

TAH-BOW-AH-TAY

It was five minutes to ten; I rubbed my eyes and looked at my watch again to make sure I hadn't misread it. I took the wriststrap off and shook the watch, and I was surprised that I could not keep my hand steady as I did it. My fingers fumbled. And it remained five minutes to ten. I figured it must be day, for there was faint illumination across the gray-white expanse which was above my head.

I twisted the stem of my timepiece, and a faint clicking sound reached my ear, and then I jerked myself wide awake as I sat straight up in a berth aboard the ice-breaker *Montcalm*, the expedition ship and a veteran of northern ice. The gray-white expanse over my head was the underside of the timber that was the deck of the ship. My hands were shaking with excitement, for it was day and that illumination was sunlight, and it was coming through the porthole of my cabin. It was the morning of the thirteenth day since I had put my equipment aboard the ship at Port Burwell, on my way "out"; from Arctic service in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I had been "in" for three years, instead of the usual twenty-four months, and I had made up my mind that I would leave the service, and go into civilian life. I did not know in what direction this plan would take me, but my mind was firmly settled on the idea.

There came the hoarse sound of the *Montcalm's* whistle; I wheeled from my berth and stretched out my hands for my uniform. I pulled on the blue riding breeches with their gold stripe along the seam. My feet, now long accustomed to the native kamiks, could not crowd their way into the shining polished high brown leather boots. I drew on the kamiks that were marked in black, that insignia which had given me the freedom of the Inuit tribes and country, "a long distance traveler who knows the country well." I buttoned on the crimson tunic with its gleaming maple leaves circling the buffalo head, and the motto, untarnished, "Maintiens le droit," and I tilted the Stetson hat at the jauntiest angle the regulations would allow, then bent my head to go through the cabin door, up the companionway and to the deck. The green islands of the St. Lawrence waterway were lush with late summer foliage, and to my left as I went to lean against the deck railing I could see in the further distance spires of churches. We were nearing Montreal.

Port Burwell, Air Base A, Chimo, Omanek, Ungava Bay, Lost River, the echo of lashing water as a walrus plunged and Tommy went to his death; Lukas, old Jennie, the grave cairn on the coastline where Chief Nashula, my foster father, lay - all these were fading into the background.

The old *Montcalm* sidled into her berth at the Montreal dock; on the other side of the customs sheds there stood my Mother, Dad and others of my family, and

beyond them, a little apart as was his wont, Nick, a tall figure in civilian clothes, one arm bandaged and in a sling, his face white and drawn but smiling. Nick who had come out, sick unto death we had feared, aboard the veteran of the northern waters, the *SS Nascopie*.

I stepped ashore. I was at home, and again my hands were shaking with excitement that had shaken them as I had tested my watch in the earlier morning. There was the noisy confusion of welcome from many groups of people, and then my ear caught the sound of a familiar question that held a chuckle in its upward lilt:

"How's your Che-pot-itik?"

My Che-pot-itik was fine...never better. I strode high in my Inuit kamiks along the city pavement; living was fun, in a few weeks I would be twenty-five years of age...there was a whole world ahead, and it was my oyster.