



THE SKY FOOL

by FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

A story of daring pilots and news-reel men on the far sky trails of the Northland.

CHAPTER I GETTING THE BREAKS.

SIX MONTHS had passed since "Rusty" Wade had flown down from Fairbanks, Alaska, to Hollywood in the hope of breaking into the moving-picture game, and as yet he had not got a break. They called him "The Sky Fool," and he was trying to live up to it.

As he stunted over Hollywood this clear spring

morning he was hopeful the breaks had come at last. On the ground, thousands of feet below, Klein, the producer, was watching him. If he could do all that Klein and his director demanded there was a week's work for him.

The world was spinning madly around the plane. Wade did not pay any attention to it. He was thinking of Klein. Once the little producer was sold on a man that man was sure of employment. But a man had to have something on the ball.

"I've shot the works," Wade muttered as the plane spiraled to the landing field.

He peered through his goggles at the squat figure

staring up. Klein's face was flushed with either rage or excitement. Wade could not tell which. He hoped the latter.

The next instant his entire mind was occupied with one of the sudden problems that confront a pilot. A passenger plane had just landed and an excited woman and boy had rushed into his path. They had failed to see him, such was their interest in the other plane.

He acted instinctively, and the next instant the right wheel and wing struck the ground. He hunched deep into his seat, knowing the plane was certain to turn over.

A roar in his ears, then a cloud of dust, and it was over. The straps had held him in his seat. He was uninjured unless fire broke out.

The seconds seemed hours long as he waited for the curious roar, once heard never forgotten—the roar of high-test gasoline suddenly igniting.

"Well, you got a break at last," a voice shouted, "a broken wing, and no telling what else."

A slim, handsome man was the first to reach Wade. "I know you don't want sympathy, Rusty," he added, "as you're not that type. So I won't say, it's tough! You were going great guns and it looked as if you'd nose out Metz for the job. Then this! He shrugged and made a wry face.

The "job" was taking a number of dog fights for a war picture Klein was producing. It meant a job for Joe Frisk, the slim, handsome man, who could do anything that could be done with a motion-picture camera. His interest in Wade's stunting was equal to Klein's.

MANY hands released the grimy Wade from his unpleasant situation. The combination of gasoline and dust, well mixed then smeared on a man, is not the best.

"You lads with the cigarettes keep away from me," he warned; "I'm liable to explode and kill some of you!"

Already the field employees were chasing the crowd back. "Nothing's hurt but the plane," Rusty could hear them saying.

"That's not the half of it," Rusty growled to Joe Frisk. "When that old *Air Musher* is repaired I'll be a financial write-off."

Klein joined the select group permitted to remain.

"Oy! Oy! You rusty-headed devil. What a shock you gave me. Then on top of it you crashed."

"It'll take a week to repair the plane, Mr. Klein," Rusty said. "Will it be too late then?"

Obviously the little producer was sorry.

"A t'ousand dollars it costs me to stand idle. To-day

we should start production. Should. I wait a week—seven t'ousand dollars!"

He turned to the man with the ratty eyes who had come up to express sympathy he did not feel. "Metz, you should be over the battlefield at two o'clock this afternoon."

"Thanks, Mr. Klein," Metz answered. He smiled behind his hand. He had gotten the aerial plum of the year.

Klein gave Rusty Wade a curious look. Wade grinned like the good sport he was.

"It was just a tough break," he said. "Boiled down, it was a business proposition. Metz and I were both bidding on a job." He shrugged his shoulders. "Crashing our equipment knocked us out of the business, eh, Frisk, old sport?"

With the damaged plane in the shop for repairs the two made their way to a rooming house a few blocks off Hollywood Boulevard.

They had met by chance, three months previous. Each had a fair stake and each had come to Hollywood to break into the game and make some real money. Thousands do it each year and only a few make the grade. They had resolved to stick together until their funds ran out.

"I'll stick," Frisk had promised, "until I've only a price for a ticket back home left."

"And I'll hang on," Rusty had replied, "until I've just enough money left for fuel back to Alaska. I can always make a little money up there flying prospectors to the creeks and taking in supplies of grub."

"Metz is lucky, they say around Hollywood; always gets the breaks." Joe Frisk scratched his head thoughtfully. "I can't figure it out because he's as cold-blooded a proposition as I ever met."

"But a great pilot," Rusty cut in.

"No greater than you," Joe insisted. "I've checked up on you Alaskan pilots. Most of the flyers here are hopping between cities. There are landing fields scattered all over the country. Some are developed; some are not. We need more of 'em, it is true; but when a pilot makes a great flight in the States he gets weather reports and all that.

"Up in your country you haven't even the landing fields; nor are there many towns where a pilot can get high-test gasoline and parts. You've got wild country under you all the time. When you make a forced landing, if you can't make the repairs, you have to walk anywhere from a few miles to several hundred. Yet, all the time you are going and coming about

your business, and few know what you are doing. You fellows are the greatest pilots in the world."

There was much truth in what Joe Frisk was saying. Rusty knew it, but he only grinned and said:

"Well, what next?"

"I can last a week more, then I'm hitting the trail for home," Joe said.

"Same here," Rusty Wade agreed.

THAT evening "Bull" Metz loafed in his home. The first half day's stunting was over. They had gotten some great stuff. "Slim" Boyer, his camera man, had missed no chance to get real action. The battle had been almost real with bombs bursting sufficiently near the plane to shake it up.

Slim was down at the studio watching them develop the film. The doorbell rang and a slimly built young man entered. His cheeks were as smooth as a girl's; his fingers slender; his feet small. But his voice was deep.

His resemblance to the woman who had run in front of Rusty's plane that morning was startling. He dropped a suit case containing a complete outfit for a modern woman. In addition there was a fetching blond wig perfectly bobbed. He grinned.

"Well, Metz, I put it over and got the scare of my life. I didn't figure Wade's plane was coming that fast. It almost got me. That lad's a pilot, isn't he?"

"If he wasn't you wouldn't be here to collect!" Metz said, and handed the other a hundred-dollar bill.

"Thanks," the man said. "The chance to play feminine parts don't come my way so often these days. I can eat for a while now and you've got a job. Everybody's happy but Rusty Wade. They say he is very low."

"In spirits?"

"No, financially. I predict the last of your competition will take off inside a month. He'll probably stick around to see if you crash, though."

The visitor left Metz to his thoughts. A sneering smile spread over his face. "And they wonder how I get the breaks!" he jeered. "Some day I'll tell 'em! I make the breaks."

THE following morning Klein called him into his private office.

"Metz, my boy," he said paternally, "so soon as a good man gets on my pay roll he's one of my boys. I keep him there so long as I can, and maybe longer. I'm a rotten business man."

Metz recalled the fifty or sixty million dollars Klein was said to be worth and doubted the statement.

"You seem to be getting by, Mr. Klein."

"Yes! It's thinking of something good ahead of the other fellow. My boy, give a look!"

He spread out a chart of the arctic. A red line had been drawn from Spitsbergen to Point narrow, he pointed to Spitsbergen.

"Next month 'Dolly' Morgan in the plane, *Ranger*, will fly across the pole alone by herself. She wants to be it, the first lady to fly over the north pole. I should say whether she's crazy or not. But she's pretty, and there's a fortune for the news-reel weekly that gets the first pictures of her landing at Point Barrow.

"My boy, you should find out all about flying in the arctic. I'll give it, ten t'ousand dollars to the pilot and five t'ousand dollars to the camera man and pay all expenses should he get the films to Seattle before that robber. Edmann, can get 'em there."

"And if Edmann's pilot arrives first, what?"

"You get it only expenses. Not a thin dime. 'A man can't get rich payin' for failures."

"I'll think it over. Edmann will pay plenty to beat you, Mr. Klein."

"You should tell me that," Klein snorted. "Don't I know it? Don't that robber use everything but a gun on me every day?"

He handed Bull Metz a packet of papers. "Read 'em! It tells how you should do it."

That evening Metz spent several hours going over the information. As usual, Klein's methods were thorough. Everything was provided for from the time the plane left Seattle until it returned again. There were maps showing where forced landings could be made and notations where fuel could be obtained.

In addition, all airplanes operating in Alaska were listed with telegraph and radio stations. Metz called in his camera man.

"Say, Slim," he said, "make a photograph of these maps, will you? I'll have a stenographer copy the rest of this stuff. I see a chance to make a little jack."

CHAPTER II HEADING NORTH.

"HOW does she fly?" Metz put the query as Rusty Wade alighted from a trial flight after his beloved plane, *Air Musher*, had been repaired.

"As good as ever, Metz!"

"It was a tough break, Rusty. But stick around and make Hollywood take you. That's the only way."

"No, I'm flying back to Alaska next week. I can make good money up there." He looked at Joe Frisk, "I've talked him into going along. If I can't make a good prospector out of a camera man then I'll try my luck at turning him into a mechanic. If he can't do either I'll keep him for a pet. If you ever drop up that way, let me know."

"I will, thanks!" Metz hurried to his plane to continue his stunting.

Rusty and Joe walked over to the hangar.

"What's the bill?" Rusty inquired, "she's in shape again."

"The bill is paid!" said the head mechanic.

"Paid? Who the deuce paid it?"

"Mr. Klein."

The partners gazed at each other in amazement.

"Let's go see him!" Rusty feebly suggested.

Mr. Klein shrugged his shoulders as they loudly voiced their thanks.

"You should thank me," he said. "I did it in a moment of weakness when my head was wrong. It was rotten business Mr. Rusty. Rotten business. Should I pay every time I see something busted up I'd be broke in a month."

He waved them toward the door, more to escape the embarrassment of their thanks than anything else.

"If we can ever do you a favor in Alaska, Mr. Klein," Rusty said, "you'll see what rotten business it was."

News of that sort travels fast. "Old Klein," people said, "paid the damages on Wade's plane when he cracked up to avoid hurting a woman and kid."

SLIM BOYER gave the news to Metz. That worthy's dark eyes flashed.

"By the way," he said softly, "I sounded out Edmann to-day. He wanted to know what the chances were to drop Klein and come over to him. I hinted I could beat any one else to Barrow and back and get the stuff besides. I told him we spoke the same language he and Klein spoke—money. He said he could speak the language more fluently than Klein. Now he's got to come to me, but now I'm going to see Rusty Wade."

He found Rusty and Joe Frisk getting ready for their trip North. Some of their gear would be shipped, but much of it was going into the storage place reserved for extra fuel.

Metz's ratty eyes glittered as he settled back to talk.

"I may go into the North, Rusty," he said easily, "I want to know a few things. Conditions up there are different, you know."

"If you are going up there on a pleasure trip, Metz, I'll go the limit. But if you come as a business competitor I don't think it is a fair question. I learned what I know of the North by tough experience, and that experience is going to give me an advantage over the competition that comes in. I pioneered when the flying game had to be sold to the sour doughs. I'm entitled to any advantage that pioneering gave me."

"Fair enough," Metz admitted. He had expected such a reply. Then he played his winning card.

"Frankly, boys," he explained, "I am going up there for Klein. This is just between us. He wants to score a news-reel beat on Edmann, and the more I know, the better chance I have to come through for the old fellow. Boys, let me tell you he is white!"

Metz suppressed a smile as he saw how they rose to the bait.

"Well, that's different," Rusty answered. "Now get out your pencil and paper and take this down!"

He talked for nearly an hour. Nor did he neglect to tell Metz that mukluks were the best footgear in the arctic; that a caribou-skin parka would keep out more cold than the heaviest woolen overcoat; and that it was better to take a twenty-two rifle and several hundred rounds of ammunition for small game, than to take a heavier weapon and fewer rounds of ammunition.

He designated the type of sleeping bag, and when Metz left them he was as well informed as it is possible for man to be without going through the experience.

At dawn the following day they turned north. Hollywood skimmed beneath their wheels—Hollywood that had kept them six months and never given them a break. Yet neither held it against the city. It was merely an experience, and life is all experience.

"AIN'T nobody got any gratitude?"

The phrase seemed to burst from Klein's lips. He was pacing his richly furnished office and otherwise acting like a caged animal. Every employee in the vicinity was trying to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. He answered his own query.

"I'm right! Nobody's got any gratitude any more. I ask you what did I do? I took them bums Metz and Slim Coyer and made something out of 'em. And that's what I done. And what did they do? They got it all my plans and then sold out to that bum Edmann! For a miserable fifteen t'ousand dollars he sells his soul."

Klein tossed his arms into the air. "I'm licked! My own throat is cut right behind my back. I ask you why treat people right when they do that? Why don't somebody say something? Should I die in silence of a broken heart?"

"Mr. Klein——," began the office manager.

"Shut up!" Klein pounded the desk. "Can't you see I'm desperate. Who can I get that can fly in that country? Nobody! Should I send somebody up there that don't know nothing about such things and maybe die? No! Should I let that cutthroat Edmann beat me. No!" He almost screamed this last. "Then——" Suddenly he stopped.

"Oy! Oy! Where's those two young men what crashed that time and I paid their bill? They said should I ever want anything in Alaska they'd get it."

A file clerk, whose business it was to obtain the name and address of all who entered the studio on business, fairly flew to her files.

"Fairbanks or Big Nugget, Alaska, will catch Rusty Wade," she said; "he's the pilot."

"Take this message. 'Mr. Rusty Wade, Fairbanks or Big Nugget, Alaska!'"

He paced the room thoughtfully and dictated at length.

"Send it just how I tell it," he directed the stenographer, "and don't try to save expenses by cutting down. At a time like this, expenses shouldn't be saved! Rusty Wade! He's almost red-headed and a fighter!"

The more he thought of Rusty the less he worried over the future. Presently he called a number on the telephone. In time he got his party.

"Hello, Edmann! This is Klein speaking. You robber! You goniff! Cutthroat! You cut my throat behind my back when I wasn't looking and got Metz. But, as George Washington said, 'I've just begun to fight!' Remember he who has the last laugh—why—er—has it!" He hung up.

"It was John Paul Jones who said he had 'just begun to fight,'" the office manager reminded him.

"Well, what of it? It was said, wasn't it! An ignorant fool like Edmann wouldn't know the difference anyway."

He brushed the palms of his hands together as though freeing himself of further worry. "Soon as I remembered he was a redhead I knew it was good as done. They always finish what they start. From childhood I've known it. An Irishman once said to me: 'I'll bust you on the nose before your whole family!' And he did!"

CHAPTER III FORCED LANDING.

"HARDROCK" SHIPLEY and his mushing mule stopped for the mail at Big Nugget's post office.

"Hold on, Tabasco," he ordered, "there might possibly be a letter or so here!"

The postmaster handed him a packet of mail, then added :

"If you're going by Rusty Wade's cabin you might give this cablegram to him. It's mighty important!"

"Didn't figure to look him up today," Hardrock answered, "but if it's important I'll be glad to."

"It's mighty important, Hardrock. It's what he'd call a break, I guess. That's all I can say."

Whereupon Hardrock and Tabasco, the only mushing mule in the North, went a mile out of their way to deliver the cablegram.

Hardrock and "Poke" Tupper, his partner, had presented Big Nugget with a landing field. While they preferred to stick to the ground they appreciated that aerial navigation was making great strides in Alaska. This had been their part.

Snug cabins, log hangars and the usual equipment of a well-constructed airport was in evidence. A short-wave radio sending and receiving set had been installed along with the usual long-wave receiving set.

Power came from a waterfall a half mile away. The cabins were heated by electricity as were the hangars. In a country where it is sometimes sixty below this was important.

Hardrock handed the cablegram without comment. Rusty Wade glanced through it, then howled with joy:

"Joe!" he yelled, "we've got a break at last. Listen:

"Metz double crossed me. If you get Dolly Morgan polar-flight films to Seattle ahead of him will pay you fifteen thousand dollars. Camera man ten thousand. If you fail will pay expenses only. Investigations prove he hired female impersonator to run in front of your plane and break you up so he could get job. Watch him. He will stop at nothing to beat you. Luck. Klein."

Joe Frisk whistled in astonishment.

"Of course the pictures will be worth a small fortune as a news-reel feature, but Klein must be out for revenge to spend all that money. We'd better hit for Fairbanks, get organized, and be on our way. Dolly Morgan is at Spitzbergen now. She may take off in

a hurry, though she's not due to hop for a couple of weeks yet according to schedule."

"Any girl that will fly across the pole alone, isn't going to pay much attention to schedules. Joe, suppose you go down to Big Nugget and send a message to Klein telling him we're on our way. I'll pack up. This sure sounds like old man Opportunity himself was knocking at our door. We're competing against one of the best flyers in Hollywood. If we come through, we're made!"

"We sure are," Frisk agreed.

Hardrock Shipley grinned. It was great to be young. There were so many opportunities; so much to do; and so much fun doing it. All the money in the world couldn't buy the thrill this pair of youngsters would get out of pitting their skill against a pair of crooked airmen.

THERE comes the old *Air Musher!*"

Slim Boyer stood on the landing field at Fairbanks and pointed upward.

They had landed the night before and were overhauling their motors preparatory to the hop to Barrow.

Bull Metz's tiny eyes narrowed as he squinted into the sky. "That confirms the cablegram Edmann sent us. Klein hired them. That man Wade may know the North, but I know a few tricks about the aerial game he don't. I'd like to bet you, Slim, he'll never set his wheels on the tundra of Point Barrow."

Slim shook his head and grinned.

"I won't take that bet. It's a cinch—for you. Let's see how they act! Maybe they haven't been notified yet."

They watched the landing with critical eyes. It was perfect. The plane rolled to within a few yards of the hangar and stopped. Joe Frisk was the first to hit the ground. He gave them a brief glance, but did not speak.

"Yeah," Slim said softly, "they've been notified and then some. Old Klein has spaded up some facts about us."

Rusty Wade strolled over toward them. He ignored Bull Metz's extended hand.

"Now, Bull," he said without heat, "we've got you birds pegged for what you are—a pair of dirty, double-crossing crooks. Anybody that would do what you did to Klein is as dirty as they make them. Now don't get excited. Nothing would suit me better than a chance to bust you one on the jaw. Another thing, you used Klein and you used me so that you could bargain with Edmann. I also know how you beat me out of that

job in Hollywood. I'm mentioning this so you'll know we're next to you and are ready for you. in the arctic a bad motor, or a crack-up is more likely to prove fatal than outside. We're taking no chance on you putting something over. One suspicious move and we act first and ask questions afterward. We know you are out to win by fair means or foul, and we're ready for you. Now do we understand each other?"

"Perfectly," sneered Metz.

"And that goes for you, too, Slim," Rusty added. "I haven't heard so much about you, but you're in mighty bad company."

Rusty left the pair flushed with fury. An old sour dough who had looked in on more than one arctic expedition, yawned.

"Every arctic expedition has its row," he observed, "but this one is starting early in the game."

Within a few yards of each other the crews worked on their planes. Metz finished first, then pushed his machine into the hangar. Though the weather was fine, he made no effort to take-off.

Joe Frisk slept in the *Air Musher* that night, or what was called night. The daylight was almost continuous.

Rusty relieved him at breakfast.

"I'll work on her now. Anybody bother you last night?"

"No, they knew we were watching 'em!"

Rusty Wade did not see the rival pilots a short distance away. They, too, had stood guard most of the night. Slim Boyer winked at Metz, then sauntered over to two Malemute dogs, chained up a few yards apart and each anxious to try conclusions with the other.

When no one was observing he slipped the chain and hurried behind a hangar. The dogs leaped at each other instantly.

EVERY man in the North who has mushed with dogs instantly tries to separate them when a fight starts. They are far too necessary to be ruined through a broken leg joint. Such is the power of their great jaws that snapping a bone is not unusual. Rusty Wade caught up a club and ran toward them.

As he did so, Bull Metz stepped quickly into the *Air Musher's* hangar. In his hand he carried a quantity of emery dust. There is nothing finer to ruin a bearing than emery dust sprinkled in lubricating oil.

Two cracks across the nose with the club was sufficient to take the fight out of the dogs. One of them went howling away; the other when chained, crouched and begged to be forgiven.

That something known as a hunch struck Rusty Wade the instant the trouble was over.

He ran, breathless, to the hangar.

"Metz!" he cried, "what are you doing here?"

"I'm looking for a wrench. Has this trouble got to the point where I can't even borrow a wrench!"

"You lie. The wrenches are on the other side of the room and you know it. This side——"

He suddenly grasped Metz's hand and twisted it sharply. A fine, dark powder covered the fingers.

"Emery!" he cried.

As Bull Metz and Rusty Wade squared off, Slim Boyer came on the run. Joe Frisk forgot hunger and came legging it to the hangar just in time to make it a foursome.

Wade and Metz were evenly matched. They stood toe to toe, each forgetting science in his rage; each thinking only of battering the other to earth.

It was a two-ringed fight, with a pair of slim lightweights and a pair of ponderous heavyweights fighting at the same time. A deputy marshal, hearing the trouble, hurried up. He stepped into the center and spoke sharply:

"Back up, Rusty! I don't know what it's all about, but it's got to stop!"

Metz wiped the crimson from his face.

"The next time, Wade, you won't be so lucky as to have an officer friend step in. The next time it'll be to the finish—up there on the ice."

"I'll be ready whenever you want to finish it," Rusty answered. "I haven't had half enough," he grumbled as he returned to the hangar.

Search as he might he could not find where the emery had been placed. As a matter of fact, he had returned too quickly for Metz to carry out his plan. Just to play safe, Rusty drained the oil out of his motors and put in fresh.

Joe Frisk noticed the pair made no effort to take off that day, though the weather was perfect.

"I've got their game figured, Rusty," he informed his husky partner. "He plans to trail us to Barrow. He probably thinks you know the best way."

"I do know the shortest way," Rusty answered, "though it may not be the best. Let him trail us—if he has the nerve."

FRISK'S theory was confirmed the following day. Five minutes after they took off, the rival plane followed.

Hour after hour they hung in the air while the vast Northland rolled beneath them. They saw game that

would make a hunter weep with envy. Moose and caribou in bands of thousands; bear and smaller game.

Countless lakes dotted with ducks; unnamed creeks by the hundreds teeming with trout; river systems that drained thousands of square miles of country all rolled beneath their wings. Great peaks, white and clean in perpetual snow, passed sometimes under their wings, but more often these were so high it was easier to go around them. Glaciers sent back flashes of green and blue in the most delicate tints.

Joe Frisk, seeing it for the first time, was fascinated.

"If I could make a living up here. Rusty, I wouldn't take the best job in Hollywood. You were crazy to go down there in the first place."

"I was glad to get back," Rusty admitted. "Where's Metz?"

They looked behind. The other plane seemed to have vanished. Rusty circled.

"This is one section where you can't land without cracking up," he explained. "Enemies or not we've got to be sure they're all right. It's the code of the North."

The streams here ran swiftly. There were splashes of white water in the deep canyons. Even if they did land safely it would take weeks to get out. Rusty's voice broke in again:

"While I think of it," he said, "if we should get into trouble, and it looks as if I'd crash, you take a dive out that door and save yourself. If one of us gets down safely he has a chance to help the other if he needs it."

Joe Frisk nodded. He thought: "Why bring such things up in a country like this!"

"Any sign of Metz, yet?" Rusty asked five minutes later.

"Can't see him! It's queer!"

AT THAT moment Metz dropped out of the blue. He had climbed above them and was coming with terrific speed. It was a stunt he had learned during the filming of war scenes. It was dangerous, but the pilot had timed everything perfectly.

As he rushed past and straightened out below, the *Air Musher* dropped into the "wash." That is the conflicting air currents following the machine.

The ground rushed up to meet them; a dizzy, spinning ground, where mountains whirled as though on a roulette wheel. Rusty Wade was calm about it. He spoke once:

"Jump, Joe! Good luck!"

Joe Hung himself into space a few seconds later. He counted then pulled the ring. Above him the parachute

opened with a rumpling sound of silk. The plane rushed by.

Twice Rusty almost regained control. It disappeared among the treetops of a river valley. Metz had vanished. He had crashed his rival in the heart of a vast wilderness.

When Rusty and Joe emerged, if they ever did, Dolly Morgan's polar flight would be old news. The missing airmen, Wade and Frisk, would be but vaguely remembered.

Joe was blown between canyon walls and landed with a crash in a thicket. A startled fox, no doubt, wondered how it was possible for a human being to slip up on him like this.

Somewhat dazed by the swiftness of the crash, Joe paused to take stock and collect his wits. One moment flying safely; the next in a nameless canyon, armed only with a pocketknife, a package of cigarettes, and a few matches. It was vitally necessary he locate the plane.

He looked at the sky, dreading to catch the heavy smoke of a burning plane. So many burn after crashing. The air was clear and bright. An eagle soared just off a crag where, no doubt, he had built a nest.

Joe Frisk stumbled along the river bank, stopping frequently to sniff for the odor of gasoline, searching for signs of broken trees. Trout lazed in icy pools and did not seem particularly alarmed when he stooped and drank. A night in the open without a sleeping bag! Unless he found the plane he was in for it.

Smoke!

A thin cloud was just clearing the canyon walls a mile ahead. He broke into a run. Every second counted now. Battered and bruised he broke through the stunted growth in the valley floor and let forth a bellow of delight.

Rusty Wade was scowling at a fire he had just built of driftwood. On the end of a sand bar, its wheels but three feet from the water, stood *Air Musher*.

"How the deuce did you land here without cracking up?" Joe shouted.

"That's not the question. How the, deuce am I going to get out of here? It was too late to think of keep going when I straightened out. I could see only cliffs ahead. I gave her the gun, skimmed the treetops and hit this bar which I saw ahead of me. In this country a pilot sure loves a river bar at times!"

He continued to ponder. "Metz made another break for himself! It's the last thing I expected to happen. I wouldn't have been surprised if he had opened up with a machine gun, but this——"

"The dirty dog," Joe growled, "and you hunting for him. He must have known it!"

"Sure he did," Rusty agreed, "but with that stamp of bird the final result is the only thing that counts. Anything to put his picture on the screen before ours gets there. But we're not licked yet, old son."

"What?" Joe was startled.

"In this country a pilot gets out of the danglest places. I suppose just thinking how far he'll have to walk sharpens his wits. You keep an eye on things. You might fix up a temporary camp and cut some firewood. I'm going to take a little walk downstream and look around."

HE WAS gone two hours.

"There's a bar a half mile down that's long enough for a take-off," he said when he came back.

"Yeah, and back in Fairbanks there's a swell landing field," Joe suggested.

"The thing is," Rusty continued, ignoring his partner's sarcasm, "to get the bus down there. I think it can be done! It's got to be done!"

"Take it to pieces and pack it down?" asked Joe.

"That's better than walking. But, Joe, that'll take too much time. We're up here to help out old Klein and square accounts with Metz for what he's done. The best way is to beat him to Seattle with a reel of pictures. Don't think I'm crazy, but I've a hunch we can build a raft and float this old baby down to that bar!"

"Gimme that ax! There are plenty of dead spruces around here for a raft!"

"I'd sort of like to turn this situation to our advantage. Up to this afternoon Metz has been tense and watchful. Now he's got rid of us, he thinks, and is relaxing, it looks like the elements of a break. Let's make it a break!"

CHAPTER IV SITTING PRETTY.

AFTER flattening out, Metz and Boyer returned to see what had happened. Far below they could see Joe Frisk just landing. Of the plane they could see nothing.

"One of 'em got out alive," Boyer suggested with a thought of the future.

"Yes, that's Joe Frisk. He don't understand this country and it'll be months before he can find his way

out. I doubt if he can live off the country. Wade may be alive, too, but I doubt it. That's tough country down there, and a crack up would be complete.

"The main idea is—we've eliminated the opposition and can take things easier. Besides—before Dolly Morgan left Hollywood she was pretty thick with that pair. That don't suit me at all. I have plans for Dolly myself." He gave his companion a searching look.

"Don't look at me that way," Boyer answered, "I'm not interested. You've got the field to yourself!"

They alighted at Point Barrow late that day and were immediately surrounded by a swarm of Eskimos. The Point Barrow Eskimo is rather blasé in the matter of planes. He has seen them come up from the south again and again, disappear over the arctic ice floes and sometimes return.

He has seen the crews of wrecked planes come slowly over the ice, weeks after they had been given up for lost. A plane to him, is just another plane. To other tribes it might be something mysterious from which it was well to flee.

Metz waved his hand. He could be pleasant when there was something to be gained by it. His contempt for these primitive people was well masked.

"Any of you speak English?" he inquired.

"Certainly we speak English. You are Mr. Metz, are you not?" A young Eskimo had stepped from the crowd and taken the leadership.

"I'll be hanged!" Slim muttered; "they speak better than we do."

"I am Ottanna," the native continued. "Why shouldn't we speak English. The government maintains good schools and our teachers are as good as any outside. You may be interested to know that latest radio reports indicate Miss Dolly Morgan may start her flight any hour!"

"Thanks!" Metz turned to his partner. "Well, Slim, there's no rest for the wicked. We've got to put skis on the old bus. If Dolly makes a forced landing on the ice, and that can happen, we're going to grab a million dollars' worth of fame as the rescuers of a polar heroine. We're sitting pretty. Now let's pile out, look the place over, make ourselves solid, and get to work."

"Suppose," Slim suggested, "you send Edmann a radio stating you've arrived O.K. I'll send one to Klein and sign it Joe. He'll think it's from Joe Frisk, and that'll settle his fears. Otherwise he may send a Fairbanks plane out to look for Wade, and, incidentally, take over the job. These birds won't

know the difference. They'll think Klein is an uncle or somebody;"

"Good idea!"

JOE FRISK was fussing with the *Air Musher's* receiving set. Near by Rusty Wade was building a raft. He did it with the precision and skill of a man who had crossed many Alaskan streams on hastily constructed rafts.

"Just a minute, Rusty. I'm getting something here. It's faint!"

It was silent, except for the rush of the stream and an occasional splash of a trout in the pool near by. Joe removed the head phones.

"What do you suppose they've done? They've made sure no searching party would be sent for us by reporting our safe arrival at Barrow."

"Well," Rusty answered, "that'll keep our friends from being worried. Let that pair lie and deceive. If we give 'em enough rope they'll hang themselves. See if you can pick up something about Dolly. I promised that kid I'd be at Barrow to greet her. It never occurred to me it'd be as a news-reel pilot, though."

As they resumed their work neither man noticed the soft smile that lingered on the other's face a moment after Dolly Morgan was mentioned.

Perhaps it was well neither knew of the other's interest in the nervy little girl they had, known in Hollywood several months previous. Quarrels start easily in the arctic.

Rusty resumed his labors while Joe tuned in on KFOA in Seattle which was broadcasting news reports. Presently Joe switched off the set.

"Brother, we've got to hump ourselves. According to Art Lindsey at KFOA, Dolly will take off most any hour now."

"The raft is ready!"

"What? That thing? The plane, will sink it!"

"This is only the preliminary raft so to speak. Get the gasoline and gear aboard and we'll take it down to the bar. That'll give me a chance to look over the river and spot the boulders. We've got to lighten that plane as much as possible or we'll never make it!"

Extra gasoline and oil; food, sleeping bags, ammunition, and a folding sled that could be changed to the frame of a canvas boat were all loaded onto the raft. Then, each with a long pole, they shoved off.

It was a tense period that followed. On the success of this depended final success. The raft pitched and tossed its way through white water that dashed spray over everything, and finally came to a stop in a big pool.

Twice they circled the pool before they could work clear and send it to the bar. They leaped overboard into the icy water and shoved it to the sand. The cargo was thrown ashore hastily.

"Joe, if you'll salvage the spikes and lines I used to hold this raft together I'll mark out a runway on the bar. We've got to clear it off before we can do much. None too much room at best. I need a long run with this load!"

FORTY-EIGHT hours of the hardest labor followed. While Joe was clearing off the runway, Rusty was floating dry spruce logs down to the plane and constructing a huge raft. Of necessity this must be kept in deep water so that it would not sink and ground when the weight of the plane was placed on it.

With bloodshot eyes and swaying from exhaustion, Joe Frisk reeled up the river bank.

"I'm done! How about you?" he said. "The only way I could keep going the last six hours was to curse Metz. That made me mad and I could keep at it. Has Dolly hopped off yet?"

"I don't know! I didn't think it would do any good to listen in. We were working as fast as we could, and it would only take time. What do you think of it?"

Rusty indicated the raft. Heavy timbers ran from the raft to shore. He had secured the raft with lines, but it was a ticklish situation at best. Most anything could happen that would spill the plane into the river. There would be no getting it out of there!

Rusty looked curiously at his partner. Few could stand the tough work and swift pace Rusty had set. He did not expect it.

"You're a good partner," he said, smiling. "It's the tight places that brings out what's in a man! I figured you'd come through when I picked you at Hollywood. I hope nothing happens to you."

Joe Frisk shuddered slightly at that. A man doesn't like to think of "something happening" to him.

"Huh? What do you mean?" he asked.

"I can't seem to keep a partner very long. The way I play the game up here is kinda risky. It seems like as soon as I get a good partner I lose him."

"Let's hear the worst," Joe insisted, "what happens to 'em—die?"

"Just the same as! They marry some girl! It seems just like the girls like the same sort of men I do. Why, Joe, I've been best man at weddings more times than any pilot in the country." He stood up. "We both needed that little breathing spell. Now let's see if we can get old *Air Musher* onto the raft!"

Aided by a slight down grade they levered the ship to the runway. It almost got away from them once. Only quick work with a block under the wheels stopped it.

The raft sagged dangerously and the side nearest the plane went under.

Standing waist-deep in the icy flood they worked the plane to the center of the raft, inch by inch, while an automatic attachment on the camera recorded the incident.

ETXHAUSTED from cold and lack of sleep they drank heavily of hot tea, rested a moment and were ready for the final effort.

"You leg down to the bar," Rusty suggested, "and get ready with your camera and lines. I want a shot of this layout going into that big eddy. And be ready to take a turn with the line around a stump the instant I yell. If we get out of that and start downstream there'll be plane scattered from here to the ocean. I'll give you fifteen minutes."

"She's stuck, Rusty!"

Rusty made a brief examination. The raft had grounded. He swore feelingly.

"Get a log alongside," he said. "We'll lash it to the side of the raft with the end well out in the stream. The current is pretty strong and it will be as good as a dozen men pushing on a lever."

"Say is there anything you can't do?" Joe demanded in open admiration.

Rusty grinned. Then his face became serious.

"Yes, there's one thing I can't do. I've never been able to win a girl I've fallen in love with. I don't fall so easily. I'm sort of air worthy, or maybe you'd better call it love worthy. But when I fall I sure crack up. You might as well write me off. I've fallen twice. Now——"

The raft shifted suddenly. "Light out, Joe," he shouted. "We're on our way!"

Joe splashed his way ashore and raced along the bank, doing what he could with a pole to check the drift of the raft. Suddenly the current swung it to the center of the stream. Rusty cut the lever pole clear. It had helped them, but now was dangerous. Again and again water spilled across the logs.

One side would sink until it seemed as if the craft would overturn; then the other. Rusty Wade ran back and forth, trying desperately to counteract the rolling by shifting his weight.

There was no guiding the raft. A smother of white water gave Rusty a lively minute, then they rushed on.

No stranger sight had ever been seen in the history of Alaskan aviation; perhaps in the world. The canyon walls, towered hundreds of feet above them; walls so sheer no man could hope to climb them. Waterfalls spilled over the rim, resembling great bridal veils swaying slightly in the wind.

Joe Frisk was now the camera man at his best. He had forgotten the exhaustion in his appreciation of drama. This was no stage setting that could be started or stopped at the will of a director. It was real—not reel!

AS THOUGH it were a chip of wood the river hurled the raft into the eddy. For a moment it seemed to remain in the exact center, spinning dizzily while the water sloped upward until it was fully two feet above the vortex.

Then, as chips of wood had done, the raft began moving toward the edge. Each complete circle was larger than the other.

Rusty cupped his hands and bellowed :

“The next time around, send me the line!”

Joe Frisk ran to the river. The line seemed too light for the purpose, but there was nothing better. He sent it curling outward. While Rusty was securing one end, he was taking a turn with the other.

Rusty started the motor, which had already been warmed for emergency. Joe signaled and pointed frantically. The whole force of the river was now on the line. The line was strong enough, but the stump was slowly being drawn from the damp ground. Small roots were popping and cracking; the tap root was giving way.

The motor roared and the echo, hurled from the canyon walls almost instantly deafened the atmosphere. Slowly the strain eased. Even more slowly the raft moved into shallow water and grounded.

The silence, as Rusty shut off the motor, was uncanny. No living thing moved. From this unknown danger all the creatures in the valley crouched in silence.

“That was a close one, but we won out,” Rusty said.

“If you can get off the ground and clear the treetops downstream and can clear the rim before the canyon gets too narrow for the wings, and several other things,” Joe answered. “Rusty! You’ve got more stick-to-it in your make-up than I have.”

“I haven’t seen you quitting yet,” Rusty retorted.

He started back upstream to float down the runway timbers. The next problem was to get the plane onto the bar for the take-off.

Good news awaited him on his return. KFOA had broadcasted again. Dolly Morgan would not take off for another twenty-four hours.

“Let’s rest,” Rusty suggested. “We’re all in! It’s no condition to be in when flying out of a tight place like this!” He yawned. “This is the first time I haven’t taken a mascot along. No wonder we have so much trouble. I usually have something, generally a Husky or Malemute pup. Once it was a young silver fox and two times I tried my luck with cats. Cats aren’t so good. I remember when——”

Rusty stopped and looked down. Joe Frisk had crawled into his sleeping bag and was dead to the world.

CHAPTER V CANYON PERIL.

JOE awakened to the sizzle of bacon in a frying pan. He had slept four hours and felt as if he could sleep forty.

“Say! Didn’t you go to sleep at all?” he cried.

“Yeah. Had a couple of hours’ sleep and I feel like a million. Since then I’ve been trying to dope out a way of getting out of here. I’m going to take most of the supplies, leave you; find a field, unload, then come back and get you.”

“You take the camera and fuel,” Joe answered. “If you can’t find a field—keep going. You can pick me up after Dolly lands. Don’t let me delay the game. Kicking through with pictures for Klein is the important thing.”

“Let’s eat, then see what happens. You may have to pick up the pieces yet!”

But when Rusty Wade took off an hour later he carried all the fuel, the cameras and some food. With all power on, the plane bumped down the rough ground. Twice it cleared, only to come back as if gathering for the final leap. The wheels left the last point of gravel and Joe groaned aloud as they sagged almost to the white water below the pool. The fall of the river was helping some—perhaps the margin between success and disaster.

Following the meanderings of the stream the plane disappeared down the canyon. The roar flowed back along the canyon walls like the rush of a mighty river. It grew less and finally died.

Fifteen minutes passed, then it returned. The tone was different and higher. Joe Frisk looked up.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried. "Now if there was only some way for me to climb out of here!"

The plane rushed overhead and Rusty Wade waved his hand in triumph.

Joe waved back, then picked up the frying pan and began to wash it out with sand. He packed the remaining equipment for hasty loading and waited.

A full hour slowly dragged by while Joe amused himself catching trout.

"I may be here for a couple of weeks," he mused, "well, what of it? I never did get my fill of trout."

Hmmmmmm!

Joe leaped to his feet and listened. The drone of motor against the canyon walls! For a few seconds it was almost musical, then with the thunder of victory *Air Musher* cleared the tree-tops downstream.

The sand and gravel leaped from beneath the wheels and it lurched to a stop a good hundred feet from the brush. Rusty Wade grinned.

"Found a peach of a landing field and left everything there. Hop in and we'll see if we can lift you out of here. Saw a half dozen eagles on the way back. Guess they resent the presence of this big bird. I'd like, to have a baby eagle for a mascot!"

"Yes, and get pecked to pieces."

"I know it's all the bunk, but I feel better when I have a mascot along. But what if it is all the bunk," he went on, "if you really feel better you have one worry less and can handle the bus better."

They turned the plane around and stowed the remaining equipment. The wheels scraped away the gravel as they turned. Something caught Rusty's eye. His expression changed from surprise to doubt, then he made a dive for a dull object lying in the wet sand. He washed it off in a convenient pool and let out a yell:

"Say! Look at this. Gold!" He weighed the nugget by shaking his hand up and down. "Worth a lot!"

"Why hasn't somebody found this place if there's gold here?" the skeptical Joe Frisk asked.

"Because this is one of countless streams in the North that hasn't been prospected. With gorges above and gorges below and the walls straight up and down, how're prospectors going to get here? Say, if this is a sample of what's at bed rock, I'll feel like erecting a monument to Metz. We're coming back here. Mark the spot on the map and make a sketch of the country as soon as we get into the air."

AGAIN the plane cleared the water by a scant margin. As the *Air Musher* bumped up and down the pockets

caused by currents in the canyon, Joe Frisk held his breath.

Dripping walls narrowly missed the wing tips. They shot over a falls, and it seemed as if there must be an air falls at the spot, for they sagged dangerously. The camera caught the canyon from the take-off until the wheels cleared rim rock.

As if glad to be free of the place the plane rushed over a ragged country for ten miles, then Rusty Wade began descending. A cleared, green spot was coming up to meet them. Suddenly he pointed ahead.

"See that!" he cried. "What is it?"

"Eagle!"

An eagle, carrying something so heavy it could hardly fly, was having a stormy flight.

"What's he got?"

Joe studied the bird. It flashed past, hopelessly outdistanced by man.

"It's got a pup, Rusty. A little, white pup!"

"The devil you say!" Abruptly he swung back. "I'm going to get that pup for a mascot—if I can!"

The king of birds swooped lower a few minutes later as the man-bird rushed upon him. The wheels beneath the plane looked like talons drawn up for flight. The snarl of the motor put the bird to flight. Perhaps he figured he had outmaneuvered the man-bird when it rushed past. Greed caused him to retain his prey, but he had lost considerable elevation.

Again and again the plane forced the bird lower. A wing struck the tip of the eagle's wing and the bird dropped to the ground. A few yards above the treetops the pup squirmed free of the claws, or was released. The men could not tell which. It struck the top of a spruce and vanished.

"A chance in a million," muttered Rusty, "but worth taking!" He brought the plane down on the landing site a few rods from the stores. Then he ran back to the tree.

Joe Frisk loaded their supplies aboard then broke out the radio receiving set. KFOA was silent, but he located a smaller station, which through some trick of the air was coming in with a roar.

"Music," he muttered, "I'll listen!"

Rusty Wade came running up.

"He's a pretty sick animal, but he's from a tough breed and will pull through, I guess!" He held up a white ball of fur, streaked black down the back. "An arctic wolf pup. Wonder how he got so far south? Any news?"

"No! Wait a minute!"

The voice from the studio thousands of miles away

came distinctly. Even Wade could hear it by putting his enclose to the headset.

"We wish to correct a bulletin earlier in the day. It should have read Miss Dolly Morgan had started her polar flight—not that she had postponed it for two days. She is already ten hours on her way!"

"Holy mackinaw!" exclaimed Rusty Wade. He tucked the wolf pup under his arm and climbed into the plane.

"Listen here, old sport, you've got to get busy and do your stuff. We're going to need plenty of good luck from now on."

CHAPTER VI OUT OF THE NORTH.

FOR the twentieth time Metz had gone over his plane. Skis had replaced wheels and the trim craft stood on the ice ready to take off.

Point Barrow, the most northerly part of the American mainland, seemed to resemble a fist, thrusting the ice back, as if decreeing the floes could come this far—and no farther.

The radio from the South was sending instructions to Rusty Wade, which either Metz or Slim promptly answered.

"Old Klein's fairly purring with satisfaction," Metz observed. "What a jolt the old boy will get when we show up in Seattle with the films."

"And what a jolt we'll get if he can hang it on us that we answered his radiograms and stopped a rescue expedition," suggested Slim. "Come on, let's go over to Charley Brewer's trading post."

The interior was warm, and famous men of the arctic had loafed there and exchanged experiences. Barrow was different than they had expected. There was the hospital and school, which, like the trading post, was constructed of sawed lumber shipped in. There was no timber in the district, except an occasional piece of driftwood.

Backlund's trading schooner had supplied many of the natives with portable lumber houses, brought from Seattle and exchanged for fur and ivory. Here and there an igloo, constructed of driftwood and sod, varied the scene.

Ottanna hurried excitedly to the pair. "She's started!" he cried. "I just heard it over the radio. She's been in the air about ten hours!"

A radio device, which Dolly Morgan could operate by merely throwing a switch sent out a short-wave impulse. Stations far to the south and at different points caught the signals and by triangulation plotted her position which was instantly reported to her.

The moment they reached the plane. Slim pulled on his headset. The buzz came instantly, then the girl's voice:

"All is well! All is well!" She evidently shut the device off at that moment to save batteries. Slim wore a peculiar expression.

"That's uncanny, Metz. I recognized her voice and I could hear the hum of her motor."

"Ready! We're going to meet her and get the air stuff. Check up our position with hers on the chart!"

A small chart was spread out before Slim. Everything was worked out ashore. All he had to do was to move two tacks, one of which represented the girl; the other their own ship. When the two tacks came together the craft should be visible to each other.

HOURS passed. The two tacks came together, then passed.

"Something wrong," Metz growled, "either she's off her course or we are!"

He turned and swung southward again, keeping to the position designated as correct. If he kept at it long enough he was bound to either run into her or show up at Barrow again.

Suddenly they emerged from a fog that had drifted up from the ice fields. Slim pointed.

"There she is, Metz. Look, she's going northward. That's all wrong!"

Metz peered through the binoculars. The sun was shining on the clouds below them as well as on the plane. The double light from sun and fog caused the craft to stand out distinctly. Metz dropped the binoculars in disgust.

"Ye gods!" he groaned, "that's the *Air Musher*. How the deuce did they get out of that jack pot? Now I've got to crash 'em again!"

"Go to it," Slim urged, "but don't give me the scare you did before."

JOE FRISK was performing a duty similar to Slim's, but with slightly better success. His handsome face was serious. He took nothing for granted. In photography, accuracy is the price of success. Why not in aerial navigation, he reasoned.

He saw the rim of the American continent slide

beneath the wings, then came the floes of the arctic. He looked down with interest. It looked like a perfect landing field from their elevation. Yet the tiny lines against the white were open leads. There were pressure ridges against which a plane would crumple. There were pools of water thinly filmed with ice.

He relaxed and thought of Dolly Morgan. People called her foolish, and she was. There was nothing to gain from a scientific standpoint by the flight—merely the fame of being the first girl to cross the north pole. And what a fleeting thing fame is. It was not worth it, yet he had to admire the courage behind it.

Again came her voice. His face grew soft as he remembered a moonlit night in Hollywood when he had proposed. Sure he was only a camera man then, and she a girl who played bits; but it looked as if he had a chance. Why couldn't he have expressed what was in his heart. The halting phrases never expressed what he meant them to.

"All is well! All is well!" They were moving swiftly in the eyes of men, but the girl's voice was crossing the floes, with never a thought of crashing as swiftly as light.

"Position again, please! I didn't get the same result. I'll check my figures."

Silence except for the roar of their own motor and hers.

Rusty, looking back for a moment, saw his partner grow pale. There was not much to see, what with the hood of his parka, pulled around the headset and his features almost hidden by the facing of wolverene fur.

"Listen," Joe said hoarsely and handed Rusty the headset. He took the controls. Another fog to blunder through. Well, they could always climb to sunshine.

Rusty seemed entranced. His face had the same interested, tense expression of a doctor listening to a patient's heart. An exclamation almost of anguish escaped him.

"Her motor's missing! That sound! It reminds me of the time an oil line broke and I melted my bearings before I could find a place to land. Walked three days that time. Came back later in another plane and had to put in a new motor. Tough job! If that motor isn't getting oil she'll never make it!"

HE HAD been cruising along at normal speed to save gasoline. Now he opened the motors wide. They broke through the fog and into the sunlight. In the blinding glare Joe saw another plane. He pointed, but Rusty shook his head.

"That's Metz," he said. "They're just getting onto her course. Keep your eye on him. If he tries to get above or behind me, let me know. I know a trick or two myself."

"I don't think he'll try any rough stuff out here," Joe answered. "There's too much chance of him going down, too."

Rusty nodded. Again Joe Frisk listened in. Rusty gave him a sharp look. Joe shook his head. His face was grave. The plane was rushing northward at full speed. They could get no more out of her.

Joe lifted up the tack and stuck it into the chart. The two tacks were together. Each man looked hopefully ahead. Then she came! A speck out of the North; the sun glistening on her wings—a picture neither man would ever forget.

Joe Frisk swung his camera around. He got some long shots, then—just as he started a closer view—a blinding flash struck him full in the face.

"What's that?" snapped Rusty.

"Slim Boyer's turning a mirror into my lens so I can't get her!" Again and again, Joe attempted to get a good shot, yet each time the mirror flashed just often enough to spoil the smooth run of film he desired.

Rusty was fighting mad. If Metz wanted battle, he would give it to him. He turned and ran at the other plane with throttles wide open. In an effort to avoid a collision, and it seemed as if Rusty was bent on a double crash, Metz shot downward.

Like a flash Rusty turned. He was grinning at his rather pale camera man.

"I knew that bird was yellow in the final analysis," he shouted. "Now get your picture!"

Neither man was prepared for what followed. Now that the girl was actually before them they no longer listened to the roar of her motor and the voices of those who were sending bearings and positions.

She turned toward a floe well to the left. The plane began a rapid descent, as though she had shut off the motor. The door opened, and for a second she seemed to hesitate, then she leaped into space.

Rusty Wade's whole body moved forward. For a moment the *Air Musher* sailed itself. The parachute opened and from Joe Frisk came the cry:

"I got that!" said Joe.

"But Metz didn't!" Rusty answered, "he wasn't in position. There goes the crack-up!"

"Keep the plane on its present course," Joe yelled. "I'm right on it!"

The camera was missing nothing. Dolly's ship, the

Ranger, struck with tremendous force and seemed to shatter to bits against the floe. A section of wing and part of the motor skidded down the pressure ridge into the sea.

A half mile beyond Dolly Morgan's feet struck the ice. She looked up and waved. Joe answered. Then he shouted in Rusty's ear: "Now what?"

"I'm going to land, of course. She'll have to have help."

"I rather hoped you would," Joe returned.

Rusty Wade did not reply. Again and again he soared over the spot. Each time the girl shook her head as if to say: "Don't; you can't land!"

Finally he rushed on to a second floe. Three times he circled it, then came down. The ice screamed as the wheels and tail skid rushed over the surface. Water, snow, and slush splashed into the air. The plane lurched violently and came to a stop.

"Now let's hurry," Rusty cried, "and break out that sled. We'll put that tarp around it and I'll paddle over and get her."

HIGH above them, Metz's plane soared, taking pictures of the shattered *Ranger* and the girl on the ice.

"What a break for us," Metz cried; "we'll get these first shots off, then come back. Get the idea? Can't you see the headlines? 'Dolly Morgan Crashes in the Arctic!' 'Metz and Boyer, Edmann Reel Photographers, Planning Rescue!' Why, man alive, it's our greatest break. The whole country will be talking about us. Dolly's safe with Rusty to look after her. Then, when the time is right and publicity is at its highest peak, we'll stage a rescue."

"What of Rusty Wade and Joe Frisk?" Slim was naturally cautious.

"They'll be also-rans because we'll rescue them, too. We can't be criticized. We can say it wasn't safe to land! The fact that Rusty can't take off that stuff will prove it. Slim, we're made!"

Metz turned his nose around and roared southward!

His plan was simple. He would radio the news from Barrow, then hop to Fairbanks alone for additional supplies. There he would ship the films to Seattle. There was no particular hurry about the films with his rival out of the race.

CHAPTER VII THE SILENT ARCTIC.

RUSTY WADE paddled slowly across a lead in a craft that was built for neither speed, comfort nor safety. It was built for emergency. It wallowed dangerously and water splashed over the bow; but the canvas deck shed it fairly well.

He worked his way along the floe, seeking a landing place, and eventually climbed to the ice and dragged the craft after him.

Dolly Morgan had not expected rescue this soon. She was sitting on a block of ice, regarding the wreck of her beloved *Ranger* through tear-dimmed eyes. She did not hear Rusty approach.

"Dolly!"

She started as though a ghost had spoken.

"Why, Rusty Wade! Of all things?"

"I said I'd meet you when you landed, Dolly, and here I am!"

He smiled and there was more than friendly interest in the smile. He knew why she was crying. Not through fear; nor through disappointment; but because something she had learned to love was wrecked.

"You shouldn't have landed, Rusty. Why, you can't get off again!"

"It doesn't look so good. I picked the best I could find. Somebody had to look after you. Guess you didn't save much grub from the plane!"

"No!" She was very serious. "You know, Rusty, I'm a little fool! I'd flown all over the country. Made a nonstop flight from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Flew down to Mexico City and then I got the north pole bug in my bonnet. Well, it was so different. The vastness of it all! I managed to keep my nerve, though. I reasoned that with a good plane and motor it made no difference whether land or water or ice was beneath. All last night I fought a storm. I crossed the north pole, though, and gave it a surprise by dropping the Stars and Stripes, a lipstick and compact. Then it all ends by my cracking up here!"

"But you made it, Dolly—the first woman to cross!"

"True. And history will credit me with being the fool of the age. Oh, Rusty, I'm so tired."

She fell asleep against his shoulder; but presently he leaned her against an ice block and turned his

attention to reclaiming some of the wreckage. There was some food. The wood in the plane would supply fuel.

An hour later he wakened her.

"We've got to go, Dolly, the floes are drifting apart. Who do you suppose is standing by the *Air Musher*?"

"Couldn't guess in a thousand years."

"Joe Frisk,"

She made no effort to conceal her delight.

"I'm dying to see him. You must have sold him on Alaska. He had no thought of coming north until he met you, Rusty."

"Yes, I sold him on this country. He's going to make a great partner unless some girl marries him. I usually lose my partners that way."

He stowed her into the craft, packed the salvaged food and wood about her, then paddled carefully across the lead.

"Who is in the other plane, Rusty?"

"Metz and Slim Boyer. They double crossed Klein and are working for Edmann."

"Klein plays the game fairly," he continued, "but his rivals resort to trickery and win." He spoke mechanically, but his eyes never left her face.

To Rusty Wade, Dolly was the ideal girl. For months he had treasured the love he held for her; for months he had determined to win her love.

Yet Dolly's eyes eagerly lifted to Joe Frisk as he stood waiting on the floe. Joe lifted her from the frail craft and impulsively kissed her. The arctic wolf pup eyed the proceeding with interest. Rusty swallowed hard as something stabbed him deep within.

"Our mascot," he managed to say, indicating the pup, "our luck has changed now."

"Mine has," Joe cried. "Dolly came through alive!"

Rusty took command as usual.

"Better not eat, Dolly, until you've rested. Your stomach is in no condition to take food after the long strain." He spread a sleeping bag for her and she smilingly obeyed orders.

NIGHT and day the roar of the arctic was in their ears. They labored until they dropped, cutting a runway on the ice. Dolly, with Joe's help, set up the radio receiving set and stood watch. The voice of the world came to her ears.

They heard Metz send a story of her crash from Barrow. He was standing by, he said. He would rescue her at great peril to himself. He would do this. He would do that. The world was eating it up.

He was silent on the fate of Rusty and Joe, but told the world that as soon as the girl had been rescued he would seek the Klein news-reel expedition. He explained that dense fogs were hampering operations.

But in the mass of news that came, with music, from the south, there was a familiar voice. Quite by chance Joe, who was standing by, caught it as he was tuning from one station to another.

"And so each night, boys, 'Old Man' Klein will send it a message. If you are alive and hear this, remember Klein sticks by his boys and will send it a plane to find you. And don't worry about the news-reel pictures. I should give a hang if Edmann beats me."

"Good old Klein," exclaimed Joe. "That's costing him plenty, too. I wish I could tell him we have shots that will put more curl in his hair. We're going to beat this game yet, Dolly. The runway is almost completed."

Then, as if answering the statement, the floe shuddered. Through the mists they saw a great floe crumping the end of their own. It came on with a deafening roar, sliced off their runway and ground past to disappear in the mists behind them.

Joe Frisk breathed hard.

"It took less than a minute to wipe out days of work, Rusty," he said thickly.

"That's the North. Man and his work don't seem to amount to much up here. But in the end there's always progress. Come on, let's start another runway. We'll build it through the center of the floe this time."

That meant cutting through pressure ridges and always there was the chance the floe would break up.

METZ was not taking chances. He watched Rusty and Joe from the air. Progress on their first runway had been so rapid his hand had almost been forced. Then the floe aided him. That meant he could delay the rescue while the first pictures were going south by plane, train and steamer.

He knew that the pictures Joe had taken were probably superior to his own and that if they reached Seattle it would mean a great victory for Klein. With the smashing of the runway this worry ceased.

Through the radio he made a great play about an attempt to drop supplies. Dolly heard the announcement and was not surprised when the big plane roared out of the mists the following day and dropped a parachute laden with food.

Rusty Wade snarled. "We don't need food and he knows it. More grand-stand stuff for the 'heroic Edmann flyers.'" He took his mood out in harder work.

Six hours later Metz sent a code message to Edmann:

Films well on way, including crack-up of *Ranger* and shots of girl on ice floes. Klein plane with her. I can rescue any time you wish. Equipping my plane with pontoons to land beside floe. Deposit twenty-five thousand dollars and will arrange to rescue her the day news reel is released. Answer.

Metz appreciated the publicity value of a rescue the day the films of the crash were released. That meant millions of people would read the story in the paper, then head for the nearest Edmann theater to see the pictures. It meant that Dolly would have to roost on a floe until the pictures could be developed and distributed.

Edmann, hundreds of miles away, swore furiously when he decoded the message, but he saw the financial angle instantly. He was willing to pay the price, but he was also shrewd. He answered in code:

Rescue her right away and make sure of it. Hold news of rescue until I send word. If something should happen that you couldn't make good the day the picture is released we would be in the hole and a laughingstock.

In a fine mood now, Edmann hurried down the street and by chance encountered Klein. He jeered.

"Already, Klein, you crook, my pictures are on the way south. And where are yours, I ask you? Not even taken yet and your plane lost. I weep when I think of your hard luck."

"You robber," Klein roared. "There's many a slip between the saucer and the lip when you're drinking coffee. In the picture-and-flying machine business anything can happen!"

"The flying machine ain't a business, it's a hazard."

Klein stumped angrily down the street.

"Always a crook wins," he said. "Ain't there no justice or luck left for an honest man? My poor boys! Who knows? Maybe they're starving."

He could not keep his mind on his work. Perhaps if he was in Seattle or Alaska he could speed the rescue. He rushed to the office and yelled at his secretary:

"Harry, you should get me a ticket to Seattle, first train."

"Air's quicker, Mr. Klein."

"Since when did I pay you to suggest? I should ride off the ground. Phooie!"

AT BARROW, Metz decoded Edmann's message. "The

twenty-five thousand dollars has been deposited, but he says we've got to rescue the girl at once. Guess he's right. Brother, we're sitting pretty. After this comes a vaudeville tour over Edmann's circuit and they'll be packing 'em in the aisles to see us," he said gleefully.

"How about winning Dolly's hand? That should be the final kick," Slim suggested.

"When I rescue that little girl," he answered, "she'll probably give me both hands."

They started early the following morning to stage the rescue. It was decided Slim should be landed on the floe some distance away, make his way over the ice to within a few yards of the girl, set up his camera and get actual scenes of Metz's arrival. Close-ups could be taken later.

As the plane drew near the floes, Rusty Wade turned a bearded face upward and looked at it through bloodshot eyes.

"They've got pontoons on now," he cried, "that means they can land. Dolly, you'll be at Barrow tonight. Well, it's the least they can do. They've cashed in on your plight. They owe you more than they can ever repay you, or will ever attempt to repay."

"And you?" the girl said.

The two men were on the verge of exhaustion. Day and night they had cut ice. The runway grew slowly. It was heartbreaking.

"And you?" Dolly repeated. "We've tried to get the stuff for Klein and failed. Edmann wins!"

Neither expressed regret that Metz and not they would be the hero in the public eye. It was Klein who worried them. Neither desired to stand up and be cheered.

You'd better get ready," Rusty suggested. "If the lead fills up with broken ice he can't take off."

THEY did not see the plane again for nearly an hour. Then it came sliding from the mists, and, quite by chance, Dolly saw Slim's camera blinking at her from behind a mass of ice. As the plane came gently to the floe the girl ran down to greet it. Rusty and Joe stopped work and watched. Metz pulled off a glove, climbed to the nose of the pontoon and shook hands. Slim had come closer now and was getting perfect shots of the rescue.

"Now, Dolly, climb in. Slim wants that, too!" ordered Metz.

"But I'm not going to climb in," the girl said quietly.

"What?" Both Metz and Slim cried at once.

"I'm not going to be rescued by you," Dolly

repeated. "My sense of sportsmanship won't permit it. These boys came down to aid me. You flew away to profit by what happened. Now you plan to cash in on the rescue."

Metz gasped. "What! You are going to stay here? You'll starve if you do. It'll take weeks for them to make a runway through those pressure ridges!"

"Perhaps—but what of it! From now on, Mr. Metz, you lose. You believed yourself a winner. You've sent no end of misinformation to the papers regarding your courage. We could not send radio messages, but we have been receiving everything."

Metz grew a bit nasty when he realized she was spoiling his carefully laid plans.

"Come on, Slim," he said; "get your stuff aboard!" As Slim handed him the camera and tripod, Metz whispered hoarsely:

"Throw the little fool to me! She's got to go or we're sunk!"

Slim turned and suddenly gripped Dolly. As she fought him off, Joe Frisk leaped to the rescue. Metz drew an automatic pistol and leveled it.

The next instant Rusty Wade had hurled a chunk of ice at the pilot. The ice struck his arm and the pistol splashed into the lead.

Slim sent the girl sprawling so he could have elbow room to work on Joe. The least powerful of the two, Joe was at a disadvantage. Besides he was tired from many hours' labor. He was putting up a game, but losing battle when Rusty stepped between them.

"Take on somebody your size," he growled.

Metz leaped to the ice to take a hand and Joe tied into him.

"Clean 'em up, Slim," he yelled, "I'll handle Joe!"

FOR several moments Rusty and Slim stood toe to toe, slugging. Rusty saw Joe go down from a blow to the jaw. Metz left him on the ice and was halfway to Rusty when Joe staggered to his feet and brought Metz down with a flying tackle. They finished their fight on the ice, while Rusty and Slim continued their quarrel toe to toe.

Suddenly Rusty shifted his tactics. He drove three hard punches into Slim's stomach. Slim lowered his guard and crash went Rusty's fist to the jaw. Hardly had Slim fallen before Rusty had gathered him up and heaved him aboard the plane. He turned to find Joe Frisk putting the finishing touches on Metz. Joe was a gory sight, but grinning.

"That was great! Help me heave him aboard."

Metz was conscious almost as he struck the plane. Mechanically he got the machine moving down the lead. Rusty turned to Dolly.

"Really you should have gone with them. There's no telling when we can get off. Besides, the floe is liable to break up any time. But I'm sure in a mood to go to work again. That rumpus cleared the atmosphere."

"Smarting under defeat, Metz was getting the plane into the air.

"Now what?" Slim Boyer inquired.

"We'll starve 'em out! In the end they'll have to rely on us for help."

CHAPTER VIII THE BIG BREAK.

CRACK! Rusty Wade dropped his pick and glanced sharply at the floe. Some part of the floe had grounded. The pressure was tearing the ice apart.

"Joe!" he yelled. "Dolly! Quick! The plane!"

Joe and Dolly ran for the plane.

Two minutes later the motor was turning over. Rusty was pale. Not so much on his own account as Dolly's. Alone he would have chanced it.

"There's a big chance we won't make it," he cried. "I haven't had time to finish the runway."

A week had passed since Metz had left them. Once he had flown over to note progress. Daily he was sending out bulletins that ice and fog conditions prevented his reaching the spot. He was confident, though, Dolly would listen to reason in time to complete the rescue on the date the films were released.

"If you say the word, Dolly——" repeated Rusty.

"I'll say the word. Let's chance it! If we fall into the water we'll swim back and get onto the floe. There's some fuel left and all the grub."

While the motor was warming up, Joe dumped everything, including his precious camera, over the side. The films alone were saved. These were in a waterproof box on his lap. He promised himself he would hang onto them until he went down for the third time.

Crack!

"She's going!" Rusty's warning sounded above the mighty roar of the parting floe.

They could see a crack slowly opening. Water was boiling toward the runway. It was now or never.

Joe leaped to the ground and gave a mighty heave that broke the wheels clear. Then he scrambled to his place while the plane lurched down the runway. Joe and Dolly hardly dared look at the floe. They were watching Rusty's back.

By his attitude they could tell what to expect. Nearer and nearer they rushed to the widening crack. The landing wheels rushed over the spot as the runway split apart. The edge of the floe rushed toward them.

"Will she never clear?" Joe almost whispered the words.

"Be ready for a crack up," Rusty warned.

Then she lifted; touched and sluggishly lifted again.

Rusty seemed to be almost trying to lift the plane with his hands. Water rushed beneath them. Then she dropped into an air pocket. The wheels all but skimmed the blue water before the throbbing motor pulled her up. The arctic dropped away; jagged ice took on a level aspect, the floe that had held them, slipped over the rim of the world.

KLEIN anxiously paced Boeing Field in Seattle, hoping for a last-minute break. A newsboy was shouting that the Edmann plane would rescue Dolly Morgan that day. Klein bought all the boy's papers and threw them away.

"How I hate that word, Edmann," he growled.

There was much that puzzled him. A message out of the North had directed him to rush a plane to an emergency landing field near Wrangell. He had stocked the plane with oil, gasoline and spare parts. That was two days ago. Another message had directed him to be at Boeing Field. He turned suddenly to find Edmann at his elbow.

"Plenty of news, these days!" Edmann beamed.

"Plenty of news by the papers." He beamed again. "I'll give you a pass, robber that you are, and you can see it the news reel of Dolly Morgan. Always Edmann's is first. Later on the others." Again he beamed.

"You're crazy! Stop it or there'll be a moider," Klein threatened.

"I'm crazy like a fox," replied Edmann. "You send it a plane to Wrangell. So do I. I take the second batch of films off the steamer and fly 'em down. Every house I have is running page ads when I tell 'em she's rescued. Pretty good business. The newspapers tell the story. I have pictures. That's advertising that don't cost a cent—only my page ads cost me money and it's worth it. To-day she's rescued as you'll see by the papers."

Klein chattered like an angry squirrel. A carload of newspaper reporters and news-reel men arrived.

"Two planes racing over Vancouver," one explained. "Flying too high to be identified."

"One's mine," Edmann said. "See, I've got a dozen planes ready to fly all over the country with films just as soon as they land. Already they were developed and printed on the boat coming down."

Two planes dropped from the sky. Klein looked up and blinked. Then he looked again.

"Give a look!" he bellowed. "Edmann, you robber, give a look. It's the *Air Musher*. It's got something or it wouldn't be coming. My boys always bring home the bacon to papa."

"I hope you eat the bacon and it chokes you!" Edmann snapped.

He was fearing the worst. The *Air Musher* was supposed to be in the arctic, stranded. Here it was, while his boys were flying over the floes.

KLEIN rushed forward with open arms.

"Rusty, my boy! Right out of the jaws of death you snatched yourself. And you, Joe. And—— Can I believe my eyes. Newspaper boys, you should give a look. See, my boys did it! They rescued Dolly Morgan and brought her down. See with your own eyes. Give a look, Edmann, I won't charge you a cent."

Rusty Wade kept in the background. This was Dolly's big moment and Klein's. In a way he had got a big break at last. He would be noticed. There would be a chance in pictures; a tour over Klein's circuit. Money.

But he knew he had lost the girl he loved to a man he loved. Joe deserved it. That meant he had lost another partner. Married men should not go in for his sort of flying. It was altogether too risky.

Edmann kept apart also. He was not offering congratulations. He was thinking of the two men hanging around Barrow, waiting to rescue Dolly Morgan and sending out reports while Dolly was already rescued.

To-morrow the world would know the story. He had no use for dead ones. He was through with them. But a live one was passing—greasy, bearded, exhausted Rusty Wade. Edmann did not congratulate him. He merely scowled and observed:

"What a lucky break you got, Wade!"

Like a flash an equally bearded, greasy, exhausted man turned on Edmann. It was Joe Frisk.

"Shut up, you rat," he said. "Rusty never got a break in his life—he made 'em. They don't call him 'The Sky Fool' for nothing."