

North to Adventure

**by
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Chapter Fifteen - Not Every Dog Has His Tree

To have a dog as friend and companion was one of our greatest alleviations in living in the Northeast, and to have found a dog with a ready sense of humour was something a bit out of the usual. I must devote a chapter to the story and even the intimate story of a dog who knew no tree.

Peveril was the police detachment pet at Port Burwell. We got him off a ship when just a puppy, this vessel passing through our customs on her way further north. The puppy was a lovely mass of soft black wool, but Peveril shot up into a doghood of long, gangling legs and short black smooth hair, with a white tip on his long straight tail, and a white tip on his nose. A mongrel gentleman, with pointer predominant, Peveril became the petted and pampered charge of myself and Nick alternately. Nick used to address the dog solemnly:

"Pevril, you are the only white man's dog in the North, and you have to be black!".

Early in his residence with us the dog recognized the possibilities of jealousy arising between two white men thrown together for years without direct contact with the outside world. Early, too, since he was a short-haired animal, he realized his right to the shelter of the detachment roof, and he slept indoors. Early, also, he saw where he could profit by the whole situation, and thus must divide his favors equally between Nick and me when we were both in residence at the Post. He disliked the floor as sleeping quarters, and soon shared a bed, under a special cover of his own. Eventually this fur cover had to be provided in duplicate, one for Nick's bed and the other for mine. For Peveril stretched his gangling length to reach the pillow with his head, precisely at "half time" of sleep, he would change beds, yet he knew himself to be my property as far as ownership went. When one policeman was living at the Post alone, no change of sleeping quarters was made during the night by Peveril.

Peveril developed a tremendous speed. He had to, since he wished to live. The native dogs resented him and he despised them and baited them unmercifully. But sometimes he did not succeed in out-maneuvring them, and several times he had to be rescued when reduced to a sorry state. He was forever wearing out his

"boots," for we had had Jennie make four paw-coverings of hide, and these were tied on Peveril before going outside. This was to avoid having his paws frozen.

I had not long returned from a patrol one day and was standing with the dog team still unhitched. I had hailed Nick from some distance, and Peveril, who was with him, had dashed to greet me. Too late he realized the temptation he was to the dog team. They started toward him. Peveril yelped and fled, belly close to the ground. He spurned the snowy stretches under his paws as a race horse spurns the dust of a well-traveled track. He reached the kitchen door, through which Peveril dashed and disappeared. With the onslaught of the team dogs Essie found she could not close the door against them, so dogs and lines swarmed through and raked their way across the kitchen floor, then jerked to a stop by the sled's blocking the too narrow doorway. Tangled in a maze of cooking utensils and an almost red-hot stove, the native dogs were in a panic. Two burned their paws upon the stove's hot top and had to be shot. And we found Peveril under one of the beds, his tail projecting out to the further side, one eye gleaming from under the hanging spread. Slowly he came out, a tired wag in that unwieldy hind appendage, but a decidedly grinning lift to one side of his jaw, and an unmistakable twinkle in both those knowing coal-black eyes.

Peveril loved a joke, and he could originate and make one of his own. Perfectly housebroken, he used the same sanitary offices which accommodated the human residents of the Police Post. Reminiscent of the late Chic Sales, Nick and I had constructed an elaborate sentry box some distance back of the Post on our first arrival. This disappeared under a blizzard's covering blanket one November day, and we never saw it again until its burial shroud of snow ten feet deep melted before the strong sun of a brief summer.

We adopted the native snow-house toilet, with snow shovel to hand. The native dogs being the natural scavengers of all filth around a camp, we found them one of the causes of perfect freedom from everything of contamination or obnoxious odors. The only odiferous distaste the white man has to overcome is that of fish and blubber smells and the scent of furs cured in human urine, which is the native method.

Peveril readily adapted himself to the snow house too. A call of nature sent him and myself one night along the short outer pathway to this convenience. Outside the Post lay the team dogs, dead to the world in a sleep so sound they neither scented or heard anything as they crowded in white-covered hummocks against the snow-banked house. Their bushy tails were curled round their paws to cover them and to protect their noses. The continuous drift of snow particles before the wind soon covers the dogs as though they had scooped out, each for himself, a

snow house, and this thing has led to the erroneous belief that the native dog does make for himself a snow shelter.

Pevekil stepped high ahead of me toward our destination. Suddenly he froze to a point, and without a doubt one could see a comic thought strike his dog intelligence. What a joke! These enemies he despised lay supine and unconscious of his alien presence. He lifted high his leg and left a calling card on each of ten snow hummocks, which remained undisturbed, as no sleeping dog moved. But I swear that I saw Pevekil laugh.

I brought Pevekil out with me when I left Port Burwell. Veteran of the North and hero of a hundred fights, he now makes his home on a northern Saskatchewan ranch, where on his first day he gazed with near-horror at a tree, and pointed a hen as he flushed her round a straw stack.

The Inuit was wary of Pevekil, as were his dogs. For the native fears any crossbreeding in his extraordinary species of transport animal, the strangest in the world and one which has defied science to its origin. It comes from an unknown source and is indigenous to the Barren Lands. The Eskimo is rightly very jealous for the purity of his animals; he watches carefully that they are kept free from all crosses, and perforce Pevekil never joined the ranks of the dog breed when in the Northland.

The native dog is a great sled animal; there are none others to compare with him. He is a meat eater, entirely alien to fish-eating, and so-called "husky," which is a cross between the dog and the timber wolf of the Northwest. The northeastern king-mik will eat anything. When on patrol the sleds must be tilted at a peculiar angle for the night, otherwise the dogs will have eaten off the thongs and fastenings; should one of the seventy-foot walrushide whips be left within the dogs' reach, there will be nothing but the ivory handle left by morning; and yet, during the season of "needle" ice, before the spring break-up, the dogs will never eat the sealskin paw-coverings which are tied on them with thongs. To have these shoes adjusted the king-mik throws himself on his back, and four paws waving in the air waits until the protectors are put on or taken off.

The native dogs tear an enemy, as does the wolf, and the native and white man are careful never to be seen by the dogs in any but a standing position, otherwise they are liable to attack.

One of the great tragedies and tremendous stories of heroism in the North is that of Mrs. Maggie Clay who, when at Chesterfield Inlet, was done to death by dogs. The dogs of all teams fight, often and ferociously. They must be stopped at once,

otherwise the whole team will be wiped out, for they fight to the death. When the fighting starts the dog-team owner will use the long whip to tame them down, and it may be necessary to shoot one or more of the animals before the carnage is stopped.

The tragedy of Chesterfield Inlet happened when Sergeant Clay had gone on short patrol, and during his absence his comrade policeman was ill and unable to leave his bed. One day when the dogs of the remaining team were restless, a fight commenced. Mrs. Clay, having known the dogs of the Northwest took down one of the whips with the intention of quelling the disturbance. She opened the outer door of their Post, but evidently slipped and fell, for the dogs immediately attacked her. Feeling the cold air drifting into the Post, the second policeman called from his sick bed, and when he received no answer he became alarmed. He staggered into the living room of the Post, found the outer door open, and Mrs. Clay lying horribly mutilated near the doorstep. She still breathed, but nothing could be done for this heroic woman who had faced the dangers of the North with her fine husband.

The native Inuit of the Northeast drives his team of dogs in a fan-shaped formation as compared to the "tandem" plan of the Northwestern Territory, and the "husky" power. Each king-mil is on a separate line of harness, the individual lines stretching ten to fifty or sixty feet, and no dog is even with his fellow. All lines are gathered into one main bridle at the sled end. The native driver, or the policeman who drives the team, is armed with a powerful whip, seventy feet long, woven hollow with thongs of walrus hide. So perfect of balance is this whip that the flick of the practiced wrist will swing the lash its full length and fetch it up with a sharp, short crack. The native driver commands this spread eagle of twelve to fifty practically wild animals by word of mouth alone. To start them he shouts "Whee-at!" To make a right turn the call is "Rah!" Left turn is "Houk!", the sounds being caught and obeyed by the female lead dog. To stop the team, the driver runs by the side of the dogs, cracks the long whip and calls out "How!"

The dog is the only creature at which the native shouts, and that he does very loudly. The Eskimo himself is offended should another person shout directly at him personally.

"One only shouts at dogs, and one is not a dog!" He gently but firmly corrects the white man who inadvertently has erred on this point of etiquette. The policeman remembers that if he wishes to attract the attention of, say, Tommy, he will call out in a loud voice "Omiak!" using a questioning tone and pretending there is a ship in sight. Seeing no omiak in sight, because both the caller and Tommy may be far from any water, Tommy comprehends that he is wanted and comes near to

receive a request or a direction which is always given in a low and soft tone of voice.

The lead dog of the team is always a female, and there is much jealousy among the bitches to attain this place of honor. The female dog has a much sharper intelligence than the male and being in heat only at certain periods of the year, at other times her senses are strictly fixed upon the business in hand, which is leading. Her usefulness is increased, for the male dog will always follow the female, and pull on his line with added weight in his effort to forge forward toward her.

The Inuit does not train his team dogs, but the older dogs train the puppies, who begin to be put in harness when six months old. They, too, from babyhood will follow their mother dog, and the female lead is usually the mother of the new teammates.

On a line the same length as that of the lead, but customarily hanging back of the team comes the boss dog, which is a male, and most often the stud mate of the lead dog. Neither lead nor boss do any work of pulling, but the boss, his position won from the other dogs by prowess, having proved himself the greatest fighter and strongest dog of the team, nips the heels of the laggard in harness, and takes on all comers who dare dispute his sovereignty of place. In short, the lead dog leads, the boss dog drives, and these two are frequently the parents of all the other dogs of a team. Yet in an emergency both lead and boss will pull their weight to the limit of their strength.

The boss dog is the only one of the males which is used in breeding; as he weakens in prestige and power another dog advances to his throne. It is known, too, that when fighting, if one of the team dogs is badly maimed and wounded, his mates will eat him. These dogs are dangerous; they may go "bad". I had experience of this when, coming home from a long patrol, my team dogs showed signs of restless irritation one morning. A dog snapped at me.

"Kill dog," insisted Tommy, who was my patrol companion. I begged for the life of the mutineer, but in less than an hour the dog had snapped again, and Tommy shot him, and a few hours later a second dog had to be shot. Later on the same trip while traveling on shore ice, I found my team morose and cagey. Two more dogs went bad, and were shot, and then I found out the cause. The dogs had found a dead whale washed up in a cove below our camp and had eaten of it.

Team dogs are turned loose from their harness at night and roam within easy reach of the overnight snow house of the men. The lead dog returns in the

morning as the start from camp begins, having answered the whistle of her owner, to whom she advances with tail wagging. A chest and shoulder harness is dropped over her, to which is attached the individual line. She takes her place at the apex of the "fan." Each dog is called up separately for harnessing and thus the danger of a sudden and concerted attack is minimized. To unharness a team, a one-handed jerk and manipulation of the leathers is made and the dog steps backward to freedom.

The native sees that the wild strain is renewed in the species every third or fourth generation of dogs. A female dog in heat is tethered out in a small open-sided snow shelter. A prowling white wolf from the wilds will venture within range, advance and will find his overtures accepted with a gracious naturalness. The Inuit owner of the dog watches carefully and as the white wolf withdraws to snuff with puzzlement at the unaccustomed tether of his friend, the native shoots him. Otherwise, directly the wolf realized his new mate was captive and a dog, he will kill her. True, also, the natives wants to get the white wolf skin. He can claim a fifteen-dollar bounty from the government, and he will secure forty dollars in exchange at the trading post, and although he is learning the art of commerce slowly, the native is learning it thoroughly.

The first generation dog and wolf puppies which are female are destroyed at birth. The males are reared, and they are bred to female dogs of the former generation. The same continues, while only second and succeeding generations are put to do sled work.

In winter patrol work, and when the native travels with sleds, an effort is made to use the surface of river ice wherever possible. Being safer as a direction finder, it is impossible to lose the river once the female lead dog has been taken to the water, the ice broken through and she has been given a drink of water from the stream. Thereafter she will never lose the river bed. When through some freak of Nature the river is blotted out, the lead will roam bewilderedly off direction until the unmarked and, to man, blank trail is picked up by her once more. Invariably these dogs can find their way home, and that is why, in case of possible starvation, no native or white man will kill his dogs for food until all else is gone, unless he is temporarily insane through desperation.

I doubt very much that this strange creature, the Inuit king-mik, will ever revert to his wild ancestry. Undoubtedly the coming of civilization to the North will make changes in him as in everything else, but the animal is invaluable in the Arctic. He actually can travel as long as eight days without anything to eat, and at the same time he can keep pulling on his heavy sled load. The enduring ability of the dog under hard conditions of travel in the Arctic is probably not to be duplicated

with any other form of animal. All Mounted Police detachments in the Arctic regions, and all trips made by the white man in past exploration parties substantiate the statement that without the Inuit dog and the Inuit guide, all the trips and patrols would have been entirely unsuccessful. The dogs have a wonderful sense of direction and they are extremely intelligent, but they can never be made into a pet. A pet dog would not obey the driver, and, in fact, the better as a sled dog the worse as a possible pet. But to the dog of the northeastern country we can stand in salute for he is an "officer and gentleman" of his race.