

# Two Boys Brush Close to Nature, Arctic Beauty

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Let us go back 2,000 years or more into the past and let our imagination meander and finally settle in the huge village of Ipiutak.

First, let us pinpoint the location of this settlement so the play of our revery can settle for better clarification of what probably went on in the great Eskimo village.

ON THE MAP of Alaska, locate the village of Point Hope. You will find it in the northwestern part of Alaska and one of the westernmost points. About 2,000 years ago, Ipiutak thrived one mile east of the present location of Tikiqag, or Point Hope.

## City of Sod Igloos

Ipiutak was a veritable city of sod igloos. If one had the yen to count the dwellings erected row on row he would find that there were 750 to 800 sod igloos, perhaps more. Eskimos scurried about everywhere and the number was somewhere around 4,000. Children by the scores romped and chased one another.

IT WAS ONE of those days that comes occasionally when the wind did not blow — a day in the month of July. There was not a cloud in the sky. The sun shone brilliantly down on the sprawling village that stretched for some four miles in the southeasterly to northwesterly direction.

To the north of the village were two lagoons, a small one located toward the westerly end, and a large one that stretched for about eight miles to the east past the mouth of the Kukpuk River.

## Adventurous Boys

It was the early part of July. The sun was still riding the Arctic skies without setting but the dip of it was getting lower on the northern horizon each passing day. The days were marching on toward fall — winter.

PUNNIK AND PANEAK had been watching for days now, the sun dipping lower each day. They knew that when the sun went below the horizon, night would start to come and it

would be getting darker and darker each day as weeks passed.

Punnik and Paneak were two boys and they were the best of boyhood friends. Punnik was ten years old and Paneak was a year older. Their parents, the Kunalooks and Tulugaks were great friends also. The two boys had grown together in an atmosphere of congeniality. They were welcomed in each household as if they were part of the family.

This relationship had made them inseparable. They played together constantly. Being young, they went on hunting trips — adventures they enjoyed most. Their quarries were ptarmigan, curlews and ducks, which they hunted with bows and arrows their fathers had made for them. They also hunted ground squirrels with snares.

## Adventure Idea

"PANEAK, DO YOU think our parents would let us stay up all night tonight?" Punnik said to his young friend putting his arm around his neck.

They had been playing on the beach of the little lagoon, running and throwing flat, round pebbles and skipped them on the water. They had become very adept at this game and could skip rocks better than other boys their age. They could even do it better than older boys but when they did it they got chased and knocked down. It didn't do them much harm because most of the time it was done in fun.

"When we did that ten days ago my parents were not very happy," Paneak said soberly. "Someone had told them that we were trying to ride Onalik's kayak."

"But, Paneak, we didn't do such a thing. All we did was to turn it over to see what was inside and how it was made," Punnik replied.

"SOMEBODY SAW US doing it and we almost got into trouble. I don't think we should even look at a kayak from now on," Paneak said laughingly.

Punnik was thoughtful for several moments. He stopped his friend in his tracks and put his hands on Paneak's shoulders and said gleefully, "Listen, I have an idea."

AND WITH THAT Punnik playfully wrestled Paneak and knocked the bigger boy down

on the hard ground of the tundra. They rolled over the ground each one trying to take advantage of being uppermost, pinning the other down.

Paneak, being stronger, succeeded in winning the wrestling match and Punnik gave up and laid on his back beside his friend. The boys laid side by side panting from their efforts looking up at the blue sky.

"Paneak," said Punnik.

"Yes."

"MY IDEA is that you ask my parents whether we can stay up all night and I'll ask yours," Punnik speculated. "That way, they might not refuse each one of us."

"Punnik, I think that will work. Let's do it that way," Paneak agreed.

With that, the boys jumped to their feet and started running up from the beach of the lagoon and scrambled up the bank. They raced to the west end of Ipiutak where their igloos were side by side.

THEIR FATHERS, Kunalook and Tulugak, had also been boyhood friends and had vowed to build their igloos next to each other years before. That was what they had done and the lifelong friendship had flourished through the years.

As the boys ran they were joined by three young malemute dogs that nipped playfully at their heels as they went.

When they reached home, their mothers were outside tanning sealskins to make waterproof mukluks for fall and winter footwear for their husbands.

"Ahkanhg (Mother), where is father?" Punnik asked anxiously.

"He and Tulugak are in our igloo making flint harpoons heads. I would advise you not to bother them. They're busy," said Punnik's mother.

"We won't bother them, mother. We just want to ask something of them," Punnik answered quickly.

THE BOYS SCAMPERED into the igloo. When they entered, the men were sitting on the floor chipping flints into harpoon heads. When they saw the youngsters, they smiled.

Punnik and Paneak stood by the pit entrance in front of the room. They were a little hesitant not quite knowing how to ask

their fathers.

"What have you in mind, boys?" asked Kunalook.

"Tulugak, can Paneak and I stay up all night tonight?" Punnik asked shyly, making sure not to ask his own father.

"KUNALOOK, THE SUN will soon start setting in the north soon. We would like to stay up before that happens," Paneak added.

## Permission Granted

The men looked at each other, chuckled and broke into laughter. They knew they had been caught offguard.

"You know what happened the last time you stayed up," Tulugak reminded.

"It wasn't the way they thought it was. I always remember what you told me about other people's property," Punnik said.

"We just wanted to look inside and see how it was made," Paneak added.

"ARE YOU TRUTHFUL about this, both of you?" Kunalook demanded.

"We are very truthful," the boys answered in unison.

The men looked at one another and nodded lightly, smiling with amusement.

"You may stay up tonight but before you do, you must promise us to behave yourselves and not tinker with other people's property," Kunalook said.

"If you don't behave, we will never allow you to stay up ever again in the future," Tulugak added, his face stern.

"WE WILL BEHAVE," said Punnik quickly.

"We will," echoed Paneak.

"Quuyahna, apahng (Thank you father), said Punnik with a quick excited smile.

Paneak did the same and the boys ducked into and out of the pit entrance.

"Mother, father said we can stay up all night tonight," said Punnik excitedly.

"Be sure then and do what your father's told you," Punnik's mother said.

THAT EVENING after eating, the mothers of the two boys took some dried caribou meat and some suet for them to eat during the night. They put them in small caribou skin bags.

## Off to Adventure

Around 9 p.m. the boys began to get ready for the night's adventure. They gathered their bows and arrows and slings. When they were ready to leave, their mothers gave them affectionate hugs and told them to be careful.

"Remember what your father told you," said the mothers.

PUNNIK AND PANEAK began their night's adventure. They started out heading in no general direction at first. They spent most of their time target shooting with their bows and arrows. Tiring of that, they chased one another in a game to tag.

For the next two hours the youngsters cavorted on the tundra in a seemingly endless display of energy. They were elated of their good fortune of staying up all night. It made it more pleasurable because the weather was beautiful with only a slight breeze coming from the north.

SOON, THE BOYS wandered toward the north beach and walked along where gentle swells swept the sandy shore. They headed northwest stopping now and then to play with their slings.

The slings were made of sundried oogruk skin. The sling itself was diamond shaped with about an inch slit in the center that went lengthwise. At each end of the diamond were two small holes on which were fastened two two-foot long, thin sealskin thongs one of which had a loop that fitted on one's finger.

## Many Seals

AS THE BOYS played along the beach they moved toward Nuvook (The Point) northwest of Ipiutak. The sea at the point swirled roughly caused by swift sea currents. In the midst of this swirl were numerous hairseals that bobbed up and down with the waves. Numerous seagulls, herring gulls and terns flew around in a confusion of flight indicating a school of tomcod was abounding in the area.

There the boys used their slings to try to hit the seals, never succeeding but coming close several times. They did not hope to get any of them but it was great fun for them to do this anyway.

IT WAS MIDNIGHT now and the sun dipped to its lowest in the north horizon and began to climb the skies without setting. Punnik and Paneak had tired themselves somewhat and abandoned their sling shooting. They rounded the point and started walking slowly southeastward along the south beach.

"Paneak, I'm getting hungry. Do you think we should eat our caribou meat now?" asked Punnik.

"I'm hungry too. Let's eat," Paneak replied.

The boys sat down on the gravel just beyond the reach of the breakers and ate. They did not sit still doing it. They rolled on the clean gravel, set on their bellies and looked up at the sky, while munching on the dried meat.

THEY GOT UP on their feet and started walking once more. They were not as energetic as before because they had exerted a great amount of energy within the past few hours. And, too, the hour was about 2 a.m. now.

## Sleepy Boys

Punnik could feel his eyelids become heavier and heavier each moment. He did not want to admit to Paneak that he was getting sleepy. Paneak was getting very quiet and Punnik knew that he was also very sleepy. Each boy would not admit it to the other.

"PANEAK, LET'S lie down on the beach and watch the seagulls and the sky for a while. I'm

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# Arctic Survival—

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getting tired of walking anyway," Punnik requested.

"Let's do that. I'm getting tired too," replied Paneak.

They got down on the gravel on their backs and made half-hearted attempts to look at seagulls and the sky but very soon they were fast asleep. They slept for about five hours. Paneak was the first to awake. He shook his young friend and Punnik opened his eyes reluctantly.

THEY STIRRED about for a few moments and were soon wide awake. Their energy had returned and they began to play around at once.

They were soon on the tundra away from the beach. The sun shone with greater splendor. A light breeze was coming from the east. Punnik looked eastward and saw Ipiutak. The mass of sod igloos looked beautiful in the distance about a mile away.

"Paneak, look at the ground all the way to the hills," Punnik said excitedly.

## Magical Carpet

IT WAS EXCITING indeed. The tundra appeared purple and faded into the blue in the distance. On the tundra was a veritable carpet of millions of forget-me-nots, anemones and other wild flowers.

Although he did not know it, Punnik was feeling a surge of life that was good.

"Let's go home, Paneak," Punnik shouted happily.

"Wait a little while, Punnik," Paneak replied. "There are all kinds of bugs crawling around everywhere. And look at all the bumblebees."

Punnik noticed that Paneak was not really looking for bugs. He was on his belly on the tundra. He was trying to be nonchalant about smelling the sweet scent of the forget-me-nots. Punnik joined him on the ground.

"THESE ARE BEAUTIFUL aren't they, Paneak," Punnik said quietly as he tenderly fingered a cluster of the blue flowers. He smelled the fragrance and lightly touched them with his cheek as if loving them.

Punnik jumped up suddenly and shouted, "Let's go home, Paneak."

He started to run letting out an elated cry. He ran to the east and into the breeze taking deep drafts of flower scented air that came from the magical carpet of Arctic flowers that seemed to have bloomed overnight.

Home was not far away. People everywhere were moving about in the sod igloo city of Ipiutak. The boys had experienced a stirring and beautiful episode of life that they would never forget.