

of its getting into the eddy. Frantic with fear, Ned Armstrong seized his hat, and using it as a paddle, made desperate efforts to guide his clumsy craft towards this only haven of safety. But he might as well have tried to send it back against the resistless current. The ponderous ice-block utterly refused to be guided. It went stedfastly on its way, dipping and rising as the hitherto smooth surface of the water broke up into turbulent swirls with the near approach of the falls, whose sullen roar already began to make itself distinctly heard.

In another minute the road-bridge would be reached, and realizing that it was the last chance, the man who had the rope ran with all his might towards the span under which the cake must pass, in order to try another fling. Had he only been a few seconds sooner he might have succeeded. But he was just that much too late, and again the rope fell short, although Ned nearly tumbled off the ice in his eager endeavor to secure it. A shout of horror went up from the people who lined the river-banks and crowded the bridge, gazing helplessly at the unhappy lad sweeping so swiftly on.

Between the bridge and the falls there now only remained an open space, scarce more than one hundred yards in length, in which the waters, as if rebelling against the leap before them, broke forth into angry foam-crested waves, in whose midst the low-lying ice-raft was tossed and tumbled about so that the boy upon it had hard work to keep erect. Half-paralyzed with terror, he stood there in sight of hundreds of his fellow-creatures, not one of whom could interpose between him and death—a sight to wring the stoutest heart. One instant more and he had taken the awful plunge.

But stay! A shout goes up from the agonized spectators. Who is that comes springing with tremendous strides across the frail-looking structure which spans the river at the very edge of the falls—the “stop-log bridge” they call it, because in the summer-time, when the river is low, it dams up the water so that the mill wheels may be well supplied. In fresher time the furious swollen stream rises to a few feet from the top, and it is along the narrow footway that a man, who is at once recognized as “Big Alec,” the stalwart foreman of the mill, is now seen rushing along. The ice-cake dashes swiftly towards the “stop-log,” but “Big Alec” is quicker. He reaches the spot right under which the cake must pass in its headlong rush; he flings himself face downward on the beams, he leans far over the edge, his long sinewy arms stretched to their utmost length, and straight towards him comes the ice-cake. He shouts fiercely. Ned, looking up, sees him. He understands. He turns to face him, and, just as the shadow of the bridge falls upon the ice, he puts all his strength into one wild leap towards the outstretched arms—he does not miss them; he is caught fast in their iron grip, and for one awful moment he sways above the raging torrent; the spectators hold their breath in sickening apprehension; then, with a gigantic effort, “Big Alec” swings the boy clear up upon the bridge, and stands beside him trembling in every nerve and muscle, while a shout that rivals the roar of the falls goes up from the overjoyed onlookers.

One of the first to be at Ned Armstrong's side was Hal Roberts, the tears of joy streaming down his cheeks as he threw his arms around his playmate who had thus been saved on the very brink.