

Saw Missing Son Riding Sea Slush in Moonlight

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It was fall time. Snow had fallen for a great many days out of leadened skies. It seemed the snow was never going to stop falling.

It was the melancholy time of the year when the Arctic world grudgingly readied itself for winter. There was a lull in sea hunting because there was yet no ice.

The days grew colder, chilling the Arctic Ocean until the snowflakes no longer melted as they fell into the sea. The unmelted flakes floated and became denser each passing day. North winds pushed them toward the shore until they turned into thick slush. The slush was so thick that white caps no longer broke on the crest of the waves.

Relentless Waves

Great swells relentlessly rolled toward the shore. They looked like a giant corrugated iron moving toward the beach. They rolled silently, swiftly, until the shallows of the beach broke them and they bit into the sands below with a great roar.

The sweep of the waves carried the slush ashore and deposited it on pebbles the size of one's little finger end until some of them grew into mounds a foot high.

It was during this time that I walked to the beach at night. The sky was clear with only a north wind blowing. The moon was full and it was brilliantly shining down. The swells had never failed to fascinate me. I seemed to be drawn to them even though I never failed to experience a weird and eerie feeling as I watched them rolling in endless lines out into the Arctic Ocean in the ghostly light of the moon.

Legend Recalled

That night was no different. As I watched the waves I felt the hair on my neck bristle. I was alone and ten years old. A chill ran down my spine as I suddenly recalled The Legend of the Young Hunter.

The legend was told to me one evening by old Samaroona, the sage of Tigara.

He began casually:

"Amagook and his wife, Punayuk, had a young son named

Tingmeak. The Amagook family was the happiest family in Tigara. There was always peace in their household because they loved each other very deeply. They lived a life that was ideal and happiness knew no bounds.

"Amagook was a fine hunter which added greatly to their comfort and well-being. Punayuk was a fine wife and mother and she made beautiful clothes for her husband and son. She took loving care in making them because she loved her husband and son.

"Tingmeak was an unusually fine boy. He was fine looking and needless to say, his parents worshipped him. He was their only son — and only child. He was never in need for anything because his father provided for the family in more than ample manner.

Apt Student

"When Tingmeak was in his early youth, Amagook began to teach him the ways of the Arctic. He taught him to hunt properly and to avoid the pitfalls of the treacherous land on which he would hunt all his life.

"Tingmeak was very intelligent and he learned quickly. His parents were over-joyed. Right from the start, Tingmeak showed promise of a fine hunter. When he was sixteen years old, he could hunt almost as well as his father. He was already taller than an average man. He had fine shoulders and promised to be a strong man.

"It was late spring. Whaling had been over. The ice on the ocean began to break up and men no longer hunted on foot. They hunted with their kayaks going from one floe to another looking for basking seals in the sun on the ice.

"Tingmeak was now seventeen years old and he was already a fine hunter. He hunted alone now and his parents did not worry about him because he was already skillful in the ways of the Arctic.

Beautiful Parka

"Punayuk had made Tingmeak a beautiful parka for the whaling celebration. He was very proud of it. He liked it so well he could hardly keep from wearing it when he went hunting, but his mother told him, 'Son, that

parka is made for special occasions only — not for everyday use.'

'It's so beautiful and I can't help but want to wear it, mother,' Tingmeak had replied.

"Early one spring morning, Tingmeak impulsively asked his mother whether he could wear his favorite parka when he went hunting.

"Well, one day won't make any difference I guess. Alright son, you may wear it for this one day only,' Punayuk agreed chuckling.

"Tingmeak was over-joyed. He went to the beach wearing his beautiful parka. He dragged his kayak by the bow grip to the edge of the water. He got into it and began to paddle following open leads between ice floes.

Failed to Return

"That night, Tingmeak failed to return. The men of the village began to search for him. They scoured the ocean with their kayaks and umiaks but they found no trace of Tingmeak. Tingmeak had met with some accident and was lost.

"Amagook and Punayuk were thrown into profound mourning. Their only son, whom they loved so deeply, was gone. Their grief was so intense that it possessed them into living with it every day of their lives. Amagook, although without hope, kept looking for any trace of his son on the beaches and lagoons but Tingmeak had completely disappeared.

The Sea Of Slush

"Summer began to wane into fall. Snow fell and days grew colder. Snow kept falling day after day. Soon heavy slush formed on the ocean on the north side of the village. It undulated with heavy swells that rolled in from the north.

"Amagook was still grieving for his son. One evening he left the sod igloo and took a walk along the north beach. The skies had cleared and the full moon was shining brightly. Heavy slush-laden swells were breaking on the beach with thundering roars. He looked out to sea not looking for anything in particular. Even in his grief, Amagook was spellbound by the weirdly undulating waves in the eerie light of the moon.

Strange Object

"Amagook's heart jumped and he shuddered! Way out in the distance he saw something that seemed to be moving toward the beach. He was sure of it because it came closer each time it appeared from the trough to the crest of the giant swells.

"Unbelieving, he strained his eyes attempting to get a clearer look. NO! It couldn't be. But there it was. He could now make out the blades of a double ended paddle as they alternately dipped into the slush. It was a man paddling a kayak.

"It was an unbelievable spectacle. It was impossible for any man to navigate in that heavy slush but the man in the kayak was doing it easily and effortlessly and the rate of speed was phenomenal!

Out To Sea

"When the man in the kayak was two waves out from the beach, he swerved to his right and headed out to sea. All of the time, the man had his face averted away from Amagook.

"Amagook's heart pounded in his chest. His breath came in gasps as the fact hit home. He recognized the parka the man was wearing! It was Tingmeak's parka!

"Spellbound, Amagook watched the man and the kayak disappear into the distance. He stood transfixed on the icy beach unable to think what to do. Should he tell his wife what he had seen or should he keep it quiet? He decided he would not say anything to Punayuk. She was already too distraught with grief.

"After scanning the sea of slush for a long while, Amagook walked home wearily. He was very quiet that night and his wife asked him why. He told her he was tired.

"The next evening, the grieving father again walked to the beach. Almost immediately after he arrived, the man in the kayak appeared out of the hazy distance. As the night before, the man paddled easily and effortlessly. When he neared the beach he swerved to the right this time one wave beyond the breakers.

Confirmation

"Amagook was now com-

pletely sure that the man in the kayak was his son. The shoulders, his mannerism of paddling and the parka he wore the day he disappeared.

"When the kayak was closest to the shore, Amagook dashed part way toward the breakers and shouted, 'Tingmeak, my son, come ashore! I am Amagook your father!'

"Tingmeak did not appear to hear or heed his father's impassioned plea. He made the turn and paddled out to sea, all the while averting his face from his father, and disappeared into the distance.

"The next night, Amagook, hopefully, went to the beach and thought, 'He was just beyond the breakers last night. Perhaps my son will come ashore tonight.'

"Amagook waited for a long time but Tingmeak did not appear that night. He gave up the vigil and walked sadly home. Hopelessness overtook him and he told his wife that night of the strange events of the past four days. Punayuk listened spellbound. She did not say a word.

"Amagook and Punayuk went to bed but they could not sleep. The whale oil lamp was still burning and its flickering light softly lit the room — but there was an uncanny atmosphere in the igloo. It was very, very quiet.

"As they laid on their bed, they were startled to hear soft brushing of fur at the pit entrance at the front of the igloo! Amagook put a restraining hand on his wife. They looked around at the entrance. There, ever so slowly, rose a wolf ruff of a parka! The hood appeared. It faced away from Amagook and Punayuk.

"Punayuk recognized the parka at once. It was Tingmeak's! The figure rose slowly out of the entrance until its hips were on the floor. It then started to edge very slowly toward a wooden dish filled with cooked cold meats.

"Amagook tried to figure out what to do. If he spoke, his son might flee. He decided what he would do.

The Leap

"When Tingmeak was about to reach the dish, Amagook leaped with lightning speed, but as fast as he was, all he grabbed was empty air. Tingmeak swished through and out of the entrance. His father rushed out but his son was nowhere to be seen.

"The following night the same thing occurred. Amagook had instructed his wife to make the bed closer to the dish of meat, which they now made sure was full. When Tingmeak was about to pick up a piece of meat, Amagook leaped for his son and again he was unable to touch him. The young man disappeared mysteriously.

"On the following night, Punayuk made the bed even closer to the dish of meat. Amagook decided to let his son eat before lunging for him that night.

"Tingmeak came in as usual. When he was within reach of the dish, he picked up a piece of meat. In the stillness of the room the parents could hear the grind of chewing. Tingmeak kept averting his face from his parents.

The Strange End

"While his son appeared to be eating, Amagook leaped with a tremendous effort and this time he touched the fur of his son's parka! It was a mere touch — a little brushing touch. As soon as it happened, a strange thing occurred. Tingmeak fell in a heap on the floor, face down!

Arctic Survival—

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"A surge of happiness welled in Amagook as he rushed to his son.

"He turned his son over gently and then reared back. He shouted in agony, 'NAHKA, NAHKA!' (NO, NO!)"

"Amagook's face paled into a deathly mask. What he saw was a terrifying sight! Tingmeak's face was unrecognizable. There were tiny sea animals crawling all over it! Tingmeak was dead . . . !"

Samaroona paused in telling of the eerie tale. I was spell-bound — almost unable to move.

The Moral

"The ending of this legend has never been made certain by our forefathers who told it before me. What made Tingmeak return the way he did? Some story tellers ventured to say that it was the family's great love for one another that made the bazaar return of Tingmeak possible.

"Others said, 'Let the dead be left undisturbed.'

"I do not know what to say," concluded Samaroona.

That evening as I stood on the icy beach and watched the slush-laden swells in eerie moonlight, the more uncomfortable I became. It felt as if every hair on my head was on end.

I could not endure the sensation any longer. I whirled around and ran home as fast as I could go!