

## **North to Adventure**

**by  
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### **Chapter Fourteen - Alone on the Barrens**

After this interval I suppose I irritated my native companions because I stopped very often to look closely for fossils, but I never could find anything of the kind, and I could not dig into the rock. I am neither a geologist nor a mineralogist, but the realization of vast hidden resources of mineral in this region of the Barrens is unmistakable. I saw one foothill which gleamed in a brief glimpse of sunlight one day, and the foothill proved to be neither ice nor snow-covered rock, but mica. That an actual mountain of manganese is already being stripped of its wealth in a more southern section of this country and leading up to this north, is already common knowledge. That there is radium up here, perhaps in quantity, is also known.

All this time on my first patrol I was diligently on the lookout, as were my men, for the missing family of natives. As yet we had come on no trace of them. For several days I followed something that proved to be a mirage. Crossing Ungava I saw a great range of high mountains which beckoned us on, and then when I wakened one morning the range of mountains had disappeared altogether. It was only then I realized that they had never been, although apparently I had seen them, and the natives with me.

I spent three days in camp in igloos built by my comrades, endlessly going over and over the maps and charts with which I was equipped. I could not make head or tail of the particular situation of the moment. According to the original map in my hand my party and myself, with our fifty dogs, our sleds and what was left of the original month's supply of food, together with my Primus stove and kerosene cans - for I persisted in cooking my food for the first weeks of the patrol - were more than sixty miles out at sea on the broad bosom of the Atlantic Ocean. It was just one of those things which the Mounted Police find out when on patrol in unknown country. Those who came after me and are yet to come up into that

country will have the benefit of the changed map, with the greater wealth of detail which has been added officially since we were there.

Tommy roused me from my concentration on the maps when he returned from a short hunting trip, and told me he had found a deserted snow house. That looked as though Hak-atok and his family had been in the neighbourhood, although, of course, it could have been some other natives. Neither the natives nor I had much hope that we should find the family alive. I called the men together, we harnessed the teams and set out, with Tommy leading. It was not long before we reached the snow house, but beyond finding the frozen corpse of a white fox which must have crawled athrough the opening and then failed to find a way out, there was nothing in that igloo.

Starting to look for an unreported group of natives such as this one, we must depend entirely upon our dogs. It seemed now that Hak-atok might have attempted to get out into the lessening blizzard and might have traveled in circles. The supposition was that if we circled this present snow house we would come upon an igloo which had fallen in.

We were right. In another two days we came to a place where the dogs began to dig into a drift of snow. Then the natives and I of the rescuing party began digging too, using snow knives.

It was not long before we came on the interior of what had been a hastily made igloo. On the sleeping shelf there lay the four persons we sought, frozen to death. My natives found the family had been on restricted rations, and later with no food at all. They had eaten all their dogs, which is the last act of desperation, for having dogs means the only way of getting home, the one margin of safety. Their dogs consumed, the family had starved to death while awaiting the advent of better weather, which did not come until they were all too weak to move. Without game in sight to replenish the food stock, with bad weather persisting so that they could not reach a former cache if they had had one, there was nothing left but the long sleep for all. The period of pain would not be long, since the depleted bodies, lacking fuel would not generate much heat, and freezing would mercifully kill consciousness.

Hak-atok and his family were given the native burial rites by my men. None of them was a relative, excepting in so far as by inter-marriage the tribe must always be inter-related, yet the bodies were passed from hand to hand in the traditional way. Commonly, if the natives are lost or die at sea in the hunt, there is

no service held. The Inuit believes that our equivalent of hell is here on earth and when we die, regardless of how or where, the spirit is transported automatically and almost at once to the happy hunting ground where the soul that quits earth, good or bad, must go eventually.

Because of the lack of earth, the burial was on a near-by hill of rock which the wind had cleared of snow. The bodies were laid face down in a row, the father, the mother, and the two children between them. It took us more than a day to find enough loose rock of transportable size to cover the bodies. In the end I lighted another of my fuses and split several large rocks into pieces of a more convenient size for carrying. I suggested to Tommy that we chip out the names of Hak-atok and his family on the rock. He consulted with his brethren and they decided against my suggestion. The Eskimo of the Northeast is extremely imitative and like to try to adopt the white man's ways, but Tommy explained as we stood beside the nearly erected grave cairn:

"Ee-nook shulik," meaning "This is a place where people have been; no one comes with a name, and one goes without a name."

The natives with me placed food on the topmost stone of the cairn, a portion for each of the four who had died. When the food disappeared the spirits would have gone. But before that happened I had given a brief salute to the rigid bodies under the more rigid stone, and wrote just another line in my private diary and in my police records. When the natives had advanced half a mile on the resumed trek, I made an excuse to go back, leaving my sled and dogs in charge of Tommy. I stooped at the grave and placed a copy of that day's story saled in a white man's pile of rocks. If such a thing ever comes, as I believe it will, as the populating of the northeastern Arctic, the landmarks will be cairns, within which will be found bottles or cans and in them the writings in blurred pencil of the Mounted Policemen who were first of the literate white people to pass that way on duty. All other trail marks of man and dog and sled are swept clean by the wind and snow a few minutes after they have passed.

The nine hundred miles inland which I covered on this patrol was not so far as the crow flies, but the terrain is terrific. I returned to Central Ungava several times during my three years in the section of the Arctic which I know, and which is so different from the Northwest. Northern Ungava and South Hudson Strait have been less explored than the sectors of the North round the pole. As yet one can call Baffin Land and the thousands of unknown square miles above the Arctic Circle on the east the forgotten land.

Since our month's supply of food had been finished exactly in the time limit from the day we left Port Burwell, I cached the Primus stove and kerosene, and this patrol saw me for the first time dependent on my rifle for food, just as any native. Raw meat became my diet. I found I could travel with much greater ease, could cover more miles and have more energy and power. The Inuit seems to have practised, since time was, those things which medical science now begins to advise. The native eats all internal organs of the animal - sweetbread, heart, liver, kidneys - he does not forget to consume the adrenal gland, and when a fish is eaten, the head is chewed up first. Without any science but with an old wisdom, the Eskimo seems to know that to renew the energy of the glands, the substances of those vital parts must be obtained from an outside source, and whether it is taken in a raw state, as he does, or is served to us in vials of choice powders and pills, the facts and results remain the same.

I found no difficulty, upon return to the Police Post, to accustom myself immediately to white man's cooked food, and white man's way of living. In fact, within sight of even this small civilization of a roof, a stove, a fireplace and an armchair, with sheets and blankets on my bed, I found it impossible to conform to anything but my own civilized ways, in direct contrast to what became almost a necessity for me when associating with the native in the wilder existence when on distant patrol. The line of demarcation in living is kept very rigid. On patrol I did as did the natives, for that is a precaution for self-preservation. The moment we hit Port Burwell, the native no longer approached me on the same footing, and he could not penetrate into the inner sanctums of the detachment home, unless on the special invitation for a party, and when due preparation of removing the furniture had been attended to.

When yet six weeks' travel from the home Post on this first patrol, we came upon an Inuit camp. It was pitched close by the George River and, strangely enough, here we found sparse timber, a few trees of stunted, gnarled and twisted spruce and fir. It was a thin line of vegetation petering out as does the ragged timber line of the better known Rockies and Sierras.

The Eskimo women of this camp commenced at once to collect pieces of wood. I realized that I, as the white man and the "law", was to be honored with a cooked meal. It was welcome and really delicious. There was caribou meat and great quantities of seal oil, which is so distasteful to the white stomach at first but for which the liking grows with use. The gnawing need of the system in these northern regions demand the fat of this oil with its heat and energy content. I filled the enamel bowl I had brought with me from the Post with the stew once, and then filled it twice more, and supped it with the spoon I also carried in my equipment. I was tempted to have a fourth bowlful, and then felt that I should give

my hostess some polite compliment on her dish, perhaps to covering up somewhat the whacking appetite I displayed. I asked the lady of the igloo:

"These smaller pieces of meat - how do you cut them so exact to size?" Almost square were these small darker bits of meat which had proved particularly tasty. They looked a bit like large raisins.

"Not meat," replied my hostess; "bugs from the caribou hide."

I shuddered. I wondered whether my heaving insides would obey the dictates of good manners, and then my hostess noticed my distress and smiled.

"Why not the bugs?" she queried gently. "Do they not live upon the essence of the caribou?"

I had no reply to that - and no more stew.

My twenty-second birthday was reached and passed on this patrol, and I celebrated that with another hot dinner several weeks later at yet another native settlement. This time I took the precaution to ask no questions as to menu until my hunger was entirely satisfied. I thought the stew this time was made of duck, but it turned out to be Arctic fox, the little limbs of which seemed no larger than the legs or wings of wild duck. For dessert at this feast there was a special treat of raw frozen liver, and for drink we had chipped ice. The native, and the white policeman on patrol, absorbs a great deal of the necessary quantity of water in eating frozen fish, and when there is no fish, ice is melted or sucked. The native will not drink melted snow, excepting after most careful preparation. The white man soon learns there is a good reason for this. Packed snow, melted over heat, will produce an injurious chemical in the resultant liquid. Careful preparation means that the snow in the vessel must be cut through and champed up and down with a knife as it melts. The ice melts quickly, and being aerated produces a clean and uncontaminated liquor.

On the last night of this patrol Tommy told me of Kouga low Me, or Big River, a stream which "Does go to the sea, but never to the source." I determined that I must consult with Nick over the possibilities of investigating this strange river. There are literally hundreds of fresh-water lakes in this northeastern country, and a correspondingly large number of rivers, tumultuous when the ice gives in late spring; and Baffin Land has one great inland sea, Lake Nettilling, which remains unplumbed and uncharted. And in and through these great distances covered with masses of untrodden land, which was old before ancient history was written, there are sources of unmeasured power.

I occupied evening after evening at the Post, after my return from this patrol, getting down on paper my experiences and impressions, and continuing my ambition to become an author. Nick was quite amused.