

ARCTIC ADVENTURE

Willard Price



Arctic Adventure

By Willard Price

Chapter 1

Polar Bear

Roger sat down on a snowbank. At least he thought it was a snowbank.

He was tired. He had been helping his big brother, Hal, build an igloo.

An igloo was a house made of blocks of snow. This one was about twelve feet in diameter and rounded off on the top. It was nine feet high. That was high enough even for Hal, who was six feet tall.

Roger shivered. 'It's as cold as Greenland,' he called.

He had often heard people say that, even in New York. Why didn't they say 'cold as Alaska' or 'cold as Siberia'? He asked Hal about it.

'Because Greenland is about the coldest spot on earth,' Hal said. 'It's the closest to the North Pole. Besides it wears a cap of ice two miles thick. That's why you're shivering right now. Because you're in Greenland.'

'Why did Dad send us here when there are so many nice warm places to go to?'

'Because a famous animal collector like Dad has to get the animals that zoos want to buy. And zoos have been asking for the wonderful animals that live up here — the polar bear, walrus, big bearded seal, sea lion, musk-ox, narwhal, wild reindeer, -caribou, humpback whale, sea otter, Greenland shark ...'

'Hey, what's going on?' Roger yelled. 'Is it an earthquake?'

The snow beneath him was shaking violently. It had come alive. There was a deep growl. Then the head of a polar bear came up. The beast was angry because his sleep had been disturbed. With a mighty heave the great body rose, tossing Roger ten feet away head first into a drift.

He pulled himself loose and began to run. The great bear came lumbering after him. The bear staggered in the deep snow. He had once been chased by a grizzly in Canada. But this creature was big enough and strong enough to eat a grizzly.

Roger made for home as fast as his legs could carry him. Home was the igloo. Hal could have killed the animal if he had had a rifle. But he and his brother were 'bring 'em back alive' men. A dead bear would be of no use to a zoo.

Roger plunged into the igloo. The great white bear followed him. Boy and bear were alone in the snow house.

The unwelcome guest rose on his hind feet to attack this impudent human. That was the bear

mistake. Standing up he was ten feet tall. Since the roof was only nine feet high, the enormous bear crashed through the roof.

What a strange sight — an igloo topped by the head of a polar bear. But Hal and Roger had built well. Not well enough to prevent the monster from going through the roof, but well enough to catch the bear between the icy blocks so he could not get down to pull that rascal, Roger, to pieces.

Hal saw his opportunity. He ran into the igloo, snatched up a piece of rope, and tied the animal's hind feet together. The rope was strong with a wire running through it. The bear roared furiously and danced a fandango to loosen the rope, but it was no use.

The front feet dangled inside and Hal promptly gave them the same treatment—or tried to. The trouble was that the forefeet were the bear's chief weapons, so strong that one swat of a powerful paw would send Hal to heaven and he wasn't ready to go there—yet. So Hal dodged the flailing feet. Luckily the big bear, with his head out in space, could not see where Hal was at any moment so his hammer blows failed to reach their mark. Hal dodged here and there—one wrong dodge and he would go to join his ancestors.

Hal finally got a loop over one of the bear's front legs. Then it was not too difficult to run the rope over the other leg and draw them together under a tight knot.

In the meantime Roger had been speeding to other igloos to get help, since two boys could not handle this thousand-pound monster alone.

An Eskimo is always willing to help, and it was only a matter of minutes before a dozen men were on hand. They weren't sure what they were supposed to do. One carried a big gun, and another came with bow and arrow. Hal, not proficient in the Eskimo language, could not tell them that the bear was not to be killed.

A handsome young man stepped forward and said, 'I speak English. What do you want?'

'We want', Hal said, 'to take this bear alive and put him in a zoo.'

'A zoo? What is a zoo?'

'A place where wild animals are cared for and everybody can watch them.'

'Yes. Very good,' said the stranger. He turned to the men with the gun and the bow and arrow. He seemed to be telling them that this was no killing job.

'What is your name?' Hal asked.

The young man was embarrassed. 'No Eskimo tells his name,' he said.

'Why not?'

'Because to an Eskimo his name is like his soul. It is a spirit. And the spirit is angry if the man it lives with tells his name. Someone else can tell you. That is all right.'

He spoke to the man next to him, who told Hal the name that its owner did not dare to speak. The helper's name was Olrik.

Hal said, 'Glad to know you, Olrik.' And he clasped Olrik's hand. 'How old are you? Or is that another secret?'

'No secret. I'm twenty. And you?'

'The same,' Hal replied.

Roger had a question. 'What's the Eskimo name for polar bear?'

'Nanook.'

Hal said, 'I have a notion that all of us including the bear are going to get along well together.'

Olrik gave him a warm smile. Already they were friends.

'Now, about this bear,' said Olrik, 'have you a piece of cloth?'

Hal didn't quite see how one could tackle a polar bear with a piece of cloth. But he went into the igloo and came out with a scarf.

Olrik, hoisted to the roof by the men, tied the scarf tightly around the bear's head, completely covering his eyes.

It had a magic effect. The giant was conquered. He stopped twisting, squirming and roaring, and was as quiet as a lamb.

Then one of the cages that the boys had brought from home was placed directly in front of the entrance to the snow house.

An axe was used to break the blocks that held the bear captive. Nanook dropped to the floor of the snow house. With his legs tied and his eyes covered he could only hunch about blindly. But he presently found the outlet and stumbled into the cage. The door was promptly closed behind him.

'He's tired after all his struggles,' said Olrik. 'Polar bears sleep a lot. When he's asleep you can come in and take the cloth off his eyes and the ropes from his feet. But be very careful. If he wakes he'll bite after you like a stroke of lightning. Perhaps you'd let me do it.'

'No, I'll take care of it,' Hal said.

'I will,' chimed in Roger. 'After all, he's sort of my bear. I sat on him.'

Hal laughed. 'So you think sitting on him gave you a special privilege? No, the folks back home would never forgive me if I came home alone.'

But when both bear and Hal were sound asleep, Roger slipped cautiously into the cage, removed the blindfold and untied the bear's feet. The bear woke, but there was no stroke of lightning. Polar bears are intelligent. This one was intelligent enough to know that somebody was doing him a good turn.

He rolled over and went to sleep again.

Chapter 2

This Strange Greenland

‘Why do they call it Greenland?’ Roger wanted to know.

‘Perhaps because it isn’t green,’ Hal answered.

‘That’s no answer,’ Roger objected.

‘Yes it is. The Danes came and made it a part of Denmark. They wanted other people to come and live here. It’s the largest island in the world. Almost 1,700 miles long and 800 wide. But it’s no good without people. People wouldn’t come if they called it Drearyland or Deadland or No-Man’s Land. So they called it Greenland.’

‘But that was a lie.’

‘Not exactly. It’s true that most of the island is covered with ice. And what ice! Eleven thousand feet thick. If you could go down a mile into it you would find ice a thousand years old. It just never melts — except that it gets a little slushy on top in summer. It’s growing thicker all the time. Come back ten thousand years from now and you’ll find it a towering mountain of ice.’

‘Thanks. But I don’t intend to come back. I still think it should have been called No-Man’s Land. Why Greenland?’

‘Because’, Hal replied, ‘there’s a broad band of green from fifty to a hundred miles wide all the way up the west coast. There are no forests. Nothing grows more than ten feet high. But there are dwarf birches, alders, mosses, saxifrages, poppies, grass, and away up here where we are, not far from the North Pole, I’ve heard that they can grow broccoli, turnips, lettuce, radishes and gardens of flowers.’

‘I’ll believe it when I see it,’ grunted Roger. ‘Why should these things grow on the west coast and nowhere else? It doesn’t make sense.’

‘They grow because a branch of the Gulf Stream flows along this coast. It brings warm water from the Gulf of Mexico. Of course it’s not so warm when it gets here. It may be about zero. But that’s not so bad as on the savage east coast, where it can be terribly cold. So that’s why most of the people live here, and only a few on the east coast. You might almost call that No-Man’s Land.’

Roger had to admit it. Big brother had an answer to everything. If he, Roger, ever learned half as much as he’d be a wise man.

‘Another thing gripes me,’ Roger said. ‘Why is it so dark?’

‘Because this is still winter. All winter there is no sun. All summer the sun shines all the time, night and day. It never goes up in the sky. It stays down near the horizon. If you didn’t have a watch, you would never know whether it was noon or midnight.’

‘But I have a watch.’

‘Even so, it’s not easy. Suppose your watch says ten o’clock. Well, which is it —ten in the morning or ten at night?’

Roger remarked, ‘I never heard of anything so topsy-turvy. If this is winter, why isn’t it pitch black? It’s only a dark grey.’

‘That’s because the sun is just out of sight, but it’s close to rising. In a few days we’ll have the sun. And a couple of weeks later you’ll be sick of it —shining all the time when you want to sleep.’

Roger laughed. Even this bad news couldn’t get him down.

‘There’s one good thing,’ he said. ‘My polar bear. I’m going to feed him now. I don’t know whether it’s breakfast, lunch, or dinner —anyhow, I bet he’s always hungry.’

Chapter 3

Roger and the Giants

Roger got along well with animals. Perhaps it was because he liked them, or perhaps because he was not afraid of them. Maybe he was too young—fifteen—for any beast to be afraid of him.

His polar bear, Nanook, stood five feet high at the shoulder if standing on all four feet. Roger was five feet tall. So the two were a match.

A few gulps by his four-legged friend and there would be no Roger. If he had shown fear that might have been the end of him.

But he spoke gently. And he petted the monster as if he were a pussy cat. His Majesty had never been so well cared for in his life. His mother bear had not petted him, and his father had threatened to eat him. This boy fed him every two days. Previously he had often been forced to go without food for a week or two.

Nanook had never learned the Eskimo language or English. But he understood the tone of a voice. Roger's voice flowed over him softly and he replied with the best imitation of a purr that he could manage.

One day Roger told his brother, 'I'm going to let him out.'

'If you do he'll take off like a blue streak.'

Roger respected his brother's opinions. But he also respected his great bear. He very quietly opened the cage door. Nanook did not move. Roger got behind the half-ton of bear and pushed. He might as well have tried to push down a stone wall.

The bear looked back at him with big eyes that seemed to say, 'What's on your mind, kiddo?'

Roger could think of only one other way to move this mountain of flesh and bone. Perhaps it would work. Perhaps it wouldn't. He walked out of the cage door and stood twenty feet away. Then he turned and spoke. Again, the tone of his voice was easy to understand.

The great Nanook stood still for five minutes, ten, fifteen. Roger was patient. Then the King of the Greenland Beasts walked out and joined his friend.

From that time on the cage door was left open. The bear went in to eat or sleep. Sleeping was good there because the floor had been covered with thick caribou hides. That was better than sleeping in the snow with rocks pushing up against your ribs.

The young Eskimo, Olrik, came to tell them that Whiskers had been seen offshore. Whiskers was the mighty bearded seal. The Eskimos called him muk-luk.

Hal had heard much about the mukluk. Hal's father, John Hunt, on his animal farm near New York

had said, 'Get all the seals you can. Especially the giant bearded seal. It's twelve feet long and on average it weighs 800 pounds. An extra, large one weighs twice that. Look out for the jaws. They could bite your head off. It pokes its head out of an ice hole to breathe. So do all the other seals. The difference is that you can get hold of the smaller seals and pull them out.'

'But you could never pull an 800-pound seal up through a six-inch hole,' said Roger. 'So how do you get it?'

'Go underwater. Take scuba tanks and Neoprene wet suits. The water will be cold but Neoprene will keep you warm,' said Hal.

So now, clad in the thick rubber Neoprene and carrying on their backs the tanks of air that they could breathe while searching for the monster, they joined Olrik and walked the short distance to the beach.

Roger glanced back and saw that his bear was following him.

'Stop him,' Hal said. 'Send him home.'

'Easier said than done,' objected Roger.

'You don't understand,' Hal said. 'Seals are a polar bear's favourite food. If he goes down with you and comes on a seal, he'll start eating it.'

'I think I can teach him not to do that.'

'He'll just be a nuisance.'

'On the contrary,' said Roger, 'he may be just what we need to capture an 800-pound mukluk. He's stronger than both of us put together. But to help him learn, we'll start with something smaller.'

Olrik set off for the nearby town of Thule to hire a truck in case the hunt for the giant seal was successful. Hal also asked him to bring some men to help.

The two boys walked out on the ice and stopped at a seal hole. The seals make holes and keep the ice free of ice so that they can poke their heads out and breathe. The brothers stood by the hole and waited. They did not budge an inch. The slightest scrape of a boot on the ice would scare away any seal.

At long last a black head came up through the hole. Hal grabbed it and tried to draw it out. Roger used his jackknife to make the hole larger.

'Great,' said Hal. 'A harp seal.' The black lines on the creature's back did look like a harp. 'This is just a pup. That's good. He's easier to handle than his six-foot father.'

Nanook, the bear, pushed forward. Was this to be his breakfast? Roger pressed his hand over the bear's jaws and he obediently backed away. Lesson one. The pup was dropped into a sack.

Later a ringed seal was caught. Again the bear was restrained. Lesson two.

After an hour they caught one more. This was a hooded seal, so called because his upper lip was long and it flopped back over his head like a hood. Again, no lunch for Nanook. Lesson three.

All three valuable seals were in the bag.

Nanook was ready now to go down with the boys, and could be trusted not to sink his teeth into the great bearded seal if one should be found.

Roger already knew that the polar bear was a famous swimmer. It could swim six miles an hour and keep going non-stop for a hundred miles. No other bear could match this performance. Roger also knew that a polar bear could kill an 800-pound bearded seal with one swat of his paw. Roger must see that this did not happen.

Olrik was back with the truck—and half a dozen men.

‘We’ll be ready for you if you get a mukluk. Wish I could go with you but I have no wet suit and no scuba. By the way, keep a sharp lookout for another big beast—the oogjook.’

‘Never heard of it. What is an oogeljerk?’

‘The name is oogjook,’ said Olrik.

‘Is it a seal?’

‘A big one. Weighs as much as five men.’

‘Well, this oogleboogle,’ said Hal, ‘what’s its name in English?’

‘Doesn’t have one. But you’ll know it when you see it. It twists and wriggles like a ballet dancer. It’s unknown to most people here and perhaps even your father has not learned about it. But if you could get one he could probably sell it to a zoo for many thousands of dollars.’

‘All right,’ Hal said. ‘Here goes for the mukluk and the ooglebug.’

He knew very well that the word was oogjook but he enjoyed playing with it. Olrik laughed.

Although summer was coming, plenty of ice remained on the sea. But near by there was a narrow lane of open water, and here the two boys and the bear slipped below the surface.

The water near the surface was cloudy with plankton, tiny living cells that were the food of the baleen whale. But thirty feet down the water was as clear as glass. The temperature was close to freezing. The boys in their Neoprene suits didn’t mind it.

Seal pups were much interested in the visitors, and swam all around them. They came close and nibbled Roger’s hands. They cavorted and scampered like children let out of school. Hal’s watertight torch lit up the lively dance of the little fellows.

But even the hungry bear paid no attention to them.

Fish in all colours swam about, and the sea floor was a fairyland with shells of all sorts, crabs with rainbow backs, and swaying sea fans rooted in the bottom and looking exactly like plants—but Hal knew they were animals. What a sight—an animal with roots in the ground.

Then a mukluk hove into sight. The bearded seal was known to be a noisy fellow. ‘Chuck-chuck-chuck’ was his song, but sung so loudly that he could be heard plainly through the water. He came close and squinted with weak eyes at these curious creatures who had invaded his territory.

Hal at once threw a loop of rawhide rope over the big fellow’s head. He and Roger began towing the monster to the open break in the ice.

They soon found that they were as weak as cats when it came to towing an 800-pound monster.

Instead of them towing him, he was towing them. His great fins were like broad paddles, and with very little effort he could pull these two-legged beasts far away under the ice.

The bear! Nanook could help. Roger searched for him. His large pet had disappeared. Roger looked up and there was the bear at the surface getting a breath of air.

Of course Nanook had no scuba. He must go up to the surface for air. But why did it happen just now when he was so badly needed?

He came at last, peering about for his friends. Then he saw them far away and deep down, at the mercy of the big seal.

Nanook sank to join them, and was he welcome! Roger put the end of the line between the bear’s teeth. It grew taut and the surprised mukluk paddled in vain. The boys swam toward the open water lane, and the 1,000-pound bear had no trouble in towing the bearded seal, whose whiskers trembled with astonishment as he was pulled into the water lane where the men waited at the edge of the ice.

He kept chuck-chuck-chucking as he was lifted up on to the ice and then slid up a ramp on to the truck.

‘Great,’ shouted Olrik. ‘You did a fine job.’

‘We didn’t do it,’ Hal said.

‘Then who did?’

‘Our four-footed giant. Without him the whole thing would have been a flop.’

‘Well, jump on the truck and we’ll go to town.’

‘Not quite yet,’ said Hal. ‘We saw something else that may have been the oogjook you were talking about. We’ll go back down and try to get it.’

So they went down, and saw to it that their bear went with them. They knew now that they could do nothing without him.

What they had seen before was still there. It did look as if it weighed as much as five men, and

squirmed, wriggled and twisted in a crazy dance.

They lassoed it and gave the end of the rope to their big pet. He dutifully hauled it, still wriggling, the waiting men, who put it on the truck and tied it down. The bag of smaller seals was also loaded.

‘Where to?’ Olrik asked.

‘To the Thule air base,’ Hal said. ‘We’ll charter one of those flying box-cars, I think you call it a sky van, and we’ll send it off tonight to our animal farm near New York. I’ll telegraph Dad right now to watch for it.’

He wired his father:

SENDING YOU TONIGHT BY SKYVAN HARP SEAL, RINGED SEAL, HOODED SEAL, HUG BEARDED SEAL, AND AN OOGJOOK —DON’T LAUGH—THEY WILL ARRIVE AT YOUR PLACE TOMORROW MORNING. ALSO HAVE POLAR BEAR, BUT WILL KEEP HIM AWHILE WE NEED HIM

LOVE, HAL

‘There’s one thing I don’t understand,’ Roger said after they had returned to their igloo. ‘Won’t those seals die because there’s no water in that plane?’

‘They’ll be all right,’ Hal said. ‘Long, long ago seals were land animals. In a way they still are. They have no gills like a fish to get oxygen from the water. They have to come up to breathe. They took to the sea because they could find food there. But they no sooner eat than they pop out of the sea. You remember Glacier Bay, Alaska?’

‘Sure.’

‘What did you see there?’

‘Hundreds of seals, each one sitting on a floating block of ice.’

‘Exactly. They liked to spend most of their time out of the water. And you remember the great rock offshore along the Oregon coast. What did you see there?’

Roger answered, ‘We didn’t actually see the rocks at all, because they were completely covered with seals.’

‘Right. They like to leave the sea, except when they are hungry. So you don’t need to worry about them one night in the sky van. When they get to the farm they can use the lake if they want to because there are fish in it. But when we get home I’ll bet we find them perched on the rocks, enjoying the fresh air.’

Chapter 4

Zeb - the Smart Guy

The hole in the roof made by the great bear had been mended. Now Hal, Roger and Olrik sat in the warm snow house, chatting comfortably.

‘By the way,’ said Hal, ‘where did you learn English?’

The Eskimo answered, ‘In your country. I spent two years at Harvard. Later I’ll go again and finish.’

Hal was astonished. ‘I’ll bet you’re about the only Eskimo who has studied abroad.’

Olrik smiled. ‘Many of our people have gone to England or America to study. Especially they want to learn English.’

‘Why English?’

‘So they can get a job when they come back. Did you realize that we have six thousand Americans and English in Greenland? They run most of the industries here and the two big airports — one at Thule and one at Sondre Stromfjord. If an Eskimo wants a job he’ll be more likely to get it if he can speak English.’

‘But Denmark owns Greenland. Aren’t there a lot of Danes here?’

‘Yes—and they’re fine people—but they don’t have the technical skill of the British and the Yanks.’

‘I heard,’ said a rough-looking fellow who had just come in. ‘You’re right. We’re the smart ones.

You Eskimos are the dumbest people on earth. And I mean you.’

He was looking straight at Olrik. Olrik said nothing.

Hal objected. ‘Hold your horses, Zeb. They told me your name. You were here with the men who helped after the big bear bust our roof. And I recollect that you stood behind and did nothing.’

‘Why should I mix with a pack of Eskimos?’ blurted Zeb. ‘I keep better company than those ignorant blokes.’ Again he stared at Olrik.

‘What was your college?’ Hal asked.

‘College of hard knocks.’

‘Do you know,’ said Hal, ‘that you’re insulting a Harvard man?’

‘What’s that?’

‘A man who has studied at Harvard.’

‘Don’t know any jerk town named Harbard. Me — I’m from New York—biggest city in the world. And I’ve come here to get my pay.’

‘Pay for what?’

‘Helping save your silly snow house.’

‘You didn’t turn a finger to save anything. The Eskimos helped —just to be friendly —and they wouldn’t take a cent. But I’ll pay you to get rid of you.’ He pulled out a five-dollar bill and slapped it into Zeb’s hand.

‘Five dollars,’ grunted Zeb. ‘It ought to be fifty.’

‘I’ll give you fifty —fifty punches —if you don’t get out.’ Soft-spoken Hal was really losing his temper.

Zeb went out with a final threat. ‘I’ll see you again —you four-flusher.’

There was a shot. Hal was out at once. Nanook, who had been sleeping in the lee of the igloo, was on his feet growling. The rascal had tried to kill their pet bear. Hal and Roger felt Nanook’s hide. There was only a scratch near the neck.

Zeb was gone. He was so poor a shot that even a target as huge as a 1,000-pound bear had lost only a few hairs.

Chapter 5

Who Cares about a Caribou?

The boys cared when one day a caribou came sliding down the hill behind the igloo, broke the wall and fell in.

A caribou in the house! That was just too much.

Was it bad luck or good luck? Dad had asked the boys to get a caribou. And now one had been delivered to them.

The caribou belongs to the deer family. He is sometimes called the northern deer. But he differs from the deer we are used to. He doesn't have lovely brown eyes, and he's not gentle and friendly.

This one began thrashing about wildly. For some reason, he didn't feel at home in an igloo. His magnificent antlers ploughed into the kettle, the lamps, the pans, the dishes, and sent them all flying.

'Let's get out of here, quick,' said Hal.

They got out, but not before they learned that the sharp horns of the caribou don't feel too good when they penetrate tender parts of the human body.

To the caribou this was not a home but a prison which he would tear to bits. He was dangerous at both ends—he had his horns in front and his heels behind.

The caribou is famous for his kick. It can kill, and has killed many interfering animals including the two-legged kind that call themselves men.

'He'll rip the igloo to pieces,' Hal said.

He was not exaggerating. The horns were tearing down the snow blocks on one side of the igloo and those terrible heels were turning the other wall into snow-dust.

The noise of clashing pots and pans brought Eskimos to see what was going on. Among them was Olrik.

'Why did you put him in the igloo?' Olrik wanted to know.

'We didn't invite him,' Hal said. 'He invited himself. What do you do in a case like this?'

'Darned if I know,' said Olrik. 'That's one thing Harvard didn't teach us.'

Zeb arrived. He knew just what to do. He sneaked in over the fallen blocks of snow and grabbed the caribou's stubby tail. At once the beast kicked Zeb in the stomach and sent him soaring ten feet away to land on a sharp rock. Zeb bent double, clutching his midriff and whimpering like a baby. He complained to Hal.

‘You’ve got to pay me for this.’

The fellow always wanted money for doing nothing.

Hal didn’t answer. He couldn’t waste time on a crybaby.

The igloo was now completely ruined. The caribou plunged out straight for the boys. Hal seized the horns and was lifted eight feet off the ground. Down he came but he still hung on. There were plenty of horns to go round, so Olrik and Roger took hold and brought the animal to a standstill.

Zeb, holding his stomach with one hand and a whip in the other, said, ‘I’ll teach the brute.’

As the whip came down Roger caught it and pulled it out of Zeb’s hand.

‘You interfering upstart,’ Zeb cried. ‘What do you know about wild beasts?’

‘Not much,’ Roger said. ‘But I know a whip is no good if you want to calm down a terrified animal.’

Still holding a horn with one hand he used his other hand to stroke the neck of the excited animal and he spoke sweet nothings into a big ear. He kept this up for a good ten minutes, stroking, speaking softly.

It was the old Roger magic. The animal had given up struggling. His eyes were fixed upon the boy. After all, he was just a boy and not worth killing. And he didn’t seem to mean any harm.

It was lucky for Roger that it is not difficult to tame a caribou. Thousands of them have been tamed by the Eskimos of northern Canada and Greenland. They have been harnessed and can pull a plough or a wagon as well as any horse or ox. In fact they are much better than an ox. One caribou can draw a sledge with two men on it at a speed of up to eighteen miles an hour. To become tame, all they need is a little understanding.

Roger noticed that the caribou’s feet were as big as soup plates.

‘That’s so he can walk on snow without sinking in,’ Olrik said.

‘What’s that funny flat bone that looks like a shovel just above his upper lip?’ Roger asked.

Olrik replied, ‘That’s exactly what it is —a shovel. He uses it to push the snow out of his way so he can get at the lichen underneath. For most of the year lichen is his only food.’

‘What is lichen?’

‘It’s something that will grow where nothing else will grow. It doesn’t even have to have soil. It will grow on rocks. It’s sometimes called reindeer moss because it’s a little like moss, and all members of the deer family including the caribou consider it a good food. It keeps on growing even under snow. It never grows large, not over a few inches. Some Eskimos eat it —I’ve eaten it myself. It’s not half bad.’

‘Dad told us to get one of these caribou,’ Hal reminded his brother. ‘He said it was the best friend of

the Eskimos. It gives them most everything they need. Their warmest blankets are caribou hide, and their shoes can be made of it because it's strong. Its blood makes a good soup. They cut open the stomach to get the moss—they think it's as lovely as cake. The caribou provides them with meat, cheese, clothes, tents, buckets and bedding. In northern Canada the caribou have been the chief support of Eskimos for thousands of years. Clothes made from caribou hide are as warm as toast. You've got this one feeling pretty good, so I think it's time to take it to the airport.'

The great animal, nine hundred pounds of bone and muscle, was led by the horns a mile to the airfield where it was placed in a box-car. After a few more animals were added the box-car would be mounted on an airplane, which would then be called a skyvan and would take off on a night flight to Long Island.

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