

THE ESKIMO HUNTER

By

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Yaki was still drowsy from sleep when he brought the dogsled to the front of his home in subzero weather.

“Where are you going this morning, son?” asked his father.

“Inuk and I are going hunting for ptarmigan birds on the ice cap,” answered Yaki, “Mother says we’re running short of meat.”

“Happy hunting,” responded his father, “we’re going to have to survive on our hunting skills since people are no longer buying seal skins.”

Waving goodbye to his father, Yaki stopped a short way down the path at a shack-like house to pick up his friend, Inuk. Inuk ran from his house excited about the hunt. He jumped into the sled, covered himself with a large warm bear blanket, as the dogs excitedly took off happy to be on the trail again. Reaching the ice cap a short distance away, both boys put on their snowshoes. With bird lures and long red flags sticking out of their backpacks, they started up the ice cap.

As they climbed, snow clouds began to form. Look!” Yaki said, pointing, “There’s a reindeer at the edge of the ice cap.” Scared by the boys’ voices the animal scampered away.

“I wish we had rifles,” said Inuk. “If we did, our village would have more meat on their tables.”

“We don’t need rifles for this hunt,” said Yaki, “the lures are all we’ll need. We’ll place them and the red flags about 200 feet apart. But let’s make sure the flags are secure so we can see them in case the lures are covered with snow.”

“Okay,” answered Inuk, “I hope the snow doesn’t start until we get back to check them.”

“I don’t think it will,” responded Yaki.

Both boys worked silently as they set the lures and climbed higher. Pulling a small folding shovel from his backpack, Yaki used it to crack through the ice of a rivulet to get a drink of water. As he bent over to drink, Inuk, waiting his turn, suddenly turned his head towards the top of the ice cap. “Did you hear something?” he asked.

“Hear what?” responded Yaki.

“There it is again!” exclaimed Inuk

“I heard it this time,” said Yaki, moving in the direction of the sound. As it became louder, they approached what looked like a man lying on the snow.

“Am I happy to see you!” said an exuberant voice in English. The two boys who only spoke Greenlandic and were Inuit Indians (Eskimos), could see he was injured.

“I think I broke my leg when my foot plunged through the ice cap,” he said, “I should have worn snow shoes.” The boys could see he was in pain and needed help. “Can you get word to my weather station?” he asked, pointing towards the American base.

Sensing what he meant and thinking quickly, Yaki said, “Inuk, take the dogsled and let his people know we need help. But bring up the blanket before you leave, he has to be kept warm.”

When Inuk left after bringing the blanket, the airman was able to convey to Yaki with hand motions that his leg had to be straightened right away. “I know it’s going to be painful,” he said, “but grab my foot and pull it towards you.” After being shown what to do, Yaki pulled on the man’s foot with all his might and the leg popped. The airman cried out in pain. Placing the rifle against his leg, the airman said with effort, “Use my rifle as a splint and hold it in place with this handkerchief.”

It began to snow just as Yaki finished tightening the knot. Knowing the rescue crew couldn’t get there while it was snowing, he got his shovel and began digging into the ice cap. Yaki worked fast as it snowed harder and the wind started blowing. He dug as deep as he could to be protected from the elements. Before they went into the hole, Yaki put one of the red flags on top of his backpack, and left it on the ice cap so the rescue team could find them. After helping the airman into the hole, they huddled together in the bear blanket.

Yaki felt comfortable, but the airman moaned in pain from their cramped position. Yaki poked his hand through the snow every once in a while to let air in so they could breathe. Time moved slowly and it seemed like they’d been there forever. When Yaki cleared the snow once again, he heard a familiar and welcomed voice. Inuk was yelling at the top of his lungs. He’d seen the flag and was sure the two were okay.

“What took you so long?” Yaki kidded.

“You’re lucky there wasn’t a heavy snow,” answered a smiling Inuk, “I saw the flag when I climbed the ice cap. Let’s get the airman out so he can be ready for the helicopter.” A few minutes later a “whirly bird” came into sight. Upon landing, the medivac team ran toward the three of them to attend to the airman. The first thing they did was remove the rifle from his leg and replaced it with a real splint.

Before the airman was ready to be lifted into the helicopter, he waved his arms and yelled, “Boys, come here! As they both approached, the airmen grabbed Yaki’s hand and shook it. “Here,” he said, handing Yaki his rifle, “I won’t be hunting for awhile, and I know you need this more than I do. You saved my life and this is the only way I can express my gratitude.”

Both the gun and what he said confused Yaki. Inuk stepped forward and said, “I think he’s giving you his gun.” Yaki’s eyes opened wide in surprise as he broke into a big grin and shook with excitement. The only thing he could do was move his head up and down in thanks and kept shaking the airmen’s hand over and over.

As the helicopter took off, Yaki said excitedly, “Wait until my father sees this gun!”

Inuk responded, “We’ll be able to get that deer and a lot more food for the village. “

“Let’s wait a day or two to check the traps,” suggested Yaki, “I’m anxious to get going.”

Yaki was so excited about getting home, his dogs didn’t seem to be running fast enough. After dropping off Inuk, he pulled up near his house where his father and mother were anxiously waiting for him.

“We were getting worried about you,” his father said, as Yaki jumped off the sled.

“I’m sorry father,” answered Yaki, “but look what I got,” as he excitedly pulled the rifle from under the blanket.

“Where did you get that?” exclaimed his father, admiring the gun. Yaki then told him about the rescue on the ice cap. Placing his hand on his son’s shoulder, he said, “Son, you’ve brought great honor to our family, I’m proud of you. You deserve this rifle. The tribal council of our village will be pleased when they hear what you’ve done.”

“Thank you father,” answered Yaki, glowing with pride, knowing he was now considered a man in the eyes of his father, and soon to the entire tribe for his brave deed.

**COMING SOON: THE SECOND AND FINAL EPISODE,
“KING OF THE ICE CAP.”**