

Stebby and the Kids of the World Club.

It was a few days into February and the President was working at his big desk. There were lots of important-looking files on it and two photograph frames. One was of his wife and daughter, and the other of Stebby, the Stealth Bomber, with his friend Old Jeb, the retired aircraft-carrier with whom the President had served when he was in the Navy. The sun was shining outside and it wasn't at all cold, like February usually is. The President closed a file, put it in a wire tray on his desk, took off his glasses, leaned back in his chair and said 'Whew. Thank Goodness, that's finished'. He yawned and stretched out his arms and wiggled his toes. There was a knock at the door and in walked his Chief of Staff.

'Mr. President'. he said.

'Come on in,' said the President. 'What's up? Nothing, I hope. I've done enough for the day.'

'Well, sir,' said the Chief of Staff. 'There's this,' And he held up a very fat file of papers.

'Oh boy,' said the President. 'Is it urgent?'

'Yes and no,' said the Chief of Staff. 'Depends what you think, Mr. President.'

'Well, I'm looking forward to a cocktail, right now....OK, what is it?'

'It's a petition, sir.'

'A petition? From whom?'

'From 'The Kids of the World Club'.

'The what?' asked the President, raising his eyebrows in surprise.

'The Kids of the World Club, sir. It's a brief letter. Addressed to you. And the rest of the file is kids' signatures. As far as I can see, from every country in the world.'

'Wow,' said the President. 'What do they want me to do?'

'Save the polar bears, sir.'

'Save the polar bears? From what?'

'Well, it appears the ice around the North pole is breaking up and the polar bears have less and less space to live. And some are sliding off the ice floes and drowning. I guess it's because of global warming,' said the Chief of Staff, looking out of the window at the bright sunshine.

'H'm That's a bad situation,' said the president, also looking out of the window. 'Polar bears drowning. That's really bad. What do they suggest I do?'

'They leave it to you, sir.'

'Great! Nobody ever told me what problems you get being President. And what do I know about saving polar bears?'

'I can find out what might be done. If you wish, sir.' offered the Chief of Staff.

'You know, Staff. The problem with this 'Kids of the World Club' is they have no sense of timing. It's cocktail time, darn it.'

'I know, sir,' said the Chief of Staff. 'But I guess it's because they're concerned about the polar bears having a bad time.'

'OK, OK,' said the President. 'Here's what we do. You find out what can be done and report back to me. How long will it take?'

'Twenty minutes, sir.'

'Only twenty minutes?' said the President, astonished.

‘Already started an enquiry, sir. I knew you’d want to do something.’
‘You’re a cunning old dog, Staff. Get the info and join us for a cocktail.’
‘Sure thing, Mr. President.’

In the family sitting-room, the President’s wife asked ‘Had a good day at the office, hon?’
The President took a sip of his cocktail and relaxed. ‘Yup. Got most of the work done.’
‘Most of the work?’ asked his wife.

‘Yeah. Staff will be here in a while with a little matter to sort out. No big deal.’

‘You always say that, and then you work until midnight,’ said his wife.

‘Seriously, it’s nothing. Just a petition from something calling itself ‘The Kids of the World Club’. Won’t take a minute to give them a response.’

On the sofa, their daughter, Emily, put down her electronic book and said, ‘I’m a member of ‘The Kids of the World Club’ and I signed the petition.’

The President and his wife looked at each other.

‘Hey, that’s great,’ said the President. ‘A very nice thing to do,’ said his wife. ‘What is the petition for?’

‘To save the polar bears,’ replied Emily.

‘Uh huh,’ said her mother. She looked at the President. ‘Can you do that, hon?’

‘Good question,’ said the President. At that moment the Chief of Staff was announced by a Marine.

‘Come in, Staff, and have a bourbon. Did you get an answer?’ The Chief of Staff was looking pleased with himself. ‘Sure did, Mr. President,’ he replied.

‘Then sit down and tell us,’ said the President, relieved.

‘It’s very simple. The ice floes are breaking up and separating. We need to stick them back together again. Then the polar bears will have somewhere safe to live. And the Intricate Research Laboratories at Princeton have come up with a special kind of glue that can do that.’

‘Oh wow!’ cried Emily. ‘Then do it please, Daddy!’

‘Hold on there,’ said her father. ‘Glue up the ice floes?’ he said to the Chief of Staff.

‘How on earth are we gonna do that?’

‘That’s the problem sir. Nobody’s come up with a way of doing it yet. We’re working on it, though. Rest assured.’ Everybody sat quietly. The President and the Chief of Staff took sips of their cocktails and looked wise. The President’s wife stared out of the window at the sun glinting off the chairs on the patio. Emily looked at her father. Then she shouted: ‘Stebby!’

‘What?’ said the President.

‘Stebby!’ repeated Emily. ‘I bet he could do it!’

‘Stebby?’ asked the Chief of Staff.

‘She means Stebworth. He’s our best flyer. A Stealth Bomber.’ replied the President. He furrowed his brow. ‘You know, Emily. You might have something there,’ he said.

‘Stebby flies over the North Pole and drops a stream of the special glue on the ice floes and they stick together again. What do you think, Staff?’

The Chief of Staff thought about it. ‘Maybe we should call the General and see what he thinks.’ The President spoke to his watch. ‘Get me the General, please.’ A few seconds later his watch bipped. ‘Excuse me’, he said. ‘I’ll take it next door.’

The president's wife, his daughter and the Chief of Staff strained to hear what was being said next door but could only hear the rumble of the President's voice. After a few minutes he came back in.

'OK,' he said. 'The General figures that Stebworth will give it his best shot. No guarantees that the glue will fall in the right places, but Stebworth is getting ready right now. And Princeton are sending the glue by courier to the airfield. Can we get on with our cocktail time, now?'

'Daddy,' said Emily, her eyes shining, 'you're wonderful.'

'Not me, Emmsy,' said the President. 'I just give the instructions. Other guys do the real work. It's up to your Stebby, now.'

Down at the airfield Stebby was firing up his extremely powerful engines. The special glue was in canisters in his bomb bay and tubes ran from them to what looked like a giant watering can slung beneath his fuselage. Stebby felt proud to be entrusted with such an important mission. He also was a member of 'The Kids of the World Club', although he had not filled out the section on the membership form where they asked you if you had any special skills. He called up Old Jeb on the intercom. 'Any tips or advice, Jeb?' he asked.

'Oh yes,' replied Old Jeb. 'Watch out for those big icebergs that hide themselves in the mist. They can be a big and nasty surprise if your radar's got any weaknesses.

Everything been properly checked?'

'Sure thing,' replied Stebby. 'See you later.'

'OK, son. Take it easy.'

Stebby flew up into the wide blue sky, and veered off at terrific speed towards the North. It didn't take long before he was crossing ice. Below he could see where the ice floes were breaking apart. He flew down and saw a polar bear slipping about on one and trying to stop itself from sliding into the water. Stebby felt even more determined to do a perfect job. He flew more slowly and turned in many circles over the ice as his observational systems created a map of the area with the cracks in the ice marked out in bright blue. Then he flew down closer to the ice, reduced the power of his engines and started to fly very slowly along the route of the cracks. The special glue flowed out of the watering can device and dropped between the first of the ice floes. Stebby watched as it bubbled and then started spreading out on the top of the water.. It filled in the gaps between the ice floes and sealed itself. The floes were sticking together again. It worked! Stebby flew on slowly and the glue flowed out neatly. The polar bears looked up in surprise. Stebby waved to them. The polar bears began to wander about, looking with interest at the bright blue lines between the floes. And testing the join to see if it would hold a bear's weight. They needn't have worried. The Intricate Research Laboratory at Princeton had done a good job. They had even promised that the bright blue colour would soon fade away and become white like the rest of the floes. Stebby was proud to work with such intelligent people and to be doing a special job for the President and for the Polar Bears and for 'The Kids of the World Club'. Suddenly, all the warning alarms went off in the cockpit - a terrific noise - shattering. Out of the mist loomed the biggest iceberg in the world, huge, grey and white, the sun glaring off its slopes, towering above

Stebby, lumps of ice falling off as it rolled slightly in the water, directly ahead! Instinctively, Stebby hit the maximum speed button and pulled the optimum climb lever. He couldn't go sideways, the iceberg was too wide. He had to take a terrible chance and go straight up and over it. He roared upwards, but getting closer and closer to the iceberg which seemed to loom over him, even closer. The needle on the optimum climb gauge was flickering near the red, the engines were making a terrific noise, and Stebby was sure he could hear the iceberg roaring. Stebby threw a quick glance at all the gauges on the control board in front of him. The radar indicated another 200 feet up before Stebby would reach the top of the iceberg. Would he clear its peak? Stebby forced extra power out of his engines and heaved and heaved on the climb lever even though the needle was now well into the red. Then, just as it seemed the iceberg would engulf him, Stebby shot over its peak, his engines complaining and the climb lever juddering furiously. There was a loud bump under the fuselage. Stebby looked down and saw that the watering-can device had been smashed off by the tip of the peak of the iceberg. But there was no other damage. Stebby said to himself, 'That's something to tell Old Jeb,' He headed back for the airfield. The polar bears wandered about on the ice, happy.

Stebby swung in above the airfield and cruised down to land. There was a surprise waiting for him. He saw the President and his family and noticed that Emily was holding a big white fluffy toy polar bear. He could hear the Air Force Band playing and he saw the General looking proud, and Old Jeb looking a bit cross because there were kids running about on his deck. Stebby saw that there were kids everywhere. Hundreds of kids. Jumping up and down. Shouting for joy. Holding placards saying 'We Luv Steb.' and 'Polar Bears Luv Stebby', and 'Stebby for President of KOWC' and a big one in the shape of a polar bear reading 'Thanks, Stebby.'