

SURVIVORS GREETED BY FRIENDLY DOG IN VILLAGE SHROUDED BY GRIEF

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(Editor's Note: After her mother dried her clothes with sand and roots the tiny girl, Olaqroaq, ran around the ocean beach. She found two clams which reminded her of her sister, father, and brothers. Now they were all dead and buried. She walked toward the burial but couldn't go all the way. Her mother noticed her and came to her. She had been crying.

"I want to see them for the last time. I won't ever play with them again," the little girl sobbed.

The mother was overcome and she and the only surviving child wept bitterly in one another's arms as the high wind whistled around them.)

After long moments of bitter grief, Siqvoana finally said, "My daughter, it is not right for you to go through such terrible experiences at your age but this has been beyond our power."

The woman talked as if she was conversing with a grown person. The little girl, indeed, had been acting almost like a grown person. She could have acted altogether like a child but she seemed to have an innate wisdom to act otherwise under the terrible circumstances.

She could have been a screaming and impossible child during the fearful days. But on the whole she was a brave girl and she only gave way under most trying conditions.

The tiny child had manifested her sturdy nature early in the deadly ordeal and it was partly from this that Siqvoana had found much of her will to go on — to survive. In the days ahead, the bravery of the mother and child was to be an important factor in the struggle for survival.

"Can we go and see them now, mother?"

"Yes, if you think you can do it now."

"I can do it now but I don't want to watch Aniqsoaq cover them."

"You don't have to do that if you don't want to, my child."

Siqvoana took her daughter's hand and they walked slowly to the burial site. Aniqsoaq had arranged the bodies a few feet

west of the pit. The mother and child walked below them and stopped. They looked at their dead family for a few moments.

"Can I walk around the beach for a while again, mother?" Olaqroaq said, obviously ill at ease.

"Yes, you may but I think you better do it on the lagoon beach so I can see you. Aniqsoaq said that some dogs in Tikiaq were running in bunches now and they are getting dangerous. Some of them might come up this way," Siqvoana said, as she led her daughter away from the bodies.

The Glance

As they slowly walked west, Olaqroaq glanced back at the bodies and at that instant, she said, her voice breaking, "I am going now."

Through the years afterwards, Siqvoana often wondered whether her child directed the remark to her or to the dead members of the family. One day, after the girl was grown, the mother inquired about the remark.

"Mother," Olaqroaq answered quietly, "I was seeing their faces for the last time. I did say that to them. When I think of it, I'm happy that I did."

Soon after the moving incident, the little girl walked rapidly away. She did not look back. Her mother watched her with tears streaming down her face.

The Burial

Siqvoana turned and walked back to the burial pit. Aniqsoaq was getting ready to lower the bodies to it. The woman helped him even though the man said he would do it alone.

Siqvoana wanted Attungana placed at the west end of the pit with his head to the east. They then placed the two eldest children side by side with their feet close to the head of their parent. They laid the two youngest boys on each side of their father.

Caribou skins had been placed under the bodies and other skins were used to cover them. Aniqsoaq then filled the pit with sand and gravel. Before he was through Siqvoana instructed him to put up Attungana's bow and arrows at the head of the grave.

Epitaph

The woman found herself strangely composed during the burial proceedings. She voiced her feelings in a steady voice:

"Aniqsoaq, herein lies my loved ones enclosed within the land that nourished them. Their happiness, goodness, and their love of life has been ended forever. Attungana and I happily raised our children. Our blood, born of love, coursed through their veins.

"I grieve the loss of their attachment to me — their dependence on me as a wife and mother. Yes, I grieve deeply the loss of Attungana but I grieve more for the loss of my children because they will never use their blood — our blood, Attungana's and mine, so it would flow in the veins of those in the future.

"Aniqsoaq, I want to think of them that they are now safely away from harm and suffering."

Silent Tribute

Aniqsoaq walked over and stood by Siqvoana. He looked as if he wanted to say something but nothing came out. He stood straight. His naked upper body looked sturdy and proud but within his eyes, there was great sadness. Tears filled them — brimmed over and dropped on the beach of the lagoon.

Long moments passed and, at last, the man said, "I want to secure the umiak before we go. It might drift away."

"I'll help you, Aniqsoaq." "I didn't get all the water out of it. If I can tip it over on its side, almost all of the water will come out."

They did this and then pulled the boat up the beach a short distance. They turned it upside down and Aniqsoaq covered the gunwhales, stern and the bow with gravel.

"If you are ready to go now, I'm ready," the man said quietly.

Siqvoana, who had been looking at the umiak as if reflecting on the terrible ordeal that took place in it, turned slowly away. They started walking toward Tikiaq.

Olaqroaq had wandered about an eighth of a mile ahead of them. She was up away from the beach about 50 feet and her figure looked tiny against the gray sky.

When they caught up with her they noticed that her eyes were red. She apparently had cried a lot since she left the burial ground. The little group walked over to the ocean side of the land strip. It was much better to walk

there because there was no spray from the waves on the lagoon.

Questions

Shortly after this, Siqvoana began to ask questions of what was happening in the big village. What Aniqsoaq told her deepened her sorrow. Many of her relatives and friends had died.

The woman was so engrossed with what she heard, she had failed to ask about Aniqsoaq's family. A feeling of distress came over her and she asked fearfully:

"How about — is Achoyak and the children — are they all right?"

The man didn't answer at once. "I buried Achoyak three days ago. The children were gone a short time before she succumbed."

Siqvoana let out a distressing cry — a muffled wailing groan.

"You have suffered greatly too, Aniqsoaq, and my daughter and I have given additional burden on you."

"It has not been a burden, Siqvoana. I feel a great deal better because I was able to help you."

Uneasy Scene

When they passed the little lagoon a mile east of the village, they took a foot trail that led to the settlement. Siqvoana's eyes fell on the scene to the southwest. A strange activity was going on there.

"I've never seen so many people in that area before, Aniqsoaq. What is going on?"

As soon as she asked, she had the answer in her mind.

"They are burying their dead," Siqvoana said appalled.

"They are burying their dead," echoed Aniqsoaq. "This has been going on for days now."

"What is going to happen to our village — what is going to happen to us?"

"It is difficult indeed to know what will happen. We may face a very dark future from here on. Many of our fine hunters are dead — some of them the very best we have ever had. Attungana was one of the best."

Siqvoana was stunned by the possibility — yes, the impending tragedy in the days ahead. She did not say another word for a long time.

A Dog

As the man and woman and

the child walked slowly toward the village, they saw a dog trotting swiftly toward them. When it was about a hundred yards away, it veered to the right in an attempt to avoid them.

Aniqsoaq picked up a rock in case the dog proved dangerous.

"That's Pooktouruk (the little poke)! It's Pooktouruk!" exclaimed the little girl. "It's cousin Utoruna's dog! Come on, Pooktouruk, come on!"

"You better be careful, Olaqroaq," Siqvoana warned.

"He won't hurt me, mother. Watch and see."

The child kept calling the dog. As Pooktouruk circled, he caught a familiar scent and stopped. He whined happily. He took a step and started walking toward the group, slowly at first and then faster.

Aniqsoaq was in readiness with the rock in his hand.

"Don't throw that rock at him, Aniqsoaq. Let me go to him," Olaqroaq said.

The dog came on and stopped a short distance away. He whined and wagged his tail. The little girl walked over to him. The dog fawned and rolled on its side whining happily. He got up and repeated this show of friendliness.

The child knelt beside Pooktouruk and wrapped her right arm around his neck. The dog squirmed and wriggled in happiness whining all the while. He squirmed away and got on his feet and playfully pushed the little girl down. He licked her face in huge swipes.

"Stop that, Pooktouruk. You are making my face all wet," the child reprimanded and then chuckled.

The dog made a wide circle at a full gallop whining and barking. When he came back to the little girl, he stopped abruptly in front of her, his head on the ground between his front legs. When Olaqroaq came to pet him he suddenly got up and made another circle.

Pooktouruk was ecstatically happy to see the little girl. The dog seemed to know that he had found a home. After a while he calmed down a bit and was content to just be near his little friend.

ORPHANED DOG

"I heard your family is all gone Pooktouruk. I'm going to miss them like you did but I'm going to take care of you. You're going to be my dog from now on," Olaqroaq said as if talking to a person.

While all this was going on, Siqvoana and Aniqsoaq had stopped and watched the child and the dog. Without saying any words, they knew that what they saw was poignantly beautiful and they silently blessed the little girl and her friend.

Dog Alone

Pooktouruk was lean from lack of adequate food. He had gone hungry for days after Kayouktuk, his wife and their 8-year old daughter, Utoruna, died. They were a young family. Kayouktuk was the youngest brother of Siqvoana.

The dog had continued to stay at the igloo in which his masters lived. He was utterly lost without them. He stayed around expectantly but he knew the family would not be back. Some people had taken them away and then he was all alone.

Once in a while, someone would give him food but most of the time he went hungry. As any dog who had no one, Pooktouruk was a picture of hopelessness, needing someone to love and care for him. Now he had found someone who would more than fill his need and he was

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happy.

The Name

Pooktouruk was now a year old. He was born to a family named Samaroona. One day, Olaqroaq and Utourna heard that seven pups had been born at the Samaroona household. They had gone over and asked to see the pups. They gleefully looked at them.

"Utourna, this one looks like a little poke," Olaqroaq had said, laughing, "Let's name him Pooktouruk."

"That's a good name. Can we call him Pooktouruk, Samaroona?" Utourna asked.

"That's a very good name. His coat certainly looks like the color of a seal skin poke," Samaroona agreed, smiling.

"I wish I could have him," Utourna had said.

"Why don't you ask your parents and see if you can have him," the man answered. "If they agree, you can have him after he is big enough to be weaned from his mother."

Utourna's parents had agreed and that was how Pooktouruk had gone to the Kayouktuk household.

From puppyhood, the two little girls had played with the dog. Pooktouruk was never in need of attention and he followed them around almost everywhere they went.

Let's Go Home

"Olaqroaq, we better be going on now," Siqvoana said quietly. "You can take Pooktouruk with you."

At this, the child put her arms around the neck of the dog. Pooktouruk squirmed and tried to lick Olaqroaq's face.

"Come on Pooktouruk, let's go home," the little girl said, almost gleefully. "You're a skinny dog and I'm going to feed you as soon as we get home. You have almost no meat on your backbone and ribs. Come on, let's go home."

(To be Continued)