

North to Adventure

**by
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Chapter Twenty-Five - Terry Sees the Interior

An alleviation to the adjustments and irritations of that early winter season after the air bases were being established was a friendship I made, and still hold, with Flight Sergeant Norman Terry, as he was then. He had come in with the outfit which was to be at Port Burwell base. He can be described in one word - swell. Tall, dark, thin-flanked, broad of shoulder and built of solid muscle, Terry had then, as now, an insouciant eagerness for living. He is a master of understatement, like Nick, and to get from him the story of some of his hair-breadth escape would test the technique of a veteran journalist. Terry will do anything for a friend, including risking of his own life.

From the moment we met, when I came on him one morning swearing over some cockeyed trick a mechanic had pulled on the plane which was in course of assembly at Port Burwell, I found that the natives and their ways, and in fact the whole country, as far as he had seen it, had fascinated Terry as it had me. It became a habit for us to get together, and he would listen while I repeated for him the legends my foster brothers had told me. It was the story of the snow house which finally made him ask me to take him on my next regulation and routine patrol by land. This was scheduled within the next week or two, but now that we had a sizable population at the detachment headquarters, I could not be away so long as I had on the first long patrol I had taken.

The story of the snow house came to me in a peculiar manner. I had been with the natives on a hunting patrol, when on the return journey we came upon an igloo which we had occupied on the way out. But the natives commenced to build a new house just beside the first one. I asked the men:

"Why the new house? surely the old one is quite good."

The Inuit thinks slowly. I have known myself to ask a question one day and get the reply two days later. Bobby said, apropos of nothing, "It contains an Evil Spirit."

I had an idea I could prove to the natives that they were wrong, so when we came to the next stopping place where there was an old snow house, I insisted

upon taking my sleeping bag and moving in to it to sleep there alone. I had Bobby put the entrance block of snow into position, and felt myself even more completely alone than I had been before, in the sense of aloneness when there is no other white person at hand.

Now I can confess that I had a tremor of plain scare as I surveyed my dwelling by the dim light of the lantern I had. I settled myself to sleep, uncomfortably cold as the place seemed, and then I awoke with a start hearing an undetermined noise. It was a scratching sound, continuing in persistent cadence, now strong and now weak. I convinced myself I had been dreaming and slept again. Toward morning I awoke to find myself sitting straight up in my sleeping bag, my teeth chattering with terror and cold. I was rigid, afraid to move, not daring to call out. Seconds passed, and I saw the blade of a snow knife come through the snow not far from me and then:

"Auk shu ni," said a voice and Bobby greeted me, "Did the white man see an Evil Spirit?"

"The white man did not see one, but the white man heard one," I replied, and all the natives laughed.

"The white man is wrong, one cannot see nor feel the Evil Spirit. The Evil Spirit talks in a dream, and the white man did not dream?"

Then I demonstrated for them the scratching sound, and the men laughed more. It seems that had been the dogs which had been trying to get into the old snow house, for the disused house becomes the caravanserie of the dogs on the return trip, I found, when camp is made at the same spot as on the outward journey.

Yet no one can fool the Inuit companion on a long patrol. We had to make an early camp that day, because I was fatigued and near to sleep. They sensed my lagging step and Bobby said to me:

"You are a member of the tribe, you must understand the secret of the old snow house."

The new house is of hard-packed snow and frozen. The body heat of those going inside it warms it up; when the house has been deserted and the entrance left open, the change in temperature forms a film of ice on the inside. Hard packed snow resists frost but ice film attracts frost; the Evil Spirit of an old snow house is the physical discomfort to the body of anyone who occupies it. Science will agree

that the high oxygen content of snow makes it a non-conductor of cold, and ice is exactly the opposite. The explanation is very simple, very logical, and bears out my contention that the native Inuit is a much more intelligent and wiser man than he is given credit for.

Terry and I started off one very fine morning on a regular patrol. We took with us just Bobby and one team of dogs. This time I stocked up with plenty of kerosene for the Primus stove, for I could not tell how Terry might react to a raw meat diet should we be delayed.

One of the places I had determined to take Terry was the permanent encampment of Chief Charlie. I knew that here, if anywhere, he would find himself very certainly one of the family, naturally with some reservations observed by the white man and taken for granted.

I told Bobby my intention, and after we had had ten day's travel, with igloo camping for the rest periods, we slewed off on a detour which had become fairly familiar to me as a part of the travelling routine. Terry tried his hand at building a snow house, and tried every other part of the work when on patrol that he was qualified to do. There was only one unwritten law of the patrol which he almost transgressed. It is almost certain death for a man, native and white man alike, to sit down while the dogs are on the trail. Once I caught Terry, who was a bit tuckered out, giving way to his inclination and preparing to take a cowboy seat on his heels. I yelled with such fervor that he jumped a foot off the ground, and then I lit into him because he had forgotten my warning. Terry was really penitent and a bit scared.

There is never any occasion in the Inuit code of etiquette to await an invitation to stay at the home of a native. Arrival with the team, sled and party, means that visitors will stay at the home of the chief. That is taken for granted, and is considered the right of every traveler. A permanent snow dwelling of a chief will have five or six rooms in it, although it may be occupied by two families. In addition, there are storage rooms and a special room for dog equipment, the whole thing connected by an elaborate system of snow tunnels. It is necessary to bring in the dog harness because if left about outside, the dogs will eat it.

A streak of mischief in me made me hang back as we arrived at the settlement, so that I would see what Terry did on his own. It was a fine day and on the first sounds of our arrival every native, man and boy, had turned out to welcome the newcomers, whoever they might be. I watched Terry go ahead. It's difficult to upset him. He just watched the actions of Chief Charlie, who advanced ahead of the other men. Our greeting was most cordial from the men. Equipment was

unloaded rapidly and handed through the tunnel entrance of the snow house first, and then the white men were motioned to crawl inside. The entrance of anyone to an igloo can be in no way imposing, for it has to be done on all fours. In an overnight igloo the white man has not room to stand up, so that it is most uncomfortable when a man is almost or quite six feet tall to have to occupy such a place, except when he stretches out in the sleeping bag. Terry was over six feet in height and so he was worse off than I with my five feet nine inches.

However, a permanent snow house allows the white man to draw himself up to full height, once he has achieved the rat hole passageway inward. And once inside, the women gather round, hardly giving a chap time to get to his feet. They speak:

"Auk shu shay," to which the male visitor replies:

"Auk shu ni."

While guests at Chief Charlie's, Terry and I had some difficulty with the two languages, male and female. This was the first time I had been for so long in the midst of a native family, for as it happened we were snowed in by a blizzard and spent more than a week here. It really gave me an opportunity to get the language question sorted out. A man cannot say some of the female words, I believe, for the reason that the tones of the voice will not allow it; but others are quite easy to become confused over, and there is shocking laughter when a man makes an error and "talks woman talk."

There is probably a definition of gender in this differing intonation. Terry and I watch a woman one morning in Chief Charlie's camp going about some household chores, the day before the bizzard overtook us. It cleared up for us a mistake which is frequently made about these people. The women are not the hewers of wood and drawers of water, as it has been the custom to think. The women are far from downtrodden. If there is a male person around, whether he be one of the immediate family or not, no woman will perform what she thinks is a menial job. She is not expected to, although women are very strong. I have seen them hoist loads of equipment on their shoulders which the average man would hate to tote more than a hundred steps, and yet which the woman would carry from shore line to tent or igloo, a length of two city blocks, with the ground rising steadily and a rocky surface and loose shale as footing.

The woman's job is essentially that of sewing, attending the children and preparing the meals. Hard work is not done by the woman unless she must, and it would seem the career woman has not yet arrived in Baffin Land.

It was Terry who drew my attention to this woman outside the igloo at a distant part of Charlie's settlement. She was standing in rather a sorrowful attitude and was talking to a dead seal which lay at her feet.

"Too bad the poo-yee-vee cannot get within the house," she told the dead animal. I recognized then that while the woman call a seal poo-yee-vee, the man pronounces it puyee.

The woman still stood and talked softly but clearly. I nudged Terry to keep still and whispered: "Wait, her husband is away on a hunt, she has not a son big enough to drag that beast into the igloo, there must be some man around the back of the igloo who she knows will overhear her."

"Not us?" Terry sounded apprehensive. To crawl through the entrance tunnel dragging a huge seal, stiff as a board in frozen death, would not be an enterprise after the white man's heart. He could not do it, since he and the seal could not get through the tunnel at one and the same time.

Once more the woman repeated the sad story to the puyee that he seemed doomed forever to lie on the snow outside the igloo and could not get inside to be cut up into nice choice pieces for the family's stomach's sake, nor even to have his hide removed so that it could be cured.

But another figure had joined that of the woman, and we saw it was a young man. He spoke to the dead seal:

"One understands that one wants to be taken into the igloo."

Then he stooped down and dragged the ungainly beast inside, while the woman followed slowly. It is quite noticeable that the Inuit is solicitous of his women folk and children. That the wife walks a step behind her husband is not a mark of respect for him, but his walking a step ahead of her is mark of protection by him. The man always makes the dangerous first move.

It was the house of the Chief's first wife into which Terry had crawled on the day of our arrival. That was because the stranger is expected to occupy the place where the head wife lives. I found Terry standing and looking terrified with a crowd of small women raising their hands up to unfasten his clothing. Terry was embarrassedly fumbling with the thongs of his keeool-ee-tuk, but the women were only following accustomed etiquette in helping him to divest himself of his outer garments. First, they beat off the loose snow from the discarded keeool-ee-tuk, and laid it apart from the household furs. The visitor, wearing his undersuit, is

then supposed to seat himself upon the snow bench, which, like a wide shelf cut around the dwelling, is spread with many fur pieces. At night this circular divan becomes the family sleeping place, and that of the visitor too. The Inuit "bundles."

I began making conversation as soon as Terry was seated and these northern hat-check girls had started to rid me of my top garments; then I joined him on the fur-draped snow bench, and waited for the next move. This is signaled by the disappearance of the older women in the group, for there are probably about a dozen women in the chief's house, which includes adult daughters and younger wives, should he happen to have more than one spouse. There may also be sisters and cousins present.

The older women return with food, for every traveler is offered refreshment at once on arrival. There is little accepted routine in Inuit living, since the family eating is just a satisfying of the appetite when the urge for food is felt. It is the same with sleeping; if one is sleepy, then the obvious thing is to lie down and sleep. If you have other urges you satisfy them just as naturally.

I whispered to Terry in an aside not to eat too much. This was being considered a ceremonial visit on my part as Mounted Policeman, so my white friend and I would be expected to visit each igloo and partake of food in each one. Shortly after we had rested, we dressed again and went from dwelling to dwelling to make the official calls. This gets to be a little tiresome, as one has to undress and dress maybe a dozen times. It seems to be a sort of keeping up with the Inuit Joneses. Terry and I were glad when this part of the visit was over, and we could return to Chief Charlie's, and found him waiting for us. He made a speech of welcome:

"This is one's home, this is one's wife, this is one's son, one's daughter, use them all as you wish."

The children were eating as we came in, and when the women had finished, we men had a supper, and it was not until this was over that "Thank you" was said, and not by us, but by the host, who whispered "Nukkou" to the Spirit who provides food and hospitality and good fellowship. It is perhaps a "grace after meat."

Before being with the family very long it is necessary to become familiar with the names of each one, and try to get them correctly. The Inuit Joneses have a real aversion to be mistaken for the Inuit Smiths. It is very complicated, but no worse than our own shibboleths.

During the days we were imprisoned in Charlie's snow house because of the blizzard, Terry and I, in an effort to entertain ourselves, introduced auction bridge to the natives, with vast entertainment for everyone. The natives learned quickly but perhaps not quite according to Hoyle. Cards were of small weight and I had accustomed myself to carry several decks, although at the end of one handling by the natives the cards were thicker than wheat cakes, being coated with seal oil blubber and human sweat.

We had devised a word for cards: "Kah Lichcha," meaning "little things we play with." And for the names of the suits: clubs, Ee-tig-eeyuak, or the track of the white partridge; diamonds, Schik-ee-duk, the white man's valuable stones; hearts, Oman-ay, which is the regular Inuit sound for the human heart; spades, Poag-a-tik, the thing the white man digs with. We could think up no word sound to represent "no trumps," but one day when playing with a group of natives I found myself with a fine no trump hand. I tried, during a session which lasted two hours, to explain this curious thing. Finally in disgust I said: "Wheyanna," it matters not. My opposing native said: "How many?" and "no trumps" had found a phonetic name. The bridge game of the Inuit would make an expert's hair curl; it may be discontinued at any time, or may last for hours on end. The native is a great kibitzer and any one is liable to take another's cards and join in the circle of players. The whole thing is a lesson in patience for the white man.

We could not induce the natives to learn to play solitaire, for they believed the invisible opponent must be an Evil Spirit, but "Snap" was well liked, especially by the young ladies, who would clutch the white man's hand in excitement of the game. No different from other girls, they had a sense of flirtatious coquetry.

It was on this patrol that I taught Terry to count in the Inuit language. From one to ten the numbers go this way, and are pronounced as spelled: Ah-tau-she-mik; Marko; Pea-nuh-stoot; Stut-amut; Tid-ha-mut; Pea-nah-shu-yuk-tuk; Shut-ah-munge-ouk-took; Shut-ah-muy-yuk-took; Ko-lounga-yuk-took; Ko-lee, while twenty finds the Avity prefixing the other sounds. As may be seen in the counting, there appears to be a series of basic sounds in the language, and the first sound uttered in a sentence will give the subject of conversation. For instance, Noona means land, so "Noona tig gik pook" means "We are arriving at land."

Terry's first night in an Eskimo home brought him a touch of the *en famille* which startled his somewhat conventionalized upbringing. Shortly after eating, the

children of the household went to bed, as is the custom, denuding themselves and getting into sleeping bags, to stretch out on the circular shelf, heads in and feet out. Then the adults retire as though actuated by one mind, and the choice sleeping place is given the traveling white man, which means he is directed to take the warmest spot in the middle of the natives, and this is usually between two of the younger adults, although everyone is pretty well bunched together in the round robin type of sleeping quarters. The group, men and women alike, drop all garments without slightest embarrassment, and I had not warned Terry about this.

"What," chuckled one of the older women to me, "is the matter with the white man?"

I looked toward Terry who was struggling with his pants as though he were in an upper Pullman berth unprovided with a curtain. All the natives stood as Nature had made them, watching his antics.

Terry was served a breakfast, which is a luxury for the white man only. Once I took on the insignia of a native on my Keeool-ee-tuk, I was a member of the tribe and thereby lost my breakfast privileges.

Our next day in Chief Charlie's home was full of interest. We already realized we were prisoners of the blizzard for some time to come, and so we set about making ourselves familiar with the names of those around us, and also watch the games played by the children. A group of the youngsters had the skull of an Arctic hare, dry and clean, with a leg bone attached by a twenty-four-inch string of caribou skin. The game was to hold the leg bone in the hand point up, then to swing the skull so that it was caught on the tip, and a story was chanted as the skull went back and forth, something like this:

"One shall put it in the ee-gee-yee (eye)."

If the manoeuvre of the bones was successful the story continued: "This is the way one shall kill Nanook." Perhaps the word was that of some other wild animal, each child as he played choosing a different one, such as Ivik, the walrus; Metik, the eider duck; Pintik, the white owl; Ek-ee-look, the salmon; Copo-ee-nock, sculpin fish; and the story ended that all of these could be used for Neckee or food.

Many times the adults joined in the game, which requires quite a little skill, as I know, for Terry and I tried it. Each person gets a turn with the "cup and ball",

which greatly resembles the game played by Mexican children. However the adult story always ran in the past tense: "This is the way one killed Nanook."

As the day advanced in the snow house we white men became intolerably sleepy, so I taught Terry how to say, "Shinik-took," which means sleepy, and personally I told my hosts "Shinik-tow-at-tay," meaning always sleepy, and Terry and I stretched out and enjoyed a nap.

There was some little ceremonial about waking up in the morning, because the women distributed the kamiks (boots) for chewing, since the skins must be kept soft and pliable. Two of the young girls will chew the boots for the visitors, but when there are only men around, then the traveling white man has to chew his own. The Inuit native's teeth get worn down almost to stumps during the course of years of this chewing, but the teeth are sound and very strong.

Terry was accepted, not as a member of the tribe with initiation as I had been, but as Kad-Lou-Nok, or white man with bushy eyebrows. This meant he could be trusted, so I told him the good news, which was welcome since the storm continued, and it looked as though we were to be holed in for some days to come.

I had noted the absence of the men from the circle for some time, and found out that they were preparing a snow dance hall in which a party was to be given in honor of our visit. For this high house they had chosen to cut down through a great drift of Ah Poetie, which is packed snow, in contrast to soft snow, which is called Kowshick. They commence cutting the dome or top first. Then the drift is tunneled into a spacious apartment for entertainment. It is really quite a wonderful demonstration of the engineering and architectural skill of these natives, and Terry and I were thoroughly interested in watch them work, which they did with speed.

It was this day of the dance that Terry began to grouch because he hadn't had a bath for a considerable time. I introduced Terry then to my own system of comparative bodily comfort. Since the native rubs himself completely over with blubber, after the first patrol I always carried with me a fine toilet soap, some of which came with the police supplies. I dampened this slightly and rubbed it well over every section of my body. I left this on and when I returned to Post, the soap could be tubbed off, and it really proved to be a marvelous skin bleacher.

On the morning following the native dance at Charlie's settlement, the Sheila was clear and bright, and so there was no excuse for the patrol members to stay longer. Terry and I took our leave of gracious and kindly hosts. Each member of

the tribe gathered to see us on our way, and we spoke to each one utilizing our best smiles to cover the hard fact that we had not mastered the name of each individual.

"Auk shu ni," was chanted as our dogs swing out toward the Police Post and air base.