

## North to Adventure

by  
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### *Chapter Twenty-one - The Philosophies of Tommy*

It was shortly after our second Christmas at Port Burwell and the weather was fine; temperature way below zero, of course, but it was clear and free from blizzards. I was getting restless. The curious call which the Barrens had for me was struggling against the natural desire to hole in for the winter months and stay at the Post.

"I want to find that Lost River," I said to Nick, "What do you think of a patrol, and I'll take only Tommy?"

Nick thought well of the plan, for he had as high an opinion of Tommy as had I. Tommy was highly intelligent. In appearance, his features had something more of the negroid than the Mongolian about them, and he was slightly taller and heavier than the average Eskimo. There was no way of finding out whether he had a throwback trace of foreign blood in him, yet there has always been the possibility of some crew member or ship's cook putting ashore or being a survivor of a shipwreck and adopting himself into one of the clans.

I discussed with Tommy the chances we might have of finding the Lost River. He was game and eager to come, and he certainly taught me a lot on this patrol. His pleasant smiling face was companionable, and his simple philosophy of living has gone far to widen my own outlook on life.

We started out with one outfit of fifty-five dogs, Tommy and myself, with my first immediate objective Ungava Bay, and the place where the George River empties itself into the inlet water. I had the lead dog given a drink from under the ice of the George, and this she followed without a break along the line of the Torngwauk Mountains. At this point we seemed to come on a new river, for the lead dog scurried about undoubtedly looking for a missing bearing. I found the maps I had with me were not entirely accurate as to this particular sector, and I also believe that I found here another river hitherto unknown and still unnamed officially. It may have been a tributary of one of the greater rivers, but we let the lead dog drink this new water, and native Tommy gave his opinion again:

"Kouga Low Me (Big River) does go to the sea, but never to the source."

Right enough on our way back from patrol we came on the mouth of this Kouga Low Me, losing itself in a thin trickle of water which fell almost drop by drop over a ten-mile stretch of dark brown palisades that rose in abrupt transition from a deep canyon. This canyon looked as though some giant hand had just scooped out a great wedge of the earth's surface. When the water hit the bottom of this canyon I could see that it gathered itself into a narrow creeklike bed, and from there it rushed on to the ocean.

At first this Big River flowed along low-lying flats with wide acreage of tundra visible. The lead dog kept us on a straight path which had only one or two wide bends in many hundreds of miles. Far in the distance I could make out a distinctly hilly country. I wanted to explore these hills, and believed I might succeed in crossing to Hamilton Inlet on the Labrador side. Of course, Tommy and I were also out for a renewal of the meat supply. I thought, and he agreed, that there should be good caribou among those distant hills. Caribou, which is seemingly scarce, is really so only because the herds are difficult to find.

After a few days' travel I determined we should have a more or less permanent camp from which I intended that we should make sorties of varying lengths, sometimes with the dogs and sometimes without. It is impossible to take the dogs when one goes after caribou, for the wild creatures know these dogs as wolves and dash beyond rifle range at scent of them. The first of my trips from the camp I made alone, leaving Tommy with the dogs. I sighted a herd of caribou, literally hundreds of them, some distance away. I followed the regular method of hunting caribou, lying in wait until the herd has raced by, then choosing your animal carefully, and shooting the stragglers.

I shot thirteen head on that trip I waited each time until the herd had gone on, and then dragged my trophies to a point where I could heap them together and build a snow house over them. This would be a cache to await our return, when the sled would be loaded with the frozen meat. Of this particular kill we eventually brought home one complete carcass, and then told the natives at Port Burwell the position of the cache. Later, as summer months approached, another group of natives brought in two more of these dead beasts and so on until the meat supply of that kill was used up.

The traveling native is careful to make a cache every second or third day. He has a saying, "Never go one step forward away from the cache beyond a length to be retraced in another day. Therefore supplies of meat left in a cache are always sufficient for three days, one day out from the cache, one day's travel back to it, and one day out again. There is a certain amount of contradiction in the native make-up, for he also argues that there is no need to provide for the morrow, and

he may not return the same way on which he has made his caches of meat. The whole thing is rather puzzling to the white man for the native thinking, apparently simple, is really quite complicated for us to understand.

It was in our third "permanent camp" of this patrol that I began to question Tommy on beliefs and traditions. I usually got him started by asking a question such as:

"Tommy, some of the white men have said the world is flat, - what do you think the world is like?"

Tommy would look at me incredulously. This surely was a joke, for looking at those myriads of Oud-luviak (little daylights or stars), he could not believe his Nayla (ears) that I should ask a question so dumb as that!

"Why, no, Kad-Lou-Nok, Ee-nook Ka-sak, those stars are always there, therefore the world is round, and the world must always be turning, for the stars appear to be different at times and in different places."

It is Tommy who says to me, when we get into a tight place from which it looks as though there were little chance of escape:

"White man kneels down and prays to his God and nothing happens; Inuit gets up and acts and finds a way, and then says to the Evil Spirit...Ha, ha, where did that get you, one is cleverer than you!"

We returned to the Big River, following a valley which was like a fairyland of ice mountains and caves. The going was not too bad, as a broad flat plateau gave us fairly level footing, but I could not get over the feeling that although apparently on a plain, I was going down hill.

It was after we had picked up the Big River again that our lead dog showed signs of distress.

"Something wrong," said Tommy.

We discovered that the river had disappeared. There was no more river ice to be seen; seemingly abruptly as it had begun it had stopped. We turned the dogs and followed a detour of many miles, and then we came upon a most surprising point. The river reappeared, shooting in volume straight out from a high rock, the flying spray freezing as it fell. I had discovered not the Big River, but the Lost River, which apparently during this distance of miles runs under the barren rock.

All around this section I saw big chunks of mica blown clear of snow, and great hills of white quartz, which is the mother lode of gold. And it was at this point I found a native grave. Tommy did not want me to disturb this because of Evil Spirits, but as a part of my survey duty, I wanted to find out if the grave's occupant were of Tommy's own generation. I found no influence of the white man in the grave; the bones were native, and there were stone knives lying alongside the male skeleton. There was a harpoon point of ivory and a thong, and although the Inuit have lost the art of reading the record of a grave cairn, the skull of the dead man had a cut in the back which let Tommy to suppose:

"Killed by harpoon," but he could not understand my interest in these bony remains since the "man" was not there.

"Does the white man know where the soul-spirit has gone?" queried the wondering native, and of course I could not tell him. To have these poor bones lifted and then replaced, I was forced to appoint Tommy as a deputy before he would help, thus a means of overcoming the Evil Spirit. The whole thing was a long process and consumed several days of our patrol time.

It was not many day's travel after we had found the native grave when a touch of excitement in Tommy's attitude told me we were approaching something different. It was "civilization," for we reached a new camp lately formed by Chief Charlie. I had known Charlie before and had gone on a short ocean ice patrol with him, but I had not guessed what Tommy must have known from the start of our present patrol from Port Burwell, that it was here I was to receive that initiation in a religious ritual which made me "One who knows the country well, travels long distances, eats and talks like a native."

This initiation was quite an elaborate ceremony, the details of which I do not believe myself at liberty to divulge any more than I would tell the ritual of some white man's lodge. The whole thing was very chastening to my ego; it gave me a sense of responsibility in living toward my fellow man. And I suppose it is giving away no secret to tell that during the ceremony all who were present - and all were men - partook of a portion of the internal organs of a bull walrus, which made me definitely a member of this tribe and initiate to the others. A bony structural part of the walrus was cleaned of flesh and handed to me to carry wherever I should go.

It was during this visit of mine to Chief Charlie's settlement that I watched a small Inuit child chewing on a hard candy, and I wondered how he could have got hold of it. Then I discovered the "candy" was the round globule of a fish eye. It was rather sickening to the stomach, but enquiry brought out the information from the

natives that "the fish eye gives good sight." That might be called superstition only for the fact that in the Mayo Research Clinic at Rochester, Minnesota, one now finds the doctors dissecting codfish eyes and distilling a new fluid which they, for the present, administer to the guinea pig and to the rat, but they are finding that if it is not a complete renewer, it is a distinct stimulant for human sight.

I have traveled far with Tommy as my sole companion, and I have looked on marvels of Nature alongside of him. I have to believe that the native Inuit of the Northeast has a greater inner knowledge of true science than modern scientists have yet evoked from all their research, theory and books. That is, in some definite directions. Could the modern scientists in whatever line, remove inhibitions of race and arrive in Baffin Land wholly unprejudiced, to live as a native, and in that living learn, I believe we should open up a field of salvation for the psychic and physical regeneration of the white man such as has never been dreamed of before.

For instance, Tommy comes with me into an entirely new territory, new to both of us. He will examine the rock and give me detailed information of the terrain conditions that are to come. I know he has never been there before; in fact, no man has been.

"How do you know that, Tommy?" I enquire.

"My father told me," is Tommy's reply, but whether I am to believe Tommy means his flesh and blood father who is said to be Nashula, and of whom I have also been proclaimed son, or whether it is Tommy's race consciousness into which he looks for guidance. I do not know. Certainly it is into that consciousness he must look for guidance as he cuts the blocks of snow for his igloo, each perfect in size, shape and depth, the proportions exact as mathematics could calculate, but he makes no measurements. He must read from a sort of photostatic memory pattern of what has gone before, unto the seventh and even the seventieth generation. Tommy, in the pursuit of daily tasks seemingly never goes wrong.

I watched Tommy making a harpoon, called Oh-tue-tee, or instrument that kills. For days he looked for the four-foot length of driftwood which would serve his purpose. To this, on one end is fastened a fine piece of ivory to act as one part of a knuckle joint; attached to this is the tusk of a bull walrus about nine inches long, and at a distant curve this is attached with a sealskin line in four strands to hold it, so that the piece of ivory may fall off the joint easily. Now attached to this is the actual spear, another piece of ivory, about three inches long, on which is a sharp piece of copper or steel, the steel being used since white men have been up

north. This is a cutting edge and the hole in this tip fits into the ivory tusk, and shielding this hole is a little sharp point on the ivory itself.

This spear head has a sealskin line attached, and halfway down the wood shaft the line is made fast by an ivory peg, the line continuing for many feet and at the end of it is fastened a seal bladder blown up with air. This acts as a float on the water.

When the harpoon is set, one finds the spear is now actually off center at the joint, at the meeting of the spear and at the spear's point. Under pressure as it is thrown, the eccentricity will, after the spear hits the seal, make it penetrate the hide of the animal, bury itself in the soft fatty mass underneath which is known as blubber, and the shaft will fall apart, releasing the line as this happens. The curved piece of ivory will tend to turn the spear at right angles in the blubber under the hide, so as the hunter pulls in the line the seal cannot escape. When the spear and line are in the seal he is only slightly wounded and will immediately dive under water and come up, attempting to get away. In his excitement the seal will breathe water instead of air and will drown. The hunter now picks up the bladder float and pulls in his prey.

The harpoon is the most primitive of weapons to remain in use in the world, and is preferred in northern hunting waters to the rifle. The rifle kills outright and the seal may sink, while the one rifle shot will frighten all other game away from the immediate hunting area. The harpoon, merely wounding, maintains a line and float. It is quiet, effective and efficient. When the seal is brought to the boat I watch Tommy or his brother native cut out the spear point from the hide. It has been weighted, so when going into the animal it has acted as a toggle bolt making it practically impossible for the great brute to get away.

"Tommy, how do you know all this?" I ask again, as Tommy in his own language explains to me the leverage, gravity and eccentric lines of his weapon.

"My father told me," says Tommy.

Before we left Chief Charlie's camp I had been measured for a new summer suit of sealskin which was to be brought to me at Port Burwell when spring arrived, and when it did come there were on the boots the requisite markings which informed all the natives of my new initiate status in the tribes. It was all very interesting.

But Lost River remains today still lost. I have no doubt that in years to come, as progress pushes further north, there will be found the secret of this water's surface disappearance into underground channels.