



THE OBSTINATE ONE

A SHORT STORY BY
ANDREW LEVKOFF

The Obstinate One

A Short Story by

Andrew Levkoff

Copyright © 2016 Andrew Levkoff

All rights reserved.

Peacock Angel Publishing LLC

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover photograph of a Noatak Inuit, taken in 1929 by Edward S. Curtis.

Cover design by the author.

The Obstinate One

“Deny the existence of a ghost and it will only grow bigger.”

— Greenlandic proverb

August 27, 2042
Ilulissat, Greenland

“Tukkujaq, take the liver,” Pakkak said to her daughter.

Pakkak Hansen pressed a paper towel to her damp forehead. A breeze ruffled the old blue and white valances on the kitchen’s open windows. From the drying racks just outside came the tang of halibut hung over the crosspieces like Dali clocks. The Hansen house, plain and powder blue, sat above the harbor, two streets away from the Inuit Art Museum. None of the Hansens had ever visited there.

Pakkak and Tukkujaq squatted on the kitchen floor. Between them, on a large, flattened corrugated box, the carcass of a ringed seal lay on its back, its speckled underbelly split from chin to flippers.

The kitchen was spare, but tidy. An old boom box sat silently on a stool. Crayon masterpieces by Tukkujaq’s four-year-old daughter, Qivi, smothered the refrigerator. A wobbly table covered by a checkered plastic tablecloth was weighted by a coffee mug filled with wildflowers. Tacked to the wall behind the table, a calendar pictured a red and white Air Greenland Dash-12 flying over the ice sheet.

As their people had for generations, the Hansens were cleaning their catch. Malik, Tukkujaq’s husband and Qivi’s father, had shot the seal before dawn at the mouth of the

icefjord. Then he had rushed home to board a Royal Greenland shrimp trawler before seven. By now he was out past Disko Bay.

“I don’t like it,” Pakkak said. “He’s working too many hours.”

Tukkujaq shrugged and without looking at her mother said, “Bills.” With her bone-handled *ulu*, a broad, curved knife shaped like an eye, she parted organs in the glistening, pungent corpse. “The dogs are gone, can’t ride the ice anymore, and no one wants our sealskins. There’s less of everything except bills. Bills we got plenty of.” She cut a dripping, dark red slice of liver for her mother and one for herself. Soon, their faces and hands were smeared with blood. They licked their fingers and laughed at the mess they’d made, then went back to butchering the meat.

“I miss Qivi,” Tukkujaq said.

“Someday we’ll all go there together.”

Qivi’s grandfather, Oqina, had taken Tukkujaq’s daughter to Nuuk to show her off to cousins who had moved to the capital. The trip was a special fourth birthday gift.

“Hear that?” Tukkujaq asked, looking up.

Pakkak grunted as she got to her feet and went to the east window. The escarpment blocked her view of the icefjord, but the sound was definitely coming from the direction of the glacier. She strained to listen. It was like all the voices of the earth whispering at once, faint and far away.

Pakkak returned to the floor and picked up her own *ulu*. “Strange,” the old woman said. “Sounds like wind, but not wind. I don’t like it.”

“You don’t like anything.” They returned to their work until Tukkujaq said, “It’s getting louder.”

Pakkak went back to the window. She gasped and her *ulu* clattered to the linoleum.

“What’s happening?” Tukkujaq yelled, starting to stand.

“Stay there!” Pakkak snapped. She skidded down on the floor by her daughter.

“What are you doing?” Tukkujaq fought against her mother. “What *is* that?!” A howling thunder obliterated her words. Damp, cold air sprayed in through the open windows. A gull shot into the kitchen and crashed into the far wall, breaking its neck. Tukkujaq screamed and let herself be clutched by Pakkak.

The house shook. Plates smashed to the floor.

Pakkak pressed her daughter’s head into her shoulder. She shut her eyes and shouted, “Don’t you let go of me.”

•••

The little town of Ilulissat was home to the Hansen family. The village sat 220 miles above the Arctic Circle at the base of a 10,000-foot-thick sheet of ice three times the size of Texas. For millions of years, this monstrous slab had obscured all but the coastline of the largest non-continental island on the planet. Early in that summer of 2042, Greenland’s ice sheet did something it had never done in untold millennia—it began to fail.

A string of meltwater lakes formed on the ice sheet’s surface. By August, some were twenty miles wide and hundreds of feet deep. Their dark blue surfaces stained the grey/white of the ice, absorbing the sun’s heat instead of reflecting it away. Rivers of meltwater scrambled to find a way down and out. Moulins, bottomless crevasses, opened up in a ragged arc sixty miles long. The ice sheet had become soft, rotten, riddled with holes. When these sinkholes formed beneath meltwater lakes, tens of millions of gallons

of water drained within hours. Lubricated by warmer water sluicing along its base, an island of ice forty miles square and as tall as the Empire State Building lifted up and out. When the water burst from beneath the glacier's tongue, this enormous slab of frozen time collapsed upon itself.

Not even the scientists had believed it could happen so fast. The data kept outpacing their predictions, and all these educated men and women could do was revise their forecasts of catastrophe and raise the volume of their alarmed voices. And it wasn't as if there hadn't been any warning—at the beginning of the 21st century, an island of ice the size of Manhattan had broken off the front of the glacier, a spectacular display witnessed by few. It barely made the news.

It was 2:16 in the afternoon of August 27th. Ilulissat's gaily painted houses speckled the dull hillside with splashes of turquoise, sun yellow, mint and carmine, quaint and unsuspecting. There were over four thousand people in the town that day. Little Qivi's father, Malik, was miles away, shrimping, and Qivi was with her grandfather in Nuuk, Greenland's capital.

Around the world, scientists recorded a 7.1 earthquake as iceberg after iceberg tipped over, their submerged bases smashing so hard into the glacier's tongue they momentarily stopped the forward movement of the ice. The collapse continued for a day and a night.

The center of this towering mass disintegrated into the ten-mile-wide trench into which the Jakobshavn Glacier drained. The sides of its broken walls that could not fall into the icefjord were pushed up onto its banks into jumbled fortresses of white and blue. Mountainous icebergs that had run aground in the shallower parts of the fjord were jolted from their anchorage and swept downstream by a cresting mélange of ice rubble and

freezing water over a hundred feet tall.

The narrow trough into which the glacier disintegrated was 5,000 feet deep. When the ice collapsed, the energy it released was concentrated and compounded by the constraining trench. The tsunami accelerated as it raced along the icefjord toward Disko Bay and Ilulissat. Auks and petrels fled shrieking before the wave.

Qivi's mother and grandmother were the only ones at home when their house was swept away in an explosion of water and ice. For twenty miles along the frigid water's edge, all the coastal villages, including Ilulissat, were razed to their foundations.

•••

People mourned the world over, but within two years, Greenland's parliament had issued forty new mining permits. Decades of unemployment, poverty and emigration were abruptly reversed. The newly exposed bedrock held more promise than any gold mine.

For generations, 97 percent of the world's available rare earth elements had been mined and exported by one nation—China. These precious metals were found in every miniaturized component, every flat-screen TV, every cell phone, every hybrid car, every computer—almost every piece of tech on the planet. Each of the United States' old F-35 fighter jets relied on half a ton of REE's in their glittering electronics. The newer warplanes used more. And all of it came from China. The irony was rarely discussed.

Under Greenland's ancient ice age mantel, the rare earth elements slumbered, enough to sate a quarter of the world's rapacious appetite. But because of the ice, men couldn't get at it.

The world was drooling over Greenland.

In 2047, five years after the disaster, Greenlanders passed a referendum declaring independence from Denmark. The money pouring in from the new mines meant that Qivi's homeland could finally shed the \$700,000,000 subsidy it received from Copenhagen, over half its annual budget. The Republic of Greenland was solvent, rich and overrun with foreigners.

...

September 20, 2055
GMEL Mining Town, 40 miles east of old Ilulissat

Grandfather washed. Qivi dried. The old hunter's face was as round and bright as a full moon. When he smiled, his eyes closed as if he were having a good dream.

At seventeen, Qivi was a full head taller than the tough little man. She wore jeans and a floppy sweatshirt, but each of her nails was meticulously painted a different color. A pristine Bosch dishwasher sat idle beneath a granite countertop. Outside, the long twilight of the Arctic deepened.

"Are you going to the dance tonight?" Oqina asked his granddaughter.

"I don't know." She bit her bottom lip. "If Inka goes, maybe. I don't like leaving you alone."

Oqina turned off the water. "You better learn."

Before dinner, Inka had texted her that *she* was going. But Qivi had been out three times already this week, once to the community center, once to the bars with Inka to play drinking games, and yesterday to another friend's for *kaffemik*, an open house celebrating the girl's brother's birthday. Everyone from their neighborhood had been there, but Grandfather's leg was hurting too much to go. She had brought back some *maktaa* for

him, but the cubes of whale skin and blubber were store-bought and had already dried out.

While Qivi put the dishes away, Oqina limped to the kitchen table, leaned his cane against a chair and sat down. He took out his pipe and began the ritual of filling and lighting it. He liked the smell of tobacco better than the taste, but he put up with one to get the other. “Besides,” he added, “last I heard, you’re my responsibility, not the other way around.”

Qivi raised her perfectly plucked eyebrows. “I thought I was my father’s job.”

“You’re everybody’s job.” Oqina pointed his chin at the sleek living room. The old house where his wife and daughter had died had been half the size of this palace. “Your father provides.”

“Anybody can make money these days,” Qivi said.

“Not anybody.” Oqina blew a curlicue of smoke and watched it dissipate. Old Way is like smoke. It hangs around for awhile, but wait a bit and it’s gone. That’s what smoke does. It’s supposed to disappear.

“I can’t talk to him. Pop’s not even here when he’s here.”

“His sled is packed full,” Oqina explained.

Qivi came over to her grandfather, bent down and kissed his cheek. “And there’s no room for you or me on it.”

“*Tuapak*, he’s trying.”

“I’m seventeen, Grandfather,” she said. “I’m not a ‘little pebble’ anymore.”

“You’re leaving for Copenhagen soon. Go have fun with your friends.”

“I’ve already been away from you too much,” Qivi said, but she was pulling her long

black hair into a ponytail and stuffing it through a pink scrunchie.

“Why are you taking that?” Oqina asked, pointing with his old Danish briar.

Qivi glanced at the trumpet case and shrugged. “I always take it.” She kissed him again and said, “Back by eleven. I laid out your pills.”

•••

The Hansen house stood at the end of a cul-de-sac in one of the fastest growing towns in Greenland, forty miles east of where the old Ilulissat had stood. This evening was moonless, thirty degrees and tranquil. Looking out from the front porch, Oqina saw the lights coming on in the high-rises looming over downtown. Most of the Chinese and Australians stayed there. He negotiated the steps, balancing with his cane. Avoiding the amber puddle illuminated by a streetlight, Oqina turned his back on the brightness. He passed the old sealskin stretched and framed on a rack that he’d hung on the side of Malik’s house when they’d first moved here. It looked forlorn and out of place in the circle of modern homes. “At least there’re no sidewalks,” Oqina had said when his son-in-law bought the place. “I’m not walking on any sidewalks.”

Behind the house, there was nothing but rock, the sluggish icefjord, and further away, the broken tongue of the Jakobshavn Glacier. 143 years earlier, this ancient frozen river had probably been the one that had loosed a smaller iceberg, one that had floated out past Ilulissat into Disko Bay, drifted down the Davis Strait, and just before midnight on the 12th of April, had crossed into the shipping lanes of the North Atlantic to embrace the RMS Titanic. That tragedy had befallen in a past so distant, no one perceived this as foreshadowing. Then the disaster of 2042 had ripped the land clean of this ‘chip’ from the ice wall’s mantle. For forty miles inland, it stripped naked what had previously lain

buried beneath a thousand feet of ice. What remained was exposed, vulnerable, alien.

Oqina opened the padlock to the shed. He thought of his lopsided family—like the antique, sinking ocean liner, everything was off true. He wondered how Malik did it. How had he adjusted so easily to this strange new world? Maybe some people are struck so hard by their lives they can no longer look back. All they can do is go forward, as if their past belongs to someone else. Malik was such a one. He had a present and a future. For Oqina, the past held everything worth looking at. Except for Qivi.

He flipped the light switch. Even stranded on sawhorses, the kayak he'd started building the day they'd moved here made him smile. There was that one seam where the sealskin had torn. "Pakkak," he said to himself, "you always sewed better than me." He'd patch it eventually. No rush.

Malik would be getting out of work soon. Oqina locked the shed and walked carefully over the scoured and undulating bedrock toward the mine.

It was good to be outside and feel the empty. The rocks, frozen waves of stone, were scarred with deep, crisscrossing fractures, like the back of a battle-scarred whale. Patches of magenta fireweed, their brilliance muted by the twilight, sprang from the cracks like blood. The air smelled new, as if he were the first person to breathe it.

Oqina stopped atop a small hillock ground smooth by the vanished ice, bending to pick a few crowberries. The bedrock at his feet was spattered with orange lichen. This buried land had come alive so fast!

The future was supposed to be happier, wasn't it? It didn't feel that way. The seas had risen five feet. People everywhere were scrambling inland. He felt bad for the ones who'd had to be evacuated, like those poor folks in the Maldives, but what could he do? Besides

the miners, nobody wanted to relocate here.

Oqina headed for the golden glow that rose like a counterfeit sunrise over the next hill. Above, the green and white curtains of the northern lights were stifled, as they were every evening, by the glare from the town and the open pit. Oqina tilted his head back and whistled, trying to make the lambent veils go faster. It didn't work. Well, maybe it did. It might have. He kept walking. In another two hundred yards, he would reach the fence capped with razor wire.

Suddenly, the mine's klaxons pierced the purpling sky. Oqina grimaced. He walked farther up the hill while the second warning sounded, and had almost reached the employee gate by the final alarm. From the vast crater beyond came a staccato of dull thumps that hurt his ears and rippled through his feet. Twenty fountains of dirt and debris shot past the rim of the hill and up into the sparkling air. Lit from below by the mine's amber floodlights, the smoke from the detonations glowed with false fire.

The shift siren wailed and the employee gate swung open. Dusty men surged out, laughing and talking. There was Malik.

"What are you doing here?" he asked as Oqina came up beside him.

"Thought you might like some company."

"Yeah, thing is.... I'm gonna grab a beer with the boys. Go home. You're going to break a leg out here." Malik headed off at a pace Oqina could not match.

Oqina watched him go. Something had broken in that boy after the women died. You could almost hear the crack and snap. By Qivi's sixth birthday, the role of father had gradually slid from Malik's shoulders to Oqina's, like summer ice lubricated by meltwater. He headed back, overheated and short of breath, shaking off his shame.

In less than a month, Qivi and her best friend, Inka, would be leaving for Copenhagen to study at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. Inka played cello. Classes didn't start till February, but Inka's parents had found an apartment for the both of them in Frederiksberg off the Old King's Road. Inka wanted to get to know the city before class started.

The furthest Qivi had ever traveled had been to the capital with Grandfather. That was thirteen years ago. Qivi would be the first in the family to see trees!

•••

There was a wall in the living room displaying many of the tools Oqina had lost in the disaster—harpoon, rolling stick, spears, bird sticks and a grinning whalebone *tupilak* on a leather necklace that contained the souls of his ancestors, a powerful talisman of protection. Except for the *tupilak*, the only possession of his that had survived, he'd remade them all.

At 11:20, Qivi came home from the dance. She found Grandfather sitting with a spear, holding it across his lap, staring at nothing. His hands matched the color of the wood.

“Your father's back,” he said without looking up.

“He is? How'd I miss him.”

“Not looking hard enough is my guess,” Malik said, striding out from the hallway. He was a big man of forty, with a thick moustache split by a scar from his shrimping days. His hands were tough as tools.

“Hej!” Qivi said. “How was work?”

“Hej, yourself. How's about getting your old man a 'brownie'?” He was standing no

further away from the fridge than his daughter. Why couldn't he get it himself?

"Sure," she said. She broke the seal on a plastic flagon of Australian beer and brought it to him. Malik gave her a quick nod, then emptied half the container in one go.

"Sassuma Arnaa, Mother of the Sea has turned her face from us," Oqina said almost to himself as he set the spear back in its wall brackets.

Malik dropped his head and cursed softly.

"The sea ice used to be three feet thick by the bay," Oqina continued. "Now you can almost break it apart with your boots."

Malik held up his security badge. "Greenland Minerals & Energy hasn't turned its face from me, and neither has Sassuma Arnaa. I make ten times what I made shrimping."

"You and me," Oqina said, "we measure what makes us smile with two different sticks. Hunting is the Inuit way."

"I hunt."

"Sure, weekends with your buddies. It's a hobby."

"I guess we measure what makes us smile with two different sticks."

Oqina had to grin. "Funny. Not what I'm talking about, though."

"I take care of us," Malik said, standing over his father on the couch. He sounded tired. "I'm doing the best I can." He finished his beer and belched quietly.

"I know you are." Oqina rubbed his flat, brown nose. "I guess now we're only allowed to be Inuit on Saturdays and Sundays."

"Snack?" Qivi said. She brought out a plate of seal chunks with a dipping sauce of ketchup and mayonnaise. She offered it to her father, who waved it away.

Oqina accepted a piece and swirled it in the sauce. "The past wasn't so bad. Seals had

enough sea ice to bear their pups. Walruses could rest. Polar bears had plenty of hunting ground. Everything fit.”

Malik sighed. “Yeah, well it still fits. Just not the way you want it to.”

“Remember when Ilulissat had more sled dogs than people?” Oqina asked. “Now the sea ice is too tricky for hunting. Can’t even cut holes in it for sealing. Folks used to get by selling surplus sealskins. Now they work in stores and eat Western food.”

“It’s different,” Malik said. “I get it. But it’s over, and it’s better. Speaking of which, if you don’t get rid of that old seal skin on the side of the house, I’m gonna stuff it into the garbage myself. It’s an embarrassment.”

“Think I’ll have a talk with Sassuma Arnaa,” Oqina said quietly. “Maybe she’ll put the ice back the way it was.”

Qivi said, “I don’t think so, Grandfather. They taught us in school. You know what albedo is? It’s how much sunlight is reflected off a surface, and how much is absorbed. It’s like a ratio or something. The ice’s been getting darker from dust and algae and soot from wildfires and corporations.”

“Like GMEL,” Oqina said.

“Sure, like GMEL,” Malik said. “It’s called progress, Dad. Welcome to 2055.”

“Achh.” Oqina waved a dismissive hand.

“Anyway,” said Qivi loudly, “the darker the surface becomes, the more heat it holds and the faster it melts. Then there’s the height of the ice sheet. It used to be 10,000 feet, but it’s thinner now, and the thinner it gets, the warmer the temperature is on the surface. So it melts even more, and gets even thinner. They’re feedback loops.”

Oqina said, “The ice is rotten.”

“So it’s rotten,” said Malik. “There’s nothing we can do about it. Just got to adjust and move on.”

“I suppose.” Grandfather chewed thoughtfully. “It’s kinda sad, though—we’re adjusting and moving ourselves out of our life.”

“When I come back from Denmark,” Qivi said, “I’ll get a job with the Greenland Symphony. It’ll be good. You’ll see.”

“I know it will, little pebble.”

“Waste of your money, Oqina,” Malik said. “You’ve got nothing left. What can she earn playing a trumpet, anyway?”

Oqina winked at Qivi. He swirled another piece of seal meat in the thick, pink sauce and popped it into his mouth.

•••

A week later, Qivi came home from orchestra practice to find a note on the front door. The hospital was a mile away. She hadn’t been on her bike since it had stopped being an emblem of cool, but she rode it now as fast as she could.

Her father was standing by the window in Oqina’s semi-private room. The other bed was empty.

“What happened?” Qivi whispered as she sat beside Oqina. A bandage covered his right eye and temple. Oqina felt her take his hand and opened his left eye. He saw her and smiled.

“It was nothing,” he said. “Pass me the water.” Qivi put the bent straw of a cup to his lips.

“He was mugged,” her father said.

“What!”

Oqina glared at Malik. “Don’t scare her.”

“I’m not scared,” she said.

Malik did not turn from the window. “Yeah. Some kids hassled him on his way back from the store. He got knocked down and hit his head on the curb.”

“The air in this place smells dead,” said Oqina. “Let’s go home.” He threw back his blanket.

“Not till the doctor says okay.” Qivi tucked him in again, then brought over the one chair in their half of the room and sat by Oqina’s side.

Malik said he had to get back to work. Qivi wanted to stay.

“Don’t you have to pack?” her father asked.

“I’m staying.”

“Suit yourself.” Malik left.

As soon as he was gone, Qivi asked, “What really happened?”

“It was an accident.”

“What was an accident?”

“Be a good girl and pass the water. I’ve got a story for you.”

“No. Not until you tell me.”

Oqina puffed air through his lips. “Your father and me had an argument over some sealskin. I lost my balance is all. Okay?”

“Wait! Did he hurt you?”

“No.” Oqina patted her hand. “Remember, *tuapak*, you only had a little time with your mother. Tukkujaq was your father’s only woman. It’s been hard on him.”

“What about you? You lost her, too. And you were with Grandmother years longer.”

“They’re still here,” he said, bumping his chest twice with a fist. “They’re with your father, too. But sometimes people lose someone close and it messes with their heart compass. Then they get lost, too. Understand?”

“Not really. He still has us.”

“He does. He knows he’s better for it, too.”

“I guess.”

Oqina ignored her doubtful look. “So, story. You ready?”

Qivi shrugged. “Sure. Just don’t make it about the Old Ones. Tell me one about Mother and Grandmother.”

“It kind of is.”

“Fine. What story that I’ve never heard at least ten times before are you going to tell me now?”

“Once there was a very Obstinate Man,” Oqina began. Qivi groaned theatrically. Oqina grinned. “Nobody in all the world was as obstinate as this hunter. No one dared come near him, because he always got his own way in everything. Like you.”

“Grandfather!”

“It came to pass that this Obstinate One’s wife was in mourning. Her little child had died, so she had to stay idle at home. Her husband did not mourn, but went about his business.

“And while she sat thus idle and in mourning, her husband, that Obstinate One, came in and said, ‘You must sew the skin of my kayak.’

“‘You know that I am not permitted to touch any kind of work,’ said his wife.

“You’ll do it. Bring it down to the shore and sew it there.”

“That guy’s a bastard,” Qivi said.

“Shh. And so the woman, for all her mourning, was forced to go down to the shore and sew the skin of her husband's kayak. Suddenly, a monster came up out of the sea—a monster in the shape of a dog!”

“A dog who lives under water,” Qivi smirked.

“Don’t make fun of the spirits, *tuapak*. They’re here to help us. Most of them, anyways. So then the dog says, ‘Why are you sewing, when you are still in mourning?’ He came toward her. His paws were the size of polar bear paws.” Grandfather raised both hands to stretch his fingers wide, shaking them for emphasis. He growled.

Qivi laughed. “That used to scare me, Grandfather.”

“There are some things,” he said, “it’s good to be afraid of. So, terrified, the wife told the dog of her husband. And the mighty dog sprang ashore and fell upon that husband.”

“I hope the dog kills him this time,” Qivi said.

“Hush. That Obstinate One was not ashamed. He drew his knife, expecting as always to get his way. And his way now was to kill the dog. So they fought together, and the dog monster was killed.

“But now the owner of the dog appeared, and he turned out to be the Moon Man.

“And he fell upon that Obstinate One, knocking the knife out of his hand. But that Obstinate One would not give way. He caught the Moon Man by the throat and began to strangle him. He clenched and clenched, and the Moon Man’s face turned red.

“The Moon Man gasped, ‘There will be no more ebb-tide or flood if you strangle me.’

“The Obstinate One did not care. He squeezed tighter.

“‘The seal will never breed again if you strangle me,’ cried the Moon Man.

“The Obstinate One squeezed and squeezed, though the Moon Man told him all the ways the world would change if he should die.

“‘There will never be dawn or daylight again if you kill me,’ said the Moon Man at last.

“At this the Obstinate One loosened his grip. He did not like the thought of living forever in the dark. He released the Moon Man.

“Then the Moon Man called his dog to life again, and made ready to leave that place.”

“And they all lived happily ever after. The end!”

“I’m not finished.”

“I know what happens, Grandfather. The Obstinate One visits the Moon Man on the moon and is never obstinate again.”

“That’s not how to tell it,” Grandfather said, folding his weathered hands in his lap.

“And the moral is, if people could see the Earth from the Moon, they’d behave better.”

“Maybe so.” Oqina coughed. “Listen, *tuapak*, I think I’m gonna take a little nap.”

“I’ll be here when you wake up.”

Oqina fell in and out of sleep. After half an hour, a nurse came in to check his vitals.

“I’ve come to a decision, Grandfather,” Qivi said after the woman had left.

“Sounds serious.”

“I’m not going to Copenhagen.”

Oqina looked at his granddaughter and weighed her conviction. “I will be very sad if you stay,” he said.

“I can go to school whenever.”

“The Old Ones would not be happy with such a selfish old man if I let you stay.”

“Well, they don’t have much say in the matter,” she said, standing then bending to kiss Oqina’s forehead.

He closed his eyes and thought awhile. At last he said, “Go with Inka to Copenhagen, see the city, get a feel for things out there. Come back next month and tell me all about it. Then you can go back before school starts.”

“Grandfather, it’s too much money.”

“If you still want to stay here after that, I won’t argue. At least you deserve a vacation. Right?”

Qivi was silent a moment, and searching her eyes, Oqina knew he had convinced her.

“C’mere,” he said. “Give me a hug.”

As they ended their embrace, he draped something about her neck.

“I can’t take this,” Qivi said, looking at the *tupilak* necklace. “It was Great-Grandfather’s.”

“And now it’s yours. You need some protection out there.”

“What about you?” she asked.

“I don’t need it anymore.”

“I’ll wear it *now*,” she said, “but only till I see you again.”

“Don’t be obstinate,” he said, grinning.

The following week, Qivi was on a plane to Copenhagen, giving Oqina the time he

needed.

•••

“I’ve come to pay my respects,” Oqina said as he maneuvered his kayak to the face of the glacier’s ice cliff. It was good to be on the water again. He had taken off his bandage because today of all days, he needed to see the world with both eyes. Good thing he’d kept his *tuilik* supple with grease. The sealskin jacket still fit snugly around the coaming of his craft. At least he wouldn’t drown.

Malik had made good his promise to throw out the sealskin frame, and Oqina had been foolish enough to try to stop him. The wood had splintered, and the old man had gashed his head. When he got home from the hospital, the first place he visited was the trash bin. What he needed was still there.

He felt the side of his kayak—the patch of sealskin was holding.

“Sassuma Arnaa, Mother of the Sea,” he said, “this is my place, between air and water.” In the early morning light, he chewed a piece of seal blubber. “I know you’ve been calling me home for awhile.” He looked into the depths. “But she’s needed me more than you. Anyway, I’m here now.”

The sun was rising behind him over the top of the glacier. The ice smelled sweet and clean. In the fjord, the tips of the tallest icebergs were turning pink. Above, the sky was startled awake by thin strokes of gossamer fire. Below, the waters pulsed with colors so pure and intense Oqina knew they must be more than reflection.

“Thank you, Mother,” he said. He pulled the hood back off his *tuilik*. It was going to be another warm day. Behind him, the ice cracked. He wouldn’t have to wait long.

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders of all photographs used in this book. In the event that any have been inadvertently overlooked, please contact me at [alevkoff at gmail dot com](mailto:alevkoff@gmail.com) so that the situation can be rectified in future editions.