

The SKY-MAN

HENRY H. WEBSTER
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CHAPTER V.

The Dart.
High, high up in the clear opaline air was a broad, golden gleam. Nearer it came, and broader it grew, and as it grew, and as it caught more fully the slanting beams of the low-hanging arctic sun, it shone with prismatic, iridescent color among the gold, like an archangel's wings. The shining thing towered at last right above the masthead, but high, high up in the sky.

Then the four watchers uttered, in one breath, a horror-stricken cry, for, as a falcon does, it dropped, hurtling. But not to the destruction they foresaw; once more it darted forward, circled half round the yacht, so close to her rail that they heard the whining scream of the air as those mighty wings cleft through it. And then, as on the night before, his plans upstanding straight, Cayley leaped backward, clear of them, and alighted on the sea beside the yacht.

Old Mr. Fanshaw walked quickly around the deckhouse and hailed the new arrival. "Won't you come aboard, sir?" Jeanne heard him call. "I'll send the dinghy for you."

"Thank you," they heard him answer. "There wasn't much room for alighting on the deck or I could have spared you the trouble."
Jeanne stole a glance into Tom Fanshaw's stern, set face, wondering if the tone and the inflection of that voice would impress him as it had her. "Don't you find it hard to believe that he could have done such a thing?" she asked; "a man with a voice like that?"

"I only wish I found it possible to believe he hasn't. Not every villain in this world looks and talks like a thug. If they did, life would be simpler." He paused a moment, then added: "And we know he did the other thing—out there in the Philippines."

Her face paled a little at that, stiffened, somehow, and she did not answer. They sat silent, listening to the receding oars of the dinghy as it made for the ice-foe. Suddenly the girl saw an expression of perplexity come into Tom Fanshaw's face. "When you talked with him, Jeanne, last night, did you tell him our name? Mine and father's, I mean? Did you give him any hint who we were, or that we were people who might know him?"

"No, only my own; and who father was. He asked me about that."
"Ah," he said. "Then that accounts for his coming back."

She had hoped that in some way or other the trend of her answer



"It was a moment before he spoke," might be in the sky-man's favor, and was disappointed at seeing that the reverse was true.

She had to repress a sudden impulse of light when they heard the returning dinghy scrape alongside the accommodation ladder. And even though she resisted it, she shrank back, nevertheless, into a corner behind Tom Fanshaw's chair. The old gentleman was waiting at the head of the ladder, blocking, with the bulk of his body, the new-comer's view of the deck and those who were waiting there until he should have fairly come aboard.

"Mr. Philip Cayley?" he inquired softly. "My name is Fanshaw, sir; and I think my son, who sits yonder—" he stepped aside and inclined his head a little in Tom's direction—"is, or was once, an acquaintance of yours." From her place in the background, Jeanne saw a look of perplexity—nothing more than that, she felt sure—come into Philip Cayley's face.

The old gentleman's manner was certainly an extraordinary one in which to greet a total stranger, 600 miles away from human habitation. Cayley seemed to be wondering whether it represented anything more than the individual eccentricity of the old gentleman, or not.

Evidently he recognized Tom Fanshaw at once, and, after an almost imperceptible hesitation, seemed to make up his mind to overlook the singularity of his welcome. "I remember Lieutenant Fanshaw well," he said, smiling and speaking pleasantly enough, though the girl thought she heard an underlying note of hardness in his voice. "You were at the Point while I was there, weren't you? But it's many years since I've seen you."

At that he crossed the deck to where young Fanshaw was sitting, and held out his hand. Tom Fanshaw's hands remained clasped tightly on the two arms of his chair, and the stern lines of his face never relaxed, though he was looking straight into Cayley's eyes. "I remember you at the Point

Very well," he said. "I'm, unfortunately, here some stories of your subsequent career which I remember or altogether too well."

The girl did not need the sudden look of incandescent anger she saw in Philip Cayley's face to turn the sudden tide of her sympathy toward him. It was not for this old wrong of his that they had summoned him, as to a bar of justice, to the Aurora's deck, but to meet the accusation of the murder of Perry Hunter. Whether he was guilty of that murder, or not, this raking up of an old, unproved offense was a piece of unnecessary brutality. She could not understand how kind-hearted old Tom could have done such a thing. Thinking it over afterward, she was able to understand a little better.

From behind Tom's chair she could see how heavily this blow he dealt had told. For one instant Philip Cayley's sensitive face had shown a look of unexpressed pain. Then it stiffened into a mere mask—icy; disdainful.

It was a moment before he spoke. When he did, it was to her. "I don't know why this gentleman presumes to keep his seat," he said. "If it is as a precaution against a blow, perhaps, he need not let his prudence interfere with his courtesy."

"He has just met with an accident," she said quickly. "He can't stand—No, Tom. Sit still," and her hands upon his shoulders enforced the command.
Cayley bowed ever so slightly. "I suppose," he continued, "that since last night you also have heard the story which this gentleman protests he remembers so much too well?"

"Yes," she said.
At that, he turned to old Mr. Fanshaw. "Will you tell me, sir," he asked, "for what purpose I was invited to come aboard this yacht?"

Tom spoke before his father could answer—spoke with a short, ugly laugh. "You weren't invited. You were, as the police say, 'wanted.'"

"Be quiet, Tom!" his father commanded. "That's not the way to talk—to anybody."
Cayley's lips framed a faint, satirical smile; and again he bowed slowly. But he said nothing, and stood, waiting for the old gentleman to go on.

This Mr. Fanshaw seemed to find it rather difficult to do. At last, however, he appeared to find the words he wanted. "When Miss Fielding gave us an account, this morning, of the strange visitor she had received last night, we were—I was, at least—inclined to think that she had been dreaming it without knowing it. To convince me that you were real and not a vision, she showed me a material and highly interesting souvenir of your call. It was an Eskimo throwing-stick, Mr. Cayley, such as the Alaskan and Siberian Indians use to throw darts and harpoons with. It happens that I've had a good deal of experience among these people, and that I know how deadly an implement it is."
He made a little pause there, and then looked up suddenly into Cayley's face. "And I imagine," he continued very slowly, "that you know that as well as I do."

Cayley made no answer at all, but if Mr. Fanshaw hoped to find with those shrewd eyes of his, any look of guilt or consternation in the pale face that confronted him, he was disappointed.

Suddenly, he turned to his son: "Where is that thing that Donovan brought aboard with him just now?" he asked.

The blood-stained dart lay on the deck beside Tom's chair. He picked it up and held it out toward his father, but the elder man, with a gesture, indicated to Cayley that he was to take it in his hand; then: "Jeanne, my dear," he asked, "will you fetch out from the cabin the stick which drops from Mr. Cayley's belt last night?"

When she had departed on the errand, he spoke to Cayley: "You will observe that the butt of this dart is not notched, as it would have to be if it were shot from a bow."

He did not look at Cayley's face as he spoke, but at his hands. Could it be possible, he wondered, that those hands could hold the thing with that sinister brown stain upon it—the stain of Perry Hunter's blood—without trembling? They were steady enough, though, so far as he could see.

When Jeanne came out with the stick, he handed that to Cayley also. "You will notice," he said, "that that dart and the groove in this stick were evidently made for each other, Mr. Cayley."

The pupils of Jeanne's eyes dilated as she watched the accused man fit them together, and then balance the stick in his hand, as if trying to discover how it could be put to so deadly a use as Mr. Fanshaw had indicated. He seemed preoccupied by nothing more than a purely intellectual curiosity.

His coolness seemed to anger Mr. Fanshaw, as it had formerly angered his son. For a moment this sudden anger of his rendered him almost inarticulate. Then:

"We don't want a demonstration!" came like the explosion of a quick-firing gun. "And you have no need for trying experiments. You know how nicely that dart would fit in the groove that was cut for it. You know, altogether too well, what the stain is that discolors it. You know where we found that dart. You're only surprised that it was ever found at all—it and the body of the man it slew."

"Everything you say is perfectly true," said Cayley, very quietly. "I am

surprised that the body of the man was ever recovered. I'm a little surprised, also, that you should think, because this stick fell from my belt last night, and this dart, which you found transfixing a man's throat this morning—"

Tom Fanshaw interrupted him. His eyes were blazing with excitement. "It was not from us that you learned that that dart transfixed the murdered man's throat!" he cried.

"I knew it, nevertheless," said Cayley in that quiet voice, not looking toward the man he answered, but still keeping his eyes on old Mr. Fanshaw. "And also a little surprised," he went on, as if he had not been interrupted, "that you should think, because this stick and this dart fit together, that I am, necessarily, a murderer."

"You have admitted it, now, at all events," Mr. Fanshaw replied. His voice grew quieter, too, as the intensity of his purpose steadied it. "I suppose that is because, upon this 'No-Man's-Land,' you are outside the pale of law and statute—beyond the jurisdiction of any court. I tell you this: I think we would be justified in giving you a trial and hanging you from that yard there. We will not do it. We will not even take you back to the states to prison. You may live out your life in freedom, undisturbed, your freedom such as you and your thoughts and your conscience, such as they must be. But if ever you try to return to the world of men—"

Cayley interrupted the threat before it was spoken: "I have no wish to return to the world of men," he said. "I wish the world were empty of men, as this part of it is, or as I thought it was. I abandoned mankind once before, but yesterday when I saw men here, I felt a stirring of the blood—the call of what was in my own veins. Last night when I took to the air again, after the hour I've spent on that ice-foe, I thought I wanted to come back to my own kind; and, in spite of the fact that I was wanted, in spite of the fact that I should be rid of that delusion so quickly, I am rid of it, and I am rid of you—bloody, sodden, stupid, blind."

"Yet, with all my horror of you, my disdain of you, I should not expect one of you to do murder, without some sort of motive, some paltry hope of gain, upon the body of a stranger. It is of that that you accuse me—"

"A stranger?" Tom Fanshaw echoed. "Why, when you confess to so much, do you try to lie at the end? You can't think we don't know that the man you murdered was once your friend—or thought he was, God help him! Why try to make us believe that Perry Hunter was a stranger to you?"

The girl's wide eyes had never left Cayley's face since the moment of her return to the deck with the throwing-stick. Through it all—through Fanshaw's hot accusation, and his own reply—through those last words of Tom's, it had never changed. There had been contempt and anger in it, subdued by an iron self-control; no other emotions than those two, until the very end. Until this mention of that name—"Perry Hunter."

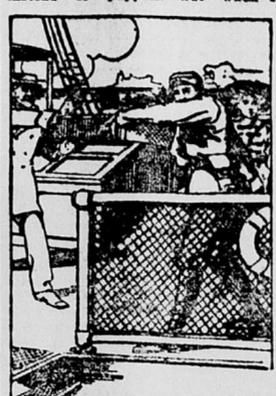
But at the sound of that name—just then, the girl saw his face go bloodless, not all at once, slowly, rather. And then after a little while he uttered a great sob; not of grief, but such a sob as both the Fanshaws had heard before, when, in battle or skirmish, a soft-nosed bullet smashes its way through some great, knotted nerve center. His hands went out in a convulsive gesture, west the stick and the dart which he held, falling from them, the stick at the girl's feet, the dart at his own. Then leaning back against the rail for support, he covered his face with his hands. At last, while they waited silently, he drew himself up straight and looked dazedly into her face.

Suddenly, to the amazement of the other two men, she crossed the deck to where he stood. "I'm perfectly sure, for my part, that you didn't do it; that you are not the murderer of Mr. Hunter. Won't you shake hands?"

He made no move to take hers, and though his eyes were turned upon her, he seemed to be looking through her, rather than at her, so intense was his preoccupation.

Seeing that this was so, she laid her hand upon his forearm. "You didn't do it," she repeated, "but you know something about it, don't you? You saw it done, from a long way off—saw the murder, without knowing

who its victim was." "I might have saved him," he murmured brokenly. "If I had not hung aloft there too long, just out of curiosity; if they had been men to me instead of puppets. But when I



Throw it Far Out into the Water.

guessed what their intent was, I guessed that it was something sinister. It was done before I could interfere. I saw him going backwards over the brink of a fissure in the ice, tugging at a dart that was in his throat. And when they had gone—his murderers—"

"They?" she cried. "Was there more than one?" "Yes," he said, "there was a party. There must have been ten or twelve at least. When they had gone I flew down and picked up that stick, which one of them had dropped—And to think I might have saved him!"

Her hand still rested on his arm. "I'm glad you told me," she said. She felt the arm stiffen suddenly at the sound of Tom Fanshaw's voice.
"Jeanne, take your hand away! Can you touch a man like that? Can you believe the lies—? but there, with a peremptory gesture, his father silenced him.

But even he exclaimed at the girl's next action, for she stooped, picked up the blood-stained dart which lay at Philip Cayley's feet, and handed it to him. "Throw it away, please"—she said, "overboard, and as far as you can."

Even before the other men cried out at his doing the thing she had asked him to, he hesitated and looked at her in some surprise.

"Do it, please," she commanded; "I ask it seriously."
Tom Fanshaw started out of his chair; then, as an intolerable twinge from his ankle stopped him, he dropped back again. His father moved quickly forward, too, but checked himself, the surprise in his face giving way to curiosity. At a general thing, Jeanne Fielding knew what she was about.

Philip Cayley took the dart and threw it far out into the water.
There was one more surprise in store for the two Fanshaws. When Cayley, without a glance toward either of them, walked out on the upper landing of the accommodation ladder, the girl accompanied him, and, side by side with him, descended the little stairway, at whose foot the dinghy waited.

"You are still determined on that resolution of yours, are you, to abandon us all for the second time—all humankind, I mean? This later accusation against you was so easily disproved."

"Disproved?" he questioned. "That beautiful faith of yours can't be called proof."
"I meant just what I said—disproved. They shall admit it when I go back on deck. Won't you—won't you give us a chance to disbelieve the old story, too?"

"I can never explain that now," he said; "can never lay that phantom, never in the world."

"I am sorry," she said holding out her hand to him. "I wish you'd give us a chance. Goodbye."

This time he took the hand, bowed over it and pressed it lightly to his lips. Then, without any other farewell than that, he dropped down into

slightly and was rowed back to the ice-foe to his wings.

When she returned to the deck she found that Mr. Fanshaw had gone around to the other side of it to see the sky-man take to the air.

But Tom sat, rigid, where he was. For the first time that she could remember, he was regarding her with open anger. "I know," he said, "that you never liked Hunter, though I never could see why you should dislike him; and it didn't take two minutes to see that this man Cayley, with his wings and his romance, had fascinated you. But in spite of that, I thought you had a better sense of justice than you showed just now."

She flushed a little. "My sense of justice seems to be better than yours this morning, Tom," she answered quietly. Then she undling her binoculars again, and turning her back upon him, gazed out shoreward.

"I am getting worried about our shore party," she remarked, as if by way of discontinuing the quarrel. "If there are ten or twelve men living there, in hiding from us, willing to do unprovoked murder, when they can with impunity—"

"So you believed that part of the story, too, did you?" Tom interrupted. She did not answer his question at all, but turned her attention shoreward again.

A moment later she closed her binoculars with a snap, and walked around to the other side of the deck, where Mr. Fanshaw, leaning his elbows on the rail, was looking out across the ice-foe.

"Well," he asked briskly, as she came up and laid an affectionate arm across his shoulder. "I suppose you've been telling Tom why you did it—why you made Cayley throw that dart away, I mean; but you'll have to tell me, too. I can't figure it out. You had something in mind, I'm sure."
"I haven't been telling Tom," she said. "He doesn't seem to be a very reasonable man this morning. But I did have something in mind. I was proving that Mr. Cayley couldn't possibly be the man who had committed the murder."

"I suspected it was that," he said. "It's the stick that proves it really," she said. "You remember how puzzled you were because the end of it which you held it by wouldn't fit your hand? I discovered why that was when you sent me in to see it a short while ago. It's a left-handed stick. It fits the palm of your left hand perfectly. You'll find that that is so when you try it. And Mr. Cayley is right-handed."

The old man nodded rather dubiously. "Cayley may be ambidextrous for anything you know," he objected. She had her rejoinder ready: "But this stick, Uncle Jerry, dear, was made for a man who couldn't throw with his right hand, and Mr. Cayley can. He did it perfectly easily, and without suspecting at all why I wanted him to. Don't you see? Isn't it clear?"

"It's quite clear that the brains of this expedition are in that pretty head of yours," he said. "Yes, I think you're right." Then, after a pause, he added, with an enigmatical look at her: "Don't be too hard on Tom, my dear, because you see the circumstances are hard enough on him already."

She made a little gesture of impatience. "They're not half as hard on him as they are on Mr. Cayley," she said. "I don't know," the old gentleman answered. "Take it by all means, I should say that Cayley was playing in luck."

(To Be Continued.)

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