

# **I Lived With The Eskimos**

**by  
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## **Chapter Nine - I Eat Raw Meat**

Chief Lukas, Tommy, Troutguts, Ee-ey-tok and Nashula made up the sealing party with myself. We had been out three days of the four we were to be gone when I counted that we had taken nine seals already. The seal run was good; we were tempted to go farther after more, and then the wind came. As though shaken by some fierce animal, our little twenty-foot omiak shivered at the impact. The small crude mast which is last on an omiak near the forepart of the ship snapped as though someone had chopped it with an axe; the small square sail made from the skin of the intestines of the square-flipper seal flapped like a dismal bird over the bow of the vessel and disappeared before any of the natives could catch it. The waves rode high; our boat careened and pitched into the trough of enormous mountains of water, I felt sure the continuous weight of green water must come down and swamp us, but our omiak floundered, dived forward nose down, then up, and rode atop the comber. The natives and I clung to what we could find to hold, the man at the helm lay across the wheel holding on grimly. As suddenly as the squall had come, there was calm. We rode on heaving water, a battered hulk of omiak, and no matter what the natives felt, there was in that boat a badly scared white man. I heard a sound, looked to our lee side and hanging there like a fly against a wall, was Tommy, who had been out in his kyak after a seal just before the storm blew up. How he had survived that wind I do not know; when he let the kyak go and clambered on to the larger deck of our lurching boat, I knew we were in a tight place, but even yet I had no idea how narrow a squeak we were to have. Somehow I had infinite faith in the skill of the natives as seamen; they were working now at the broken mast, and I could only hold on. This was when I began to recognize as never before how utterly helpless I would be to aid the men, even if I could make it forward.

It was becoming rapidly darker, with heavy clouds scudding low across a leaden sky. The water churned and twisted. We were the full three days out from Port Burwell; we had not seen land for a day, and as far as I could make out we had come up the Hudson Strait, making for Ungava Bay. I could not be sure from what direction the wind blew, for the last squall had spun our boat about like a top; Tommy's abandoned kyak had disappeared long since. Still the helmsman hung on, and still the other four natives worked with the broken mast. We were shipping water. I commenced to bail, more to keep myself occupied than that I had any hope of lessening our danger. And then Tommy came back toward me,

urging me by signs to follow him up to the forepart of the ship. The helmsman lashed his wheel with thongs and the six of us crouched in what poor shelter we could find. The gale increased and there came a howling, whining cry of angry wind. Ee-ey-tok touched my arm, then when he had my attention, he spread his arms and hopped forward. I thought he meant we would have to swim, but I was wrong. The natives do not swim, and I might have known what he meant at first, but he reached for a harpoon that lay near, spread his arms again and jumped over the weapon as it lay on deck. I could hardly see him, but I grasped the idea. Evidently we were being blown ashore, and the plan was to jump to safety if we could. I nodded and sat down to wait. I looked at my wrist watch and saw by its illuminated face that it was nine in the evening; we should, under normal conditions, have been well on our way to our home port with a fine catch of sea. I felt badly. I thought of my home in Montreal and wondered if I would see the folks again; I thought of Guts, my horse, and I laughed a bit to myself when I thought of Peveril. I wondered would he miss me or just think I was away on a specially long patrol. I straightened; this was no time to become morbid or to give up hope. The natives chattered together, raising their voices above the wind.

And then the little craft struck. I could hear her ribs crack under her stretched sealskin sides. I do not remember jumping; I suppose some instinct makes one's limbs act in self-preservation, and maybe I lost consciousness. When I recovered my senses I was alone, lying under a sort of rock shelter. I felt sore all over and my mouth was parched dry; my lips were coated with frozen salt spray. It was quite dark and the storm raged. I felt around; at least I was on land, even if the rocks on which I lay were wet. Whether it was minutes or hours later I shall never know, but it came to me that the gusts of terrific wind were more widely spaced; there were moments of calm between, and in those moments I could hear another sound. It was like a dripping faucet in a bathtub. It was near, close by my head, and I hoisted myself up. I was afraid to move too far, a foot too much in one direction or the other might send me over a cliff's edge or back into the ocean, which seemed to boil just below my feet. I could hear waves rush and churn. I hoisted up another inch or two, and balanced so I could take off one fur mitt and feel out toward that sound of dripping water. It was running water, a small but steady stream of it. I licked my cold wet fingers and the water was sweet. I had not realized the dreadfulness of thirst until then, when I tried to cup one hand and drink. I felt above my head and there was rock; I pulled myself up another foot, rolled to my side, and managed to get my face nearer the running liquid. It seemed as if I could never get enough.

As the storm abated, the dawn broke and the clouds rose higher, although the sun was hidden. I looked round, and standing in the lee of a rock some distance away were the five natives. At least all six of us had been saved from drowning. I

pulled myself to my feet and walked stiff-legged to join the men. I wished I knew their language.

"Auk shu ni," each one repeated as I came beside them.

"Auk shu ni," I repeated, for the greeting, "Be strong" is something that must be learned the first day in the North, and remembered always.

And then each man followed with one word: "Wheyanna!"

I knew that one, too.

"Wheyanna!" I said, and all five of the men grinned. This was better; now I knew I'd got off on the right foot. "Wheyanna" means "It matters not." Maybe if I had known why they said "Wheyanna" just then I might not have repeated it and would have lost an experience given to few men, that of being made blood brother of the tribe, with old Chief Nashula as my foster father and Tommy my foster brother, later to be one I shall always remember as a very good friend.

My first disappointment was to learn we had been cast ashore on a rocky island, barren of all animal or birds and with not even a muskeg, or swamp, in its solid rock bed. Our only salvation so far was the running stream of fresh water which later we found came from pools filled with rain water. Boiling surf churned and blustered against the rocks, and only in two places of the island did we find coves with low loose stones and a meager stretch of sand. That our omiak should have come ashore at one such cove instead of battering against the high bare cliff face was a miracle. We searched the cove and lower rocks as daylight increased and the scudding clouds cleared across the sky. We found no spar nor scrap of our omiak left, and we saw no trace of shellfish. We went up and down the sharp rocks, hoping one of our cargo of seals might have lodged in a crevice, beaten up by waves and tide, but we found nothing. I sought for some of the seaweeds but there were none. Hunger was beginning to tear at my insides; it was over twelve hours since we had eaten, for the storm had stopped all chances of a meal on the wrecked ship the night before. I pointed to my opened mouth; Lukas and Nashula rubbed their stomachs, so I guessed I was not the only one of the party to feel the need of food.

The first pangs of hunger are hard to bear, and then there comes a time of lightness and feeling of well-being; it is as if the brain becomes fired with energy and power. I felt then I could have written great poems or might have produced world-famed literature. That feeling passes, and there come visions of delicious foods before the mind's eye. I could see, I could taste and I could smell steaks,

roasts of beef, fried chickens; and then I thought of hot dogs and hamburger sandwiches.

We had walked all over our refuge; it was not large, but we felt it was safer to stay on the ocean side of it. There was a terrific current swirling wide between us and the mainland rocks which rose in a sheer, black face as far as we could see. I was to find out that the island is known as Savage Island, and I thought that maybe some of the early explorers named it that, for savage and cruel it was.

Our fourth day of our life on the island was dawning. Our fur kamiks were getting badly worn, the soles and sides cut easily on the sharp rocks. It was drearily cold, but no ice came in from the ocean. We had left Port Burwell on the 28th of September, but now my watch had stopped, and I was not sure how long we had been cast adrift. To the natives days and count of time mean nothing, but I knew we had had four darkneses; that meant we were as yet only four days over the time Nick might think to look for our return. I could not hope that he had set out to trace our omiak yet, and I wondered whether he would ever find us before it was too late. I felt very weak. I could hardly get my arms up to my mouth to sip the fresh water, and scarcely was able to push one foot ahead of the other. I saw the natives could endure hardship much better than I, for their lives had been made up of it; of comforts such as we are used to they knew nothing; four of the five with me had almost starved to death before, but that time it had been on the mainland, and at the last moment they had come upon a native encampment almost buried in the blizzard which had put them off their direction. That settlement was strange but friendly and there was plentiful food there.

Now I knew we could not keep going much longer and I was beginning to wonder how death came, when I heard the native Ee-ey-tok call. He tried to run to us from where he had gone along the cove, once more looking for shellfish, a bird's nest, or even the remains of some monster of the deep which might have been cast up by the storm. He fell to his hands and knees and crept toward us at the best speed he could make.

As he approached, he spoke. The excitement among the natives became intense. They made signs for me to follow where they went, and pointed to their mouths and rubbed their middles. I rose and went forward, moving like an old, old man, for now my limbs were heavy.

Ee-ey-tok pointed to a mark on the sand at the edge of the cove. It appeared like the impress of a giant's foot.

"Nanook, Nanook!" the men called to each other, then at once commenced to throw pebbles in the air. I caught their purpose. This was to test the wind direction; for if there were a polar bear on our island we must keep to the lee of him so no man smell could startle the beast and drive him out to sea. The polar bear can see only eight or ten feet ahead of him, and finds his food by smell and some instinctive sense of where to hunt for it.

Somewhere, then, along this beach was a mammoth polar bear we could tell that by the size of the paw mark. Outside of a zoo I had never seen one. I wondered what good the bear was to do us. The only weapons we had were our six-inch steel hunting knives sheathed at our waist belts. I looked at that monster paw spread, and regretted my missing revolver. Surely I could have had strength to lift it, power to keep my hand steady enough and my eye sure, to kill with the bullets that were in the chambers. But my revolver lay in the drawer of the room at the detachment. I was helpless. I drew my knife, looked at it and put it back again.

A low cry came from the natives again.

"Nanook, Nanook!"

I looked. An enormous yellow-white animal was ambling along the water's edge, now tumbling into the waves and now out again, playing like a giant puppy. Chief Lukas waved us up the rocky slope: Nashula signed to me to crouch down behind a rock low enough to see over, so that we watched what went on down below us. Lukas lay on the loose shale, barely hidden by some scattered rock. I saw the glint from his hunting knife as he withdrew it from the sheath, and then we waited. The bear advanced, drew back, weaved its long neck from side to side; we could almost hear the snuffing as it caught the alien smell. Like all wild animals it was curious, and it came closer; the head weaved over the rock behind which Lukas lay. I opened my mouth to yell a warning and Nashula clamped his mittened hand across my lips. I bit back my excitement, for the next few minutes, I knew, meant life or death for all of us. I saw that now. Everything depended upon Chief Lukas and a six-inch hunting knife.

Lukas sprang, his steel knife shot upward, found the mark and slashed into the side of the bear's neck. The red blood spurted, but six inches of knife was nothing but a pinprick for a beast I judged must weigh nearly a thousand pounds. The animal reared to its hind feet, the great forepaws spread wide open, for a polar bear does not try to hug an enemy as does his brown cousin, but he boxes like a pugilist.

Lukas was dodging those flailing paws, ducking in and under. The native Eskimo is a small man, the tallest not more than five feet one or two, with an exception here and there such as Tommy. Lukas was stabbing, hacking, trying to reach a vital spot, and the bear was tiring. The down flails of his paws were slower, and maybe Lukas miscalculated the speed for the flail of the paw caught the sealskin sleeve of Lukas' summer keeool-ee-tuk, the pelt ripped, the crimson of the man's blood poured out, he staggered and fell as the bear rolled over and away from him. The natives who had been beside me had reached the bear with knives out before I realized they had gone; they were hacking and hewing to get the head off. I crawled over to Lukas with strength enough left to pull the thong from my hood and to make a hasty tourniquet above the torn biceps. Secreted in my clothing I had a box of first-aid materials which we always carried. I got this out, poured all the contents of the small bottle of iodine on the arm and bound it as best I could with the small amount of gauze in the package. I had only native clothing on, or I could have torn off my shirt for bandages. I was struggling to get off my pants and remove the thick wool police drawers I had worn underneath, but my hands would not function to untie the thongs. Lukas did not faint, and no sound came from him as the iodine seared into his tortured flesh. As I struggled with my outer clothing I turned to find Tommy beside me. The natives had cupped their hands and drank of the bear's warm blood. It gave them immediate strength and Tommy motioned for me to do the same. My stomach did not turn; when a man has looked death by starvation face to face he is not squeamish when food comes like a shower of manna from heaven itself. The little first-aid tin was the vessel in which we brought the healing foodstuff to Lukas, then we ate of the warm raw liver, and when I had torn a part of the wool clothing and wrapped Lukas' arm, we lay down to sleep heavily.

It was hours later when I awoke. I do not know how many, but I felt well and strong and hopeful; surely, I thought, the great Good Spirit in which the Inuit believe is the same Power as the God of whom I had been taught. We had food; with the flint rocks that lay on all sides and with some of the blubber we could make a fire; we could burn the bear's fur and hide, and it might be that some of the natives out sealing would see the smoke and wonder what made it coming up from barren rocks. It might be that Nick would be led to sail this way. I went away by myself and, concealed from the others by a jagged end of cliff, I am not ashamed to say that I wept as I prayed my thankfulness for the food.

For sixteen days, counting them as the natives do, by sleeps, we six men stayed on Savage Island. We ate of the bear meat, taking less and less each day as the food palled on us. It snowed, but the men made no attempt to build an igloo. I wondered until I saw the snow melting in a day; then a thin wet drizzle of rain and sleet commenced to come down. We built ourselves a shelter of rocks that was primitive as that of a cave-dwelling man, but we slept and ate there, and then

climbed the highest point of rock each day to keep the smudge of smoke rising. We burned our inside kamiks; I took what was left of the long wool underdrawers and shredded them with my hunting knife, then watched them smolder with a gray smoke rising against the clean air, for the weather continued to hold.

And then one morning from the lookout station we saw a small boat sailing by. Frantically we tore off superfluous parts of our clothing, our hoods and mittens, our top pants, and piled pieces on the fire; then we made a second fire from the first and walked back and forth between the thin cloud to break the steady rise of it, this to cause wonder if those aboard the boat should chance to notice the queer circumstances of smoke rising from these entirely barren rocks.

Evidently the sailors saw the smoke; we watched the craft turn inshore, coming straight as a die for us, and then I saw it was the white painted police boat dancing across gray waves that were tipped with silver as the sun caught the crest of them.

That was the *Ah Chook* and we were safe. Somehow I stumbled down the rocks after the natives, the sharp edges cutting our feet through the one thin covering we had saved from the fires. I saw my comrade start when he saw me, for I had a sixteen-day growth of beard; it was matted and red, for my hair is blond. When I got aboard the *Ah Chook* and changed my clothing, I could count each rib. I drank hot tea greedily, and I thought bully beef and canned beans the greatest foods invented. It was two days before I could bring myself to tell Nick about that raw bear liver and the raw bear chops and steaks. But it was this adventure that made me Kad-Lou-Nok, Ee-nook Ka-sak and foster son and brother to the northeastern Inuits for all time.

The ceremony that gave me the title was simple enough. Chief Nashula called me from across the deck as the *Ah Chook* went ahead full speed. We were sailing against time for winter was on us in those brief days since our rescue. It snowed continuously, at times wiping out all the expanse of water round us; the sea-coo must have been close on our heels, for ice floes, although we could not see them through the curtains of snow and flying spume, were battering occasionally against the boat's sides. I was getting back my strength slowly. Nick ladled soup into me as though he were keeping a gas tank filled, and we both did all we could for Lukas with the surgical supplies we had aboard. His arm was a mess. It made a clean enough wound and healed over quickly, but the muscles were torn beyond repair by our amateur surgery. Lukas never recovered the use of his arm while I was in the Northland.

At Nashula's call I turned round to find him coming toward me, his right hand extended. He led me over where the natives had placed themselves in a circle on the deck. I understood what they said pretty well, and they always spoke slowly when they addressed me. In the long days on the island after we'd had the bear meat to stay our hunger, Tommy and Lukas made themselves my teachers. Tommy was good at making pictures in sand or snow, using the point of his hunting knife as a pencil and later using one of the small bones from the dead bear. He drew an object, said the word which described it, and I repeated the sounds as nearly as I could until I was able to recognize the tone without the picture. Some of the words I wrote down when on the ship, spelling them as they sounded to me, which is all anyone can do. One needs to be able to carry a broken-time tune before one can speak Inuit Eskimo.

"Auk shu ni," said Chief Nashula as he placed me in the exact middle of the group.

"Auk shu ni," said each of the other men and I repeated the "Be strong" salutation each time. This was the correct thing to do. Nashula smiled and made some hand passes before my face; the men rose, danced around me two or three times, using a slow shuffle and humming a wordless murmur as they went, and as each one passed I was touched on a different part of the body. It looked a stupid performance, but the men were serious, even solemn.

"Kad-Lou-Nok, Ee-nook, Ka-sak," each man chanted and Nashula lifted his hand as though in blessing. I knew the meaning of the words; I had become White Man who is almost an Eskimo. Later I was to get certain markings of white fur pieces inset into my keeool-ee-tuk, and straight lines of darker fur running on my kamiks. This honor meant, too, that from then on I took my place in all expeditions as one of the tribe. I was to be taught their many skills in hunting and fishing; I was to learn their weather signs, and when I was a guest in a native home I would no longer be served with breakfast as a strange white man usually is. Now I took my share of dried seal meat, fish, or sometimes stew just like any other man of the country. Some months following I was to be told the secret rites of the tribe when they greeted the sun on its first short appearance in the middle of January, which meant the coming of another spring. I felt proud of the trust these men were putting in me. They told me their beliefs and recited to me their only two commandments in living. Simple and faithful, these men we call heathen believe no man or woman must steal, nor must they lie, for both those sins are punishable by death in the code of the northeast Eskimo.