

ALSO BY RAQUEL RIVERA
**Arctic Adventures: Tales from
the Lives of Inuit Artists**
illustrated by Jirina Marton

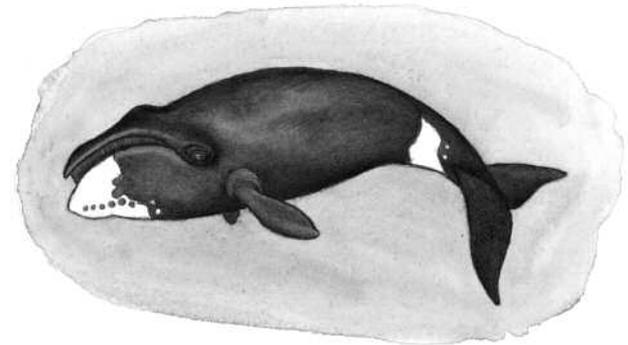
TUK AND THE WHALE

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Raquel Rivera

PICTURES BY
Mary Jane Gerber



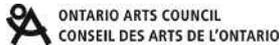
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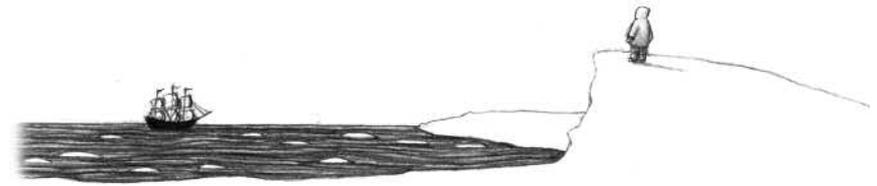
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GRANDFATHER suddenly stopped working.

He had been drilling holes through a flat piece of driftwood. Wood was a rare find. This piece would fill another gap between the sled runners of the family's kamotiq.

Now he sat perfectly still. His bow-drill stopped spinning.

Tuk watched while Grandfather slowly leaned back on his heels. Did the old man hear something? Tuk strained his ears. All he

could hear was the *whump-whump* of a raven's wings beating at the wind.

"They are here," said Grandfather. He went back to work, spinning the drill shaft deeper into the wood.

Tuk's eyes widened.

They are here! Just the way Grandfather had dreamed. Tuk had to see this. He jumped up and ran toward the beach, stumbling over the snow-covered rocks.

"Sure, go," Grandfather said to the air. "He's young. He gets excited."

Tuk climbed the crest that protected their camp from the wind. He reached the top and looked out over the bay.

There was the beach, cleared of snow by strong winds off the water. The sea ice stretched into the bay. It broke up into floes at the far edge.

Nothing unusual to see here. He waited a moment. Grandfather was hardly ever wrong.

There it was!

It looked like two great narwhal horns rising from the water, piercing straight through

the sky. Tuk squinted against the glare that bounced off the ice. Those flapping white skins must be the "sails" Grandfather had mentioned. He said they could be turned to catch the wind, or turned away when the wind was too fierce.

Next into view came the great hull. It was the biggest boat Tuk had ever seen. What kind of creatures would travel in such a large boat? They must be giants!

Tuk felt a chill.

"Mother!" he called, even though he knew she couldn't hear him. He turned and ran all the way back to camp.

Mother was outside the snowhouse. She was chewing on a scraped sealskin, making it soft enough to sew.

"Mother, when is Father coming back?" Tuk gasped as he reached her side.

"The light is still strong," she replied. "He may return today."

"Because the boat is coming! The boat that Grandfather dreamed about! I can see it already. Tomorrow it will be here!"

Mother put down the skin, but her mouth stayed open. She stood up, looking this way and that.

“Unat,” Mother called out for Tuk’s sister. “Where are you? You know I don’t like you to run off alone!”

“I’m just here, Mother!” Tuk’s little sister was on the other side of the iglu’s entry porch, playing with a rock. She had tied a rabbit skin around it to make a baby doll.

Mother turned back to Tuk. “And you, did you leave your grandfather by himself, when he needs your help?”

“Don’t worry, Mother, the boat won’t be here for a while. It is still far away.”

“No, it is not far away,” Mother said half to herself. She looked toward the coast. “I wish your father would return,” she murmured.

“I’m going to find Samik. He’ll want to see this!” Tuk told her.

“I want to come!” Unat called, looking up from her doll.

Tuk turned to Mother, who said, “Keep

her with you. Make sure she comes back. I want her staying with us tonight.”

Unat had a good friend in every iglu, and she often slept away from home. Even Maakut, who was a camp elder, sometimes invited Unat to stay. But Unat’s favorite place was her best friend Ooleepeeka’s iglu.

Ooleepeeka had two mothers. Her father was such a good hunter that he needed two wives to take care of the skins. So Ooleepeeka lived with more brothers and sisters than anyone Tuk and Unat knew. When it was too dark and cold to play outside, there were always games and songs in Ooleepeeka’s iglu.

Tuk’s best friend in camp was Samik.

Samik was the youngest in his family, about the same age as Tuk. His mother and father were quite old now. His brothers and sisters had husbands, wives and children of their own.

“Come on, Unat, I know where we can find him,” Tuk said. Samik would be somewhere along the river with his throwing

bones. Sometimes he brought back a ptarmigan or a rabbit.

Unat was out of breath. It was hard to keep up with her brother's big steps in the snow.

"Tuk, why does the boat come to bother us?"

"Don't be scared of the boat," Tuk said. "Remember Grandfather's dream? He said a great skinless boat will appear from over the sea. And it will leak out treasures from the land of things."

"Yes, but what does that mean?"

"I don't know," Tuk admitted. "But Grandfather would tell us if there was anything to be scared about, right?"

"I guess," Unat said. But she didn't sound so sure.

Tuk didn't say it, but he wasn't so sure, either.

The children's thoughts were soon interrupted by distant shouts of laughter. They looked at each other. Samik wasn't hunting, not with all that shouting. He must have gone sliding!

Unat let out a whoop and ran toward the noise. Tuk followed.

Samik and Ooleepeeka were flying down over the snow humps and boulders of Steep Hill. They rode on the skin of a bearded seal. It made sliding so much faster. They tumbled off it as they reached the bottom.

"I want to go next!" Unat shouted as soon as she reached them. But Ooleepeeka's big sister Arna was waiting her turn.

"Unat, you're too little to slide Steep Hill," Arna said.

"I am not! I'm almost as big as Ooleepeeka!"

"Forget the hill," Tuk said. "The boat, the great boat is coming into the bay! Grandfather said it would, and now it has come!"

The group ran over crusty snow and rocky ground. They crept up the crest. They peered over the ridge.

"Oooooe," breathed Samik. "How many people must fit in that boat?"

"Grandfather dreamed that it is not a boat

full of people. He thinks it is mostly empty,” said Tuk. “He says they want to fill it.”

“Fill it with what?” Ooleepeeka asked. Tuk shrugged.

“My father says we should stop the boat when it comes,” Samik said. “It should go somewhere that is empty, like we did. Father says we should fight and drive it away. After all,” he added, “that boat brings strangers.”

Samik was right. Strangers couldn't be trusted. They weren't related by blood, or by marriage. They didn't bring news of friends and family in other camps. They could take things, break things — even hurt people. It was easy for strangers to do bad things to people because they didn't know anyone. And they could always just leave again.

Tuk and the others stayed under the shelter of the ridge after that. They threw stones to see who could throw the farthest. Every so often someone would climb up to make sure that the boat was still far out in the bay.

The days were so long now. It was almost never dark. Nobody slept much during this time. The sun kept them all awake.

Finally, the daylight dipped behind the hills. When it was too dark to see the frosty breath in front of their faces, everyone began to get cold and tired.

Maybe their fathers had come back from hunting. Maybe they had caught seals.

“Let's go,” Tuk nudged Unat, whose face kept dropping into the fluffy trim on her parka. “You are falling asleep on your feet.”

Everyone started back, guided home by the camp snowhouses. Each iglu glowed like a moon in the blue night. The qulliit were lit. Even if there was no meat, they would soon be snug and warm.

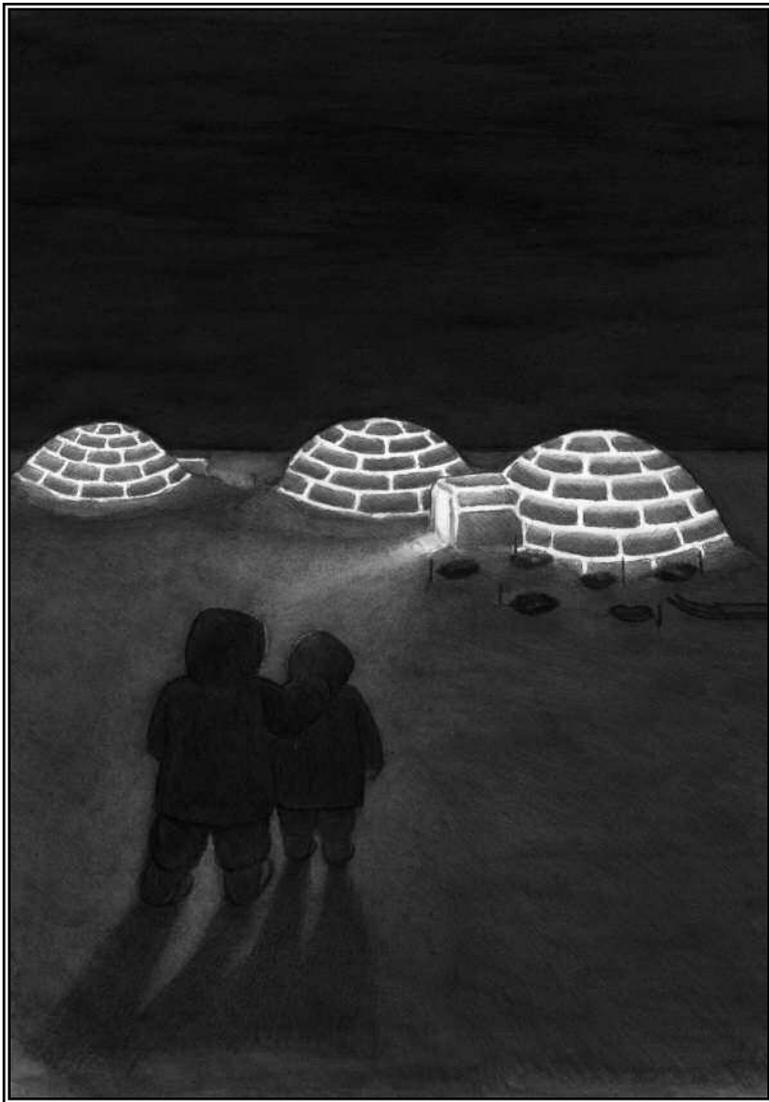
As Tuk and his sister neared their home, he saw humps in the snow drifts.

“The dogs!” Tuk whispered.

“Father's back!” Unat cried.

“Shhh!” Tuk hushed her, pointing toward the bright iglu. He could hear several voices.

They had visitors. Surely the grown-ups



had gathered to decide what should be done about the strange boat in the bay.

In the dark outside, Tuk spoke softly into Unat's ear.

"Stay quiet as we go in. Head straight for the sleeping platform. Don't say anything."

Children weren't really supposed to listen to conversations between their elders. But Tuk was almost grown now. He didn't want Unat's baby ways to get them both sent away.

The two of them skirted around the dogs. Father had tied them separately to keep them from fighting. One or two looked up, but they didn't bark. They knew the two children creeping past.

Tuk eased Unat's small form into the main room, guiding her quietly toward the back. He knew that the grown-ups were aware of their entrance. He just hoped that they couldn't be bothered to interrupt themselves and send them to another igloo.

"Your dream says they are not evil spirits," said a low voice, Samik's father. "They

are ordinary men — just Qallunaat. We can drive them away. We have done this before. The stories say so.”

Samik’s father crossed his arms, tucking his hands up into his sleeves. “What about the time those strangers raided the camp at Bloody Point? What about that story? And don’t forget the story about the curious hunter who paddled too close. The Qallunaat pulled him right out of the water into their great boat, his kayak still attached! No one ever saw the hunter again. We should get them — before they get us.”

“There are other stories,” Maakut’s son said. “Stories of peaceful trading and friendship.” Long ago, Maakut had adopted her nephew’s baby. Now that he was a young hunter, Maakut’s son could feed his adoptive mother, as she had fed and cared for him.

“That is right,” Grandfather replied. “We know those stories, too. The dream said that we should help the strangers from the great boat.”

“But why, Arvik?” asked Maakut. “Are they too many to fight?”

Of all the grown-ups in camp, Maakut was the only one older than Grandfather. It was right that she be the one to question him.

“They are many,” Grandfather admitted. “And they have no women or children to feed and protect. It is better for our families if we don’t fight. The dream said that they would ask for help and, if we help them, they will go away again.”

“We are busy. And we need our food for ourselves,” Ooleepeeka’s father pointed out.

“That is true. But they bring their own provisions from far away. In that respect, they can take care of themselves.” Grandfather had an answer for everyone.

“If we share our meat, maybe they will share, too,” Maakut mused.

Samik’s father was still. They would do as Grandfather said.

During her research on Inuit artists, living and deceased, Rivera collected these four stories: Pudlo Pudlat recalls his nephew's being stuck on an ice floe as it floated out to the ocean; Jessie Oonark tells of Talelayu, the goddess of the sea; Kenojuak Ashevak describes the life of an Inuit artist. Discover the world's research. The Arctic is home to a circumpolar community of native people whose culture and traditions have enabled them to thrive in what most would perceive as a totally inhospitable and untenable environment. In many ways, sea ice can be viewed as the glue that binds these northern communities together; it is utilized in all aspects of their daily life. Sea ice acts as highways of the north; indeed, one