

Arctic Survival—

Attungowruk's Young Wife Sets Him Up for Death

Editor's Note: The following is the second installment of the story of Chief Attungowruk of Tigara (Point Hope), who became notorious largely because of his use of liquor.

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By HOWARD ROCK,
Times Editor

"Chief Attungowruk was a shrewd business man," said Eebulik, great-nephew of the Chief. "He traded goods, such as yard goods, flour, tea, sugar, and other things, for fox skins, polar bear skins, and baleen. When ships came during the summer, he sold them. He became quite a rich man.

"From what I heard, he was really a fine man. He didn't hesitate to help anyone who needed it. But he became a completely different man when he drank. This led him to murder his favorite wife, Quinuwana, although he didn't know he did it due to heavy drinking."

Beginning of the End

When the effects of liquor wore off and after the terrible realization that he had killed his wife, it was the beginning of the end for Chief Attungowruk. He didn't seem to care what happened to him or to anyone anymore.

His grief for the loss of his wife was genuine. He brooded in his somber hours. He lamented when drinking. He also started to blame some of his wives for the tragedy. This was unfounded, of course, but he persisted.

An added pall of dread pervaded the Attungowruk household. The women did not feel safe any longer. Some of them thought that something would have to be done. But, what? By themselves, they were powerless to do anything against the powerful brute — an insane maniac when drunk.

From Bad to Worse

The brooding Attungowruk became progressively worse in his drinking habits. His temper became short and he exercised it by beating up less stronger men in the village. Hate and fear became the order of the day.

Even when he was drinking heavily his strength was no match for any man in the village. He now ruled his people by brute force and not by reason. In an-

swer to this rule there crept an uneasy atmosphere in Tigara. People no longer reveled. They became almost mute expecting the unexpected. "What will happen next!" people asked in muffled voices.

Within a year after the murder of his wife, Attungowruk claimed another victim, a man whom he thought was undermining his station in Tigara. This was to be followed by two more murders.

Fear gripped the community. Each man, or woman, imagined himself that he was to be the next victim. Men spent sleepless nights to protect themselves and their families.

Fearful Young Wife

Attungowruk's youngest wife originally came from a village south of Tigara. She was one of four children in her family. She had two younger sisters and an older brother. After Quinuwana was killed by her husband, and after several months, the young wife gained favor from the Chief. But along with that suspicion from Attungowruk began to manifest itself.

Since she was a pretty woman, the Chief began to accuse her of being unfaithful. She began to bear the brunt of her husband's drunken tirades and accusations. People who had heard of this began to look to her as a marked woman.

"It's just a matter of time," people said.

The young wife was aware of the probable doom. It was frightening and oppressive to her. The danger to her life was real and if there was nothing done, she was sure to lose it. What to do about the danger she was in became an obsession with her. She vowed to herself that she would do something about it — and she must do it soon!

Drink-crazed Chief

Apparently driven by remorse of his deeds, Chief Attungowruk sought refuge in the numbing effects of the drink. In his sober moments he was a tragic and deeply depressed man. He would try to make amends for the wrongs he did. Although pathetic, these were met with some show of sympathy but mostly with unintentioned artificiality. Attungowruk could sense this

and when he drank, it added fuel to his tirades.

As he was drinking one evening he suddenly shouted, "I'm hungry!" He turned to his young wife and told her to cook some caribou meat. She responded fearfully and went down through the pit entrance and out into a cooking chamber in the hallway.

The young wife took special care in cooking the meat, exactly the way Attungowruk liked it. When it was done, she put the steaming briskets and ribs (Attungowruk's favorite meat) into a wooden bowl and brought them into the house.

She placed the bowl in front of her husband, who, by this time was roaring drunk.

"It's about time you got the meat cooked, you cheat!" Attungowruk roared. "It never used to take you that long. What did you do, sneak out again?"

It was no use to answer her husband and the young wife walked over to the other women and sat down among them, cowering.

The Rage

Attungowruk, after a heavy swallow of liquor, picked up a piece of brisket. He bit into it and looked menacingly around to his young wife.

"This is not the way I like the meat! YOU — CHEATING WOMAN!" the Chief screamed.

Rage now completely obsessed Attungowruk. He spluttered and rasped in the deadly quiet of the huge sod igloo — the only sound — the sound of a man fraught with evil intent.

He took another swallow of liquor as if to brace himself. He raised himself unsteadily to his feet and staggered. He flexed his huge muscled arms and let out a wild sound of rage and lunged toward his young wife. Just before he reached her, he fell heavily on the floor. Before he could do any harm, liquor had knocked him out. He lay face down snoring raggedly.

Deathly Silence

Deathly silence descended on the huge room except for uneven snoring of Chief Attungowruk. None of the women stirred for a long time.

"Why don't you try to sleep for a while. I will fix a bed and put a cover on him," the young

wife said just above a whisper. The women nodded.

"It is hot in here and he is sweating. I'll get out and open the corner of the skylight," the young woman volunteered.

She went out and walked up to the roof of the igloo. When she reached the skylight, she unfasted two foot-long pieces of wood and lifted the corner of the oograk gut window. She looked down into the room and she could plainly see her husband lying on the floor.

It was about the hour of eleven in the evening and the early June sun was shining above the horizon. The weather was beautiful. The young woman could not help but compare it to the evil atmosphere of the Attungowruk household.

She went into the house quietly. Some of the women had already bedded down and two of them were preparing for bed. The young woman fetched a thick haired caribou skin and laid it beside Attungowruk. She then gently rolled him over to it.

Reflection

The young wife looked down at her husband. Her eyes blurred with tears and she murmured, "Attungowruk, you used to be such a good man — a good man."

After covering her husband with a light squirrel blanket, she moved quietly to her accustomed bedding spot. She laid down on her back making sure to use her light parka for a pillow.

The young woman did not try to go to sleep. She gazed out into the blue sky through the open triangle of the skylight. She was wide awake and she did not intend to go to sleep. (Tears filled her eyes and cascaded down her temples. She couldn't suppress a sob. She wept quietly.)

After what seemed an eternity, she looked around the room. Attungowruk was snoring heavily. And all the women were apparently asleep.

Stealthy Departure

The young woman raised herself slowly to a sitting position looking around all the while. She stood and picked up her light parka and padded noiselessly on her mukluks toward the pit entrance. As she was about to go out, Attungowruk grunted noisily. The sleeping women stirred. The young wife froze with a

sickening fear in her bosom, her eyes wide with fright. Her knees felt weak. She didn't dare to breathe.

A great relief came over her when Chief Attungowruk resumed his heavy snoring. The sleeping women were still once more. She lowered herself down into the pit entrance and stole out the hall and into the early morning daylight.

The hour was about two in the morning. The sun was shining brightly. She donned her parka, looked around, and started walking. She walked almost casually toward the west side of the village. She did not want to run for fear of arousing dogs that might bark at her.

The village looked deceptively peaceful in the early morning sun of the late spring. Loose spring ice was floating around in the Chukchi Sea. The straggling flocks of eider ducks were flying on their way north.

The young woman was startled to see a man walking toward the south beach apparently going seal hunting. He did not look back. She felt relieved. She kept walking casually.

She reached a sod igloo that was one of the last ones on the west side. She entered quietly. There were six people sleeping. She padded stealthily toward a tall man. She got on her knees and tapped him lightly on his shoulder. He awoke and looked around — a mixture of fear and surprise on his face.

The young woman bent close to his ear and whispered for a long period. The tall man listened, frowning. He grew pale.

Stole Back Home

When she was through whispering to the tall man, Attungowruk's young wife stole quietly out of the igloo. She walked back to her home making sure not to hurry. She entered as stealthily as when she went out. Attungowruk was still snoring and the women were still asleep.

The young woman went to bed without being noticed. This time she wanted sleep but sleep would not come. Her nerves were at a breaking point. Her lips trembled and she shivered but not from cold. She was in a state of agony but she dared not cry out.

Agony of Waiting

She was waiting now and she did not want to wait. If sleep would only come it would numb her senses. It would not come. She knew that. And then she heard a faint brushing noise from the vicinity of the skylight. She knew what it was. She turned away from the oograk gut window and faced the wall.

Time seemed to stand still — interminable time! She heard another faint noise — then an incredible stillness.

With a great suddenness, a deafening explosion filled the huge room of Chief Attungowruk! A rifle shot had been fired.

The young wife of the Chief screamed. She kept screaming — screaming!

(To be continued)

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