

Around The World

The velvet green landscape fell away below me. Fields of different shades of green rolled across the hills like a patchwork blanket. I was off on the adventure of a lifetime. It had taken six months to put together the balloon. It was worth it. Flames roared overhead as I pulled on the chord to inflate the balloon even further.

It didn't take long to leave the verdant hills of England behind. I was soon able to look down onto the wind-swept highlands of Scotland. A lone albatross rose on a current of warm air and floated alongside me for a while. It seemed close enough to reach out and touch.

Around lunchtime, I saw Iceland as a speck on the horizon. The glaciers and Northern Lights beckoned me, but the weather had other ideas. A storm picked up and snatched the balloon in its grasp. Lightning arced across the coal-black clouds and thunder shook the basket underneath my feet. Suddenly, it didn't feel very secure. I watched forlornly as Iceland shrank away again. The storm was blowing in from the west. There was nothing I could do to control my vessel now. I just had to hold on.

By the time the storm abated, I was far off-course. The mountains and ravines of Norway and Sweden passed beneath me in a blur. Panic quickly set in. How would I get home? There was no time to dwell on my fears, though. The almighty landmass of Russia crept into view soon enough. Endless snow settled on the plains like a crisp white bed-sheet. The candy-coloured domes of St Basil's Cathedral appeared and vanished as I stood and gawped. I watched a pack of wild wolves chasing unseen prey between sparse trees. A pair of eagles flew even higher than the balloon, chattering endlessly to one another.

The wind changed direction once again and cast me south. The basket rocked perilously, but another gust of flames steadied it nicely. Mongolia and China passed serenely below. I picked up the course of the Great Wall for a while - the movement of my vessel following its sinuous curves. At one point, I received the shock of my life. I turned just in time to see the vast peak of Mount

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Everest, rising up like an ice giant. We skimmed the ice close enough to grab a handful of snow but narrowly avoided crashing.

I picked up the pace now. I pulled hard on the chord. The balloon filled with hot air. We shot forward. We were moving fast enough now to chase the rising sun. The parched landscape of Australia filled the entire world. Uluru and then Sydney harbour drifted lazily past. Nothing does anything in a hurry in Australia. It's too hot.

There wasn't time to enjoy the sunshine before thousands of miles of open ocean stretched before me. I closed my eyes and caught a wink of sleep. The sound of people playing on the beach woke me. I looked over the edge of the basket to see California passing by. I watched the cities of the United States of America become farmland and factories. The towering skyscrapers of New York jutted upwards like teeth in the distance.

Soon, it was all behind me. I watched the coastline of England growing in the distance and gently brought the balloon down to land.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find an example of a simile in the text.
2. Using the context of the text, write a definition for "abated".
3. Find and copy a word that is used to describe the landscape of England as "bright green or covered in grass".
4. Which word tells you that the albatross was on its own?
5. Write a synonym for the word "serenely".

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R What landmark gave the author a fright?

S List the countries the author flew over in order.

R What landmarks did the author see in Australia?

E How do the author's emotions change throughout the text?

S What was the author doing just before they saw California?

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