hunger and the most intense cold. It is the only way.”

“It is certainly a good idea,” answered Barwell Dawson. “It won’t do to go up north ‘soft,’ as they call it.”

On the morning of the fourth day it cleared, and Andy and Chet decided to go out once more after the moose. Mr. Dawson’s ankle was now well, but he did not want to try walking a long distance on it just yet.

“You can get your game today,” he said, “and we can start for Lodgeport tomorrow. There I’ll see that lawyer for Andy, and then I’ll try to return to my camp back of Moose Ridge, and see what the storm did to it.”

“If you want me to, I’ll go back to the Ridge with you,” said Chet. “I haven’t anything else to do, now that I can’t get work at one of the lumber camps.”

“Very well, I’ll be glad of your company.”

Andy and Chet were soon on their way to where the latter had left the moose. Fortunately they had been able to borrow snow-shoes from Professor Jeffer, who owned several pairs. Both lads knew how to use the articles, and glided over the newly fallen snow with ease.

“Just imagine we were bound for the North Pole!” cried Andy. “Wouldn’t it be great!”

“I’d like to look for my father, Andy,” and Chet’s face clouded.

“Oh, Chet, I’m sorry I spoke—I didn’t want to remind you——”

“Oh, it’s all right, Andy. If I don’t hear from my father soon, I’d like first-rate to go north with Mr. Dawson’s expedition.”

“I don’t think he’d want to bother with boys.”

“We are not so very young. And both of us know how to rough it—and we are pretty good shots, too.”

“I guess you’ve been thinking about it pretty strongly.”

“Haven’t you?”

“Yes, I have. Mr. Dawson seems to be such a splendid man, the trip ought to be fine, even if the North Pole wasn’t reached.”

“Just my idea. We would do lots of hunting, and riding behind the Esquimaux dogs. Just think of being on a sledge with eight or ten dogs to pull you over the ice and snow!”

“And the thermometer 50° below zero! Don’t forget it is fearfully cold up there.”

“Well, it’s mighty cold here, sometimes. Anyway, I’d like to go—if he’d take me.”

“Same here—but he doesn’t want boys, he wants men, and tough ones, too.”

So the talk ran on, as the boys made their way to the clump of spruces where Chet had had his adventure. At a distance they saw the stick, with the handkerchief, deep in the snow.

“Well, there is your landmark, anyway,” said Andy. “I hope nobody disturbed the game.”

“It looks all right,” answered his chum. “But of course the snow would cover any tracks, even if the game was disturbed.”

With eager hands they uncovered the mound, and soon brought to light the big moose with his wide-spreading antlers.

“Certainly a dandy!” cried Andy, as he surveyed the game. “You can be thankful he didn’t hit you before you reached the tree, Chet. He would have smashed you into a jelly.”

“Well, as it was, he caused Mr. Dawson a bad fall.”

The boys went back to the trees, and after a careful inspection, took a hatchet and cut a long branch for a drag. On this they bound the deer, and then started on the return to Professor Jeffer’s cabin, hauling their load behind them.

It was hard work to make progress through the deep snow, and they had to rest several times to catch their breath.

“I think we had better take the long way around,” said Chet, after half the distance had been covered. “We can’t very well get up the hill this side of the cabin, and, besides, there is a bad gully to cross this side of the brook.”

“You show the way,” answered his chum. “You know these parts a little better than I do.”

By the new route they had to pass through a patch of woods where the snow made the branches of the trees hang low. It was hard work to pass between some of the trees, and once it looked as if they would have to turn back.

“We are earning this meat,” was Andy’s comment, as he paused to pick up the cap that a branch had swept from his head.

“Looks like it,” answered Chet, laconically.

“I guess we should have waited until the weather was better.”

Now, as it chanced, Chet was as tired as Andy, and consequently his quick temper showed itself.

“You didn’t have to come for the moose if you didn’t want to,” he cried, quickly.

“Oh, I’m not complaining, Chet.”

“It’s the same thing.”

“Not at all—and there is no cause for you to get mad about it.”

“Well, then, don’t find fault. I’m pulling as hard on this load as you.”

“I know it. We made a mistake to come this way, I am afraid.”

“Oh, yes, that’s you,—blame that on me, too.” Chet now looked thoroughly angry. “I’ve a good mind to leave the old moose where he is.” And he let go of the branch on which the game rested.

“Chet!”

Andy uttered the name reproachfully, and gazed fearlessly into his chum’s eyes. There was an awkward pause. Then the face of the quick-tempered youth grew red.

“Well, I don’t care——” he began, and took hold of the drag again.

“Yes, you do care,—and I care, too. We can’t afford to quarrel, and all over nothing. Come on, we’ll get through somehow,” said Andy.

“Guess I said too much,” murmured Chet, and began to haul on the load as if his life depended upon it. “I thought——Oh, Andy, there’s a shot for us!”

The quick-tempered lad, who was equally quick-eyed, stopped and pointed to a tree some distance on their right. Andy saw something move, but could not make out what it was.

“Partridge,” announced his companion, and swung his gun around. “I’m going to take a shot when they go up.”

He glided over the snow, and Andy came behind him. Then up went four partridge with a whirr that would have startled one not accustomed to the sound. Bang! went Chet's gun, and bang! came the report of Andy's immediately after. Two of the partridges came fluttering down, while the two others circled around in a helpless, dazed fashion.

"We must get those, too!" cried Chet, and blazed away again, and then Andy took another shot. Down came the game, and the boys glided forward to secure the prizes. The partridges were of good size, and plump, and the lads gazed at them and turned them over in deep satisfaction.

"We'll prove to Mr. Dawson that we can hunt," cried Chet. His recent ill humor had completely disappeared.

In getting back to where they had left the moose, Andy struck an icy rock and rolled over and over in the snow. Chet was compelled to laugh, but quickly subsided, thinking his chum might be angry. But though he had hard work to get up and secure the game he had been carrying, Andy retained his peace of mind.

"Fortune of war," he said, as he dug the loose snow from his clothing. "Birr! but it's cold."

"Want to go to the North Pole now?" said Chet, quizzically.

"This minute, if I had the chance," was the quick reply.

The partridges were tied on top of the moose, and once again the two lads headed for the cabin. Soon they came in sight of the place, and set up a loud whistling, which brought the two men to the door.

"A fine moose!" cried Barwell Dawson. "And fine partridge, too."

"Don't you think we are pretty fair hunters?" asked Chet.

"First-class," returned Mr. Dawson.

CHAPTER XI—A SERIOUS LOSS

Having brought their game around to the shed attached to the cabin, the boys were glad enough to rest before the generous fire, while Professor Jeffer proceeded to cut out some choice moose meat, having been requested by Barwell Dawson to do so.

“The moose is yours,” Mr. Dawson said to the boys. “But I must have at least one steak, although it may be rather tough.”

“You can have as much as you like,” answered Chet. “I don’t think Andy wants it all, and I am sure I don’t.”

Darkness was settling down once more around the cabin, when Andy chanced to think of the papers concerning the land claim in Michigan. He had placed them in an inside pocket of his jacket, and now he inserted his hand to bring them forth, to make certain that they were safe.

“Oh!” he cried, and his heart began to beat wildly.

“What’s the matter?” queried Chet, who was near. “Hurt?”

“The papers!”

“What of them?”

“They are gone!”

“Gone?” repeated Chet, and now Professor Jeffer and Barwell Dawson listened with interest.

“Yes, gone—I can’t find them anywhere.” Andy rapidly went through every pocket in his clothing, and in the overcoat he had hung on a horn. “Yes, they are gone,” he groaned. “Oh, this is the worst luck yet!”

“But they must be somewhere around,” said Barwell Dawson. “Have you any idea where you dropped them?”

“No, although it might have been when I took that tumble in the snow.”

“If you lost ’em there, we ought to go back for ’em right away,” declared Chet. “The wind is rising, and that will drift the snow over ’em.”

A vain search was made around the cabin and the shed, and then, tired as he was, Andy donned his overcoat and cap to go out. Chet did the same.

“Oh, you needn’t mind, Chet,” said Andy.

“I just will mind, Andy. We are going to get those papers back,” was the brisk reply.

“Here, take a lantern,” said Professor Jeffer, and brought forth an acetylene lamp, similar to those used on bicycles. “That ought to help you find the papers,” he added.

In a minute more the two lads had set off through the snow. As Chet had said, the wind was rising, and it often caught the snow up in a mad whirl and hurled it into their faces.

“Phew! this is not so pleasant,” panted Chet, when they paused to catch their breath, having covered about a quarter of the distance to where Andy had fallen. “Takes the wind right out of a chap. But never mind, come on,” he continued, and started on once more.

The rays of the acetylene lamp lit up the way fairly well, and here and there they could see their former trail, although it was growing more indistinct every moment. The wind now whistled through the pines and spruces,—a sound as dismaying as it was lonely.

“Might have brought down some game, with the aid of this lamp,” said Chet, as they trudged forward on their snowshoes.

“I’m not looking for game just now.”

At last they reached what they thought was the spot where Andy had had the fall. So far they had seen no trace of the missing documents. Now they gazed around, much crestfallen. The hollow was completely filled with the drifting snow, and a ridge had formed, wiping out the trail utterly.

“I am going to try digging,” said Andy. “Wish I had brought a shovel along.”

The lamp was hung on the branch of a tree near by, and both youths set to work, shoving and kicking the snow to one side or another. Thus they worked, in something of a circle, for the best part of an hour. Not a trace of the papers could be seen anywhere.

“Maybe I lost them further back—where we found the moose,” said Andy. “I’m going to look. But you needn’t go with me if you don’t care to, Chet.”

“I’ll go where you go, Andy. I want to see you get those papers back.”

Again they moved forward, the wind and snow cutting each in the face, and sometimes almost blinding them. They had to rest twice before they reached the spot of Chet’s thrilling adventure.

Again the search began, and it was kept up until both lads were wellnigh exhausted from stooping over and “sifting” the snow. Andy straightened his back and gave a sigh.

“I guess it’s no use,” he groaned. “They are gone! I’ll never see them again! And that claim is gone, too!”

“Oh, don’t give up yet!” cried Chet, trying to cheer him up. “If we can’t locate them tonight, we’ll do it in the morning when the sun shines. They must be somewhere around. They made quite a package, with a rubber band around it, and such a package can’t vanish completely.”

To this Andy could only answer with a sigh. He doubted very much if the precious documents would ever come to light again.

Utterly fagged out, the boys turned their backs on the wind and made their way to Professor Jeffer’s cabin. Here they found the others anxiously awaiting their return.

“What luck?” sang out Barwell Dawson.

“None,” answered Andy, and dropped into a chair as tired out as he was disheartened.

“You’ll have to go out in the morning.”

“Just what I said,” came from Chet. “Oh, we’ll get those papers back, don’t worry.” But although he spoke thus lightly, it was only to cheer his chum up. He, too, was afraid the documents were gone forever.

Andy’s sleep was a troubled one. He dreamed that his Uncle Si was after him, and that both had a tussle in the snow over the papers. Then A. Q. Hopton came up with a pitchfork, speared the papers, and bore them off in triumph. He awoke to find Chet shaking him.

“Andy, stop your groaning!” Chet was saying. “You are going on to beat the band!”

“I guess I had a nightmare,” answered Andy, sheepishly. “What time is it?”

“Just getting daylight.”

“Then I am going to get up, eat a little breakfast, and start on another search for those papers.”

“Sure—and I’ll go along.”

The boys arose as quietly as possible, and dressing, went to the kitchen and prepared their morning meal of wheat cakes and a small moose steak, and coffee. They were just finishing the repast when Professor Jeffer showed himself.

“Up early, I see,” he said, with a smile.

“We are going to look for those papers again,” explained Chet.

“To be sure. Well, I trust you find them, although I am afraid you will have quite a search.”

The sun was just peering over the trees to the eastward when the two lads left the cabin. It promised to be a clear day. It was intensely cold, and the wind still blew, although not so hard as during the day and the night gone by.

Andy took the lead, and each boy strained his eyes to catch sight of anything that might look like the documents. Once Andy saw something at a distance, and ran to it with a rapidly beating heart. But it was nothing but a strip of birch bark, and again his heart sank.

The noon hour found them still on the hunt. Fortunately they had brought some lunch along in one of the game bags, and they sat down in a sunny and sheltered nook to eat this, warming up a can of coffee over a tiny campfire Chet kindled. Then the hunt was renewed, and kept up in various places until the sun began to go down over the woods to the westward.

“It will be dark in an hour more, Andy,” said Chet, kindly. “I guess we had better return to the cabin. We can come out again tomorrow, if you wish.”

“I—I don’t think it will be any use to come out again, Chet.” Andy’s voice was very unsteady. “I am afraid the papers are gone for good!”

“Oh, I wouldn’t give it up yet!”

“If I only knew where I had dropped them! But I don’t know. They may be right around here, and they may be half a mile away.”

It was with a downcast heart that Andy followed his chum back to the cabin. Somehow, he had hoped that the timber claim would prove a valuable one, and that he would get a goodly share of it. Now that hope was shattered.

“I won’t be able to prove a thing without the documents,” he told himself. “And it would be useless to try.”

That evening the matter was talked over by the men and the boys from every point of view, but nothing came of it. Barwell Dawson agreed with Andy that nothing could be accomplished until the missing documents were brought to light.

“I really think your uncle is to blame for this,” said the hunter. “If he had not acted as he did, you would not have been forced to run away, and then the papers might be safe and sound at your cabin.”

“I’d like to know what became of that A. Q. Hopton,” said Andy.

“Well, he didn’t get the papers, and that’s one comfort,” said Chet, with a sickly grin.

There was now no use in going to Lodgeport to see a lawyer, and instead, Andy and Chet went out again for another search. But this was as useless as the others. Not a trace of the missing documents could be found anywhere.

“Might as well give it up,” sighed Andy. “They are gone, and that is all there is to it.”

Again matters were talked over, and Barwell Dawson advised Andy to go home and face his uncle.

“If you wish, I’ll go with you,” said the hunter. “Perhaps I can get him to tell just what that A. Q. Hopton was up to.”

“I’d like it first-rate, if you would go along, Mr. Dawson,” answered the boy quickly.

“Want me along?” asked Chet.

“You might as well come,” answered Andy. “We can take some of the moose meat. The horns are yours, Chet.”

They set off for the Graham cabin on the following morning. Barwell Dawson’s ankle was now quite well, although he was prudently careful how he used it. It had cleared off rather warm, so the trip was a pleasant one. The boys had with them all the meat they could carry, and also their guns, and wore the snow-shoes Professor Jeffer had loaned them.

On the way Chet asked Barwell Dawson how soon he expected to start for the north.

“I hope to get the *Ice King* ready by the middle of February or first of March,” was the hunter’s reply. “You see, for such a trip we require an immense amount of stores, and of just the proper kinds. It won’t do to take stuff that will freeze and burst open. Once I remember I was up there, and

had some bottles of catsup along. The bottles froze and burst, and we had catsup scattered all over the camp."

"I suppose you can't get much up there?" said Chet.

"Absolutely nothing outside of game—musk oxen, polar bears and hares, seal, walrus, and some birds. In some parts of Greenland you can get moss that you can put in soup, but it doesn't amount to a very hearty meal. In a cold climate like that, one needs to eat plenty of meat, and the more fat, the better. The Esquimaux live on the fattest kind of meat they can get, and on blubber, and they think tallow candles a real delicacy."

"Excuse me from eating candles," said Andy.

"If you were real hungry, you'd eat anything," answered Barwell Dawson, gravely. "I was once lost on the ice, and was glad enough to chew strips of seal hide to ease the pangs of hunger. When I got back to camp, my stomach was in such a condition that they fed me my first meal very carefully, just a bit at a time. If I had eaten my fill quickly, I might have died."

CHAPTER XII—A LETTER OF INTEREST

"The place looks shut up," observed Chet, when the party came in sight of the Graham homestead. "Not a bit of smoke, and the snow isn't cleared away from the doorstep."

"Maybe Uncle Si is sick and can't get around," answered Andy, quickly.

"Sick? Lazy, you mean," returned his chum.

They advanced to the front door and knocked. There was no sound from within, and Andy walked around to the shed. The door was locked, but the key was on a shelf near by, and he quickly opened the door.

"Uncle Si is away," he announced, as he walked through the cabin, and let the others come in. "My! but it's cold here! We'll have to start a fire right away."

"I'll do that," answered Chet. "You sit down and rest that sore ankle," he went on, to Barwell Dawson, and the hunter was glad to do as bidden.

While Chet started a lively blaze in the big open fireplace, Andy went through the cabin, looking for some trace of his uncle. Much to his surprise, he found Josiah Graham's traveling bag missing, and also all of the man's clothing.

"He has gone away!" he cried, and then caught sight of a letter, pinned fast to the top of a chest of drawers. The outside of the letter was addressed to Andy Graham. The communication was written in lead pencil, in a chirography anything but elegant, and ran as follows:

> "*My dere Nephy Andy* i hav got a chanct to git a job up Haveltown way and i think I beter tak it you dont seme to car for to have me tak car of you so i am goin to leave you to tak car of yourself Mr. Hopton wanted to treet you square but you would knot listen so you must tak the konseakenses. he said the pappers aint much akont anyhowe. i leave my lov even if you dont lik me —*Josiah Graham*"

It took some time for Andy to decipher the communication, and for the first time in his life he realized how very limited had been the education of his father's half-brother. He read the epistle to Chet and Barwell Dawson.

"He has deserted you!" cried Chet. "Well, 'good riddance to bad rubbish' say I!"

"I think he was afraid that you would make trouble for him," was Mr. Dawson's comment. "He thought you would take those papers to some lawyer, or to the authorities, and tell how he tried to sell them to Mr. A. Q. Hopton on the sly."

"I guess that's the way it is," said Andy. He drew a deep breath. "Well, I am glad to get rid of him so easily. I sincerely hope he stays away."

"But he won't stay away," returned Chet. "He'll wait until he thinks everything is all right again, and then he'll sneak back, to live on you."

“He’ll not live on me again,” declared Andy. “I know him thoroughly, now. If he wants to stay here he’ll have to work, the same as I do.”

“Well, you are in possession of your own,” declared Barwell Dawson, as he rested in the chair Uncle Si had used. “You can now take it as easy as you please,” and he smiled broadly.

“I don’t see how I am going to take it easy, if I can’t get work,” answered Andy, soberly. “A fellow can’t live on air. Of course, I can go out hunting and fishing and all that, but that isn’t earning a regular living.”

“You can’t get work anywhere? You look like a strong young man, and willing.”

“I am strong, and willing, too. But times are dull, and there are more men up here than there is work. If it wasn’t for having the cabin here, I think I’d try my chances elsewhere.”

“Where?”

“I don’t know—perhaps down in one of the towns.”

Andy invited Barwell Dawson to remain at the cabin for the rest of the day, and the invitation was accepted. The chums set to work to prepare a good dinner, and of this the hunter partook with great satisfaction.

“You boys certainly know how to cook,” he declared, as he finished up.

“A fellow has to learn cooking and everything, in a place like this,” answered Andy.

“It’s a good thing to know how to cook. I’ve found it so, many a time, when off on a hunt.”

“Mr. Dawson, I’d like to put a proposition to you,” burst out Andy. “Of course, if it doesn’t suit, all you’ve got to do is to say no. But I hope you will give it serious consideration.” And Andy looked at Chet, as much as to say, “Shall I go ahead?” To which his chum nodded eagerly.

“What is the proposition?”

“That you take Chet and me with you on your trip north. I know you would prefer men, but we are not so young, and each of us is strong and healthy, and we can do about as much as a man. We are both used to cold weather, and to roughing it, and you know we can shoot, and tramp over the ice and snow—and cook. We talked this over between us, and we’d like to go very much. We don’t want any pay, or any reward. All we want is our food, and some ammunition, and we are perfectly willing to rough it along with the rest. We are both practically alone in the world, so nobody will be worried over us, even if we don’t come back alive.”

“Yes, but you want to come back, don’t you?” asked Barwell Dawson, quizzically.

“Of course. But we realize the danger, and we are ready to face it.”

“We’ll go wherever you go,” broke in Chet. “And we’ll do just whatever you want us to do. As Andy says, we are used to roughing it, and I think both of us can stand as much as anybody. Why, I don’t know that I’ve had a sick day in my life.”

“And I have been sick very little—none at all since I grew up,” added Andy.

The hunter and explorer looked sharply at the two boys. He saw by the clear look in their eyes that they were honest to the core, and in earnest in all they said.

“Well, it is something not to have any family ties,” he said. “I have two friends who wish to go along, but both have wives, and one has two children. I don’t think it would be fair to take them. I am a bachelor myself, and my relatives do not care what I do. I believe if I died, all some of them would think about would be my money.” He added the last words rather bitterly.

“Then you will consider taking us?” pleaded Andy.

“Yes, I will consider it. But I must think it over a week or two before I give you my answer. When a man plans such a trip as this, he cannot be too careful as to who are his companions. I must say I like you lads very much, and I haven’t forgotten how you aided me at the cliff. But I must have time to think it over carefully, and make a few inquiries.”

With this the lads had to be content, and for the time being the subject was dropped. But later on Barwell Dawson showed his interest by asking them a great number of questions about themselves.

“I think he’ll take us along,” whispered Chet to Andy, on retiring for the night. “And I sincerely hope he does. It may give me a chance to find out what became of the *Betsey Andrews* and my father.”

“Don’t be too sure of our going,” answered Andy. “If you are, you may be bitterly disappointed.”

In the morning it was decided that the two lads should accompany Barwell Dawson to the lodge he had occupied back of Moose Ridge. They went along gladly, wishing to become better acquainted with the hunter and explorer. The storm had now cleared away entirely, the wind had died down, and the clear sun shone upon the ice and snow with great brilliancy.

On the way the party managed to pick up some small game, and Barwell Dawson showed his skill by hitting a partridge at a great distance. He shot with ease, showing that he was thoroughly familiar with the use of firearms. He even gave the boys “points” for which they were grateful.

“He certainly knows how to shoot,” said Andy to Chet. “I don’t see how he missed that moose.”

“He lost his footing, that’s how,” was the reply. “The very best of sportsmen miss it sometimes.”

“Isn’t he a splendid fellow, Chet!”

“The finest I’ve met. Oh, I do hope he takes us along with him!”

When the lodge was reached the boys built a fire and cooked another appetizing meal, the hunter meanwhile resting his ankle, which was still sore. The reader can rest assured that Andy and Chet did their best over the meal, for they wanted to let Mr. Dawson know of their real abilities in the culinary line. The repast was as much liked as the other had been.

“If you go with me, I’ll have to throw out the man I was going to take for a cook,” declared the hunter and explorer. “I don’t believe anybody could serve food better than this.”

“Oh, we’ll do the cooking all right!” declared Chet, enthusiastically.

“Of course there will be a ship’s cook,” explained Mr. Dawson. “But he won’t go along over the ice and snow. He’ll have to remain with the sailors on the ship.”

“How many will be in the party to leave the ship?” asked Andy.

“I don’t know yet—probably five or six, and the Esquimaux.”

Having reached Barwell Dawson’s lodge, the party settled down for a week, to hunt and to take it comfortably. During that time the hunter and explorer asked Chet much about himself and his father.

“We must try to find out about that whaler as soon as I go back to town,” said Barwell Dawson. “Somebody ought to know something about her.”

During the week the hunter and the boys became better friends than ever. The man liked the frank manner of the lads, and Andy and Chet were fascinated by the stories the explorer had to tell.

“I am going down to Portland next week,” announced Barwell Dawson one day. “If you both want to go along and see the city, I’ll take you, and foot the bill. Then we can go up to the little town where the *Ice King* is being fitted out, and you can let me know what you think of the ship.”

This proposal filled the boys with delight, and they accepted on the spot. Both Andy and Chet made hurried trips to their cabin homes, and came back with the best of their belongings in their grips. Then they helped Barwell Dawson pack up; and two days later started for Pine Run.

There was mild surprise in the village when it was learned the two boys were going away, even though it might be only for a short while. To nobody in the village did Barwell Dawson mention his proposed trip to the frozen north.

“They wouldn’t understand it, and it would only make me out an object of idle curiosity,” he explained to the boys.

From the general storekeeper Andy learned that his Uncle Si had tried to borrow ten dollars, but without success. The storekeeper said Josiah Graham and Mr. A. Q. Hopton had had a bitter quarrel, and parted on bad terms. He did not know where either individual was now.

“Well, let Uncle Si shift for himself,” said Andy to Chet. “It will do him good.”

“Right you are, Andy. But what a shame that you lost those papers.”

“Oh, don’t mention them, Chet. It makes me feel bad every time I think of it.”

“You ought to go back some day and take another look for them. I’ll help you.”

“Yes, I intend to go back—if not right away, then when the snow clears off.”

“Provided we are not bound north by that time.”

“Yes, provided we are not bound for the Pole!”

CHAPTER XIII—BARWELL DAWSON REACHES A DECISION

The trip to Portland proved full of keen interest to both boys, who had spent most of their lives in the backwoods. Barwell Dawson procured rooms for all at a hotel not far from Monument Square, and then he allowed the lads to do all the sightseeing they pleased. They took several trolley trips, and visited many points of interest, not forgetting the big stores, which were as much of a revelation as anything to them.

The hunter and explorer set to work without delay to find out if possible what had become of the whaler, *Betsey Andrews*. At first he could learn little, but one day came a letter from New Bedford, from a maritime agency, stating that the whaler had not been heard of since stopping at Disko Island, off the coast of Greenland, two years before. It was supposed that she had either been hit by an iceberg, or been sunk in a storm, with all on board. Once a small boat belonging to the whaler had been found washed up on the coast of Greenland, but it had contained no persons, dead or alive.

This news was very disheartening to Chet, and for several days he was not himself at all, and Andy could do little to cheer him up. But it was not as bad as if the youth had not expected something of this sort before, and his hopes soon came back to him.

"I'll not believe father is dead until I see the proofs," he told his chum. "He may have been cast away on the coast of Greenland, and been unable to find a ship to bring him back home."

"Let us hope that is true," answered Andy. "And let us hope that he gets back soon." But though Andy spoke thus, he had small expectations of ever seeing Mr. Greene alive.

"I expect Professor Jeffer down tomorrow," said Barwell Dawson, one morning after reading his mail. "As soon as he comes we'll run up the coast to where the *Ice King* is being fitted out."

The weather had cleared off warm, and the snow was fast vanishing. The professor arrived on time, and was full of enthusiasm concerning the proposed trip to the north.

"I wish we were sure of going," said Andy, to him, and then told of what had been said to Mr. Dawson.

"I like you lads very much," returned the old scientist. "I hope Mr. Dawson sees fit to take you along."

"Perhaps you can put in a good word for us," suggested Chet.

"I'll do it," was the prompt answer.

Professor Jeffer was as good as his word, and that evening he and Barwell Dawson had a long talk concerning the boys. The hunter and explorer could not help but smile at Upham Jeffer's enthusiasm.

"Well, if you are on their side too, I'll surely have to take them," he said at length. "But it is a risky thing to do—they are not men, remember."

“They will stand the trip as well as though they were men,” was the professor’s answer. “They are in the best of health, and full of vigor. Besides, it is well to have the enthusiasm of youth with us. It may help to cheer up many a lonely hour.”

“I like the idea of their being without close family connections, Professor. I hate to take a man away from those near and dear to him.”

“True, sir, true—especially when it is not actually necessary. Yes, I’d take the boys by all means. I do not think you’ll regret it. Of course, though, each will have to have a complete outfit.”

“You can trust me to get the best there is.”

When Andy and Chet heard the good news they could scarcely contain themselves. Andy danced a jig right in the hotel room, while both lads had to shake Barwell Dawson by the hand several times, and then they shook hands with Professor Jeffer, too.

“It makes me feel just as if we were one big family,” cried Andy, enthusiastically. “Oh, Chet, just to think of it! We’ll hunt musk oxen, and polar bears, and seals, and walruses! And go clear to the Pole, too!”

“And travel on dog sledges,” put in Chet. “Say, I’m ready to go this minute!”

“So am I! Mr. Dawson, you can’t start any too soon for us.”

“Well, boys, don’t be too enthusiastic. Remember, this is going to be no child’s play—trying to get to the North Pole. And we won’t try to reach that point at all unless, when we get into the Arctic regions, we find the conditions more or less favorable. You must remember that many brave and vigorous men have tried to reach the Pole and have failed. There are immense fields of ice and snow to cross, and ‘leads’ or rivers of icy water. And if you lose your supplies, there remains nothing to do but to starve.”

Nevertheless, even though he spoke thus, Barwell Dawson was secretly as hopeful as were the boys. Could he have seen what was before him, his enthusiasm might have quickly died within him.

Now that it had been settled that they could go, the two boys were eager to see the vessel which was to be their home during the coming summer and winter. The *Ice King* was being fitted out at the seaport town of Rathley, and they took the train for the place, arriving there about noon. The vessel was tied up at the dock, and the lads and Professor Jeffer were invited by Mr. Dawson to come on board.

“I’ll introduce you to Captain Williamson,” said the hunter. “He is in charge of the repairs that are being made. He is a fine man, and I know you will like him.”

The captain proved to be a bluff and hearty old salt, who had at one time commanded a whaler. He shook hands with a grip that made Andy and Chet wince, and looked them over with a twinkle in his eye.

“So you are going to try to hunt polar bears and such, eh?” he said. “Well, you look out that the bears don’t eat you up,” and he laughed broadly.

“We’ll try to keep out of the way,” answered Chet, modestly.

“And what are you going to do when the thermometer drops to fifty below zero?”

“Work around and keep warm,” answered Andy, with a grin, and this made the captain laugh again.

“Guess you’ll do,” he said. “Anyway, we’ll try you.”

The *Ice King* was a two-masted steamer that had been built for use in the icy seas of the north. She was small, broad of beam, and shallow, with an outer “jacket” of stout oak planks, and a prow and stern of steel. Inside, all the bracings were extra heavy, and the railings of the deck were of the hardest kind of timber. She carried an engine of great power, and steam could be gotten up both with coal and with oil.

“You see, it will not do to take too large a ship,” explained Barwell Dawson. “A small vessel can often get through where a big one would get stuck. The *Ice King* is built shallow, so that instead of being crushed in the floating ice, she will slide up on it, or over it. The sides are two feet thick, and they ought to resist a tremendous pressure. We have to have great engine power, and a steel prow, for sometimes we’ll have to simply smash our way through.”

The entire lower portion of the ship was to be given over to the storage of provisions and coal, and coal was also to be stored, at the start, on deck. The quarters for the crew were forward, in a forecastle of the usual order. At the stern was a fair-sized cabin, half above and half below the deck, with quarters for Barwell Dawson, the captain, and the others. The boys were conducted to a stateroom not over six feet by seven. It had an upper and a lower berth on one side, and a tiny washstand and some clothing hooks on the other.

“We’ll all have close quarters,” said Barwell Dawson. “My own room is but two feet larger than this.”

“It’s large enough,” said Andy. He turned to his chum. “We’ll be as snug as a bug in a rug in here, won’t we?”

“Suits me right down to the ground,” returned Chet. “Not much room for clothing, but as we haven’t much, that’s all right.”

Professor Jeffer was to share his stateroom with another man, who had not yet arrived. He asked for a cabinet, in which he might store his scientific instruments, and Mr. Dawson said he would attend to the matter.

“Next week I shall commence the purchase of all supplies,” said the man who headed the expedition. “Until that time there will be little for any of you to do, and you can go where you please.”

“I’m going back home—to have another look for those missing papers,” said Andy. “Besides, I want to bring away the rest of my things, and nail up the cabin.”

“And I’ll go along,” said Chet. “I want to get my things, too. About the cabin, I don’t care much what becomes of it, for it has seen its best days.”

The two boys spent three days in the vicinity of Pine Run. During that time both went out twice to look for the documents Andy had lost, but without success.

“They are gone, and I’ll have to make the best of it,” said Andy, with a deep sigh.

The two boys packed up what few things they wished to take along, and then each cabin was nailed up tightly. Both wondered if they would ever see the places again.

“Maybe we’ll never come back from the far north,” said Chet.

“Are you afraid, Chet?” demanded Andy, quickly.

“Not a bit of it. Just the same, we may never see Maine again. What happened to my father may happen to us.”

Professor Jeffer had come back also, to ship his case of scientific instruments, and also another case of books. The professor did not want much in the way of clothing, but it would have been a real hardship had he been deprived of his other belongings.

“The success of this trip will depend upon accurate scientific observations,” said he to the boys, when on the return to Rathley. “It is all well enough to hunt, and even to reach the North Pole, but of what use is it if we cannot return with full data of what we have observed?”

“You are right, Professor,” answered Andy. “But your instruments are beyond me.”

“I will teach you how to use some of them, after we are on board ship. There will be many days when you boys will have little to do, and it will be an excellent opportunity to improve your minds.”

“Well, I wouldn’t mind a little more education,” said Chet, bluntly.

“I’ll be pleased to teach you, my boy. I was once a schoolmaster—although that was years ago.”

“Professor, do you really think we’ll reach the Pole?” asked Andy, earnestly.

“I do not think; I hope. Many have tried and failed, but I believe the Pole will be gained some day, and we’ll have an excellent chance of success. Mr. Dawson is a wonderful man—he seems more wonderful every time I talk to him. He is fitting up his ship with the greatest possible care and forethought, and has made a deep study of polar conditions. Besides, he has had practical experience on the fields of ice and snow, and knows just what to expect in the way of hardships.”

The run to Rathley was made in less than two hours. It had been decided that the party should put up at a hotel for a few days, until some painting on board the *Ice King* was finished. Then they were to go aboard and make themselves at home as best they could until the day set for the departure.

They reached the hotel in the evening, and that night all slept soundly. In the morning, after breakfast, Chet suggested they walk down to the steamer and see how the painting was progressing.

“Hark!” cried Andy, when they were within two blocks of the wharf. “What is that man crying?”

“Fire! fire! fire!” yelled the individual in question, as he came rushing up the street.

“Where is it?” asked Andy and Chet in a breath.

“Down at the dock! A steamer is on fire!”

“A steamer!” exclaimed Professor Jeffer. “Can it be the *Ice King*?”

“Oh, I hope not!” burst out Andy, and then he set off on a run, with Chet by his side, and the professor following more slowly.

CHAPTER XIV—THE FIRE ON THE STEAMER

“She is doomed! There goes our chance to reach the North Pole!”

Such were the words that escaped from Chet’s lips, as he and Andy came out on the dock where the *Ice King* was tied up.

Before them lay the two-masted steamer, with a thick volume of smoke rolling up from her main hatchway. The fire alarm was sounding, and men and boys were running to the scene of action.

“What a catastrophe!” The words came from Professor Jeffer. He was almost out of breath from running. “I hope they can save her!”

“Wonder what is burning?” queried Andy. He, too, felt his heart sink within him.

“Can of benzine exploded,” answered a man standing near. “The painters had it, and one of ’em dropped a lighted match on the can.”

“He ought to be blown up with it,” fumed Chet. “Who ever heard of such carelessness!”

There was the tooting of a whistle, and a fire engine came dashing down the street, followed by a hose cart and a hook and ladder company. In the meantime, Captain Williamson had sounded the alarm on the ship, and set some men to work at a hand pump, for the engineer had no steam in the boilers.

“Can we do anything, Captain?” asked Andy, as he ran up the gangplank.

“I don’t know,” was the short answer. “Might help at the pump, or help carry buckets of water. If we had the engine going we’d soon get a good stream on that blaze, but we didn’t look for anything like this.”

Andy and Chet tried to get to the pump, but found that already manned. Then they got buckets and ropes, and commenced to haul up water over the side, and a number of other boys and men did likewise. Some sailors took the full buckets and threw the water down the hatchway, where they thought it would do the most good. Then the fire engine on the dock got into action, and a steady stream was directed down into the interior of the steamer.

But the conflagration had gained considerable headway, and some cans of paints and oils added ready fuel to the blaze. The smoke grew thicker and thicker, and presently a tongue of flame shot skyward.

“She’s doomed sure!” groaned Chet. “Oh, was there ever such luck!”

“The trouble is that the water doesn’t do much good on the paint and oil,” exclaimed Professor Jeffer. “Sand or dirt would be better.”

“Here comes a chemical engine!” cried Andy. “Maybe that will do some good.”

“It will do more good than throwing water,” said the old scientist.

The chemical engine got into action without delay, and as the chemicals were forced down the hatchway the smoke became even thicker than before. But the tongues of flame died down, which the boys took for a good sign.

Barwell Dawson was not on hand, he having gone to Boston on business.

“If the vessel isn’t saved, it will be an awful blow to him,” was Andy’s comment.

The boys continued to work, and so did the sailors and the firemen. Thus an anxious quarter of an hour passed. Then the chief of the fire department happened to pass Chet.

“Will the vessel be saved?” asked the lad.

“Sure thing!” cried the old fire-fighter. “But it’s a blaze hard to get at. If a man tried to go down there, he’d be smothered in a minute.”

Nevertheless, some of the hook and ladder men went into the engine room, and there chopped a hole through a bulkhead into the hold. Then more chemicals were used, and more water, and soon it was announced that the fire was under control. A little later the smoke cleared away, and the firemen went below, to put out any stray sparks.

It was found that the total damage was confined to that portion of the hold where the painters had stored their paints and oils. Here the woodwork was much charred, and some beams and braces were burnt through. But Captain Williamson estimated that two hundred dollars would make everything as good as ever.

“And that I’m going to get out of those painters,” he went on, doggedly. “If they don’t pay up, I’ll have ’em arrested for gross carelessness.” It may be said here that in the end the painters had to pay for the repairs, although they did so unwillingly.

A telegram was sent to Mr. Dawson, and he came from Boston on the first train. He was much disturbed, and roundly berated the painter who had caused the conflagration. The man had been smoking, and the hunter gave orders that in the future they were to smoke on deck only, and use no matches whatever while below.

The repairs made necessary by the fire were made within ten days, and then the task of getting the *Ice King* ready for her long trip to the Arctic regions went forward as rapidly as ever. Mr. Dawson was a busy man, for he superintended the buying of everything, from fur clothing to pemmican.

“Pemmican is the great thing in the Arctic regions,” he explained one day, when Andy asked about the food. “It is nothing but the round of beef, cut into strips and dried, and then mixed with beef tallow and currants. It will keep for a long time, and is highly nutritious.”

“Is it appetizing?” asked Andy, with a grin.

“It is when you are good and hungry, Andy. Besides, it is comparatively light, and easily carried. I don’t know what explorers would do without it. Of course, as long as we can get fresh meat, we’ll eat that. But we’ll have to fall back on pemmican more or less. You’ll find it more appetizing than seal blubber, such as the Esquimaux eat.”

The hunter purchased for the lads some silk underwear that was extra warm, and some stout boots, and outer garments of wool and of fur, and also some oilskins for wet weather. Then he took them to a gun shop in Portland and fitted them out with pistols, repeating rifles, and stout hunting knives. He also purchased for them water-tight match safes, and colored goggles of the automobile variety —the latter to ward off headache and snow-blindness.

“You need not wear the goggles all the time up north,” he explained. “But as soon as your eyes hurt the least bit, put them on.”

“You are very kind to get us all these things,” said Chet. The new repeating rifle made his eyes sparkle with pleasure.

“Indeed you are kind!” cried Andy. “We didn’t expect half so much.”

“I want you to go away completely equipped,” answered Barwell Dawson. “Half of the failures of exploring expeditions is due to the lack of proper equipment. It’s like going hunting with a gun that won’t shoot straight. Sometimes you hit your game, but more times you don’t.”

The hunter and explorer also went over the scientific instruments with Professor Jeffer, to see that nothing should be lacking to take all manner of observations and measurements. Some linen notebooks were also provided, which could not be torn easily, and likewise fountain pens, and ink made of liquids that would not readily freeze. Mr. Dawson also procured a number of cameras for taking pictures, and films that would not be affected by the intense cold.

“You’ve got to think about the cold every time you buy anything,” observed Andy. “Wonder what about a jack-knife? I was going to buy a new one, and I don’t want to ask Mr. Dawson about it—he has bought enough already.”

“I guess you can get any kind you want,” answered his chum. “But don’t use it when it’s too cold, or the steel will stick to your skin.”

“Oh, I know that. I once put my tongue on some cold iron, and I had a terrible time getting it off again.”

The boys were in Portland, and set off to buy some trifles, having still a few dollars of their own. Andy purchased the knife at a hardware store, and they were just coming from the place when Chet caught him by the arm.

“What is it, Chet?”

“Look at the man across the way! It is your Uncle Si!”

“Uncle Si!” cried Andy. “So it is! And he has seen me!”

Andy’s first impulse was to run, but he did nothing of the sort. He stood his ground, and gazed at his uncle coldly as the latter shuffled up. Josiah Graham looked anything but tidy and prosperous, and Andy rightly imagined that his relative had been going through some hard times.

“Humph! So here you be!” were Josiah Graham’s first words. “I was a-wonderin’ what had become of yer.”

“What are you doing here, Uncle Si?” asked Andy, as calmly as possible.

“Me? Wot’s thet to you, I’d like to know?”

“Oh, you don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.”

“I’m a-lookin’ fer work. Be you workin’ now?”

“Not just at present.”

“How did you git here?”

“Came on the train.”

“Humph! Needn’t be so pert! Maybe you had an offer o’ work here?”

“No.”

“We haven’t got to look for a job,” said Chet. “We’ve got something better to look forward to.”

“Better, eh? Wot is it?” And Josiah Graham’s small eyes gazed shrewdly at the youths.

“Never mind what it is,” broke in Andy, hastily, with a warning look at his chum.

“Ah, I know!” cried the man, with a leer. “You came down to sell thet land claim! Goin’ to do it without my knowledge an’ consent!”

“No, I didn’t come for that.”

“You can’t tell me, Andy Graham! I know better, I do!” the old man shrilled. “But you remember I’m your guardeen, an’ you can’t sell nuthin’ without me!”

“You are not my guardian, Uncle Si. You went away of your own free will, and now I want you to let me alone.”

“Did you sell them papers yet?”

“No.”

“Then you better give ’em to me. You was a big fool to run away as you did. I was a-goin’ to make a good bargain fer yer.”

“Uncle Si, if you had sold those papers to that Mr. A. Q. Hopton, I could have had you arrested,” said Andy, quietly but firmly.

At these words the face of the shiftless man changed color, and his jaw dropped.

“Me? Arrested?” he stammered.

“Yes, arrested. I have had advice on the subject. You had no right to do a thing without the consent of the court.”

“Humph! so you have been to a lawyer, eh? Pretty way to do—not to trust your uncle, who allers did so well by yer. Has thet lawyer got them papers now?”

“I won’t tell you a word about the papers.”

“Humph! You ain’t got no right to run away like this.”

“I am not running away. I have a right to go where I please—and do as I please.”

“Who told you thet?”

“Never mind who told me.”

“You’re a-gettin’ too high-toned fer your boots, Andy Graham! How much money have you got?”

“That is my business.”

“Ain’t you a-goin’ to tell me?”

“No.”

“Where be you a-stopping?”

“That is my business, too.”

“Don’t git sassy.”

“I am not ‘sassy,’ as you call it. I intend, in the future, to mind my own business, and I want you to mind yours.”

“You had better leave Andy alone,” put in Chet, who saw that the shiftless man was working himself up into the worst possible humor. “You never helped him, and he doesn’t want anything to do with you.”

“Say, this ain’t none o’ your business, Chet Greene.”

“Andy is my friend.”

“Humph! he better not be!” snarled Josiah Graham. “You ain’t no fit boy fer nobuddy to go with—you the son o’ a thief, an’ mebbe wuss. I want you——Oh!”

What Josiah Graham wanted next was never made known, for just then he landed flat on his back in the gutter, where a well-directed blow from Chet’s fist had sent him.

CHAPTER XV—THE START OF THE COOK EXPEDITION

If ever a man was surprised, that man was Josiah Graham. Even Andy was astonished, for he had not dreamed that Chet could be so quick-tempered.

“Oh, Chet, that was a hard blow!”

“He deserved it,” was Chet’s answer. His voice was strained, and his face pale. “I’ll allow nobody to talk that way to me.”

“Yo—you young villain!” spluttered Josiah Graham, as he rolled over in the dirt of the gutter and picked himself up. “I’ll—I’ll——”

“After this you keep a civil tongue in your head!” interrupted Chet. He still had his fists clenched.

“You—you——”

“If you call me any more names, I’ll knock you down again.”

Chet’s manner was so aggressive that Josiah Graham retreated several feet. A few persons had witnessed his fall, and a crowd began to collect.

“What’s the trouble?”

“Is it a fight?”

“Do you want a policeman?”

“No, we don’t want any policeman,” said Andy in alarm. “Chet, we had better get out of this,” he whispered. “If we don’t, we’ll all be taken to the station house!”

“Your uncle is the meanest man I ever met! He ought to have a sound thrashing!” answered Chet, recklessly.

“I know, but we don’t want to have the police come down on us.”

“I’ve a good mind to have the law on yer!” howled the man who had been knocked down.

“Do so—and I’ll have the law on you,” retorted Chet. “You can’t slander me for nothing,—and you can’t try to rob Andy, either.”

The last shot told, and Josiah Graham backed still further away.

“We’ll settle this some other time!” he muttered, and then turning, he disappeared into the crowd and hurried away much faster than was his usual speed.

Not to be questioned by those who had gathered, Andy and Chet pushed through the crowd in the opposite direction. Soon they were a couple of blocks from where the encounter had taken place, and then they slackened their pace.

“The miserable hound!” muttered Chet. He was still completely upset.

“Don’t take it so hard, Chet,” answered Andy, soothingly. “It’s just Uncle Si’s mean way, that’s all.”

“I suppose he tells everybody what he thinks I am!”

“Oh, I don’t think that. He was riled up, and wanted to say something extra mean. And it was mean —as mean as dirt!” added Andy.

He continued to talk soothingly to his chum, and presently Chet cooled down somewhat. But he still said he wished he had stayed and given Josiah Graham the thrashing of his life.

“He thinks I have the lost papers,” said Andy, later on.

“And I’d let him continue to think so,” answered his chum. “If you say they are lost, your uncle may tell that fellow, Hopton, and the real estate man may fix it up to do you out of that claim anyway. I’d keep them in complete ignorance of the truth.”

Andy thought this a good idea, and resolved to follow the suggestion. He wondered if his uncle would make another move against him. He was soon to learn how really mean Josiah Graham could be.

For the two boys, waiting for the steamer to sail on her momentous voyage, the days passed slowly. After their outfits had been purchased and stowed away aboard the *Ice King*, there was little for them to do. They read some books on polar exploration, and spent hours in poring over the maps of the Arctic regions which Barwell Dawson and the professor possessed. They traced out the routes of Kane, De Long, Greely, Peary, and others, and wondered what route Mr. Dawson would pursue.

“He is going up the west coast of Greenland anyway,” said Chet. “And that suits me, for that is where the *Betsey Andrews* was last heard of.” No matter what was going on, thoughts of his missing parent continually drifted across his mind. Would he ever see his father again, and would his parent be able to clear himself of the accusations brought against him?

“Do you suppose there are any other exploring expeditions north just now?” asked Andy of Professor Jeffer, at the breakfast table one morning. All were now stopping at a hotel in Rathley.

“But very few, I believe. I understand Robert Peary is about to try it again this coming summer, just as we are going to do, and Mr. Dawson tells me that a noted hunter and explorer from Brooklyn, Dr. Frederick A. Cook, is now somewhere up north. This Dr. Cook went up north to hunt walrus and polar bears, but he is quite an explorer, and he may take it into his head to strike out for the Pole, especially as he had for his captain Robert Bartlett, who commanded Peary’s ship, the *Roosevelt*, during Peary’s wonderful trip in 1905 and 1906.”

“Do you think we’ll meet any of those other parties up there!” asked Chet.

“It is possible, but not probable, for the country is so large. But we shall probably hear of Dr. Cook’s party through the Esquimaux as soon as we arrive. Those men of the frozen north make good messengers, and news travels for hundreds of miles in an incredible space of time, considering the ice and snow.”

What Professor Jeffer had to say about Dr. Frederick A. Cook was true, and as the name of this famous hunter and explorer was soon to be on everybody's tongue, it will be well to give more details concerning him and his party.

Dr. Cook was born in Hortonville, New York State. He was of German descent, and his family originally spelt the name Koch. His father was a physician, and so was his grandfather, so it was but natural that the lad should take up the study of medicine.

In his younger life he had to work hard. The family moved to Port Jervis, N. Y., and there Frederick entered High School. Then the family moved again, this time to the Williamsburgh section of Brooklyn, N. Y. While studying, the boy did his best to earn some money, working with a produce dealer in Fulton Market, and also as a printer. Then he purchased a milk route, and having gotten ahead a little financially, entered a Medical School, from which, in due course of time, he received his diploma. While in college he was married, but his wife died shortly after the wedding.

The young doctor was looking around for an opening, when he heard that Commander Peary was fitting out an expedition for polar exploration. This was the first Peary expedition, and a competition was opened for the position of surgeon with the party. Dr. Cook won in the contest, and thus took his first trip to the far north, in the ship, *Kite*, in 1891. The north-western coast of Greenland was explored, the party reaching a north latitude of 82°, and Dr. Cook received a splendid training for future work in that territory.

Returning home, he married again, and for a short time settled down to the practice of a physician. But the wish for hunting and for exploration was in his heart, and in 1893 he went north again, and took a third trip the year following. Then came a voyage on an ill-fated ship, the *Miranda*, and the explorer came close to going to the bottom of the ocean. The ship collided with an iceberg off the coast of Labrador, and also hit some reefs off the coast of south Greenland. A transfer was made to another vessel, and the *Miranda* was left at sea, a hopeless derelict.

In 1897 Dr. Cook joined the *Belgica* Arctic Expedition, as surgeon and anthropologist, and spent nearly two years in that service. Then he went north in another ship, the *Erie*, carrying supplies for the Peary party, then again in the polar regions.

After that a trip was made to Alaska, and the intrepid explorer tried the ascent of Mount McKinley, said to be 20,300 feet high—the tallest mountain in America. At first he failed, but another year he came back and made the grand ascent, a truly great achievement. He wrote a book on the subject, and also another volume relating his experiences while a surgeon and explorer in the frozen north.

Dr. Cook had a great friend in Mr. John R. Bradley, a man of means, who was a well-known traveler and hunter. The two talked the matter over, and decided to fit out a vessel and make a trip as far north as possible. In the main, the project was kept secret, and neither boasted of what they were about to attempt to do. At Gloucester, Mass., they found a ship that suited their purpose, and she was thoroughly overhauled and renamed the *John R. Bradley*. Suitable provisions for a long trip were taken on board, and the vessel left Gloucester harbor July 3, 1907. It did not look at all like a "North Pole" expedition, and its departure excited very little comment. It was thought that Mr. Bradley and Dr. Cook had merely gone off on a hunting trip after bears and walrus.

It took until the end of August for the *Bradley* to reach the upper end of Smith Sound, in Baffin Bay. Here was located the port of Etah, and not many miles away another port called Annootok. All of the provisions and other supplies were landed at the latter port, and then the vessel sailed back to

the United States, leaving Dr. Cook and his party to hunt and explore to their hearts' content. The vessel's return created some surprise, and then the word gradually spread that it was possible Dr. Cook would try to reach the North Pole. Mr. Bradley was at once besieged with questions, but gave no definite information.

At Annootok Dr. Cook found many Esquimaux assembled, all ready for a great bear hunt. As he could speak their language, he talked to them, and engaged a number of them, with their dogs and sledges, to serve him.

Work was at once begun to make Annootok a regular base of supplies. A small house was erected, and also a storehouse and a workshop. All the provisions brought along were packed away, and the explorer obtained from the native hunters large quantities of polar bear meat and other game.

And so he set off on his memorable trip northward, and what this brought forth we shall learn later.

CHAPTER XVI—A TRICK, AND WHAT FOLLOWED

"Day after tomorrow we shall set off on our trip to the frozen north."

It was Barwell Dawson who made the announcement to the boys and Professor Jeffer, after a long consultation with Captain Williamson.

"Good!" shouted Andy, swinging his cap in the air.

"Suits me," added Chet. "I've been on pins and needles to go for a month and more."

"You mustn't be impatient," replied Mr. Dawson, with a smile. "Even as it is, we'll be getting away nearly a month before I originally planned to go. But I am ready, and so is Captain Williamson, so there is no use in delaying."

"What about Mr. Wilson?" asked Andy, referring to a man who had signed for the trip.

"He is sick, and cannot go. But Dr. Slade will be on hand, and likewise Mr. Camdal. They sent me a telegram last night."

"I suppose all the crew are here?" questioned Professor Jeffer.

"To a man—and all as anxious as we are to start."

"Do they know we are going to try for the Pole?"

"Not exactly, but I've told them—and so has the captain—that we intended to stay in the polar regions for at least two years."

Winter had passed, and now it was the middle of Spring. The weather was warm and pleasant, just the sort for a cruise, as Andy declared.

The boys had had but little to bother them outside of another meeting Andy had with his Uncle Si, who had followed him to Rathley. Josiah Graham had tried to "bulldoze" the youth, and had wanted Andy to give him ten dollars, but the boy had refused, and walked away, leaving his uncle in a more bitter frame of mind than ever.

"I don't know how he manages to live," Andy told Chet. "He doesn't seem to work."

"If he isn't willing to work, he ought to starve," answered Chet. He had no tender feelings for the man who had called him the son of a thief.

"I am sorry he came to Rathley. I don't understand how he found out we were here."

"Oh, he'd take more trouble to find you than to hunt up a job," answered Chet.

On the day previous to that set for the *Ice King* to sail, Chet was walking down one of the docks, when he saw two men in earnest conversation. One man was pointing his long forefinger toward the vessel that was bound north, and drawing closer, Chet recognized Josiah Graham.

“Now what can he be up to?” the youth asked himself. “He seems to be quite excited.”

The men were standing near a high board fence that separated one dock from another. Chet ran back through a warehouse, and scaled the fence, coming up quickly on the other side. Through a knothole he could see the two men, and hear all that was being said.

At first he could not catch the drift of the talk, but presently discovered that the stranger was some sort of officer of the law. The two were talking about Andy, and at last Josiah Graham said:

“I don’t want him to run away from me. It’s up to you to stop him, an’ I want for you to do it.”

“Are you his guardian?”

“O’ course I be—I’m his only livin’ relative. He’s got property, but he’ll go to the dogs if he ain’t looked after. I want him brung ashore when thet ship sails, an’ I understand she’s a-goin’ to sail to-morrer.”

“Well, I’ll see what can be done,” answered the stranger. “Will you come to the office and make some sort of a complaint?”

“Have I got to do that?” questioned Josiah Graham, anxiously.

“It would be best.”

“All right then, I’ll do it. It’s fer his own good,” answered the shiftless one. “We’ll catch him when he leaves the hotel to go to the ship.” Then the two men walked away towards the center of the town.

“The mean rascal—to try to keep Andy from going on this trip!” murmured Chet to himself. “I’ll soon put a spoke in his wheel!”

He started on a hunt for Andy, who had gone uptown to make a small purchase. He looked into several stores, and at last located his chum in a barber shop.

“Last haircut for some time to come,” announced Andy. “After this, I guess I’ll let my hair grow—it will be warmer.”

“I’ve got something to tell you,” returned Chet. “Hurry up.”

“Can’t hurry, when I’m getting my hair cut, Chet.”

Nevertheless, Andy told the barber not to waste time, and ten minutes later both boys were on the street. There Chet related what he had overheard, Andy listening in wonder.

“He certainly is the limit, Chet. Now, what do you suppose I had best do?”

“I don’t know—tell Mr. Dawson, I suppose.”

“But I don’t want to get him into trouble.”

“Do you think it will do that?”

“It might—and he might tell me it would be best for me to stay behind,” answered Andy, gloomily. “And I’m not going to stay behind!” he cried, desperately.

“Then I know what you can do!” exclaimed Chet, struck by a sudden idea.

“What?”

“Play a trick on your Uncle Si. But it will cost you a five-dollar bill.”

“That’s cheap—if only I can get rid of the old curmudgeon.”

“Then come with me, to the writing-room of the hotel.”

Andy did as requested, and there Chet unfolded his plan. Andy agreed to it at once, and without loss of time the following letter was penned:

> “*Dear Uncle Si*: I am sorry I caused you so much trouble. Will you come to Pine Run at once? I inclose five dollars for the trip. How much money can you get for those papers? Thought I’d like to go on that ocean trip, but I suppose sailoring is harder than lumbering, isn’t it?
>
> “Your Nephew,
> “*Andy*.”

Andy had in his pocket an envelope postmarked Pine Run, and addressed to himself. With care he erased the name “Andrew” and substituted “Josiah,” and then he changed the address. He knew where his uncle was stopping, a cheap lodging house.

“I guess that will set him off the trail,” said Chet, with a grin, after the envelope had been sealed with care. “And we haven’t told him any falsehood, either.”

The boys laid their plans with care, and hired a youth employed around the lodging house to hand the letter to Josiah Graham, but without stating where it came from. Then Andy and Chet set watch.

In the middle of the afternoon they saw Josiah Graham enter the lodging house. They waited impatiently, and half an hour later saw him emerge, carrying his faded grip in his hand. He headed directly for the depot.

“I guess the plan is going to work,” whispered Chet. “Let us follow him.”

“He mustn’t see me—or it would spoil everything.”

They followed on behind the man, and saw him enter a police station. He came forth five minutes later, looking flushed and humiliated.

“I’ll wager he has withdrawn his charge against you,” said Chet, and his surmise was correct.

From the station house Josiah Graham hurried to the depot. It was three o’clock, and a train for Pine Run was due in fifteen minutes.

“Pine Run ticket,” Chet heard him demand, at the window, and it was handed to him. Then he came out on the platform, and sank down on a bench, with his grip at his feet.

“You are rid of him, Andy,” cried Chet, gayly.

“It was fine of you to think of the trick,” responded Andy, gratefully.

“Say, I’ve got a good mind to have some fun with the old man,” went on Chet.

“Fun? I hope you don’t mean to knock him down?”

“No, for he might have me arrested, and that would keep me from going on the trip. I’ll just quiz him a little.”

“Better be careful.”

“Don’t worry—I know what I am doing.”

While Andy still kept out of sight, Chet sauntered slowly across the depot platform, as if looking for somebody. Josiah Graham stared at him and leaped to his feet.

“Wot you a-doin’ here?” demanded the lazy man.

“Oh!” cried Chet, in well-assumed surprise. “Is Andy with you?” he questioned, anxiously.

“No, he ain’t,” snapped Josiah Graham.

“Do you know where he has gone?”

“Don’t you know?”

“He was at our hotel yesterday, but he isn’t there now.”

“Mebbe he’s on thet ship,” sniffed Josiah Graham.

“No, he isn’t on that ship, either.”

“Wasn’t he a-goin’ to sail with you?”

“So he said, but——” Chet paused. “Then you really don’t know where he is?”

“If I do, I ain’t a-goin’ to tell you, Chet Greene.”

“Don’t be hard on me, Mr. Graham, now I am down on my luck.”

“Humph! It’s your own fault you ain’t got no work. Why didn’t you stay around Pine Run?”

At this question Chet only sighed. He took on a very forlorn look.

“Would you—er—would you——”

“Wot?”

“I hate to ask it, but would you mind lending me the price of a ticket for Pine Run?” he said, falteringly.

“Me?” shrilled Josiah Graham. “Not much I won’t! You go an’ earn your money, young man. Serves you right if you are out o’ pocket an’ ain’t got a cent.”

“Then you won’t—er—even give me the price of a—er—a dinner?”

“Not a cent! You don’t deserve it. I see how it is,” went on Josiah Graham, craftily. “Thet man who owns the ship has got sick o’ you an’ Andy, too, an’ don’t want nuthin’ more to do with yer! Well, I don’t blame him. Now ye can both go back to Pine Run an’ go to work.”

“How can a fellow get back if he hasn’t the price of a ticket?” asked Chet, in a hopeless fashion, although he could scarcely keep from laughing.

“Go to work an’ earn money, I tell yer! I have to do it, an’ you ain’t no better nor I be.”

“Have you been working?”

“O’ course I’ve been working.”

“Then you won’t even give me ten cents for some bread and coffee?”

“No. Go to work—it will do yer good.”

“Will you tell me about Andy?”

“Well, if ye want to know so awful bad, Andy has gone back to Pine Run. He has found out the errors o’ his ways, an’ has sent fer me to take care o’ him. I don’t think he’ll be a-runnin’ away ag’in very soon.”

“Too bad! too bad!” And the mischievous Chet placed a handkerchief to his eyes.

“It’s wot a boy gits when he won’t mind his uncle,” went on Josiah Graham, stiffly. “After this I guess he’ll toe the mark! It’s a pity you ain’t got nobuddy to bring you to your senses.”

“Maybe you’d like to take me under your care?” suggested Chet, with a most woe-begone look on his face.

“No—I got my hands full with Andy. Here is my train, so I can’t talk to yer no longer. Go to work an’ earn somethin’ to eat, an’ the price o’ a railroad ticket.” And then Josiah Graham swung himself aboard the train, which pulled out from the station a moment later.

“Oh, Chet, how could you do it!” roared Andy, when the chums were alone. “I thought I’d split, listening to the talk!”

“Wouldn’t even give a fellow the price of a meal,” returned Chet, coolly. “Well, I rather think he’ll be surprised when he gets back to your cabin and finds everything locked up.” And then he, too, laughed heartily over the trick that had been played on Andy’s shiftless relative.

CHAPTER XVII—AN ENCOUNTER WITH ICEBERGS

"Off at last, Chet!"

"Yes, and your Uncle Si didn't stop you, either!" responded Chet, with a broad grin.

"If only we could have seen him when he got to the cabin!" exclaimed Andy. "I'll wager he was mad!"

"Well, boys, it will be a long while before you see the United States again," remarked Barwell Dawson as he came up. "So use your eyes for all they are worth."

"Just what we are doing," answered Andy.

The *Ice King* had cast off her lines quarter of an hour before, and a steam tug had headed her out of the harbor of Rathley. Now, under the steam of her own powerful engines, she was heading straight out into the Atlantic Ocean.

It was an ideal day, and the boys were in the best of spirits, even though they were leaving their native land for the first time. Chet was full of the hope that in some manner he would hear something about the missing whaler and his father.

The *Ice King* was loaded "to the brim," as Andy expressed it. Below, every available space was filled with provisions and other necessities, and coal, and on deck many bags of coal were piled up amidships.

"To get through the ice, the ship must have a good head of steam on," said Mr. Dawson. "And to have that, we've got to have coal, or oil."

"How soon do you suppose we'll strike ice?" questioned Chet.

"Oh, any time after we round the coast of Nova Scotia."

At the last moment some extra supplies had come on board, and these were still awaiting proper distribution. The boys watched land slowly disappear in the blue haze of distance, and then set to work to assist in making everything ship-shape.

"It will seem queer to live on a ship, I'm thinking," said Chet.

"I hope we don't get sick," answered his chum.

"Oh, I don't think we shall."

"Don't be too sure."

The boys had already become acquainted with the other members of the party, Dr. John Slade, a quiet but friendly gentleman, who had once spent two years in lower Greenland, and Mr. Samuel Camdal, an old hunter, who had shot with Barwell Dawson in the far West and in Africa. Mr.

Camdal could tell some famous stories,—of hunting, and of narrow escapes from wild animals,—and the lads felt that he would make good company during the days when there was not much to do.

It was a real pleasure for the lads to put their stateroom in order. Although the room was small, it had a homelike air about it that was pleasing. Neither lad was burdened with excess baggage, so they were not as crowded as they might otherwise have been.

The course of the *Ice King* was to be up the coast of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, and then into Davis Strait, to Baffin Bay. The boys had studied the chart thoroughly, for a sea trip was altogether a novelty to them.

"Shall we stop anywhere along the coast of Greenland?" asked Chet, of Barwell Dawson.

"Yes, I have arranged to stop at Upernivik, for an extra supply of coal which a collier from the lower coast is to bring up for us."

"How long do you suppose we'll be at Upernivik?"

"Two or three days at least—perhaps a week."

"And can Andy and I go ashore?"

"Certainly. But it is only a small settlement, and you won't find much of interest."

"I wanted to make inquiries about the *Betsey Andrews*."

"Oh, I see. Well, I'll help you, Chet. But don't be too sanguine. You may not hear a word of the whaler."

"I want to do all I can to hear from my father."

"I don't blame you. I'd be that way myself, if my father were missing."

In a few hours the *Ice King* was out on the broad Atlantic. The long swells made the steamer roll a good deal, and soon the two boys felt this in their legs, and then in their stomachs. Each looked at the other in a woe-begone manner.

"What's the matter?" asked Andy.

"Nothing," returned Chet, manfully striving to overcome a feeling he could not subdue. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing much, only—I—I feel sort of crawly inside."

"You're seasick, Andy!"

"How about yourself?" retorted Andy, and he made a movement toward the side of the steamer.

"I guess I—I am—with—you!" gasped Chet, and also ran for the rail.

After that, the two chums lost all interest in living for several hours. They felt as miserable as a person with a dose of seasickness can feel. They remained on deck for a while, and then sought the

seclusion of their stateroom. Here Dr. Slade came to their assistance.

“Two more down, eh?” said the physician, with a little smile. “Well, I’ll do what I can to fix you up,” and he brought forth his medicine case.

“Wh—who else is sick?” asked Andy. In seasickness, “misery loves company” every time.

“Mr. Camdal and Ben Haven, the first mate.”

“The first mate?” queried Chet, between his groans. “Do sailors get sick?”

“Some of them do. I know the captain of an ocean liner who has crossed the Atlantic forty or fifty times. He told me confidentially that he is sick about every third or fourth voyage. It’s just the condition his stomach happens to be in.”

“Then it isn’t so—so babyish after all,” said Chet, and that gave him a grain of comfort.

The doctor did what little he could for the two lads, and by noon the next day they felt quite like themselves. Let me add, that during the remainder of the voyage they were not seasick again.

Although well weighted by her heavy cargo, and by the extra planking on her sides, and extra bracings inside, the *Ice King* made good time on her trip. It was summer, yet as the vessel turned northward it became colder daily, and soon the boys were glad enough to take Barwell Dawson’s advice and don heavier underwear. Then, as it grew still colder, they put on thicker outer garments also.

“I think we’ll see some icebergs soon,” announced Captain Williamson, one evening. “I can feel ’em in the air,” and he threw back his head to take in a deep breath. Many old sailors who have been in northern waters affirm that they can often “smell” icebergs before the bergs can be seen.

The boys retired as usual that night, and slept soundly until about five o’clock in the morning, when a tremendous thump on the vessel’s side aroused them and threw Chet sprawling on the floor.

“For goodness’ sake! what’s that!” gasped the lad, as he scrambled up.

Before Andy could speak there came another tremendous thump, which added to their alarm. A series of smaller thumps followed. On deck they heard Captain Williamson giving a series of rapid-fire orders.

“I think I know what’s up!” cried Andy, at last, as he donned his clothing with all possible speed. “We’ve struck some floating ice.”

“That must be it,” answered Chet, and he, too, began to dress with dispatch.

When the youths reached the deck, a cry of astonishment burst from their lips. It seemed as if during the night the *Ice King* had entered another world. On all sides were large and small cakes of floating ice, and in the distance half a dozen big icebergs loomed up.

“Looks as if we were getting to the North Pole fast,” remarked Andy, grimly.

“Phew! but it’s cold!” added Chet, as he buttoned his clothing tightly about him.

“Well, boys, how do you like this?” sang out Barwell Dawson, as he noticed them.

“Got into it kind of sudden like, didn’t we?” asked Chet.

“I think so, although the captain said last night to expect it.”

“Shall we have this all the way up now?” asked Andy.

“Hardly. I think, and so does Captain Williamson, that there is clear water beyond.”

The captain was on deck with his glass, scanning the ocean ahead anxiously. Several large icebergs appeared to be drifting directly toward the steamer, and he gave orders that the course be changed slightly.

“The *Ice King* won’t mind the small ice,” said he, “but there is no sense in trying the big bergs, yet. We’ll get all we want of that later.”

“Right you are, sir,” responded Barwell Dawson. “Don’t take any chances when they are not necessary.”

After watching the ice for a while the boys went below for breakfast. At the table they sat down with Professor Jeffer and Dr. Slade.

“I am going to try to get some photographs of the icebergs,” said the professor. “I trust we get close enough to them to get some good views.”

“They ought to make good pictures,” responded the doctor.

All the while the boys were eating, the small cakes of ice thumped against the sides of the steamer. But this did no damage, although, as the professor explained, there was danger of some ice getting caught in the propeller.

“And we can’t afford to have that damaged,” he added.

When the boys came on deck again, they saw that the *Ice King* was much closer to several of the large icebergs. In fact, the steamer appeared to be picking her way through a veritable field of floating ice.

“It is much thicker than the captain expected,” said Barwell Dawson, gravely.

“Is there any danger?” asked Andy, quickly.

“There is always danger when so much ice is floating about. But we hope to get through all right.”

The lads could readily see that not only Mr. Dawson, but also the captain, mate, and sailors were much concerned. Captain Williamson still had his glass in use, and was scanning the sea ahead.

“I think we can make it,” he said to Mr. Dawson. “But it is going to be a tight squeeze.”

“Well, we don’t want such a tight squeeze that we get our ribs stove in,” answered the explorer.

“Are we going to pass between the icebergs yonder?” asked Chet.

“We’ll have to—to reach the clear sea beyond,” answered the captain.

The speed of the steamer had been reduced, and the course again changed. They were pushing away from one of the big bergs that seemed to tower up into the sky like some giant of the polar regions.

“If that iceberg hit us, it would knock us to flinders,” was Chet’s comment, as he viewed the oncoming mass.

On one side of the ship were the icebergs, and on the other the floating cakes, the latter growing thicker every minute. The *Ice King* was turned into the floating cakes, which thumped and bumped loudly on the bow and sides. Then came an unexpected crashing from the stern.

“What’s that?” cried the mate, who was at the wheel, steering under Captain Williamson’s directions.

“Ice in the propeller!” answered a sailor.

As he spoke the engine stopped, and in a twinkling the steamer swung around until her bow pointed directly toward the big iceberg.

“Look! look!” yelled Andy. “We are going to be hit, sure!”

“If we are, we are doomed!” echoed Chet.

Before anything could be done the big iceberg came drifting on them, slowly and majestically, a very mountain of crystal-like whiteness. So terrible was it that it fascinated the boys, who could do nothing but stare in commingled wonder and horror. An upper mass of the iceberg hung over the top, as if ready to fall and crush the steamer beneath it.

A moment passed—to the lads it seemed an eternity,—and then the big iceberg scraped the side. There was a strange grinding and crashing, and some pieces of ice came showering on the deck. Then the steamer began to rock, and some of the shrouds became entangled in the mass that overhung the deck. The *Ice King* commenced to move backward.

“We are being carried along by the iceberg!” cried Barwell Dawson, and his words told the truth of the awful situation.

CHAPTER XVIII—SHOOTING WILD GEESE

It was certainly a time of extreme peril, and the boys realized it fully as well as did the men. The steamer was caught in the grip of the big iceberg, and the deck was directly beneath an overhanging portion that might at any time break off and crush the vessel and all on board.

Captain Williamson had run aft to learn what could be done with the propeller, and he had already told the mate to get the sailors out with fenders to save the ship as much as possible from chafing on the side of the berg.

“The loose ice on the other side helps to keep us against the big berg,” said Barwell Dawson.

“I have tried to get some pictures, but the big iceberg is too close,” came from Professor Jeffer, who was as cool as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

“Well, we’re going to get away from it mighty quick,—if we can,” answered Mr. Camdal, pointedly. The close quarters did not suit him any better than it suited Mr. Dawson and the boys.

To clear the propeller a man had to be hoisted over the stern in a sling. He carried with him a pickpole, and with this dug out the cake which had become caught in the blades of the propeller.

This work had hardly been accomplished when another grinding sound came from the big iceberg, and a shower of small ice came down on the forecastle, knocking out several lights of glass. Andy was struck on the head and hurled flat.

“Oh, Andy, are you hurt?” cried Chet, in alarm, as he rushed to his chum’s assistance.

“Not much, but that was a pretty good crack,” was Andy’s reply, as he felt his head where a lump was rapidly rising.

“You boys had better go below,” said Barwell Dawson. “You can’t do anything up here, and you may get a worse dose next time.”

But the lads were loath to retire, and so lingered on the deck, but took good care to keep out of the way of the ice that fell a little later.

Finding that the propeller would now work, Captain Williamson gave orders for full speed astern. As soon as the engines started there was more crashing of ice, the small stuff being ground down under the ship, and the ice of the pinnacle breaking off along the shrouds. Everybody on deck had to get out of the way, for the deck took on the appearance of “an ice-house upset,” as Chet put it, big chunks of the frozen material lying in all directions.

“Hurrah! we are leaving the big iceberg behind!” cried Andy, a few minutes later, and his words proved true.

“I can see clear water ahead!” called out Professor Jeffer, shortly afterwards, and then he turned, to get the photographs he wanted of the big iceberg.

The report concerning open water was correct, and, having left the vicinity of the big iceberg, Captain Williamson had the steamer steered in something of a big circle. Thus they avoided all but the small ice. The latter, however, thumped and bumped on the bow and sides as strongly as ever, and once there came a shock that threw everybody on the deck headlong.

“I hope that doesn’t damage us any,” observed Andy, when this new scare was over.

“It may start some of the seams,” answered Barwell Dawson, “although the vessel was reënforced to withstand just such knocks.”

Inside of an hour the *Ice King* had passed all the big icebergs and a large portion of the floating cakes. Clear blue water was ahead, for which all on board were thankful.

“I didn’t expect this, so far south,” said Captain Williamson, after making a tour of the ship, and having had the deck cleaned up. “It is unusual.”

“I know it,” answered Barwell Dawson. “I am thankful we didn’t run into the big iceberg at night.”

“Yes, darkness would have made the situation much worse.”

“Have we started any of the ship’s seams?” asked Dr. Slade.

“Not as far as I have been able to discover.”

The boys went to the forecastle to see what damage had been done there, and found the ship’s carpenter putting in some new lights of glass. One sailor had received a black eye from a chunk of falling ice, but otherwise little bodily harm had resulted.

“Well, I call that a narrow escape,” said Andy, after the excitement was over.

“So do I,” responded Chet. “I don’t want another such experience.”

“You will have to go through harder things than that up north,” said Barwell Dawson, who overheard the talk.

“We’ll be prepared then,” answered Andy. “This wasn’t expected.”

“I am afraid you boys don’t realize what you are up against,” went on the hunter and explorer. “We are going to face many perils in the polar regions. If you feel you don’t want to go further, you can leave us when we get to Upernivik.”

“No! no! we want to see this thing through, perils or no perils,” cried Andy, hastily.

“Indeed we do!” added Chet. “I guess you’ll find we can stand as much as anybody after we get used to it.”

Late that afternoon the steamer came in sight of a large flock of wild geese. Professor Jeffer calculated that there must be thousands of them, and ran for his camera, to take some snap-shots.

“Can’t we do a little shooting?” asked Chet, of Mr. Dawson. “They are heading this way.”

Permission was granted, and both boys rushed below for shotguns. When they came up, the geese were flying almost directly over the *Ice King*, uttering their strange cries as they did so.

It did not take Andy and Chet long to get into action, and both shotguns spoke up at almost the same time. Each youth fired twice in rapid succession. The geese were so thick they could not help but strike some of them, and three came fluttering down on the deck of the vessel.

"Not a bad haul," was Barwell Dawson's comment. "Now you can have roast goose stuffed with onions for tomorrow's dinner."

"And we'll invite all hands to join us," answered Chet, gaily. "I guess there will be enough to go around."

"I don't know about this shooting birds from the ship," said Captain Williamson, in a low voice. "Some of the sailors don't believe in that sort of thing. They think it brings bad luck."

"What do you think?" asked Chet.

"Oh, I am not superstitious," responded the commander.

The master of the vessel was right—some of his hands were very superstitious—and these deplored the killing of the geese, and refused to touch any of the meat when it was cooked.

"We'll have trouble, see if we don't," said one sailor.

"Maybe it will sink us," said another, with a serious shake of his head. Then they muttered among themselves, and cast ugly glances at Andy and Chet.

"Too bad," whispered Chet to his chum. "If I had known the sailors would take it so seriously, I'd not have shot those geese."

"Oh, the affair will soon blow over," was Andy's answer. But his surmise did not prove correct.

In the morning the boys heard that the *Ice King* had sprung several leaks. The captain had had the well-hole sounded, and had ordered the pumps started.

"The icebergs and the floating cakes did it," said Barwell Dawson. "I was hopeful we would escape, but it seems not."

"What are you going to do?" asked Andy.

"I don't know yet—we'll see how bad the leaks are."

The ship's carpenter was below, examining the seams, and now Captain Williamson and Barwell Dawson joined him. A thorough examination was effected, and when the party came on deck again they were talking earnestly.

"It's pretty bad, I guess," said Andy to Chet.

A consultation took place in the cabin, between the captain and the explorer, and at the conclusion the course of the vessel was changed.

“Instead of heading for Upernivik we are going to put in at Holstenborg for repairs,” explained Barwell Dawson to Professor Jeffer and the others. “I am sorry for the delay, but it cannot be helped. The ice must have hit us harder than we thought.”

“Well, the delay won’t worry me,” answered the scientist, calmly. “It will give me a chance to see something of another part of Greenland.”

“Where is Holstenborg?” questioned Chet.

“It is on the western coast of Greenland, about four hundred and fifty miles below Upernivik. It is not much of a place, but Captain Williamson thinks it would be unwise to attempt to reach Upernivik in our present condition.”

“Well, I don’t care if we do land further down the coast,” said Chet, thinking that here would be another chance to make inquiries concerning the lost whaler.

It soon became whispered around that the *Ice King* was leaking badly. Some of the hands took the matter calmly, but others were excited.

“It’s because those geese were shot,” cried one sailor. “It was wrong to do it, and I said so.”

“Those boys ought to be heaved overboard,” said another.

“Right you are,” answered the tar who had first found fault.

Some of this talk presently reached the ears of Ben Haven, the mate, and watching his chance, he came up to where Chet and Andy were standing amidships.

“I want to tell you lads something,” said he in a low voice.

“What is it?” asked Chet.

“If I were you boys, I’d not walk forward for the present,” went on Ben Haven. “Some of the sailors are down on you for killing those geese. Better keep out of their way until we reach port—which will be tomorrow morning.”

“Why, do you think they’d try to—to harm us?” asked Chet.

“They might—if matters get worse with the ship. Some sailors are awfully headstrong when they get frightened.”

Chet and Andy promised to heed the warning, although both were inclined to laugh at it. They kept away from the forecastle, and it was not until after supper that one of the sailors came near them. It was then reported that the steamer was leaking worse than before, and the pumps were kept going constantly.

“You boys are responsible for this,” said the sailor. He was a tall, thin individual, who rejoiced in the name of Pep Loggermore.

“What do you mean?” demanded Chet, stiffly.

“You know well enough what I mean,” growled the tar. “If we go to the bottom, there won’t be nobody to blame but you!”

“That’s nonsense,” broke in Andy. “The ice started the ship’s seams—we had nothing to do with it.”

“You shot them geese, and——”

“Oh, that’s foolishness!” cried Chet. “We don’t want to hear it. A man with sense ought to know better than to talk that way.”

“I know what I am talking about,” grumbled Pep Loggermore.

“You go on about your business,” said Andy, sharply.

Loggermore was about to argue some more, when Captain Williamson put in an appearance. He slouched off, but when out of sight, turned and shook his fist at the youths.

“I ain’t going to sail with no such fellers as you,” he muttered to himself. “And I don’t think the other men will want to sail with you, either. If we ever get ashore alive, we’ll see to it that you two fools don’t come aboard again!”

“What did that fellow want of you?” demanded the captain, of the chums.

“Oh, it wasn’t much,” answered Andy, evasively. He did not want to get Loggermore into trouble.

“Did he threaten you?”

“He didn’t like it, because we shot the geese,” said Chet.

“What tomfoolery!” muttered the captain. “Well, if he bothers you again, let me know, and I’ll teach him to mind his own business.”

“What about the leaks, Captain?” asked Andy, to change the subject.

“They are pretty bad, but I hope to reach port without serious trouble,” was the reply.

But the look on the face of the commander of the *Ice King* showed that he was greatly worried.

CHAPTER XIX—GREENLAND AND THE ESQUIMAUX

There was a good deal of ice near the coast, yet, by setting a constant watch in the crow's nest of the steamer, Captain Williamson was able to steer a fairly straight course for Holstenborg.

"It is only a small Danish settlement," said Barwell Dawson, in reply to a question from Chet. "Ordinarily, on account of the marine laws made by Denmark, we might have trouble in landing, but being in need of repairs, I fancy there will be no difficulty."

A little later land was discovered, and presently the coast loomed up, dark and rocky, with the mountain tops covered with snow and ice. Then, through the glasses, they made out a few buildings, of stone and wood, clustered together near a natural harbor.

"Not much of a town, that's sure," was Andy's comment.

Signals were set, and as the steamer came to anchor, a small boat came out from shore. It contained one of the government officials, a round-faced, pleasant-looking Dane, with yellowish hair and mild blue eyes.

It was with some difficulty that matters were explained, and then arrangements were made to have the *Ice King* towed to a spot where the necessary repairs could be made. Work on the vessel began the next day, and while this was going on the boys received permission to go ashore.

They found but little to see. There was a mine back of the settlement, where ore was being blasted out, and they watched several blasts go off. Then they walked to where a fishing vessel had just come in with, a large quantity of seals, and some fish which were called cod, but which they found to be of a different variety from those caught off the New England coast.

"Those seals ought to be valuable," said Andy. "Think of the price of a sealskin coat!"

"Not this kind of seal," answered Professor Jeffer, who chanced to be near at the time. "The seals from which we get sealskin coats such as you refer to come from the coast of Labrador and from Alaskan waters. These seals, as you will find by close examination, do not have a skin of fur, but one of hair, like a horse. But the Esquimaux use them for garment-making. An Esquimau woman will make herself a very fine dress out of these sealskins."

The boys watched the fish and seals taken ashore, and then caught sight of a man in the crowd who looked as if he might be American or English.

"I'd like to talk to that man," said Chet, and watching his chance, he called to the individual. The fellow called back, and when his work was ended, walked over to the boys.

"My name is Rooney, Jack Rooney," he said after the youths had introduced themselves. "I'm from New Brunswick, although I once lived in Maine. Glad to know you." And he shook hands.

"Have you been along the coast of Greenland long?" asked Chet.

"About fifteen years, off and on."

“Then you must know something about the whalers that come up here.”

“Yes, I’ve been aboard plenty of ’em,—one time and another.”

“Did you ever see the *Betsey Andrews*?”

Jack Rooney stood for a moment in deep thought, and then scratched his grizzled chin.

“How long ago is it she was in these parts?”

“Oh, two years ago at least.”

“Who was her captain, do you know?”

“Captain Jacob Spark.”

“Spark? Oh, yes, I remember him! A one-armed man, an old war veteran.”

“Yes, I was told he had but one arm.” Chet’s heart began to beat a little faster. “Then you remember him and his ship?”

“Oh, yes.”

“My father was on board the *Betsey Andrews*. He shipped the last time she left New Bedford.”

“I see.”

“She never came back, and I can’t find out what became of her,” continued Chet.

“What! was she lost at sea? But hold on, I remember hearing something about that.” Jack Rooney scratched his head. “Let’s see, who was it told me? Oh, I remember now, Tom Fetjen. He told me something about her getting fast in the ice, but I don’t remember the particulars.”

“Who is Tom Fetjen?”

“Oh, he’s a fellow who travels up and down the Greenland coast, bartering with the Esquimaux—in a small way, you know.”

“You don’t remember what he said about the *Betsey Andrews*?”

“None of the particulars, no. But Fetjen could tell you, I am sure. He knew this one-armed Spark quite well. Often told stories about the captain.”

“Where is Tom Fetjen now?”

“I don’t know, but maybe I can find out,” answered Jack Rooney.

The fisherman became interested in the boys, and had Chet tell more about his missing parent. Then he went in search of some men who had business dealings with Tom Fetjen, and talked to them in Danish.

“They say Tom Fetjen went up the coast to Upernivik,” said Rooney, after the interview. “If your ship is bound for that port, you’ll probably find him there. He owns a boat called the *Northland*, a

little two-master."

This was all the information Chet could obtain in Holstenborg concerning the missing whaler.

"Well, that's something," said Andy. "You can talk to this Tom Fetjen when we reach Upernivik."

"If he doesn't leave there before we arrive."

"Rooney said he was apt to stay there quite a while, Chet."

"I know he did. Well, I suppose I can only wait and see." And Chet heaved a deep sigh.

While Andy and Chet were ashore interviewing Jack Rooney and others who could speak English, Captain Williamson was waited on by three of his hands. The delegation was headed by Pep Loggermore.

"What do you want?" demanded the master of the *Ice King*, briefly. He could readily see that trouble was brewing.

"We came to speak about them boys," replied Loggermore, doggedly. "We been talkin' amongst ourselves, and we don't want to take no more chances."

"What boys?" asked the captain, although he knew perfectly well who were meant.

"The boys that shot them geese and brought us bad luck."

"See here, Loggermore, this is all nonsense."

"Excuse me, Cap'n, but it ain't nonsense at all. We talked it over, and we are sure it was the killin' of them geese——"

"You talk like a fool," interrupted the master of the steamer. "Those boys are no more responsible for our ill luck than you or I. The ice knocked us a bit too hard, that's all."

"We want them boys kept ashore!" cried Pep Loggermore. "Ain't that so, mates?" he added, turning to his companions, and they nodded.

"What! Are you going to try to dictate to me?" roared Captain Williamson.

"We ain't asking anything but what's right. We——"

"Not another word, Loggermore. Go for'ard, all of you, and don't let me hear another word of this nonsense," said the captain, sharply.

"But, Cap'n——"

"Not another word, I told you, unless you want the cat!" answered Captain Williamson.

He drew himself up, and his eyes flashed dangerously, and the men silently left him and resumed their work in the forward part of the ship.

“Sailors are queer fellows,” was Dr. Blade’s comment. “Once they get an idea in their heads, you can’t drive it out.”

“I’ll drive it out, don’t fear!” answered the captain.

“It is too bad that the boys have made such enemies,” went on the ship’s physician. “I am afraid it will spoil a good deal of their pleasure.”

When the chums came back to the steamer that evening, they noticed that two of the sailors looked at them darkly. Yet nothing was said to them of what had occurred, the sailors being afraid to speak, and the others not wishing to make the boys uneasy.

But among the sailors there was quite a talk over Andy and Chet.

“We’ll make ’em stay ashore if we can,” said Loggermore. “Just wait until we are ready to sail. I am not going to trust myself with fellows like that to bring me bad luck.”

The repairs to the *Ice King* took the best part of a week to make, but at the end of that time the ship’s carpenter pronounced the craft as seaworthy as ever.

“She may stay up here for a year now, and never start those seams again,” he said.

“Let us hope so,” answered Barwell Dawson. “A leaky ship isn’t at all to my liking.”

Pep Loggermore and a crony watched for a chance to catch Andy and Chet ashore. What the sailors might have done, there is no telling, but certainly they would have done all in their power to prevent the boys from returning to the *Ice King*. But the lads kept on the vessel, there being nothing more to visit on land.

“We might heave ’em overboard some night,” suggested Loggermore, but the other sailor would not listen to this proposal. He was willing to have the youths left behind, but that was as far as he cared to go.

“Never mind, we can watch them at Upernivik,” said the tar. “There will be a better chance to leave them behind there than there was here.” And with this proposal the affair rested, although Loggermore declared that if there was any more killing of birds from the ship he would heave the boys overboard sure. This may seem a terrible threat to some of my readers, but they must remember that some sailors, especially ignorant ones, are extremely superstitious, and they deem the killing of a bird at sea the worst kind of a bad omen.

The run up the Greenland coast was made without unusual incident. They passed a number of icebergs, but always at a distance, and the small ice did not bother them seriously. The weather moderated a little, so that life on deck proved delightful. The boys saw more wild geese, some ducks, and also some northern petrel, but, warned by Captain Williamson, did no more shooting.

“Upernivik is about the last settlement north of any importance,” said Professor Jeffer to the boys. “It can be called the most northern town in the world. It is a trading station for the Esquimaux, and also has a mine, from which large quantities of cryolite are obtained.”

“And what is cryolite?” asked Chet, curiously.

The professor smiled faintly. “It is a substance, found only in Greenland, from which washing soda is made, and also some kinds of baking powder. The metal, aluminum, is obtained from it, and it is also used in the making of certain kinds of glass. Greenland has a very large stratum or deposit of cryolite, and it is a source of considerable revenue to the mine owners, and also to the Danish government, the latter putting a heavy export tax on it.”

It was nightfall when the steamer dropped anchor in the harbor of Upernivik. From the deck of the vessel Barwell Dawson, who had visited the settlement before, pointed out the governor’s house, the Moravian church, and other buildings.

“There are quite a number of Esquimaux here, full-blooded and half-breeds,” said he. “Most of them live in the stone huts along the mountain side.”

“What do you mean by half-breeds?” questioned Andy.

“The half-breeds are the families of the Danish men who have married Esquimaux women,” replied the explorer. “Some of the half-breeds are very intelligent, and they are also much cleaner than the full-blooded Esquimaux.”

“Are the Esquimaux very dirty?” asked Chet.

“They are the dirtiest people on earth,” was the emphatic answer. “And why shouldn’t they be? They never wash, and the only thing they rub on their bodies is whale or seal oil, to keep out the cold and to help limber them up.”

“Gracious! I shouldn’t want to live in the same house with them!” cried Andy.

“You couldn’t live with them, that is, not for any great length of time. The smell would make you sick.”

CHAPTER XX—FAST IN THE ICE

"Well, there is one piece of luck," said Barwell Dawson, the next morning. "Our collier is here, so we can take on coal at once, and get away from here inside of three or four days."

"Yes, we want to take advantage of the weather while it lasts," answered the captain of the *Ice King*. And the task of transferring the coal began an hour later.

Andy and Chet asked for permission to go ashore, and, after word had been sent to the governor of the place, they entered a steam launch in company with Barwell Dawson and Professor Jeffer. The explorer knew what was on Chet's mind, and aided him to find out if the *Northland* was at Upernivik.

"She is here," said Barwell Dawson, after making inquiries. "I will have you taken to her."

Chet found Tom Fetjen, a Danish-American, tall and powerful, with a shrewd but kindly face. He listened to the boy's story with interest, and then shrugged his big shoulders.

"I no can tell you mooch 'bout dat whaler, *Betsey Andrews*," he said, slowly. "I not know for truf what happen to him. But I hear som't'ing las' year. Two Esquimaux men come to me an' da say dat de whaleboat he got stuck by de ice far up dare." And Tom Fetjen waved his hand northward.

"Stuck in the ice?" queried Chet.

"Dat is what de Esquimaux men say. Da climb up de ice mountain an' see him ship stuck fast, but go—what you say him?—float, yes, float up dat way," and again the trader pointed northward.

"Do you mean that the *Betsey Andrews* got stuck in some floating ice, and was carried northward?" asked Chet.

"Yes, dat is eet. Nobody hear more of de whaleboat."

"Where did you hear this?"

"Hear him at Etah, las' summer."

"How did the Esquimaux know it was the *Betsey Andrews*?" asked Andy.

"One Esquimau big chief, got glass to look. He see de cap'n who got de one arm. He try to git to ship, but tumble in water—'most drown heem. Den snowstorm come big an' can't see de ship no more."

This was all the trader could tell. He was of the opinion, however, that the whaler had been finally crushed in the ice, and all those aboard had been lost.

But Chet would not believe this. He shut his teeth hard and looked at his chum.

"I've got to have positive proof before I give up," he said, in a voice that choked with sudden emotion.

Although the boys were not aware of it, Pep Loggermore and his crony did their best to follow them around Upernivik, hoping to place them in some position whereby it would be impossible to regain the ship. But, by mere chance, the boys kept out of the sailors' way, and when the coaling was at an end, and the *Ice King* sailed, they were on the ship.

"Let us try it again at Etah," said Loggermore to his crony.

"As you please, Pep," answered the other. His hatred of the lads who had killed the geese had somewhat subsided. But Loggermore was as much against Andy and Chet as ever. He had it firmly fixed in his mind that if they were taken along, dire disaster would surely overtake the expedition.

The course of the *Ice King* was now up Baffin Bay and past Cape York to the entrance to Smith Sound. Although it was midsummer, the weather seemed to grow colder hourly, and it was not long before the boys were glad enough to don additional clothing.

"As soon as we get to Etah you will get your first taste of polar exploration," said Barwell Dawson. "We'll go out on a hunt."

"Is it much of a settlement?" asked Chet.

"Hardly any settlement at all. In the summer the Esquimaux have their skin tents pitched there, and in the winter they put up a few *igloos*, that is, ice huts, and that's all."

That night came another scare. They almost ran into a tremendous iceberg that towered like a giant in the water. But the lookout saw the monster just in time—it was rather foggy, or he would have seen it sooner—and they sheered to windward.

"What a high iceberg!" exclaimed Chet, when the danger was past.

"Yes, and to think that it is much deeper in the water than out of it," added Andy.

They reached the inlet leading to Etah in a fog, and that afternoon experienced a snowstorm that lasted for over two hours. Then the weather cleared, and they made out a number of tents lining the coast. Here and there they saw some Esquimaux in their strange little boats, fishing. The natives set up a shout when the *Ice King* came to anchor, and some lost no time in coming on board. They were strange-looking creatures, short of form and round of face, with straight black hair and mouths unusually large. But they were good-natured, and smiled and laughed as they talked to Barwell Dawson, Professor Jeffer, and Captain Williamson, all of whom could speak a little of the Esquimaux tongue.

The boys were allowed to go on a hunt the next day. Led by two of the Esquimaux, the party went off in one of the small boats to a point where it was said game might be found. They were out for six hours with Barwell Dawson, and came back loaded down with birds, and with a small polar bear. Chet and Andy had shot the bear between them, and were proud of their haul.

"The first polar bear!" cried Andy. "I don't think it will be the last."

Before returning to the ship, the two boys went off on a little excursion by themselves. Pep Loggermore followed them, and tried to think of some way of keeping them from returning to the *Ice King*, but got no opportunity of carrying out his plan to do them harm.

At Etah a large quantity of meat was purchased from the Esquimaux, who had been awaiting Mr. Dawson's arrival for over a month. They had been out hunting bears, musk oxen, walrus, seals, and other game for him, and they had likewise collected for him over a hundred of the best Esquimaux dogs to be found. With the dogs they brought six sledges, that were light but strong.

"My, but those Esquimaux do smell!" was Andy's comment when ten of them came on board and took quarters in the forward part of the ship. "They smell worse than a fish market!"

The dogs were penned up, and made the air hideous with their barking and snarling. All the supplies were taken on board, and then the *Ice King* steamed away from Etah on her voyage into the great Unknown.

"It's good-by now to everything, civilized and uncivilized," said Barwell Dawson. "From now on we have got to trust to luck as to what comes."

It was the explorer's plan to push as far as the ice would let him into Smith's Sound. Then, when the *Ice King* could sail no further, they would disembark and prepare for the coming winter—the terrible Long Night. Now it was summer, and daylight at all hours of the twenty-four.

A good deal of floating ice was encountered within six hours after leaving Etah, and after that the thumping and grinding on the sides was kept up night and day. Although the vessel had full steam up, the engines were run slowly, as too hard a crash might result disastrously. Occasionally they could make out the shore line, but usually low icebergs shut the land from sight.

"I don't think we can go much further," remarked Andy, on the third day out from Etah. "The ice seems to be closing in all around us."

Nevertheless, the next day they struck a wide "lead," and ran through this for miles. But then the ice became thicker than ever, and Captain Williamson shook his head gravely.

"Not much further, Mr. Dawson," he said. "I think we had best make for the shore yonder," and he pointed with his gloved hand.

"As you think best, Captain," was the explorer's reply. "We have now come about as far as I thought we could go."

The boys watched the working of the vessel until late that night. When they awoke in the morning, they found that the engines had stopped. They dressed and ran on deck.

"Well, I never!" cried Andy. "We are high and dry now, and no mistake!"

All around them were immense fields of ice and snow. The *Ice King* had slid up on the ice, and the big, transparent blocks held her as if in a vise. Not far away was an iceberg that looked like a small mountain.

"This is as far as the ship will go," said Professor Jeffer to the lads. "The rest of our journey will be made by walking, or on the dog sledges."

It was so cold the boys were glad enough to hurry below and drink some steaming coffee. While eating, they learned that Barwell Dawson had already arranged to take the most of the supplies

ashore and house them on a hill not far away. The Esquimaux were getting out the sledges and dogs to do the carting.

“We’ll go off on a hunt soon,” said the explorer. “But before we do that we must get ready for winter, which will ere long be upon us.”

Several days of hard labor for all hands followed, as many of the supplies were taken off the steamer and carted on the sledges to a small hill, upon which the Americans erected a living hut and a storehouse, and the Esquimaux put up half a dozen *igloos* and dog shelters. The boys were glad to work, for it helped to keep their blood in circulation.

The Esquimaux had a perfect system regarding their dogs and sledges, and were under the leadership of a chief named Olalola. Olalola had the largest sledge and the best dogs, and it was a sight to see him load up and start his team of half a dozen or more.

Crack! would go the whip, and away the dogs would bound with their load. Sometimes the boys or the men would ride on the sledge, and Andy and Chet thought it the best sport they had ever experienced.

A week passed, and during that time they experienced two blinding snowstorms. But then the weather cleared off as if by magic, and Barwell Dawson asked the boys if they wanted to go off on a hunt after polar bears.

“Just the thing!” cried Andy, and Chet said practically the same.

It was decided that the party should be made up of Mr. Dawson, the boys, Olalola, and several others. The Esquimau was to take along some provisions on the sledge, for it was thought the party might be out several days.

“This is something like it!” cried Chet, as they trudged along over the snow and ice. “I hope we bag about a hundred polar bears!”

“Why not make it two hundred while you are at it?” answered his chum, dryly.

The first day was a disappointment, as no game of any sort appeared in sight. But on the following morning Olalola said there were bears ahead, and they soon came upon unmistakable traces of the game.

They were going toward an icy hill, and rounding this they saw at least a dozen bears. Telling the Esquimau and the others to remain to the rear, Barwell Dawson crept up on the bears, taking Andy and Chet with him.

“Don’t fire until I give the command,” said the hunter, and both boys nodded to signify that they understood.

It was a thrilling moment for Andy and Chet, but they were used to hunting big game, so they did not get nervous. Coming up within gunshot, Mr. Dawson gave the signal, and all three fired their weapons. One bear fell dead, and another was badly wounded.

“Hurrah! that’s the way to do it!” cried Andy. “Come on, let us bag some more!”

He ran forward, and Chet and Mr. Dawson followed. The polar bears were evidently dumfounded, and did not know for the moment what to do. Some turned to run away, but others arose on their hind legs to do battle.

“Some of ’em are coming for us!” cried Chet, in alarm, and then Mr. Dawson’s rifle spoke up, and another of the big fellows was laid low. But the other bears leaped for the boys, as if to hug them to death or eat them up.

CHAPTER XXI—A FIGHT WITH POLAR BEARS

“Look out, he’s coming for you!” shouted Barwell Dawson.

Both Chet and Andy heard the words, but paid no attention. Their guns were raised, and each was aiming at the bear nearest to him. Crack! went Andy’s firearm, and the polar bear was halted by a wound in the forepaw.

Chet was not so fortunate, as his gun failed to go off. The next instant the polar bear leaped on him and bore him to the ice. As boy and beast went down, Barwell Dawson opened fire, and the bear was hit in the side, a wound that made him more savage than ever.

Although Chet was sent sprawling, he did not lose his presence of mind. As quick as a flash he rolled over, from under the very forepaws of the polar bear, and continued to roll, down a slight hill to one side.

By this time Andy and Mr. Dawson were firing again, and Olalola, coming up, used several spears with telling effect. At the increase in noise,—the Esquimau adding his yells to the cracks of the weapons,—one after another of the bears turned and commenced to run away.

“Don’t go after them!” sang out Barwell Dawson. “They may turn again, if you do. Shoot them from a distance.”

Once more he discharged his gun, and Andy did likewise. Then Chet scrambled up and used his firearm, the piece this time responding to the touch on the trigger.

Another of the bears was now killed outright, while the largest of the group was badly wounded in the hind quarters. This bear dropped behind the others and, drawing closer, Chet let him have a shot in the ear that finished him. The other beasts disappeared behind a hummock of ice, and that was the last seen of them.

“Are you hurt?” asked Andy of his chum, as soon as the excitement was over, and while all were reloading their weapons and the Esquimau was securing his spears.

“Got a scratch on the back of the neck,” answered Chet. “It’s bleeding a little, but that’s all. Say, this is a dandy haul, isn’t it?” he continued, enthusiastically.

“We must be more careful in the future,” said Barwell Dawson. “Usually polar bears are timid and run away, but these chaps must have been very hungry, and that made them aggressive.”

The largest of the polar bears was all of eight feet long, and correspondingly heavy. To lift him on the sledge was no easy task, and with the others, the hunters found they had all the game the dogs could drag over the ice and snow.

“We may as well start for the ship at once,” said Barwell Dawson. “Olalola thinks a snowstorm is coming, and we don’t want to get caught out in it if we can help it.”

They returned to where they had encamped for the night, and picked up the few belongings left there. Then they started direct for the shelters put up near the ship.

The last half-mile of the journey was covered in a heavy snowstorm, and all were glad when they caught sight of the *Ice King*. They found Captain Williamson and Professor Jeffer on the deck, watching for them.

“I was afraid you would be snowbound,” said the captain.

He and the professor were astonished at the sight of the polar bears. The game was taken to one of the storehouses, where some of the natives were set to work to prepare it for use during the winter now close at hand.

It had been arranged that the Esquimaux and some of the sailors were to live on shore, while Barwell Dawson and his party, and the captain and engineer and two others, remained on the steamer. Thus all had more “elbow room” than if they had crowded the entire party in one place or the other. From the hold of the vessel several large lamps were produced and put into readiness for use.

“The darkness of the winter months is the worst feature of a trip to these parts,” explained Barwell Dawson to the boys. “Of course, I hope for a great deal of moonlight, but even so the dark days are many, and lights are absolutely necessary.”

“The darkness has a strange effect on some people,” said Professor Jeffer. “I have heard of sailors going mad because of it. But I trust nothing of the sort happens to any one in our party.”

After that, there was a good deal to do for a week around the ship and up at the hut, and the days passed swiftly. Then, one clear morning, the explorer called to Andy and Chet.

“Come with me, if you want to get your last look at the sun for some months,” said he.

They left the *Ice King* and walked to the top of an icy cliff a mile away. Professor Jeffer was with them, and so were Dr. Slade and Mr. Camdal.

On the top of the cliff they had to wait nearly an hour before the sun showed itself. The long beams of light flashed across the ice, and then gradually grew dimmer and dimmer, and then disappeared altogether.

“Gone!” said Chet, in a low tone. All had been very silent for several minutes.

“Yes,” answered Barwell Dawson. “And you’ll not see the sun again until next February!”

“What a night!” murmured Andy, and somehow his heart seemed to sink within him.

It was a silent party that returned to the ship. Andy and Chet both began to wonder how the long spell of darkness was going to affect them.

“It won’t be so bad the first few days—or nights,” said Andy. “But after that——” He finished with a grave shake of his head.

“Let us try to occupy our minds with work and by reading,” answered Chet. “I guess it’s the only way to keep from going crazy.”

The lights were lit after that, and kept burning brightly all through the long winter—one large lamp on the deck of the *Ice King*, and another equally large in front of the hut on shore. Smaller lamps were likewise kept burning constantly indoors.

Hunting continued from week to week, and the boys aided in the shooting of more polar bears, and also in bringing down several large musk oxen. The musk oxen, with heads resembling big buffalo bulls, were a source of great wonder to the lads.

“This is hunting, and no mistake,” said Andy. “I wonder what the fellows in Maine would say to these, if they could see them.”

“Beats moose hunting, doesn’t it, Andy?”

“Rather. By the way, Chet, I’d like to know how my Uncle Si is making out.”

“He ought to be up here. Phew! wouldn’t he complain of the cold! It was 38° below zero this morning!”

“I know it, and Professor Jeffer says it will be colder than that before long.”

They had to guard carefully against the cold, for it would have been an easy matter to have an ear or one’s nose frostbitten. As it was, one of the sailors had a big toe “nipped” by the frost, and suffered greatly because of it. The boys found it unwise even to touch anything metallic with a bare hand, for fear the member would get “burnt” or cling fast.

It was late in November that something happened which disturbed the party not a little. Late in the day, while Andy and Chet were dozing in their bunks, they not having anything to do, there came a curious grinding sound from the sides of the *Ice King*.

“What is that?” asked Andy, as he sat up and rubbed his eyes.

“Bless me if I know,” responded Chet. “Let us go on deck and see.”

They donned their fur coats and mitts, and ran out on the deck just as the grinding increased. They found Captain Williamson and Barwell Dawson engaged in earnest conversation.

“It’s the ice pack,” explained the explorer. “It is closing in on us.”

“Closing in!” cried Andy. “Why, it’s as close in now as it can get!”

“Not quite,” was the grim reply.

“Why, do you mean——” Andy stopped short.

“Isn’t the *Ice King* strong enough to stand the pressure?” questioned Chet.

“The steamer is braced to stand a great deal. But this ice has an enormous power,” replied Captain Williamson. “If it comes against us too strongly, it may crush the ship like an eggshell.”

At first the commander could think of nothing to do to relieve the vessel, but presently it was suggested that the ice be chopped away from the bow and one side in a slanting direction. All hands, including the boys, went at the work, with picks, and crowbars, and spades.

It was a fight against nature and the elements, and never did men and boys work harder. As they labored, the ice of the vast pack continued to move closer to the ship, causing the *Ice King* to groan and crack in every timber.

"If she breaks, jump for your lives!" cried Captain Williamson. He was more anxious than words can describe, yet he managed to keep cool, and directed the work as well as he was able.

By night the ice had been chopped away to the depth of a foot and a half the entire length of the vessel. Then the wind, which had been blowing strongly from one direction, shifted to another, and the pressure on the vessel let up a little.

"I think we are safe for the present," said the captain. "All hands can rest for a few hours. But come in a hurry if I blow the whistle."

Utterly exhausted by their labors, the boys went to their stateroom and threw themselves down to rest. Both fell asleep instantly, and it seemed to Andy that he had not slept more than five minutes when Chet shook him.

"On deck!" cried the former. "The whistle is blowing!"

They had been asleep five hours, and the rest had refreshed them greatly. They hurried again to the deck, and as they did so they felt the *Ice King* tremble from stem to stern.

"I'd rather be outside than in—if she is going to be crushed," said Andy, in a voice he tried in vain to steady. He well knew what it would mean to be cast away in the Arctic regions without a ship.

Again everybody was set to work to cut away the ice at the side and the bow of the *Ice King*. Small holes were drilled, and cartridges exploded in them to help the work along. In the meantime the crashing of the ice pack continued, as the wind, having changed to its former course, drove the great white mass tighter and tighter against the vessel.

"I am afraid the ship is doomed!" cried Professor Jeffer. He was laboring as well as his years permitted.

"A little deeper!" cried Captain Williamson. "And throw all the coal on deck overboard!"

The coal added considerable to the weight of the ship, and when this was deposited on the ice, the vessel's draught was lessened by several inches. With a straining and cracking she came up, and then the work of cutting the ice at her side continued.

By noon, the prospect of clearing the *Ice King* was almost hopeless. The interior timbers were cracking, and one had snapped in twain. To prevent a conflagration, the fires were put out, and the lamps also extinguished.

"Another hour will tell the tale," said Barwell Dawson, almost sadly. "A little more pressure, and if she doesn't come up she will be smashed as flat as a pancake!"

Captain Williamson was now trying to raise the vessel by means of steel cables slipped under the bow and stern. The cable ends on the ice pack side were fastened down by crowbars set in deep holes, and the other ends were hauled as near taut as possible by means of temporary windlasses.

“I believe we’ll make it!” cried the captain, presently. “Now then, one more turn on the cables!”

The windlasses groaned and twisted, and then, of a sudden, one broke from its fastenings and hit the side of the ship, letting the steel cable slip down into the water. This allowed the bow to rise and the stern to go down.

“The ice pack is moving!” yelled one man. “It’s coming in for all it is worth! The *Ice King* is doomed!”

CHAPTER XXII—THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT

The crashing and cracking sounds which rent the air seemed to justify the man's cry. It was true the ice pack was being driven in sharply by the wind, which had greatly increased during the past hour. It pressed on the side of the ship with telling force, and all those outside heard several timbers give way inside and collapse.

But just at the crucial moment the work the men had been doing proved its worth. The ice began to crack and split a little deeper down, and suddenly the *Ice King* gave a start upward.

"I think she is coming up!" cried Dr. Slade, and even as he spoke the steamer rose up higher as part of the ice pack got under the hull. Then came a swishing sound, some water spurted up into the air, and the vessel came up still higher, while the ice appeared to close in solidly under the keel.

"Saved!" roared Captain Williamson, and his face showed his relief.

"Are you sure?" asked Andy, anxiously.

"Yes, my lad. The *Ice King* is now riding on top of the ice instead of between it. Any additional move of the ice pack will simply force us upward."

"She may tip over on her side!" cried Chet.

"We can easily guard against that, Chet. Yes, we are saved, and I am mighty glad of it."

"And so am I," added Barwell Dawson.

The grinding of the ice pack continued for several days, and the vessel was squeezed several inches higher. But the pressure on the side was gone completely, and the ship's carpenter was set to work to repair the damage done. One of the timbers running across the boys' stateroom had been snapped in twain, and the lads viewed the wreckage in deep concern.

"If we had been sleeping in here when that happened, we might have been killed," said Chet, and his chum agreed with him.

During the following three weeks it snowed a great deal. It was, however, clear on Christmas Day, and the boys went out for a walk in the vicinity of the vessel. All hands were treated to a dinner of wild duck and plum pudding, and something of a church service was held by the captain, assisted by Dr. Slade, who had a good tenor voice, and had once sung in a church choir.

"Makes a fellow feel just a little bit less like a heathen," remarked Chet, after the church service had come to an end.

"Indeed, that is true," answered Andy. At Pine Run he had attended the village chapel whenever he had the chance to do so.

As Professor Jeffer had predicted, it grew steadily colder, and there were many days between Christmas and the middle of January when the boys did not care to venture outside. Outdoor work

was out of the question, and all hands busied themselves within as best they could. The men smoked and played games, and sometimes got up boxing matches. The boys often took part in the games, and Chet showed his skill as a boxer by flooring two of the tars hand-running.

Yet with it all the time passed slowly, and both Andy and Chet were anxious for the Long Night to come to an end. The darkness was beginning to tell on many of the party, and Pep Loggermore especially began to act strangely. Once he began to sing hysterically, and the doctor had to give him some medicine to quiet him.

“He’s a strange Dick, that chap,” said Captain Williamson. “I am sorry I had him sign articles with me. He’s one of the old-fashioned superstitious kind that I don’t like.”

The boys were glad when the full moon shone down on the ship, for then it was almost as bright as day. The moonshine made the distant cliffs and peaks of ice look like castles of white, and added a rare beauty to the scene. Professor Jeffer took several photographs in the moonlight,—of the ship, the hut and storehouse, and of different members of the party. To pass the time, some of these films and plates were developed on the ship, and the boys aided in printing the pictures, many of which proved very good.

One moonlight night Andy and Chet determined to take a short walk to a point some distance behind the storehouse, and in the direction of the *igloos* of the Esquimaux. So far, they had not seen the inside of any of the houses of ice, and they were a bit curious to know just how the natives lived.

They soon met Olalola, who had been on a hunt, and he invited them inside his temporary home, and one after another they crawled through the passageway that answered for a vestibule.

Inside, the *igloo* was about ten feet in diameter, and rounding upward into a dome a foot or two above their heads. Here lived six of the Esquimaux. They had some dirty skins on the floor and in the center was a tiny fire, resting on some flat stones, the smoke escaping through some small holes in the top of the dome.

The smell was something awful in the place, coming from some seal meat that was cooking over the fire, and also from the pipes of the Esquimaux, who were all smoking stuff that the lads later on learned was a combination of plug tobacco and seal hair—the hair being added to the tobacco to make the latter last longer.

Olalola could speak a few words of English, and he invited the lads to have some of the stew that was being made. Just for the novelty each lad tried a mouthful. But to swallow the nauseating mess was impossible, and they had to spit it out. At this all of the Esquimaux laughed loudly. They were not in the least offended because the boys did not like the food.

“Boy no eat, me eat,” said Olalola, and filled his mouth with great gusto. Then the youths excused themselves and got out as fast as possible.

“Phew! talk about fresh air!” cried Chet, when he and his chum were in the open. “Wouldn’t you think the Esquimaux would die in that kind of rot?”

“I don’t believe they are very healthy,” answered Andy. “Dr. Slade says they are not.”

“They all need a bath, and need it badly,” said Chet, in deep disgust. It was his first and last visit to the *igloos*.

When it was clear the Esquimaux often played games. One was leapfrog, and another was of the “snap-the-whip” variety. In the latter sport they would roar loudly when the last man was sent whirling over and over on the ice.

“You’d think he’d break his head,” was Andy’s comment, as he saw one unfortunate land with a crash on a hummock of ice.

“Well, they are rough fellows, and so their sports must be rough,” answered Professor Jeffer.

Nearly every Esquimau is skillful with the dog-whip, and one of their pastimes amused the boys very deeply. The men would gather around in a big circle, and in the center of this a small object, usually of wood, would be half buried in the snow. Then the men, each with his long dog-lash, would try to “snap” the object from the ring. Crack! would go the lash, making a report like a pistol, and the snow would come up in a little whirl, and sometimes the object would come with it.

“Pretty good shots, some of them,” said Andy.

“Wait until we get on the road with the sledges,” answered Barwell Dawson. “Then you’ll see some fancy doings with the whips. Some of those chaps can reach a dog twenty feet away, and take a nip out of his hide as quick as a wink. That’s the way they get the dogs under such perfect control.”

“I wish I could learn how to drive the dogs,” said Andy.

“You’ll have plenty of chance, when we get on the move again,” returned the explorer.

Two days later, Andy was walking from the storehouse to the ship when, in the dim light from the lamp near the hut, he saw something unusual that attracted his attention. A man was crawling along on all-fours, muttering wildly to himself.

“Whatever can that fellow be up to?” asked the boy of himself. For the instant he thought he might be mistaken, and that the form was that of some wild beast.

His curiosity aroused to a high pitch, the lad stopped short, and then made a detour, coming up on the opposite side of the storehouse. Here he found the man, still on all-fours, bending over a case of some sort.

“Oh, this darkness! Why don’t the sun shine?” the man was muttering to himself. “I must have light! I will have light!”

“It is Pep Loggermore, and he is as crazy as a loon!” murmured Andy. “I had better tell the captain of this at once! The sailor may hurt somebody if I don’t!”

Andy turned around, to make a quick run toward the ship, when he heard the scratching of a match. A tiny flash of flame followed, and in that little flare of light he saw the crazed sailor bending over what looked to be a can of oil!

“He is going to set something on fire!” thought Andy. “Maybe the storehouse! That’s his crazy idea of getting light!”

Andy was right, Loggermore was trying to set fire to the storehouse. Already he was pouring oil from the can over a number of boxes, the ends of which formed that side of the shelter.

“If I run to the ship, it will take time,” reasoned Andy. “By the time I get back with some of the others it may be too late. What shall I do?”

It was a hard question to answer. He had no desire to tackle the crazy sailor alone. But even while he stood debating with himself he saw Loggermore strike another match.

“Stop! Don’t light that, Loggermore!”

So shouting, Andy leaped toward the man, who was still crouched down, mumbling to himself about wanting a light. At the sound of the youth’s voice, the sailor turned, and something like a snarl broke from his lips.

“Go away! Go away!” he shrieked.

“Loggermore, you mustn’t set anything on fire.”

“I want light! I must have light! I hate the darkness!” growled the crazed sailor.

“You’ll burn up all our stores. If you do that, we’ll starve to death!” continued Andy, as he drew closer.

“I want light!” went on Loggermore, doggedly. “The darkness hurts my head—I can’t think straight. Stand back and see what a fine light I’ll soon have!” And so speaking, he lit another match, for the other had fallen in the snow and gone out.

“Help! help!” yelled Andy, at the top of his lungs. He could think of nothing else to do. “Help! help!”

“Shut up!” cried the crazed sailor. “Shut up!” And now, dropping the match he had just struck, he leaped at Andy and caught him by the shoulder and the arm.

The grip of the crazy fellow was like steel, and do his best, the boy could not break away. Pep Loggermore whirled him around and sent him crashing up against the boxes of the storehouse. There both stood, panting heavily, with the sailor’s eyes glowing like two balls of fire.

“Le—let me go!” gasped Andy. “Loggermore, you are crazy—you don’t know what you are doing. Don’t be so foolish, that’s a good fellow——”

“No, no, I’ll not let you go! You are a Jonah, Andy Graham! You shot the geese, you and that other lad, and you’ve brought us all kinds of trouble! I’ll not let you go!” shrieked Loggermore and then he slammed Andy against the boxes once more. The feet of both came down on the can and on the box of matches the sailor had dropped, smashing each down into the ice and snow.

Then suddenly a light flared up, coming from the broken box of matches. They spluttered an instant and set fire to the oil, and also to the clothing of the man and the boy. Loggermore was too crazy to mind this, but Andy was filled with horror.

“Let go!” yelled the youth, and struggled in vain to release himself. But he could not break that awful hold, and so he dragged the tar with him, and both rolled over and over in the snow. Andy tried to kick out the fire around his legs, and in the meanwhile Loggermore got a grip on his windpipe as if to strangle him. The boy tried to fight the man off, but could not, and presently all grew dark around him, and then he knew no more.

CHAPTER XXIII—"NORTH POLE OR BUST!"

Down in the cabin of the *Ice King*, close to a roaring fire, Captain Williamson and Barwell Dawson were playing a game of checkers—the captain's favorite amusement. Chet had been watching with interest, but had now gone on deck for a few minutes, to get the fresh air and to see what had become of his chum.

Suddenly through the stillness of the Arctic night Chet heard Andy's cry for aid. He strained his eyes and saw the flicker of a light, as Loggermore struck one of the matches.

"Something is wrong," cried Chet to himself, and then tumbled down the companionway in a hurry.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Captain Williamson, startled by the youth's abrupt entrance.

"Something is wrong with Andy—he is calling for help!" answered Chet.

Both the captain and the explorer leaped up, scattering the checkers in all directions. Each ran for his fur coat and mitts, and each caught up a gun, and Chet did the same. Then they scrambled up on deck in double-quick haste, and leaped over the side of the steamer on to the uneven ice below.

"Where is he?" asked Barwell Dawson.

"Up at the storehouse. He yelled——Look, the place is on fire!"

Both men gazed in the direction, and then Captain Williamson let out a yell that could be heard throughout the entire ship: "All hands turn out to fight fire!"

Chet started on a run, with Barwell Dawson at his heels, the captain remaining behind to rouse the hands to action, for in a twinkling he realized what it would mean were the stores burned.

When Chet reached his chum, Andy lay flat on his back in the snow, motionless. Pep Loggermore was dancing before the ever-increasing flames, shouting gleefully.

"Light at last! I told you I'd have light!" shrieked the crazed sailor.

"Andy, what is it?" asked Chet, and bent over his chum. Then he saw some sparks on Andy's clothing, and saw that part of his lower garments had been burnt off. Loggermore had had sense enough to extinguish the blaze on his own clothing.

Soon half a dozen of the sailors and Esquimaux were on the scene, and they began to put out the flames by throwing snow and cakes of ice on the storehouse. In the meantime Chet pulled Andy to a safe distance. As he did this the latter opened his eyes and started up.

"Le—let go, Loggermore!" he gasped.

"It's all right, Andy."

"Oh, is that you, Chet! Whe—where is Loggermore?"

“Dancing around like a maniac.”

“He is crazy. He—he tried to burn me and strangle me!” panted Andy.

“What in the world made him crazy?”

“The darkness. He wanted a light, so he set fire to the storehouse.”

By this time Andy felt a little better. But he was very weak, and Chet had to help him back to the steamer. Here he sat down and told his tale. Then Chet went out to relate what he had heard to Captain Williamson and the others.

It took but a few minutes of energetic work to put out the fire. When the commander of the *Ice King* saw the battered oil can and box of matches he was furious.

“The man who did this ought to be strung up on the yardarm!” he exclaimed.

“Loggermore did it, but he is not accountable,” said Chet, and told what Andy had had to say.

“Where is Loggermore?” asked Dr. Slade. “I’ll have to take him in hand.”

A hurried search was made for the crazed man, but he had run away. A party was sent out for him, and he was found nearly a mile from the ship, dancing on the ice, singing loudly, and tearing his clothing to shreds. It was with difficulty that he was brought back and placed in the ship’s brig. Then Dr. Slade gave him a sleeping potion and he sank into a profound slumber. When he came out of his sleep, he said he had had some bad dreams, but he could not remember anything of the fire or of his attack on Andy.

“He is not to be trusted,” said the ship’s physician. “You can give him his liberty, but I advise that an eye be kept on him.”

“We’ll keep an eye on him, never fear,” answered Captain Williamson, grimly.

Andy suffered very little from the attack of the frenzied sailor, and in a day or two he felt as well as ever.

“But I’ll never trust Loggermore again,” he told Chet. “After this he must keep his distance.”

Day after day passed, and at last the Long Night came to an end. There was general rejoicing, and when Andy saw the sun once more he threw up his cap in his delight, and fairly danced a jig.

“It’s grand, Chet!” he cried.

“Grand doesn’t express it,” was Chet’s answer. “It’s sublime! Andy, I don’t know how you feel, but I don’t want to go through another such spell of darkness.”

“Nor I,—not for a hundred thousand dollars! Oh, a fellow doesn’t know how good sunshine is until he can’t have it!”

Preparations for the departure northward had been going on steadily, the Esquimaux getting their dogs and sledges in readiness, and Barwell Dawson and the others going over the supplies to be taken along. Of the supplies the greater portion was pemmican, over a thousand pounds being

placed on the sledges. They also had bear meat, peas, beans, bacon, and a small quantity of coffee and tea, with salt, sugar, and pepper. They likewise carried a portable alcohol stove with some tins of alcohol, matches in water-tight boxes, and such cooking utensils as were absolutely necessary. Professor Jeffer had the scientific instruments, including a high-grade sextant, thermometer, and barometer, and also a good film camera with numerous rolls of films. Four shotguns were taken along, and three rifles, with a large quantity of ammunition. Dr. Slade carried his medicine case.

As soon as the Long Night was at an end, more Esquimaux put in an appearance, with their dogs and sledges. One of these was named Estankawak, and Barwell Dawson learned that he was considered one of the best dog-drivers in the Arctic region.

“Then we must have Estankawak by all means,” said the explorer, and interviewed the fellow without delay. When he came back from the interview, his face showed his excitement.

“I have just heard great news!” he cried, to Professor Jeffer and Dr. Slade.

“What is it?” asked the professor, while the boys listened with interest.

“According to what this fellow Estankawak says, Dr. Frederick Cook reached the North Pole last Spring.”

“Reached the North Pole!” exclaimed Professor Jeffer and Dr. Slade in a breath.

“Yes. He got there April 21, 1908, and he is now on his way back to the United States to break the news.”

“Was the Esquimau able to give you any particulars?” questioned the doctor.

“Some, but not a great many. He says Dr. Cook left Annootok about the middle of February, taking with him eleven natives with their sledges, and over a hundred dogs. The party pushed on steadily day after day, across Ellesmere Land to the Garfield Coast, hunting considerably on the way. From Nansen Sound Dr. Cook made almost a bee-line for the Pole, a distance of about eight degrees, or, roughly speaking, five hundred and fifty miles. On his final dash, he had with him only two Esquimaux, the others being sent back at various times.”

“And where is he now?” questioned Andy.

“He is getting back to civilization as fast as possible, to send word home. If what Estankawak says is true, Dr. Cook has done a wonderful thing—something for which explorers have been striving for ages.”

“Then we won’t be the first at the Pole!” said Chet, ruefully.

“Never mind, Chet, if we get there, we’ll be the first boys at the Pole!” answered Andy, quickly.

“That’s so,” answered Chet, and looked a little relieved.

“Did you ask the Esquimau if he knew anything about Commander Peary’s trip this year?” questioned Dr. Slade.

“Yes. He tells me that Peary is north of us, at Cape Sheridan, and has been there since the middle of last September. He, too, is going to make a dash for the Pole, and may even now be on the way.”

“Perhaps we’ll meet him!” cried Andy.

“It is not likely with so many miles of snow and ice between us,” answered Barwell Dawson.

The news concerning Dr. Cook made the explorer more anxious than ever to be on the way, and one bright Wednesday afternoon it was announced that the expedition would start northward on the following morning. The party was to consist of Mr. Dawson, the professor, Dr. Slade, Mr. Camdal, and the two boys, and eight Esquimaux. The natives were to drive eight of their best sledges drawn by ninety-six dogs. They were to travel northward to Grant Land, and then make a straight dash for the Pole. Captain Williamson and his men were to remain as near them along the coast as the weather would permit, awaiting their return.

“And I hope with all my heart that you all come back safe and sound,” said the commander of the *Ice King*.

“Wish you were going along, Captain,” said Andy.

“So do I, lad; but my place is by the ship. You’ll want the *Ice King* when you get back.”

At last came the moment for leaving. All the sledges were packed, and the dogs harnessed and ready for action. At the side of the leading team stood Estankawak, long whip in hand.

“All ready!” shouted Barwell Dawson, after a general handshaking.

“Good luck to you!” cried Captain Williamson. “Be sure and bring that North Pole back with you!”

“Sure—on our shoulders!” answered Andy, gleefully.

The explorer motioned to the Esquimau. Crack! went Estankawak’s long whip, and off the leading sledge started. The others followed in rapid succession. There was a cheer from those left behind, and an answering cheer from those who were leaving.

“It’s North Pole or bust!” said Chet, with a curiously dogged look on his face.

“North Pole or bust!” answered Andy.

“Do not be too sanguine,” said Dr. Slade. “Because Dr. Cook has reached that point does not say that we shall be equally successful.”

“Don’t you think we’ll get there, Doctor?” asked Chet, quickly.

“I hope so, but I am prepared to take what comes. I do not believe that you boys understand the dangers and difficulties of the trip before us. We may not reach the Pole, and we may not even get back alive. Arctic explorations have, in the past, cost many hundreds of lives.”

“Don’t discourage the lads,” broke in Professor Jeffer, briskly. “We shall succeed—I know it, I feel it. And when we stand on the apex of the world,—where there is no east, no west, no north, only south—ah, what a glorious prospect!” And he waved his arms enthusiastically.

“That’s the talk!” shouted Andy. “We’ll get there somehow, and don’t you forget it!”

“It’s North Pole or bust!” repeated Chet, “North Pole or bust!”

CHAPTER XXIV—THE LAST HUNT

It was Barwell Dawson's intention to strike out directly for Cape Richards, the most northerly point of Grant Land. It may be added that this locality was only a short distance west of the point from which Commander Peary made his successful dash for the Pole. Dr. Cook's route was still further westward, so Mr. Dawson's trail lay almost midway between those of the world-renowned Pole-seekers.

It was a clear, mild day, and for the first few miles the going was excellent. Everybody was in the best of humor, and the boys felt like whistling. Estankawak was in the lead with his sledge, and Olalola followed him, while the others came behind in a bunch. The dogs trotted along evenly, and the drivers had little trouble with them.

"This weather is fine," remarked Barwell Dawson. "I only trust it continues."

"Well, it will continue for a few days, that is certain," answered Professor Jeffer. "But after that ——" He shrugged his shoulders. "We'll have to take what comes."

For several days the expedition traveled through the heart of Ellesmere Land, and there found excellent hunting. Polar bears, musk oxen, and caribou were there in plenty, and the party also laid low many Arctic hares and foxes, and likewise a few Arctic petrel.

"We must hunt while we have the chance," said Barwell Dawson. "The more meat we secure now, the greater will be our stock of provisions when we get to where there is nothing but ice and snow." And all understood this, and hunted to the best possible advantage.

By the time the north shore of Grant Land was reached it was much colder, and now they occasionally encountered snowstorms, but fortunately these were of short duration. Reaching the vicinity of Cape Richards, they went into a temporary camp, to rest up and repair some of the sledges which had become broken.

"I am going on another hunt tomorrow—possibly our last," announced Barwell Dawson. "Do you boys want to go along?"

Both were eager to go, and the start was made directly after breakfast. They took with them two rifles and a shotgun, and provisions to last for four meals.

After skirting a small hill of ice, they came upon a narrow lead of clear blue water and following this, reached a point where the ice had been driven in a tight pack for miles. Here they saw the traces of a polar bear, and were soon hot on the trail, which led them along the lead, and then into the interior.

"I see him!" whispered Andy, after nearly a mile had been covered. "He is lying down behind yonder hummock!"

Andy was right, but before they could reach his bearship, the animal scented them and hobbled away.

“He is lame!” cried Chet. “I think we can catch him! Anyway, let us try.”

The others were willing, and away they went over the ice, which soon became comparatively smooth. Once Chet lost his footing and went flat. But he soon got up and continued after the others.

Finding he could not escape those who were pursuing him, the polar bear turned as if to attack them. Both Andy and Barwell Dawson fired at the beast, and he rolled over in a death convulsion, and was speedily put out of his misery by Chet with his hunting knife.

“See, his forefoot is gone,” said Andy, as they surrounded the game. “Looks to me as if some other animal had chewed it off.”

“If it hadn’t been for that, he would have outrun us,” answered Mr. Dawson.

They spent the remainder of the day looking for more game, and toward nightfall started for camp, dragging the bear after them.

“We’ll take him as far as possible, and then send the Esquimaux out for him with a sledge,” said the explorer.

All thought they knew the direction of the camp, but in looking for game they had become more or less turned around, and now Barwell Dawson called a halt.

“We may as well camp here for tonight,” he said. “We don’t want to tire ourselves out when it isn’t necessary.”

Some snow was scraped up, and a hut constructed, and they went inside and had supper. It was a cold meal, but they were hungry, and enjoyed every mouthful. Then they fixed the snow hut a little better, and lay down to sleep.

They had been resting for about three hours, when Chet awoke with a start. A loud barking had awakened him.

“Dogs!” he murmured. “Must be one of the Esquimaux has come for us.”

The barking had also awakened the others, and getting up, the three crawled out of the snow hut.

“They are not dogs, they are foxes!” cried Barwell Dawson.

“Yes, and look at the number!” ejaculated Andy. “Must be fifty at least!”

“Fifty?” repeated Chet. “All of a hundred, or else I don’t know how to count!”

Chet was right—there were all of a hundred foxes outside, sitting in a bunch, with their heads thrown back barking lustily. They had followed the blood-stained trail of the polar bear, and wanted to get at the game.

“This is very unpleasant,” said the explorer, gravely. “I didn’t think we’d meet foxes so far north. They can’t get much to eat up here, and they must be very hungry.”

“Do you fancy they will attack us?” questioned Andy.

“I don’t know what they will do. They want the bear, that’s certain.”

“If we only had a good campfire that would keep them at a distance.”

“Yes, but there is nothing here with which to build a fire.”

“Supposing we give ’em a dose of shot?” suggested Chet.

“You can try it.”

Chet had the shotgun, and taking careful aim at the pack of foxes, he fired. The flash of the firearm was followed by a wild yelp from the animals, and three leaped up, and then fell on the ice badly wounded. The others of the pack retreated for a few minutes, then came back to their former position, barking more loudly than ever.

“They are certainly game,” said Mr. Dawson. “Killing off a few of them don’t scare the others.”

“What are we to do?” asked Chet, dubiously. He had fancied the foxes would disappear at the discharge of the shotgun—for that was what foxes usually did down in Maine.

“We’ll do our best to stand them off until it grows lighter,” answered Barwell Dawson.

“Do you think they will run away if we go out after them?”

“Not if they are very hungry. Remember, a hungry animal is always desperate.”

Sleep was now out of the question, and they took turns in watching the foxes from the entrance to the snow hut. It was too cold to remain outside long.

“They are coming closer,” announced Andy, after two hours had passed. The foxes had stopped barking some time previously.

The report was true. The beasts were coming up stealthily, moving a foot or two, and then stopping to reconnoiter.

“I’ll give them another shot from the gun,” said Chet, and was as good as his word. This time two of the foxes were killed, and almost immediately their companions fell upon the carcasses, and began to tear them apart.

“That shows how hungry they are,” declared Barwell Dawson.

“Shall we give up the bear to them?” asked Chet.

“Not yet—but we may have to do so in order to escape them,” answered the explorer, with a doubtful shake of his head.

Another hour went by slowly, and by shouting they managed to make the foxes keep their distance. But then the animals commenced to come closer once more, slowly but surely encircling the snow hut.

It was a perilous situation to be in, and the youths realized it fully, as did Mr. Dawson. At any moment the foxes might make a concerted attack, and what could three persons do against ninety or

more of such beasts?

But now it was growing lighter, for which those in the hut were thankful. As the glow of the morning sun shone in the sky, Andy set up a loud shout and flung a fair-sized cake of ice at the foxes. The ice went gliding along, and struck one fox in the forelegs, wounding him severely.

“Hurrah! why didn’t we think of that before!” cried Chet.

“A good idea,” put in Barwell Dawson. “We’ll treat them as if they were ten-pins!”

Some loose ice was handy, and taking aim at the foxes, they sent piece after piece bowling over the icy surface on which they stood. The animals had again gathered in a pack, so they could not be missed. If one leaped out of the way, the chunk of ice hit the next, and soon there were howls of pain from several. Then the foxes retreated, and when Chet fired another shot, they suddenly turned tail, and trotted off, around a distant hill and out of sight.

“They didn’t like the ice and the daylight,” said Barwell Dawson. “I doubt if they come back very soon. They may try it again tonight, but we’ll be in camp by that time.”

Again they took up the march for camp, dragging the bear behind them as before. Going was fairly easy, and dragging the bear over the smooth surface was not much work, but whether they were heading just right was a question. Many times Barwell Dawson tried to get his bearings, but without success.

“I think I’ll have to climb yonder hill and take a look around,” said he, when the sun was fairly high. “We ought to be able to locate the camp from there.”

“We’ll go along,” said Andy, who did not care to be left alone in such a field of desolation.

“Yes, I would like to take a look around myself—just to see how the land—or, rather, ice—lies,” added his chum.

Leaving the bear where it was, the three started to climb the icy hill on their left. The snow on the side aided them, and they reached the summit with little difficulty.

“Phew! here is where one feels the wind!” cried Andy, as he drew his coat closer.

“Cuts like a knife, doesn’t it?” answered Chet. “Wonder what it will be up at the Pole.”

“Colder than this—you may be sure of that,” answered Barwell Dawson.

All gazed around them. To the east and west, as well as the south, lay the long stretches of snow and ice. Northward were the same ice and snow, with numerous leads of clear, bluish water.

“There is our camp,” said the explorer, pointing to some dark objects in the distance.

“How far is it?” asked Chet.

“I can’t say exactly. Probably two miles. Distances are very deceiving in this atmosphere.”

“There is that lead of water we must have followed yesterday,” said Andy, pointing.

“Yes,” answered Barwell Dawson. “We won’t go back that way, though—we’ll try the route over yonder.”

They were soon down the hill again, and making for the spot where they had left the polar bear. Resuming the load, they struck off as best they could in the direction of the camp.

About half the distance had been covered when they found themselves quite unexpectedly on the edge of some “young” ice,—that is, ice recently frozen. It did not seem safe, and Barwell Dawson decided to turn back, in the direction of the route they had followed when leaving camp. This brought them to the lead of the day previous, and they were surprised to note that the water was much wider than before.

“The ice must be moving,” said Barwell Dawson. “I think the sooner we get back to camp the better.”

They had a small hill of ice before them, and started to skirt this. Andy was in the lead, and as he passed a rise of ice and snow, he heard a sudden roar that made him jump.

“What was that?” he cried, in alarm.

“A walrus!” answered Barwell Dawson. “And close at hand, too. Get your guns ready, boys!”

CHAPTER XXV—CROSSING THE GREAT LEAD

In less than a quarter of a minute more they came in sight of the walrus, stretched out on the ice close to the lead. It was a large specimen, weighing a good many hundred pounds, and as awkward as it was heavy.

At the sight of the man and boys the beast raised itself up slightly and started as if to turn back into the water. As it did this, Barwell Dawson raised the rifle, took steady aim, and sent a bullet through its head.

“That’s a fine shot!” exclaimed Andy as the walrus fell back, uttering a roar of pain. “Shall I give it another?”

“Might as well,” was the explorer’s answer, and the lad quickly complied, the shot scattering into the walrus’s head, killing it almost instantly.

Scarcely had the echo of the discharge penetrated the air, when there came a number of loud roars from a little further around the icy hill. The hunters advanced, and Chet uttered a yell:

“Look! look! Did you ever see so many walruses in your life!”

He pointed ahead, but there was no need to do this, for all saw, only a couple of hundred feet away, a veritable herd of walruses numbering at least a hundred if not twice that number. They had heard the death-cry of their mate, and were lumbering forward to see what was the matter.

“We can’t fight such a crowd as that!” exclaimed Andy, aghast. “We had better clear out.”

“I wish the Esquimaux were here,” returned Barwell Dawson. “We could make a mighty haul of walrus meat, and that is what we need.” He looked at the boys. “Who is the better runner of you two?” he asked.

“Andy,” answered Chet, promptly. “He can outrun me twice over.”

“Then supposing you leg it for camp just as hard as you can,” continued the explorer. “Tell the Esquimaux and Mr. Camdal to come as quickly as possible.”

Without waiting for more words, Andy was off like a shot, directly past the walruses, who simply raised themselves up to gaze stupidly at him. The others had withdrawn from sight, and when the beasts saw Andy running away they thought themselves alone. Slowly they lumbered over the ice and surrounded their dead companion, uttering hoarse roars that could be heard a long way off.

Andy had the direction of the camp well in mind, and made as straight a run for it as the nature of the ice permitted. With such heavy clothing a record run was impossible, yet he covered the distance in good time.

He found the Esquimaux outside of their *igloos*, listening to the roaring of the walruses, which could be heard far away over the ice. He soon made them acquainted with what was wanted, and

with a glad shout they started off with their spears and bows and arrows. Then he aroused Mr. Camdal, and the latter got his shotgun and an ax.

“An ax is sometimes better than a gun,” explained Mr. Camdal. “You can sometimes crush a walrus’s skull with one well-aimed blow from an ax.”

The Esquimaux were ahead, but the others soon caught up with them. The walruses were still roaring and bellowing. One of the natives said this was a sign that they were getting ready to move.

As they drew closer, the Esquimaux spread out in a semicircle, and held up their spears ready for use. Olalola was in the lead, for he was considered by all to be the best hunter.

The walruses were found almost where they had been when Andy went for aid. A few surrounded the dead beast, sniffing the carcass suspiciously. Evidently they had never been hunted, and did not know the meaning of a gunshot.

As soon as the Esquimaux were sufficiently close, they threw their spears, and followed these up with a number of arrows. In the meantime the others discharged their firearms, and then Mr. Camdal rushed in boldly with his ax. By this means eight of the huge creatures were laid low before they could help themselves. The others turned to gain the open water, and went sousing in, sending the icy spray in all directions.

In his enthusiasm, Chet had drawn close to the lead, and before he knew it he found two of the walruses confronting him. He dodged one, but the other beast knocked him flat with one blow of a flipper. It looked as if his life would be crushed out a moment later.

Andy saw his chum fall, and for the moment his heart leaped into his throat. Then he jumped to the front, and sent a bullet into the breast of the walrus. But this was not fatal, and the walrus still lurched forward.

“Pull Chet away!” yelled Mr. Dawson, and fired from a distance, the bullet hitting the walrus just below the head. Then a spear whizzed through the air, thrown by Olalola. This caught the beast in the mouth, and went part way down its throat. The walrus flopped backward, and at that moment Andy caught his chum by the leg, and dragged him out of danger. Then Mr. Camdal came to the front, and a blow from the ax finished the beast.

The battle was now practically over, for the walruses that were alive had taken to the water. Those that were badly wounded could not swim very well, and the Esquimaux went after them, bringing in two. The total killing amounted to thirteen.

“That’s a lucky thirteen,” was Barwell Dawson’s comment, after the excitement was over. “The meat is just what we want, for the Esquimaux and the dogs, and the hides will come in handy, for footwear and harness.”

It was no easy task to get the walruses and the polar bear to the camp, and several of the dog sledges had to be brought up for that purpose. Then two days were spent in getting the meat ready for use, and in preparing the hides.

It was a clear, cold day when the next start northward was made. A light wind blew from the westward. Barwell Dawson calculated that they might cover twenty, if not twenty-five, miles.

“From now on we must do our best,” said he. “We can afford no more delays, otherwise our food supply may give out before we get back.”

Fortunately all were in the best of health, although Professor Jeffer suffered a little from snow-blindness. He at once donned a pair of smoked goggles, and several of the others did likewise.

The end of the week found them a hundred and fifteen miles closer to the Pole. They had encountered two leads, but had managed to get across without great difficulty. One of the sledges had been badly damaged, and it was resolved to break it up, and use the parts in repairing the other turnouts. Two of the dogs were sick, and had to be killed.

The next day the weather changed, and for forty-eight hours they struggled on through a heavy snowstorm, with the wind fortunately on their backs. During this storm one of the sledges fell into some open water, and three dogs were drowned, while a small portion of the outfit went out of sight into the Arctic Sea.

“All hands must be more careful after this,” said Barwell Dawson. “As we advance, going will probably become more treacherous. Keep your eyes wide open.”

As soon as it cleared off, Professor Jeffer brought out his sextant and his artificial horizon (a pan of mercury), and took an observation. He announced that they were close to the eighty-fourth degree of north latitude.

“That means we have but six more degrees to cover,—about four hundred miles,” said Chet.

“Professor, will you explain how you take the observation?” asked Andy.

“To be sure, certainly,” was the reply of the scientist. “It is very easy when one knows how. Here is the sextant, shaped, as you can see, like a piece of pie. The curved side has a scale on it, which is just one-sixth of a circle, hence the name of the instrument. Here is a telescope which is adjustable, and here are two glasses, one for the rays of the sun, or a star, and one for the horizon. At sea, I would use the natural horizon, but that is impossible here amongst the ice and snow, and so I use an artificial horizon made of a pan of mercury.

“When I want to take an observation, I watch my chronometer and wait until it is exactly twelve o’clock. Then I point the sextant in such a fashion that the rays of the sun, reflected downward, seem to meet or ‘kiss’ the horizon. As soon as I have the light of the sun in a direct range with the horizon, I use this thumbscrew, which sets the scale below, which, as you see, is divided into degrees, minutes, and seconds. As soon as I have read the scale by means of this magnifying glass, I consult this book I carry, the Ephemeris, or Nautical Almanac, and knowing the altitude of the sun, I readily calculate just where we are located, in degrees, minutes, and seconds north latitude.”

“It’s certainly a great instrument,” said Andy. “I’d like to try it some day.”

“You shall do so,” answered Professor Jeffer, and the very next day he allowed Andy to aid him in getting a true sight, and showed the boy how to work out the necessary calculations, and also make some allowances,—for such observations are not absolutely perfect in themselves.

They had now to advance with more caution than ever, and several days later came to some open water that looked as if it would bar all further progress. The lead was six or seven hundred feet wide, and ran east and west as far as eye could reach.

“Looks as if we were stumped,” murmured Chet. “How are we ever going to get across?”

A consultation was held, and then Barwell Dawson sent one party of Esquimaux to the eastward, and another to the westward, to look for a crossing place.

The Esquimaux were gone for two days, and during that time a fierce snowstorm came up, blotting out the landscape on all sides. It was so cold that the boys could do nothing outside, and were glad enough to crouch in an *igloo* for warmth. During the snowstorm, more of the dogs became sick, and four of the finest of the animals died.

“Something is wrong with them,” said Barwell Dawson, and had Dr. Slade make an examination. It was then learned that the dogs had been poisoned by eating tainted seal meat. The meat was inspected, and over a hundred pounds thrown away.

When the natives who had been sent out came back, they reported that to the east and the west the lead was wider than ever.

“Any smooth, floating ice?” asked Barwell Dawson.

Yes, some smooth ice had been seen, and the explorer went out the next day to investigate. As a result some large cakes were floated close to the temporary camp, and these were lashed together with walrus thongs.

“What do you intend to do with those?” questioned Professor Jeffer.

“I am going to try to get across to the other side,” answered Barwell Dawson. “We’ll use the flat ice for a ferry.”

“It’s a dangerous piece of business, sir.”

“I know it. But we must do something,” was the firm answer.

Two of the Esquimaux agreed to get on the floating cakes of ice, taking with them one of the teams and a sledge. It was no easy matter to induce the dogs to go aboard, as it might be called, and the natives were a good hour getting started. But once afloat, they crossed the lead without serious danger, and then began the task of getting the rest of the expedition over. This took all of that day, and also the next. On one of the trips an Esquimau went overboard, and Dr. Slade also took an icy bath, but both were quickly rescued, and bundled up in clothing that was dry and warm.

“There, I am glad we are over that lead!” exclaimed Barwell Dawson, when the last of the men and sledges had crossed. “I trust we don’t have any more of the sort to cross.”

“I am afraid we’ll have a great many,” answered Professor Jeffer. “Getting to the North Pole is going to be the hardest kind of a struggle.”

“We’ll get there—if we keep our health, and the provisions last,” said the explorer, confidently.

Once again they turned northward, into that vast region of ice, and snow, and solitude. It was certainly a gigantic undertaking. Would they succeed, or would all their struggles go for naught?

CHAPTER XXVI—ON A FLOATING MASS OF ICE

"One hundred and thirty miles more, Andy!"

"Who said so?"

"Professor Jeffer. He just took an observation," answered Chet, as he crawled into the *igloo* and slapped his mittened hands to get them warm.

Andy shook his head slowly. "Chet, it doesn't look as if we'd make it, does it?"

"Barwell Dawson says we are going to make it, or die in the attempt."

"Well, I'm just as eager, almost, as he is. But eagerness isn't going to make these leads close up, and isn't going to give us extra food and drink."

"Getting sick of pemmican and walrus meat?"

"Aren't you?"

"Rather—but there is no use in kicking."

"Say, do you know what day this is?"

"No."

"The first of April. Maybe some folks would call us April fools, to try to reach the Pole."

Here the two boys became silent, for both were too tired and too cold to do much talking.

The last few weeks of traveling had been very bad,—so bad in fact that half of the Esquimaux had been turned back, to make a camp and wait the return of the others. Mr. Camdal had been taken sick, and he had been left behind, and now Dr. Slade was ailing, and so were two of the natives. Sixteen of the dogs had perished, and their bodies had been fed to the other canines.

The hardships had been beyond the power of pen to describe. They had encountered numerous snowstorms, and a cutting west wind had for three days made traveling impossible. The smooth ice had given way to little hills and ridges that battered the sledges frightfully. One more had gone to pieces, and the parts had been used for mending purposes, as before.

The effects of the hardships were beginning to tell on everybody. The boys were thin and hollow-eyed, and when they walked, or, rather, toiled along, their legs felt like lead. To get up any speed was impossible, and if in ten hours' walking they managed to cover fifteen or twenty miles they thought they were doing well. The glare on the ice and snow also affected them, so that their eyes appeared like little slits. Professor Jeffer had been in danger of having his nose frost-bitten, but the boys had noticed it just in time, and come to the old scientist's rescue by rubbing the member with soft snow, thus putting the blood again in circulation.

“Well, lads, how do you feel?” asked Barwell Dawson, as he entered the *igloo*, followed by Professor Jeffer. “Dead tired, I suppose.”

“Tired doesn’t fit it,” answered Chet, with a sickly grin. “I am next-door to being utterly played out.”

“Perhaps I had better leave you two boys behind, while Professor Jeffer and myself, with one sledge, make the final dash.”

“No; now I’ve come so far I’m going to stick it out,” answered Chet, grittily.

“And so am I,” added Andy. “I guess we’ll feel better after a good sleep,” he went on, hopefully.

A few minutes later all sank into a profound slumber, from which they did not awaken until well in the morning. Then the barking of the dogs and the shouting of one of the Esquimaux made them leap up and crawl outside.

“Olalola says the wind has died down,” said Barwell Dawson. “We may as well make the most of it.”

A hasty breakfast was prepared, and inside of half an hour they were again on the way, toiling over ice that was rough in the extreme. They pushed on steadily until noon, when, it being bright sunlight, Professor Jeffer took another observation.

“One hundred and sixteen miles more,” he said, after his calculations were complete. “We are gradually lessening the distance! We shall make it after all!” And his face showed his enthusiasm. To such a scientist as the professor, gaining the Pole meant far more than it did to the boys.

In the middle of the afternoon came another setback. Another lead came into view, broad, and with the water flowing swiftly. At this the Esquimaux shook their heads dismally.

“We cannot go over that,” said one, in his native tongue.

“We must,” answered Barwell Dawson, briefly. With the North Pole so close at hand, he was determined that nothing should keep him from reaching the goal.

The party gathered at the edge of the lead, and there found the ice cracked and uncertain. Andy was with Olalola, who had a sledge drawn now by but six dogs.

Suddenly, as the men were walking up and down the shore looking for some means of crossing the water, there came an ominous cracking. Andy tried to leap back, and so did Olalola, but ere they could do so the ice upon which they and the dogs and sledge were located broke away from the main field, and floated out into the lead.

“Look out, there!” exclaimed Chet, in horror.

“Throw us a rope!” yelled Andy, while Olalola uttered a cry in his native language.

But no rope was handy, and in a few seconds the strong current of the water carried the cake of ice far out into the lead. It still kept its balance, but there was no telling how soon it might turn over and send Andy, the Esquimau, and the dogs to their death.

“Oh, we must save Andy!” screamed Chet. “What can we do?”

“We’ll do all we can,” answered the explorer.

He ran to one of the loads and tore from it a long rope. Then he hurried along the edge of the lead, in the direction whence the current was carrying the flat cake of ice with its human freight.

Andy and Olalola saw the movement, and both understood at once that they must make some sort of a fastening for the rope, should they be able to catch it. With a sharp-pointed knife, Andy picked away a small hole, and in it set a peg taken from the sledge.

While the lad was doing this, Barwell Dawson curled up the rope as if it were a lasso. His outings on the plains now stood him in good stead, and he threw the end of the rope with the skill of a cowboy lassoing cattle. Olalola caught it and slipped it over the peg, and then he and Andy did all they could to hold the peg in the ice.

It now became a question if the explorer could haul the floating ice in, or if the current would be too strong for him. Chet came to his aid, and so did two of the Esquimaux.

“Beware of where you stand!” sang out Chet. “The shore is cracked all along here!”

This was true, and all were in danger of going down. The ice was the most rotten they had yet encountered—why, they could not tell.

Working with care, they at last turned the floating mass shoreward, until it bumped lightly. But just as they did this, the ice at their feet began to give way.

“Jump for it! Don’t wait!” yelled Barwell Dawson, and Andy jumped, and so did Olalola. The latter tried to drive the dogs, but ere he could do so the peg came up, allowing the rope to free itself, and off floated the big cake again, carrying the dogs, sledge, and supplies with it. Andy and Olalola got into water up to their knees, but managed to throw themselves headlong on the firm ice and roll over and over to safety.

“I’m glad to see you safe,” said Mr. Dawson, “but it’s too bad about those dogs and the supplies.”

“Can’t we get them in?” asked Professor Jeffers.

“We can try it.”

They did try it. But just below where they stood the lead widened out, and another lead cut crosswise, so their further progress was barred. They stood on the edge of the ice watching the dogs and sledge disappear around a hill to the north of the lead. The dogs howled dismally, as if knowing they were doomed.

The loss of so many dogs and so much of their outfit sobered the entire party, and Estankawak berated Olalola soundly for allowing the team to get away from him. Estankawak had been faint-hearted for several days, and now he came to Barwell Dawson and advised that all turn back.

“We cannot reach the Big Nail,” said he. “We have not enough food and not enough dogs.” By the “Big Nail” he meant the North Pole.

“We have certainly suffered a severe loss, but I think we can reach the Pole anyway,” answered Mr. Dawson.

“Estankawak wants to go back.”

“Very well, you can go back if you want to,—but you’ll have to go alone.”

This, of course, did not suit the Esquimau at all. He said he wanted the other Esquimaux to go with him, and walked away, grumbling to himself.

“He’ll have to be watched,” said Chet to Andy, when he heard of this talk.

“Right you are,” answered his chum. Andy had not suffered from his adventure, but it must be confessed that he had been badly scared.

On the following morning, while they were still trying to get over the lead, a strong wind came up from the northeast. This began to move the ice on the north shore, and in less than six hours the lead was completely choked up with it. When they looked at this transformation, the boys could scarcely believe their eyesight.

“Now is our chance!” cried Barwell Dawson. “Olalola says it is perfectly safe to cross the ice, although it will be a terribly rough journey.”

They went forward, Estankawak most unwillingly, and inside of two hours left the lead behind them. They now struck ice that was comparatively smooth, so progress became more rapid. By the next day they were within just a hundred miles of their goal.

“We’ll get there!” cried Andy, but in less than ten hours his tune changed, for it commenced to snow furiously, while the wind became a perfect gale. All hands were glad enough to crawl into some hastily-constructed *igloos*, and even the dogs sought whatever shelter they could find.

They were thus stormbound for several days. To make any move whatever would have been folly, and Barwell Dawson attempted none. Yet he chafed roundly at the delay, the more so as he saw his stock of supplies rapidly diminishing.

“We must go on shorter rations,” said the explorer, and cut down the quantities that very day. This led to increased dissatisfaction on the part of Estankawak, and he conversed earnestly with another of his tribe, Muckaloo by name, but not in the hearing of Olalola.

“He is up to no good, and we must watch him,” whispered Andy to Chet. “Maybe he will try to bolt, and take some of our things with him.”

This was just what Estankawak had in mind to do, and he readily got Muckaloo to join in the scheme. Early in the morning of the next day, when the weather showed signs of clearing, the two Esquimaux crawled out of their hut and sneaked over to one of the sledges and harnessed up the team of six dogs. On the sledge they placed such of the stores as were handy.

The boys were watching them, and Andy immediately notified Barwell Dawson.

“Going to mutiny, eh?” cried the explorer, and snatching up a shotgun he ran outside without waiting to don his fur coat. He saw Estankawak and Muckaloo at the sledge, just ready to drive off.

“Stop, you rascals!” he roared, in the native tongue. “Go a step, and I’ll shoot you down!”

The Esquimaux were startled, for they had not dreamed that any one outside of themselves was stirring in the camp. They looked at Barwell Dawson, and at the leveled shotgun, and Estankawak dropped the whip he had raised, while Muckaloo hung his head.

“You are going to stay with us,” went on the explorer. “If you want to leave, you must go without any of our things.”

“It is death to try to reach the Big Nail,” growled Estankawak.

“It will be death if you try to run off with any of my things,” replied Barwell Dawson, grimly. “Go back to your *igloo*, and stay there until I call you.” And at the point of the shotgun he made the mutinous natives retire to one of the ice huts.

CHAPTER XXVII—HOW COMMANDER PEARY REACHED THE POLE

After the trouble with Estankawak and Muckaloo, Mr. Dawson had a close conference with Olalola. He found the latter as faithful as ever, and so put him in sole charge of the dogs and sledges, and warned him to keep a close watch on the others.

"Do not let them steal anything," said the explorer, "and when we return to civilization you shall be richly rewarded. I will give you a boat, a gun, and a hunting knife."

This, to the Esquimau, was riches indeed, and he promised to keep watch day and night. He had a stern talk with Estankawak and Muckaloo and came close to thrashing them both. After that the mutinous natives caused but little trouble.

Two days went by, and slowly but surely the party drew closer to the Pole. The professor took another observation, and announced that they had now but sixty-eight miles more to cover to reach the Top of the World.

"That wouldn't be so bad if walking was good, but it seems to grow worse," said Andy. He had already worn out two pairs of walrus-hide foot-coverings, and now the third pair looked woefully ragged.

"I'd like to know something of Commander Peary," observed Chet. "He must be in this region."

"He is," answered Barwell Dawson. "But just where, there is no telling. Perhaps he has been to the Pole, and is now coming back."

They would have been much surprised if they had known that Commander Peary was at that moment less than a hundred miles away from their camp. This intrepid explorer had pushed his way steadily northward over the ice from Cape Columbia, to which point he journeyed from Cape Sheridan during the latter part of February. His outfit at this time consisted of seven members of the expedition, seventeen Esquimaux, 133 dogs, and nineteen sledges. It was the largest and best outfit Lieutenant Peary had ever had at his command for this work.

It was the explorer's plan to establish supply stations all along the route, and for this purpose some of the party were at first sent ahead. They found conditions very similar to those which I have already described, and lost several sledges and a good many dogs, while some of the natives became sick and had to be sent back.

By hard work Commander Peary reached the 85th degree of north latitude on March 18th, and five days later managed to cover another degree. It was intensely cold, the thermometer registering fifty and more degrees below zero. One man had his foot frozen, and had to be sent back to one of the bases of supplies.

Feeling that the goal was now within his grasp, Commander Peary kept on steadily, and soon passed the 87th degree of latitude—his highest point during the expedition previously taken. This was a day of rejoicing. Here he dispensed with his last supporting party, and pushed into the Great Unknown with only a handful of faithful followers.

At the end of March he was held up most unexpectedly by open water, and every one of the party was much disheartened. But this water was crossed April 2d, and two days later the great explorer found himself within one degree of his goal.

Despite the intense bitterness of the cold, he pushed on as steadily as ever. It was a nerve-racking ordeal, yet he had but one thought, one ambition—to reach the goal for which he had been striving for twenty years. He could scarcely sleep and eat, so anxious was he to get to the end of the task he had set for himself.

At last he stopped, on April 6th, to take another observation. This showed him to be within a few miles of the Pole, and if he went wild with joy, who can blame him? He called to those with him, and away they went over the ice, paying no heed to the keen wind that cut like a knife.

And then came the supreme moment of joy. The North Pole was gained—the height of his ambition had at last been realized. He really and truly stood upon the Top of the World. It was to him the moment of moments, and yet he could not realize it, for it all seemed so commonplace. At the Pole it did not look different from what it did for miles around the sought-for spot. All was a field of ice and snow, vast and desolate.

Thirty hours were spent at and around the Pole, taking observations and photographs, and in planting the Stars and Stripes, and also some records. Then Commander Peary started back, to break the news of his success to a world that had just been astonished by the reports of Dr. Cook's achievements of the year before.

It was but a few hours after the professor had made the announcement that they had but sixty-eight miles more to cover that the party under Barwell Dawson came to another lead. It was wide and of great depth, as a sounding proved, and how to cross this became the next problem. Even Olalola shook his head.

"There is no end to it," he said, sadly. "I go with you, but how?"

"We must find a way," answered the explorer, and he and Chet went out on a tour of discovery.

They came back discouraged, and that night all rested on the edge of the lead, wondering what they should do next. At last Barwell Dawson called the boys and the professor to him.

"I think it best that we make the rest of the journey alone," said he. "We can take the best of the dogs, and the best sledge, and try to make a quick dash, leaving the others here to await our return. What do you say?"

The boys were willing to do anything, and the professor was of a like turn of mind.

"But how are you going to get over the lead?" asked Andy.

"I'll find some kind of a way," answered the explorer.

The matter was explained to Olalola. He was sorry to have them leave him, but promised faithfully to look after the camp, and after Dr. Slade, who was still ill, while they were gone. He said that by following the lead westward, they might be able to cross it.

"I think so myself," answered Mr. Dawson.

The start was made early the next day, Andy and Chet taking turns at driving the six dogs, the pick of what were left of the pack. The course was along the lead westward, and after a mile had been covered, they reached a spot where some new ice covered the water.

“Do you think it will hold us?” asked Andy.

“I’ll test it and see,” was Mr. Dawson’s reply.

After an examination the explorer came to the conclusion that they might risk the new ice.

“But we must go over it quickly,” he cautioned. “Don’t let the dogs stop.”

They walked a distance back, and set the sledge in motion. Then out on the ice they spun, Chet cracking his long whip in true Esquimau fashion. The new ice cracked and groaned under their weight, and when they were in the middle of the lead it began to buckle.

“Spread out—don’t keep together!” yelled Barwell Dawson. “Chet, whip up the dogs and let ’em go it alone!”

The boy understood, and gave the canines the lash. Away they sped at breakneck speed. Then Chet leaped to one side, and he and the others continued on their way a distance of fifty or more feet from each other.

It was a great risk they had assumed, and each instant they thought the ice would break and let them down in the water. A rescue under such conditions,—with the thermometer standing at fifty-three degrees below zero,—would have been out of the question.

“The ice is going down!” screamed Andy, just as he was within a rod of the north shore. “Hurry up!”

There was no need to sound the warning, for all understood the peril only too well. They increased their speed, and slid the remaining few feet. Then, just behind them, they saw the ice buckle and break, allowing a stream of icy water to run over it.

“Safe, and thank Heaven for it!” murmured Barwell Dawson, when he could catch his breath.

“Don’t ask me to take another such run,” panted Professor Jeffer. “I thought we’d surely be drowned!”

As soon as they had recovered somewhat from the dash, they walked on to where the dogs had stopped. In letting them go, Mr. Dawson had known that they were in no physical condition to run out of sight. When the travelers came up, they found the canines stretched out resting. The harness was in a snarl, and it took them the best part of a quarter of an hour to get the team straightened out again.

“Did you notice that the ice looks purple?” remarked Andy, as they went on once again.

“I did,” answered Barwell Dawson. “It is as peculiar as it is beautiful.”

He had noticed the purple ice several days before, and also several mirages in the sky,—mirages that looked like hills and mountains, but which he knew were only optical delusions. Coming

northward, the party had also had a splendid view of the *aurora borealis*, or Northern Lights, that mysterious glow thought to be electrical or magnetic. Once Andy had said that he could hear the lights, and that they sounded like the low hissing of steam.

It grew colder that night, and it was all the explorers could do to keep from freezing. They had a small quantity of tea left—a quarter of a pound—and after melting some snow over their alcohol stove, drank the beverage boiling hot. Then they made themselves a hot stew of pemmican and ground-up peas. Each of the dogs received a chunk of frozen walrus meat, something they gnawed on savagely, so great was their hunger.

The next day the sun was clouded, so that it was impossible for the professor to take any observations. But they knew they had not yet reached their goal, and so they pushed on, over ice that was hummocky, but not nearly as bad as it had been.

"Hello!" cried Andy, about the middle of the afternoon. "What's that yonder?"

He pointed to their left, where a dark object lay on the ice, half covered with loose snow.

"Might as well see what it is," said Barwell Dawson, who was as curious as the others. So far, in that land of desolation, they had seen absolutely nothing but ice, snow, and open water.

They moved to the spot and saw that the dark object was the carcass of a dog, frozen stiff. Beside the dog lay a board of a sledge.

"Look!" exclaimed Barwell Dawson, as he held up the board. "Do you see what it says?"

All looked at the bit of wood and saw, burnt upon it, the following:

PEARY—1909

"It is something from the Peary expedition!" said Professor Jeffer. "He must have gotten up here ahead of us!"

"It certainly looks that way," answered Barwell Dawson. "Well, he deserved to reach the Pole, after his many years of untiring efforts."

Leaving the board as a silent monument, the four continued on their way northward. Again the wind was blowing from the west, and they calculated that it was on the increase.

"With the thermometer down so low, if it blows very strong we'll be frozen stiff," declared Chet. "Why, a winter in Maine is a hothouse alongside of this!"

The next day, owing to the wind, they made but scant progress. It was cloudy, yet just around noon the sun peeped from behind the clouds, and Professor Jeffer hurried to take an observation. Barwell Dawson gave him the correct time, and the old scientist quickly succeeded in making his computations.

"Well, how do we stand?" asked Mr. Dawson, when Professor Jeffer had finished.

"We are within twenty-two miles of the Pole," was the answer that thrilled the hearts of all.

CHAPTER XXVIII—THE TOP OF THE WORLD AT LAST

"We'll get there tomorrow!"

"If the weather permits, Andy."

"Oh, we must get there, Chet! Just think of it—only twenty-two miles more! Why, it's nothing alongside of what we have already traveled."

"Well, food is running very low."

"Oh, I know that. Didn't I take an extra hole in my belt last night after supper? I feel as flat as a board."

A day had been spent in camp, with the wind blowing furiously, and a fine, salt-like snow falling. They had tried to go on, but had covered less than half a mile when Barwell Dawson had called a halt.

"It's no use," he had said, with a sigh. "We can't do anything in this wind. Let us keep our strength until it subsides."

They had spent the day in mending the sledge, which was in danger of going to pieces, and in fixing up their foot coverings, which were woefully ragged.

It was still blowing when they started again on their journey. But it was not nearly so bad as before, and the snow had ceased to come down. The sun, however, was still under the clouds, and the sky looked gray and sullen.

"I don't know that I'd care to live here the year round," said Andy, with an attempt at humor. "It would be too hard to dig the potatoes."

"Or go swimming," answered Chet. "Every time a fellow wanted a bath, he'd have to chop a hole in the ice."

"Or tumble in a lead."

"But, just the same, if we do reach the Pole, what a story we'll have to tell when we get back!"

"We'll not be the first at the Pole."

"We'll be the first boys at the Pole."

"Right you are."

They trudged on, occasionally urging the lagging dogs. The canines seemed to realize the loneliness of the situation, and occasionally stopped short, squatted down, and rent the air with dismal howlings.

"They don't see any food and shelter ahead, and I don't blame them," said Barwell Dawson.

By nightfall they calculated they had covered twelve miles. If that was true, only ten miles more separated them from their goal.

“And we’ll make that tomorrow or bust!” cried Andy. He was dead-tired, and ached in every limb, but a strange light shone in his eyes—the same fire that lit up the eyes of Barwell Dawson.

In the morning the sky looked more forbidding than ever. But there was only a gentle breeze, and the thermometer registered forty-eight degrees,—several degrees warmer than it had been.

“We’ll travel until noon,” announced Barwell Dawson. “Then we’ll make camp, and wait until we can take an observation.”

They progressed almost in silence, the boys occasionally cracking the whip and urging the dogs. Barwell Dawson and Professor Jeffer were busy with their thoughts. Their fondest hopes seemed about to be realized. The boys thought of home. Would they ever see Maine again?

“Seems like a lifetime since we left Pine Run!” remarked Chet once.

“Two lifetimes,” responded Andy. “One such trip as this is enough for me.”

The lads were footsore and weary to the last degree, but neither complained. They did not want to worry Barwell Dawson, and what would have been the use? He could not aid them. It was now a question of every one for himself.

It was one o’clock when the explorer called a halt. On every hand was the field of ice and snow. But far ahead could be seen something which looked like a big iceberg. The sun was still under a cloud.

“I think we have gone far enough,” said Barwell Dawson. “We’ll camp here, and wait until we can take an observation.”

No time was lost in gathering cakes of ice and building a fair-sized *igloo*. The boys worked with renewed interest. Had they really and truly reached the North Pole at last?

“At the most we cannot be over a mile or two away from it,” said the explorer.

All were glad to rest, yet sleep was almost out of the question. The one thought of each member of the party was, “Are we at the Pole, or how much further have we to go?”

Early in the morning it was cloudy, but about ten o’clock the sun came out faintly.

“Unless it comes out full, I cannot take an accurate observation,” said the professor.

All waited impatiently and watched the sky. When it was a quarter to twelve the clouds rolled away to the eastward, and the sun burst forth with dazzling brightness.

“Now is our chance!” cried Chet.

All assisted the professor in his preparations to take the all-important observation. The old scientist’s chronometer was compared with that of Barwell Dawson.

“A difference of but three seconds,” said the former. “We will split the difference when I take the observation,” and this was done.

The sextant was raised, and the old scientist looked through it with great care. His artificial horizon had been arranged but a short distance away.

“Time!” roared Barwell Dawson, and the professor set the thumbscrew of his instrument. Then, through the magnifying glass, he read the figures and set to work with pen and pencil, making his computations, with his Nautical Almanac before him. All awaited breathlessly what he might have to say. Suddenly the aged man threw down the paper and pencil and threw his arms into the air.

“We are at the 90th degree of north latitude!” he cried. “We have reached the North Pole!”

“Hurrah!” yelled Andy and Chet, simultaneously, and Barwell Dawson joined in the cheer.

“You are certain of that?” asked the explorer. “We must make no mistake.”

“Read the observation for yourself,” answered the old scientist.

“It is true,” said Barwell Dawson, when he had verified the figures. “We are really and truly at the North Pole. Now, then, to raise the flag!”

The others understood. All through the bitter journey they had carried an American flag and a fair-sized flagpole. Once the flag had become torn but they had mended it with care.

In a twinkling the pole was brought forth, and planted in the ice and snow. Then the flag was raised, and it floated proudly in the breeze.

“Three cheers for Old Glory!” cried Barwell Dawson, and the cheers were given with a will.

“Three cheers for Barwell Dawson!” cried Andy, and he and Chet and the old scientist gave them, roundly. Then there followed a cheer for Professor Jeffer.

“And now a cheer for the first boys at the North Pole!” cried Barwell Dawson, and he and Professor Jeffer raised their voices as loudly as they could. The boys could scarcely contain themselves, and both danced a jig, and then Andy turned half a dozen handsprings, just by way of working off his superfluous spirits.

It was wonderful what a difference reaching the Pole made in them. All the hardships of the past weeks were forgotten, and even the men acted like schoolboys out for a holiday. They walked around the vicinity of the *igloo*, and sang and whistled, and for once completely forgot their hunger. Then, during the course of the afternoon, Professor Jeffer took more observations and a number of photographs.

The next day the sun continued to shine brightly, and promptly at noon another observation was made. This gave the same result as before, so all were assured that they were really at the 90th degree of north latitude.

“We must be at the North Pole,” said Andy. “For see, while we call one part of the twenty-four hours day and the other night, the sun goes right around us and never seems to rise or sink.”

“Yes, that is something of a test,” answered Professor Jeffer. “But it is not as infallible as that made by the sextant. The earth is more or less flat here, and that makes a difference.”

To make “dead certain” that they had covered the North Pole, the entire party journeyed five miles further ahead, and also an equal distance to the right and left. At one point they saw traces of another exploring party, but the snow and ice had covered up the records left behind.

“And now to get back,” said Barwell Dawson, at the close of the third day spent at and around the Pole. “We have no time to spare, if we want to get out of this land of desolation before winter sets in again.”

“I am ready,” answered Professor Jeffer. “I have taken all the observations and photographs I wish, and have collected a valuable amount of data.”

“You can’t get back any too quick for me,” said Chet, dryly.

“There is no use in disguising the fact that our provisions are very low,” continued Barwell Dawson, gravely. “We have very little left for the dogs.”

“What will you do with them?” asked Chet.

“One is a little lame. If the worst comes to the worst, we’ll kill him and feed him to the others.”

They left the *igloo* standing, and on the top placed a metallic box containing a brief record of their trip. Then they took down the flag and placed it on the sledge.

They started on the return at seven in the morning. The weather was not so cold as it had been, and going seemed to be better, so they covered the twenty-two miles to their old camp without much difficulty. Here they had to repair the sledge again, and also had to kill off the lame dog. This made a feast for the others, and gave them some food that was much needed.

“I could almost eat dog meat myself,” said Chet.

“It may come to that,” answered Andy. “I guess it is a heap better than nothing, when a chap is starving.”

They found the new ice on the lead much thicker than it had been, and so crossed with ease. But now came on a heavy fall of snow, and all traces of their former trail were wiped out.

“We’ll have to steer by eyesight and the compass,” announced Barwell Dawson.

The boys were so hungry that they kept an eye open continually for game. But not so much as a bird showed itself. It was truly the land of ice and snow, and nothing else.

On the fifth day, the case containing alcohol sprung a leak, and all of the precious stuff was lost in the snow.

“We’ll have to eat our meals cold after this,” said Barwell Dawson. “Too bad, but it can’t be helped.”

“I don’t care how cold they are, if only we could get enough,” grumbled Chet. An almost empty stomach did not tend to put him in good humor.

Another day passed, and again it snowed. The flakes were so thick they could not see around them, and so had to halt and go into camp. Their provisions were now so low that only half rations were

dealt out.

“We can’t stand this,” cried Chet. “I’ve got to have something to eat.”

“Oh, Chet, don’t grumble,” answered Andy. “We are as bad off as you are.”

“To-morrow, if we find it necessary, we’ll kill off one of the dogs for food,” said Barwell Dawson. “That will leave us a team of four, and we ought to be able to get back to where we left the others with those. The sledge has next to nothing on it now.”

The morning dawned, dull and cheerless. They had a few mouthfuls of food, and then hitched up the dogs once more. Nobody felt like talking, and they started on their long journey in silence.

Painfully they covered fifteen miles. Each was footsore and weary to the last degree, and not able to go another step. They sat down on a ridge of ice, and looked at each other.

“We have got to have something to eat,” declared Chet. “I am going to have one square meal, if I have to die tomorrow!”

“Chet!” exclaimed Andy, reprovingly.

“We’ll kill one of the dogs and eat him,” said Barwell Dawson. “It’s the only way out of it.”

CHAPTER XXIX—FIGHTING OFF STARVATION

Yet to kill off one of the dogs was a serious undertaking, as they well knew. In that country to travel without a dog sledge was all but impossible, and the remaining animals might fail them at any moment.

“Let us wait until tomorrow,” said Andy. “Something may turn up.”

“I’d rather have something to eat now,” growled Chet.

“I will deal out a little pemmican,” answered Barwell Dawson, and served each person about five ounces.

Then, with increasing slowness, they covered three miles more. Ahead was a little hill, and the explorer thought to climb this and take a look around, to get his bearings.

Hardly had he climbed the hill when he uttered a cry, calling the others to him.

“There is something to our right,” he said. “Some dark object half hidden in the snow.”

“Perhaps another memento of the Peary expedition,” grumbled Chet. “I don’t want any more of ’em—I want to get back.”

“We’ll have a look,” cried Andy. He turned to his chum. “Come, brace up, Chet, and stop grumbling, that’s a good fellow.”

“All right!” exclaimed Chet, suddenly. “I suppose you’ve got as much right to grumble as I have. But my stomach is as flat as a pancake,” he continued, woefully. “I could fill up on sawdust, if I had any.”

All of the party set off in the direction of the object Barwell Dawson had discovered. The explorer was in advance, and suddenly he set up a ringing shout:

“Saved! saved!”

“What do you mean?” asked Chet, quickly.

“It is our old sledge—the one the dogs ran away with. It is stuck in a crack of the ice.”

“Are the stores on it?” asked Andy.

“Yes, everything seems to be here,” returned the explorer, joyfully.

How the sledge had gotten there they did not know, and, at that moment, they did not care. Probably the floating ice had bumped against the shore and the dogs had started northward, not knowing what else to do. Then the sledge had become caught in the crack, and the dogs, growing impatient, had broken their harness. They had gnawed at the coverings of the stores, but had been unable to get at the food, and had then disappeared utterly.

The finding of the sledge with its provisions, and its supply of alcohol, filled the entire party with joy, and they uttered a prayer to Heaven for their deliverance from what looked to be starvation. As quickly as it could be done, they fixed the little stove and lit it, and made themselves a steaming hot broth, which they devoured with gusto. Then they fed the dogs, built a rough *igloo*, and sank down in a profound slumber, from which nobody awakened until ten hours later.

"Although we have found these supplies, we must be very sparing of them," said Barwell Dawson, when they awoke. "There is no telling when or how we will be able to get more—certainly not until we have joined the rest of our party, and gotten down to where we can find game."

All were now anxious to rejoin those who had been left behind, and they journeyed steadily southward as fast as the weather would permit. They had one wide lead to cross, and it took a whole day to get to the south shore. Then came more snow, and they had to lose a day.

But luck was with them, and one day, late in the afternoon, they heard a loud shout, and saw an Esquimau, standing on a hillock of ice, waving his arms at them. It was Olalola, and they soon reached him.

"Chief Dawson reach the Big Nail?" asked the Esquimau, eagerly.

"We did," was the answer.

"Olalola much glad," went on the native, and his smiling face proved his words.

All in the camp, including Dr. Slade, who was better, were glad that those who had gone to the Pole had returned, and the very next day everything was packed on the sledges, and the journey to the ship was begun. The food supply was very low, and all the extra dogs were killed and fed to the other canines. The Esquimaux lived on blubber and walrus meat. The boys tried blubber once, but had to give it up.

"It turns me wrong side out in a minute," was the way Andy expressed it.

As they drew further south the weather moderated, for which they were thankful. But they had much open water to cross, and this consumed a good deal of time.

"I wouldn't mind it, if only we could find something to eat," said Chet. He suffered more from hunger than did any of the others, for he had always been a hearty eater.

The next morning there was great excitement among the natives. A musk-ox had been seen, and all were eager for the hunt.

"We must get that beast by all means," said Andy. "Think what it means—ox-roast galore!"

The trail of the game was readily followed, and about seven o'clock in the evening the hunters came upon a herd of six musk oxen, resting in the shelter of a small hill. They surrounded the game, and succeeded in bringing down three of them. The others were pursued, but managed to get away.

"This ends short rations," was Chet's comment, and his eyes brightened wonderfully. What he said was true, and that evening the explorers enjoyed a better meal than they had had for many weeks. The Esquimaux and dogs came in for their full share, and the big meal put even Estankawak in good humor, and he thought no more of deserting them.

As they came down into the heart of Ellesmere Land they picked up Mr. Camdal and his party. They shot other game, and so had all the food they could eat, and more. The hunting just suited Barwell Dawson, for, as he told the boys, he was more of a hunter than he was an explorer.

"How soon do you suppose we'll reach the *Ice King*?" asked Andy, one day.

"If we have luck, we ought to sight the vessel in four or five days."

"Will you sail for home at once?"

"I think so, Andy. I presume you'll be glad to get back," and Mr. Dawson smiled faintly.

"Yes and no," replied the youth. "I won't know what to do after I return. I don't want to live with Uncle Si."

"You ought to go on another hunt for those missing papers."

"I'll do that, of course."

"And even if you can't find them, I'll look into the matter, and see if I can't learn what rights your father had in that timber tract. I'll not have much to do myself for a while. I'll not want to go on another exploring expedition in a hurry."

So far, aside from Dr. Slade's attack, there had been but little sickness in the party, but on the next day Barwell Dawson was taken down, and all had to go into camp for three days until he felt better. During that time, Andy and Chet went out hunting, and brought down another polar bear, of which they were justly proud.

"It's a great place to hunt," said Andy. "But I don't think I care to come up here again."

"Nor I," added Chet. Then he heaved a long sigh. "I wish——" He stopped short.

"What, Chet? Were you thinking of your father?" And Andy's voice softened.

"Yes, I was. I thought sure, when I came up here, that I'd get some trace of him."

"It's too bad. I wish I could help you," answered Andy, and that was all he could say.

With their broken sledges and their small dog teams, the party moved slowly forward, to where the *Ice King* had been left along the coast. They did not expect to find the vessel fast in the ice, but hoped that Captain Williamson would be cruising near, on the lookout for them.

"When we get to the coast, if the vessel is not in sight, we'll fire some signals," said Barwell Dawson. "The captain will be sure to answer them."

Two days more passed, and they came to something of an open bay, dotted here and there with floating ice. At the sight, the boys set up a cheer:

"The sea! The sea!"

It was indeed the sea—or, rather, the upper entrance to Smith Sound. The party had traveled too far to the eastward, and had now to turn southward, skirting the coast. Here the going was very rough,

and the very next morning one of the sledges went down in a crack of the ice, and was smashed completely.

“Thank goodness we do not need it any longer,” was Barwell Dawson’s comment. What stores the sledge had contained were hauled up from the crack and loaded on the remaining turnouts.

Another day passed, and now all kept on the lookout for a sign of the ship. But though they climbed to the top of a high hill, skirting the coast, no sign of a vessel was to be seen anywhere.

Again they resumed their journey, and thus two days passed. Then Andy, who was in the lead with Olalola, set up a cry:

“I see the hut and the storehouse!”

He was right; they had at last arrived at the spot where they had embarked from the *Ice King*. The place was deserted, and they could easily see where the steamer had pushed through the floating ice, and made her way to the broad lead beyond.

“We’ll hoist our flag, and fire a signal,” said Barwell Dawson, and without delay a pole was nailed to the top of the storehouse, and Old Glory was swung to the breeze. Then one of the shotguns was fired off three times in succession. All waited long for some answer to the reports, but none came.

“He must have gone off for some reason or other,” said Barwell Dawson. “All we can do is to wait for his return.”

“Perhaps the steamer was hit by an iceberg and sunk,” suggested Professor Jeffer.

“Let us hope no such calamity has befallen us,” answered the explorer, gravely.

It sobered all of the party a good deal to find themselves alone at the spot where they had so confidently thought to find the *Ice King*. They knew that there was great danger of a “squeeze” in the floating ice, and wondered what they should do if the craft had gone to the bottom of the polar sea. They might possibly get down to a point opposite Etah, but it would be a hard journey, and after it was made there was no telling if they could cross the water to that settlement.

Three days went by, and the hearts of the party sank lower and lower. A few went out hunting, for the larder was again getting low. But for the most part all remained in the vicinity of the shore, awaiting eagerly some sign of the missing steamer.

At last, early one morning, Andy made out a cloud of smoke far off on the water. He drew Chet’s attention to it, and then called Olalola. The three watched the cloud draw nearer, and at last the Esquimau began to smile.

“Ship,” he said. “Ship with fire!”—meaning thereby a steam vessel.

The word was soon passed that a ship was in sight, and all gathered to watch the approach of the craft. As it came closer, they saw that it was the *Ice King*, and on the deck stood Captain Williamson and his crew waving them a welcome. The captain had seen them with his spyglass.

“Hurrah for the *Ice King*!” cried Chet, and the cheer was given with a will.

“This ends our troubles here,” added Andy. “Now to get aboard and start for home!”

CHAPTER XXX—HOME AGAIN

It was no easy matter for the *Ice King* to push, her way through the ice and reach the shore, but at last this was accomplished, and a gangplank was put out, so that our friends could go aboard.

“Did you reach the Pole?” were Captain Williamson’s words.

“We did,” answered Barwell Dawson. “But it was a hard journey, I can tell you!”

“Good! I mean, I’m glad to know you got to the Pole,” went on the captain. He looked over the party. “Look well, too.”

“We look better than we did a few weeks ago,” said Andy. “Then you might have taken us for a lot of starved cats.”

“Have you been on a trip?” questioned Chet. He saw that the commander of the *Ice King* was looking at him rather curiously.

“Yes, I left here eight days ago, after I had heard of a whaler that had gone to pieces in the ice. Some Esquimaux brought the word, and said that a crew of five white men and one negro were on the shore to the northwestward.”

“And did you find them?” asked Chet, eagerly.

“I did, lad, and I’ve got news for you.”

“About my father?”

“Aye, Chet.”

“Was it the *Betsey Andrews* that went down? Is my father among the men?”

“Yes, it was the *Betsey Andrews* that was caught in the ice. She drifted for months before she got a squeeze that finished her. Then the crew went ashore, and did what they could to save themselves.”

“But my father—is he—alive?”

“Yes,—or he was, the last that was heard of him.”

“He isn’t with the men you found?”

“No, they are on board, and you can listen to their story later. After the whaler went to pieces, another vessel came along—a small ship bound for Nova Scotia, the *Evans*, and she took six of the crew with her, and among those was your father.”

“The *Evans*? What port was she bound for?”

“Halifax.”

“And was my father all right when the *Evans* sailed?”

“Yes, although he had suffered somewhat from exposure, as had all of the crew.”

The fact that word had at last been obtained of his parent filled Chet’s heart with joy. He lost no time in introducing himself to the sailors who had been rescued by Captain Williamson, and from them obtained a full account of the ill-fated trip of the *Betsey Andrews*.

The ship had been all over the whaling grounds, and had had almost a full supply of oil and whalebone, when the commander, against the wishes of the mate and many of the crew, had decided to turn northward in quest of another whale or two. The captain had acted queerly, as if out of his mind, and had run the ship into a situation among the icebergs from which it was impossible to escape.

Many months of anxiety had been passed on the whaler, and the climax had come when the awful squeeze crushed her as if she had been an eggshell. In that calamity the captain and two of the men had lost their lives.

After the disaster the mate had taken charge, and the men had transferred their supplies to the shore and gone to living there. They had had more than enough oil to burn, and during the winter had kept a beacon light going, hoping it might bring some one to their assistance. Several had proved themselves good hunters, so they did not suffer for something to eat, although their diet was a limited one.

At last the *Evans* put in an appearance, and lots were drawn as to who should go aboard. Tolney Greene was one of the lucky ones, and the *Evans* had left, promising to leave word regarding the others at Upernivik and other ports.

“Oh, I am so thankful to know that father is alive!” said Chet to Andy.

“I am glad, too, Chet,” answered his chum. “I hope you meet him as soon as we get back.”

“So do I. But it’s a long sail, Andy!” And Chet heaved a sigh.

One day was spent in getting the things aboard the *Ice King*, and then the bow of the steamer was turned southward, and the long trip homeward was begun.

It was a slow and tedious journey, with many perils from icebergs and fogs, and during that time Captain Williamson had more trouble with Pep Loggermore. As a result, the sailor was put in irons. At Upernivik he was allowed to go ashore, and that was the last seen of him.

“If he has deserted, I am glad of it,” said the captain, and Andy and Chet said the same.

At Upernivik the Esquimaux were paid off, and Barwell Dawson rewarded Olalola as he had promised. The native shook hands warmly with the boys.

“Nice boys,” he said. “Olalola wish he had boys like you!”

“Take good care of yourself, Olalola,” said Andy.

“And if you ever visit the States, come and see us,” added Chet.

“No come to States,” said the Esquimau. “Too big sun, fry Olalola like fat!” And this quaint remark made the lads laugh.

At Upernivik the *Ice King* took on a fresh supply of coal, and then without delay continued on her journey southward. Chet had had a long talk with Barwell Dawson, and the explorer had promised to stop at Halifax to learn what had become of the *Evans* and Mr. Greene.

“And I will do all in my power to see that your father gets a square deal,” added Mr. Dawson. “Of course, if he is guilty, I can do nothing for him, but if he is innocent, then we’ll do what we can to bring the guilty parties to justice.”

“I know he is innocent,” answered Chet, stubbornly.

“I trust that you prove to be right, Chet,” was all the explorer could say.

As the steamer drew southward the weather became milder, until it was a real pleasure to be on deck. The boys discarded their furs, which they hung up as relics of the great trip.

“Looking back, it seems like a dream, doesn’t it?” said Andy.

“A good deal that way,” responded his chum.

“I suppose by this time the whole country is talking about what Dr. Cook and Commander Peary have done.”

“More than likely.”

At last they reached Halifax, and all in a quiver of excitement Chet made inquiries regarding his father. He learned that Mr. Greene had had a chance to ship for Portland, Maine, and had done so, eight days previously.

“I’ll meet him there!” cried Chet.

“So you will,” answered Andy. “For we are going to Portland instead of Rathley.”

The run to Portland was made without special incident, and as soon as the *Ice King* had tied up, Chet went ashore, with Andy, to hunt up the *Evans*.

He found that the craft lay at a dock three blocks away and soon covered the distance. She had come in the day before, and was busy unloading her cargo.

“So you are Tolney Greene’s son, eh?” said the captain to Chet. “I’ve heard of you, for your father spoke of you several times.”

“And where is he?”

“Started for home yesterday—to find you, he said, and to catch a rascal named Hopton, who had gotten him into trouble.”

“Hopton!” ejaculated Andy, who was present. “Do you mean a man named A. Q. Hopton?”

“That’s the fellow. Mr. Greene had it in for him good and proper. He committed some kind of a crime, and then fixed it on Mr. Greene, but Greene had the evidence against him—picked it up somewheres, just after signing to go on the *Betsey Andrews*.”

This was all the captain of the *Evans* could say, but it was enough, and without delay Chet arranged to go to Pine Run, and Andy said he would go along. Barwell Dawson agreed to meet them later, and insisted upon giving each youth a small roll of bankbills, for expenses.

It was midsummer, and hot,—a big contrast to the weather which the lads had so recently experienced. As the train rolled toward their home they discussed Mr. Greene’s affairs, and wondered how Mr. A. Q. Hopton had gotten him into trouble.

“But he is equal to it,” said Andy. “I know that by the way he tried to treat me, and how he tried to pull the wool over Uncle Si’s eyes.”

“Where do you suppose your Uncle Si is now?”

“Hanging around, most likely, waiting for something to turn up,” replied Andy.

“I hope you’re not going to let him have any of that money Mr. Dawson gave you.”

“Not a cent. If he wants any money, he’ll have to go to work and earn it.”

At last the two youths reached Pine Run, and both walked to the general store, that being the center for information as well as supplies. The storekeeper looked at them in surprise.

“Back again, eh?” he cried.

“Have you seen my father?” questioned Chet.

“Yes, he was here this morning, Chet. He was full of business.”

“Where did he go?”

“Up to your cabin. He was very much put out that you had gone away.”

“Do you know anything of my Uncle Si?” asked Andy.

“Well, rather.” The storekeeper laughed outright. “Richest thing ever was!” he chuckled.

“What?”

“The way the men around here treated him. They got tired of his laziness and habit of borrowing money, and told him he must go to work. He wouldn’t do it at first, and they hauled him out of bed one night, and said they were going to tar and feather him. Then he got scared to death, and promised to go to work, and he’s been at work ever since—over at Larrington’s sawmill. He came in last Saturday and paid his bill in full, and bought some groceries for spot cash. I reckon he’s turned over a new leaf.”

“I’ll be thankful if he has,” said Andy.

“By the way,” continued the storekeeper, “he was talking of some property that is coming to you.”

“Property?”

“Yes,—some timber land in Michigan. I believe you had the papers and lost ’em. Well, one day some hunters found the papers in the woods—pretty well soaked, but all there—and they brought ’em to your Uncle Si. He’s got ’em now, and he’s waiting to hear from you. He told me a real estate fellow named Hopton wanted ’em, but he was going to hold on to ’em until he heard from you.”

“Good for Uncle Si!” cried Andy. “He is coming to his senses at last! I am glad the papers have been found. I must see him at once!”

CHAPTER XXXI—GOOD NEWS—CONCLUSION

To get to his own place, Chet had to pass the cabin belonging to Andy, and so the chums left the village together, in a carriage they hired with some of the money Barwell Dawson had given them.

The thoughts of each youth were busy, so but little was said by them during the journey. As they came in sight of Andy's home, they saw smoke curling from the chimney.

"Uncle Si must have gotten back from work," said Andy. "Most likely he's cooking supper. Chet, will you stop?"

"Well, I'd rather see my father first," was the answer.

"I don't blame you. Well, come over tomorrow, unless——Hello, there is a stranger!"

Andy pointed to a man who had come to the cabin door, he having heard the sound of the carriage wheels. Chet stared hard at the individual. Then he took a flying leap to the ground and ran forward.

"Father!"

The man started, and then flung out his hands.

"If it isn't Chet—my own son Chet!" he burst out, joyfully. "I was just wishing with all my heart that I knew where you were." And he shook hands over and over again.

"And I've been hurrying to you as fast as I could for weeks," answered Chet, with a glad look in his eyes. "I heard you were at our cabin, and was going there."

"I was there, and came here to ask Mr. Graham about you," answered Tolney Greene.

Josiah Graham had come to the door, holding in his hand a frying pan containing bacon. He gave one look at the newcomers.

"Andy!" he burst out, and in his amazement let the frying pan clatter to the doorstep, scattering the strips of bacon in all directions. "Is it really you, or your ghost?"

"No ghost about me, Uncle Si," answered the boy. "They tell me you have gone to work."

"Why, er—ye-as, I have a job at the sawmill."

"I am glad to know it."

"I—er—I got over my sickness, an' so I'm a-goin' to work stiddy after this," went on Josiah Graham, lamely.

"That's the best news I've heard in a year."

"Where have you been, Andy?"

“Oh, on a little trip, to the North Pole and elsewhere,” was the cool reply.

“You’re joking me! But have your fun,—it ain’t none o’ my affair. But I want to tell yer somethin’,” went on the old man, impressively. “I got them papers back.”

“So I heard. I hope you’ll not give them to that A. Q. Hopton.”

“Not much! Hopton is a swindler—I found thet out in Portland, when I was there.”

“What about Hopton?” demanded Mr. Greene, who had been in earnest conversation with Chet. “Do you mean the real estate dealer?”

“I do,” answered Josiah Graham.

“Where is he now? He is the man who caused me all my trouble. Just let me get at him! He covered up his tracks pretty well, but I’ve now got the evidence against him.”

“I don’t know where Hopton is now, but I guess I kin find out,” answered Josiah Graham.

All entered the cabin, and there each told his story in detail. The men listened to the boys in open-mouthed wonder.

“And to think you came north, and was so close to me!” said Mr. Greene to his son.

He said he had been half crazy when he signed articles for the trip on the *Betsey Andrews*. Then he had gotten word about A. Q. Hopton, and had discovered that the real estate man was guilty of the crimes of which he himself was accused. He had gone to the captain of the whaler to get his release, but the captain had refused to let him go, and had locked him up aboard the ship until the voyage was well begun.

“He was a strange man, that captain,” said Mr. Greene. “And it is no wonder that he lost his ship and his life in the frozen north.”

“And you have the evidence to prove your innocence, and prove this A. Q. Hopton guilty?” asked Chet.

“Yes, my son, I can prove that Hopton was guilty, and nobody else.”

“Oh, how glad I am of it!” murmured Chet.

A substantial supper was prepared for all,—Andy assisting his uncle in getting it ready.

“Uncle Si isn’t a bit like his old self,” whispered Andy to Chet, when they sat down. “Going to work has waked him up and made another man of him.”

“Hope he sticks to it,” answered Chet.

That evening, after all the stories had been told in detail, Josiah Graham brought out the papers Andy had lost in the woods. As the storekeeper had said, they had been well soaked by the snow and rain, but they were still decipherable.

“I am going to tell Mr. Dawson about them, and then turn them over to some first-class lawyer,” said Andy. “If they are really worth anything, I want to know it.”

On the following day the two boys and Mr. Greene returned to Portland. Chet’s father conferred with the police, and as a consequence Mr. A. Q. Hopton was located, some days later, in Augusta, and placed in custody. He was subjected to a close examination, and finally broke down, and confessed his guilt. He said that Tolney Greene had had nothing to do with the crimes, and Chet’s father was completely exonerated. He also told about the timber land in Michigan, and through a firm of good lawyers Andy’s claim to a substantial interest was established,—an interest said to be worth fifteen thousand dollars.

“With all that money, you won’t have to work no more,” said Josiah Graham to the boy.

“But I am going to work, just the same,” answered Andy. “And you are going to work with me, Uncle Si. Some day, we’ll have a big lumber camp of our own.”

“And what is thet Greene boy goin’ to do?”

“He is going into partnership with me—when we are old enough,” answered Andy.

“Do you think it’s wuth it, to work so hard when you’ve got so much money?” asked Uncle Si, wistfully.

“Certainly I do. It’s the best thing for me—and for you, too. I shouldn’t want to be idle, even if I was a millionaire.”

“Well, jest as you say, Andy.” The old man heaved a long sigh. “I suppose you are right—anyway, it’s your money.” And then he went to work again, and said no more on the subject.

As soon as his name was cleared, Tolney Greene looked around for work. Through Andy’s influence, he obtained the position of superintendent at the lumber tract in Michigan, and Chet went to work with him.

“And what are you going to do?” asked Chet of Andy, one day.

“I am going to rest for a month or so,” was the answer. “Then Mr. Dawson, who has been appointed my guardian, is going to send me to a first-class boarding school.”

“And after that, Andy?”

“I am going into the lumber business—and you are going with me, Chet.”

“Me?”

“Yes.”

“But I haven’t any money.”

“Never mind, when I go in for myself you are going to have an interest,” replied Andy, and his tone showed that he meant what he said.

The report that the Barwell Dawson expedition had reached the North Pole created a great stir. Many would not believe it, and the explorer and Professor Jeffer were called upon to submit proofs. This they did willingly. Then Barwell Dawson was asked to lecture, but declined. But Professor Jeffer took to the platform, and made a great deal of money thereby, and from the book he issued later.

“It was a grand trip—a truly marvelous trip,” the professor was wont to say. “But—but I do not think I desire to go again.”

“You are right,” answered Barwell Dawson. “Once is sufficient. After this I shall devote my time to hunting and exploring in localities not quite so cold.”

“And where there is plenty of food,” put in Andy.

“Yes, don’t forget the food,” said Chet. “As long as I live I never want to get so close to starving again!”

And all the others agreed with him.