

# ON FIRM ICE



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by Carter Wilson

illustrated by William A. Berry

People living together in a winter camp feel close to one another. They know they need each other's help to survive. The men call their hunting partners *Those we live with on the firm ice*, and when they say that, they mean *Those we trust*.

KNUD RASMUSSEN

# SCIENCE

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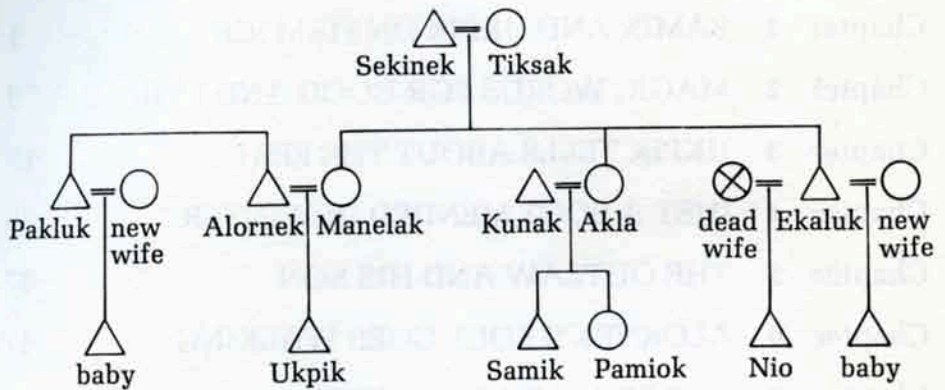
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## The People in the Stories



Other people in the book who are not part of the family:

*Iterujuk, the old woman in the bear story*

*Itkilik, the man who lied at the fishing place*

*Okortok, the old man who told a story about a mad dog*

*Okortok's wife, the old woman Alornek attacked*

## About the Stories

IN 1923 a Danish explorer named Knud Rasmussen spent almost a year with the Netsilik Eskimos — the seal people, as they call themselves — around Pelly Bay in northern Canada. Rasmussen spoke the Eskimo language and he collected, among other things, stories and legends.

Since Rasmussen's time, several anthropologists have lived with the Netsilik and these men have also added to the stock of Netsilik tales which we have.

The stories in this book are based on actual events in the lives of the Netsilik, and on their legends. I have made up the characters, Samik, Ukpik and the others. But I wanted the things that happen to these people to be possible things, so I checked each story with people who know the Netsilik. I have tried to make the taste and the feel of the stories right.

Stories have as important a part in the lives of the Netsilik as they have in our lives. A Netsilik woman told Rasmussen this:

Mothers and grandmothers always put their children to sleep with stories. And from stories we get all of our knowledge of how things have been, for children never forget what they hear.

Carter Wilson





# 1 SAMIK AND UKPIK ON FIRM ICE

SAMIK woke up excited. He rolled over and gazed up at the dome of the new igloo and listened to his father snoring beside him on the sleeping platform. He wished his father would wake up so they could begin.

Something smelled good. Samik's mother was warming soup over the blubber lamp. His father sniffed and smiled and opened his eyes, then shook himself awake and propped himself up on one elbow. "Eh, Akla," he said to his wife, "is there some of that for us?"

Samik's mother passed a bowl of soup to Kunak and Samik. The boy drank and then waited for his father to make up a plan for the day.

Kunak and his family had just come to the camp on the ice for the seal hunting. Samik felt he had been waiting for this time forever. He was a boy still, but this year he was old enough to hunt with the men. And also, at a seal camp all of your friends lived near you. There were games and feasts and night and —

Down the entrance tunnel crawled a fat bear of a man with a round shaggy head. As he came, the visitor growled, "Just me, Alornek here." After him came a thin-faced boy a little older than Samik.

The two men greeted each other, but the boy stood apart and said nothing. Alornek laughed his deep laugh and told what a run of luck he had been having since he came to the seal camp. "I brought back a big one yesterday," he said, "and I will get another one today."

Samik stared at the man. Alornek was bragging, and people said that bragging gives a hunter bad luck.

Well, that was Alornek's way. He was a man who told big stories and always made jokes and bragged. Samik's grandfather had once called Alornek a boy in a man's body.

Kunak got up and put on his coat. Outside the two men took up their harpoons and started off together. Samik would have liked to tag along, but the men had not said anything to either of the boys.

The other boy, the one looking at Samik now with those hard black eyes, was named Ukpik. He stood silently, twanging the string of a bow he had with him.

In other years they had been friends. Their fathers had been hunting partners once, before they had a disagreement, and the two families had traveled together. Ukpik was Samik's cousin, and their fathers had agreed the two boys would be sharing partners when they grew up. They had played together and hunted together.

Still without saying anything, Ukpik turned away from Samik and started off across the camp. Was it because their fathers were no longer partners? Did that mean the boys couldn't be friends?

Samik went home and sat on the sleeping platform, wonder-

ing about his cousin's silence. The excitement he had felt earlier was dribbling away.

Though he tried to hide his disappointment, his mother knew he was sad. She and Samik's little sister were getting ready to go visiting. "You have the new bow your grandfather made for you," Akla said.

"Yes, I do," Samik nodded. "It's a good one."

She meant he should go and play and feel better. But he waited until Akla and little Pamiok went out. Then he took the new bow and tested the string a few times, and tried to make up his mind about what to do.

At the edge of the camp stood six big figures in a row. They were cut from snow into the shape of men, but they were bigger than men. Tufts of caribou hair marked the eyes and hearts of some. An arrow stuck out of the forehead of the closest figure.

In front of the snowmen, down on one knee, was Ukpik. Two other boys danced around him, shouting, but Ukpik paid no attention to them. He took aim and shot.

"Ay!" Ukpik yelled. He had missed the snowman completely.

As he watched, Samik smiled to himself. Then he went toward the three other boys, swinging his new bow as though it were some useless old toy.

Ukpik frowned and said, "Well, here's little Samik the seal stealer."

"What do you mean?" Samik asked.

Ukpik turned and kneeled. Hardly taking aim, he let go an



arrow with a PING of the bowstring. This arrow landed right next to the heart of the second huge snow man.

Ukpik turned to the other boys and spoke as though his old friend wasn't there. "Last year I had a little partner, a boy named Samik. One time we were at the breathing holes at night, hoping the seals might be there. This Samik, who was as close to me as my coat, had a breathing hole to watch very near to my own. I got up from my place one time and went over to him. Well. This Samik had fallen asleep.

"Then I saw the bobber in the hole move — the seal was in there. So I grabbed little Samik and shook him. He leaped up, grabbed his old harpoon and plunged it into the hole.

"Well, the seal was Samik's. When we dragged it home the grown people said, 'What a man our little Samik is to stay out all night and to catch a seal.' But nobody said, 'What a hunter Ukpik is, Ukpik who stays awake!' "

Samik was nodding. It had happened just as Ukpik told it. "And I told everybody how you woke me up," he said to Ukpik. "Is it **my** fault what the grownups say?"

Ukpik remained silent. Then he jogged up and down because his feet were cold. "Is that a new bow?" he asked.

"Yes."

"See if you can hit anything with it," Ukpik said. Then he turned to the other boys and added, "This Samik is all right. No wonder, I taught him to shoot myself."

Samik knelt in the snow. He drew back the arrow, the bow shivered and grew strong, and he aimed for the head of one of the snow men. The arrow shot off straight, crossed into the



patch of blue sky by the snow man's shoulder and disappeared.

Ukpik broke out laughing. "Well. Not much of a bow. Or not much of a shooter."

"Or," Samik said, "not much of a teacher."



Ukpik frowned and bit his lip. "You mean **I'm** not a good teacher?"

"Maybe that's what I mean," Samik said.

Ukpik came up to him and put his arm around Samik's shoulder. "You're a good boy," he said.

Then Ukpik got his leg in front of Samik's and pushed on Samik's neck as hard as he could. Samik went over face first into the snow. He turned over just in time to see Ukpik about to land on him, and he rolled out of the way.

Samik got up, grabbed his bow and dashed around behind the snow men to get his arrow. Then he was off running.

At first he could hear Ukpik's heavy breathing right behind him. Then he could hear it farther back and finally not at all.

"Eh! Samik!" Ukpik called between big gulps of breath, "Samik — come on with me!"

It was all right then, Samik waited for his friend and together they walked to Ukpik's.

In the warm igloo Manelak, Alornek's wife, was putting chunks of hard frozen fish near the lamp to thaw.

The two boys sat down and said nothing. Manelak looked up at the two of them. They smiled at her. She smiled at them. Ukpik cleared his throat.

"Will you eat something?" Ukpik's mother said.

Both boys nodded. When a piece of salmon was passed to him, Ukpik held it a moment in his hands. "Well, Samik," he said, "our grandfather says two men who work and hunt well together are two men on firm ice."

Samik nodded.

Later, when he went home, Samik found his mother and Pamiok there and full of women's chatter. His mother asked if he wanted to eat and Samik said no.

Pamiok looked up at him. "You aren't hungry?"

"I've been eating salmon with my partner. There's nothing wrong," Samik said to his sister. "We're here on the ice. I went practicing with my new bow and hit what I wanted to hit. Tomorrow I'm going to go with my father to look for seals."

"Also," Pamiok said, "you are bragging."

All the grown people said Pamiok was such a pretty girl. Samik didn't understand why they said that. He thought she talked too much for a girl of ten and didn't show the respect she should to a brother of twelve.







## 2 MAGIC WORDS FOR GOOD AND EVIL

KUNAK had gone on a trip and he had taken Samik with him. Akla expected them to return that night or the next day, but she was worried. The wind had come up and the men could have a hard time getting back.

Pamiok saw that her mother had stopped her work. There was a strange silence outside as though Narsuk, the great spirit of bad weather, was holding his breath before letting the snow begin.

Pamiok was very tired, but she didn't want to sleep. The wind and the danger to her father and brother had made the night too frightening for sleep.

"Are you going to wait for them?" Pamiok asked her mother.

"Yes," said Akla.

Pamiok lay down and thought about sleep. "It might be possible but — no. I'll wait up too." Half to herself, half out loud, she sang:

Kamiks, boots made of caribou skin,

Bring me some, oh please, a gift for me.

Just some shoes.

Ay Kai - ak - sur - pal.

Seal, dear little animal,  
Dear little soup animal and oil animal,  
Bring me oil, oh please, a gift for me,  
Just a little gift for me —

Akla was staring at her. "Pamiok, where did you learn that song?"

"From my grandmother," the girl said.

"Did Tiksak teach it to you?"

"No. I just heard her sing it once."

Her mother seemed frightened. "You must never sing that song again," said Akla.

Pamiok was confused. "Isn't it just a song for a woman who wants seal oil for her lamp? That's what Tiksak said it was for."

"Yes," Akla nodded, "but the words of that song are magic. Your grandmother is an old lady who knows about magic and magic words, she knows how to use magic for good reasons. But those of us who don't know—we mustn't say those words."

Pamiok was frightened now. She imagined she could hear the snow driving harder around their igloo, and thought of her father and brother and she began to cry.

Akla told her not to worry over and over again like a song, and then she asked if Pamiok would like a story. "It's about magic words."

The girl felt she knew all her mother's stories by now, but she nodded anyway.

"Well," her mother began, "as your grandmother says, 'Children are so full of life, they don't want to sleep. Only the droning words of a story can make them drop off!'



"So," Akla said, "this is a story about the power of magic words, magic words so strong that they could make an animal made of snow come alive.

Once there were two young brothers who hunted together. And they were good hunters. Even in the coldest, hungriest part of winter they had big chunks of meat set out to thaw.

In the camp where the brothers lived there was a poor old woman who had bad luck. Her husband was dead, and she had no children to take care of her. She was often hungry. The old woman was named Iterujuk.

Well, this old Iterujuk saw how good the two brothers were as hunters, so she braided her old gray hair and put oil on her face and she went right up to the brothers and she tried to make a deal with them.

"Look," old Iterujuk said, "you young men need a wife. I've been a wife for most of my life. I know everything a wife should know and I could help you. Why don't you take me in?"

All the time she was talking, old Iterujuk couldn't take her eyes off that pile of caribou meat.

But the two young hunters thought the light in her eyes was love, so they considered her offer. They went to ask their father.

"No. Absolutely not!" their father said. "My two sons are not going to marry a woman old enough to be their mother."

So the sons did not take her in, and day by day old Iterujuk got hungrier and angrier at the boys' father.

Soon the hunters had to move their camp to get better luck, so all the families packed up and set off. Old Iterujuk went too, but she stayed behind the others. She didn't even walk in the tracks the others had made, because she was so busy making up a plot to get the boys' father.

When they finally came to a place where the hunting looked good, all the families built new igloos. All by herself Iterujuk made her own place to live, away from all the other igloos, and she mumbled out loud as she worked and planned her magic.

As soon as she had her igloo ready, she went away from the camp and made a big bear out of snow. A gigantic one! Now Iterujuk was a powerful old woman who controlled many spirits. One of these spirits was a bear. So she said heavy magic words to her bear spirit and the spirit came to her and entered the snow bear, and the snow bear began to look and move just like a live bear.

Then old Iterujuk said, "Great bear, there's a man I want you to get. An old man. You know the one I am thinking of. Kill him!"

Then Iterujuk went back to camp. The people said, "Where have you been, Iterujuk?" But she was a clever lady and she just gave the people a sweet smile instead of an answer.





The next day the two young hunters went with their father to a place where they had stored some meat. There they built an igloo and brought the frozen meat inside. And as soon as they were inside, they heard the rumbling of a great bear.

The men blocked up the doorway with big chunks of snow and sat shivering and scared. The bear pounded around the igloo and then started pushing in at the entrance. The sons pushed back with all their strength. But the bear was so strong that at last he



pushed his way into the house. His roar was as loud as the roar of ice cracking.

The boys jumped on the sleeping platform with their father and all three hid under the sleeping skins.

And as the bear came in, the lamp flickered and almost went out. The hunters were terrified because the flickering of the lamp told them that the bear was a spirit, not a live animal.

The bear sniffed around and saw all three of them. But he went right for the father and dragged him out of the igloo. The poor old man was helpless and the horrible bear began to tear at him with gigantic claws.

Slowly the sons got their knives and crept up behind the great bear. They plunged their knives into its back again and again, but it was as if they were stabbing the air. The knives could not hurt the magic bear.

Then they got their bows and shot arrows straight at the bear's ugly snout. The bear brushed the arrows away as though they were flies.

When at last it turned around and lumbered away, the poor father was almost dead from wounds the bear had given him. "I'm going to die, my sons," the old man gasped. "Just hand me a bow and some arrows to take with me into the other land, so when I am dead I can kill her."

The sons didn't know what their father meant, but they placed a bow and some arrows in his hand before he died.

The next day the brothers went sadly back toward their camp. When they got near they saw a strange figure made of snow and they went up to it. It was shaped just like the great bear of the night before. So the two young hunters understood what had happened. They knew who had killed their father in such a cruel way, and they started thinking of a way to take revenge against old Iterujuk.

They had just settled themselves in their own igloo when a little boy ran in with the news: old Iterujuk had been found dead.

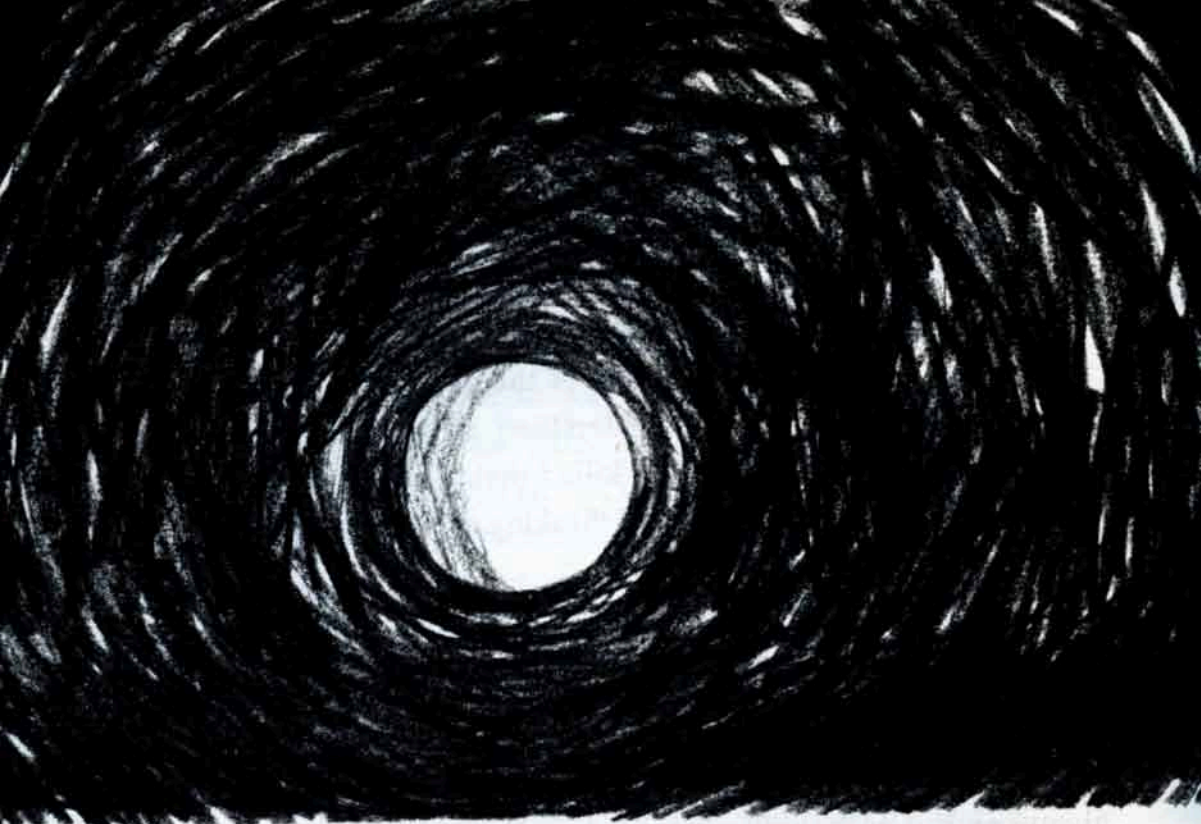
"When your grandmother tells this story," Akla said, "she always ends it with these words:

The magic that some people know how to work with words is strange and powerful. Sometimes magic words work for good and sometimes their power is turned around for evil. But not even magic words have the power that dead people have.

Akla looked down to see if her daughter had been frightened by the story, but Pamiok had fallen asleep. Smiling, Akla thought, "Even words that don't have magic have power — the power to put little girls to sleep."

Later Kunak and Samik arrived, covered with snow, and cold. Akla told them nothing about what had happened while they were gone.







# 3 UKPIK TELLS ABOUT THE FISH

A COUPLE of years ago, when I was nearly eleven and Samik was only ten, we did something bad together. Samik is a good boy, but sometimes he is too good. He follows the orders that grown people give without thinking them over first.

Myself, I listen to everything everyone says, but nobody makes up my mind for me. After all, I have more sense right now than **some** grown people will ever have.

Kunak, Samik's father, is a good hunter, but he's not as good as my own father, Alornek. Once Kunak and my father were partners, and our families were close together. That was before Kunak got jealous of my father and broke up their sharing partnership.

That summer we went fishing along a river. We tried some of the places downstream, but we got nothing. I told my father we should move on and he pretended he didn't hear me. Then after a while my father said, "We'd better try another place." Grown people are like that.

In the morning we packed up and started off. I was walking with Samik. No, I was walking ahead of him. On a long march, Samik grunts and groans like an old woman, but I happen to have wonderful breathing power and I even sing while I'm trotting along.

That day I sang happy songs, because I was so miserable. We had expected to get fish downstream, and now we were out of

food. I was chewing on the neck of my coat to make my stomach think help was coming soon, but my stomach wasn't fooled.

Toward night we came to a place where there is usually good fishing. My eyes are excellent. My name — Ukpik — means "owl," and so I see as well in the daytime as an owl does at night. Long before we got to the fish trap, I could see a tent set up there. The family camped by the river was Itkilik and his wife. Itkilik has always been our friend, but that day when we came panting up he was about as warm to us as the winter wind.

"Downstream there's not a fish worth talking about," my father said.

"Same story here," Itkilik said. Then he turned back to his tent.

We rested a few moments, we drank a little water. But Itkilik had said there were no fish here, so we had to move on.

Though we were exhausted and the stupid babies were screaming, we loaded our packs and started off again. I was in the lead. When I had walked a way, I noticed some piles of stone, and I went over to inspect them.

No fish here, Itkilik had said. Well, under these seven piles of stones was plenty of trout. I called my father and Kunak and Samik over and they looked too.

My father is a terrible man when he's angry. He puffs up like a dog, and starts yelling. When he found out that Itkilik had lied to us about the fish, that he had really put away seven big stores of trout, Alornek said, "We ought to teach that Itkilik a lesson,"

and gave a kick to one of the piles of stone.

But Kunak was calm. "No," he said, "Itkilik made a catch of trout for himself. Now the run of fish is over."

"And he should offer us some food!" Alornek said.

"He should, but he didn't," Kunak said.

How I remember that night, with the babies yelling and even our dogs refusing to carry their loads because they were so weak with hunger.

I don't think dogs are really as smart as we are, though they are better at some things, such as smelling. When a dog is starving, he just gives up hope and lies down to die. But we humans know you have to push on and on, you use your last bit of strength for walking, not for howling about your stomach. Dogs never think about tomorrow, they don't hope for anything unless it's in smelling distance.

Of course this also means dogs don't remember yesterday and don't cry, which may be an advantage they have over us.

Finally, we came to another fish trap on another stream my father knew about, and there we found some trout. It was three days before we got enough to eat to forget our hunger.

We were sitting around the lamp in Kunak's tent. I remember it very well. Samik's father gets very big-mouthed when his stomach is full. That night Kunak sang us a song about his deepest hopes.

I hope for all the meat I need to live,  
Which includes animals who give me their skins  
To protect me from the wind and weather and cold.



I hope for a life without sadness or pain,  
Which also means no sickness and no suffering  
To follow me now or when I'm old.

I hope to be like animals,  
Which means I want to run fast as a caribou,  
To be as wary as a seal sunning himself  
on the ice.

With those skills I could hunt better  
than any other man.

Everything I hope for myself

I hope for my family too.

If I am strong they will be full,

If I am well, they will not be sad.

Toward the end of Kunak's song I could see my father's face grow dark and his body seemed to swell. When Kunak was finally through, my father said, "What you hope for, Kunak, I hope for too. But more. My hope is for other people as well as my family. I hope to be good enough, lucky enough in hunting to be able to take care of my family and then have enough left to share with others. If I had fish, great piles of them, I would want to give you some."

My father was so angry and sad all at once that he began to cry. "If I saw you hungry, Kunak, I would give you my last little piece of meat."

Of course my father meant to say 'next to last.' I know him that well. My father would save the **last** piece of meat in the

world for himself and take it outside to eat where the rest of us couldn't see.

"Not like that Itkilik," my father went on. "Itkilik stopped being my friend when I saw those stores of fish he was hiding from us."

Kunak said, "Well, a man must make up his own mind about what he must store and what he can give away."

But my father, when he's angry, is never as sensible as Kunak. He started cursing Itkilik. He got more and more excited and finally he jumped up and yelled, "May evil spirits — a whole pack of giant foxes — steal every last fish in Itkilik's store!"

Outside Samik and I talked about whether Alornek's curse would bring evil to Itkilik. I thought it would not, because my father had not really called on spirits to carry out his curse. But Samik thought the curse might be working already.

And then one of us — I don't remember which — said that Itkilik **should** be taught a lesson. I do remember for sure that Samik made up the plan, not me. It was Samik's plan.

The next night we crept out of our camp. We traveled fast; the land was blue around us and Samik was afraid of tonraks. He thought he heard strange sounds and wanted to go back to our own camp. But I made him come on.

When we got near Itkilik's stores of fish I went very slowly because I was afraid Itkilik's two dogs would hear us.

But then, with my good night eyes — remember I am named for an owl — I could see that Itkilik had gone away.

I found the place where the stores of fish were and showed Samik what to do. We found the smallest stones on top of each pile and pulled them away. Not very far away. Then with our hands we dug out the fish.

I wanted it to look as though foxes had gotten in. That's why I only pulled the stones away a little. Samik wanted to take some of the fish home with us, but that shows how stupid he is.

I said no. "We're not robbing Itkilik, we're teaching him a lesson."

We spread the fish out all over the ground and left them there. In a while birds and probably real foxes would find the feast and finish off our work. When Itkilik came back he would find only fish bones and by the looks of things he would have to decide that animals had gotten into his stores.

When we got back to our own camp we were exhausted and it was already day. Samik's little sister who talks too much was standing outside. She asked where we had been.

"We went out early to hunt for birds," I told her.

"Without bows?" she asked.

"That's right," I said.

Luckily Pamiok is afraid of me so she never said a word to the others. That is almost the whole story, except for the unhappy ending.

The next winter when we were seal hunting, Itkilik came into camp with his family. He came to our igloo looking pale and thin, and told my father this:

"After you left that fishing place, Alornek, our luck changed. We had several days of good fishing and I managed to store a



few. But when I went back to clean out the store, I found the foxes had gotten the fish. They must have been big foxes to move the stones I put down."

My father lost his smile and he was shivering under his coat.

My father is very strong, and I got my strength from him. But my father can also be frightened very easily. That day he thought he had sent evil spirits to teach Itkilik a lesson. My father was so afraid for what he thought he had done that right then he gave Itkilik almost every piece of meat we had.

Luckily, I had my grandfather's name and not my father's, so I don't share my father's fear.

After Itkilik left, I said to my father, "Well, I'm glad Itkilik got what he deserved."

But my father was still shaking over the evil he thought he had caused, and when he spoke his voice was low. "No," he said, "no. Nobody should have to suffer what poor Itkilik has suffered. Didn't you see how thin he was? No man should suffer."

When I think about it, I have to agree with my father. No man should have to suffer hunger even though he lied to us and wouldn't share with us when he had plenty.

I'm sorry now that I let Samik persuade me to help him against Itkilik. As I said, I don't very often listen to the bad advice that other people always give me.







## 4 JUST A BOOT MENDED IN WINTER

SEKINEK is an old man now and he spends much of his time just sitting, rocking back and forth, thinking and dreaming.

His mind is on his little granddaughter Pamiok, and on the terrible trouble she caused.

As he rocks, Sekinek says to himself, "We are small people and we live hard lives. And Nuliajuk and the other great spirits who watch over us are so powerful that they make us feel even smaller than we are. They ask so much of us, they have so many rules. And if we offend them, they turn their backs and go away from us."

Sekinek is wise, he knows about spirits, but not even the old man can keep all their rules in his head. "And if I can't remember everything," he says, "how can a little girl like Pamiok keep in her head all the rules she has to learn?"

One day in winter, a silent day for there was no wind, Pamiok had been playing with her friends. Together they had built a little igloo and put their dolls inside. But Pamiok had gotten tired of the game and the chatter of the two girls with her. She picked up her own doll and said in the deepest voice she could manage, "Well, my little wife, I'm going to the breathing holes."



As soon as she started walking away she felt a sharp shivering pain in her left foot. At first she thought the pain had come because she had been sitting so long. But no — the feeling turned to cold, and by the time she got to her own igloo, the feeling had turned to wet. Very wet.

Pamiok inspected her kamik and found a hole in the toe, just a little opening where the sewing had come undone, but enough to let in some snow. It was too bad for a boot to come undone so early in winter.

Only Samik was at home, and he was asleep on the platform. Pamiok turned her attention to fixing her leaky boot. Mother's needles and sinew thread must be somewhere around. She looked first by the blubber lamp and among the clothes on the drying rack, but she found nothing. So she turned to the sleeping platform and began looking there.

As she picked through old things, Samik's broken bow, an old knife of Kunak's, she moved very carefully so she wouldn't wake her brother. Finally she found a little bone case. Inside it were Akla's needles. Nearby were old ends of sinew. Pamiok moved over by the blubber lamp for more light. She worked quickly, taking off her kamik, threading the needle.

From time to time she looked up, thinking she heard her mother coming home. Her stitches were not bad, not as small or as even as Akla's, but then she was only a young girl.

Knowing what her mother would say if she came in, Pamiok got frightened. 'What are you doing with my needles?' But then Akla would see how well Pamiok had done her work and would laugh. Maybe.

There was something wrong with what she was doing, but she couldn't remember what. When the kamik was fixed, Pamiok was glad, because the feeling went away. Quickly she put the needles back where she had found them.

Soon she heard Akla laughing outside with her sister Manelak. They were coming in. Pamiok took out her doll. No — their voices were growing fainter. The women were going on to Manelak's igloo. Pamiok felt completely alone, and so she sang to herself and to the doll. Songs are the only friends who come to us when we are alone and lonely.

Days walked by and disappeared, like people on a march. Pamiok's boot no longer leaked and soon she forgot that she had sewn it up.

The men and boys went every day now to the breathing holes, but there were very few seals. When one was caught, people shared and the meat quickly disappeared. Days came when Pamiok had nothing at all to eat, except perhaps some tiny bit her mother could find for her.

Her brother and her father went out early and sometimes they did not get back until the next morning. They would sleep a few hours, heavy dreamless sleep, and then go out again, almost without speaking to Akla or Pamiok.

Alornek came by sometimes, or Ukpik, but neither father nor son seemed to have the strength to make jokes. Their faces were thin. When the men talked they spoke in low voices, and only of hunting. They thought of moving the whole camp and trying their luck in a new place.



Alornek said that hunting at night was useless, and Kunak turned to Samik and said that some people were lazy even in time of hunger. Alornek's face turned red and Pamiok was afraid, but Alornek merely got up and left their igloo.

The women stayed together, but now, instead of jokes, there were long silences broken only by stories of how hunger had come in other times. Old Tiksak, Pamiok's grandmother, began a tale of a man who died of hunger, and when she got near the end of the story she stopped suddenly because both Akla and Manelak looked so sad.

People began to wonder aloud who had broken a rule and offended the spirits of the seals.

The men had a meeting one morning in the great igloo where in better times the singing and the feasts took place. Pamiok wasn't allowed to go, but later Samik told her what had happened. Their grandfather, Sekinek, was a famous angatok, a man with the power to control spirits, and he said this: he and the other angatoks in the camp should call on Nuliajuk, the great spirit who herded the seals from place to place under the ice, and they should beg Nuliajuk to let the seals return to the people before they starved. The other angatoks agreed that this was what must be done.

After the calling of Nuliajuk, the people in the camp seemed a little lighter, a little happier. For the first time in many days, Alornek came in the morning and asked Kunak to go hunting with him. "And make sure your harpoon is sharp," Alornek said, smiling, "I feel good things are coming to us."

Slowly, like ice, that little feeling of hope seemed to melt in the people. By the fourth day, when still no seals came, they were worse off than before.



Samik told her that Sekinek and the other angatoks had decided to call the whole camp together to find out who had broken a rule and so deeply offended the spirits.

They went together in the dark, Kunak, Akla, Samik and Pamiok. Inside the great igloo were all the people Pamiok knew in the world. She sat down with her mother among the women.

The light from a single blubber lamp glowed softly and no one spoke. The great igloo seemed changed to Pamiok, not like the place where other times she had heard singing and laughter.

One of the angatoks said that every person here must search through himself or herself to find the offense against the spirits. The angatoks had been trying to find it. They had called their own spirits for help, but with no luck. The broken rule was hidden deep in someone, frozen, and would have to come out.

After the other angatok had spoken, Sekinek got to his feet and snuffed out the lamp. There was silence and then a low moaning. Pamiok put her hand out for her mother. A baby began to cry.

And a voice began to shout, the voice of an angatok, maybe Sekinek himself. It shrieked high like a bird, then it swooped low. "It's coming, I feel it coming!"

Now in the darkness Pamiok thought she could see a shape — a man turning around and around. The voice screamed that the spirit of a caribou was running among them, a wild spirit, a spirit got loose.

Other voices began to join in. Pamiok could hear Alornek's voice above the others. He was yelling out his mistakes. The words of so many people filled the room that Pamiok could only hear a roar.

She pressed her hands over her ears to stop the noise, and so she could listen to her own thoughts. As the other voices rose and fell around her, she tried to think of what rules she had broken, but no words came. She thought she could hear the clicking of the hoofs of that caribou spirit, and for an instant she thought she felt the brush of its fur against her as it rushed by. But still no words came.

The whole camp slept late into the next morning. At last the men got up, and Pamiok could see them standing in small groups before their igloos, talking, looking off over the ice. But they did not move. They seemed to be afraid of finding nothing changed when they got to the breathing holes.

Pamiok went with Akla to her grandmother's igloo. They sat together silently for a while, each with her own thoughts.

Akla was asleep, and Pamiok felt that she herself was dreaming, though her eyes were wide open.

"Grandmother, what's going to happen?"

The old woman rocked back. "Don't worry," she said.

Pamiok said that she couldn't help it. The questions came to her all the time. Her stomach was tight.

"From hunger," Tiksak said. "So come here my little bird and lean against me. If I had a bite to eat I'd give it to you, but since I don't, I will give you a story.

Once there was a witch, a horrible old spirit woman with white hair flying in the wind. She only had three teeth in her head.

This old witch woman only liked to eat one thing.

Not salmon, not caribou, not an oily piece of seal, nothing like that. But a nice fat child — well! Every day the witch woman went out looking for a nice little girl or boy to eat and as she was walking you could hear her hopefully sharpening her three teeth against each other.

One time she found some boys and girls playing together on the rocks. She came up on them suddenly and grabbed the fattest boy. The other children dashed for safety and began crying because they knew what would happen now to their poor friend.

But the boy was smart. He had a big hole in his kamik and his toe stuck out. He wiggled the toe back and forth and pointed at it.

The old witch woman asked, "What's that?"

The boy shivered and said, "That? That's a toe witch, a little fellow of a witch!"

Well, then the old woman witch took her hands off the boy and asked, "I've never seen a toe witch before. What does it eat?"

The boy smiled and said, "Toe witches eat old women witches."

And the old woman witch trembled and ran away as fast as her old legs would carry her. The boy brought his toe back inside his kamik and just laughed.

Old Tiksak herself began to chuckle. She noticed Pamiok hadn't moved. "Didn't you like the story?" she asked.



The girl turned around and whispered, "I know, Grandmother."

"You know what?"

"Why the seals have gone away."

"Why?"

As soon as Tiksak had said the word 'kamik' she had known.

"My kamik had a hole in it and I sewed it up. I forgot, Grandmother, I forgot," Pamiok said.

"How many days ago?"

"I can't remember."

"But after we came to this camp?"

"Yes."

Akla was awake. She had heard too. "And no one ever told you that women are not allowed to sew anything once the seal hunting has started?"

"Yes, I knew that. But I forgot," Pamiok said softly.

Her grandparents talked that day about another gathering of all the people in the camp, where Pamiok would tell what she had done. They talked about the meeting with the other angatoks, but already the whole camp knew.

Pamiok was afraid to go outside. She cried and her mother put her on the sleeping platform and covered her. But still the girl was afraid.

For a long time Pamiok couldn't sleep. And when she did, she dreamed of an old story of a man who offended the spirits and was sent out of his camp alone. In the dream she saw him dark and tiny in a great snow-filled white world.

The men went out hunting that night.

Toward morning her father came in alone. He sat down heavily. "Nothing," Kunak said.

Then a little later he asked Akla if Pamiok was asleep.

"Yes."

"Some of the men say it is our fault as much as Pamiok's. That we haven't taught her, that you haven't kept watch over her as you should."

Akla said, "Do you think what they say is true?"

"No. A little girl's head isn't big enough to carry everything inside. She drops things — forgets. We all do that."

Later Pamiok heard a voice outside. Alornek.

"Hey, Kunak, send your wife to my igloo to get some meat."

Akla got up and went out. In a little while she was back with meat, followed by Samik and Ukpik and Alornek.

"Well, what do you think about this?" Alornek said. "My Ukpik got himself a seal. I would have gotten one myself if I weren't such a sleepy stone."

"Are there more?" Akla asked.

"Oh yes. Three during the night and more today for sure," Alornek said. "Our friends the seals have come back to us."

The meat was cut up and the men began eating right away. Akla came and shook Pamiok.

The girl got up and her mother passed her a piece of meat.

"No, I don't want any," Pamiok said.

Kunak looked up, his mouth full. "Eat, my little one. Don't be afraid. We make our mistakes, we forget, we offend the spirits. But look," he held up meat, "they don't stay offended





long. The spirits forget our mistakes as soon as we remember them. So go ahead and eat."

Old Sekinek has been asleep. When he wakes, he thinks again of Pamiok and he says to himself, "Our rules are a heavy load on our backs. We feel smaller than we are because we are watched by such great spirits. The world is large and full of danger."

Then he notices his old wife has taken a piece of meat from the pile in the corner and is tearing it with her teeth. Sekinek smiles to himself and says, "And we are lucky people too."





# 5 THE OUTLAW AND HIS SON

NIO did not mind living with the old people. His grandmother and grandfather treated him well. They were wise and understood him. When he wanted to be by himself they left him with his thoughts and did not bother him. Sekinek taught the boy hunting and would sometimes tell him stories.

But at strange moments Nio found himself envying his cousins Ukpik and Samik because they lived with their own parents. He could remember when he lived as they did and had thought that it would always be so.

Nio's mother died when he was nine years old, he could remember that. He and his father, a hunter named Ekaluk, had taken their things and moved in with the old people. Men cannot take care of themselves, and though Ekaluk had looked, he had not been able to find another woman who could be his wife. For a year the father and son had lived with Sekinek and Tik-sak. Ekaluk brought his catches of fish and the caribou he killed to his mother, and old Tiksak made clothes for her son and grandson.

Ekaluk had a hunting partner named Pakluk. This Pakluk was Alornek's brother and a generous man. He would ask Ekaluk and Nio to come eat at his tent while they were fishing



in the fall. Pakluk had a pretty young wife, a woman who laughed a lot and showed her little teeth and sewed well and seemed to be all the things a wife should be. Nio hardly noticed her, but he could see that his father was watching her very closely.

It was in the fall, Nio remembered, and he was ten. Pakluk had gone away on a trip. The boy remembered suddenly being awake in the night. The skins of the tent buckled and puffed in the wind like a man breathing, and Nio heard a voice whispering "Father!" Nio thought of ghosts and buried himself deeper under his caribou skin. Then his grandfather got up and went outside. The other voice, the one that had called, was Ekaluk. Nio could hear them talking.

"Pakluk's wife has agreed to go with me," Ekaluk said.

The old man said, "Pakluk will follow you."

"By the time he finds out we'll be far away," was Ekaluk's reply.

Then, Nio recalled, his father had come into the tent and quickly gathered a few things — his knife, his bow, some skins. The boy pretended to be asleep. When his father was ready, he shook Nio and told him that he was going. Nio didn't ask where. "You'll stay with the old people," his father said before he went out.

That night was two years ago, and now it seemed like a dream to Nio. He could barely remember it. Much clearer to him was the memory of Pakluk's angry face when he came back and found his wife was gone, and also the memory of Pakluk's terrible words: "When I see Ekaluk again, I will kill him."

From time to time in their travels, the old people had bits of

news about Ekaluk. Sekinek heard from a man that Ekaluk and his new wife were in a camp on the ice way to the west. Later someone told them Ekaluk had been forced to leave that camp. The people were afraid of him because he was a stranger and, they said, because he was a man who stole wives. The next year they heard that he and the woman had gone off and lived alone during the winter. Some people said that not even the best hunter could survive through the winter if he tried hunting alone.

Often, Nio knew, his grandmother was sad about her missing son. Tiksak would be sitting by her lamp working and her head would go back and she would stare up at the dome of the igloo for a long time. She had made up a song about herself which she would sing when this unhappiness came on.

I cry for a little boy I used to carry against me,  
A little boy, a man now who's gone.  
And I blame myself for my lost son.  
When he grew up he was unlucky  
And he was in need.  
When he grew up he was foolish.  
How old I've gotten since he's been lost,  
How old my husband has grown.  
I stumble, my feet won't hold me.  
Even on smooth ground I stumble and fall.  
How I envy other women  
Who have their children with them,  
How old I've grown,  
I stumble and I fall.





Nio had just come back from hunting. He drove his harpoon into the snow outside his grandfather's igloo and stood looking at the lights in the night sky. They rolled about above him like, as Tiksak said, the ball in a great game spirits play.

Then the dogs began to bark and Nio could see a figure coming, just a tiny dot on the great surface of the ice. When he went inside, Nio told his grandparents a visitor was getting near the camp, probably a man with a sled from the way the dot moved. Sekinek nodded, but nothing more was said.

Later Nio heard talking outside and knew the visitor had arrived in camp. He waited, but no one came to see them. As usual he got ready for sleep and lay down on the platform. Then the boy heard feet crunching in the snow outside, and Kunak's voice.

Samik's father came inside with the traveler who was his friend from another camp. "This man has news for you," Kunak said, "and he wanted to bring it to you now because he's setting out again in the morning."

The stranger nodded. Tiksak offered him food and after he had eaten, he spoke. "I was coming from my own camp and I met a man named Ekaluk who said he wanted to see you."

"You met him between your own camp and ours?" Sekinek asked.

"Yes."

"How far out?"

"I met him at midday," the traveler said.

"Was he alone?" Sekinek asked.

"No. He had a woman with him, and a child."



"Eeee!" Nio could see his grandmother smile and then pull the neck of her coat up to hide her pleasure.

"And he asked me to bring this to the old woman." The traveler took out a small bag and passed it to Tiksak. She turned away so the men could not see her open it. And when she turned back there was no expression on her face.

Sekinek asked the visitor not to tell anyone else in the camp, and Kunak took the tired stranger away to sleep.

Then Sekinek told Nio that they would be traveling in the morning. Nio understood. His father had something to say to them, and he was afraid to come into the camp because Pakluk lived here. Nio wondered if his father still needed to be afraid of Pakluk. Pakluk had found himself a new wife and seemed happy.

Then the boy noticed that his grandmother was crying. That was strange, too. She should be glad to know that Ekaluk was alive. Nio asked her what was wrong.

Tiksak's thin fingers picked open the little bag that the stranger had given her, and out onto her lap fell the beaks of two birds. She held up one and said, "I gave this to my Ekaluk — it's a charm to make him a good hunter. Now he sends it back to me with another."

Nio did not know what that could mean. Why had his father sent back his charm and sent a second like it? And why did the two charms make her cry when they had just received such good news? But the boy couldn't ask questions and so he went to sleep wondering.

In the morning he was surprised by the way the old people packed the sled for the journey, with meat and extra skins and the harpoons — as though he and Sekinek were going to be gone a long time. But again, Nio didn't ask questions.

His grandfather followed the tracks that the stranger's sled had left the day before. The snow had blown and drifted in the night and Nio could barely see the traces, but Sekinek and the dogs seemed to know where they were going.

They had traveled nearly half a day when the old angatok spotted a bump on the ice and pointed it out to Nio. As they got closer they could see it was a small igloo, the kind people put up for a night when they are traveling. Nothing moved there. They could see no dogs, no harpoons stuck up in the snow in front of the igloo. Sekinek said that Ekaluk had probably seen them coming and didn't know yet who they were.

When the old man and the boy reached the igloo, they found no one there, so they sat down and waited. Nio had been thinking this would be a happy day — the day he saw his father again — but now strange doubts came over him.

After what seemed a long time, they saw two people coming toward them across the ice, a man carrying a harpoon, and a woman.

Nio's father and the woman were very thin and hungry-looking. Their clothes were ragged and old. But his father smiled at them and took them down into the tiny igloo. It was an odd place to Nio. He noticed that they had few of the possessions most people have.



Ekaluk's new wife offered Sekinek food, but he said he wasn't hungry. Then the old man asked how it was going for his son.

"We are alive," Ekaluk said. "We tried living in other camps, but the people were suspicious of us because we were strangers to them. So we lived alone. Then, this year just when we were ready to move out on the ice for the sealing, the new one came along."

Ekaluk nodded toward the baby, who was hidden under his mother's coat.

"A son?" Sekinek asked.

"Yes," Ekaluk nodded. "But now my wife has to go with me when I hunt. I can't leave her here."

Nio understood that. People said that when a baby was small and couldn't protect itself, then both the baby and the mother were in great danger from bad spirits. So Ekaluk would be forced to take his wife and baby with him, which would slow him down and make it hard for him to hunt as a man can alone.

"And you, Nio," Ekaluk said, "have you learned from your grandfather?"

The boy nodded.

"Have you gotten seals?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

Nio was actually very proud of himself. Last winter he caught two seals and this winter he had already harpooned three. But he didn't want to show his pride. "A few," he said.

Ekaluk said to Sekinek, "I'm going to take the boy with me, then. With his help, maybe things will be better for us."

Sekinek agreed. "We knew you wanted him when we saw you sent two charms — one from yourself, one for Tiksak to keep for the boy. I brought his things with him."

The men went outside and brought in the skins the old people had packed for Nio. The boy stuck his own harpoon into the snow beside his father's. And he saw that without saying anything Sekinek carried some pieces of meat down into the igloo and dropped them onto Ekaluk's tiny store of food. The old man showed nothing, no sadness over leaving his grandson. In the morning Sekinek went back to the camp alone.

Nio did not know what to think. In a way, he had gotten his wish. And he was willing to go with his father and hunt with him, even though he knew the great danger, knew that here, outside any camp, they were living closer always to hunger.

But he missed the camp. Here there would be no nights of singing in the great igloo, no days spent shooting at snow men with his cousins, no tales from his grandfather. Here the baby cried in the night no matter what his father and the woman did to make it laugh and be quiet.

After two days, Ekaluk decided to move on. He didn't like being so close to the camp where Pakluk still lived. So they got ready. Ekaluk had only one dog so he and Nio had to help pull the little sled.





## 6 ALORNEK'S SOUL GOES WALKING

MANELAK stayed up through that whole first night of Alornek's danger. She sat and rocked herself back and forth from time to time as though she were trying to keep a baby quiet.

She was a silent little woman, Alornek's wife, with a wide nose and a sharp smile. The kind of person who laughs longest at other people's jokes never makes jokes herself. Maybe this was the reason Alornek liked her — he made the jokes and she did the laughing.

Ukpik had gone to sleep at last, though it was hard for Manelak to understand how the boy could sleep while his father rolled around on the platform, shivering, moaning, and sometimes sitting up and shouting —

"Tonraks! I see tonraks. **They** did this to me!"

Alornek's eyes were wide, though he did not seem to see. Over and over he repeated, "I'm cold. My soul is cold," and "My soul is out wandering somewhere on the ice."

For several days Alornek had been acting strangely, as though he were sick or as though some evil thing was bound up inside him. Then, just that morning, Manelak had been getting ready to go visit her parents. Alornek was outside, and she



heard his deep bear's voice screaming for her and she crawled out the tunnel as fast as she could.

Alornek stood staring, shivering. His arms were clutched tightly to his chest.

"There, you see that?" he pointed ahead of him.

Manelak looked, but she saw nothing.

"Me. Myself. See me over there?"

At first Manelak thought Alornek was making a joke. "No," she said, "I see you right here beside me, my husband. You're wearing a coat."

"There, there, there," he kept repeating. He held out his arms and pleaded, "Come back, come nearer to me. Come back inside."

Manelak could not see what Alornek was seeing so clearly. She could only sense her husband's desperation and the terrible power this vision — whatever it was — had over him.

"What is it?" she asked again, putting her arm around his big waist, trying to comfort him.

"There," Alornek sighed, "now you've made it disappear."

"Good. Let's go back inside." Manelak tugged at his coat. "What happened?"

Alornek took a breath. "I saw someone walking toward me. It was not a person, not anyone I knew. A spirit. And it said 'Come along with me.' I stood as still as I could. Like my feet were frozen in my boots. But my soul inside me knew this spirit, and my soul pulled right out of my body, flowed out like water gurgling between stones. I couldn't hold it in."

Manelak looked up at her husband's face. "Do you still see it, Alornek?"

"No," he said, "when you touched me it went away."

Manelak wondered later if it had been her fault. Maybe Alornek's soul had just gone for a little walk with the spirit and meant to come back right away. Then when she appeared and touched her husband, the soul got frightened and ran.

During the night, Manelak told Alornek her thought. "But," she said, "your soul will come back like a bad child as soon as it gets over being frightened. After all," she tried to smile, "your soul shouldn't be so frightened of **me**."

Alornek shook his wild long hair and said no. Someone had sent evil spirits — great tonraks — to take away his soul and to kill him.

"Who would want to hurt you?" Manelak asked.

"Who wouldn't? They all hate me," Alornek said.

Manelak hoped this was a joke, but there was no smile on her husband's face. She decided to ask her father and mother. The old people were angatoks and would know what to do. To Alornek she said, "Maybe Sekinek can help you."

"Yes," Alornek replied, "and send tonraks against my enemies. I know who they are." The idea of help and revenge made him feel better and soon Alornek went to sleep.

In the morning, Ukpik was up early. When he put on his outer coat to go hunting, Manelak stopped him. She said the boy couldn't go while his father was sick. There was a rule against hunting when someone in your family was sick, Ukpik knew, and so instead he went along with his mother to see Sekinek.

They came into the old people's igloo and sat. Ukpik began, telling his grandfather that something strange had happened to



Alornek. Manelak told about the day before. Neither of the old people spoke, but after Manelak finished, Sekinek began to nod.

"Did tonraks do this?" Ukpik asked.

"I don't know yet," his grandfather said.

Ukpik bit his lip. "How can a person lose his soul?"

His grandmother spoke slowly to the boy. "Our bodies are only holders for our souls, Ukpik. A man's soul looks just like him, it lives inside him, it gives him strength. And when a soul no longer wants to live in a body, it goes out. And the man dies."

Sekinek added, "Our souls want us to live as long as we can. But sometimes something happens."

After a while, Ukpik asked, "And do you know how to make a soul come back inside?"

"We will have to try, for Alornek's sake," his grandfather said.

They came in the night, the two old people. Sekinek wore the band of white caribou skin decorated with beads.

Alornek was weak. He told Sekinek he felt as though all the bones had been drawn out of his body.

The old man told Manelak and Ukpik to get down and to hide their heads. When they obeyed, both Sekinek and Tiksak began to chant, using strange words to call on their helping spirits.

Most people are afraid of all spirits. When they feel spirits coming close to them, they close up and are like igloos at night with the tunnel blocked with snow — no visitors would be tempted to come.

An angatok, though, is a man or woman with great courage.

When he feels a spirit near him, an angatak allows the spirit to come into him, and he makes the spirit his helper. An old and powerful angatok like Sekinek may have seven or eight spirits to call on when he needs help.

Sekinek's voice had dropped low. Manelak could see him sitting on the platform next to Alornek. Her poor husband was very still. Though his eyes were wide open, he did not move at all.

Sekinek had a thong in his hand. He pulled the caribou blanket off Alornek, then pulled up the leg of Alornek's pants and tied the thong around the sick man's ankle.

Slowly and carefully, with one end of the thong in his hand, Sekinek began to pull on the thong and then to let it go. As he pulled, he chanted, "My spirits, find a soul for me, a lost soul. Lead it back to the warm body of this man."

Sekinek had slowed in his pulling. Now Alornek's leg barely moved.

"What has this man done to deserve such danger?" the old man asked the air, his eyes shut. "What has he done so wrong that his soul would grow fearful and not want to live in his body? Answer me, my father and my bear and my gull and my little seal."

His helping spirits had come to the angatok and he was asking them what rules of life Alornek had broken. Sekinek would ask a question and tug on the thong around Alornek's leg. If he mentioned the rule that had been broken, the spirits would pull against the thong and not let Alornek's leg rise.

The old man chanted, "My spirits, has someone been eating





the food he shouldn't eat in seal hunting time? The insides of frozen salmon?"

He pulled slowly on the thong and Alornek's leg moved.

"Or is it the seals? Has someone here forgotten seals are to be treated like friends? Has one of us done wrong? Is that it?"

The old man bent and tugged again.

Manelak suddenly raised her head and whispered, "Father!"

Sekinek stopped. Then he turned back to his work. He pulled on the thong and nothing happened. Alornek's leg was stiff.

"They brought a seal home," Manelak whispered, "Alornek and Ukpik did. We were so busy and so hungry we forgot to give it water."

She remembered the day and her happiness when she saw Alornek and Ukpik dragging the seal through the camp. Alornek's laughter filled the igloo, and she even remembered looking at the seal's open, smiling mouth and thinking then, 'We must give him water. Seals are thirsty when they're caught and they like us to melt a little piece from the ice window and give them a few drops.'

Her father was speaking to her, though his voice was far away and hollow from his talk with the spirits. "Didn't you remember that we have to let seals know how happy we are to have caught them, my daughter? Only if we treat them well will seals let us go on catching them."

"I know," she said. "But that day we were foolish. We forgot."

Sekinek said, "So we know where Alornek's soul has gone. It left his body to go and tell the seals that Alornek is only a



careless man, not a bad man. He didn't mean to offend the seals. But now, we have to try to get his soul to come back inside him, or he'll die without it."

Quickly the old man untied the thong from Alornek's leg.

"Come, my healing spirits, and add your strength to mine while we beat this careless man." Sekinek made fists of his hands and began to hit Alornek. On the chest. On the legs. On the head.

Alornek cried out in pain, although the old man's blows were not heavy. With her open palms Tiksak slapped Alornek's ears. Tiksak howled like a dog and Sekinek's voice was hoarse.

With his eyes still shut, old Sekinek stopped to catch his breath.

"I hear him," Alornek gasped, "I hear my soul, right there in the tunnel."

Sekinek bent close to Alornek's ear and whispered, "Your soul is afraid we're going to kill you."

Then the old man threw back his head and yelled, "Come, my strongest spirits! We'll beat this man to death for breaking the rules!"

Then both old people shouted and began to hit with their fists on Alornek's shivering body.

Sekinek leaned in and said, "Alornek, he's in the room now, don't you feel him?"

"Yes, he's coming to me."

"Kill this man!" Tiksak shrieked.

"He's coming, he's here!" Alornek clutched his arms around himself.

The old man's hands dropped to his sides and he sighed a deep, long sigh. He sat down heavily on the edge of the platform. His strength and power seemed to have flowed out of him. Calmly, he spoke to his spirits again in his angatok words.

Alornek lay breathing heavily on the platform, his arms wrapped around himself. He was smiling. After a moment, he got up and said to Manelak, "We're terribly hungry after all that walking, my soul and I. Hey, my little left hand, can't you find just a bit to eat for us?"

Alornek ate as though he had never eaten before. And as he did, his good humor came back to him. "My soul has talked to the seals," he said, "and I think all is well between us now."

The old people agreed to eat something. When he was through and licking his fingers, Sekinek began to laugh to himself. He said, "Souls are good things, Alornek. Yours was outside wandering around and he heard us and our helping spirits shouting that we were going to kill you. So he came and sat in the tunnel and watched and listened. Then he leaped back inside your body to help you fight against us. Do you feel the strength of your soul in you again?"

"Yes," Alornek nodded, "I feel it."

"You must be careful," the old man said. "The next time your soul goes walking he may not want to come back so quickly."







# 7

## THE FIGHT OF THE PUPPY AND THE BACKWARD SEAL

SAMIK had begun to believe that he had been waiting at the same breathing hole his entire life. He crouched behind the snow blocks which protected him from the wind, his harpoon and knife ready, eyes fixed on the indicator which stuck up from the hole. Seal hunting, he knew, was skill and work, but it was also patience and waiting.

Behind him there was a shout. Samik turned and Ukpik was on his feet and had plunged his harpoon down, and was beginning to pull.

Ukpik had gotten his catch up and onto the ice by the time Samik and the men got to him. Smiling, laughing, they admired the animal. Ukpik cut into it and brought out the liver. He divided the meat and handed the pieces around — to his father and Kunak, to Pakluk and finally to Samik.

Wiping blood off his chin, Alornek said, "Well, my boy is certainly a hunter, isn't he?" The man paused and looked around the circle of well-known faces. "It takes a great hunter to teach such a fine son, doesn't it Kunak?"

Samik saw his father smile and nod in answer to Alornek's talkative foolishness.

"That's why we don't see your Samik taking home so many seals, Kunak," Alornek went on.



What Alornek said wasn't true, Samik told himself. The big man was just trying to make Kunak angry. But Kunak's face remained smiling.

"It's hard to understand how some people can stay alive," Alornek said. "You know, I had a hunting partner once, and if it hadn't been for me he would have died of hunger. In those days I was doing the work of two men!"

Alornek chuckled, and everyone looked at Kunak, for he was the old hunting partner Alornek was talking about.

But Kunak didn't answer. He only said that Ukpik had gotten a fine seal and he was going back to camp.

Samik helped Ukpik put cord through the seal's nose and together they dragged the animal across the ice. When they got to camp, they took it to Manelak and she let the melting ice drip down into the mouth of the seal. Akla and some other women were there, waiting and talking while Manelak first skinned the seal and then gave chunks of the meat to each of the other women for their families.

Samik sat watching this with Ukpik. He remembered the strange insults Alornek had just thrown at his father for no reason and they made him angry. He couldn't understand how Kunak could remain so calm.

"If I'm going to be such a bad hunter as your father says," he turned to Ukpik, "maybe you won't want me for a partner."

"Oh," Ukpik grinned, "you know my father's jokes. He's just that kind of man."

"Not jokes," Samik said, "insults."

"But insults don't hurt Kunak," Ukpik said.

That was true, Samik thought. There were some hunters in the camp who would glow with anger if Alornek treated them the way he had treated Kunak. But Kunak remained calm, even later when he heard that Alornek was going all around the camp telling stories against him.

Samik asked his father one night why Alornek was doing this. At first Kunak said, "There are some men who like storms and some men who like clear days." But later he told his son about the end of the hunting partnership between Alornek and himself. "Alornek has a big belly and it takes a lot to fill it," Kunak said. "And he wants to be in charge, always. He stole some things from me once, not because he wanted them, but just to see if he could."

"And so you ended the partnership," Samik said.

"Well," his father smiled, "Alornek says **he** ended it, so it depends on whose stories you listen to."

Several days later, while Samik was lying on the platform, Manelak came to visit his mother. The women talked for a while, and Samik paid no attention to them. Then he heard Manelak tell about a strange thing Alornek had done. "There's a song," she said, "that he is thinking about singing, and he told me I would be singing a part of it. I told him I wouldn't, and he got mad and picked up a snow knife. So I said I would sing my part," Manelak shrugged.

Very soon, everyone in the camp had heard that Alornek was not going to stop with insults and stories about Kunak, and everyone knew that he was preparing a song against his old hunting partner.



Samik was almost afraid to ask his father what he was going to do. Kunak remained always so calm, maybe he wouldn't answer the other man's challenge.

Many nights in winter the great igloo was lit with blubber lamps and the people came together. Tonight Pakluk had just returned from a trip to the shore with a big supply of fish, and had asked the people to join him in a feast.

Akla was pulling a comb through her hair, something Samik liked to watch because it reminded him of when he was very small and would watch her comb and then braid her hair. The boy noticed that his father was not getting ready to go. Kunak sat with his arms inside his coat, his sleeves hanging limp, humming to himself.

But at last his father got up, and they went together through the dark to the great igloo. Inside people were already busily eating and talking, and Samik found a place to sit among the men with Ukpik.

He was excited, and soon found his own stomach was full. He passed pieces of fish without taking a bite from them.

The drumming began, a heavy, loud sound. Voices died, and one of the hunters started with a song about himself and how he hunted a white bear with bow and arrow, how frightened he had been because the bear was a clever one. "But then," the man sang on, "I remembered I was a man and the bear was only a bear. I shot, I wounded it with an arrow, I killed it." As he sang the hunter beat the edge of the great flat circle of the drum and swayed back and forth.

When he was done, there were shouts from the other men,

they liked the song, they liked thinking that they would be as strong as this man if the chance to kill a bear came along.

The drum was passed to Alornek's brother Pakluk and he sang. When Pakluk was through, he gave the drum to Alornek.

At first Alornek pretended he did not especially want the drum, he pretended to pass it on, and then with a smile he held it flat to his chest. In the lamplight his face shone. He beat the drum and then began to sing in a deep voice:

I want to sing just a little sweet song, a song  
That came into my head when I was thinking about  
a time long past.

My song is the story of my old partner and me.  
Me, Alornek, I'm not a man who's lucky.

My old partner was an extra heavy weight on my back.  
He's a man who can't run, who can't hunt.

Alornek stopped and looked up. A woman's voice chanted.  
"What he says is true. My husband doesn't lie." As she sang,  
Manelak's head was bowed.

Alornek continued:

Having him along on a hunt was like having  
a baby with you.  
Crying about the cold, crying about his stomach.  
No wonder the caribou got away from us!  
They could hear Kunak's complaining from  
a long way off.



Samik was silent, but around him the men and boys were beginning to laugh. Whether or not they believed Alornek, they appreciated a joke. Alornek was pleased with himself.

This old partner of mine can't even watch out  
for his own family.

His children break rules every day,  
his daughter sews

All winter long. Kunak doesn't have the sense  
that a puppy has.

Again Manelak's voice, "What he says is true. My husband doesn't lie."

Samik saw Kunak's calm face, and wished that for once his father would get angry.

Yes, a fellow like him should stay home,  
And not try to live a hunter's life.

Alornek finished singing and the drumming stopped. Around the room many people were laughing. They had never heard a song so strong against anyone. Alornek sat down and handed the drum to the man beside him.

The man got up and took the drum to Kunak. Samik could see his father tapping the drum lightly with his fingers. He looked doubtful about whether to answer Alornek's song.

Lightly Kunak began drumming and then to sing:

I am only Kunak and this is a song by a man  
Who doesn't know very well how to make up songs.  
I was just lying at home, having a nap,  
when the words

Of another man began to seep in through my walls  
Like wetness in spring. I was surprised

because this man,  
Whose name you know, this man was my friend.

I have thought about why he would want to call me  
a bad hunter,

And I can only find one reason.

Maybe Alornek remembers  
A time — a time I have almost forgotten —  
and maybe

He is ashamed of himself.

For Alornek is like a seal swimming backward.

As he sang this, Kunak raised his arms like fins and pulled  
them toward himself, as if he were gathering something to him.

Alornek — the seal who swims backward —  
he only takes in,  
He never gives out.

Everyone was laughing. A **seal swimming backward** — that  
was new to them.

One time when Alornek and I were partners,  
I caught a lot of trout and I gave Alornek some.  
The rest were lying in my house. I was out,  
my wife was out.

Alornek had eaten all of his fish,  
and he got hungry.

He came to my house and took all the fish.



Now, I would have given him more if he  
had been hungry.  
But he ate what he wanted and fed my fish  
to his dogs.  
When I found out I asked him why and he just  
laughed at me  
And said: "What's yours is mine, little Kunak.  
I just wanted  
You to know that."

Such a man — who only takes — is not worth  
being partners with,  
Though he may be a friend.

Such a man, if he thinks he's so strong,  
should come to me  
For a boxing match instead of sending  
insults to me  
Through the mouths of other people.

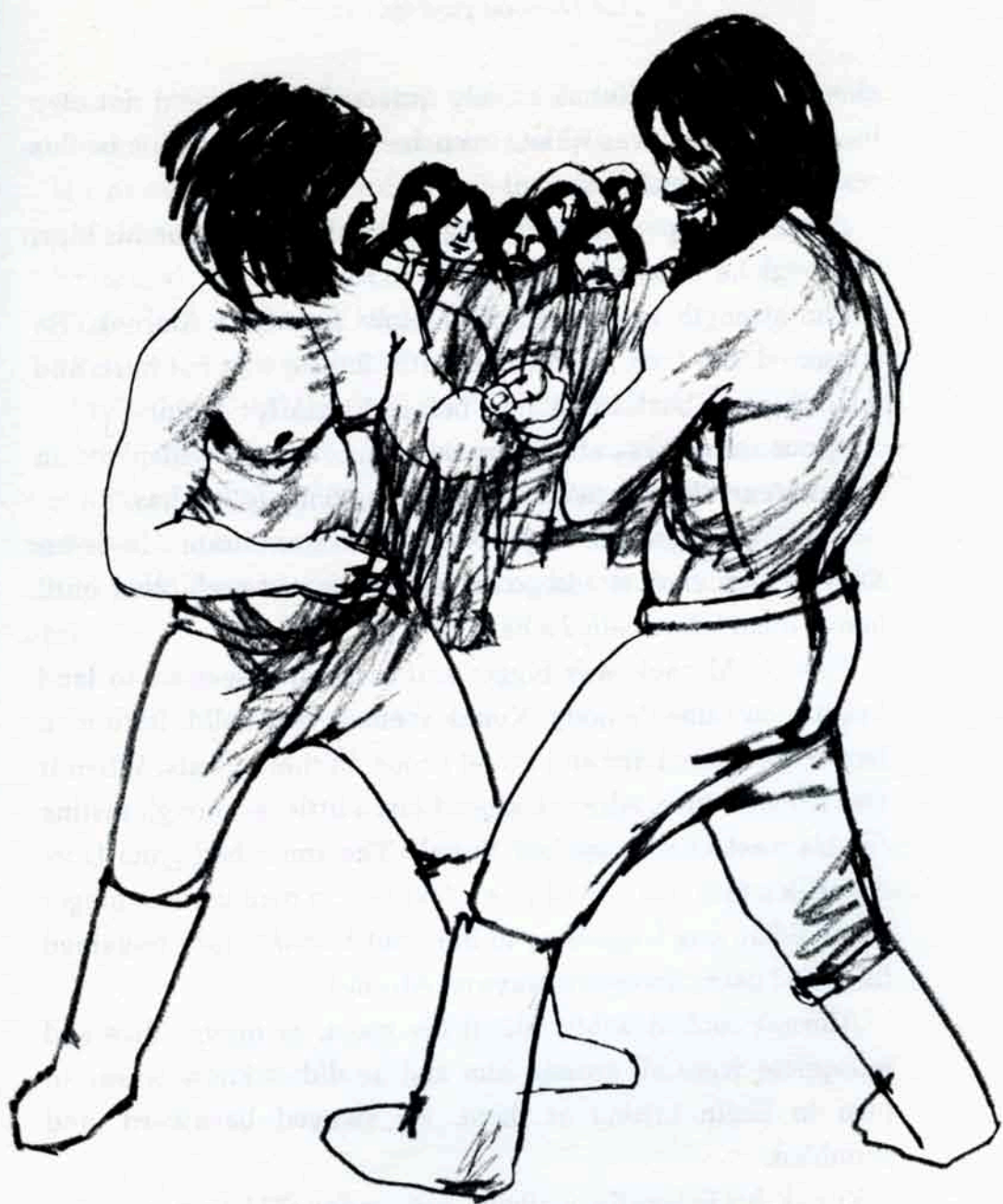
Alornek had jumped to his feet. "All right, my little Kunak, let's find out who's stronger. Now." Without waiting for an answer, Alornek began pulling his coat off over his head. Kunak nodded.

The two men stood face to face, wearing only their pants. Kunak looked small next to the great bulk of Alornek.

"You first," Kunak said. He braced his legs.

Alornek made fists of his hands, pulled back and hit Kunak on the shoulder. The blow shuddered through Kunak's body, but he did not move.

Again and again Alornek hit him, in the stomach, on the





chest. Each time Kunak's body quivered, but he did not step back. Everyone was quiet, even babies seemed to know this was a serious business.

Alornek stepped back, smiling, and put his hands on his hips, as though he didn't expect much from Kunak.

The strength in Kunak's first blow surprised Alornek. He staggered and took in a deep breath. But he was not hurt, and the grin came back to his face before Kunak hit again.

"Your father was stupid to start this," Ukpik whispered in Samik's ear. "He doesn't have the strength my father has."

Samik shrugged. The fight was a test of endurance between the two men, they would go on taking turns at each other until one of them fell or called a halt.

Though Alornek was bigger and his blows seemed to land heavier on Kunak's body, Kunak seemed very solid. Both men began breathing hard and sweat shone on their chests. When it was Kunak's turn, Alornek sagged just a little, as though resting for his next chance against Kunak. The smile had gone from Alornek's face. He looked like a lost man, a man who no longer knew what was happening to him, but Kunak's face remained fixed and calm, his eyes always on Alornek.

Alornek looked wildly about the room, as though flies and mosquitos were all around him and he didn't know where to turn to begin hitting at them. He swayed backward, and stumbled.

Kunak, his fist ready, waited. "Are we done?" he asked.

Alornek couldn't tell where the voice had come from. He dropped to his knees, stunned.

Kunak reached for his coat and as he bent over his knees seemed to break under him and he too fell.

It was over and the people began to chatter and laugh. Someone picked up the drum and began to hit it.

"You see?" Samik said.

"Your father fell too," Ukpik said.

"Yes, but after it was over."

"My father is still the stronger," Ukpik insisted.

Samik did not answer. He was proud of his father's strength, and he was hoping tonight would settle things between Alornek and Kunak. That happened sometimes — a song duel or a fight could end the anger between two men, make them friends again.





## 8 BROKEN BONES

FOR days after his fight with Kunak, Alornek lay on his platform. Finally the big man threw off the caribou skin and got up.

Ukpik could tell that his father was madder than ever. So the boy decided to get out of the way and crawled into the tunnel.

Poor Manelak was trying to be cheerful. She sang to herself as she worked and Alornek sat staring at his wife and mumbling to himself. He got up again and said, "I'll show you who's strongest—" and jabbed at the air as though he were still boxing with Kunak.

Then Alornek got down on his hands and knees and went looking through his things. He glanced up at Manelak and said, "If you're so happy to see your husband lose a fight, go home to your father and laugh about me there!"

Alornek had raised his snow knife up over his head. Manelak didn't see it, but Ukpik shouted from the tunnel just as the knife came down.

Manelak heard and swung away. Alornek's knife ripped through the sleeve of her coat, but it missed her arm. She got up and tried to get past Alornek. The man blocked her way. He raised the knife again but Manelak ducked under his arm and into the tunnel.



"Hurry," she whispered, pushing Ukpik ahead of her.

They stayed with Sekinek for the night. Late, before going to sleep, Ukpik said to his grandfather, "Maybe Alornek is just very angry because Kunak beat him in the fight. Maybe in a while he will become calm again."

But Sekinek said, "Maybe an evil tonrak has gotten into Alornek and made him crazy."

It was hard to sleep that night, for Ukpik was afraid that his father might come after him or after his mother again with the snow knife. He was frightened at the thought that tonraks could have taken control of Alornek.

In the morning, the women from Kunak's igloo came by to talk with Manelak and old Tiksak. Akla said that her husband and Samik had gone hunting, and Ukpik decided to follow them. When he got outside, the camp looked deserted — no one else around.

Then the boy spotted his father. Alornek peered out of his own tunnel and then, with his head down like a dog, he ran for Kunak's empty igloo. He disappeared into the tunnel, and a moment later came out. As he stood up Alornek lifted his coat and stuffed something into his pants.

Then he noticed Ukpik and quickly pulled the coat down over his big belly.

Going up to Alornek, the boy said, "I'm going to look for breathing holes." He was hoping his father was feeling better and would come along.

But instead, Alornek said, "I'm going hunting, but not for seals."

Then, laughing loudly to himself, he went toward his own igloo.

Ukpik could not understand his father. What else would they hunt in winter except seals? The boy stood puzzling a while, and then a second strange thing happened. He saw his father come out of his igloo and pack his sled for what looked like a long trip. Alornek carried caribou skins, but he had no harpoon. Where, Ukpik wondered, could his father be going to hunt without a harpoon?

Ukpik kept his questions and the secrets of his father's strange actions to himself. All night he wanted to tell his grandfather and to get some answers, but he kept quiet and in sleep he was again followed by bad dreams.

His mother said she did not want to go back to her own igloo, but in the morning Ukpik saw his father returning from his hunting trip and the boy went home to visit.

Alornek looked tired, as though he had been traveling without stopping to sleep. When Ukpik came in, his father smiled and said, "And where's my little wife?"

"She's at Sekinek's," Ukpik said.

Alornek was silent. He did not seem to remember that he had stabbed at Manelak and tried to kill her. Then he said, "For a big man, I have been more afraid than a big man should be. But not any more," he laughed. "I used to be afraid of spirits, but I'm a big man and I can control spirits myself now."

Ukpik looked up into his father's smiling face. "What spirits?"

"Eeee — too many to name," Alornek said. "Ukpik, I am



surrounded by more enemies than any man has ever had before. But I have ways to get my enemies before they can get me. I have collected more spirits than any man has ever collected before."

Ukpik did not believe this. He was sure that his grandfather, Sekinek, had more helping spirits than his father could have.

Alornek got angry. "Don't you believe me?" he asked, and then he picked up a chunk of frozen meat and threw it hard at Ukpik.

The boy dodged out of the way in time.

Alornek took a second chunk of meat, bigger than the first, and Ukpik got ready to duck into the tunnel. But then, his father seemed to forget him. Alornek turned the meat over in his hand and took a bite of it.

After that, Ukpik did not go to visit his father again. The boy went hunting with the others. From time to time they would see Alornek going by, but he would not speak to them. And Ukpik, waiting at the breathing holes, wondered about what his father had said about enemies and spirits. Who was Alornek's enemy? Nobody, really. But then the boy would think of Kunak and how much Alornek had come to hate his old hunting partner.

One day Kunak decided to try some breathing holes which were beyond the place where Ukpik and Samik were waiting. He left the two boys and started off for the other side of a ridge of ice.

A while after Kunak had gone, Ukpik thought he heard a dog

barking, and then through the wind he thought he heard Kunak's voice. Ukpik jumped up and ran for the ice ridge and Samik came right behind him.

When he got to the top of the ridge, Ukpik saw below him Kunak, lying on the ice, his face and coat covered with blood. Standing over the body, swaying from side to side like a man dancing, was a huge white bear.

Ukpik began shouting and Samik, when he saw it, began shouting. The bear looked up at them slowly, as though deciding whether he could fight with all three humans. Then, the gigantic animal dropped to all fours and lumbered away, going fast.

The boys had no weapons with them, but once the bear had turned its back, they lost their fear and raced down the ice ridge to Kunak's body.

Getting close, they could see the claw marks on Kunak's face. And they could see that the man was still alive. Kunak's eyes were open and he tried to move but he couldn't. The snow all around Kunak was covered with blood.

They had to get him back to camp, but the hunter's body was too heavy for them to lift. So they each took a leg, and began dragging Kunak like a seal over the ice, looking for the smoothest path as they went.

As soon as they could see other hunters, they began shouting and the men came running. They lifted Kunak onto their shoulders and carried him to camp, no one sure that the poor man was still alive.

At Kunak's igloo, they put the body on the platform and



Ukpik ran to get Tiksak, his grandmother, for she knew how to stop bleeding.

The old woman rubbed her special oils onto Kunak's face and neck and soon the bleeding stopped. She said that Kunak was a very lucky man. Only his face had been slashed by the bear. It was fear, she thought, which made him unable to speak.

Ukpik knew the bear was real, but he also thought that inside the bear was an evil tonrak, sent against Kunak by Kunak's enemy. As long as the evil spirit was loose in the world, Kunak would not be safe. No one would be safe.

The boy wished that he had helping spirits of his own. He wished he knew how to turn the tonraks away from the injured man, but he didn't. He thought he knew who Kunak's enemy was, and who had done magic against him. Ukpik didn't want to tell anyone, but a man might die if he didn't.

So late that night Ukpik finally told old Sekinek everything — about seeing Alornek go into Kunak's igloo and steal something, about Alornek's boasts that he could harm his enemies, about seeing Alornek go off to hunt without a harpoon.

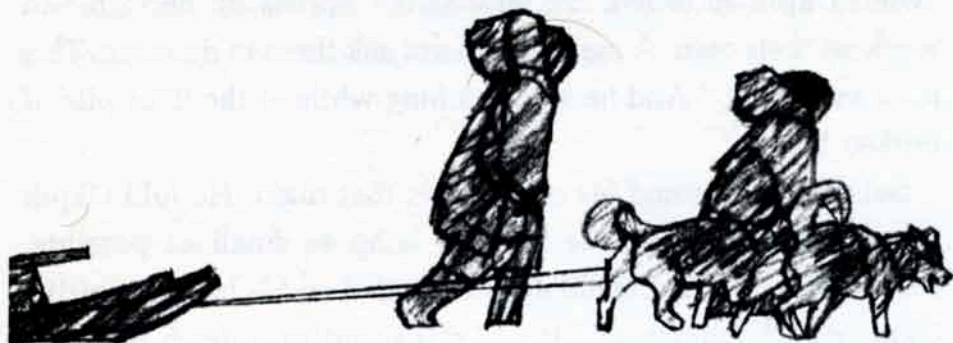
Through all this, Sekinek said nothing. He only nodded. At last he asked, "Do you remember which direction your father went when he left camp alone?"

Ukpik nodded.

Sekinek turned to his wife and said that he and Ukpik would be traveling in the morning, but he did not say where.

They packed some skins and a lamp and some blubber and a few pieces of meat. Ukpik harnessed the dogs, and the old man and the boy left the camp.

They traveled in the direction that Alornek had gone on that strange day. Sekinek seemed to be looking for something. Then, after a long while, the old man stopped and pointed and smiled. Ukpik could not see what his grandfather saw at first, though he thought he had good eyes.



As they got closer, Ukpik could see it — a small igloo, the kind a man builds for a night when he is on a long trip. Snow had blown up around the entrance, and Ukpik had to clear it away before he and Sekinek could climb inside. Here was the place Alornek had come to hunt his enemies.

"Eeeee!" the old man cried as soon as he grew accustomed to the light.

By Sekinek's feet were three rib bones from a seal. Each rib had been broken in the middle.

Sekinek said, "You see what your father stole from Kunak?"

Yes, Ukpik saw. The bones were from a seal Kunak had killed.

"It is the worst kind of magic," old Sekinek said, "the kind of magic a man makes when he wants to see another man killed



by tonraks. He steals something — anything — that belongs to his enemy. He calls on his spirits and breaks his enemy's things before the spirits and begs the spirits to do the same to the body of his enemy."

Sekinek ordered Ukpik to bring in the skins and the lamp. When Ukpik returned, Sekinek said, "Spirits do enough bad work on their own. A man should not ask them to do more. This is an evil thing." And he stared a long while at the little pile of broken bones.

Sekinek performed his own magic that night. He told Ukpik to make the flame in the blubber lamp as small as possible. Using secret words the old angatok called on his helping spirits. Ukpik could understand little of this shouting, though he heard the words tonrak, and Kunak's name, and Alornek's. He saw the blood rush to his grandfather's old face, he saw the old angatok's eyes shut tight and then pop open, he saw Sekinek swoop around the tiny igloo like a bird, yelling and whispering.

Then the old man was silent. He spread a skin for himself and one for Ukpik and told Ukpik to sleep.

But the boy could not. "Is Kunak safe from tonraks now?" he asked his grandfather.

"We will see," Sekinek said. "We will see who has the stronger spirits, an old man like me, or a young man like Alornek who never had spirits before."

Ukpik felt better. He wondered what was going on in the camp.

"And you, my little Ukpik," Sekinek said, almost in his sleep, "when spirits come into you — and they are going to come into

you — use them well, make them do good for people. That is an angatok's real business."

Ukpik held his breath. How did Sekinek know Ukpik would control spirits some day? How did the old man know Ukpik's wish to become an angatok?

Too many questions, he thought to himself, and all at once his exhaustion overtook him and he slept.





# 9 WHEN A DOG IS CRAZY

MANELAK was waiting the next morning when her father and her son returned. She told Sekinek and Ukpik that sometime in the middle of the night, Kunak had woken up and asked where he was and then he had eaten, though his cut face still hurt him. His fear of the white bear seemed to be passing.

Old Sekinek and Ukpik smiled. They kept their secret, but now they knew whose magic was stronger.

Every person in the camp knew about Kunak and the bear. They talked among themselves. The word tonrak was used. They thought of who Kunak's enemy could be, and they remembered the song duel and the boxing match between Kunak and Alornek. They whispered about Alornek and said he was crazy.

Alornek stayed in his igloo by himself. People did not want to go near him. But Ukpik went. He knelt at the entrance and listened. His father was singing.

While the other people talked among themselves, Alornek's family worried. One night Pakluk, Alornek's brother, said, "Losing a good hunter like Alornek is bad for everyone," and they knew how deep Pakluk's unhappiness went.

Women told their children not to play near Alornek's igloo. Some people said that they heard strange screaming in their sleep, and they were afraid.



One day when the men came home, the women told them something bad had happened.

Pamiok, Kunak's daughter, had been walking by Alornek's igloo. She had heard Alornek calling to her, "Pamiok, come here, I need your help."

She had gone into the tunnel. According to her story, Alornek was sitting on the platform hugging himself, and singing. At first he hardly noticed the girl. Then big tears filled his eyes and he began to say, "My niece, my little Pamiok, now you've done it. Now you've made the seals go away from us and we are going to starve."

Pamiok told him no, that he was thinking of another time. She said there were plenty of seals.

"Then why are we always so hungry?" Alornek asked her.

All at once Alornek reached for his harpoon and lunged at Pamiok. She escaped into the tunnel and ran.

When Ukpik came into Samik's igloo, he could see that Pamiok had recovered from the fright Alornek had given her.

Ukpik turned to Samik and asked, "Do you want to come out with me?"

"Where to? It's dark out there," Samik said.

"Just to walk."

"All right."

Once they were outside, Ukpik lifted his coat and took out a slab of meat he had been hiding against his chest.

"Where are we going?" Samik asked again.

"I have to take this to my father."

Ukpik found the tunnel into his father's igloo closed up with

a snowblock. He pushed it aside with his hands and started down the black tunnel. Then he found another block.

Alornek's voice came from inside the igloo: "Don't come any farther."

"It's only me — Ukpik."

"Don't come," the voice said.

"I have some meat for you."

"I don't want it."

"All right."

Ukpik turned himself around. Samik was right behind him. "He doesn't want to eat," Ukpik whispered.

For a while the men went about their work. Once when they were visiting at Kunak's house, the hunter smiled suddenly and said, "Maybe he will be better when the winter's over and we move off the ice."

Everyone knew who Kunak was talking about, because Alornek stayed always on their minds. What was he doing there in his igloo? What was he eating? "Mad things frighten us," one of the hunters said while they were eating at the great igloo one night.

It was Sekinek who finally had the news. "The other families have come to see us," he said.

"About Alornek?"

"Yes. Today he came out. He went around from igloo to igloo begging for food."

"Did he come here?"

"No, not at all. He went down into old Okortok's igloo and begged for something sweet to eat. When Okortok's wife said



she had nothing for him, Alornek grabbed Okortok's knife and tried to stab her. Okortok managed to chase him out, and Alornek went running through the camp and broke every harpoon he could find in front of igloos. The other hunters want us to talk to them."

"When?"

"Tonight," Sekinek said.

That night the older hunters in the camp met with the men related to Alornek. When Sekinek and Kunak, Pakluk and Uk-pik got there, the others were already seated. Talk stopped abruptly.

No one seemed to want to begin. Many were nervous. They tugged at tufts of fur on their coats, they spat, they avoided looking at Sekinek or Pakluk.

Okortok cleared his throat. "We all know the way we do things. We all know how we act."

"Eh, eh," some of the other men nodded and agreed.

"Once I had a dog," Okortok went on in his smooth voice. "A good dog, a lead dog, the very best. Then this dog began to be very strange. He would howl at his own shadow, and try to fight with himself. Sometimes on a trip he would lie down and pretend he was dead. Then I would give him a kick. Now most dogs get up when you kick them, but not this one. So I would unharness him and leave him on the trail. Sometimes he wouldn't catch up with us for days and days."

Okortok paused. He put his chin in his hand. "But I kept this crazy dog, even with his craziness. You know how it is."

Sekinek nodded and repeated, "You kept him."

"Yes. Until he started fighting with the other dogs. Not for fun or for the game of it, but tearing into them with his teeth. What could I do? I had to save my other dogs by killing this one. It was a loss for me, but I had to do it. My daughter was just a little girl then and I thought 'What if the dog goes at her with his teeth?' You know such things can happen when a dog is crazy. A time comes when you have to protect the others. That's the way we are."

Again several men nodded in agreement.

Pakluk broke in, "But you waited until you knew for sure the dog was crazy — until the danger was too great."

Okortok looked straight across at Alornek's brother. "With Alornek that time has come. It came today."

Ukpik could see his grandfather's sharp face. It was very still, as though Sekinek weren't even breathing. Then the old man put his hand up to cover his eyes and his head began to nod. "Yes," he said.

Before he knew what he was doing, Ukpik was on his feet. "No!" he shouted.

All the faces were turned up at him in surprise, a whole crowd of faces.

He saw himself running, going through the dark to Alornek, harnessing dogs and leaving this camp. Going.

"Sit down." It was his grandfather's hard voice. "What you say is right, Okortok, though it is hard for me to say the words. We cannot afford the danger. Yes, this is the way we do it."

Sekinek took a deep breath and looked around the room. "And so we must think together of the way," he said. "One man



should go to Alornek and do it, either by talking to him or with force and with surprise if he has to. And the man should be related to him, so everyone will know that we do what we do without revenge or hatred. If his relative does it, the spirits will know that the killer did not mean evil."

The eyes of the other hunters were on Pakluk. They looked at him and then looked away.

"There's danger," Okortok put in.

"Yes," Sekinek said. "There's still danger from spirits. We must do what we can to protect the man who takes the job."

"I'm not afraid," Pakluk said, "not of my own brother." Even as he spoke Pakluk looked tired, as a man too troubled to sleep looks.

The hunters got up after a while. There was no talking among them as they went out into the cold.

"Alornek, are you home? I've come to talk to you," Pakluk called.

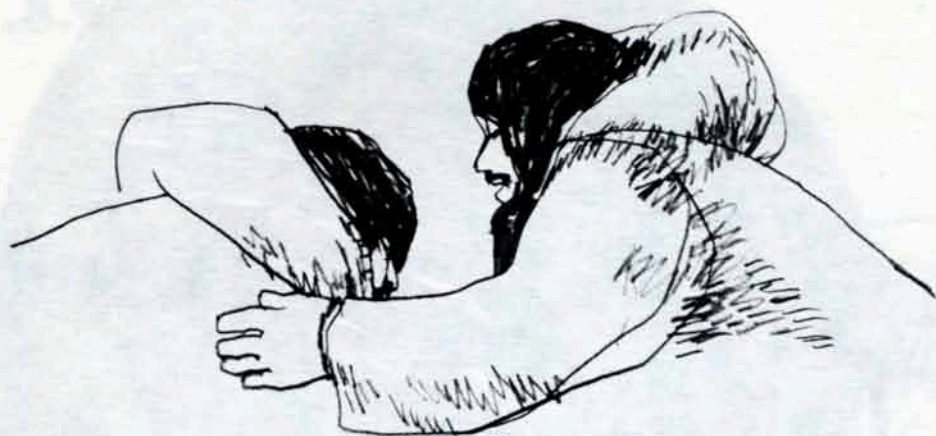
"No, I'm not at home," came back the voice.

"May I come in, then?"

As Pakluk told it later, Alornek was almost like a child. He was thin from not eating, and though his eyes were excited, he barely moved as his brother spoke.

Very soon Pakluk's fear went away. He explained what all the other hunters had agreed to, and Alornek nodded, as though this was news he had expected to hear, as though he had been waiting for this day.

Alornek said, "I'm going to share my things first, and you can



take them outside so my little Manelak and my Ukpik can have them. If my things are outside when I die, other people can have them, isn't that true?"

"Yes," Pakluk nodded.

So Alornek chose among his possessions and put them in two little piles. Then he had Pakluk carry the things outside.

Pakluk said that Alornek could have his choice of ways, and for the first time Alornek looked frightened. "I don't like being hurt," he said.

Pakluk said that a strong sinew around the neck would hurt least and Alornek said, "Yes, let's do that!"

"I'll go home and get one," Pakluk said.

And Alornek said oh no, he had a piece of strong sinew they could use right here somewhere if only he could find it, and he got down on his hands and knees to look.





# 10

## LIFE AS IT USED TO BE

SEKINEK worried about his grandson Ukpik. For four days after Alornek's death, everyone had stayed inside. There was little to say. At the end of that time they had taken Alornek's body out to lay it on the ice. Ukpik had refused to go along. All day the boy would sit in Sekinek's igloo, not moving, just hugging himself. He kept together all the things his father had left for him, watched them, would not let other people touch them. Sekinek thought that maybe the spirit of Alornek had come back to torture his son.

Finally, one day, the old man knew what he would do. He ordered Ukpik to get the sled ready for a trip, and together they went out on the ice. They stopped and built a small igloo, where they lived for three days.

In the night, Sekinek told this story: "When you were born, Ukpik, we said many names over you, but none of them seemed to be your name. At last we said the name of your other grandfather — Ukpik — and that name fit. It was summer then and when I came out of the tent where you were lying, I saw an owl circling in the sky, an owl in the daytime, and I knew The Owl was your right name and your guarding spirit."

Ukpik was silent and then he said, "But I haven't seen this spirit myself."



"And as long as you are sad," said Sekinek, "you will never see him. To know our spirits we must be brave and open ourselves to them. And we must not let our sorrows overcome us, for our spirits do not want to see our faces when we are weak."

The old man touched his grandson on the arm and his old gruff voice croaked:

For joy, for joy,  
I sing for the joy  
Of singing.

The old man said, "My first helping spirit came to me while I was singing that song. When the spirit came in I felt the top of the igloo was lifting right off and that I could see right up through the sky and right down into the earth! I was burning with light like a lamp, and that made me an angatok. I had a light in me other people couldn't see, but the spirits saw it clearly enough."

Sekinek's eyes were shining with the memory. He settled back and soon seemed asleep. Ukpik remained by the blubber lamp and a long while later the old man woke to hear the boy singing to himself:

I sing for the joy of singing,  
I see a little bird,  
A little white owl.  
And I myself am an owl.  
I have my spirit's name,  
For joy, for joy!

And so, in the morning, Sekinek began to give the magic words and the knowledge which angatoks have to his oldest grandson.

After they returned to camp, Sekinek noticed that Ukpik would smile more often, and when his sorrow overcame him, the boy would suddenly make a joke, or begin to sing. And Sekinek knew what feelings must be running through the boy, what strength having helping spirits must give to Ukpik.

Sitting in the great igloo one night, Sekinek thought how pleased he was with his grandsons. Very rapidly they were becoming men. Samik, he could hope, was going to become a skillful hunter, and Ukpik, perhaps, a great and powerful angatok. As usual, Sekinek's thoughts turned to his third grandson and he wondered where Nio and his father were at this moment. The old man had had no news of the outlaws.

Sekinek was nodding and half-asleep as he listened to the songs. He saw a thin little man come into the igloo, but his coat hid the man's face and he sat down next to Ukpik with his back to Sekinek.

Then Samik was tugging on Sekinek's sleeve. "Grandfather," he whispered, "they're here."

"Who?" Sekinek asked, his eyes opening. And then he saw that the stranger sitting with them was his own grandson Nio, thin and haggard, but still Nio. The old man was not very surprised. He believed that by magic thoughts he had brought his grandson to him.

He did not say anything, or make any move. Instead the old man looked across the circle of hunters at Pakluk. Pakluk was



very surprised, but he did not seem angry. Sekinek looked across to the place where Pakluk's new wife was sitting among the women. Pakluk was happy now, maybe his anger at Ekaluk had died, maybe Ekaluk and Nio could now come home to live. Sekinek wondered.

When people began to go, the old angatok got up and his family followed him out of the great igloo. There was a moon and he could see Nio's smiling, anxious face. Ekaluk and his wife and the baby son were waiting at home.

"My son was a help," Ekaluk said when they began to talk. "You've made him a good hunter. But we couldn't travel fast enough, couldn't get enough seals to keep us. I've been thinking we would starve for a long time now."

"So," Sekinek said, "you have to come back here."

"Yes."

Sekinek had told Ekaluk the terrible thing that had happened about Alornek. They all knew that the camp was now short of hunters. "And," Sekinek added, "Pakluk is happy now with a new woman and a new son of his own. Perhaps now we can have life as it used to be."

But still there was danger. Though Pakluk was content, who could tell? Now that he knew Ekaluk was in camp, his old desire for revenge might catch fire again.

"I will go and talk to Pakluk in the morning," Ekaluk said.

Sekinek shook his head. "No, that's dangerous. I will go." Then he made a plan. He would take Ukpik with him when he went to see Pakluk. Ekaluk and his family would be ready to go. If Pakluk seemed to still want revenge, Ukpik would come

home and Ekaluk would have to get out of the camp as quick as he could.

The igloo was crowded, but at least the baby did not cry and everyone slept a little. At last Sekinek said it was time for him and Ukpik to go to Pakluk. As they were leaving, Ekaluk's wife began to repack her things.

Pakluk was smiling when they came in, but he looked tired. He had been worrying. It was possible, everyone knew, that Alornek's spirit would turn evil and try to hurt him.

His new wife was playing with her son. She showed it to Sekinek, and the angatok said, "That's a healthy-looking one." Then he said, "We've had word from Ekaluk. He has a son also."

For a moment, a look of hatred came into Pakluk's eyes. But it passed quickly.

"If you are happy with things," the old man said to Pakluk, "then maybe we can have life as it used to be."

Pakluk smiled, "You mean Ekaluk is starving out there alone."

"No," Sekinek replied, "Ekaluk only wants to live here and take care of me because I am getting old and can't hunt well anymore. Ekaluk only wants life to be as sweet as it can be. Don't you want that?"

Ukpik was sure from his face that Pakluk didn't care if life were sweet. So, though he pretended to sit comfortably, Ukpik kept himself ready to run for home if Sekinek gave him a signal.

Pakluk didn't answer. He raised the leg of his pants and scratched himself. Ukpik could see the bone handle of a knife



sticking out of the top of Pakluk's boot. Maybe Pakluk was only feeling his strength, only making a threat. Many hunters carried knives with them all the time.

But Ukpik remembered stories Sekinek had told him. In the old days, before even Sekinek was born, whole camps began fighting, half the men against the other half, over some simple business just like this.

"Maybe Ekaluk is a natural thief among people," Pakluk said finally. "A crow is a natural thief among birds. Maybe Ekaluk only wants to come back to our camp in order to steal a second wife for himself!"

Sekinek said, "Ekaluk took your old wife because he was unlucky and foolish. Unlucky because his own wife died and there were no unmarried women among us at that time." Sekinek paused. "Ekaluk is happy with his new son. He wants to celebrate the birth of a son by giving games to the camp. Would a natural thief — a crow — do that?"

There was a long pause and then Pakluk said, "Games? Well, we should always celebrate the birth of a son."

Tiksak made up the balls of caribou meat with the help of Ekaluk's wife. First they melted fat and formed it into a slippery ball for the women's game. Then they took the neck and shoulders of a caribou for the men and wrapped it tightly with cord. Once the meat was bound, Tiksak took her knife and cut off the corners to make the square lump into a ball.

The whole camp had heard the news and all morning there had been visitors, mostly women who came to see the new

child and to peer at the thin familiar faces of Ekaluk and his wife and Nio.

When Sekinek said it was time, Ekaluk took the ball for the men's game and gave the women's ball to his mother. As Ekaluk went through the camp, he called to people, asking if they wanted to come try to steal some caribou meat from him.

Laughing, people began to join in the march. Turning, Nio could see sixty people coming behind him. Last was Pakluk.

Ukpik had said something about Pakluk carrying his knife in his boot. Maybe Pakluk was going to wait until the thick of the game so he could get close to Ekaluk and then — No, Nio thought, that was a stupid fear.

Ekaluk announced to the whole camp that he had a new healthy son and that he wanted to share his happiness with them.

Then Tiksak took the ball of caribou fat off to one side, and put it down in the snow before the women, who were trying to arrange themselves in a line.

Sekinek took the other chunk from Ekaluk and laid it on the ice. The hunters got into a line. When the signal was called, each man would try to take the ball for himself. There would be a huge pile-up and fighting until somebody could hold onto the slippery ball long enough to become the winner.

Nio had decided not to join. It was a rough game, really meant for grown men. But Samik and Ukpik were there at one end of the line, so Nio changed his mind and trotted up to them.

"Are you ready to take a pounding?" Ukpik asked him.

"Not from you," Nio said.



Still Pakluk hung back. Ekaluk called to him. "Aren't you coming, Pakluk? I thought you were best at this."

Pakluk was still for a moment. Then slowly he moved forward to the line of men. "I am the best," he said solemnly and the other men laughed.

The signal for the women's game had already been given and a loud shout went up. The women rushed forward. Akla was first to get to the ball and she scooped it up with both hands. The other women crowded around her, pushing and shoving.

An old man who did not play called the start of the men's game. The hunters dove for the meat, they were all over it, around it, down, scrambling to get in close. Nio found himself far out on the edge of the heaps of bodies, grabbing at legs, pulling himself up into the pile of men, trying to dig down between the fur-covered forms.

Way down he saw his father, red-faced and gasping for breath. And then he saw Pakluk's solemn face. Pakluk looked as though he was thinking — his chin was on top of the meat and his arms were tight around it.

The women's game ended — the women never fought as long or as hard as the men. Samik's mother Akla was the winner.

The men began to grow tired and give up. Hunters were standing up, and a single man burst out of the center of the pack, clutching the meat to his chest. Pakluk. He was running and slipping across the ice with Ekaluk and two others behind him.

Pakluk tripped and fell heavily, landing with the meat under him. One of the other men lifted him up by his feet and shook him, and Ekaluk dove in to grab the ball.





For a few moments Ekaluk pulled with all his strength, and bit by bit the slippery ball seemed to be getting out of Pakluk's grasp. Then Ekaluk's hold weakened, his hands slid off the ball and he rolled back on the ice.

Pakluk was on his feet again and running, this time toward the women. As he got near them, he realized no one was following him and he slowed to a walk. Everyone shouted for the winner among the men.

Again the men and women lined up in two rows. Because he was the winner, Pakluk led the way. Firmly he grabbed each woman around the neck in a big hug and pressed his nose against hers. Behind him came the other men, each doing the same thing.

The signs of battle showed on everyone's face — bruises, cuts, one or two black eyes beginning to close. But nobody seemed to care. There was only laughter and praise for the winners.

"Look at Akla, the Woman Who Stole the Meat and Kept It!"

"And Pakluk, the Man with the Bear's Hug!"

Nio was standing by himself and he was pleased. He was back with his family and with his friends again. Life could be — what did his grandfather say? — "Life as sweet as it used to be." Or sweeter, the boy thought, now that his father could live in the camp again and did not have to live alone on the ice, suffering as men suffer when they are away from other people.

Tiksak was sitting as usual, scarcely moving, locked up in her dreams. A drop of water landed near her, but she did not seem

to hear it. Another drop fell from the dome of the igloo and hit her on the neck.

The old woman's eyes shot open in surprise. "Eh," she said to no one in particular. "There's a story. Once there was a family who waited too long in winter. The snow was getting soft and the ice was beginning to break up under them. But they were silly people and they sat inside all day and made jokes and said stupid things to each other. Everyone else in their camp went off to shore to hunt. Finally a big piece of ice broke off with them and their igloo on it, and they rode off to sea, still laughing."

Ukpik knew what his grandmother was saying. Already many of the other families had left the camp.

When Kunak came visiting, Sekinek said, "I've been thinking about getting started."

"I've been thinking the same thing," Kunak said.

"Tomorrow would be a good day," Sekinek said.

The next morning they took everything from their igloos. Samik searched the place he had lived to be sure nothing of value was being left behind. He and his father packed their sled and then went to help Sekinek.

The old woman climbed up to ride on one of the sleds. Ekaluk said that Sekinek could ride on the other, but the old man said he was not so feeble quite yet and could walk.

So he started out first and Ukpik ran ahead with the dogs, talking to them, encouraging them and making sure their lines didn't get tangled. Manelak came along behind.

Then Kunak and Samik started with Akla and Pamiok



behind. Samik was already thinking about how you hunt seals in the spring.

Then came Nio and Ekaluk, with Ekaluk's wife riding on top and the new son sitting up in her hood and looking around at the world and wondering where he was going.

#### THE END

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