

Roy Rockwood

The Speedwell Boys and Their Ice Racer: or, Lost in the Great Blizzard



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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	19
CHAPTER VI	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

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CHAPTER I

ON THE ROAD AND ON THE ICE

“Crickey! this is some snow, Dan. Never saw it come so fast in my life,” declared Billy Speedwell earnestly, as his brother rolled the heavy cans of milk out of the cooling room at Fifield’s.

Their new motor-truck, in which the boys picked up the milk from the various dairies under contract to Mr. Speedwell, stood near. One at a time the brothers lifted the heavy cans and tossed them into the wagon.

“You’ll likely see a lot more snow before *this* winter’s over, Billy,” grunted the older lad, as the last can was placed.

“If it gets deep in the roads we may have to go back to using Bob and Betty and the old delivery wagons.”

“Not much!” exclaimed Dan, with confidence. “We’ve got seventy horses in this old engine; that ought to push her through the drifts.”

“We’ll have to put the chains on her tires before we start out to-morrow morning – unless I miss my guess. This is going to be some snow,” remarked Billy.

“According to the almanac,” his brother responded, “we’re going to have many big storms this winter and lots of ice. Why! there’s a regular blizzard due before Christmas.”

“Well, I like the winter,” declared Billy. “But if the Colasha stays frozen over we’ll not use the *Red Arrow* again till spring.”

“No; I suppose not.”

“And with the roads deep in snow we won’t do much fast riding on either our *Flying Feathers*, or our racing-auto.”

“Oh! there’ll be good weather for motor-car races yet.”

“That’s so,” cried Billy. “I guess we can get a bit of fun out of the old car, eh?”

“We’ll try,” agreed Dan, who was just as much of a motor enthusiast as his younger brother.

Billy had hopped in and taken the wheel. The motor was singing beneath them and in a moment the electric truck lurched forward and they slid out of the Fifield yard.

When they turned into the road, heading for home, the wind and snow struck them with all their force.

“Some storm!” Billy muttered, with set teeth, and trying to peer ahead.

The lamps did little good in such a smother. The flakes whipped into his face and clung to his goggles. Again and again he wiped away the accumulated moisture with his mittened hand – thereby blurring his sight for a moment entirely.

It was just after one of these attempts to clear his vision that the accident happened. The truck was steaming along at a good clip, for the Speedwells were anxious to get home to shelter and a warm supper.

Dan shouted and seized his brother’s shoulder. The latter felt the jar as the mudguard struck the dim figure that he had only seen when the truck was right upon it.

Down went the foot passenger, who had been plowing against the storm, too, deaf and blind to the motor-truck. Billy shouted, but was not too excited to stop the motor and brake the car.

He leaped into the gathering snow on one side, while Dan left the truck on the other. Fortunately the wayfarer had been flung aside; the wheels had not passed over him.

"He must be badly hurt, Dan!" gasped Billy, in great distress, on his knees beside the fallen figure.

"Does he move?"

"I – I can't tell. Try it, Dannie," choked the younger Speedwell. "I – I'm afraid to do so."

Dan had the wrist of the unfortunate in his own bare fingers. "His pulse is all right," he said.

Just then the unknown stirred and muttered. What he said neither of the Speedwells could understand; but they were both delighted. Certainly the victim of the accident was far from dead!

"Who are you? Are you hurt?" asked Dan.

The other made a strange sound – it was as though he said several words, but they were unlike any speech the boys had ever heard before.

"He can't be intoxicated; can he?" gasped Billy.

"Why, he's only a boy!" declared Dan, dragging the unknown into a sitting posture in the snow.

"There's a cut along his cheek. See! it's bleeding."

Billy brought out his handkerchief and wiped the blood away. The mysterious youth – he wasn't as old as Dan – tried to speak again. The sounds that issued from his lips were so strange that the younger Speedwell was startled.

"I never heard the like, Dan!" he gasped. "Is he some kind of a foreigner?"

"It doesn't sound human," drawled Dan. "He must be a stranger from Mars."

But it was not altogether a joke, although the youth now staggered to his feet with the aid of the brothers, one on either side. He had been much shaken, it was evident. His cheek still bled, and he seemed strangely weak.

"Come along home with us, old man," Dan said, patting him on the shoulder. "We'll see what's the matter with you there."

The stranger seemed to understand. Although he could not speak intelligibly, it was plain that he understood what the Speedwells said to him. And he did not lack intelligence – Dan and Billy were sure of *that*. His eyes were bright and he wasn't at all dazed. The blow had knocked him out for only a minute.

They helped him into the seat and again Billy started the truck. The snow whirled down upon them faster and faster; but this time there was no stop made until they turned in at the Speedwell gate and the outline of the big barn and cow stables loomed before them.

Dan hurried the strange youth into the kitchen, where the odorous steam of supper attacked them cheerfully as soon as the outer door was opened.

"What *is* the matter?" cried Mrs. Speedwell, who was a motherly person, as soon as she saw her older son and the strange boy. "Is he hurt? Who is he, Daniel?"

"I don't believe he's badly hurt, Mother," explained Dan. "But he doesn't seem able to tell –"

Again the unknown mumbled something. His eyes roved eagerly toward the table, already laid with a bountiful repast.

"I know he's hungry," exclaimed Mrs. Speedwell. "Let him wash his face and hands, Daniel, and sit down at once."

The strange boy could do that. Carrie brought a bottle of antiseptic and little 'Dolph stood by and watched the stranger in childish curiosity. In a few moments Billy and their father came in, and then all sat down to the table.

The visitor was undeniably hungry. Adolph could scarcely eat his own supper he was so greatly interested in seeing the unknown youth "mow away" the heaping plateful good-natured Mr. Speedwell put before him.

"Why!" declared Mrs. Speedwell, "that young fellow was pretty near starved. And he's only a boy, too! What can his folks be thinking of –?"

The visitor looked at her, smiled, and nodded. He tried to say something, too, but it was such a jumble of sounds that they all looked amazed, and even the boys' father shook his head.

"That certainly beats *me*!" he exclaimed. "What do you think he means, Mother?"

"I am sure I do not know. But we must find out about him. He ought not to be wandering around alone."

"On a night like this, too!" from Dan.

"Oh, we'll put him up," said Billy, quickly. "Won't we, Mom?"

"Surely, my son," agreed his mother.

"Maybe he is some kind of a foreigner," said Carrie, the boys' sister.

"Sounds more like hog-Latin," chuckled Billy, to his brother.

"Sh! he can understand English well enough, even if he doesn't speak it plainly," said the older boy.

"Guess you are right there," agreed Billy.

The entire family was deeply interested in the youth. He had been hungry indeed; and when supper was finished he appeared sleepy, too.

"No knowing how far he had tramped in the snow and storm before you boys ran across him," Mr. Speedwell observed.

"We didn't exactly run across him," Billy said, with a chuckle. "But we come pretty near it, Dad. Too near for comfort."

At any rate, Mrs. Speedwell and Carrie prepared a room for the stranger. He had a suit of Dan's pajamas to sleep in, and little 'Dolph had become so friendly with him that he insisted on the visitor's taking to bed with him one of Adolph's newest and most precious toys – an air-gun.

The visitor retired after saying something that must have been a grateful response to Mrs. Speedwell's kindness.

"By gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Speedwell, slapping his knee, "that surely sounds like English – only he mumbles it so. Sounds just as though he were tongue-tied."

"He surely isn't dumb," agreed Dan.

"Not at all," Billy added. "But I never heard anybody as tongue-tied as all *that*."

The Speedwells were not late to bed – especially on such a night as this. The wind howled and the snow continued until midnight; but when the alarm clock awoke Billy and Dan in their room at two o'clock, the storm had ceased and a faint strip of moon was struggling amidst the breaking clouds.

The snow was not too deep for the auto-truck, although the brothers could not get over their long route as quickly as usual. School was in session and Dan and Billy put in full time every school day, in spite of the milk delivery.

They were spinning out the river road towards Colonel Sudds's place, beyond the Darringford Machine Shops, about half past seven, with only a few more customers to deliver to, when Billy caught sight of something on the river that interested him immensely.

"Look at that flyer, Dan!" he cried. "Iceboat, sure as you are an inch high!"

"I'm several feet more than an inch tall, Billy," chuckled his brother, "so that *must* be an iceboat and no hallucination."

"Don't pull any of the 'high brow stuff,' as Biff Hardy calls it," returned slangy Billy Speedwell. "And tell me, pray, who owns an iceboat around Riverdale?"

"I didn't even suppose the ice was thick enough to bear a boat," returned Dan, who was quite as surprised at the appearance of the swooping craft as his brother.

The river bank fell abruptly from the edge of the road. Dan had brought the truck to a halt, for both boys were immensely interested.

Anything that flew like that craft on the ice below, was bound to hold the attention of the brothers. They were well named, their chums at the Riverdale Academy declared. Billy Speedwell had never yet traveled fast enough to suit him, and Dan was just as much of a "speed maniac."

However, Dan's natural caution usually kept the brothers from reckless racing of any kind; but they had won prizes and made records with their motorcycles, racing car, and motorboat.

Now they stared hard at the craft flying down the river toward the buildings belonging to the Colasha Boat Club. The ice was firm in patches, but from this height the Speedwells could see that there were open strips of water, yards in width.

The tides did not affect the river much so far from its mouth; yet there was some brine in it and despite the severe cold of the last few days, the ice was not entirely safe.

"Two fellows in her," announced Billy.

"I see 'em."

"And just as reckless as they can be. See there! Don't they see that channel ahead? My goodness, Dan! It's fifty feet wide if it is a foot!"

"You're right, Billy; they're going to have a spill!"

"Worse than that," cried the younger brother, and he hopped out of his seat. "Come on, Dan! there's going to be something doing down there in another minute. We're going to be needed –"

He halted in his speech, for at that very moment the skimming iceboat shot over the edge of the firm ice, its runners cut through the shell-like crystal beyond, and the heavy body of the boat splashed into the open water.

Its momentum carried it far; but only the front runner hit the ice on the other side of the open channel. The runner slipped under the firm ice, and the careening boat stopped. With a crash heard plainly up on the highroad, the mast went by the board, and the craft and its passengers disappeared under the falling canvas.

CHAPTER II

A BIG IDEA

Dan and Billy Speedwell, now seventeen and sixteen years of age respectively, were, as has been observed, famous in the county as speed experts. In “The Speedwell Boys on Motorcycles” are related several of their first speed trials at the Compton Motordrome and on the road, and in the second volume of the series, “The Speedwell Boys and Their Racing Auto,” is told the winning of a thousand-mile endurance test.

The brothers later obtain possession of a motorboat and adventures connected with the great regatta of the Colasha Boat Club are narrated in “The Speedwell Boys and Their Power Launch,” and in the fourth volume, entitled “The Speedwell Boys in a Submarine,” the brothers are two of an adventurous party that find a submerged wreck and the treasure aboard it.

The boys’ father had been merely a small dairyman and farmer, and the boys had to work hard between school sessions to help him. By certain fortuitous circumstances they had been enabled to obtain motorcycles, a racing auto, and a power launch; but the disposal of the recovered treasure had made the Speedwell family quite independent.

Something like twenty thousand dollars had been wisely invested for Dan and Billy, and in addition they were able to help their father increase his business and give the family many luxuries which had before been beyond their reach.

As we have seen, however, the Speedwells lived plainly and were busy and industrious folk. The brothers went to school faithfully and helped as they had for several years in the delivery of the milk to their father’s customers in and about Riverdale.

The interest of the two boys in the career of the strange iceboat had brought them to a halt on the river road. Dan and Billy were both descending the steep bank at breakneck speed before the fall of the mast spelled utter ruin to the ice craft.

“They’ll be drowned, Dan!” gasped Billy, hurrying on the slippery path.

“They’ll be mighty wet – that’s sure,” returned the older boy. “Hold on, Billy! Let’s take some of these rails. We’ll need ’em.”

It was always Dan who thought the more clearly. Billy was as brave as a young lion; but he lacked his brother’s judgment and caution. He would have gone empty-handed to the rescue of the victims of the wreck; but Dan saw ahead.

The boys immediately tore down a couple of lengths of rail fence which here marked the boundary of some old pasture. With the rails on their shoulders they hurried on.

Just then a faint cry for help came from the half-submerged iceboat. Billy returned a shout of encouragement as he and Dan hurried to get around the open stretch of water.

When the boys leaped down upon the ice they chose a firm spot for their attempt. They were able to run right out toward the middle of the river (which was here at least two miles wide) without venturing upon any thin ice. Their principal peril was from holes hidden by the heaped-up snow of the night before.

The weight of this snow had broken down great patches of ice, leaving open places like this into which the iceboatmen had fallen. And there had been a very high tide not four hours before, which had raised the level of the Colasha River even as far up-stream as this point.

Naturally the ice – not yet very thick – had given way in many places. The two on the wrecked boat had been very reckless indeed.

This was no time to tell them so, however. Dan and Billy went to work in the most approved fashion to reach the half-frozen castaways clinging to the outrigger of the ice craft.

“Keep up your pluck! We’re coming!” yelled Billy.

“So – so’s – Christmas!” stammered one of the castaways.

“Crickey!” gasped Billy. “That’s Monroe Stevens – sure’s you live, Dan!”

The Speedwells had cast the fence rails on the ice in a criss-cross fashion and now Dan was creeping out upon the frail platform thus made, to the very thin ice. He said:

“If he was going to be hanged the next minute, Monroe would joke. Hi, there! Save your breath to cool your porridge, Monroe! Who’s with you?”

“B-b-barry Spink,” chattered young Stevens. “Don’t y-y-you know – know Barrington Spink, Dan? Lem-lem-lemme present you.”

This introduction seemed a little unnecessary, for the next moment Dan Speedwell seized Barrington Spink by the wrist and fairly “yanked” him out of the water. Young Spink was all but helpless from cold and exhaustion.

As Dan backed away from the hole, dragging Spink with him, Billy swarmed over them both and seized upon Monroe Stevens.

“Hold tight, old man,” he cried. “We’ll get you out.”

“All – all right,” chattered Stevens. “But d-d-don’t be too-o-o long about it, Billy. They certainly for – for – forgot to heat th – this bawth!”

Billy clutched him tightly by the collar and in a few moments he felt Dan tugging at his own heels. Barry Spink was lying, panting, on the ice – but fast freezing to it, for the thermometer was still far down the scale.

“Come on! come on!” gasped Billy, when the four of them were on their feet. “Let’s get where there’s a fire.”

“Y – y – you bet!” agreed Monroe Stevens. “I – I never was so shivery in – in all – all my life!”

Spink could hardly speak. But he moaned occasionally something about the lost iceboat, which he called the *White Albatross*.

“Goodness knows!” chattered Stevens, “we deserved to lose the silly thing. I knew better than to try her out to-day – and I – I told you so, Barry.”

“I didn’t know there was an iceboat on the river,” said Dan, as they all climbed the steep hill to the road and the waiting motor car.

“It – it was the only one on the Colasha,” mumbled Spink.

“We’ve been building it on the q. t., Dannie,” exclaimed Stevens, grinning. “And she certainly could travel some. We got one on you and Billy that time.”

“You seem to have got one on yourselves,” returned Dan, grimly.

“Didn’t you know enough to wait till the river really froze over, Money?” questioned Billy, with some disgust.

“Aw, that Barry!” grumbled young Stevens. “He was crazy to try her out. And we got up this morning before sun-up. Sure, she whizzed – ”

“We were watching you come down the river,” admitted Dan.

“Say! couldn’t she travel?” exclaimed Stevens.

“You bet,” agreed Billy. “How far up the Colasha did you go?”

“Went around Island Number One – ”

“And we’d been all right,” snarled Barry Spink, who seemed to take an interest in affairs for the first time, “if it hadn’t been for that dummy. He put the jinx on us.”

“The jinx!” exclaimed Billy, laughing.

But Dan had noticed something else, and he repeated, curiously: “Dummy?” What d’ye mean – dummy?”

They had reached the motor-truck and Billy hustled the half-drowned youths into the seat and bundled them up in the robe and blankets while Dan started the motor.

“Back to the fire house – eh, Dan?” he asked his brother, as he slid under the wheel.

"The boiler room at the shops is nearer. They'll take 'em in and dry them," advised the older Speedwell.

"I – I don't care where in the world you take us as – as long's it's *hot*," wailed Barrington Spink.

"But how about this 'dummy'?" demanded Dan, of Monroe Stevens.

"Why, we had stopped at Island Number One and were repairing the rudder, when along come this feller who couldn't talk."

"Couldn't talk?" cried Billy, waking up to the coincidence, too, and looking at Dan, amazed. "Why! there must be two of them."

"Two what?" queried Stevens.

"You called him a dummy. Is he really dumb?"

"He mumbled something or other when we asked him to help us," explained Monroe; "but it wasn't anything *human*. And Barry declared it was bad luck to meet a dummy."

"And so it is!" snapped young Spink. "Doesn't *this* prove it?"

"Funny about there being two fellows who act like dummies being at large," remarked Dan to Billy.

"I should say so," agreed the younger brother. "Say, Money! where'd *your* dummy go to when he wouldn't help you chaps?"

"He was comin' across from the mainland, and he went up into the woods on Island Number One. I bet he's stopping there," answered Stevens.

"Nonsense! there's nothing on that island. No hut, nor any shelter. Bet he was going right along across the river."

"Well, he didn't go on while we were up that way, for when we got the *White Albatross* fixed, we sailed around the island and come down on the far side – and the snow lay all along the edge of the island there, and there wasn't a footprint in it. Oh! here's the shops. My goodness! won't it be – be go-o-od to get next to – a fire," chattered Stevens.

When the Speedwells had seen the shivering castaways humped upon stools before the boilers, they hurried away to deliver the remainder of their bottled milk. On the way to Colonel Sudds's Dan said:

"What do you think of this 'dummy' they talk about, Billy?"

"Funny. Wonder if he's the twin of the one we've got at our house?"

"Question is, *have* we got him at our house?" returned Dan, thoughtfully.

"Pshaw! the folks wouldn't let him leave so soon. If he was at Island Number One so early, he must have left our house soon after we did," declared Billy. "And that isn't troubling me," he added.

"What is?" asked his brother, smiling.

"Why – it's no trouble. Not really. But there is something that is buzzing in my head, Dan."

"I knew there was a bee in your bonnet," chuckled his elder.

"Oh, you did? How smart you are! But I don't believe you can guess what sort of a bee it is?"

"No-o. Some new idea, I reckon?"

"You bet it is, old man!" declared Billy, with enthusiasm. "And a big idea, too."

"Let's have it," urged the older Speedwell.

"Well! you know about this Barry Spink; don't you?"

"I know he's not long in Riverdale."

"Yes. But where he comes from?"

"Up the Hudson somewhere."

"Crickety! that's just it," cried Billy, with rising excitement. "Up where he has lived the winters are long and hard. The rivers and lakes freeze over usually in November, and stay frozen until February or March. And I bet that fellow knows all about iceboating."

"Don't you tell him so," advised Dan, with a grin. "He's got a swelled head as it is – I can see that."

“Never mind, Spink. That isn’t exactly what I mean – not what *he* knows. But he and his busted iceboat have put something into my head, old man.”

“Out with it, boy.”

“It’s just this: Let’s go in for an iceboat ourselves. Let’s get the fellows of the Outing Club interested – and maybe some of the girls, too – Mildred, and Lettie, and some of the others. And we’ll have races, and all that.”

“If the ice gets thick enough and ‘stays put,’” suggested Dan, slowly.

“You said yourself last night,” Billy declared, quickly, “that the almanac man promised a real winter this time.”

“And we’re getting a piece of it right now. Jinks! maybe you’ve got a big idea, Billy.”

“Sure I have. And if that chump, Barry Spink, can build a boat as good as that *White Albatross*, what’s the matter with us building a better?”

“Now you’re talking,” agreed his brother, with growing enthusiasm. “Hustle now, Billy! there goes the first bell. We’ve only just time to get the truck under the shed and hustle into school. Got my books with yours? Come on, then,” and the Speedwells hurried off to the academy.

CHAPTER III

MORE THAN ONE MYSTERY

The two reckless youths who had tried out the iceboat and lost her that morning did not appear at the academy during the forenoon session. Indeed, Barrington Spink was not an attendant at the Riverdale school.

He was a recent comer to the town and the boys knew very little about him, save in a general way. He was the son of a widowed lady who seemed to have a superabundance of cash and who was very proud and haughty.

Mrs. Spink had bought a large house on the outskirts of Riverdale, had furnished it gaudily, hired a host of servants, repainted and refurbished everything about the place, including the iron dog on the lawn, and had set up a carriage and pair as well as an automobile.

The Speedwells had often seen Barrington Spink around town before the occasion when Billy had hauled him out of the icy river, but had never spoken to him. Monroe Stevens belonged to one of the wealthiest families in Riverdale and naturally Spink had gravitated toward "Money," as the other boys called Monroe.

After school was out and Dan and Billy were walking across the square towards Appleyard's to get the truck (they had not gone home at noon) they came face to face with the newcomer to Riverdale.

He was with Wiley Moyle and Fisher Greene, both of the so-called "aristocracy" of Riverdale, but good fellows both of them and Billy's particular friends.

"Say, Billy," remarked Fisher, grinning, "Barry here has just been telling us how you pulled him out of the river this morning. The chill hasn't got out of him yet, you see," he added, with a meaning glance at young Spink, who had nodded very distantly in return for the Speedwells' hearty greeting.

"He was just asking us about you," drawled Wiley Moyle, "and we told him that Riverdale would have to go without lacteal fluid in its coffee if it wasn't for you and Dan."

"And our cows," replied Billy, seriously. "They have something to do with the milk supply, I assure you."

"And the barn pump – I know," chuckled Wiley, grinning saucily.

"Oh – I – say," stammered Spink, eyeing Billy rather askance. Dan and some of the older boys were discussing an important topic some distance away. "I didn't suppose you fellows really made a chum of this – er – Speedwell boy."

"Huh?" grunted Wiley. Wiley's folks were rich enough, but his father made him earn most of his own spending money, and Wiley helped around Jim Blizzard's newspaper office on Saturdays and after school. "I knew you were a chump, Barry; but this –"

"Oh, I'm obliged enough to him, I'm sure," said Spink, airily. "He certainly helped me out of the river."

He had been fumbling in his pocket while he spoke and now brought out a little flat packet of folded bills. Selecting one, he approached Billy Speedwell, who, having first flushed at the fellow's impudent tone, was now grinning as broadly as Wiley and Fisher.

"Re'lly," said young Spink, "you did that very bravely, Speedwell. Here is a little – er – something to show my appreciation."

Billy had accepted the dollar bill and at once fished up a handful of silver from the depths of his trousers' pocket.

"Hold on! hold on, Mr. Spink!" he exclaimed. "If you mean to pay me with this for saving your life, there is no need of overpaying me. Here! there's ninety-five cents change – count it. And I'm not sure that I'm not charging you too much as it is."

Fisher and Wiley Moyle burst into a roar of laughter, and Barrington Spink turned several different colors, as he realized that Billy had made him look like a goose.

“Why – why – That fellow’s only a *milkman*,” sputtered Spink, as Billy drifted over to the bigger crowd of boys to hear what was afoot.

“You give me a pain in my solar plexus – you gump!” snapped Fisher Greene. “Why, Billy and Dan have got twenty thousand dollars or more in their own right. Didn’t you ever hear of the treasure of Rocky Cove? Well, those are the boys who got the emeralds – they, and the old Admiral and Mr. Asa Craig. You want to take a tumble to yourself, Barry Spink!” and he moved away from the new boy.

Barrington Spink’s eyes fairly bulged. “He – he’s kiddin’ me; isn’t he?” he demanded of the grinning Wiley.

“Not so’s you’d notice it,” returned Moyle.

“Not twenty thousand dollars?”

“Thereabout.”

“And they run a milk route?”

“That’s Mr. Speedwell’s business. And fellows around Riverdale have to work the same as their dads did when *they* were boys. There are not many drones in this town, let me tell you,” concluded Wiley.

He started over to the other boys, too, and left Spink alone. The new boy was “in bad,” and he began to realize that fact. Perhaps he couldn’t help being born a snob; having his standards set by a foolish and worldly mother had made Barrington Spink an insufferable sort of fellow.

“The peasantry of this country doesn’t know its place,” Mrs. Spink often observed. “That is why I so much prefer living in Yurup.” That is the way she pronounced it. If the truth were known (but it wasn’t – Mrs. Spink saw to that) the lady’s father was once a laborer on a railroad; but the mantle of Mr. Spink’s family greatness had fallen upon her.

“If it wasn’t for Mr. Spink’s peculiar will,” she often sighed, “I should not venture to contaminate Barrington with the very common people one is forced to meet in this country. But Mr. Spink had peculiar ideas. He left Barrington’s guardians no choice. My poor boy must be educated in American schools, doncher know!”

And Barry was getting a fine education! He had shifted from place to place and from school to school, learning about as little as the law allowed, and doing about as he pleased. Now he was so far behind other boys of his age in his studies that he was ashamed to enter the Riverdale Academy until the tutor his mother had engaged whipped Barry’s jaded mind into some sort of alignment with those of the boys who would be his schoolmates.

The boys surrounding Dan Speedwell were enthusiastic and all tried to talk at once. A flock of crows on the edge of a cornfield could have been no more noisy.

“Greatest little old idea ever was sprung!” shouted one.

“Takes the Speedwells to hatch up this ‘new thought’ stuff,” whooped Jim Stetson. “What d’ye say, boys? Tell it!”

The yell from the crowd made everybody in the snowy square turn to look; but when they saw the crowd of boys from the academy the spectators merely smiled. Boyish enthusiasm in Riverdale frequently “spilled over,” and nobody but Josiah Somes, the constable, minded it – and *he* considered it better to give the matter none of his official attention.

“Meeting to-night, fellows, in the Boat Club house – don’t forget!” shouted one of the bigger boys. “We’ll give this iceboat scheme the once over.”

“It’s a great idea,” declared Wiley Moyle, enthusiastically. “And they tell me the river above Long Bridge is already solid as a brick pavement.”

“It isn’t so solid below the bridge – or it wasn’t this morning,” chuckled Billy Speedwell. “Mr. Spink can tell us all about *that*.”

But Barrington Spink was hurrying rapidly away.

“Why, if the Speedwells have all the money Wiley says they have, they’re worth cultivating,” he muttered to himself – which is *one* of the mysteries that bothered Dan and Billy during the next few days. They wondered much why Spink’s manner should so change toward them. The boy hung about them and tried to make friends with “the milkmen” in every possible way.

The other – and more important mystery – met Dan and Billy when they arrived home that very afternoon. The strange boy that Billy had knocked down the evening before, had disappeared.

“When we got up this morning, after you boys had gone,” explained their father, “that fellow had skedaddled. What do you think of that? And without a word!”

“Then Money Stevens may have seen him over by Island Number One!” cried Billy.

“It looks so,” admitted Dan. “I didn’t think there could be two chaps who couldn’t talk, in the neighborhood.”

“That’s not all, boys,” cried Carrie Speedwell. “Just see what little ‘Dolph picked up.”

She presented a crumpled slip of paper for Dan and Billy to read.

“Dolph found it right there beside the bed that strange boy slept on. He must have dropped it. See how it reads, Dan?”

Dan read the line scrawled on the paper, aloud:

“Buried on the island. Dummy will show you the spot.”

There was no signature, nor address – just the brief line. What it could refer to – what thing was buried, and on what island, was hard to understand. Only, it was quite certain that the “Dummy” referred to was the youthful stranger who could not talk English understandably.

“I am awful sorry he went away without his breakfast,” sighed Mrs. Speedwell. “And he didn’t look half fed, at best. It is too bad.”

“He’ll have a fine time living over on Island Number One at this season,” whispered Billy to Dan.

“Don’t let mother hear you,” replied the older boy, quickly. “She’d only worry.”

“Better let ‘Dummy’ do the worrying,” chuckled Billy.

“Well! it’s mighty odd,” said Dan, shaking his head. “And I really would like to know what’s buried on the island.”

“So would I,” said Billy. “Treasure – eh?”

“You’ve got treasure on the brain, boy,” grinned the older youth. “You’re getting mercenary. Haven’t you got wealth enough? We’re capitalists.”

“Yes – I know,” said Billy, nodding. “But I wonder if we’ve got money enough to get us the fastest iceboat that’s going to be raced on the Colasha this winter?”

“Ah! now you’ve said it,” agreed Dan. “But it isn’t going to be money that will get us *that* boat. We’ve got to learn something about iceboat building as well as iceboat sailing.”

“Huh! that blamed little wisp, Barry Spink,” grunted Billy.

“What about him now?” asked Dan, laughing.

“As inconsequential as he is, he’s got the whole town ‘bug’ on iceboating. He’ll be all swelled up like a toad.”

“We should worry!” returned Dan, with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

CHAPTER IV

THE “FLY-UP-THE-CREEK”

Mildred Kent, the doctor’s daughter, and her closest friend, Lettie Parker, halted the Speedwells at the close of school the next day. Mildred was a very pretty girl and Dan thought she was just about right. As for the sharp-tongued Lettie, she and Billy appeared to be always quarreling – in a good-natured way.

“We want to know what’s in the wind, boys?” demanded Mildred, her pretty face framed by a tall sealskin collar and her hands in a big shawl muff.

“There’s snow in *this* wind,” replied Billy, chuckling, for a few sharp flakes were being driven past the quartette as they stood upon the corner.

“Aren’t you smart, Billy Speedwell!” scoffed the red-haired Lettie. “Doesn’t it pain you?”

“You bet it does!” agreed Billy, promptly. “But they tell me that you suffer a deal yourself, Miss Parker, from the same complaint.”

“Now, children! children!” admonished Mildred. “Can’t you be together at all without scrapping?”

“And what about the wind, Mildred?” asked Dan.

“You boys were all down to the Boat Club last night, I hear. What is doing?”

“Aw, don’t tell ’em, Dan!” urged Billy, as though he really meant it. “They’ll want to play the part of the *Buttinsky Sisters*– you know they will!”

“I like that!” gasped Lettie, clenching her little gloved fist. “Oh! I wish sometimes I was a boy, Billy Speedwell!”

“Gee, Lettie! Isn’t it lucky you’re not?” he gasped. “There’d be no living in the same town with you. I like you a whole lot better as you are – ”

Dan and Mildred laughed, but Lettie was very red in the face still, and not at all pacified, as she declared:

“I believe I’d die content if I could just trounce you once – as you should be trounced!”

“Help! help! Ath-thith-tance, pleath!” begged Billy, keeping just out of the red-haired girl’s reach. “If you ever undertook to thrash me, Lettie, I know I’d just be scared to death.”

“Come now,” urged Mildred. “You are both delaying the game. And it’s cold here on the street corner. I want to know.”

“And what do you want to know, Miss?” demanded Billy.

“Why, I can tell you what we did last evening, if that’s what you want to know, Mildred,” said Dan, easily. “There’s nothing secret about it.”

“You can’t be going to plan any boat races this time of year?” exclaimed Lettie. “The paper says we’re going to have a hard winter and the Colasha steamboat line has laid off all its hands and closed up for the season. They say the river is likely to be impassable until spring.”

“That’s all you know about it,” interposed Billy. “We just *did* agree to have boat races on the river last evening. Now, then! what do you think?”

“I think all the Riverdale boys are crazy,” returned Lettie, promptly.

“What does he mean, Dan?” asked Mildred.

“Poof! Boat racing! Likely story,” grumbled the red-haired girl.

“Now, isn’t that the truth, Dan?” demanded Billy, but careful to circle well around Miss Parker to put his brother and Mildred between himself and the county clerk’s daughter.

“As far as it goes,” admitted Dan, chuckling. “But he doesn’t go far enough. We did talk some about having boat races – iceboat races.”

“Oh, ho!” cried Lettie. Her eyes flashed and she began to smile again. “Iceboats, Dannie? Really?”

“But I thought they were so dangerous?” demurred Mildred, rather timidly. “Didn’t Monroe Stevens and somebody else almost get drowned yesterday morning trying out an iceboat?”

“Deed they did,” admitted Billy. “But the river wasn’t fit.”

“And you boys got them out of the water, too!” exclaimed Lettie, suddenly. “I heard about it.”

“Somebody had to pull ’em out, so why not we?” returned Dan quickly, with perfect seriousness.

“And you boys are going to build another boat?” asked Mildred.

“A dozen, perhaps,” laughed Billy.

“We’ll build one if nothing happens to prevent – Billy and I,” said Dan. “And if the interest continues, and there are enough boats on the river to make it worth while, we’ll have a regatta bye and bye.”

“An iceboat regatta! Won’t that be novel?” cried Mildred.

But Lettie was interested in another phase of it. She demanded: “How big is your boat going to be, Billy?”

“Oh, a good big one,” he said, confidently. “Eh, Dan?”

“We haven’t decided on the dimensions. I want to make a plan of her first,” Dan said, seriously.

“Well, now! let me tell you one thing,” said the decisive Lettie. “You have got to build it big enough to carry four – hasn’t he, Mildred?”

“Four what?” demanded Billy.

“Four people, of course. You’re not going to be stingy, Billy Speedwell! You know our mothers wouldn’t hear of our sailing an iceboat; but if you boys take us – ”

“Ho!” cried Billy. “You don’t know what you’re talking about, Let!”

“There isn’t any place you go, Billy Speedwell, that *I* can’t!” cried the red-haired one, who had always been something of a tomboy. “And I’m not afraid to do anything that *you* dare to do – so there!”

“Dear me, Lettie don’t get so excited,” advised Mildred. “Do you suppose girls could sail on your iceboat, Dan?”

“Why not? An iceboat is no more dangerous than a sailboat. And I intend to build our boat with a shallow box on the body so that at least two passengers can lie down in it comfortably.”

“Lie down in it?” queried Lettie, in a puzzled tone.

“Of course,” grunted Billy, “or the boom would knock their silly heads off when the boat comes about. Don’t you know?”

“To be sure! ‘Low bridge!’ I’ve sailed enough on a catboat to know when to ‘duck,’ I hope,” returned Lettie.

“And we can sail with you, Dan?” Mildred was saying. “Do – do you think it will be safe?”

“Perfectly,” replied the older Speedwell. “Not, of course, when we race. We’ll carry only ballast, then, and one of us will have to stand on the outrigger to keep the boat from turning turtle – ”

“Oh, that sounds dreadfully exciting!” gasped Lettie, her eyes shining.

“It sounds pretty dangerous,” observed Mildred. “You two boys are speed crazy, I believe! Burton Poole’s got a new car – have you seen it? He says it is a fast one.”

“Pooh!” returned Billy. “Burton’s got to get up awfully early in the morning to be in the same class with us.”

“Never mind the autos,” said Mildred, briskly. “We’ve got what we want, Lettie,” and she laughed. “Remember, boys! we’re to have first call on your iceboat when it is built.”

“Oh, yes! When it is built,” said her chum, laughing. “We’re all counting our chickens before they’re hatched.”

“You wait till a week from Saturday, Let,” said Billy, with confidence. “By that time we’ll have hatched a pretty good-sized chicken – eh, Dan?”

His brother would not promise; but that very night the boys drew plans for the ice racer they intended to build. Mr. Speedwell owned a valuable piece of timber, and the boys always had a few seasoned logs on hand. They selected the sticks they needed, sledded them to the mill, had them sawed right, and then set to work on the big barn floor and worked the sticks down with hand tools.

They even made their own boom, for Mr. Speedwell helped them, and he was a first-class carpenter. The iron work they had made at the local blacksmith shop. The canvas for the sails came from Philadelphia, from a mail order house. Before the middle of the next week the Speedwells carted the new boat down to old John Bromley's dock in sections, put it together on the ice, and John helped them make the sails and bend them, he knowing just how this should be done.

They had a private trial of the boat one afternoon, towards dark, and she worked beautifully. Even Bromley, who had not seen many iceboats and was an old, deep-water sailor was enthusiastic when he saw the craft, with Dan at the helm, skim across the river, tack beautifully, and return on the wind.

They then started to give her a couple of coats of bright paint.

"What you goin' to call her boys?" Bromley asked.

"Ought to be something with feathers – she's a bird," laughed Billy.

"And we're going to 'hatch' her about as quick as you promised the girls," his brother remarked.

"Barry Spink's is the *White Albatross* – he's going to name it after the boat he and Money wrecked."

"Bird names seem popular," said Dan. "Fisher Green has sent for a craft already built. He showed me the catalog. *His* will be called the *Redbird*."

"Say!" shouted Billy, grinning. "I got it!"

"Let's have it, then," advised his brother.

"What's the matter with the *Fly-up-the-Creek*? There's nothing much quicker on the wing, is there?"

"Bully!" agreed Dan, with an answering smile. "And I bet nobody else on the river will think of *that* for a name. She's christened! *Fly-up-the-Creek* she is. But I wonder what Milly and Lettie will say to that name?"

CHAPTER V

WINGED STEEL

There was a moon that week and the nights were glorious. While most of the Riverdale young folk were skating in the Boat Club Cove, the Speedwell brothers were trying out the iceboat each evening, and “learning the ropes.”

The proper handling of a craft the size of the one Dan and Billy had built is no small art. With the huge mainsail and jib they had rigged, she could gather terrific speed even when the wind was light. She might better have been called an “ice yacht.”

When the ringing steel was skimming the ice at express-train speed, the two boys had to have their wits about them every moment of the time. Dan handled the helm and the sheet, while Billy rode the crossbeam for balance, and to keep the outrigger runner on the ice.

For boys who had entered in semi-professional motorcycle races, and had handled a Breton-Melville racing car, the speed gathered under normal conditions by this sailing iceboat seemed merely ordinary. What she would do in a gale was another matter.

While they had been building the craft just enough rain fell to wash the snow from the roads; and as the frost came sharply immediately upon the clearance of the rainstorm, almost the entire river surface was like glass. The cold was intense, and the Colasha froze solid. The icemen were cutting eighteen inches at Karnac Lake, it was reported.

There were few airholes between the Long Bridge and the lake (Dan and Billy covered the entire length of the river between those two places) and almost no spots where the swiftness of the current made the ice weak. As for the tides – the ice was too firm now to be affected by ordinary tides above the Boat Club Cove.

As Bromley’s dock was above the Long Bridge, few of their mates saw the Speedwells’ craft at all. The Speedwell house was within a short distance of John Bromley’s and not many of the academy boys and girls lived at this end of Riverdale.

So what the *Fly-up-the-Creek* could do was known only to Dan and Billy. They sailed her one night away up the river, past Meadville, the mills, and the penitentiary, and so on to the entrance to Karnac Lake. It was certainly a great sail.

“Would you believe she’d slide along so rapidly with nothing but a puff of wind now and then?” gasped Billy, as they tacked and came about for the return run.

“That’s all right,” Dan returned. “But suppose we got off so far and the wind gave out on us altogether? Wouldn’t that be an awful mess?”

“Gee!” exclaimed Billy, laughing. “We ought to have an auxiliary engine on her – eh? How about it, boy?”

“Why, Billy!” exclaimed Dan, “that might not be such a bad idea.”

“Wouldn’t work; would it?” asked the younger boy, curiously. “I only said that for a joke.”

“Well – ”

“You’re not serious, Dan?” gasped Billy, seeing his brother’s thoughtful face.

“I – don’t – know – ”

“Whoo!” burst out Billy. “You’re off on a cloud again, Dan, old boy! Whoever heard of a motor iceboat? Zing!”

“Hits you hard; does it?” chuckled Dan.

“I – should – say! Wouldn’t it be ‘some pumpkins’ to own an engine-driven craft that would make Money, and Spink, and Burton Poole, and all the others that are going in for iceboating, look like thirty cents?”

“I admire your slang, boy,” said Dan, in a tone that meant he *didn’t* admire it.

“Well, but, Dan! you know that idea is preposterous.”

“You’re wrong. There are sleds, or boats, being used on the Antarctic ice right now, propelled by gasoline – an air propeller and a series of ‘claws’ that grip the ice underneath the body of the sledge.”

“Air propeller?” cried Billy. “Why, there isn’t resistance enough in the air to give her any speed.”

“Not like a propeller in the water, of course. Yet, how do aeroplanes fly?”

“Gee! that’s so.”

“But, suppose we had a small engine on here and a sprocket wheel attachment – something right under the main beam to grip the ice and force her ahead?”

“Great, Dannie!” exclaimed the younger boy, instantly converted.

“Well – it might not work, after all,” said Dan, slowly.

“Let’s try it!”

“We’ll see. Where we lose headway on this *Fly-up-the-Creek* is when we head her around, or the wind dies on us altogether. *Then* the auxiliary engine might help – eh?”

“Great!” announced Billy again. “We wouldn’t get becalmed out here on the river then, that’s sure.”

The boat was creeping down the river right then, failing a strong current of air to fill the canvas. The string of islands that broke the current of the Colasha below Meadville was on their left hand. The last island – or, the first as they sailed up the river – was the largest of all, and was called Island Number One.

As the iceboat rumbled down stream Billy asked, suddenly:

“What do you think about that dummy, Dan? Suppose he’s over yonder?”

“On the island?”

“Yep.”

Dan viewed the high “hogback” of the island curiously. It was well wooded, but the boys had often been ashore and had never seen a hut, nor other shelter, upon it. Dan shook his head.

“Where would the poor fellow stay? What did he do through that cold rainstorm – don’t see a sign of smoke. He *can’t* be there, Billy.”

“I know it doesn’t seem probable,” admitted the younger boy. “But remember that paper ‘Dolph found. Something’s buried there, and Dummy was left to guard it.”

“How romantic!” chuckled Dan.

“Well! isn’t that so?” demanded the younger lad.

“We don’t know what that line of writing really means,” said Dan.

“Huh! It’s plain enough. Oh, Dan!”

The younger boy had turned again to look at the island as the iceboat slid out of its shadow.

“What’s the matter now?” demanded Dan.

“Look there! Up – up yonder! Isn’t that smoke?”

“Smoke from what?” demanded Dan, glancing over his shoulder quickly. He dared not neglect the course ahead for long, although the boat was not traveling fast.

“From fire, of course!” snapped Billy. “What does smoke usually come from?”

“Sometimes from a pipe,” chuckled Dan. “I don’t see anything – ”

“Above the tops of those trees – right in the middle of the island.”

“I – don’t – see – ”

“There! rising straight against the sky.”

“Why – it’s mist – frost – something,” growled Dan. “It can’t be smoke.”

“I tell you it is!” cried Billy. “What else could it be? There’s no mist in such frosty weather as *this*.”

“But – smoke?”

“Why not?” cried Billy. “I bet that Dummy is over there.”

“Then he must have his campfire in the tops of the trees,” chuckled Dan. “*Now* where’s your smoke, Billy?”

A puff of wind swooped down upon them. Dan had to attend to the management of the *Fly-up-the-Creek*. The puff of wind was followed by another. Soon the current of air became steady and the iceboat whisked down the river at a faster pace.

“Where’s your smoke now?” Dan repeated.

“Wind’s whipped it away, of course,” grinned his brother. “Gee! can’t this thing travel?”

The experience of skimming the crystal surface of the river was yet so new that Billy gave his whole mind to it, and forgot Dummy and the faint trace of smoke he had seen against the starlit sky, hovering over Island Number One.

This slant of wind that had suddenly swooped down the icy channel drove the craft on as though it really were a bird winging its way homeward. The steel rang again, and at every little ripple in the ice the outrigger leaped into the air.

As the speed increased, Billy crept out upon the crossbeam so as to ballast it. A little cloud of fine ice particles followed the boat and the wind whined in the taut rigging.

They had no means of telling how fast the boat flew, for it was impossible to properly time her by their watches and the landmarks along the river bank; but Dan and Billy were quite sure that they had never come down the stream any faster in their power boat than they did now.

There was a piece of “pebbly” ice inshore, not far below Island Number One, and Dan remembered its location. Therefore he changed the course of the iceboat and she shot over toward the far bank.

Billy shouted something to him, but he could not hear what it was. The younger boy pointed ahead, and Dan stooped to peer under the boom.

The moon had drawn a thin veil of cloud over her face and, for the moment, her light was almost withdrawn. A mist seemed rising from the ice itself; but Dan knew that was a mere illusion.

Suddenly the moon cast aside her veil and her full light scintillated across the river. Billy uttered a yell and waved a warning arm as he gazed ahead. Dan saw it, too.

It seemed as though a wide channel had suddenly opened right ahead of the rushing iceboat – they could see the moonlight glinting across the tiny waves of an open stretch of water.

CHAPTER VI

GETTING INTO TRIM

Ready as the Speedwell boys were in most emergencies, here was an occasion in which it seemed that disaster could not be averted. That is the principal peril of iceboating; it is impossible to stop a craft, once she is under fast way, within a reasonable distance.

It was too late to drop the sail and hope to bring the *Fly-up-the-Creek* to a halt before her nose was in the open water. For the instant Dan Speedwell's heart seemed to stand still.

There flashed across his mind the remembrance of how that other iceboat – the *White Albatross* – had gone into the open river. Had he and Billy not been on the spot, as they were, Money Stevens and Barrington Spink would doubtless have been drowned.

And here was another such accident. The iceboat flew right down to the wide channel where the moonbeams glanced upon the ripples —

But she kept right on in her flight, and to Dan's amazement the runners rumbled over the apparently open water with an increasing roar!

"Crickey!" shrieked Billy, turning a grin upon his brother, "didn't you think that was open water, Dan? I thought we were done for – I really did! And it was only the moonlight glistening upon a rough piece of ice."

Dan's heart resumed its regular beat; but he knew that – had it been daylight instead of moonlight – his brother would have observed how pale he was. Seldom had his coolness been put to a keener test than at that moment.

"I tell you what it is," Dan said, discussing the incident with his brother afterward, "iceboating is a job where a fellow has to have his head about him all the time. And we've got to be especially careful if we take the girls riding on this thing."

"If we do!" grunted Billy. "Why, if we don't, Mildred and Lettie will give us no peace – you know that, Dan."

"Just the same, we'll not take 'em with us when there's any sign of a gale on the river. It means too much. There are too many chances in iceboating."

During this week some of the other Riverdale boys had been busy. Monroe Stevens's *Redbird* arrived and made a pretty show on the river near town. Money maneuvered it about the cove and up and down the stretch of river near the Boat Club very nicely.

Barrington Spink had saved the mast and sail from the wreck of his old boat and local mechanics had built for him another *White Albatross*. As he had plenty of money he easily obtained what he wanted, including a mate to help handle the iceboat. But, as a whole, the boys and girls of Riverdale did not quite "cotton" to the new boy.

Came Saturday, however, and there were more than a few of the Outing Club down by the river to watch the maneuvers of the iceboats. Although the skating was excellent, it was neglected while the young folk watched Money Stevens get under way and shoot out of the cove in his *Redbird*.

The *White Albatross* was a larger boat than Money's and it was rigged up quite handsomely. There were cushions in the box-body, and neat hand-rails. Money had taken out his sister Ella and Maybell Turner; so now Barry wanted to inveigle some of the girls into *his* craft.

Mildred and Lettie were waiting for the appearance of the Speedwells, but not altogether sure that they would come. The girls hadn't had a chance to speak to Dan and Billy for several days.

"Do you suppose they have finished the boat they were building?" Lettie asked the doctor's daughter.

"When Dan promises a thing – "

“I know,” Lettie broke in, hastily. “But he isn’t infallible. And I *do* want to try iceboating. That Barry Spink hinted that he’d take me out if I wanted to go. Here he comes now.”

Spink came forward, all smiles and costume – and the latter was really a wonderful get-up for Riverdale. Most of the boys of the Outing Club were content to wear caps lettered “R. O. C.” and call it square. That is as near to a uniform as many of them got.

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