

KING OF THE ICE CAP

By

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With a cold breeze cutting across their faces and dogs barking, Yaki and his friend Inuk, skimmed over the snow in Yaki's dog sled bound for the ice cap. When they arrived, the boys climbed towards the first of their ptarmigan bird lures. The lures were covered with snow, but were marked by red flags attached to long poles. "I'm going to the top and get my backpack," said Yaki, "then I'll check the other traps on the way down until we meet."

"Okay," answered Inuk.

The previous day, the boys had discovered an injured U.S. airman on top of the ice cap. While Inuk went for help, Yaki dug a hole to protect the man and himself from the snow and heavy winds that had suddenly come up. When doing this, he thought his shovel had struck something, but in his efforts to help the man, it had slipped his mind. Now that he had reached the top and retrieved his backpack, he remembered what had happened. Curious, he decided to dig again. In a matter of seconds his small shovel hit something solid. The longer he dug, the more he realized this was no ordinary object, it was too large!

Clambering out of the hole, he ran down to Inuk and yelled, "I think I've found something buried in the hole I dug yesterday! Bring your shovel and help me dig!"

Inuk dropped everything as they both hurried up the ice cap. "What do you think it could be?" questioned Inuk.

"I haven't the slightest idea," answered Yaki.

When they got to the hole, they both jumped in. "Be careful as we shovel," said Yaki, "we don't want to damage anything in case it's something important." As they cleared the snow, the object began to take form.

"Wow! I think it's an airplane," said Inuk getting all excited.

"I can't believe it, but I think you're right," responded Yaki. "Let's keep shoveling until we find the front." They weren't sure if they were going in the right direction, but luckily they found an edge that curved down to the windshield.

"Let's clear it off so we can see inside," said Inuk.

As they quickly wiped off the glass, Yaki looked through and said, "This is a big airplane! "

"Let me look!" said Inuk. "I wonder if it's a military plane, and if it is, how did it get here? Why don't we go to the American base and tell them what you found, it could be one of theirs."

Climbing out of the hole, they ran back to their dogs and sledged to the base a short distance away. A military policeman (M.P.) was at the guard gate of the air force installation when they arrived, and the boys told him what they'd found. But the airman scratched his head in confusion not understanding their language. Using their hands and arms, they described a flying airplane and pointed to the ice cap. The

sentry seemed to understand and made a phone call while the boys waited. A few minutes later, a master sergeant and a Greenlander drove up. "Can I help you boys?" asked the Greenlander, speaking in their language. After Yaki and Inuk told him what they'd found, the Greenlander translated the information to the sergeant.

"That's incredible!" Exclaimed the sergeant, "I wonder if it's the missing plane from World War II that was forced down during a blizzard and had to land on the ice cap? The crew walked away with minor injuries, but the plane was never found after the storm. The story became a legend."

"The boy's said it's in the exact spot on the ice cap where you picked up the airman yesterday," responded the translator.

"We'll send a helicopter," said the sergeant, "tell the boys we'll meet them there."

This was a new adventure for Yaki and Inuk. They had known the small U.S. base was there, and had always been curious about it, now they'd been there twice in two days. Speeding back in the dog sled, they left the dogs in the same spot, and went up the ice cap as fast as their legs and snowshoes could carry them. As they neared the hole, they heard the approaching helicopter which got louder and louder. "Look at the size of that helicopter!" exclaimed Yaki, "it's twice the size of my house!"

"It's the largest one I've ever seen!" responded Inuk. When it landed, an entire squad of men piled out with an officer in charge.

"I'm Captain Snow," the officer said, when he came up to the boys along with the same translator. "Is this where the plane is?"

"Right below us," Yaki pointed.

“Okay sergeant, have the men carefully start digging around the plane.” With the men working as one, it wasn’t long before a B-17 came into full view. Forcing the door open, the captain and a sergeant went in, and a short while later came out. “The plane’s like new.” the captain said, “and I think it’s the one that’s been missing all these years.”

Things were moving fast for Yaki and Inuk as they watched in awe. They looked on as the enormous helicopter took off and hovered over the B-17, dropping lines to the men below. “What are they doing?” asked Inuk.

“I don’t know,” answered Yaki, “but we’ll soon find out.” They saw the men attach lines to different parts of the plane, then move back. Before their very eyes, the helicopter lifted the large bomber into the air. “I can’t take the noise!” screamed Yaki, as both boys covered their ears and ran away from the swirling snow. After lifting the plane from its snowy grave, the helicopter took off in the direction of the old airfield.

Within minutes another helicopter landed and the men began boarding. The captain came over with the translator and asked the boys, “Who found the plane?” Inuk pointed to Yaki. “Aren’t you the one who saved the airman yesterday?”

“Yes,” answered Yaki, “with Inuk’s help.

“I want to thank you personally for saving his life,” said the captain. Give me your name and address and we’ll let you know what happens to the B-17.” The captain and translator then climbed into the helicopter as the officer threw a salute to the two young boys.

When Yaki returned home he told his father and mother about his new experience.

“You’ve had a lot of excitement the past few days,” said Yaki’s mother. “I don’t want to dampen your spirit, but school’s about to begin, and you’ll have to concentrate on your studies, that means less hunting.”

“I know mother,” answered a disappointed Yaki, “but not before Inuk and I go back and get those trapped birds.”

“We could sure use them,” she answered.

Things returned to normal as everyone in the tiny community struggled to survive.

A few months later, an air force jeep with the captain and a translator arrived at Yaki’s home. Within minutes Yaki’s father and the two men from the base came out of the house, got into the jeep, and sped off. Arriving at Yaki’s one room schoolhouse, they entered the class. Yaki looked up in surprise from his desk when he saw the three of them. His father had never done this before. I wonder what they’re doing here? he thought.

“I’m sorry to interrupt you,” Yaki’s father respectfully said to the teacher, “but we have something important to give Yaki. Yaki’s father walked to his son and handed him an official looking envelope. Still mystified, Yaki opened the envelope and carefully pulled out a check with his name on it. “This is a check for \$150,000!” he said in a daze, “and it’s in my name. What ‘s it for?”

The translator came forward and explained, “Since the B-17 you found was almost new, the U.S. government is giving you what is called a “Finders fee” of \$150,000.”

Stunned by the news, everyone looked at Yaki for his reaction.

His teacher asked, "What are you going to do with the money?"

Yaki looked down at the floor for a while, shuffled his feet and responded, "Since I couldn't have done neither without Inuk's help, if it's all right with him, I think we should use a small portion of it for our families. But I'd like most of it to go to the village. Life has been hard since the fur and sealskin trade stopped. Maybe we can buy two fishing boats with a big part of the money and bring back the men who left for fishing jobs in other parts of Greenland. That way everyone will benefit in our village."

As quiet as Eskimo children are by nature, they surged up as one, and lifted Yaki onto their shoulders. In the excitement of the moment, the teacher yelled, "School's closed for the rest of the day," as Yaki's friends carried him out the door of the school.

The news traveled fast, and within minutes the entire village knew what had happened and were crowded in and around Yaki's house. Everyone shook Yaki's hand praising him for his deeds. As mother and father of the hero, his parents would now be respected elders of the village, ones who had trained their son to be wise at such a young age. Yaki thereafter would not only be known as savior of their village, but also as King of the Ice Cap.