

THE SONG OF THE WHITE LAND

Jean Bédard

Richard Clark, translator

2016

This *Song of the Land* is inspired by the story of Jens Haven, of the Moravian Brethren, and of Mikak, an Inuit woman of Labrador. Their meeting could have changed the subsequent history of the world...

To all the peoples who have the paid the price for our shipwrecked loves.

LEXICON

AMUTI: women's traditional coat.

ANGAKKUQ: shaman.

APUT: coat of snow.

INUMARIK: outstanding Inuit hunter, capable of surviving in solitude for a long period.

INUKSHUK: human-shaped figure of stones serving as a landmark.

INUKTTITUT: the Inuit language.

JUSUSI: "Jesus" in Inuktitut.

KABLUNAT: stranger, usually European.

KATAJJAQ: traditional throat song in which two women respond to each other.

KOMATIK: sled mounted on two runners.

KUDLIK: lamp carved from stone in which animal fat burns on a moss wick.

NANGIARNEK: vertigo, dull anxiety which seizes the lone kayaker when fog mixes everything up.

UMIAK: boat with a frame made of wood and whalebone, capable of transporting several people, usually women.

PAAK: igloo entrance.

QARMAT: hut made of skins, stones, poles and earth.

SEDNA: mistress of aquatic animals.

TORNAQ: spirit who assists an angakkuq.

TORNGAT: free spirit, often evil.

TORNGARSOAK: the first Bear, who exercises an influence on all the worlds.

ULU: half-moon shaped knife with an ivory handle, used to scrape as well as cut, and given to girls at puberty.

UUMMAT: heart, in the sense of an all-embracing universal sensitivity.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

MIKAK: Inuit woman captured by the English. She will serve as interpreter and guide for the Moravian Brethren.

JENSINGOAK: Jens Haven, Moravian Brother, explorer.

MORAVIAN BRETHERN: Christian community whose origins go back to the reformer Jan Hus. They draw their inspiration from the great pedagogue and philosopher of universal democracy, Comenius. The community was persecuted as much by the Catholics as by the Protestants. The Brethren established missions, notably in Greenland and Labrador.

Christian Andreas Schlözer, Stephen Jensen, Christian Drachart, Joseph Neissen, William Turner, James Rhodes, James Lister, Peter Lehmen, Christoph Brasen, John Schneider.

NERKINGOAK: Mikak's father.

SEGULLIAK: angakkuq (wise man) in Mikak's family group.

NUTARRAK: Mikak's first husband.

TOOTAK: son of Mikak and Nutarrak.

TUGLAVINA: Segulliak's brother and Mikak's second husband.

SORLARK: daughter of Mikak and Tuglavina.

KARPIK: teenager captured with Mikak and taken to England.

FRANCIS LUCAS: captain who teaches Mikak English.

NATTORALIQ: cousin and, for a while, companion of Mikak.

MARY BUTTERWORTH: Jens Haven's wife.

PROLOGUE

"If life is a necklace of seashells, where is the beginning? No doubt in the knot connecting the two ends. But there are several ends and several knots, for there are broken moments, and they are not all easy to put together again. Do you want to know what an Inuit is? Before him, everything is scattered. After him, bones, sculpures, and seashells are solidly attached, and the one who sees the necklace starts to tremble..."

My grandfather paused to make sure that I had considered well what he had just said. He didn't speak very often. That day, he knew that he was going to speak, for he had thrown me a sideways glance, had sat down on his favorite stone and smiled like someone cutting up a fat bearded seal.

"A long time ago", he continued, "in the beginning of winter, toward the end of the night, even before I had woken up, I found myself behind a sled pulled by three dogs. I was standing up on the komatik's runners, in the driver's place. How had I gotten there? I still don't know: I was barely beginning to wake up and look around me.

"I was going along the beautiful Black River. At that time, it was still twisting between sheets of ice, struggling with winter. But it was writhing with hunger, I even think that it was hunger that had grabbed me by the collar and thrown me behind the sled even before I woke up.

"I was going in the direction of the current. I began to think of my baby brother. I recalled that at the moment of my departure he was sleeping on Mama's chest, one ear on the breast, the other on the lookout. The whole family was sleeping. But he seldom slept..."

"The sled's shaking opened my eyes and my memory. The wind was whipping my face. The dogs were pulling out of rage. They wriggled their muzzles in the icy air. They didn't detect the slightest scent. Paws gripping the aput, they went onward with thrusting hips, but their noses weren't in it.

"I looked around me. We weren't very far, though, from the cache of a big catch of fish that I had made at the end of the summer with my father. Mother had no more milk. The storm had lasted too long. I had to go look for the fish and return immediately.

"The moon cracked the sky, and the stars broke against each other. It was cold. My lungs burned. The mountains sunk their heads between their shoulders, but the plateau had grown calm. We were in a circle brushed smooth that let us pass, but all around us we heard the yelling of the maniacs of the wind.

"How did I end up there? Likely a calm spell had pricked up my ears. It had led me outside without a sound. I had harnessed three dogs while pulling the silence behind me. If we had awoken anyone, they would have prevented us from leaving. Hunger was sleeping on them like a pile of stones.

"The dogs and I were going against the wind, against death, and when you go in that direction, you become hard and stiff. Will against will. You resent those who go to sleep, who let themselves be swept away, who let themselves go on the chest of the greatest of pleasures...

"Looking that way was out of the question. The storm was gaining ground. The ice was trying to catch the dogs' paws, but they ran with light small steps, barely touching the ground, they skipped like drops of water on a burning stone. They were seeking their way, but there was no scent. It was the cold that made them run. The Black River's convulsions were showing the way to the cache. The dogs followed without smelling anything.

"Now, the wind had picked up with a will. It had stopped laughing, it cracked its knuckles as it closed its fists. I clenched my teeth. It boxed my ears. It built up muscle on me; I, on my side, built up bone against it. It wanted my skin; I sliced its flesh with my body-knife. The wind could care less, it was putting itself together again from every side at the same time. I didn't even see the dogs any more. The North was throwing sleet as hard as sand in my face. I banged against it. I grew rigid. It wasn't me who was going to give in.

"I burst out laughing, because for a moment I saw myself from a distance, stuck standing up on the back of the sled's runners. Seen from so far away, lashed by the sleet, against the background of snow, I resembled a virile member. My spleen skipped in my throat, for I saw my desire to live raring to go.

Grandfather stopped. His gaze swept the ground, then bounced back on me. He made sure I understood who I was, I, Mikak, Nerkingoak's nubile daughter. Did I know the price of my existence?

I burst out laughing. The laugh of an embarrassed child, as timid as that of a little girl who wants to cry. Grandfather turned his eyes toward me. He touched a drop of water that had formed on the corner of my eye. He looked around. Ancestors had drawn near. He continued:

"Dying was out of the question before I reached the piece of rope that was fleeing ahead of me. I was going against the wind, gusts were spitting on me. The snow was peppering my face with sparks. It was running, gesticulating like a crazy woman. It was erasing everything in its nervous sweeping. There were no more rivers, no more mountains, no more rocks, no more colors, no more forms.

"The whiteness crumbles everything. Nothing is dark any more. Shadows try to get out of the whiteness in order to enlighten us, make the world appear, connect us, point out the passage, but the whiteness swallows them, and we are snow in the wind.

"Not a single form emerged any more. Every scent had disappeared. Noises were swept away by the whistling. There might be a pack of wolves there, just two steps away; there would have had to have been a collision for us to discover them facing us, just as surprised as ourselves. The whiteness... Everything is white, invisible, odorless, soundless, and this is finally what devours us. We are in the stomach of the bear. We struggle. We build our bones. But it digests us, in the end.

"I didn't want this. I was going against the storm. The cold hardened my will. I pushed the komatik, burning coals at the end of my fingers. The dogs pulled. The whiteness erased them. I no longer saw them, but they were pulling in the same direction, in a closed fan. They must be slipping their muzzles under the snow, following a current.

" 'Aiee, Aiee!' I shouted at the dogs in order to persuade myself.

"I clearly sensed that they weren't smelling anything. They were going ahead in order not to die. A drum began to play like thunder then in the emptiness of my mind. My heart dug into my bones in order to stay alive. My ears resounded in my beating head. There was a shaking in my chest. The birds of my memory were flapping their wings to depart.

"I refused to think. Then, in a flash, I knew that the cache had been robbed by a bear, that there was nothing left, that the storm had erased the last vestiges of the scent... I knew it, but understanding it was out of the question. That's the way it is: what we know, we don't understand, for if we did understand, our feet wouldn't walk, our hearts wouldn't beat, the drum wouldn't knock on our bones.

"So I silenced every one of my certainties, leaving in my mind only the greatest of improbabilities: to survive. If life runs with certainty to death and wants to rest there, the hunter goes in the opposite direction, against death. Another obvious fact was shouting in my mind, even stronger than death, and I erased it too from my thoughts: I would not return, a hunter never returns empty-handed. But understanding such truths was out of the question. Like the river, I saw nothing, but I went straight ahead. And then the dogs stopped. But maybe they had stopped a long time ago! Who could know? The wind blocked the view with all the snow it found. The moon was lost in its own paleness.

"My feet were stamping in place to warm me and I was no longer going forward. I knew that I hadn't been going ahead for quite a while, I knew that the dogs, already too thin, had gone away into the arms of the wind. This was another truth.

"My own father spoke to me then, I heard him in my drum, as real as a storm: "Eat your lead dog. Don't give in. Keep on until the next shell. May your bones take root in the rocks and may men come and tremble before your children and your grandchildren." I ate the dog. And the wind cried, "Live, you stubborn fool! Live!" I was now alone on my side of the world, lost in the whiteness. Without the slightest desire to keep on.

"I walked. I advanced. At least, I had the vague impression that I was. The wind had broken time into dust... There was no longer any before. There was no longer any after. I walked. My mother was no more, my father was no more, my brother was no more.

"I walked. I was alone in the white, absolutely alone and already white with cold. I no longer existed. I sprang out, one step at a time, from my decision to go on. Each step was a decision. And each of my decisions took form: one foot, then the other, one leg, then the other, one thigh, then the other... I went out from my decisions like a bear goes out of its cave in the spring, claws extended, teeth planted in inaccessible meals.

"Because my situation was desperate, I was losing nothing to attempt one new step, and then another. I no longer had any pain. If I had felt one, even just a tiny one, I would have hoped for a deliverance. But I had nothing to relieve. I had nothing to pursue. If I had had one thing to pursue, even if it were a tiny little fish hidden far away, I would have hoped. I had always hoped for something... But I didn't know it.

"Now that all my sufferings and desires had been removed, I wasn't necessary any more, I could disappear without anyone wrinkling their brow. So I went out of myself like a light beams out from the moon, for nothing, for the pleasure of adding myself to the world one moment more, to crawl a little further, to make a little longer mark. I was going to keep on this way as much as I could. Alone.

"For a moment, I wanted to panic. But I didn't know how to panic any more. I started from the blackest white, and from the white one breath came out, then another, one step, then another.

"The wind began to pant. It had had enough of wrestling with me. In wrestling with me, it gave me body. The snow had trouble getting back its breath. For long intervals, it allowed me to see very far ahead of me: mountains. Nearer also: a hill in the form of a crescent moon. In the kindly hollow of that hill: my maternal uncle's family.

"My uncle, seeing me first, had already harnessed his dogs. He ran toward me, shouting and laughing. "An inumarik!" He was right: an enormous blizzard was dying behind me and I was coming out of it alive. Then his wife added fat to her kudlik to warm up a piece of seal."

I am old now. My grandfather died a long time ago, and my father also. I am an Inuit, because I know who my grandfather is. But am I still that at the moment I am speaking? No one wants to remember the old times any more. Except for you, the raven, turning around me with your broken wing. You, you listen to me. I am going to speak to you about nangiarnek, the vertigo my grandfather conquered.

Listen... a hunter slips into his kayak. The sea is oil, but it undulates. He heads toward the open ocean, for he has seen a whale's round back. Fog descends, and the hunter finds himself caught in a milky whiteness. He doesn't see anything any more. Black and white are the same. The sea

undulates, but he no longer has any point of reference. High and low, right and left, front and behind, he doesn't recognize them any more because the line of the horizon has been drowned in the fog. Worry mounts. Inner and outer get tangled up.

At some point, the hunter feels the animal brush against his kayak on the left. So he leans to the right to regain equilibrium. But there is no horizon, and the animal hasn't even swung its tail. The man then realizes that he himself has upset his kayak.

It is thus that fear itself produces its weapon. We struggle against our phantoms.

This morning, I stretched my necklace out on the snow, in the middle of the frozen lake, and I tried to remember the story. I wanted to recapitulate my life in order to place the horizon back on its line and put my pieces back together. An old raven came to look at what I was doing; he limped with his wing. How was it that I was reduced to telling my story to this old raven? What happened to me? Where are my people?

THE ENCOUNTER

The three-master

It was summer. The flies were devouring us, we went out into the islands to search for a little wind. The kayak and the umiak put distance between us and the mosquitoes. We kept an eye on the rocks the seals climbed on, we watched for the blowing of a whale, we observed the bubbling of a school of fish... The water barely rippled, the sea kept its leather impermeable. The gaze went far. Nothing appeared.

We weren't hungry, our supplies were good. It was nice to let the water slip under our boats and the air on our faces, to ripple like the dying in the rising vapors. The sun allowed its shining hair to fall on the sea. We gripped them, we were lifted with the mists. The horizon broadened, taking on the form of an ulu, an ulu that scraped the sea. Purplish sinews held the sea hooked to the sky. In the distance, islands were misshapen and blurred by the horizon's traction.

Don't forget, we were living in the ventral pouch of a sated animal. What we don't digest digests us.

Close to an island, gulls and cormorants were ripping the greenish body of the water. This was the direction we took, making very slow movements so as not to wake up anything, for the flies had left us, and peace plunged our foreheads into the dream.

Maybe there was a school of haddock down there!

Here, on the Land without Trees, the landscape is the uummat of our grandmother, her old heart, her ventral pouch. That day, the grandmother looked at the young woman I was then, and her look made me dizzy, for it appeared as if she were going to slip her ulu between my scales, she were going to shake the blade a thousand times, until the muscle gave way and the oyster opened. I was young, without a man and with no children, and, in dreaming, my gaze stretched far into the distance! The stories are many, but all say the same thing: grandmother won't let go, she likes her oysters good and fresh, she likes to knock them so that they open and give themselves.

I pondered. Even though there are many stories, none had come to us from the other side of the horizon, none had been able to make its way between the sinews of the sky and the leather of the earth. No story spoke of the ancestor who had arrived from over there, from the other

side of the horizon, by the northeast. He came from Kalaallit Nunaat¹, the great continent of ice where a mountain had succeeded in piercing the sky. The ancestor had teased it to the point of exasperation. The mountain had laughed for so long and then quibbled, that it had without knowing it handed over the secret of Inuktitut. Some milk and a little blood had flowed from the summit. But they also relate that it is Mount Caubvick, in the heart of the Torngat range, that spoke first.

The ancestor came from there, but no story spoke of it... There were many bits of stories, but they were not to be broadcast to inattentive ears.

I told myself that if they didn't tell that story, it was because it hadn't happened yet. It must be lingering somewhere over there. Only scraps of it circulated, you heard them whispered sometimes, without managing to untangle them.

How, after crossing the horizon, could our ancestor have lost the story of our beginning? Probably because of inattentive ears. When was the story of our origin going to return to us? No one was able to answer that question, not even Segulliak.

Nevertheless it was possible to imagine. When you are still young, you can have a light mind and a happy-go-lucky belly, and if there aren't any mosquitoes, certain birds of the mind cross the horizon and return, dropping images. Not enough to make stories, but enough to make them up...

I saw a strange man, small, stocky and alone. His big red mustache set off spasms of laughter in all who saw him. They laughed about him a lot. He had run away by going to sea and the sea, rolling with laughter, had pushed his umiak out into the ocean. He was so far away at present that it was impossible for him to retrace his steps. Besides, he didn't want to turn back...

We can't know, because no story has survived from so far. Here, in the great uummat, the pouch of the sky sewn to the sea by caribou sinews, all things - the animals of the sea, those of the rivers and those of the rocks, our men, our women and our children, our fathers and our mothers, our brothers and our sisters - all is held together by one story or by another; the least clump of lichen rolling in the wind is attached to a story of caribou or of grandfathers. For each thing, there is a story, sometimes several. That's what it is, the uummat, a great connection.

However, on the other side of the seams of the sky, things exist that are alone and still without a story...

Every day, we went to the sea to savor the absence of flies and pull the line in what remained of the schools of fish. Out to sea, the haddock laughed.

¹ Greenland.

The sun exploded in sparks. One might have said it was a big flint hammering granite. The sea shone like a stone. Islands of ice danced in the distance, scarcely detached from the water. At such a distance, there are no birds. Moreover, no kayak can go that far. And if one day a kayak were to drift to that point, the hunter would have long been dead of thirst. Yet the islands of ice danced in the hope of escaping from the grand uummat through a fissure. Every so often, one of them was seen to disappear.

Every day, we went out and turned around the island. Every day, we stretched fish out to dry on flat stones. There weren't any flies, and our minds loved to dream.

Nerkingoak, my father, and Segulliak, the angakkuq, took me out with them on a small umiak they maneuvered as easily as a kayak. They waited for opportunities. They told stories. In the distance, the reefs were shaking their white beards. Pointed heads came out of the water...

"Do you remember?" Segulliak asked my father.

"I remember," my father answered after sucking a long spell of peace.

Between the question and the answer, the memory hadn't said a single word. It had passed in silence into their common memory. The two men respected their origin.

"The animals of the sea must never touch the animals of the land, rotten wood must never touch sound wood, the ultimate beginning always escapes memories, the future must not be lost in fulfillment, an inumarik must never rest on his victory. To mix no thing up is a fundamental law for us. On the other hand, among all the animals, the Inuit is the seamstress. To sew without entanglement constitutes the great way.

That was what my father Nerkingoak repeated to Segulliak the angakkuk, and this is why he paid careful attention so that his answers wouldn't cover up the questions. The thread had to continue to do its work: to sew without entangling.

The air, also, separated and sewed the sky and the earth. Fog came out of the tears in the fabric. The breeze ran pink.

And then a black dot higher than it was wide began to tremble in the fog of the horizon, between the islands of ice, very far to the northeast. A small black dot among hundreds of white dots...

We returned to the island to turn over the fish we had spread out. We ate some of them, then returned to the water. Nice days.

Regularly, as if attracted by a whale's spout, our gazes turned toward the dot which was lengthening in the distance, between the islands of ice. It was like a tiny tree trunk with shreds of flesh rippling in the wind. Beneath the vertical stroke a horizontal stroke was forming day after day. And this grew bigger as the fish dried.

An anxiety hovered. No one spoke. An object had just crossed the seams of the horizon from the northeast, a cutting object no doubt. Something had happened.

My imagination saw the little man with the mustache again. Drifting in his boat, he was looking in our direction, staring at us. One might have said that he saw fog come out of the islands and mountains, but not our kayaks and our umiaks, not our dangling arms and our astonished faces: we were still much too small for his eyes. He was searching in his mind for a story that would tell what he was seeing, but he didn't find any. He probably saw an archipelago in front of him, and behind it, islands, the entrance to a fjord, and on the sides of this fjord, round, curved mountains, in heavy sleep. But he couldn't see us on our island: we were still only indistinct mosquitoes. Nevertheless, a country he did not know was arriving in front of him, a country that for him was without a story. On our side, we couldn't tear our gaze away from this boat that was appearing ever more clearly.

This took place in the days of summer when the sun doesn't leave the night much time to sleep. Evening and morning hurled shadows that ran like crazy women over the sea. Some of them drowned in big spots near the islands of ice where the boat was enlarging its masts. Others surrounded the skiff. And me, I imagined...

The man who had nothing to lose, who had been laughed at too much, was swaying in time with his boat. Unable to stop his movement, he had ended up by piercing the horizon and he wasn't dead: he had fought against death and all the exquisite pleasures of death. If he had had a friend, a family, a wife, attachments, he would have been brought back to his home. But nothing brought him back. He was without attachments.

As opposed to us, he was not at the end of a great lineage. The link of past generations had broken for him at the moment when he crossed the horizon. He found himself at the beginning of a generation to come. He felt free... He was an ancestor searching for his future while looking our way...

I'm digressing.

It's incredible, such a drifting with great torn sails on an often furious and always salty sea... At that time, I too had no idea of such a voyage, for I hadn't yet gone to the other side of the horizon on a boat of great size. To lose oneself in that way, it seemed to me that you would have had to have lost everything.

I imagined that man, alone, sliding over the sea. He had seen so much snow dissolve in the sea, so much mist and fog, white nights in darkness, and dark days in the whiteness of a storm; he had cut himself off from all the stories of his world, and didn't yet know the stories of the new world appearing before him. He was floating in the unknown, after having struggled for such a long time... Like my grandfather, he no longer knew how to die. He needed a woman in order to resume the course of his existence, and produce a daughter or a son spinning the wind on the sea of time.

His boat was approaching. The black spot became a three-master. It was headed not toward the island without flies, but toward the entrance to the fjord.

Several families who had come from far away were gathering on the island then because it was the season, and in order to avoid being seen by the three-master. It was necessary to learn the common opinion, as well as Segulliak's. Qarmats were set up on the ground. Segulliak, who was part of our hunting band, slept in our family's qarmat. Like a big brother, he turned his face to me every time I looked away. He intimidated me.

Volunteers went out in kayaks to meet the three-master. Their mission was to attract it toward the south side of the fjord in order to discourage it from approaching the island, for there were many of us there. According to several stories, a two-master had in the past come from the south, through the islands, and if they didn't agree on everything, they did speak of a ship which spat thunder. Kayaks were pierced, hunters were drowned. But it was not from there that the three-master was coming: people had seen it tearing the northern horizon. It was a boat without a story. But was it different from the two-master?

Before the volunteers' departure, Segulliak addressed my father Nerkingoak, Nutarrak, the youngest of the hunters, who had killed the fattest seal of the winter, and all those who were going over there:

"I believe I remember a few words of their language. As soon as you can be heard, shout: "No fear. We *friends*. Yes. Heul!" And raise your hands for them to see that they are bare, without lances or harpoons. If they keep quiet, one kayak should approach alone. Nutarrak, it's your business. If they motion for you to come, climb on to the boat. And then another kayak should approach...

-- I'm not afraid, but why should we go to meet them one after another like timid people? Nutarrak asked.

-- Who can protect himself from the white bear if he doesn't know its habits? If these men are bad, they will teach us what we need to know in order to drive them away... If they are good, they will teach us how to build a boat driven by the wind...

-- In any case, they're kablunats, why seek to know them?

-- I hope you don't meet a wounded bear! You don't know how to turn a danger to your advantage."

Nutarrak knew perfectly the meaning of this tirade: "Study the threat before acting." But above all he knew this story of a knife an Inuit had stolen from a kablunat. The knife had slipped out of the thief's hands, cutting his thumb. Because of this, Nutarrak believed he knew what Segulliak meant, but he thought he knew how to master an iron knife and believed it was a very good way to turn a danger to his advantage.

The volunteers set out, and the sun slipped four times behind its great evening fire. It smoothed the sea so well with its calloused yellow hands that it looked like a polished and shiny flat pebble. At the fourth awakening, a slight breeze made us turn our heads.

Standing on the high rocks of the island, we watched the volunteers return in their kayaks. But they weren't coming from the three-master, nor from the coast, they suddenly appeared between two islands, from the north, after a long detour. The three-master was barely visible, anchored in a landing place near the fjord, to the south.

Nutarrak was the first to stand out from the streaks of the sea. Bolt upright in his kayak, with smile as big as the moon, he was already staring at Segulliak. I knew it. He probably already had a knife in his qarliik.²

When the volunteers had landed, people approached them and Nutarrak spoke. For the first time, the young hunter sat down on a stone so big that his feet didn't touch the ground, and he spoke because everyone kept silent, even Segulliak, who wanted to hear his first words without prompting them.

"They are many. They aren't families, they are only men. I said: "No fear. *We friends. Yes. Heu!*" A man with auburn hair, short and stocky, burst out laughing. He answered: "Ikinguitsgenpoqui."³ He laughed in our way, not like the others. He said that he came from Kalaallit Nunaat, and that is why he spoke our language. He left the deck of the boat for a moment, and returned dressed in an anorak like ours, but without any sign of family, no seashell decorations, nor beads, nor necklace. He said he knew us as his own.

-- Know us as his own? Segulliak repeated.

-- Those are the words he said and he seemed to know their meaning. We called him Jensingoak⁴ and he liked this name. He seemed good, while the others seemed rude. Twice, they wanted to hurt us, first shooting at the sun with their thunder-sticks, then pointing them toward us. Jensingoak intervened. We spoke with him a long time, never with the others, who didn't speak, but chewed noises between their teeth. Soon, when we hear the thunder come out of the boat, that will be the signal, we will go look for Jensingoak on the coast by the same detour we took to come back. He has agreed to come on our island alone, without a hunting weapon, not even a knife. The boat will wait without moving. Jensingoak says he wants to live with us, for his country is here. He will go back again on the three-master, though, for he wants to return later with a wife and some Brothers."

Segulliak was silent. Everyone was silent. No one could open their mouths. We were in the heart of summer. The people of the boat were kablunats, they could tear a kayak apart at a very

² Pants.

³ We are friends.

⁴ Little Jens.

long distance. Among them, a man with a mustache spoke our language and said he was returning to his home...

My dream frightened me. Dreams must not touch things, we must sew without getting anything entangled.

We were afraid and we were in a hurry. His hand placed on his right thigh, Nutarrak held his qarliik firmly. This gave him a rare self-assurance. From time to time, he raised his eyes toward me, as well as toward other girls.

My father had said nothing about his meeting with the kablunats. In the evening, he whispered in Alingana, his second wife's ear, that the men of the boat ate dried fish and the lard of a land animal at the same time. We had to get ready for the worst.

The dream

The next day, the light was like a fine sparkling snow. Eyes squinted to watch the kayaks escort Segulliak's umiak. The angakkuq wanted to hear Jensingoak with his own ears and see him with his own eyes before bringing him to the island.

We women still had fish to dry. We cleaned the haddock and spread it on the stones in silence, unable to speak, searching in our minds for the remnants of old dreams to fill the hole the boat had made in the great uummat.

Who was this man who was coming to live with us? Was he the beginning of an age-old story? the conclusion of one of the numerous stories held in suspense? An ancestor wanting to enter by the future like a dog trying to catch its tail! Who could imagine that!

Were we lost? Were we wandering? Shells with no attachments? Cords poorly tied?

Stories are told, they buzz in our ears, they hover like dreams, but they don't come across our lives with bones, skin, eyes, hands, and a foot. Stories are told with the voice of a witness, and not with the voice of a hero, and the sound that comes out of his mouth fades and disappears as silence digests its meaning. We thread stories into ears as into the eye of a needle... How can we live if the story settles down in our midst as a man we have never seen?

I tossed and turned on my fur in a night that was too short and disjointed. With no warning, a dream swept me away:

When he was young, the man with the mustache woke up in a big house made of trees and stones. Some people were sleeping around him. He realized that he had woken up far too much, had never been this much awake. He felt oppressed as if the house in which he lived was smothering him. Like a chick imprisoned in its egg, he lacked air.

He went out of the house, took a breath that woke him up even more, and ran so that each new breath would bring him fresh air. The trees around him seemed jagged and sharp like flint. At the height he was looking at, the color green broke the blue of the sky, and a yellow liquid defined every leaf of every tree. One might have called it a perfect morning, but there was neither sun nor clouds, nor moon nor stars. The sky was as naked as a whale calf.

The young man became aware that there were too many trees. He saw trees he had cut with his own hands, he remembered it perfectly. Yet the trees were there, in luminous health; they were crossing the roofs of houses built at the very place where the stumps had been torn out...

Suddenly, while he was running in order to breathe, a force threw itself at his throat, causing an intense pain. The air no longer entered. His bulging eyes groped the sky, searching for a helping hand. Normally, the heart muscle would have vomited on the grass all the blood it contained, but that was not what happened: it was the heart that expelled the man.

And the man then underwent a second awakening, even more intense than the first. He found himself at the end of his breath ejected to a horrifying height, like a drop of water at the end of a whale's breath.

At that moment, he saw the people who were sleeping around him and yet were coming and going as if they were awake. Among them was he himself. That man who was himself had got it into his head to kill an old widower who talked in his sleep a lot. This jabberer surrounded himself with children and salivated like a walrus in heat. The old man's hands ran through the children's pants. And he, who slept and yet had awakened, was walking in order to go and kill this scumbag abuser of children.

Now he saw himself walking, a terrible hate in his heart, with the intention of killing. But the one who was walking was barely awake, just enough to walk and hold his knife sound asleep, awake enough to kill, but not enough to stop himself from killing. He saw the killer, and the killer, alas, was none other than himself, but he could do nothing against him, for the dreamer is powerless in his dream.

At the moment when he realized his total powerlessness, an awful clap of thunder fell from the sky. The man went into his sleep again, while remaining in a waking state just long enough to stop the murderous movement.

Sweaty, breathless, like someone who has escaped by the skin of his teeth, he sat down facing himself, took himself firmly by the shoulders and said to himself: "I am going to take you far away, very far, for here, your life is finished."

We were on the island without flies. The sky was charged with yellow oil. Our eyes remained open. All was quiet.

Segulliak rowed toward us, his head immobile on a relaxed torso. His teeth shone, he was smiling with pride. His lungs were filled with a surplus of himself. Behind him, a small man with auburn hair, a wide mustache, and the round eyes of an insect was sitting up straight on a chest. He was smiling like a child watching a seal come out of a hole, but he didn't move, he just swung his shoulders in balance with the umiak. He wore a shirt of caribou leather without any decoration.

The man with the mustache disembarked and approached us. He opened his arms and pressed each one against his chest, men and women, children and elders, like a grandfather just returned from an exceptional hunt who has forgotten the particularities of each one. He arrived in front of someone, opened his arms to her or him, stepped forward, wrapped himself around that person and laughed.

As soon as he approached me, I moved away and was going to place myself behind another group.

He didn't have the slightest hesitation, made no distinctions between the rival families, the brothers who had shared the same woman and were jealous of each other, the girls available for marriage who didn't want to be touched, the child in his mother's arms who was afraid... He went ahead making the same steps, the same actions, as if each one came from one and the same story.

The silence was palpable. Everyone knew that nothing would ever be like what it was before. From now on, we could neither retreat nor hurry up. We knew nothing of the rest of this story which had never been recounted. A story which no doubt was going to be made of fears and failings, for it had no antecedents.

My turn arrived. The man came toward me and took me in his arms as strongly and for just as long a time as he had done with the others. And I started to cry. He was an inumarik. That man had conquered nangiarnek.

Jensingoak sang

From now on, Jensingoak was among us.

The sea had sweated the whole day long. In the sky, flocks coming from the northeast charged black and panicked clouds. Furtive winds threw themselves into the sea, throwing up furious spray. We had to gather up the fish spread out on the rocks, reinforce the tents with good stones, put the kayaks and the two umiaks higher up. Tie everything down. Get ready. For it wasn't just a gust of wind. A buffalo fur as big as the sky was soaking up water. There would be enough for a long stretch of bumps.

Jensingoak, Nutarrak and Segulliak rolled some large stones from which they made a wall to shelter the qarmats from the strongest winds. They made signs to each other like when they

were hunting, they acted as a single man, and the rock obeyed their shoulders. All the precious driftwood on the island had already been gathered and separated so that no rotten piece touched good wood. There wasn't much of it.

The rain formed a waterfall advancing toward us over the sea. The already reddish legs of the sun crushed the moaning belly of the water. Over the sea's foam-drooling rollers ran the feet of giants. The waves' froth took on a crimson tint. The day's last traces were buried in big violet clots. We were driven into our shelters by the tightening of the sky, and the rain poured on the skins of our qarmats.

We now found ourselves inside the belly of a whale. Under a sky of black grease that made the poles shake.

While Jensingoak was hesitating outside between the tents, Segulliak had grabbed him by the sleeve and with Nutarrak they dove into our qarmat. The ancestor hadn't seen me and in stepping back had stepped on my shadow, but my shadow had rushed into his and both had become entangled. Nutarrak, who was floored by Jensingoak's odor, threw me some irritated looks. Adopted by Segulliak's family, Nutarrak was part of our hunting band. That was why we were in the same qarmat.

Father, who had already lit the kudlik, spread out the family's most beautiful furs for the guest. Jensingoak sat beside Nutarrak and Segulliak. But he didn't display the raw pride which lit up Nutarrak's face. It was plain to see that he had knocked around over some very large white and empty expanses. He had lost the power to mock what he didn't know.

The rain fell like punches, the water filtered in between the skins of our qarmat. Everyone sought a place between the drops and stayed put there in the posture of a woodchuck ready to whistle.

The wind's first attack calmed down.

Some children came in, curious and shining with water. Beavers, otters, seals, blackbirds. We drew together into a knot around the kudlik, in a sperm whale's halitosis: our breaths piled up one over the other and, in the dampness, the human odor thickened through the piling up of our breathing. A small pale space gasped for breath in front of the strange face of Jensingoak, who was chewing herbs like the other men. We didn't look at him, we loitered in his unaccustomed light and pungent odor. The qarmat dripped on the silent faces.

The thing to do was to make a fire without smoke. My father, who knew well how to do it, took charge. After meticulously choosing the mosses, the moss-plant, the dwarf birch and the small wood, which he split between two stones, he at last took out his niggit⁵, placed the handle between his teeth, shook the bow, and lit a nest of sphagnum in the center of his pile. The

⁵ Bow-drill used to place an object or light a fire.

actions came out of the amber air formed by the gazes surrounding the ancestor. Actions that were waiting for approval.

Light sprang out, dry and crackling, in the precious bark of the birch. Jensingoak smiled at my father. The space then took a good deep breath: the qarmat had just been widened, suddenly everything was larger.

Nerkingoak grew solemn. All the families were waiting for his word, for he was not just my father, he was the friend of Segulliak, and he had known how to bring the angakkuq and the young hunter together. A difficult friendship, for in the beginning Nutarrak's family kept far away from Segulliak's. My father knew the art of fire, he knew how to arrange the opposite elements so as to arrive at the best result. It was he who cracked the white stone against the black stone so that the sacred sparks of the start of winter sprang out. Since the three men had joined forces, the hunt brought gaiety to our families as never before.

That evening on the island without flies, we had brought in the dried fish in time, and there was an abundance of it. The children felt the happiness. We heard small laughs burst out in the drying silence. The smokeless fire had attained its perfection. The smell of moss-plant envelopped us. My father threw little piles of sweet-smelling lichens on the flames while Alingana heated pieces of fish which she then distributed. The ulu leaned in the hunters' direction, bowing out of respect for the haddock.

No one dared to speak. The fish calmed the memories going in every direction. All people saw in them were reminiscences. But an ancestor was there, in the flesh, under his soaked and strange mustache.

Segulliak searched his memory for a story that might at least bring us closer to him, but he didn't find any. So he waited for all the stomachs to be appeased, for the rain to stop pecking at heads, and for the fire to have dried most of the faces. But, regaining its breath, the storm jammed us together in a new surge of fury. The rain was laughing in our ears at the top of its lungs. For a long time it laughed, sometimes knocking on the roof like a bear on a baby seal's hiding place.

Then the bear got tired and the rain resumed its childlike giggling. With his hand moistened by the falling drops, Nerkingoak took from the fire each of the small red branches piled up in it, extinguishing in this way each precious brand. Saving fuel was a necessity.

In the morning a pale and gray light filtered between the furs of the roof. No one knew how long Torngat's agitation and the jolts of his bad mood would last. We had to economize on air during the calm spells and numb ourselves so that the weather wouldn't make us impatient. As for the kudlik, it stayed lit and colored our faces. Our mouths, red and mute, seemed to swim in the air. The children slept, their faces quiet and trusting.

Alingana had started a katajjaq with the youngest teenage girl, but we didn't hear them singing yet. Little by little, the sound of the throats ended up by submerging the percussion of the rain. The interplay of breaths arrived in waves, guiding minds between sleep and waking, cutting the pouch of dreams. Images fell into our minds. Each person took care not to let fear or anxiety enter. But time exhausted vigilance.

Segulliak stroked his drum in a very gentle movement, like a man breathing on his wife's cheek. And then Segulliak stood up on his knees in a clap of thunder. Agitated by a spirit, the drum rocked and struck the drumstick Segulliak was holding tightly. Segulliak flew off above the kudlik in a beating of raven's wings. Ayayas formed in the throats of the men, and the women's breathing began to growl in the dark corners of the qarmat.

Suddenly the storm shook its furs, rolling over the roof with its paws in the air. The sky formed a rock that was crushing the poles. You might have said it was a bear struggling in a trap. Fear entered through the cracks the wind was opening between the skins. The spirits of the storm were striking Segulliak: his head fell, as if it were hanging on the end of his neck, then rose. He was in trance.

It was the angers, the resentments, the rivalries, the jealousies that were causing the storm. To pacify them, the strengths of all the families had to be united. So they called for the elders, the young hunters Sedna had devoured, the grandmothers and the grandfathers dead of starvation, they called all the strong voices to save their family.

The women's ayayas were doing battle, but it wasn't enough. The voice of Nutarrak came out of its cave, low and muted; the guttural rumbling of a walrus trying to cover Segulliak's voice. Nerkingoak could no longer manage to reconcile the opposites. The divisions were feeding the storm. So we all sang the song of our bones, ribs rounded, bellies distended, short of breath. We had to sew between the rivalries and the jealousies.

The storm resumed, hitting the qarmat's roof even harder.

There was too much anger, too many unsatisfied desires. The one who returns from a river emptyhanded holds it against the one who returned with his hands full. Similarly, the young woman who wants Nutarrak's gaze is not alone in arousing his attention while he scorns his own desires like an owl hovering over a nest of crabs... And there were no doubt many other troubles. The families had gathered near the coast for feasts and weddings, packed on to small spaces without flies, wind against wind, memories against memories...

Jensingoak did not sing. He was like an island rising in cliffs out of the sea, impassive in the boiling of the waves carrying us away. His knees did not betray the slightest trembling, and his head shone like a block of wood. The light on the top of his spinal cord looked blue like a kudlik's halo.

It was then that the storm began to howl and spit, threatening to sweep everything away. The roaring came from the bottom of the rocks, the jaws of the sky and the earth were chewing mountains. The women's bellies trembled in their throats. The men had become drums, muted and deep. The musk-ox scratched the rock and fumed in front of his rival. The females urinated in small groves. Under Segulliak's scowling armor, we formed a single body, we were one against the storm. With our hooves, we struck the rocks. We spat gravel on the storm. Raucous cries answered raucous cries... All our chests united against the storm. Cries against cries. Fear against fear. Pounding anxiety. Tangled up and badly sewn.

And then suddenly, surging out of nowhere, the "pi-ik" of the nighthawk was heard, the "kah-lah-a-look" of the white-fronted goose, the whistling of the teal, a series of bird songs, as if the sun were shining in the marsh and the morning was enjoying his female in a rosy dawn. Repeated shivers lightly touching the ear. Our caribou skins had disintegrated, our naked bodies were bathing in a dry and light breeze. The birds had untangled us. The air, translucent once more, was chirping over the velvet of the women. And the sun's legs stretched in the down of the sky.

Impossible to know where it was, this strange bird that was singing. Its song sprang up like a fountain, in the very center of the kudlik. Suddenly we were in a flock of mergansers with our wings spread out, following a quiet river, borne by vapors, lifted into the immensity.

And then Segulliak realized that Jensingoak's body formed a tree trunk. The hymn was coming out of his mouth... From now on nothing was threatening any longer. The storm was there, though, banging, but he stood like a motionless mountain in the winds. The hymn came out of his mouth...

He was asleep in the boat

The face of a child

Men stirred up

Waves that tossed the craft.

He awoke, slowly stretching out his arms.

What are you afraid of? he asked.

Their eyes, wild and turbulent, were sinking.

He looked at the sky. He saw it gentle and calm.

Then the fear left them.

The storm lost all its force.

A happiness was chirping around them.

The ancestor was calming his child.

After the storm, Jensingoak returned to the three-master.

"I will return with a wife, Brothers and Sisters.

-- No kablunats, Segulliak insisted.

-- No kablunats", Jensingoak promised.

His smell took a long time to melt on our tongues. His voice caressed our ears all winter. The fat in the kudlik drew his face. Our ancestor.

The kablunats

Jensingoak's song had produced a sap that irrigated the trunk and branches of the Inuit. A new life. The sap had placed a hand behind my neck, honey oozed on my legs, I woke up wet from my dreams. My odor crossed the leather of my summer clothes. My body was calling for the man.

Nutarrak did not resist and wanted me for the continuation of his route. My father Nerkingoak approved. So Nutarrak deposited his seed in my womb with the spirit of one who knows he is just a male and can only perpetuate himself through a woman.

The following spring, Tootak was greedily drinking my milk, and Nutarrak was proudly throwing seals and fish in front of the igloo's paak. He saw me sewing his lineage with my lineage. He looked at the thread and the sewing. I forced myself to not get my life entangled with my dreams.

We were walking on the ice and our feet knew that it wouldn't open. The fish hole didn't empty. Nothing pulled the plug on the mound of seal meat. The pouches of fat remained stuffed. Suspended from the dome, the caribou paunch didn't age. The kayaks crawled without danger over Sedna's soft belly. The torngats wept their misfortune far away in the mountains of the North. As soon as one of them approached, the blue air burned the tips of its wings and it returned sheepishly into its caves.

We were sitting, one evening, back to the setting sun, and the horizon pierced tunnels in the aurora borealis. My mouth was singing the hymn of the fisherman who sleeps in his umiak while everyone races around out of fear. I knew it word for word, it was my skull that resonated, and all the crows kept silent to hear it. The family answered with ayayas. Throats

were unknotted: the heart was emptied. We looked at each other as the eye looks at the hand that has just wiped away tears.

There was a base under our feet, a grandfather rock under our steps. In the winter, the man who walks in the white darknesses of the snow feels a hand placed on the shoulder of his solitude.

But all this gradually retreated, sucked up by the height, fraying into the great blue. The white earth's winds erased the ancestor who had left neither seed nor the desire for seed. He would return with his wife. Torngats prowled around our dogs.

We fell back to earth.

Then we resumed wandering over the plateaus in search of caribou. The seasons slipped their ulu between sky and earth. Time was knocking heads, the muscle of the oyster was getting tired. The scales partly opened and blades of nights penetrated our days. We called out to the caribou, the master of joy, in order to fight a heaviness that was spreading over us. But they had departed, taking everything with them, even their hoofprints.

Tootak ran around me then, frightened, dove into my hood like a woodchuck into its hole. I was singing. My throat was trembling. Time was driving its ulu deeper. Our hearts were cracking.

The nights and the mornings passed. Now Tootak was climbing the hills and waiting for his father. The aput didn't have a wrinkle. The child didn't laugh much. He watched my eyes sliding over the heaving horizon of the sea.

We swelled our lungs, but lacked air. Ashes stayed on our tongues. The line of the horizon dried on the sea.

A summer came when Sedna stayed sterile, silent and cold. The rivers waited for the salmon in vain. The ringed seals mocked our harpoons. We were hungry. Hunger awakened Nutarrak's nose. One day, his nose was caught in an odor. Because of it, he no longer slept.

From one sunrise to the next, he led us toward the south, near the strait of Newfoundland. Several hunters went down with us. Our eyes scanned the reefs, the water's inner recesses, the shores. Nothing moved. All of a sudden, Karpik, a young teenager, pointed his oar toward an island. "There!" he cried. Since his eyes had never been mistaken, no one hesitated. There was no fog; nothing troubled the air. The evening sun cut the fat of the sky, the moon shone from the other end of the firmament, nothing blocked the view.

Turning north, we saw, coming out of the island, the reddening sails of a two-master, already close enough to see us... We remained motionless. Our oars no longer wanted to bite into the

water, our hearts huddled like stones in our chests: seized by fear, seized by hope. Was it Jensingoak? Was it kablunats from the South? The two-master didn't hesitate and approached. It had the wind in its sails. It saw us unmoving. We were divided.

As soon as we could make out a kablunat on the boat, the thunder erupted and began to shake the kayaks, one after the other. The hunters drowned in their sealskin garments, crying out their final ayayas. From our umiak, we extended our oars to the survivors, but Sedna had already swallowed them all.

My eyes searched for Nutarrak. Whitecapped rollers deadened all the cries. Our links were being torn, sinew by sinew. Suddenly a solitude came and stuck to my skin like hoarfrost to a rock. I realized then that the women's umiak alone remained on the surface: our men had all sunk.

The two-master laughed and knocked its wings against its hull; it was quivering with pleasure. Its cannons celebrated by making reefs explode before our terrified eyes. When it arrived close to us, they threw us rope ladders. Kablunats were looking at us from up there, and one of them stretched out his hand. We climbed aboard to find ourselves in the middle of their arrogant eyes, we, five widows, Tootak and Karpik.

They tore off our clothes, the better to laugh, and threw us pell-mell in the hold through a hole that had opened under our feet. Then they threw us blankets in order to keep us alive.

The darkness had swallowed us in its great maw. The rolling of the boat made us vomit on each other. Tootak cried like a wolf. He wasn't able to get his breath back. He fell as if dead, but awoke into his nightmare again.

The total darkness had swallowed time. No sign to mark the succession of the days. We heard walking on the deck. Boots struck their heels to see if our silences were finally going to crack. Since we didn't want to feed their pleasure, we swallowed ravens' wings and, with their feathers across our mouths, we stifled the cries of our anxieties.

And then the rolling stopped and the sky opened over our heads once more. The kablunats tied our hands behind our backs, all except me, for I had to carry Tootak in my arms. I was the only one able to cover my nudity with a blanket full of vomit.

Once on land, they led us behind a stockade where square cabins stood and pails full of water awaited us. The kablunats watched us trying to wash away our shame and they laughed, drooling like buffalos.

Then they shut us up again, but this time the light of their eyes slipped between the planks. For several days, they gave us a pasty soup, telling us by signs to eat, but we couldn't get that mud into our mouths. Then, to prevent death from relieving us, they gave us water and some pieces of fish.

One night, some kablunats grabbed the youngest of us and took her into another cabin. We heard her moaning like a herd of seals on the sea ice. When they brought her back, her face was white and dead. At dawn, having found a piece of wood, she sharpened it on a stone and stabbed her belly up to the heart.

When the kablunats understood that we were going to kill ourselves one after the other, they gave us back our clothes and left us alone. From then on, a man came every day to bring us fresh fish and water. A face that repeated itself, with eyes that wrinkled as if a doubt had blazed in the middle of his world, and he was feeling his way through this doubt.

The place was called Fort York. The town around it was named Chateau Bay. The man with the eyes wrinkled by doubt was called Francis Lucas. He had to be addressed as "my captain". He had heard about our capture, and immediately understood the dangers we confronted. So he had arranged to take command. And he never left the little bench that was there on the other side of the door.

He talked a lot, especially to himself. I noted all this down in my memory. "*May we have some fresh water?*" I asked him one time.

He was surprised that I had learned these words. After that, he taught me many sentences of his languages, saying that he wanted to exchange our languages like presents.

We were confined there all winter, under his guard, and no one was molested any longer.

In the spring, Lucas put Karpik, Tootak and I on board an immense three-master, telling us simply that it was "The Order".

Finding the meaning of this kind of word was tough. "The Order" was like an imaginary route over plateaus marked by invisible but imperative inukshuks. The kablunats followed these paths so as not to get lost. Lucas knew these inukshuks perfectly, even though they were only words going from ear to ear or papers going from hand to hand.

Lucas was my only connection. He guided me on their imaginary routes. If by chance I found myself somewhere else than where "The Order" wanted me, kablunats could shoot me on sight or take me away to be hanged. I had to remain, then, in Lucas's shadow, I had to live: I had a child at my breast, and Karpik was looking toward the side of death.

They let me walk on part of the deck under Lucas's surveillance. On this boat, no one saw the schools of fish, the whales' spouting, the dolphins, or the sperm whales. The boat followed an imaginary route, often against the wind, and wasn't interested in either hunting or fishing. We ate horribly dry and salty fish, while schools of mackerel bubbled around us.

My people's coast grew distant. To the west, between the lip of the sky and the lip of the earth, the shoreline formed a tongue that was losing its color. At dawn, when the rays crossed the whole sea to harpoon it, and a little blood ran in the water, the coast appeared again for a moment before disappearing in the grayness of day.

My heart beat in my temples, my stomach was tied in knots, I pressed my son against my chest. I had to keep on in the white night, as my grandfather had kept on.

The boat slipped over the water and this lasted for deaths and for lives.

I had felt death before... My grandfather stretched out his hand, or my grandmother. It was like crossing the igloo's paak in spring, when the heat makes the aput melt. It was death, nothing more. Like all the Inuit, I had from time to time endured the teasing of a torngat: it yelled, raising the snow around me, froze my ears, my nose, my cheeks, hid my ulu, made a beautiful pelt I had hung in the sun rot. Regardless of death or the torngats, I was Inuit, I was part of a family. I was somewhere, on the end of a thread with which I was sewing my lineage.

The baby keeps warm in the fur of its mother's hood, the shell preserves life in the egg, two shells protect the oyster: in the same way, our ancestors envelop our dreams... Everything, from mountains to rivers, from the dead to the living, Sedna and even a troop of torngats, everything strikes, but without betraying. The difficulties, the suffering and the blows cultivate dignity, not ruin it, open the heart, not close it.

There, on the boat, the land of my people had disappeared... I was outside. Here a man could soil, kill, and derive pleasure from it. "The Order" formed a network of incomprehensible routes in a landscape invisible for me. "The net essential for containing the nastiness of men. *Man is a wolf to man*", Lucas repeated. I replied that the wolf cooperates with the wolf and that it feeds without ruining the dignity of its prey.

Lucas taught me everything. He didn't hold anything back, he emptied his heart. He searched for the center of his kayak to get back balance. It was very hard for him. He was afraid of his own people, who didn't like to see him talk with me.

The three-master followed "The Order". It was going back up to its source like a salmon.

All the coasts had disappeared now. No island. Only the sea. My heart was crushed on itself. I was an Inuit in the absolute and blinding whiteness of a blizzard without limits. Where were my people? No one could go so far. I didn't feel them any longer, neither them, nor the cords

that connected me to them. I was alone. Infinitely alone with my little Tootak who kept me from dying.

And suddenly, a great puff of air managed to widen my chest. There, so far from everything, there where I was, the sea, the clouds, the waves on the sea, the wind, the big birds that followed the boat, the immensity, everything was the same as back home. The landscape had crossed over with me.

If I forgot "The Order" and the men of the boat, I was in the same world as before. Nothing, neither the sea, nor the moon, nor the sun, nor the clouds, nor the birds, nor the fish, nor the dolphins, nothing had to do with "The Order" and nothing could betray our ways of living. If I wanted, at the moment when I wanted, I could throw myself into the sea with my son and die in dignity.

"The Order"

"The Order" wasn't just imaginary, and it wasn't small. I realized this when I arrived in port.

We were hemmed in between buildings of wood, of stone, of all kinds of strange materials. We followed squared roads over which iron wheels bumped. Neither plains, nor hills, nor mountains could be seen; everything was enclosed in rows or in squares. However, we did feel the presence of the earth and rocks. They stayed hidden away beneath the cobblestones or far behind the fog, anxious, holding their breath.

Lucas explained to me the metal, the horses, the movement of the crowds, the workshops, the markets, money, business and why everyone was running around in the squeaking of wheels. I remembered every word that Lucas said, I perceived every movement, every gathering, every dispersal in the deafening noise, but I understood nothing about it.

The people were separated by doors, walls, enclosures. Some were asking for something to eat, and they were ignored. Every cord that had held them together seemed to have been cut, then tied up again farther up, somewhere in "The Order". Pulled by these mysterious cords, we too advanced, my little Tootak clinging to me, Karpik in my shadow, and I squeezed against Lucas who was explaining his country to me. Armed men followed. People looked at us with astonishment. Some people stopped, stared at us. But nothing stopped Lucas. He was going back to the source.

We came out at last from the sea of houses and shouts. The fog had retreated behind two rows of gigantic trees loaded with yellow, scarlet and blood-red foliage. They formed the columns of a corridor at the end of which stood a fantastic structure of stones, "the castle of Her Majesty the princess Augusta".

Along this highway, horses ran, carrying riders, and others were pulling carriages. There were men and women on foot as well. The clothing shone, the necklaces sparkled, the boots

glistened, the hats made you laugh, the heels clicked, the eyes were fixed on invisible inukshuks, the route of orders.

We finally arrived in front of this smiling woman, pink as the inside of a seashell, who moved her neck like a snow goose. Lucas stayed back, next to the door. She opened her arms and pressed me against her chest as Jensing oak had done.

We remained there imprisoned for one whole winter.

Water dripped on the stone walls that a worrisome wood fire struggled to dry. The food was disgusting and we were forbidden to go out to fish or hunt. Sometimes we were called to the princess's rooms. To reach her, we had to pass through corridors and five doors guarded by soldiers. We couldn't do a thing, we were tied like dogs by the fixed stares of our guards, sword in hand.

A naturalist by the name of Joseph Banks came to visit us. He questioned me for three days. He scratched some paper with a feather, but he didn't answer any of my questions. I told him several times that we were starving to death, for all the food they gave us was flabby, full of salt, boiled or burned, lifeless. The words went from his ears to his fingers, and were transformed there into little marks on parchment, stiff and dead.

Joseph Banks stared at me. Holding a small stick, he traced two lines facing the lashes in front of my eyes, then swiveled the stick to a vertical position between my eyebrows and my lips. He sighed: "Hum." Then he became insistent. He wanted to take my clothes off in order to examine me, but Karpik intervened.

Some days later another, even stranger man arrived, by the name of John Russell. Without saying a word, he inspected me like you study a flint stone you want to split to make a knife. For a long time he remained motionless.. His eyes had hands which were feeling my face. He took refuge behind a sort of plank as wide as it was long. This lasted for several days. He came at the time when the sun had gone down rather low in the west. At twilight, he went off with his plank and his instruments.

In the end, there a shiny surface on the plank that reflected my motionless image and Tootak's also. It was astonishing, you might have said it was a lake.

We had other visits, as odd as that of the naturalist or the painter. People came, wrote, sketched, scribbled, but no thread, not even a little spider's thread, formed between us and them. Everything fell dead on an inert matter. They went away with their piece of paper, and nothing else. They lived with reflections. Their solitude seemed without limit. Our solitude was without limit.

In spite of all our complaints, we never received suitable food. The landscape itself was nothing more than a corpse crushed on the surface of a plate of glass that we were forbidden to open. I grew weaker day by day. I found it hard to calm Tootak, who was suffocating with fear. As for Karpik, he had walled himself into a stubborn silence. During the day, they came to get him. A tutor was teaching him English, but he didn't learn anything.

At the end of the winter, they did a lot to make sure we wouldn't die. They read the naturalists' papers, they bustled around us, they consulted books, they took measurements. Our life remained miserable, we were like geese trapped at the turn of the season, their beaks pointed toward the north, their wings held in a net. We threw our eyes on the glass window, but they were smashed to pieces there, falling back on the floor tiles blind and full of despair.

I was surrounded by my broken cords, imprisoned in my dried bones. Tootak looked at me: he was sucking a dried-up marrow in vain. Karpik, feverish, was moaning in a white bed. We didn't succeed in dying, but ideas of dying attacked us from every side.

Winter had passed without anything being settled. I still didn't understand a thing. It was like a nightmare that didn't end.

And then one day the door opened. Jensingoak was there in front of us. I remained speechless. He had known. He had come. An unbreakable connection had pulled on the sinews of his heart... His gaze lifted me. My breathing made sparks. He approached, I fell into his arms as into a grandfather's arms.

He brought some fresh fish that smelled like the torrent. But we couldn't eat it, for the air around us was dead. So he led us near the rapids where he had just been fishing. The river sang like the rivers of our country sing, its bed of stones laughed like the people in our country laugh. And Jensingoak smiled like a mountain on the plateau.

Outside the castle, near the rivers and far from houses, the world had remained alive. I was sewn to the uummat by the vegetables, the animals, and my recovered appetites. The cords were not broken. I stretched toward my own as strongly as Jensingoak had stretched toward me. So I was somewhere in the Inuit web.

We ate the fish seated on stones, surrounded by the sound of the river. Tootak stayed huddled in my arms. Karpik followed on Jensingoak's heels. He led us further away, where there was moss and very large flat stones. A woodchuck whistled and birds sprang from the trees. Tootak gave me a piercing look and wriggled, forcing me to set him on the ground. He then started to run, returned toward me to strike my knees, then went even further away into the grass. He tapped me again, then sat down on my knees, pacified. Karpik never let go of Jensingoak's hand.

Jensingoak remained with us for two moons. He often went out, but sometimes slept with us on planks, covering himself with a caribou skin he had brought with him. He taught me to

read. In this way, he said, I would be able to discover the secret of Europe's misfortunes, which was found, according to him, in a small book bound in red leather that he gave me.

"Just as you have to sew without getting anything tangled up," he told me, "sew these stories alongside your own, and be careful with your seams. You will discover how the man who has lost his roots becomes his own enemy and how he hopes to regain peace."

He then led me to a wharf where a three-master was being loaded.

"You're returning home," he explained to me, looking me straight in the eyes. I can't leave with you and Tootak, but I will be with you before winter.

-- I won't get on the boat without you," I replied.

-- Confound it!" he exclaimed, opening his arms and bursting out in laughter.

I turned around. Captain Lucas had just arrived behind me, smiling like a seal. We went on board, but only Tootak and I. Karpik didn't want to ever leave Jensingoak and remained with him.

Time pulled on the moon, the moon pulled on the sun. Little by little, the memories of the castle sank at the back of the boat into the image of sunrises superimposed. They grew dull like a dream that vanishes in the morning.

The sea had grabbed England with both of its hands, had made it move back to the end of its fingers, then plunged it into the abyss out of which it must never come again.

The horizon swayed. The wind ran after the waves and the foam charged down in mauve rollers into the black waters.

Despite all my efforts, the fear I had known in this country was still engraved in my bones. On the deck of the boat, pressing my child in my arms day and night, I was no longer the same woman. The sky's blue and smooth flagstone bore the weight of all that existed, and also of all that didn't have the right to exist. Someone had cheated.

When I saw the coast of my country scattered with white glaciers outlined in the distance, the cords were not immediately reestablished. The landscape was closed in by panes of glass. The woman I had become didn't feel any connection coming back to life, no cord was thrown in the sea to bring her to a face, not her father Nerkingoak's any more than Alingana's.

The woman I was was alone, her heart closed in on itself like an oyster between its shells. Back there now, an Inuit could weep, and she wouldn't hear it. A man could desire a woman back there, and she wouldn't feel it. A child could fall in the river back there, and she wouldn't see it.

The gulls were flying over her head, and the woman no longer knew why. And she felt she was a stranger.

The time for landing arrived. When the father took his daughter in his arms, she wept for a moment. Then she waited for the ice to melt. And the ice slowly melted. Then, looking into the woman's widened and motionless pupils, Segulliak declared:

"This eagle is a strange hybrid...

-- What kind of eagle? Nerkingoak asked.

-- A bald eagle. The largest of our birds, whose female is always bigger than the male. A bird that lives in couples, a single male for one female, the same nest every year, and the older often eats the younger in case of famine. It flies over the carcasses of caribou, it flies very high and sees everything.

-- Why do you say it is strange? Nerkingoak asked.

-- That female eagle has swallowed a carcass it hasn't managed to digest. You could say that it's the carcass that is digesting her."

Segulliak had her drink infusions of bitter lichens.

Then I realized one day that I had arrived. My body had thawed and my belly was free. I felt the women, the men, the children, the plants and the animals. Tuglavina, Segulliak's brother, had caught me in his look, then in his patience, then in his affection, and finally in his begetting.

Even so, it sometimes happened that I awoke in the castle in a sweat, yet by force of wings I crossed all the ocean and regained my roots. It also happened that I would fly off just to see some parts of the world and sew them together.

I didn't, like Segulliak, need the sweat lodge in order to fly away. When my spirit completely united and fell into its center, a red tube like an esophagus formed, and I was sucked out of myself. I left my body and flew away directly where the winds of the heart carried me. The body fell as if dead.

Segulliak wasn't worried. He was never very far away. He explained to the others that fissures had formed in my bones, that I was free in my movements, and that if a tornaq wanted me, I would be as skillful an angakkuq as he himself.

The ancestor

"It was a very long time ago, long before an iron knife split the first splint of wood. We weren't yet little nations, each one jammed into its own customs. The Inuit traveled with the great

migratory birds and covered the seas and the continents, drinking his joy from the nipples of the mountains. His wind-hair was charged with spray over the oceans and pollen in the steppes. His nose breathed all the earth's air in a single day, for he inhaled and exhaled through all the gills of the sea, the grass of the prairies, the leaves of the trees, the nostrils of the animals. Until the day when Cain cried: 'I want this piece of land.' And he killed his brother Abel. Cain is an old name that means: 'I have acquired.' Abel means: 'I am taking care of.'"

This is how Jensingoak had recounted the beginning of the book he gave me. At least, this is how I had understood it. He had told me that when we were on the river's edge, not very far from the castle.

A moment later I asked him if he were the first ancestor, the gatherer, and if he were going to prevent Cain from killing Abel. He replied: "I am bound to you and to all those I know back there by a connection which brings me life and without which I would die. I can't do anything about it. My life is with you or it doesn't exist. But I too have been broken by the environment. Now I am trying to reconstruct myself, and I need your art of sewing."

Then he related to me some parts of his life.

He was born a little before my own birth, in a small town of wooden houses, on a farm where animals who gave their milk lived. He too had lived his childhood with birds at his fingertips, roots at the end of his feet, head in the hills, satisfied with all that lives on earth.

And then, it was school, and then it was the city. There they shut him up in a glass pot beside other glass pots, the whole world behind panes of glass. They wrote scriptures on a blackboard in place of living things. A stick roamed in order to keep the children in their pots. Jensingoak took his resentment into himself. And one day, a day like that of my abduction, someone, with his dirty old hands, tore open his private nucleus. If he had been an Inuit woman, he would have sharpened a stick and pierced his belly up to his heart. But he was a young boy.

He was going to kill the pastor, but a clap of thunder made him drop his knife. Then he fled and ran for a long time.

Arriving on the shore of the ocean, he met an inumarik by the name of Jususi who had come out of a great blizzard of immaculate snow. Jususi had been killed several times, but he always returned. He was trying to re sew the first uummat. Alas! The uummat was torn on Cain's iron knives. One day, sitting on a stone beside Jensingoak, Jususi spoke to him frankly: "I'm in despair. Abel will not be reborn here, not in this land of fears and slaughters. Find a boat and leave right away, as far north as you can."

Jensingoak left for Kalaallit Nunaat. There, it was cold enough for his taste. The cold packed the man tight against the woman and separated the each family by the right distance. No one heard another family's dog, but the dogs talked to each other. Then the children laughed in the igloos. Jensingoak was happy, for he had been sewn to this people.

And then one day he heard Jususi whispering in his ear again: "Go even farther." He had to once again leave his life, go to the fringes of his existence, to the limit of his endurance, in the coldest sea, through the most dangerous icebergs, the most secret reefs, the most powerful currents, the most unpredictable winds, the most jagged coast, the most impregnable fjords, the most solitary Inuits.

This was how he came to us like a man who takes care of what is around him.

MOVING IN

The second expedition

Here is what I was able to read myself, not so long ago, in the archives of the Brethren at Nain, and what I remembered word for word.

Financed by the society of the Moravian Brethren for the evangelization of the savages, the Lark was chartered for Jens Haven's second mission. Haven was accompanied by the brothers Schlözer, Drachart and Hill. A voyage without incident. Arriving at Saint John's in Newfoundland, the four missionaries departed again on the Niger, commanded by Captain Thomas Adams. They arrived at Chateau Bay, at the tip of the Strait of Belle Isle, but they were not authorized to disembark. After negotiation, only Haven and Schlözer had permission to follow the coast north in order to visit the Inuit. The commander of the Niger, Thomas Adams, had received the order from the governor of Newfoundland, sir Palliser, to keep Drachart and Hill on the boat in order to avoid a feeling of independence that would not serve His Majesty's interests. The governor's decree read as follows: "It would be a great advantage for the commerce and trade that His Majesty wishes to establish in North America, if a friendship could be established between the Esquimaux of the coast of Labrador and the merchants of the colony. All that can be done to reduce the cruel customs, the acts of piracy and the murders perpetrated by the savages should be encouraged... "

I who am old at present, I have really seen and really felt all the "friendship" that His Majesty has had for the "Esquimaux of the coast of Labrador"!

The *Niger* was moored at Chateau Bay. They unloaded the merchandise, they negotiated, they loaded the mail, some furs, some barrels of whale oil, some cases of dried cod...

During this time, Jensingoak and Schlözer succeeded in buying a large French fishing boat. They decked it on all its length and made two hatches descending into two compartments separated by a watertight partition, so that the stern would hold if a reef pierced the prow, and vice-versa. They rigged their boat as a sloop, with readily handled sails.

After which they filled it with provisions. And it was at their own risk and completely alone that they set out toward the north on the Labrador Sea.

On the good days, they followed the coast; on the bad days, they took refuge in the bays or the fjords. They advanced in the solitude and the immensity.

It was not a kayak, but a sloop. For the sea, it was all the same, a shell like all the others. A seashell resting on the fleece of the biggest animal in the world, which restrained itself from laughing. The two Brothers were astonished: the water bears, the waves rock, the boat slides.

They thought: "The sea is keeping us alive for one moment, then another, and still another. And this has lasted for several days." Their breathing grew ample, terror never went very far away.

For you who are floating, time is long. The sea undulates. The head bobs. You think bizarrely. You say to yourself: the sea may change today, lose its calm. At every moment, it struggles not to get carried away. It's like that. Everywhere a calm wrested from a possible anger. Again today, a reprieve.

Seated on the liquid immensity, you become aware that through the thin wooden partition your buttocks are placed on, you depend on the mood of the sea. And then, you observe the reefs, the outcrops, the white teeth, and the wind always ready to leap.

Suddenly you are far away. But your imagination is here, more active than ever, filling the gaps, shaking the quietest components of your mind. For want of a storm, small squalls rise in the sea of your emotions. You think, you daydream, you are in danger: it is useless to call, to cry, the water won't take pity, your little struggles do not interest it, it has its own quarrels, and they are tremendous.

To the east, the horizon curves to where your eye is exhausted. To the west, the rocks of the coast stiffen their legs extended in the sea. All is there, indifferent to your agitation.

Jensingoak gave free rein to his thoughts because the sea remained calm. And it was long and it was dangerous. One mistake in his mind's seams and nangiarnek risked mixing up his inner world with the sea of Labrador.

The weather stayed perfectly fine. Jensingoak forgot the quiet things, the sea and its lapping. He thought of each one of the Brothers: of Schlözer beside him handling the sails, of Hill and Drachart, remaining on the *Niger*, and of Mary Butterworth who had been entrusted to him just before the departure for Newfoundland, of so many other Brothers and Sisters with their temperaments successfully harnessed to duty and customs. Here in this desert of water and salt, while time never stopped spreading over surfaces too great, what is man?

It was this man that Jensingoak was searching for: the man who has stepped outside his law, the man at sea, the original man. He wanted to be perfectly clear about it, about himself, about his Brothers, about the future of his culture. Was Christianity just a rampart against the fear and anxiety provoked by the betrayal of Cain, the possessor. Did a Christianity exist for Abel, a Christianity that today had taken refuge on the great white plateaus of the North's little peoples. Could Cain and Abel be reconciled? Is it even legitimate to try?

"The sea", Jensingoak said to himself, "is gentle or terrible depending on the wind. Our little inner seas, once out of their sheath of order and laws, what are they? Schlözer the peasant, Hill the gardener, Drachart the preacher, once they are at sea, who will they be? Once they are among the Inuit, who will they be? When we are settled down with no return, abandoned to

ourselves, who will we be?" And if Mary Butterworth said "yes" to his proposal and the community accepted their marriage, who would she be once she were settled down on a great frozen plateau, in a shaking wooden cabin, with a baby on her arms?

The two Brothers gazed at the gently undulating sea, aware that the world is capricious. Their hearts swayed from front to back like that of an old Inuit woman singing an ayaya as she resews a mocassin. The two men let their gazes wander over the water's surface, as far as the eye could see. They tasted this double sensation: no Brother could come to their aid, but perhaps the sea wouldn't hit them with a bad squall today. Who knows the principle of storms? The sun passed above their sloop headed toward the north. A bald eagle was watching them at a high altitude, but they didn't see it.

The breeze was so gentle that at one point, Jensingoak felt troubled without knowing why. The waves were no longer anything but noise. The sea was no longer anything but water. The sky was no longer anything but emptiness. A horrible sensation took hold of him: they were the only living beings on a liquid corpse. He hadn't been careful, his eyes had come loose and, suddenly, his grandmother was nothing more than a soft and soulless thing, it was no longer even a grandmother, it was just some water.

Jensingoak felt his heart getting excited, the blood was beating in his temples and in his throat. He slipped his hand in the water as if to make sure, but the water didn't react, it let his hand pass without doing a thing. His face was covered in sweat. The oppression was unbearable. No one. There was no one any longer either in the sky or in the sea. No one could understand the horror striking him. His heart made a fist between his lungs. Jensingoak could no longer breathe. Alone in a great pile of things bobbing at the mercy of the storms... His life: an accident among so many others. His death: an imminent accident.

For an interminable moment, it was as if there were no longer any air and that his eyes were going to explode. Suffocation, panic. Alone in a soulless immensity. This was why he was always going aimlessly, the farthest possible, to see if his life, his death, his suffering would produce any resonance whatsoever, if not on the rocks, at least on the sea.

The sloop advanced on the thread of time at the mercy of a sea that was dangerously calm. Without his being aware of it, a white squall had approached from the east side. Suddenly spray was slapping his face. Pow! The sea was alive again. He too was alive, not more, not less alive than the water. Both shared the same life. Then Jensingoak thought of the Inuit he had met on the island without flies. "With them, with them", he repeated a hundred times in his head, while the squall was striking the sails and Schlözer was bringing the sloop back in line with the wind. "Never more life without them. Never more."

"Sit down, you're going to make us capsize!" Schlözer yelled at him.

Jensingoak had struck the most radical reef there was: the death of everything, and himself, an accident in the middle of a lifeless carcass. At the stern, Schlözer was holding the rudder with

both hands because the squall hadn't subsided. Behind him, the white ocean, as far as the eye could see. Then, the wind grew calm as quickly as it had arisen. Jensingoak's solitude shivered on his saturated skin: it was inhabited again.

The next day, the two Brothers neared the coast and scrutinized it with the acuteness of a young beaver coming out of its lodge for the first time. Nothing appeared, not even the shadow of a qarmat, not the slightest sign of a man or of a woman. Thanks to a favorable wind, they covered another fifty or so nautical miles. At Kippokak they decided to disembark without waiting for other signs. The wind slept. A bald eagle cried from who knows where.

Solitude in the North

They had waited for low tide to tie the sloop to some very large rocks, then had watched it rise with the sea. The moorings held fine. The moon was in its dead-water phase; there was no danger of the boat leaving without them. They slept a little, huddled up against each other in a grassy spot. For lack of wind, the sky had grown dull over their heads.

Now that they had rested, the two men could quietly explore their surroundings. There was a bald mountain of a good height at that spot. The gray sky, inhaling, had drawn them there. As they climbed, they felt as if they were staying in one place: it was the horizon that was descending like the sea at ebb tide. The world, exhausted by the moon's attraction, no longer resisted: it sat down on itself, settled down on its own foundations.

A bare mountain emerged. On its summit, two men, three hundred nautical miles from their Brothers. Around them, an immense circle made of a single rock spotted with every color. The horizon had closed in on itself, and in pressing against itself had raised the two men above the plateau. Over the circle's expanse, time had deposited stones, streaks of broken rock, ponds of grasses. In the hollows: dark and feverish lakes. On the plateaus: violet lichens, some dessicated spruce the height of dwarfs, goose droppings, and a congealed sunset.

There where the rock had been broken, dwarf trees emerged from the moss. But nothing blocked the view. Every animal that scurried, ran, drank, showed itself. Imagine a vast forest where all the trees had flown away; all the animals, astonished, saw each other; some salivating, the others frightened. The two explorers didn't perceive any animal, however. Besides the vegetation, there wasn't the slightest sign of life. A mineral continent, without shelter or hiding-place, on which the air rested like a lover on her aged husband.

"Do you realize that we are on a virgin earth," Jensingoak wanted to say to Schlözer. But the silence there drove all words back on to their meaning. "Virgin" no longer meant anything. It was so fertile, this solitude.

Nevertheless, Jensingoak was gradually overcome by a strange sensation: he and his companion weren't suited to the grandeur there, either to its color or its serenity. It was too

pure. They were still much too puny and unstable for such a raw clearness. They weren't like the lichen, so happy and proud...

Suddenly a cramp bent Jensingoak in two. A flash of blood and sperm passed through his memory. There, in a swamp of recollections, the pastor with dirty hands... Jensingoak slammed the door on him... He immediately got hold of himself, drew a little light from his Brother's eyes. And said to him: "Pray Heaven to make me worthy." Schlözer helped his friend get up, for he had fallen on his knees.

Like hunters advancing toward their prey behind their white canvas shields, they felt able to approach the world that was there, thanks to the little crosses hanging on their necks. It was immense. They were walking on the rock, and the rock bore them like it bore all the rest. In the moment they were living in, there wasn't a drop of moisture in the air, the cold had brushed back every obstacle. The colors cut through space.

They suddenly had the reflex to lie face down like hunters. A mother caribou and her fawn had just captivated their eyes. The mother caribou was hesitating in front of a long and narrow lake. Either she would go around it or she would cross it. She went ahead on a point of land, then retraced her steps. She put her hooves in the water there, took a few steps, then climbed back on shore so as to better see what was around her. The little one approached her and searched for the udder by knocking his muzzle under her belly. The mother's ears stood up as she turned slightly toward the back. She curled her nostrils and slid them along a wavering of the air. Then she turned, advanced nervously into the water, and made up her mind to cross it. The little one hesitated for a moment, but soon slipped into the wave opened by his mama. The air imprisoned in his hairs lifted him, his restlessness in the water carried him, he didn't let go of the ties of scent that bound him to his mother.

All of a sudden, springing from behind a big block of granite, the point of a kayak cut the water. Erect in a compact silence, an Inuit hunter was running over the surface of the lake as swiftly as an egret in the sky. The hearts of Jensingoak and his companion gave a start. They had never suspected this presence.

The hunter's almost silent oar propelled him toward his prey. The mother caribou made a half-turn. By a movement of the paddle, the Inuit made his kayak pivot. The mother dove into the water, touched bottom, emerged, got her footing on the gravel, bounded out of the lake. The little one, who was following her closely, slipped on some slimy moss, bellowing with fear. The harpoon had already struck him when the mother, making a half-turn, approached him.

The hunter took his last harpoon and fired it at the female as she was coming out of the water and getting ready to bolt. The weapon was attached to the hunter's wrist by a tendon which stiffened to the point of extricating him from the kayak. Pulling the man, the mother took a few more steps, then collapsed.

The hunter then sat down in a puddle on the edge of the lake. He remained there like a stone. He appeared to be giving death the time to soothe the two animals.

There was an upheaval in the air. Sky and earth clenched their teeth. Nothing trembled any more. The hunter took a deep breath which seemed to unblock the sky from the earth: space was liberated, transparent again. The breezes got their breath back. The grayness quivered once more.

He got up, took hold of his kayak, raised it to the height of his hips and delicately deposited it on the shore. He placed large stones at its front and back and then along the hull so that the sun wouldn't warp it as it dried. After that, the hunter pulled the fawn out of the water, then sat down.

Jensingoak and Schlözer, who had never taken their eyes off him, were surprised at the detail of each of his movements. They looked all around, but saw no one. Alone, unable to count on any help, the man moved with the prudence of a blade of grass emerging for the first time into the light.

Dawn rounded its back on the horizon as if to tear itself out of the torpor of the night. An icy wind was now sweeping the bald mountain where the two observers were glued to the spot, still incapable of the slightest movement, paralyzed by the solemnity of the moment. A breeze passed, long, numbing... Had they slept? Who could know? The curtains of dream were pulled down: without trees and without nights, the world was blended with its images.

When the observers' eyes succeeded in focussing on the movements of the world again, the hunter was no longer alone. A woman and a child were holding the feet of the fawn who was showing his belly to the first light of morning. The hunter cut into the skin and stripped the animal, taking care not to tear its leather. When he had finished, he spread a skin over the rocks, a skin in one piece in the shape of a shirt with four sleeves. Then the man cut out tongues of meat which the woman laid on flat stones. At one point, he took an eye out of the head and gave it to the child, who threw it like a ball, laughing. The mother went looking for the eye, and split it with her ulu so that the child could eat it.

They shared the liver and continued their slow work. It was imperative not to lose a single morsel. Jensingoak knew that at each meal the hunter, the woman, and the child would add the nostrils, the eyes, the ears, and all the external and internal senses necessary for life. The woman took some pieces still covered by their fascia. Holding the muscle firmly between her teeth, she removed the white membrane from her ulu, cleaned it, and spread it over a wide stone: future rope, thread, straps. Finally, the little animal was in pieces: food, tools, straps, skins, fat, marrow... Days of life.

Then they did the same thing with the mother.

The child played with the female's two antlers. He stuck them into a grassy spot - not easily, for the soil was shallow - , then threw a rock at them until they fell down. He went and cuddled for a moment on his mother's breast, then resumed his game of hunting caribou.

Jensingoak and Schlözer slipped a little further away to where they couldn't be seen, and ate a little dried cod.

The reversal

When the two explorers stuck their heads out from behind the rock to look at the Inuit family, there was only the hunter, standing, motionless. Nothing else, neither crow nor carrion-eater. They decided to go and meet him.

Their route had to twist to avoid rivers, cliffs or lakes. They could easily lose sight of the hunter. Jensingoak had taken the azimuth and guided himself with the help of his compass. Before undertaking the descent, Schlözer had meticulously studied the landscape and assisted him thanks to his well-trained visual memory.

They descended a gentle slope, waded across the first river, detoured around several small lakes, entered a wide valley, followed a caribou trail, the one used by the mother and the fawn, no doubt, and finally found themselves facing an inukshuk. Not the slightest trace of the Inuit and his family, neither trail nor scent.

Schlözer, however, caught sight of him in the distance, on what appeared to be a dark rocky mountain, barely visible in a fog bank. Jensingoak pointed his compass in that direction and took the azimuth again.

The sun dove under the horizon, the darkness was illuminated, the cold air pressed the two men against each other, making of them a single animal. That night they slept in one and the same dream. Auroras twisted in the icy air, fissures formed on all the celestial vault. Stars unleashed waves of light that fled like packs of dogs. Then, suddenly, a sky anchored from one end to the other and dotted with stars shone above their heads.

The two men woke up at the same time and in the same globular eye, unable to look at each other, unable to add a single word to the silence surrounding them. They searched for phrases, Bible passages, something that could put a hand on their shoulders and say: "I am there."

They found fragments of the Old Testament that lingered there, as old as the stone, and hastened to recite them so as to come out of the rocks' oppressive silence.

One age goes, another comes, and the earth remains...

The wind goes toward the south and turns toward the north, the wind

turns, turns and goes away...

the sea is not filled

the eye is not filled by what it sees, the ear is not filled

by what it hears

There is no memory of olden times...

The words had awakened them, and Schlözer saw the silhouette of the hunter again in the distance. They got up, shook themselves in a small lake, drank a little water and set out to meet him.

"Utaqqivoq⁶!" Jensingoak yelled at the silhouette wavering in the fog.

The man was no longer there. So they followed the azimuth, which the dream hadn't erased from Jensingoak's memory, and detoured around all kinds of stone and water obstacles. When the sun settled over their heads, they discovered another inukshuk. A fog was dancing at the periphery of the circle of which it was the center. Human forms appeared and disappeared there. Six Inuits advanced and retreated in the varying thickness of the air.

They remained until evening observing them. "If they want to, they'll take us", the two men whispered between their sewn-together lips. They were thinking about Erhardt, their predecessor, who had been murdered by a starving band. That was the official story, at least.

The sun dove for the length of a short siesta and got up again a few leagues further, slowly rising out of the tatters of fog. Now there were just three Inuits, silent, each one on a promontory. The first was seated in the east, the second had hoisted himself onto a pedestal in the northwest, the third was motioning to us to come with his raised arm.

"Utaqqivoq!" Jensingoak yelled again.

Then he heard the stone laugh in a silence more intense than all the others. Since the two Brothers were hungry, they ate their final ration and headed toward the man who was calling them. The fog fell down on their route. In his haste, Jensingoak had forgotten to take the azimuth.

Despite the dense fog, their shadows made a violet path in front of them, for the evening sun was already braising the stone. They decided to return toward the coast by putting the shadow behind them, weighted with the infinite silence of the west.

They walked that way for a long time, sleeping for a few hours here and there, in the reassurance of the sunrise and sunset that fed the shadows, and of the noon that erased it. Their feet burnt and sad at the same time, their stomachs in a lump in their empty intestines,

⁶ Wait.

disappointed at being here rather than there, to be still alive rather than having stayed there, they arrived at the sea at last.

They waited there three days, blind in a goose-feather fog, their hands under their armpits to struggle against the cold. The image of the man of the caribou danced on the white mists.

After three days, the sea's down finally lifted, liberating the view. The two men saw an alignment of inukshuks and decided to walk in that direction. Toward noon, the sloop appeared in the distance. Their hearts fell back into their blood. Their muscles stretched out in space, then struck each other in order to rally.

The two Brothers measured their indifference to life and death. At each step, they had to tear themselves away from the immobility of the stones. Fragments of the Bible held them trembling around their bones.

I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes, said Job.

See, before him is only illusion, the sight of him alone is enough to stagger you, said his friend.

But Job had three daughters. The first, he named Turtle-Dove, the second, Cinnamon Flower and the third, Eye Shadow. He was full of days.

They arrived back at the sloop. The stern hatch was partly open, and they went down to look for provisions. On the chest there was a great number of strips of caribou...

Tears fell on the still-fresh meat. They ate in the animal's warm silence. A female was belling in the mountains. Their hearts had taken shape again, for Job's three daughters were dancing around them, naked and shaking with laughter.

They left the spot like a moose leaves its yard. Nostalgia blew in the sails of the sloop. They were no longer in a hurry about anything. They were afraid that noise would erase what they had experienced. Now they knew what an inumarik brother was, they knew what it meant to live barefoot in the snow.

When the sloop arrived at Chateau Bay, they left for England as soon as possible.

Jensingoak and Schlözer had no trouble convincing Drachart and Hill that the mission they wanted to establish shouldn't depend on the governor in any way. Drachart and Hill had been visited by a number of Inuit who had come down to the South in hopes of meeting Jensingoak. On the *Niger*, the two Moravian Brothers had been constantly watched by Captain Thomas Adams who frightened the Inuit with cannon or rifle fire.

Nevertheless, Drachart the preacher had spoken. And the Inuits didn't close their ears, for they liked unusual stories. The Brother also succeeded in making the Inuits understand that Jususi,

who had lived a very long time ago, had found a road that permitted him to come back from the dead.

"And why did he want to come back from the dead?" one of them had asked, truly surprised that someone would want to set foot again on so hard a world.

-- So that we could see him and hear him, Drachart had answered.

-- So why did he finally fly off into the sky? the Inuit retorted.

-- Because that is where people are happy," Drachart concluded.

The Inuit shrugged. He measured the answers on the scale of the man who pronounced them. Did he know what he was saying?

The four Moravian Brothers were now resolute. First they had to convince their community, and then go and pull a concession from the king of at least a hundred thousand acres on which they would be sovereign. If not, they would just be kablunats relying on political powers, opening by this very fact the way to trade, this fever which they knew would be as fatal to Europeans as to Inuits.

The third expedition

The four Brothers returned to London by way of Chateau Bay. In Newfoundland, the Bureau of Trade made many representations to the governor in favor of a religious mission to Labrador. Finally the Privy Council looked favorably at the Moravian Brethren's petition to establish a mission in order to prepare the savage mentalities for civilized commerce. In London they asked for a hundred thousand acres of land where they would be autonomous and independent, without the duty to report to the governor.

Karpik had learned to read and write. He was put in the care of brother Christian Drachart who entrusted him to one of the Brethren's schools in Yorkshire. But in the fall of that year he contracted smallpox and died after pronouncing these words: "Oh! Jususi, take me with you, for I have nowhere to go." Drachart baptized him before his final breath. He wrote his name in the register, stating that he was the first Equimau in Labrador to be saved by the Christian faith.

Pressured by the princess, the king accepted the Brethren's proposition. It was accordingly decided at the Synod of the Brethren to establish a permanent mission in Labrador. In consequence, Jensingoak, Christian Drachart and Stephen Jensen were given the responsibility for a third preparatory expedition. The Society of the Brethren for the Evangelization of the Savages gathered the necessary funds.

Driven by favorable winds, the three Brothers crossed the sea in four weeks. The three-master anchored near Amitok Island. Twenty-nine kayaks and umiaks approached the boat. The

sailors were frightened and drove them away by firing in the air. But Jensingoak and brother Jensen let a boat down into the water to meet them. They landed on the island. There was a gathering there. Segulliak was among the Inuit present.

"At first," he told Jensingoak, "when I saw the boat, I was afraid, for our kayaks are often the target for their gunfire. But when I recognized you, I knew that no harm would be done to us."

And he gave an engraved leather strap to Jensingoak who replied:

"The head of our mission is named Christian Drachart, and he is waiting for us on the three-master. May this strap attach us to each other in an equal friendship. Let's pray that our seams are firm, but let's not mix up our customs.

-- I'm a middle-aged man now, Segulliak said, and I can hear your stories without being flustered. But, you see, we don't have either rifles or cannons. Did you know this?"

He thanked Jensingoak for my return and read in his interlocutor's somber eyes that things had gone otherwise for Karpik.

A few days later, Jensingoak and Drachart were rowing toward the coast, following Segulliak's kayak and his family's umiak. My father Nerkingoak welcomed them on the shore.

"Welcome. Look, my daughter and her husband Tuglavina are there, on the little island just in front of us", he told them, pointing it out with his finger.

As soon as they touched land on the islet, I was facing them, with my daughter in my arms.

I had explained to my family, to Tuglavina's family, and to all the families that had gathered in the area, that Jensingoak would be returning with some Brothers. That they would be arriving on a strange boat, that the boat would leave again with the crew of kablunats, and that the Brothers would be our best protection against the murders and the acts of intimidation perpetrated by the traders. I had told about what was going on in Newfoundland and how people lived in England, and that they mustn't provoke so great a number of well-armed men, nor try to come to an agreement with them, for they never responded on their own, but always acted according to an order coming from higher up, from further away, impossible to reach.

Drachart went along the coast and, from qarmat to qarmat, told the story of the Creation of the animals and the account of Jususi who died to save all men, even the Inuit. The Inuit liked Drachart's stories, because for them they had never heard anything like them. Jensingoak was absorbed in all sorts of preparations. He climbed up the hills, taking big papers with him, made observations, looked at his compass, drew the surroundings. He often took me with him, for my memory never forgot a landmark. With me he acted like a hunter with his brother's wife, distant, oblique, hands tied, while butterflies sprang up from the back of his neck.

Toward the end of the summer, Drachart the preacher addressed Segulliak in the presence of several families.

"I will never forget your promise of peace and your interest in listening to our stories," he began.

-- You are welcome among us, Segulliak answered, you and your Brothers with you, on condition that you help us keep the kablunats far away from here.

-- In that case, Drachart said, we will return next year, we will buy a hundred thousand acres of land from you, we will build our house and we will live among you.

-- That's fine, Segulliak replied, bring your gifts, settle down, we are brothers."

Then Drachart took some hooks out of a chest, some needles, some knives, some arrowheads, all kinds of small metal objects, and some kettles also. After that, he took a paper, wrote the names of all who were there and asked each one to make a mark as a sign of approval.

"The time has come for each one of you to learn to read and write, to live without killing men, nor stealing, nor lying," Drachart concluded.

-- What you haven't succeeded in teaching those who speak your languages, we will learn", Segulliak answered.

And the men suppressed their anger, for the objects spread out before them shone in the sun.

After this ceremony, the Brothers embarked on the three-master for a coastal expedition. They brought Segulliak, Tuglavina and several others with them. I was with them along with Tootak and my little Sorlark. Direction: the Bay of Esquimaux. Captain Mugford didn't know the reefs well at all. I showed him the safe passages.

Despite all the promises of those of us who had boarded the boat, some petty thefts had taken place, but this might have been done by seagulls. On leaving Amitok Island, the captain wanted to show his power by firing cannons.

Some time later, Drachart couldn't find his hat. Seeing it on the head of one of us, he went toward him.

"We are brothers", the Inuit said to him...

-- Yes, Drachart answered. But now I don't have anything to cover my head.

-- That's not so bad, you have others. On my head, it can save my life, for now all the strangers will know that I am your brother.

-- In that case, said Drachart, I'll give you an ordinary hat, and you'll give me back my Moravian pastor's hat."

When we arrived at the harbor of Nunangoak, more than twenty families gathered around us. Drachart climbed up on a rock, his pastor's hat on his head, and recounted his favorite stories. When he had finished, he asked if anyone had understood.

"Your Jususi is an inumarik of great merit," one said. "He gave his life. He acted like the great caribou who gives us our food in the good season. We should honor him.

-- I really like the story about the bread that replaces his flesh, another said, because it reminds us that a man must never eat a man, any more than a wolf eats a wolf, but simply be fed by his spirit. We too have several stories like that..."

In order to hide the shiver crossing it, Drachart stretched his face like skin to be scraped!

"Thank you for your comments," he simply answered, swallowing, "But the Father is not an animal."

Segulliak then said in conclusion: "Long live Jensingoak." And everyone repeated: "Long live Jensingoak."

Stimulated by this appeal, a grandmother raised her voice to insist on the fact that they must promise not to attack each other with the intent to kill even when they were shocked by some words. She concluded by asking Drachart: "Will your presence among us really prevent the kablunats from piercing our kayaks with their guns?"

This time, Drachart remained silent for a long time. On the right he saw our defenseless little people, on the left the armed English and French people who contradicted the Gospel even if they read it every Sunday, and in the middle, the Brethren, a small community that all Europe had persecuted, savagely pursued, and still despised because of their nature schools, their communitarianism, their democracy and their stubborn pacifism.

"We will do all we can so that on your way to conversion you won't be brutalized by the traders."

His word fell, hesitant. Segulliak turned toward Jensingoak, who was mute and pale. If Segulliak had seen what was in Jensingoak's mind then, he would have seen wars without mercy, fields of corpses, tortures, mass graves. He would have seen binge drinking, rapes, fraud, unfair trade, slavery. He would have seen everything that Jensingoak was fleeing.

But Segulliak saw only Jensingoak's lips, lips sewn one to the other. And no word could come out of his mouth, for he loved truth but detested despair.

Some time later, while he was seated a little to one side in our qarmat, Jensingoak asked Segulliak: "Can we come among you in this rough and beautiful country to build a house for ourselves, our wives and our children?"

Segulliak said nothing, for he had already said all that he had to say.

"We won't be a burden on you," Jensingoak insisted. "We will live on our own means, and if we have something to share, we will share it. If you don't go into the South to get provisions, guns and alcohol, if you don't trap the white fox in order to do business with the traders, they won't bother you."

Segulliak let three days pass. Then the two men sat down on the hill again.

"You see what is around us," Segulliak said. "There is enough for you and for us. However, your Gospel will be our ruin, for what can the goodness of a Brother like you do against an army equipped with cannons?"

In the days that followed, the air softened as if the sun were celebrating a hunt, and we gathered around the Brothers again.

"When you claim that we are brothers, are you telling the truth?" one of us asked.

-- Yes, certainly, Drachart replied.

-- Then you won't do us any harm.

-- On the contrary, we'll bring you hooks, knives, kettles, our Gospel...

-- When you look at a tree, at the top the branches are multiple and separate like a herd of caribou spreading out over a plateau, but at the base the trunk is single. Remain at the base, as close as possible to the source, and we will be united forever, Drachart insisted. No trade between us, simply mutual assistance and sharing as in the first Christian communities."

Next, the Brothers went from qarmat to qarmat to gather each one's consent regarding the establishment of the mission and verify their commitment to the pact of peace, brotherhood, and mutual aid. When all this was done, they set up large stones to mark the territory from Monenguak to Kangerlack.

"What we have said, our children and our children's children will still respect," Drachart declared during the final ceremony. "The stones will recall our promises to all those who will live after our death."

The Brothers left for London late in autumn, making a brief detour via Newfoundland to take on cargo. They brought Tootak and left him off at Chateau Bay. My son didn't like to hunt or fish, and laughed at all our old stories, but he could carry on a conversation in English.

Jensingoak knew a family who would take him on as an apprentice in their shop that made fur coats.

The stones the Brothers had erected at the four corners of their territory bore the mark "G. R. III, 1770", the mark of the king of England; on the other stones the letters "U. F." were engraved: the Unity of Moravian Brethren. This future establishment would be called Nain.

Moving in

In Yorkshire, the Brothers were getting ready: prefabricating the house, collecting the supplies, the equipment, the tools. Most of all it was necessary to ensure that there was a reliable resupply annually, which presupposed chartering one boat each year for this dangerous crossing... A very heavy financial, technical, and human engagement for all the community of the Brethren.

Mary Butterworth had obtained the consent of the Fulneck community for her union with Jens Haven, our Jensingoak. The wedding took place at Chelsea on April 11, 1771. Twelve other persons were chosen for this expedition. Among them, Christian Drachart, Joseph Neisser, William Turner, James Rhodes, James Lister, Peter Lehmen, Christoph Brasen and his wife Judith, as well as John Schneider, recently married to Rebecca. Because of his excessively fiery temperament, Jensingoak had not been chosen to lead the expedition. Brasen assumed this role.

Before leaving, Drachart gave a sermon before the Brothers assembled at Fulneck: "My sisters, my brothers, several of you have risked your lives in perilous journeys in order to make the Gospel known to the most wretched savages in the world. We thank the Savior for illuminating our hearts. We are still ready to risk ourselves, and this time, for a permanent mission. But we must be sure of your spiritual and material help. We are going into great darkneses, across reefs, icebergs, winds and storms, intense cold and savages... We need you, the angels, and all the powers of heaven... "

On May 8, 1771, the group left the port of London on the Amity commanded by Captain Mugford. On August 9, the Brothers arrived at their permanent mission near the Bay of Esquimaux. But they had almost not gotten there at all. They had been saved several times, which confirmed the holy character of their mission. During a foggy night, Mary, thirsty and sick, got up. She had climbed on deck to vomit and take the air. Through a hole in the fog, she had seen an enormous island of ice coming toward them. She had yelled to warn them to change direction, but too late. Suddenly the iceberg split down the middle. The backwash was frightening, but instead of capsizing the boat, it had thrown it into the distance. All the Brothers who had climbed on deck gave thanks for the miracle.

The Bible was their companion every day. They opened it at random. On their arrival, they read: "You made them go in and you planted them on the mountain, your heritage. You have prepared a place for them to inhabit. Your hands have founded a sanctuary."

At about two days by kayak north of the Bay of Esquimaux, our family found a well-sheltered harbor behind a string of reefs. The Brothers could drop anchor there, unload the beams, the rafters, and all the material needed for the house, as well as the supplies of food, the sleds and the tools in order to set up their permanent mission on their enfranchised territory.

For us, it was assurance that the kablunats wouldn't come to bother us any longer, for the Moravian brothers formed a shield. For them, here was the white land where they wanted to plant the "Tree of Life" in a "virgin and savage" land.

They set up three large tents with two wood stoves to cook their food. In these tents were raised and braided beds, soft and colored wool blankets, kettles, pails, chests full of clothing, others full of tools, others full of hunting weapons or fishing tackle, and there also were ropes, cases of nails, and so many other wonders I was learning the names of. And this was their temporary installation!

Tuglavina and Segulliak followed Jensingoak like a grandfather. The explorer taught them how to use tools: saw, ax, adze, mallet, and so many other impressive things. Assisted by several Brothers and by other hunters, they put the house together. It was unbelievable. Floors as wide as ten igloos and flat as the horizon. On the sides of the floor, they fitted enormous beams together, already squared and pierced to let the pins pass through. The men knocked, struck, hit these long pins which went through the beams at the four corners and the openings. They installed the heavy doors and the glass-paned windows. Then they set up a mighty mast in the middle of the building, held by cables at the four corners of the house. Starting from this mast, with the help of cables and several pulleys they installed rafters as big as the trees I had seen around the castle. They nailed planks on the rafters, then clapboards they placed like fish scales.

We Inuit women were standing, our mouths half-open. We watched our men obeying the Brothers and taking pride in the building they were raising. They were shaking, though, their backbones reeling like grass in the wind. How could we understand it? They were superhuman for having done so many things, yet at the same time subhuman for needing so many things.

One day, a two-master approached the coast. The launch lowered from it brought us a small delegation. They handed brother Brasen a roll of paper that he read aloud. It was a declaration from the governor of Newfoundland stating that in case of danger the Brothers were under the protection of the British government.

The Brothers agreed to exchange tools, arrowheads, and kettles for seal, caribou or fat. They also agreed to teach us how to use, maintain and repair these objects.

Over twenty families were now surrounding the Brothers' house. We were subjugated by all we saw. Even I, who had been to England, was unable to take my eyes off the fire of the forge, off

the hand of brother Turner who struck the reddened metal in order to give it the form he wanted.

The Brothers had nets, they fished on the sloop bought from the French and sometimes caught very large quantities of fish. Guided by an Inuit, they could bring down a seal in the open ocean with their guns. They brought in a lot of food.

Winter hurled itself into the little dale where the Brothers' house was set. Five caches were overflowing with food. The time had come, however, for us to go to our respective hunting grounds, in the shelter of a mountain, in a small woods through which a river passed that was swift enough not to freeze to the bottom. Many families hesitated. Why go away from food supplies like those? But on the other hand, how could we survive the winter, remaining so near the coast? Finally, five families decided to build their igloos around the great house. We were one of them.

The wind and cold packed the Brothers next to each other. The two stoves swallowed the wood in their great mouths of fire. There was a good supply, but Turner and Rhodes could be seen returning every day with several armfuls of logs. I taught Inuktitut to Mary, Judith and Rebecca. In the big house, I removed my amuti, because it was hot. The three women distorted all the words they were learning; we laughed a lot.

Manuina, his two wives and his five children were with us, in a rather small igloo, for the hunter had had a dream and believed his death was near. He had attended many lessons from the Gospel, and went one day to see brother Brasen.

"Jususi is good," he said to him.

-- He died to save us, Brasen repeated.

-- A good hunter.

-- Yes! Brasen said.

-- Do you really love Jususi? Manuina asked.

-- I try to be like him, but it isn't easy...

-- Yes! But you couldn't possibly let us starve to death, while you have food.

-- Never.

-- Nor my wives and children.

-- It is a sin to have two wives.

-- If something bad should happen to me, you wouldn't leave them alone.

-- Certainly not.

-- If something should happen to you, I would take your wife too," Manuina confidently concluded.

Brother Brasen's face was incapable of expressing the emotion he felt, half-pity, half-anger. Looking at him, Manuina burst out laughing. That was enough, he went back with his meltwater and a little of the Brother's provisions.

A few days later, the wind stopped. The cold grew milder. The dogs needed exercise. The desire to leave was pecking at our legs. The long and sparkling nights licked the aput. Between sky and earth, a peace was breathing, transparent as the ice of a lake. It was irresistible.

Auroras illuminated the plateau's projections and shaded the valleys. It was possible to venture far out on the ice, let the dogs sniff, test the ice in order to take the ringed seals gnawing at their breathing holes by surprise... Get a little fresh food. Besides, our igloo had iced up above the kudlik, the dome didn't breathe well, seal blood had penetrated the snow in the section where meat was cut, and the smells were becoming hard to take. It should have been rebuilt as was the custom in the middle of the winter. And if we had to build, why not leave?

Tuglavina had agreed with my father and Segulliak to go to Nintok Island to join the rest of our family. A long night on a sled. There was a rocky hollow there scattered with small spruce, there was water running under ice that was never too thick, and a usually plentiful seal herd.

The frozen whale

We arrived on Nintok Island. The wind continued to forget us for an entire moon. Our men hunted. The dogs had already scented several breathing holes. Sticks indicated the locations. Every day, the hunters widened a small opening with a smooth stem. They had placed a knucklebone on it sensitive to the slightest respiration and stood leaning like broken trees, or lying on their sides like a walrus keeping watch, their eyes fixed on the knucklebones, the harpoon ready, for days on end...

Nothing. They didn't take anything. Our supplies were melting away, and we had five children with us. Time rolled a deathly silence over the floating ice.

And then, toward the end of a day as calm and unfruitful as the others, a joyful komatik came toward us, drawn by a dozen dogs: Mary, Jensingoak, Schneider and Manuina were bringing food! It was a feast. Our igloo was large, divided into three beds, with beautiful white bearskins

for sleeping. A section was cleared for Mary and Jensingoak. Schneider and Manuina shared the bed of Segulliak and my father.

Tuglavina avoided the Brothers' glances, for we had almost nothing to offer. After two or three nights of silence, unable to stand it anymore, Schneider spoke. "Don't be discouraged", he said in a solemn tone. "The Lord is with us. I would like to speak with you..." The children suppressed their giggles. Nevertheless, everyone settled down respectfully to hear his story. "The father of Jususi", Schneider continued, "created the sky and the earth, and all that lives..."

As if lightning had just struck him, he stopped short and looked around him, probing the opaque silence of our questioning. He began to see what was in front of him: children, adolescents, women and men with hollow cheeks, stunned and taken aback. He saw our igloo on Nintok Island as well, and the immense bank of ice covering all the sea between the coast and the island, which held the island in its grip, extending out to sea as far as an eagle's eyes could scan. He saw that there were neither men nor women from Nintok Island all the way to Nain, nothing but solitude. He saw the ice and the cold waiting for the right moment. He heard the fragile trembling of his own breathing.

In this widened as well as simpler vision, he repeated the sentence, but this time only in the depths of his mind. He measured the weight, the width and the depth: "... the sky and the earth, all that lives..." He wanted to repeat it in the igloo's air, but it froze on his lips, unable to get away. The words were suddenly too brittle, they were like little glass pots. Their meaning could not come out without breaking them.

Schneider understood then that it was impossible to explain such a sentence. At that exact moment and for the first time in his life, there was so much purity in the ears that heard his word, so much height, and transparency also, that he was drawn into a deep meditation. The word "*father*" was there before him, like an abyss, and each of the other words that followed: "*sky*", "*earth*", "*all*", "*life*". He no longer grasped their meaning, or rather, the meaning of the words had grasped him, to carry him into an immeasurable abyss. The sky had taken him and drawn him into the stars; they were more numerous than the snowflakes on all of the aput. The earth had swept him off into one of its volcanoes where it cooks the rock, thousands of kinds of rocks... The all? The all was like an indescribable night that held its breath so as not to shake the stars... And it was no doubt many other things also.

Sitting under a dome of snow, so far from all he knew, faced with all he did not know, he realized that what he had said since his birth, thousands of sentences, thousands of words, he had said them without thinking, they were words detached from their meaning, words which went here and there across already-made streets because no one ever questioned them... There was no need to question them because everyone thought they understood them. They were little pots transmitted without ever being opened for fear that their contents might escape. But in the igloo on Nintok Island, the words could not remain intact and pass from hand to hand like that, for eyes looked with thirst and ears listened with hunger.

"Jususi, how did you know him?" my father asked.

Schneider didn't know. A terror chilled his back. The infinite solitude of one who has lost everything. The terror passed from his sweaty face to his icy chest. Each one perfectly understood this face. Each one had known a similar moment, a moment of absolute solitude where all the stories disappear. And then, you raise your eyes, and there is a stone covered with snow, and you weep because it too is so alone.

"Speak", my father insisted.

-- Do you understand what I am feeling? All my life, I spoke without knowing what I was saying because the weather was good, because life was given to me. But here, life is not given. My stories lose their foothold. You could say that there is too much truth for them, they cannot walk in so vast a country.

-- So tell us one of your stories, a story you have lived, my father added. Then, we will tell you one of ours, for the winter is long in a land of rock and ice..."

The winter really was long.

Jensingoak and Schneider were now two lost brothers, with no defined religion, on a sea of ice rubbed by the wind, two brothers among a little people who had always lived there and yet hadn't died of fear. They had recounted some memories. Our family too. We had looked at our roots from every angle, and it was as long, jagged, and fractured as a fjord. This gave the impression of being face to face, cliff in front of cliff. The kayak that ventured between the two facades trembled like a birch leaf. In the silence, we thought about possible futures, possible unions, children who might issue from these unions.

Suddenly, a terrible blizzard approached and settled down on the island. We had to close the igloo's paak. We continued our exchanges. Each one gave us some very old songs that shivered between their teeth. We ate what was left of our food. We were, in the end, the same being, the same thirst and the same hunger, and silence had set up its own igloo.

It came to pass that we no longer heard the howling of the dogs. So each of us went to sleep, surrounding the children in our warmth like kudliks, economizing our fat, reducing our respiration. To prick up our ears was enough, in case the blizzard went away.

But the Brothers couldn't manage to sleep. One night, Schneider went and shook my father.

"Why are you sleeping? We must go hunting."

-- Good luck!" my father answered as he fell back into his snoring.

The blizzard didn't yield. Mary's breathing panted and wheezed. The air was like a thick layer of rancid fat. Tuglavina, who had heard Schneider wake up my father, got up and went to open the paak to let in a little fresh air. Mary wanted to go out to breathe and vomit, for she was ill. Two dogs succeeded in getting in in spite of the blows of Tuglavina's stick. Manuina jumped up to intervene. One of them attacked his ankle. Tuglavina planted his knife between its ribs. The other dog turned against him. Jensingoak ran it through with a harpoon.

They filled in the paak again. Manuina took off his mocassin. The wound didn't look very deep. They ate the little bit of meat the carcasses of the two starving dogs provided, then went back to sleep again. Their dreams were troubled, for to eat dog is forbidden.

Tuglavina couldn't get to sleep. With a knife between his teeth, he stuck his head out into the blizzard. The dogs were no longer there. The moon was full. In a slackening in the screen of snow, he thought he saw a fox. He waited for another slackening of the storm, and saw a second fox. This time it was convincing. The growls followed a direction. The hunter went back in and woke up his father; they talked. Ulluk, the youngest of the group, woke up also. It was decided.

Tuglavina, Ulluk and Jensingoak slowly went out of the igloo, taking care to fill in the exit behind them. There really were holes in the blizzard, and in the holes restless foxes appeared, running in the direction of distant howling. No doubt the dogs were down there, in the howling. All that was needed was to follow the animals, their tracks, their cries. The moon shone on the furs. Ulluk's piercing eyes and caribou ears cleared a way for them. They pulled a sled along with them.

An interminable journey. At one point, they realized that the blizzard was going to close in on them and they wouldn't be able to either go ahead or turn back. They built a small igloo. They slept in it for a while.

The blizzard yielded a little. They saw a fox, heard growling. They went in that direction, on all fours so as to see better. And then, a miracle! A transparent stratum formed between the ragged layers of the blizzard, and they could extend their gaze for a good distance. On the sea ice in front of them, the body of a beached whale.

It was too beautiful. The blizzard closed its grip again. We had to build another little igloo. But the men didn't have any more fat for the kudlik. No fire.

The cold entered their clothing. Hunger and thirst absorbed the whiffs of warmth remaining in their bodies. The men moved so as not to die, rubbing against each other, drawing from the reserves in their bones, drawing their life from their marrow.

Death stood there like the sweetest of women. She invited us into her bed with her languorous voice. Jensingoak tried to hang on to his duty to live, but death was sweeping him away in a sensuality he had never known, and he could no longer tear himself away from her attraction.

Ulluk removed one of Jensingoak's boots and bit his toes. He kept them in his mouth to warm them. Jensingoak came out of his torpor. He slipped his hand into Ulluk's hood, finding a little warmth there. Swinging back and forth, Tuglavina sang the ayayas of surrender to death. The three men were going to give in. Why delay such an exquisite pleasure! Why endure such suffering! They searched for motivations.

A shiver passed. Little children seemed to be struggling in their hearts. Then, they tore themselves out of the arms of death and returned to the terrible pains of their bodies. Crawling against the current in torture and torment, they brought the burning tips of their fingers back to life, then their toes. Their legs could move again.

Powerful cracking reached their ears. The wind was moving the sea under the ice. Horrible spurtings came out of the crevasses here and there, falling back again like a rain of rocks. To tear a little more warmth out of their bodies, they formed a tight circle.

Then the wind stopped short. The whale was there: a mountain of ice. One dog alone had survived, too weak to react; he was called Aalavoq. The others were only ice-covered sculptures. No foxes. The ice enclosed the whale like a wall.

With his ax, Ulluk attacked the wall imprisoning the animal in order to tear out a portion of fat. On his return to the little igloo, he would thus be able to light the kudlik and warm himself, melt some snow and drink. The thick sheet of ice gave way, but too slowly.

Then Jensingoak noticed that the foxes and dogs had scratched at the whale's back. Behind the ice, they saw a big hole which communicated with the intestine. That was where they had to strike. Ax in hand, Jensingoak cleared a way. Ulluk relieved him. Thanks to the strength of the one and the precision of the other, the tunnel proceeded little by little into the intestines. Soon they reached a spot that radiated warmth.

Ulluk detached a large segment of steaming intestine, then he and Jensingoak managed to make a hut in the belly of the whale. Using the fat that was present, they lit the kudlik.

Jensingoak went to look for Tuglavina, who had gone back to lie down in the little igloo. They had to drag him because he was no longer strong enough to walk. Tuglavina was struggling with dreams, and all the energy he expended in his struggle, he didn't have available for his legs.

Ulluk removed his anorak, took off the coat underneath it, turned it inside out, with the fur on the outside, then put his anorak back on, went outside and spread his coat in the snow. Jensingoak imitated him. The two men wanted to do the same with Tuglavina. But the hunter rebelled. He was giving up the fight.

Ulluk broke the whale's intestine in several places. On contact with the air, the excrement gave out the warmth of a sauna, but the gas burned the lungs and the odor was unbearable. Jensingoak enlarged the opening of their hut of flesh so as to point it in the direction of the wind. The warmth gave them life again and transformed the snow into water. They drank their

fill. After hesitating, Tuglavina drank as well, with Ulluk's help, for he didn't have the strength to hold the cup. Aalavoq ate from the burst intestine.

Ulluk and Jensingoak felt that they were going to come through it all right, but Tuglavina sucked at bitterness like a pipe, because he was ashamed: two hunters were struggling in front of him and were treating him like a sick man. And then, all at once, the extreme tension they were in slackened. Jensingoak burst out laughing. Ulluk gazed at him, stunned.

"Remember Jonah swallowed by a whale!"

-- Oh yes! That was a story! It had bad breath, that whale!" Ulluk guffawed.

-- It's because it's not his breath... "

Tuglavina glanced at him with a vexed look, and Jensingoak understood that he had no intention of laughing.

After regaining their strength, the three men cleaned their clothing in the snow, got dressed again, enlarged the hole Ulluk had begun to dig, then tore off the whale a quite large piece of fat with which they fed the fire of the kudlik they had brought with them. Clearing a way, they went up as far as the liver, then to the heart and the lungs; then they broke some bones and arrived at the muscles.

At the end of two days, they were satisfied and had enough fat and meat to revive the families who must be starving to death on Nintok Island. The wind arose again, but this time it pushed them in the back. Jensingoak, Ulluk, and the dog pulled the sled, where a much-weakened Tuglavina rested with the provisions.

Arriving at the family igloo, they were struck by a black silence. They lit three kudliks to melt some snow and provide something to drink. Each one awoke slowly as if returning from a very distant country. All did return, except for one little girl and a boy, rigid and wrapped in each other's arms.

Mikak and Mary

While Tuglavina, Ulluk and Jensingoak were risking their lives on the sea ice in search of a possible beached whale, Schneider and I took turns next to Mary, who was feverish. What a strange face, bloodless, long and angular! A narrow neck, fine and strengthless shoulders, arms like the legs of a wading bird.

Curls the color of a red fox trembled on her hollow cheeks. She was frustrated because she couldn't manage to retie her fur hat and knew that I wouldn't be able to either. She didn't like to feel slovenly. At last she burst out laughing, for her round and greenish eyes had just been captured by my little Sorlark, installed inside my hood.

Annirivuuq, my sister's son, approached us when he heard her. Everyone was sleeping, and the child liked this nervous laugh still resonating in the heavy silence. Six years old, he wanted to hear us blabber. We really were blabbering, for Mary was entering a drunkenness created by the fever.

"Tell me truly, Mikak, what do you remember of our Gospel?" Mary asked me.

-- Gosfel", Annirivuuq repeated, reconstructing the sounds in his way, but with Mary's serious grimace.

Seeing that I was going to let the boy talk in order to better duck the question, she returned to the charge:

"Yes, what do you remember of it?"

-- I wouldn't want to hurt you, Mrs. Mary.

-- No, tell me, I'm afraid of falling asleep, you understand! Let's struggle together to keep awake. Sometimes losing one or two illusions wakes you up!"

She burst out laughing, coughed and spat. I was still hesitating. She pinched my hand.

"I'm going to tell you... If I hadn't been abducted and taken to England, I'd be like my family, I wouldn't be able to believe... "

I wanted to stop there.

"Believe that Jususi loved us so much", Mary continued in my place.

-- No, we can easily believe that. How many hunters have died to save their families. But those who whipped him with the scourge, those who drove enormous nails into his hands, who laughed as they watched him suffer, a brutality like that! Who could have believed that men could arrive at such meanness and such ferocity? That is what we can't believe. And worse, you tell me that they did it calmly, in obedience to the governor. That this was the custom. How can we believe in such wickedness if we haven't been a witness of it! And you wear that cross like an amulet that constantly reminds you how far the cruelty of a kablunat can go!

-- Is that what you remember?"

Annirivuuq caressed Mary's hair. As she smiled at him, he came up to her face and rubbed his nose on her cheek. I was relieved. I didn't want to go any farther. But, when the boy turned around and was looking at Schneider stir the fire in a silence that said a great deal about the attention he was devoting to our conversation, Mary gave me an insistent look. Having no other choice, I continued.

"What you told about the temple and the Hebrews, God's people: the hundreds of animals slaughtered, the prostitutes, the stonings, the abandoned lepers, the smell of burnt flesh rising up to Yahweh's nostrils... The slaves treated worse than dogs. The poor they let starve to death next to a banquet... You tell us all this without being astonished by it, as if they were ordinary people. And they are the ordinary people, down there, in your home. And isn't it to flee all that savagery that you came here?"

This time, Mary stayed frozen, unable to answer. She never had noticed the Bible's basic structure: war after war, barbarity, slaughter, insensitivity to the suffering of others, servile obedience, and, here and there, a man or woman worthy of this name, so rare that they were venerated as saints... But as for me, I couldn't stop any longer.

"And this is coming to us on big boats. We see them massacre numberless quantities of whales in order to light the lamps on the streets of London. They take fish, not for themselves, but for a people without number. They have us trap animals that are not eaten in order to make fancy clothes. They are arriving like a blizzard with no end. You might well say they will never stop until they have emptied the country of all its animals and made us like them."

For a long time, Mary remained in a fog. Then she emerged.

"Am I a kablunat for you? Tell me frankly."

I didn't want to answer. She kept her eyes on me, even as Annirivug was multiplying his efforts to capture her attention and reduce the tension.

"No! You are as good as my sister... "

-- Mikak, do you think of me as your sister?" Mikak asked me at last.

I wasn't sure that she knew what she was saying. Moravian Sisters were totally devoted to each other. But becoming the sister of an Inuit meant sharing her father, her mother, her grandfathers, her ancestors, and also sharing her children, her grandchildren, her responsibilities, sometimes the husbands...

Annirivug stood up behind me and patted my shoulders.

"I want this bond so much," Mary continued. "So tell me what still prevents it. You can be brutal. Now, today, you can."

-- Why did you say that it's the cold and snow that saves us, the dispersion and the fragility of our lives that have spared us, that if we had lived crowded and comfortable in cities, with guns and horses, we would be as malicious as the kablunats? Don't you have any respect for our ancestors, our wise men and our angakkuqs?"

Mary searched her memory for when she might have ever said such a thing.

"Oh, that, that's not me," she said all of a sudden. "That's Drachart all over. Brother Drachart preaches a lot... In reality, we are lacking in faith. You, Mikak, can you believe me? You know, nothing here is as we had imagined it. Everything has been turned upside down. Now it's we who are the savages. The English and the French are little by little going north with their alcohol and their guns. We realize this, so we are defending ourselves like cats that have fallen into a bowl.

-- Cats", Annirivuuq repeated.

Schneider came up to us and put young Nattoraliiq down beside the little boy. She, his seven-year-old cousin, was not asleep, but didn't have the strength to approach the one kudlik still radiant due to Schneider's vigilance. Annirivuuq wrapped the little girl in his arms in order to give her a little warmth. I covered both of them with a big white bearskin.

I think sleep comforted us for a moment. We both awoke, Mary and I. The little ones were sleeping under their fur, just as Sorlark was in my hood.

"I'm pregnant," Mary confided. "If I survive, I'll be a mother."

-- Don't you believe in resurrection?

-- Yes, but the child isn't born!

-- Perhaps you do believe in resurrection because you believe in death more than anything and you have a rather frightening idea of death. The cord between the mother and her baby is like the cord between a grandfather and his granddaughter, or the cord between two sisters, they are indestructible... "

The last kudlik went out, for lack of oil. The darkness then became total, and snoring formed a kind of carpet for my ears. I was about to dive into a heavy sleep myself when Mary said to me with a start:

"You must explain to me this confidence that allows you to endure so many difficulties without ever complaining, but, on the contrary, while laughing most of the time."

Since I was exhausted, I told her the old legend of the raven, which I could recite while almost asleep.

"There was a raven on a rock. He kept his beak closed in order to hold on to the sun which was burning his tongue. A little girl came behind him and tickled him. Bursting out in laughter, he opened his beak and the sun ran away a short distance. The sun was so beautiful a woman that men came from everywhere to mate with her.

-- The sun: a woman? Mary interrupted.

-- It is the creating womb, the heart, the uummat.

-- Oh good! Keep on, I'll be quiet.

-- Constantly impregnated, the sun-mother beamed out white geese, foxes, caribou, bears, all that flies, all that runs. The beings she had created mated with each other and multiplied, and this didn't stop. But there wasn't space to separate the beings, and everything was tangled up. Then a seagull left all her feathers on the shore. She was completely naked. Because the gull was naked, she created a desire around her. The desire rushed on to a stump and formed a man in the stump. The gull took the man in her embrace. Her people were many. In spite of her happiness, the gull was still nostalgic; she was thinking about the sun up there. Other gulls happened to pass by. They tore off some of their feathers and glued them on her back and arms. Dressed like that, she could fly away. But a terrible black cloud filled with ashes, dust, and soot blackened her feathers, so that she now had the appearance of a raven. She came back to earth with the sun in her mouth. The Inuit families no longer recognized her. In spite of everything, a little girl tickled her, she couldn't help laughing, opened her beak and the sun fled away again into the sky..."

Mary had fallen asleep.

Ulluk cried out.

Three kudliks had been lit along their whole length. There was whale oil in abundance. Snow was melted. Water was distributed. Everyone woke up. Pieces of meat were thawed out. Our bones came out of their lethargy, muscles stretched, our tongues spoke.

Ulluk recounted the exploit. Jensingoak nodded in agreement, for the truth was beyond imagining. But Tuglavina kept the back of his neck bent.

And then a shout was heard. Two women had discovered the two children. They didn't wake up. Annirivuuq was wrapped around Nattoralik. The boy was almost naked, for he had buried the girl in his anorak in the hope of saving her.

I immediately put Nattoralik on my bare skin and covered myself with thick fur. After quite a long time, she awoke. I blew into her mouth. She moved... A resurrection that had cost the life of my sister's son.

Manuina's Baptism

We left Nintok Island to settle down once more near the Brothers' great house, where we waited, living off their provisions. Tuglavina had lost his panache. He no longer said a word. When the weather permitted, he wandered over the sea ice. He bit the cold and broke icicles. I

passed my days teaching the Sisters Inuktitut. I perfected my English, and made progress in German.

I must admit that, for me, it was a good life. In this house, it was as if we had come out of the cold, the winter, the world, the mountains, the rivers, the hardships. We were somewhere else, transported by an extraordinary trance into a mild land. We Inuit were a little afraid of offending the dead, to, in this way, live as well as them, and yet we couldn't resist, we filtered in there for quite long intervals, interrupted each time by abrupt returns to our sweaty igloos.

With the Brothers completely new spirits came, with smooth sides, soft and yellow eyes, thick and lazy tongues, bodies always lying down a bit, clothed in slippery down. These spirits roamed around the stove without ever touching the ground, harmless, bloated and clumsy like caribou bellies. They enveloped us, and we felt a little like we did after making love, simply good, eyes lying down in fat. Our wills grew soft and, in our igloos, our children disturbed us.

Above this softness, and very much higher, there was an air and spirits even lighter, more languorous, more delightful, as irresistible as death: music. The Brothers polished the horn, the trumpet, the cornet, the two bugles, then stuck them on their mouths, and made a sound me out of them that transformed our ears into birds.

We were transported. Our skins shivered as after the first bath in the spring. The resonance warmed us like a fire, but more gently and all around the body. We went away in warm and misty sheets over immense plains. And then we took off with the wings of Canada geese grafted on to our backs. We didn't want to come back, ever. Our grandchildren didn't have toothaches any more. We were in so peaceful an intoxication that you might have said that we were in death's arms.

When the Brothers stopped the music, we fell back down to earth. We had swallowed the sun-woman. Life was too hard. It was too cold to hunt. Seals, we no longer saw them. They were far away. We went to sleep in our igloos waiting for the Brothers to wake us up. We went to eat with them. We sang hymns. Brother Drachart really went at his preaching. This did him good. And while he savored himself, we ate the provisions.

While the sun was walking a little higher, a little farther, and for a little longer time each day, Manuina stretched out on his komatik for his final sleep. His wound had never really healed, it was lurking in his blood and darkened it. The white and shadowless dogs were already hitched to the sled of his agony and were stamping their feet. More worn-out than old, the hunter didn't want to depart without having settled his affairs. He kept his foot firmly on the brake of the sled, but Lady Death was pulling his hair.

"I have already spoken to you about it, Manuina", Drachart said to him. You must give up one of your two wives. Then I can baptize you and you will find the road of the Father.

-- If you take one of them, I'll be very much relieved," Manuina confessed. The other one will be plenty for me. But, you understand, it's not up to me to choose.

-- Manuina, I repeat, I can't take one of your wives.

-- They're very good wives. Each one has two living children. How will they manage? In the land without shadow, I will see more clearly. I'll be able to guide them, but I won't be able to either hunt or fish. You understand that!

-- Don't worry, we won't abandon them, they will be like our sisters.

-- Both of them? Manuina insisted.

-- Yes, both of them, Drachart continued, emphasizing his words.

-- I won't have any worries, then.

-- No, you're free, you can follow the great corridor of light that leads to Jususi and his Father.

-- And my children?

-- We'll take care of them, too.

-- But then I'll have nothing to do.

-- No, you'll be free like a little child."

He couldn't get used to that idea. That freedom... Just to watch his two wives, his children, eating... through someone else's care.

"Isn't it a great sin to abandon your own that way?"

-- No, it's not about forgetting your family, but leaving this world."

Manuina repeated these incomprehensible words several times: leave this world. What could that mean?

Suddenly he felt a painful terror in his belly: he remembered being the prey of a powerful torngat, a very long time ago. He had woken up in his dream, but it was a nightmare. Invisible forces were tearing him and there was no way to return. He had gone to see Segulliak, who had told him very clearly: "This torngat is a free spirit. A free spirit can't really exist, for all things live through the cords which connect us to the rest of the world like a baby in its mother's womb. The torngat troubling you doesn't exist. It is just the fruit of your mind's over-excitement. It is not your destiny to be an angakkuk. Take care of your wives and children, and the free spirit will leave you." Segulliak was right. The torngat evaporated because he, Manuina, had become a provider again; he brought his two wives and children seals.

So, to abandon his responsibilities like this, to make do with watching his family waste away and even worse, to leave the world like the first seagull, how could he do this without falling into the torments of a free spirit?

"But no one can leave this world without getting lost," he answered Drachart.

-- Listen, Manuina, Drachart finally replied, Satan does exist, you're right. But with baptism, you'll slip between his hands and you'll leave for the Father's house."

You could read the terror in the eyes of the hunter who refused to die.

In order to see Manuina, Segulliak took advantage of a moment when no Brother was at his bedside. After listening to his fears for quite some time, he told him: "You have nothing to lose, but everything to gain. Don't give up anything. Take everything. Two fathers are better than no father, and why not the Father of heaven! You have two souls; may the one set off on the great sled for who knows where, and may the other stay to help your family. No torngat will trouble you, because your two souls will still be connected by the seams of the great uummat, I promise you that."

This, Manuina clearly understood; no one could have two mothers, but two fathers, that was not so rare, and the older one must need to be taken care of, for he was surely very tired, the Father of heaven with all his worries...

When Drachart returned to see him, Manuina was ready. "Feed my two wives, baptize me, and I will take care of your Father." Drachart baptized him and Manuina departed in a hunter's great smile.

The mama bear

It was the season of pale lights. There were beautiful windless days when we could bare our heads to feel the fingers of warmth on our eager faces. My man had lost his pride. He turned his back on me. Taciturn spirits filled with resentment were dancing around him, poking at his dreams of ever more terrible calamities. He needed to subjugate them, make them powers of healing, for if not we would all be in danger of being submerged in his inner storm.

"Go and get to the Korak River," Segulliak had told him, "get near Mount Caubvick, climb halfway up a mountain and look at the Torngat range. Then your eyes will straighten out and you will see your way."

Tuglavina took just one dog with him, the tireless Aalavoq, and set out for the mountain, because Segulliak was feeling tired of him and wanted to send him away. A man who hates himself quickly becomes unbearable.

It was a habit rooted in a thousand stories, winter gives no luck, that is why families grant themselves some distance in winter and come closer together in summer, and if one of their

members is tormented, he must go away and find his rest again; if not, he puts his whole family in danger. Tuglavina had to make peace with the mountain of his soul.

After his departure, all of us grew sober. The Brothers' supplies had considerably diminished. We were still a long way from spring, and the beginning of spring is always the worst season... Brother Brasen had instituted an extremely severe rationing. We were hungry, and the Brothers, too.

The nights were still long and overwhelmed us with sadness. So we laughed about everything and nothing. The children played at making caribou antlers fall by throwing squares of ice at them. They had fun, without a care. The hunters watched them, wrinkling their brows and gritting their teeth.

We added days to days in this way on the great coastal whitenesses, but the seashells we strung were like pieces of dried clay. The men sounded the bumps in the sea ice, for the tides were increasing in scope, demolishing the plates of ice, rolling them head over heels and forming worrisome mountains.

We should have been hunting on our winter territories. But it was no use pulling on the ropes of the night's enormous roll; dawn wasn't coming any faster. Spring seemed suspicious of the flaccid seaweed the wind had rolled up to the big wooden house.

One day, Kopic, my paternal aunt's young husband, went to meet Jensingoak.

"I need your knife", he told him.

-- For how long a time? Jensingoak wanted to know.

-- I'll be done with it before night."

Silence cut their gazes apart so that they wouldn't touch. Quick as a flash, Jensingoak caught a spark that didn't have time to flee.

"I can't", he replied. But come to Tasisuak Lake with me. With your help, we'll come back with some big fish.

-- Don't take me for a child, Kopic said.

-- I know what you want to do, Jensingoak retorted.

-- My ration will go to my wife.

-- She won't eat it, she'll cry.

-- You're right. She needs me. I'll go and meet her."

And he went away.

The next day, Kopic was nowhere to be found. Everyone knew what the story was. He wanted to give Sedna, the mistress of sea creatures, something to eat. When that was done, perhaps she would open her womb to feed the idiots who had stayed on the coast to hang around with the strangers!

Learning what had happened, Jensingoak harnessed his dogs and, without asking for brother Brasen's approval, went toward Tikkoatokak Bay. According to the Brothers, he had acted on impulse. Entrusting my little girl to the care of my sister, I harnessed my fastest dogs and succeeded in joining Jensingoak by taking a dangerous shortcut on the ice of the river mouth. My friend needed a guide. I had guessed his plan. With a gun, it was possible. But had he taken note of the moon, a danger of a wind against the tide, of a tidal bore of ice in the fjord?

Aurora borealis tore the forehead of the sky to shreds. The firmament was like a plain of green grass passed over by a south wind. We could have said that it was summer upside down over our heads. Instead, it was Jensingoak's tormented spirits that defied the sky's implacable serenity. Crimson stripes, violet hairs, the jaws of a raging toothache flowed into the auroras.

I too needed an anger. The bell jar of rations, of prayers, of songs, of brass bands, of going to bed, of getting up... they were seasonless days repeated against the moon, one might have said. They had the same effect as an ayaya striking you on the head with hammer blows. I couldn't take it any longer. We were getting soft. I needed to break what was left of winter in the howling of my dogs.

The dogs had understood me. They charged ahead at terrific speed, accelerated without ever slackening their effort and finally passed Jensingoak's komatik. I blew him a big laugh along with the snapping of my whip. He shivered with a voracious pleasure he could not conceal. He caught up with me with no trouble, but then stayed behind me. We were going to hunt, to reinvigorate our people, to tie the two broken ends of the necklace of life back up again.

I led Jensingoak to the end of the bay, on the north side of the Tikkoatotak River, because there was a small mountain there where a mother bear was hibernating. A bald eagle had seen us. With a little luck, the mother bear would wake up, mistaking our hunger for her own. She would come out, she would lead her little ones, she would bring us to the young seals hidden in holes on the bay's floating ice.

At the mouth of the river, we tied our dogs behind a big rock and left our sleds there. Jensingoak slipped his arms under the straps of his backpack and straightened up. He used his rifle as a cane. On foot, we went up the river, which made no noise under the still-thick ice. Our steps sank into the softened snow. An exhausting route.

We camped under a makeshift igloo at the foot of the mountain. We slept for a while, each in our own coldness, but our dreams smelled of male and female, heated oil and the green mosses of spring. A short sleep in a single great body which enveloped us both in spite of ourselves.

We couldn't stay in our igloo any longer, packed into a sheath of snow with sticks that drove each of us back into our own corners. It was unbearable. We went out.

The dry cold air immediately washed our faces. The drops of sweat evaporated, prickling the skin. Jensingoak threw me a smile so Inuit, so male that, acting on impulse, I threw my hood back and looked him full in the face. He had his own secret for melting the ice.

He put his hand into his baggage and brought out a bugle. He placed it on his lips, rolled his mustache, puffed out his cheeks, and ripped the sky with a vibration the mountain had never heard. He repeated his bellling to the point of setting off small avalanches.

The aurora borealis took flight. The sun arose and cast a great flame over the mountainside. My body blazed like the naked seagull. From the purity of the place and the movement of the man, the ice was melting.

A hole was slowly forming in the upper part of the slope, at a height we couldn't reach. When we saw it, we slipped into our little makeshift igloo. With his pava⁷, Jensingoak made two large eyes in the dome of snow. We were so close to one another, so close as we gazed ahead of us into this strange eyeglass he had cut out in the igloo...

The mother bear juttod out of her hole, gently let herself fall, slid on her side, went down the slope for a while... One might have said that the mountain had just given birth to a mother bear. She laughed, letting fall a little of her robe of snow, which the evening sun was staining with blood.

The mother bear straightened up, sniffed the air, grew drunk in the moon's faint light. She remained motionless like a ghost, gazing at the world with a new eye that saw it as so beautiful, so grand, so gentle. She saw herself on her mother-mountain's belly. She was in perfect trust and safety. In front of her was majesty. She gazed, bowled over by the shimmering whiteness of the growing day. Facing her, a great cliff of sandstone made rosy by the hoarfrost; below, the recess of the frozen river; in the middle, a white dome looking at them with astounded eyes. A beautiful world full of solitude and peace, with two moon eyes so near each other and yet unable to touch.

She sat down.

For a long time, she contemplated the sky, just at the height of the small clouds writhing above the cliff, crawling with paws in the air, scratching the mountain's back, which made them wriggle on each other. For a moment, nostalgia blurred the mother bear's coal eyes. She rapidly

⁷ Long knife used to cut snow and build igloos

shifted her gaze from the sky and let it linger on the body of the cliff. From it she harvested certain nourishing colors. Her pleasure gave an extraordinary grace to the movement of her head. This blue vault, this sky buttressed by solar columns was her new cave now. "So much space!" she seemed to be saying to herself. "And what a house is mine!"

It had been worth it to dive to the bottom of her winter hole and collapse down there like a pile of stones tumbling to the bottom of a well, far beneath her fears and her anxieties. And then to sink to the peaceful bottom, to settle down there in width, in height and in depth, there in the shadows. The great reconciliation. It had been a harrowing fall. How not to grab onto terror or rage, rebellion or worries, to all the asperities of animal or Inuit souls! In her winter night, she had let herself fall like a gannet, with whistling wings; then like a sea turtle, with cutting feet, then like a red crab, with circling eyes. In the mud, she had sunk again...

And then, it was infinite peace. Starting from that, she had begun her climb back up, passing through all the animal kingdom, from the mollusk to the most beautiful of bears. To reconcile all, to form just one single animal. At each stratum, she had made peace, then joy, then love, forging blood, flesh and bone, reconstructing herself completely... She had in this way re-formed the world and her body in the world. She had re-formed the world according to the needs of her soul, re-formed her body according to the needs of the world. She could have become a monster, she had become a mother bear.

Finally, when she heard the bugle, she awoke in the beauty, in the perfect harmony of the North. Before our astonished gaze through the igloo's two eyes, she rejoiced in the peace and in all the magnificence of her work. A world that was hers. Her own heart open in the uummat of Torngarsoak. A beautiful world. All transparent matter ends up by reflecting its own center on its own periphery. She was the center and she was looking at the circumference. A good world.

She was sitting down, leaning back in the hollow her weight made in the snow, nipples in the wind. Wisps of scent came zigzagging out of them and crept into the hole she had just come out of. Attracted by the aroma, two small playful and careless noses came out of the hole and bounded toward her like waves, stopping only briefly here and there by fits and starts, the one biting the tail of the other. They tumbled up to their Mama, and thoroughly enjoyed it.

The peace the mother devoured in her nostrils, the little ones suckled in great smooth gulps until their eyes became as black and as drunk as their mother's.

While we were in the little igloo, Jensingoak enveloped me in his meditation. His silence recited: "Genesis, chapter 1, first morning of the world..." Tears flowed from his eyes. The she-bear was fashioning the Inuit we were becoming as we watched. We let her be, and we let her make us. She was sculpting a single inumarik with two hard heads at odds with each other so as not to mate and in their turn remake the world into a single uummat.

The ultimate hunt

The bear cubs had drunk greedily. Once satisfied, they rolled on each other. Without their knowing it, their playing formed a skipping ball that rolled to the bottom of the slope. The mother stayed confined in her place for quite a while longer. She clasped the sun with her four giant paws. She straightened up, inhaled a long line of mild air and once again remade the world, beginning with her aspiration for peace. Then she made the world turn in front of her for a moment, looked at it very carefully, shivered with satisfaction, fell down, and rolled head over heels to her two little ones. Taking them with her, she went toward the sea ice with joyful steps.

We followed them at a good distance. Each time there was a chance of her seeing us, we hid behind the white canvas shield used for hunting seals, which I had thought to bring along. But she wasn't worried. She didn't like to look behind her.

A breeze from the north cleared her nostrils. She was alone since the beginning of the world. This world was hers. It was her, like a reflection of her happiness. Consequently, she saw nothing but happiness. She went her way, the good always before her, never letting herself be distracted by the insane idea of a misfortune. She didn't retreat, didn't ask herself: "Who goes there?" Before her was her good, and nothing else.

And we, behind her, we too knew what we wanted, we knew our good also.

Her mother bear's muzzle climbed back up the wind. The full moon opened the way for her, and the aurora gave its approval. So she discovered a first hole in the ice, under a thick layer of frazil. She stood up to her full height, then dived into it, two paws in front, pressing down with all her weight, with all the weight of the moon. The seal's nest broke. With one blow of her jaw, she slit its throat, tore it, freed it. The bear cubs drank the blood, and she, the first mother, took sustenance from what belonged to her. Thus renewed, she went off a distance.

Jensingoak placed a stick at the spot where the young seal had been devoured, next to the hole in the ice where the mother seal would assuredly return to nurse her baby.

After that, we continued to follow the mother bear, at a distance... At the end of the day, at the end of the night, she had eaten a dozen young seals. Sated, she collapsed against a block of ice in order to feed her little ones. Jensingoak remained on his knees behind the white shield for a long time. The whole sky was singing Torngarsoak's praises. The stiff hairs of the aurora borealis squeaked as they crawled over the aput. The sea ice had gooseflesh.

The shot was fatal. The mother fell. As if after making love, she remained on her back, paws toward the sky, covering all the universe with her convulsive embrace. The little ones hopped on their mother, drinking the milk and the blood.

We turned around and went back, following the sticks. At every hole, our wait wasn't very long. Jensingoak killed four mother seals which he left on the ice like stains.

We went to look for the sleds and the dogs. We piled our catch on the two komatiks. The mother bear had to be split with an ax, cut into pieces, in order to be carried.

The two cubs, who didn't want to leave us, followed us, crying, all the way to Nain. When we arrived, the unharnessed and hungry dogs made a meal of them. Everyone looked, but no one saw what was happening: the gift of Torngarsoak.

The whole village ate in the crowded air of the Brothers, who stared at Jensingoak with horror and condemnation. Even Mary took part in this judgmental gaze. Who was her man, so close to the savage with the necklace of red seashells? What had he done with her?

Disgusted, Jensingoak went and hid on the north shore of Tasisuak Lake.

I found him that very night, trembling in a hole in the snow he had made. I heard the night grating its teeth against each other to grind his soul. He smothered his groaning like a fire crushed under the snow.

The night finally came to a close. The dawn decongested the entrance to the hole in the snow. Then the warmth arrived and our clothes were glued to our backs. Jensingoak raised his eyes to me and told me: "I have two hearts now, and they are tearing each other. How do I find peace again? Tell me, Mikak! How do I find peace again?" I pressed him in my arms. He wept for a moment. But his rebellion refused all healing.

The plot

We had missed the meeting with Torngarsoak. At Nain, while we were hunting the bear, Segulliak had foundered: a taciturn, joyless spirit had attacked our angakkuk. We forget it sometimes, but we walk on the edge of a volcano at every moment. Our inner abyss can explode in anger against any one of the stars. A man can feel insulted by a perfectly clear sky. The slightest thing is sufficient: a tiny bit of scorn against you. For a hunter, to come back emptyhanded is an ordeal worse than hunger. For an angakkuk, to watch his clan decline constitutes a stumbling block.

"Jensingoak and Mikak went hunting!" the silence had repeated in Segulliak's ears. "They went hunting", could just as well mean: "They are giving each other a good time", "They might have success", and "And you, what are you doing?" The looks turned against Segulliak. He wanted to change the direction of the accusations he felt he was the object of.

For the evil spirit tormenting Segulliak, it was all about taking advantage of Jensingoak's absence and hunger's presence, letting them act, while discreetly pushing them in the right direction.

"It is obvious that the bad luck comes from the Brothers", the evil spirit suggested to our people. "Isn't it because of them that the families have foolishly remained on this windy part of the coast? Isn't it they who distribute the poverty rations? Aren't they the ones who have the guns for hunting?" So, if we were to eliminate them, we could take possession of the great house, eat as much as we wanted, keep our children warm. We would have the weapons, we would have the sloop, the nets, the axes, the knives, the kettles, the power..."

The idea was not foolhardy, far from it. There was a time during the night when all the Brothers were sleeping except for the watchman. And, at least once in the course of his watch, he went outside to get wood. To send him to the blessed without making any noise was the only thing required. Then several would sneak inside, one for each Brother, while another would go and get hold of the guns. This would occur on a windy and noisy night... The evil spirit had no trouble distributing the roles...

So, in the heart of a windy and noisy night, Segulliak went to surprise brother Turner as he went to get wood. The angakkuk held his knife with a firm hand; with the other hand, he tapped the blacksmith on the shoulder. He was nearly twice Segulliak's size. On seeing the smile of the colossus, Segulliak was destabilized and fell back instantly into the fog of his mind.

Instead of striking, he extemporized: "Excuse me for surprising you, but I must speak with you immediately."

-- Go ahead", the Brother replied, without paying the slightest attention to the knife.

That was when Segulliak found a way out in his mind.

"I must speak to Brasen and to all the Brothers, it's a matter of life and death.

-- Good! If you insist. Come."

They went into the house. Brother Turner woke up Brother Brasen, who asked for more of an explanation.

"You have to wake up everyone," Segulliak insisted.

His frightened face left no other choice. Brasen woke up the Brothers. Segulliak placed himself in the middle of the circle.

"Some hunters have plotted against you, for this very night."

All were surprised by this, with the exception of Drachart.

"We should have expected it," he said, while the Brothers were still questioning each other. They are miserable wretches."

Brasen received Drachart's response like a slap, but couldn't immediately answer him back. Encouraged by his silence, Drachart went further.

"We shouldn't have let them pass the winter so close to us and in such great numbers. We will have to convert them one by one, and let only the baptized make use of our supplies..."

This time, Brasen had recovered his composure. He regained his authority and silenced Drachart with a sign of his finger.

"We are very grateful to you for informing us," he said to Segulliak. "Now, it will be best that you return to your igloo discreetly, because if those who plotted know that you denounced them, they might want to take revenge. Go sleep in peace. It is up to us to think about what follows."

Segulliak turned around. Silently, he went to warn the hunters that a dream had passed through the Brothers' house and warned them.

"How do you know it?" one of the hunters asked.

-- I caught this dream in my sleep, but it immediately got away.

-- Who then sent this dream to the Brothers to warn them?" a second hunter asked.

-- There are some bald eagles that worry me", the angakkuk answered, and all were subjugated by Segulliak's power.

I only learned of this plot much later, years after brother Brasen spoke to Jensingoak about it.

When our two sleds arrived at Nain filled with food, Segulliak was no longer at the village: he had gone off hunting with several others. The people ate the sled's contents without the slightest celebration, like wolves that have lost the moon and eat out of rage. During that time, the starving dogs devoured the two bear cubs. Not one Brother, not one hunter had the idea of thanking Torngarsoak or even God the Father.

That night, Jensingoak, disgusted, left his own people and went off to meditate in a hole in the snow on the north shore of Tasisuak Lake. And I joined him in order to share his bitterness.

The grand visit

The igloos had melted, the qarmats were set being set up: a struggle and pandemonium under the sun's swift rays. Spring was already burning the grass in its granite kettle, and none had suffered from the generally liquid and muddy change of season. The hunting was good from the beginning, for Sedna had disgorged a troop of seals that had come to bask on the rocks at low tide. A fall behavior on the first days of summer! We no longer had to spend an hour of clock time listening to brother Drachart in order to get a portion of rations.

Distrust had melted also. Everyone displayed their gratitude to Segulliak. Now that he was converted, he no longer used the traditional methods, but recited psalms and warded off misfortune.

One morning, while the clouds were stretching in the yellowish sky, Sorlark started laughing, because Aalavoq was licking her and barely let her breathe. I immediately went out to scan the horizon: no Tuglavina. At the following dawn, Aalavoq again slipped unceremoniously into our qarmat to make Sorlark laugh. Segulliak threw me a sideways glance. I had understood.

Taking Sorlark in my arms, I abruptly went out with Aalavoq. "Go, I'll follow you", I said to him. The dog began to whine with fear. "Go", I repeated, with even more authority. He lay down, muzzle between his paws. I took the whip and snapped it on a rock. Aalavoq got up and, making a thousand detours, led me to my sister's qarmat. The two lovers were playing, completely naked, in the beautiful warmth of the morning.

I turned around, driven by rage, shoved to the left and to the right by their loud laughter that followed me, and by the cries of Sorlark demanding her papa...

Tuglavina had brought back some very beautiful white fox and caribou skins. He had convinced his people, and even Segulliak, that he was under the protection of a powerful tornaq who went hand in hand with Jususi. He had the right to a second wife. He had chosen my sister.

I didn't understand my emotion at all. Why feel humiliation rather than deliverance? Was I wounded or was I worried for my sister? Were Tuglavina's crazy ideas any of my business! And yet I felt unbelievably alone; I was suffocating and I didn't know why. My heart fell over on itself like a stone that rolls into a ravine.

When I returned to my qarmat, Segulliak had already put my things outside. Nobody in my family wanted to take me into their tent, for everyone reckoned that Tuglavina was trapping enough white foxes to feed two good fur scrapers. Moving in with the Brothers was unthinkable, because they didn't trust me and didn't want me around Jensingoak.

So I moved in with my sister. Tuglavina slept between us. He only talked to my sister, for my ears were sewn shut with caribou sinew. Sorlark went to the side where there was a lot of

laughing, that is to say between Tuglavina and my sister. And why was she laughing so much? Was it because of Tuglavina's tickling? No! Above all it was because of the hole that the death of her son had left, the desire to kill that surfaced in her as soon as she caught sight of Nattoralik, the cousin her son had saved. She kept all this swarming locked up with the violent pleasure Tuglavina was now the master of. There was no place for me any longer, neither in my sister's heart, nor in my husband's heart, nor in my daughter's heart, nor in the heart of the one I loved more than everything.

I was alone, no doubt about it, a she bear coming out of her hole in the spring, nipples in the wind, without a bear cub to relieve her. I was alone, but I lived and I slept besides embraces and laughter that hurt my ears. I wanted to disappear.

One morning, we learned that the Brothers' sloop had run aground on a rock, near Nintok Island. Fortunately, brother Turner was part of the crew. With the assistance of the tide, some stakes, and brother Turner's uncommon strength, they had saved the sloop while sacrificing the catch.

Some days later, Segulliak and Tuglavina persuaded Jensingoak to take me with them, because I more than anyone knew the region's coasts. In fact, I hoped to form a profitable alliance in this way.

On the boat, I found myself as alone as in the family igloo. Yet there were embraces which were not made, embraces that Jensingoak held back and that were transformed into hard looks. I wanted to die.

Mary gave birth to a son. A funny baby, small and stocky, with big round insect eyes. She spent the summer in an imaginary nest, gratified, satisfied, as if the entire universe were suckling her blessed breast. She only spoke about her Daniel. For her, all the rest had disappeared. Her Jensingoak had, like a wasps' nest, grown sticky-sweet, more unattainable than ever.

During the best part of the season, the sloop brought in so many fish that all the families, those who had spent the winter at Nain, and those who came for the summer gathering, devoted themselves exclusively to hunting.

Tuglavina had finally convinced his brother Segulliak to trap with him. The two men brought back white fox skins and wolf skins. My sister should have counted on my help to clean, scrape and dry all these skins, but I was guiding the sloop beside Jensingoak and the distance he imposed on me.

Toward the middle of the summer, while the caches and supplies were overflowing, a worry took hold of the Brothers. They took turns standing on the beach behind a telescope through

which they scanned the horizon. They were searching for something in the distance, but all they saw were islands of ice.

Jensingoak and Schneider were building a second sloop, a little more massive than the first, with the goal of carrying out an expedition toward the north, beyond the dangerous Cape Kiglapait, in the region of Okkak. It was there that Jensingoak wanted to go, and he had persuaded brother Brasen to let him leave. In reality, the latter wanted to remove his friend from the beautiful savage who spoke German and English a little too well.

The sun waned. The moon triumphed.

At last they caught sight of the three-master they were looking for, the *Amity*. The Brothers celebrated that day. The lamps stayed lit almost all night. They read the letters they had received, got accustomed to new tools, fishing gear, all sorts of rigging for the new sloop, clothes, fabrics, hats...

The Inuits felt unwanted. One after the other, the families left for the plateaus, in the shelter of a hill, in a valley pricked with spruce. It wasn't easy, however, to leave such abundant supplies behind, and only bring along a sledload. There were at least three hundred of us Inuit remaining around the Brothers' house.

Then the *Amity* left again. The routine of bell, music, and catechism resumed. We ate all we wanted with no worry. The sloop spent the winter on blocks.

The following year, the *Amity* brought a man with a pastor's hat with a red ribbon: the Reverend Paul Layrits, who had to be greeted by bending the neck.

Every day, when the sun reached its midpoint, everyone assembled. There were more than a thousand of us. Families had come from as far away as Kangiqsualujjuaq by following the Kingurutik River. The Brothers' reputation had spread as far as those places, where I had family: kablunats who didn't kill, who didn't buy and sell, but who shared iron tools, knives, kettles, needles...

During one of these gatherings, Segulliak got up and declared: "We, our women and our children, were happy to see the *Amity* appear on the horizon. We love the Brothers who share our life, we love to hear them speak. We are renouncing many customs. Do you see how far our faith goes? Do you perceive it?"

-- Rest assured, we are worthy of your faith, Reverend Layrits immediately replied. We are here for your happiness in this life and in the other. We will share everything with those who accept baptism. Through baptism we become brothers...

-- We have our customs of adoption, a hunter interrupted. I am ready for baptism if one of the Brothers agrees to marry one of my daughters who wants...

-- No! Layrits exclaimed. You don't understand, we have good boats for fishing, guns that kill a seal from over a hundred paces, we have kettles, we have the better life. Our being somewhere is enough to make you to come with the hope of alleviating your wretched poverty. You draw benefits from baptism, we don't draw any benefit from your igloos..."

The *Amity* took brother Layrits back.

There still were many of us around the Brothers' house. Manamina, Alingana and Akaplack, three women from my family, were received as catechumens. They spent a lot of time with the Sisters: Mary, Judith and Rebecca.

In the middle of the winter, Akaplack contracted a pulmonary infection. Brother Brasen had already used up all his medicines. Resigned, Akaplack prepared to die. Brother Drachart baptized her.

Akaplack wanted to die dressed in white like the Virgin Mary. This was done, thanks to the work of the Sisters. The day of her death, all her family wore white also. They placed her in a stone vault so as to be able to bury her in the Christian way as soon as the thaw arrived. We sang the hymn of death:

You are calling me next to you here and now.

As they pierced Jususi in the prime of life.

As his holy body came living from the tomb

mine too will spring up out of death.

The ceremony knitted the converted families together, all the more so since the converted were learning music and playing an instrument. The unbaptized were afraid of approaching the cemetery, but plenty of Inuits wanted baptism, Tuglavina in particular, who hoped to persuade Jensingoak to build a sloop for our family. He had his plan. But brother Drachart was opposed to his baptism: a man must not have more than one wife. Tuglavina, who now had three, said that they weren't his wives, but simply helped him scrape the skins.

Between two worlds

That dreaded moment returned when it was very difficult for us to imagine leaving Nain to return to our old winter territories. When the time came to tie our baggage on the komatik, we found something else to do, we put the task off until the next day. There were nearly five hundred of us remaining around the Brothers' house, unable to leave. Some families packed,

harnessed their dogs, crossed a few hills, but lingered around Tasisuak Lake, one day away by sled, unable to go further.

And then, one day, when the sun itself seemed to hold back the night as if it hated winter, Segulliak, profiting from the fact that we were sleeping like bears, placed nearly all of our baggage on the komatik all by himself, and sat down on the load. Returning to the igloo, he poked us in the back with a stick, then shouted in our ears. He took our furs off and threw our coats on our heads.

We found ourselves between three scraggly spruce on the shore of Tasisuak Lake. A partition of ice impossible to penetrate covered it entirely. The fish laughed at us underneath their shield. But there were white fox to trap.

When I went out into the starry night to get a little air far from Tuglavina and my sister, I scanned the surroundings, but the Brothers' great house wasn't there. Its absence closed its two shells one against the other, crushing me.

Two days later, I felt the wind, I searched for scents, I was the mouth of a baby sucking air, all of my belly searching for the paak, the entrance to the invisible tunnel that would lead me to him, my friend, the mountain of Nain, the man-mountain, the peace of Torngarsoak, he thanks to whom I could bear to stay hidden away like the last of Tuglavina's bitches.

The sun didn't come out of my eagle's beak any longer. I could no longer fly away toward him, my man-brother, to look at him from up on a perch... I wanted him in my flesh. He was torn away from me. I missed him so much I could die. I no longer had the strength to take care of Sorlark. Moreover, my sister did take very good care of her, and Sorlark much preferred her cheerful arms to my deposed ones.

Until then, I hadn't noticed that a cord had formed between Jensingoak and me, an elastic cord no doubt, but sensitive as a nerve, one that now was tearing my insides. Life no longer had any savor and Tuglavina's smells made me vomit. I couldn't stand my own people any longer. I slept with Aalavoq, as far as possible from Tuglavina, who stood up like a walrus, chest puffed out, his guttural belling a call to fill the territory with his offspring. Sorlark didn't come to my side any more.

There was a flat place on the side of a hill. I built a small igloo there and settled down in it, without food, without a kudlik, going backwards into death's soft and silky arms.

So much had changed since the day when he sang the hymn about the man who sleeps in the storm.

Before that first meeting, I lived in a complete world. Everything was there: my father, my aunts, my sister, the family, the hunting group, the young hunters' smiles, the other families, the immense expanse covered by the four-legged, the immense amplitude covered by the two-winged, the loud harmony of the seas, nothing was missing. I lived in a tremendous white pocket which needed nothing else because it was stitched to the stars and the light was mirrored on its silvery fabric. The sinews of the earth and the sinews of the sky were bound together and closed the horizon on itself.

And then, he came, an indentation, an opening out, a bottomless crevasse.

What it is, is that he is not like the others. In the beginning he was bitter, like the coffee that the Sisters sometimes served on Sunday after the sermon, but after a short time, it became impossible to do without it. He is like the dry heat of the house's two stoves: today, who could do without it? He is like the Inuit's first sunrise: the naked gull did without it very well until she saw it, but since then she can no longer breathe without it. He is like an adolescent girl's first sexual pleasure: for a child, this doesn't exist, but the womb of the adult bites into it.

There are rare beings and moments that we never had a hint of, that arrived as extras. Today there are more necessary than the air we breathe.

He had arrived with such a way of smiling in his red mustache that we immediately knew that he was a gift to us. He wasn't just one of those who risk their lives to feed us, no! he was much more than an inumarik, he was himself a new food. His air gave us something to drink. His straightforward gaze swelled us with blood.

We noticed it immediately, he arrived with a people of invisible birds, knowledgeable in all the corridors between the moon and the stars. A people we couldn't see, but who tore us away from all strangeness, made the sky familiar. Suddenly birth, life, death, the animals, the rocks, the lakes, the oceans, the moon, the stars, all this held together, all this became a single person wearing a necklace with ten thousand shells. His Christianity: an inhabited solitude.

Before, there was us, our dead, our ancestors in the rolling of the seasons; there were goings in and comings out in the density of trials, with tightenings and loosening; there was that ball, already immense, that rolls moon and sun over our heads... Now that ball is pierced, it calls. We have to learn to live with open hearts like oysters ripped apart.

The sun threw out its weak and tired morning light, took a few steps in the sky, then fell back into night. My amuti was covered with frost. I was going to die in my little igloo, my eyes fixed on the infinitely slow flickering the twilight dawn was tracing in the paak... However, one doesn't die without spreading an odor, and that odor had gone to Nain in spite of me.

One violet-colored morning, I heard Jensingoak's team with its distinctive panting and its nervous barking. Jensingoak entered the igloo with the stern air of a dissatisfied dad. The igloo was narrow, so he had to squeeze against me in order to rebuke me.

"You're dying a little too quickly for my taste", he said severely.

-- Your taste? I asked.

-- Yes, my taste, little sister.

-- If I were your sister, I'd be living in your house...

-- And you'd hear Drachart preaching...

-- It's better than the wind.

-- It's more dangerous..."

He stopped short. He had come to understand.

I had fallen into a crevasse between two ice floes. He, in spite of his two hearts or perhaps because of his two hearts, jumped from one block of ice to another like a caribou; he leaped between the Brothers and the Inuit, between the English and the French, between the dead and the living; he knew the languages and the worlds. He had been so wounded in his youth that he stuck to nothing. Each world was for him too small a garment which he tore by his running. As for me, I was flattened in the bottom of my crevasse, my wings broken, neither Inuit nor Christian, while he was both at the same time.

He took me in his arms almost like a lover. I felt his wound, what he called his "soiling". The cold was on his side. He remained in his ice. I was the naked gull, however, with no defense.

"I will burn your heart", I breathed in his ear.

For a long time we remained motionless in each other's arms, but our bodies, the bodies that are in our minds, came together in uncontrollable spasms. In the morning, I raised my head to look at him again.

"Tell me, what is Christianity? Because I don't understand anything anymore.

-- Love...

-- If it's love, why are you rejecting me?

-- You know. I'm not free.

-- So you don't believe that Jususi has freed you. They were just empty words...

-- I am closer to you than to Mary..."

That was the whole truth. He tasted me through my clothes, and that was enough for him. But as for me, my belly wanted to explode.

He left, taking away from me the right to die. How could I no longer love him, though he was more cruel than my husband? I ate, I drank, I breathed, I carried what he called "the cross", and which he fabricated with his own hands.

There were mornings and nights. And then, it was too much. As if in a sweat lodge, I was transformed into a bird again. It took nothing at all, a laugh, a bark, and my beak let the sun-woman go, and I flew away toward him, my friend, my love, at a dizzying height, at the height of my pain, more eagle than ever.

The surrender

I couldn't stand Tuglavina any more, nor my sister, nor the three other girls who took turns satisfying him. Segulliak, too, was no longer able to listen to their sighing. He and I returned to Nain and built our igloo there.

Sorlark had refused to follow me, like all those in my family. It is true that Tuglavina had his plan for directing the territory and the people in it like a governor. As I learned later, that winter of initiation, which he had supposedly spent in the mountains learning to master a tornaq who would open the gates of wisdom to him, he had in reality passed in the South, where he had come across Tootak. My son, baptized with the name of Palliser in memory of the governor of Newfoundland, did not trap himself, but helped a merchant.

The winter had advanced, but it was still far from its conclusion. The days stretched out slowly, the cold kept us crowded around the Brothers' house.

At Nain, the provisions were plentiful, no one thought of venturing out onto the sea ice, even during the beautiful windless times when the hunting would have been easy. There was also a net at the community's disposal. To fish, you had to dig two holes in the ice as far apart as the length of the net; next, with a pole made of young birches tied to each other and terminating in a hook, you passed the net under the water; then, you could go back and get warm and only return to empty the net every two or three days. Yet, even for so small an effort, no one budged.

This led brother Drachart to grow insistent. On Sunday, he preached longer and longer. He wanted catechumens ready to renounce the "old customs", as he called them. There weren't enough volunteers for his taste. He got angry. He became so funny, a red ball with big sideburns, a mustache and a beard trimmed like a burbot, that the youngest couldn't contain themselves. After that, it was quite a sermon!

Unable to take any more of it, brother Brasen convoked an assembly in front of the great house. The Brothers were strong on democracy, and now they wanted committees, meetings, discussions, labor details... A week later, it took place. There were at least four hundred of us at this "constituent assembly". Jensingoak and Turner were not present. They were fishing, as far as possible from what was happening at Nain.

It was brother Brasen who began: he asked a simple and direct question, and the answer, simple and direct also, came from the oldest man, baptized Matthew a week before.

"Why aren't you fishing any more? Why aren't you hunting any more?"

-- You have the sloop, the guns, the fire and the kettles. If you go to the seals, you bring enough of them back in a single day to feed us for a month. If you go to the haddock, there is enough for the whole winter. If you follow the caribou with your guns, our sleds are crushed beneath the weight. Then, you ask us to leave our old beliefs; for you, they are stories for children. On your side, you have long stories that last the whole winter, with kings who have hundreds of wives. You have heaven, where you don't have to take care of anyone any more, where all there is to do is have a good time together around a banquet. And then, you are good, you aren't kablunats, you share everything, you don't let anyone starve to death. We don't want to live like we did before. Organize us as a community the way you want. We'll discuss this. We'll tell you what we need, and you'll organize us accordingly. It will be the good life..."

Brother Brasen remained speechless. Drachart wanted to talk, but Brasen motioned to him to keep silent. The elder's words had put almost all Nain at ease, life was going to be better. Everyone believed it...

Everyone, with the exception of two men. I hadn't noticed him until then, but in turning around, I saw Segulliak: he had the same expression as Brasen. Both of them, each on his own side, saw the irreversibility of change, the impossibility of turning back, and the unavoidable fate of the Inuit swept away by "the good life".

While silence knotted the two throats, everyone imagined the security this new alliance that had been agreed upon in general assembly would bring. Unable to stand it anymore, Drachart took the floor without getting Brasen's permission: "In that case", he said, "you owe us obedience." The rest was just procedures. At the end of the day, we had been organized.

THE GREAT EXPEDITIONS

Toward Okkak

Let's go backward. While the Reverend Brother Layrits was preaching at Nain and advising the Brothers, Jensingoak and Rhodes had left for the north. They hoped to discover a passage between the coast and the islands, which they might be able to pass through thanks to their especially sturdy and solid new sloop. As the days went by, they zigzagged between the small islands with no mishaps, threaded their way between the turbulent currents and shallows of the mouth of the Tikkoatokak, avoided the sand banks, dodged the reefs surrounding the big island of Aulatsivik.

They passed alongside the imposing Cape Kiglapait, where rockslides had formed outcrops barely betrayed by the movement of the waves. They cleared a way into the dangers, to the west of Okkak Island and Cod Island. After that, the coast became less rugged for a while, and they reached the majestic Hebron Fjord.

Their progress was in the image of their existence: the thread of life circumventing the thousand ways of dying. A miracle each day. An ever so small thread whispering in their ears: "Stay a little longer with me." In the name of an act of Heaven, gather the overwhelming beauty of the four vastnesses: the sky, the sea, the earth, and their own souls. And that was all that they loved.

Jensingoak took measurements with compass and sounding line, roughly drawing the obstacles, the shallows, the islands... He was preparing the cartographic work. He bore his mountain of silence on his shoulders.

On the north shore of the Hebron Fjord lived the Inuit of Kangerdluksoak. There were some very nice rivers there, filled with fish, a cape that offered protection from the dominant winds, a quiet beach, schools of cod nearby, ways to access a high plateau where caribou flourished on seas of lichen with shimmering colors.

Children were playing on the beach, women were scraping skins. They had surely noticed the boat, but gave it no thought. Their ulus slid along the back of the leather with the rhythm of waves, and the fat rolled into overflowing pails. Out of that abundance emanated a perfect peace, inhabited by a preserved people. Once again, the Brothers felt that they had arrived in a new world, beyond the countries marked by the sin of Cain. "May these people remain unknown", they prayed together, setting free hymns of thanksgiving into the space surrounding them.

A group of five hunters went down on the beach to welcome them. They brought some fresh salmon which they shared with them, seated on a flat, lichen-covered rock. The rock accepted the two Brothers. The light was subdued and left the people there intact.

In the morning, some families approached. They came for the news. Many of them had branches in the south through marriages that had taken place in the region of Nachvak or somewhere else, long ago or more recently. They had relatives at Nain, knew of the Brothers' existence, and wanted to know what had become of Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so.

The Brothers were surprised to observe that every one of them recalled with pleasure the names of a hundred people, along with their position in the family, as well as an abundance of anecdotes illustrating the duties of mutual protection.

This lasted for several days. Brother Rhodes wrote down in a notebook the blood ties and the ties of adoption. Ties of adoption and ties of blood were never in competition. The ties doubled, tripled, no one was abandoned. When he checked the family swarms he had sketched in his notebook, Brother Rhodes realized that it contained just about as many dead as living. Like Jususi after his resurrection, the dead fished, ate, talked, asked for directions or guided a lost hunter. Brother Rhodes didn't know what to think of it.

On the trip back, the two explorers took the same navigable route and took advantage of this to make their measurements and maps even more precise. On the south shore of Okkak Bay, they found a gathering place that might be favorable for a mission; moreover, it was closer to Nain.

The welcome held in store for them by the Inuits who spent the summer in the Okkak region was as good as that of the Inuits of Kangerdluksoak. There also, five days weren't sufficient to record and reconstruct the ties of marriage and adoption. Jensingoak and Rhodes realized that this mutual aid was not without calculation. The person who didn't help or sought to take advantage could find himself isolated. And as it wasn't possible to survive in isolation, a time would come when he would redeem himself by good deeds. On the whole, each one sought to give a little more than what he or she received. This surplus was his or her pride.

On returning to Nain, brother Rhodes recounted all he had written down. Everyone would then be able to reweave the ties that had gotten loose, add new names to the family branches, raise in their esteem those who had shown generosity, lower those who had shown themselves to be mean.

Then, winter set in. As I have told, Jensingoak came into my little igloo and snatched me from the hands of death.

Running aground

On March 9, 1774, amid general excitement, we received a royal letter giving us permission to buy from the Inuit two other territories of one hundred thousand acres each, one to the north of Nain, the other to the south.

The following summer, Jensingoak left for Okkak again. This time he took with him the brothers Brasen, Lister, Lehmen, and three Inuit hunters. They brought heavy baggage with them. Jensingoak, usually always ready to confront danger, had taken a long time to decide. His nights were tormented by evil premonitions. He would have liked to have taken me as a guide, but Brasen didn't want me on the sloop. The summer had dangerously advanced. I was worried. But I had my own way of accompanying them!

The very day of their departure, at twilight, about six nautical miles from Nain, very near Cape Kiglapait, a sudden gust of wind threw their boat against a big reef. As if that weren't enough, tidal rollers more powerful than killer whales continued the work, striking the hull, pushing it up on the rock. With hard knocks and howling, the sea crushed the men and their nutshell of a hull on the shards of stone.

In the middle of the night, the sloop was full of water and threatened to break in the middle. The crew, soaked to their bones, were in despair. The weather didn't moderate; it grew even more incensed.

Kingminguse, one of the three hunters, and Jensingoak took the initiative of pulling on the lifeboat's rope. They did not succeed; the waves were all the lifeboat obeyed. They went at it all together. With bleeding hands, they were able to bring it back between two rocks where it went aground, but was still afloat. With a great deal of difficulty, they succeeded in getting aboard and in bailing out the skiff whose hull was striking the rocks on both sides. Then Kingminguse cut the rope.

While three of them attempted to row, the others protected the lifeboat from the reef with the oars. All of a sudden, a squall caused the boat to roll. It was going to be crushed against the rock. Everyone was thrown in the soup. Kingminguse, Jensingoak and Lister managed to swim to the rock without being crushed by the waves. They grabbed on to it with firm hands. Holding on to each other, they succeeded in retrieving an oar and handing it to those who were sinking. They saved the two Inuits in that way. Brother Brasen, who had let the Inuits pass, succeeded in his turn in picking up the oar, but his frozen hands no longer obeyed him and he was swept away by a roller. Lehmen and a hunter disappeared before their helpless eyes.

It was as if the three drowned men made holes in the water. Clinging to the rock, Jensingoak, Lister and the two hunters stood fast. They were, however, being gradually transformed into statues of frost. All warmth and all will abandoned them. Inexorably, they would be emptied of all their psychological substance. Then a new strength entered them, one they did not know, and which permitted them to wait for the calming of the storm. When the tide went out and the wind ran away, they were still frozen. They rubbed each others hands and feet in order to

regain a little mobility and get the blood to circulate in their dead limbs. The sun remained timid. An eagle fired off its grating cackle in the middle of a flock of frightened gulls. A few sea urchins fell out of the flock. The men sucked their juice and ate the edible part.

They succeeded in getting back to the wreck. With sealskins and all kinds of clothing, including their own, they sealed the hull. Now they were nearly naked. The new strength that had filtered into them kept them alive. With cables, they fastened the mast to a rock some distance away, in such a way that a rising tide could straighten the boat and lift it up. The operation failed. The boat was in fact righted, but the tide hadn't raised it enough to release it from the rocky teeth that held it.

The cables were placed in a different, much shorter way. They hoped that this time the boat would fall completely over on its side, that the cables would hold, and that in this way the sea would release it. The tide that followed rose with a nearly supernatural strength, and the operation functioned so well that, in their surprise, they almost forgot to cut the cables.

The survivors were in extremely weak condition. They were dead, they were alive, they didn't know it any longer. They felt as if they had left their old bodies behind them. They were now inhabited by a new life, but, like that of babies, it was still puny.

A current brought them close to Nain. A widow in a kayak saw an eagle turning in the sky, and, under the eagle, the sloop, sails in shreds, half submerged. She went to get help. They brought the men back in umiaks. The sloop ran aground on its own not very far from Nain.

The men had suffered enormously. Fingers and ears had to be amputated, deep lacerations sewn up, scratches as wide as a hand treated. Kingminguse alone was still able to work properly; the others had difficulty recovering from the cold. Horrific visions tormented them. Jensingoak was in danger of being carried off by pneumonia. Mary didn't leave her man. I didn't dare come near him. Their little Daniel sat on the bed and seemed to be praying for a miracle.

So I left for the high plateaus. There, not very far away, but very alone, I had a vision. I saw his soul. It was a large, still bloody caribou skin suspended from a post by three iron nails. In the middle of that skin, a little child was searching for his mama. He didn't cry, for drops of milk were falling on his tongue.

Not long after having that vision, while climbing a hill, I found some lung herbs. I brought back a good quantity of them. When I handed them to Mary, she shrugged her shoulders. But Judith, Brasen's widow, heated some water, infused the herbs, and gave some to Jensingoak, and to Lister also.

Jensingoak came back to life very slowly and as if in spite of himself. He will never recover his vitality of long ago, only a vitality he didn't know, one that was fed in dark and very somber

depths. The sea had flooded his soul. He heard waves and the waves never stopped calling him.

At the very beginning of spring, Jensingoak set out alone far into the fjord, as far as Kingurutik Lake, where birds nested and chirped in large number, so as to go cut wood. Deep down in himself, he hoped never to return to the coasts and the sea.

A little later in the season, Kingminguse abandoned his old customs in order to be baptized. He took the name of Peter, in memory of the rock where he had been saved. His conversion gave a great impetus to Drachart's sermons. People saw in it a sign that the death in the storm of two missionaries and a hunter had not been in vain. Kingminguse said to those who wanted to hear him: "I am now washed in Jususi's blood, as in a torrent of peace, with no fear of my meeting with the Father."

In the summer, the *Amity* disembarked brother Samuel Liebisch, whom the London community had designated to succeed Brasen as superintendant of the mission. The arrival of the replacement had something lugubrious about it for us, the Inuits who stayed around Nain. They could very well add a new Brother to the house, they could very well give him the role they wanted, but replacing Brasen insulted our minds.

Judith did not survive her husband's death for very long. Before dying, she entrusted her son to Jensingoak and his wife.

Okkak

The community was in turmoil, and Liebisch felt the need to remove the silent Brother from it. So he named Jensingoak the head of a second mission in the North. It had to do with taking effective possession of a hundred thousand acres of territory in the area of Okkak, at about one hundred forty nautical miles north of Nain. Brother Stephen Jensen would accompany Jensingoak.

Aboard the sloop that had been repaired, the two Brothers took the route already traced out during the previous expedition. The condition of the sea was perfect. They went around Cape Kiglapait, avoided the reefs near the Kikiktaksoak islands, and arrived at Kivillek Island, where several families gathered because of the schools of fish the ospreys loved to spy upon with their spectacular dives.

They were welcomed with open arms. The families knew what a Moravian mission brought: a warm house, iron tools, the security of an organization that made it possible to accumulate sufficient supplies for the winter. In their sloop, the Brothers brought needles, knives, kettles, axes... It wasn't difficult to collect names and acceptances. Next, they placed large stones at the

four corners of the territory, reciting the established formula: "*In the name of God and the Savior, under the protection of his Majesty the king of England, we take possession of this territory for the purpose of a mission of the Brothers of Unity requested by the Society for the evangelization of the savages.*"

The mission was called simply Okkak.

The two men got back to Nain before winter. There were some beautiful days. With a few hunters who had been introduced to the ax and the two-man saw, Jensingoak went to cut wood in the valley bottoms. The wood was squared, bored with an augur; the bark was peeled off the pins; thick pieces were cut to make into planks. This was for manufacturing the components of the house at Okkak, because there was no wood in that region. The forge was making good progress at beating out the nails, the strap hinges, the latches...

On September 13, Schneider and Rebecca, Lister, Jensingoak, Mary, Daniel, and Brasen's son left for Okkak. The sloop was nearly swamped under the weight of the equipment. Three hunters in kayaks accompanied them.

They advanced with extreme prudence, sheltering in good anchorages as soon as there was any risk of showers or squalls. Arriving at Okkak, they built the house and sent out the fishermen they had brought with them to increase the provisions. In October, the house, in the shelter of a mountain and perched on the edge of a cliff, was habitable. They moored the boat very securely in the harbor of Nutak. Winter might arrive.

About a hundred natives settled down around them. For the Brothers, the most difficult thing was sparing the wood, heating with fat every time this would suffice, doing without hot water, eating food raw most of the time, living constantly in the cold. They also had to approach each family, establish bonds of trust... The missionary life.

Jensingoak, for his part, found every good reason to explore the surroundings, follow the rivers, slide over the plateaus where the caribou were accustomed to pass, detect the birds that could pinpoint locations, the fox dens, the white bear nurseries, approach the families that kept at a distance...

At Nain there were very long and very hard stretches of cold, followed by a muddy spring and a stormy summer. Segulliak was at loose ends. People no longer came to see him for a healing, advice, a hunt, or just a traditional story. He became heavy and morose.

When winter came, I went off with Aalavoq on the sea ice. I left the dog free to smell where he wanted. He always ended up by finding a breathing hole. Carefully, I approached. I poked the snow around it with my sounding rod and found the low place. Next, with the help of a small

wooden shovel, I dug without making any noise, just enough to be able to place the breath-catcher out of reach of the wind, and I planted the sounding rod in the middle of this cavity, carefully widening the hole.

Then I installed the hunting point on the handle of the harpoon, tied the strap to a stake, and carefully laid the harpoon on two forked sticks stuck into the snow. I made a good flat place for myself about a foot and a half from the hole. After setting a scarf of thick fur on it, I placed myself there, standing up like a man, and leaned over the hole.

I waited. I waited. I waited. The moment the breath of the seal made the knucklebones waver, I shot the harpoon.

What I liked especially was this painful waiting in absolute immobility. The short sun slid over my back. I saw my shadow get longer. My bones cracked in my joints. Just as there are moments of intense torment, there are euphoric relaxations. And it is there that an eagle carried me away in his sharp talons on his steep ascents. As I gained altitude, the snow turned blue, a scintillation dazzled me, tears washed my eyes, then the colors turned to pink, and vision overlapped into very long distances. Inevitably, I was going to meet my man-rock.

He was there, in a valley or on the plateau, he occupied an immense territory, for where I was, I saw the whole way he had followed from the beginning, and this made an immense path like that of the people of caribou. You have no idea of all the space the pursuit of self covers in a white country...

He had found a hollow where a few spruce survived, he positioned himself in front of a tree, crossed himself on the forehead, struck with the force of a killer whale...

Pow! My harpoon dug its point into the seal's head.

It wasn't because I was somewhere else that I wasn't here; on the contrary, my attention was only the keener for it... I let the seal dive to the end of the strap. I bring it back, I loosen it. Next, I widen the hole with my shovel. The hole is covered with blood, which wakens Aalavoq who wants to help me at any cost. I throw him a look telling him to go away and keep quiet. Once the seal is tired, I manage to lift it enough to cut through its muzzle with a well-sharpened walrus tooth. I attach a second strap to it which I harness to the dog. Between the two of us, by fits and starts, we succeed, then, in getting the animal out of the water.

When, after a hunt, I returned to the village, the older women stabbed me with their frightened looks. The men laughed, because they had placed bets on my slim chances of surviving a winter far from Tuglavina, and without depending on the Brothers who didn't want to see me in the great house any more.

I had no other choice. Jensingoak had come to meet me in my little igloo where I had taken refuge with neither water nor food. My isolation was a ritual act. Normally, either my family would come seeking me out in a spirit of reconciliation, or it would let me die. No other family ought to intervene. In saving me, Jensingoak insulted my family. He ought to have taken me with him, but he didn't do it, because he refused to have two wives. So I was left to myself. A reprobate.

Before leaving for Okkak, Jensingoak had given me his hunting tools, his iron points, and even an ax and a knife. This had hastened his departure, for he was breaking one of the Brethren's rules and an Inuit rule at the same time. Because of this, I was hunting, and I was rejected. I was surviving, though, and that was the fear I read in their eyes.

The winter passed and I was still alive. I was even sharing the game I took with Nattoralik, my cousin, who had survived thanks to Annirivug's warmth. She was of marriagable age now, but no man came near her. My sister hated her, because she thought her life was an imposture: it was her son who should have lived, not her. Because my sister detested her, everyone abandoned her. And because everyone abandoned her, I loved her and shared my catch with her.

Despite being rejected by the young men, Nattoralik's eyes shone from the second birth my sister's son had given her. Rather than bearing that story as a disgrace, she honored the price of her life. She was tall and broad-shouldered. I suspected that Annirivug, my sister's son, was hovering around her, for she wasn't trembling in solitude.

Segulliak accepted her in our igloo. At night, we woke him up with our katajjaqs pierced by the eagle's shrill and grating cries. He let us do it. On the days of good weather, Nattoralik came to hunt with me. Her arm was as good as a man's.

Slices of color, lying one on top of the other, were smoking over the sea ice. The pink air flaked and fell back as frost. The white sky was nothing more than a corpse held up by the hairy columns of cold. We knew we shouldn't go far from the igloo or the village, still filled with Jensingoak's absence. Yet he, down there, was taking advantage of this cold to go and cut wood as far as possible from his people.

That morning, Aalavoq was not surprised when I passed his harness around his neck. Nattoralik wasn't surprised either. Picking up my iron ax and my shovel, I went out alone to one of the valleys where one could find dwarf birch, moss plant, and other aromatic shrubs used for ritual fires.

When I arrived in the valley and took hold of my ax, the dense cold, pressing upon me rather than struggling against me, entered my bones and my muscles, stood me up like a tree in the spring that thinks only of radiating its green force through its branches. But it wasn't spring.

I had never cut wood, but I had often observed Jensingoak. I began by examining the bushy little trees there, barely emerging from the aput. The birch exposed a stump that a healthy branch was trying to cover. It was wedged between two black spruce entirely covered with snow, as if they were holding a big white bear fur over them with both hands. The wind, however, had no intention of tearing off their clothes. It was being gentle and, seated on top of the hill, whistled its song of ice. It was looking at me.

In the face of this tree, my spirit was shaken. I went into a sort of trance I had never known. No doubt the solitude had firmly gripped me for too long, it had crushed me excessively and now it was playing the fool and deceiving me. I heard the two spruce trees whisper: "Cut down the poor birch, it's alone and half-dead."

I dug a hole in front of the birch, then I cleared a space around it by circling it with my shovel. I took the ax, but felt I didn't have enough room in my hole, so I enlarged it. This led me to free some of the spruce tree's branches, some of which had been broken by the snow. Now it was the conifer's branches that were in my way. I cut some of them.

I was ready. I placed myself in front of the birch, as I had seen Jensingoak do, my feet parallel, my trunk as solid as the tree itself. The cold burned my hands and feet; I felt much stronger than the birch. I savored this masculine vigor. I closed my eyes for a moment, made the sign of the cross on my forehead... Even so, my ax didn't want to strike the birch, abandoned as it was, and my blade was looking toward the spruce that had spoken against the birch. I turned toward it; at the base, the trunk was stripped of its bark. "Confound it! This is the one I have to cut."

This made me laugh, because this was the same oath Jensingoak used. I was him. I was going to attack the spruce with his hands, his arms and his legs, the spruce that was smothering the birch...

Suddenly the need to urinate took hold of me. In my heart, a little girl was doubled up with laughter. No, I wasn't going to squat. The first ax-blow on the spruce reduced it to silence. The blade had cut so deep that the tree knew it was already dead. It hadn't foreseen the shock. The second blow arrived from underneath, forming the perfect angle. And then I rushed forward, attacking the trunk from the other side. The tree bent. By the fourth blow, it was on the ground. I cut the branches and tied all the wood on my sled. The odor it gave off was invigorating.

Since I felt that the cold didn't want to allow me any more time, I decided to go back. I was filled with pride. All winter, nearly every day, I had brought back a seal. No hunter had done that much. And now, with a few blows of an ax, I had felled a tree in the deadly cold.

It was still early when I arrived at the igloo; the sun was crushed heavily on the horizon. Segulliak wasn't there. Nattoralik was cleaning a skin. The fire in the kudlik looked like yellow icicles, upside-down and motionless. Nattoralik's fingers were finding it hard to scrape the fur.

"I have some wood. I'm going to make a fire my father's way."

Soon a small fire was crackling. I opened a chimney on the dome. There was no danger, the smoke went out gladly, for the cold outside relentlessly accomplished its work of inhaling. Inside, we savored the heat. We had half undressed in order to dry ourselves. I watched Nattoralik eat. She had her way of doing it: she too one end of a piece of meat between her teeth, then, with her ulu, cut it even with her lips. The fire made her action look bloody. Her lips resembled the heart of a wild goose still palpitating on the cutting floor. It was the first time that I looked at a woman like a man looks at a woman. I approached her...

Segulliak arrived. He immediately went out again. The next day, he built his igloo at a good distance from ours. From that day on, the Brothers no longer wanted us around them.

The avalanche

In 1777, Jensingoak and his family was expected at Nain. They were supposed to take the big sailing ship from Newfoundland for a visit to Herrnhut, in Germany.

Spring had softened the aput, making travel difficult outside the marked ways. Fortunately, the moon was not at spring tide, and the sea ice route between Okkak and Nain was still firm and without crevasses. Komatiks could pass over it. The family arrived cheerful and full of plans.

I felt my friend's presence in the big house, but he didn't come near our igloo. Moreover, no one approached our igloo since Segulliak had built his some distance away.

The day before, at the beginning of the afternoon, while the sun was burning the south side of the fjord, a very strong premonition had stirred my heart. Aalavoq had pricked up his ears at the same time I did. Nattoralik and I were hunting on the sea ice. Our small sled was already harnessed. Suddenly Aalavoq and Nattoralik's two dogs set off like harpoons. We had just enough time to catch hold of one handle of the sled, and left our equipment on the ice.

When we arrived at Tasisuak Lake, the moon lit up the aput. My family's igloo had disappeared. The heat of the day had set off an avalanche.

Aalavoq immediately started to paw the snow, and the two other dogs imitated him. Nattoralik had the idea of cutting the sled's thongs and making shovels with its runners. But there was too much snow... This is what led me to take a stick and cut one of my fingers to make a distress signal. Aalavoq then set off running to warn the Brothers. When he arrived, it was still dark. Aalavoq turned up in front of the Brothers' big house and started to bark with force and determination. Jensingoak recognized his barking and rushed out to see what was happening. Hooked on the dog's harness: a stick marked with blood.

He went in to warn those who had awoken: he left right away to bring help, and if a dog returned, additional assistance would have to be sent. He got dressed, harnessed the Brothers' team, and, in case they were needed, loaded on it a gun, two shovels, ropes, furs... And set the dogs off at horrific speed behind Aalavoq who was already far ahead. As Jensingoak swiftly realized, the dog was going to Tasisuak Lake.

We had worked all night. Dawn was breaking when we discovered the first empty spaces where the igloo had been. From then on, we continued to dig with our bare hands. And then we heard Aalavoq's barking.

Jensingoak rushed ahead with his dogs to help us. Aalavoq, his muzzle sunk in the snow, was all of a sudden pulling on a hood. It was my grandmother, we pulled her out of there, she was lifeless. Frantic, we continued. An arm came out of the snow. I recognized my sister's hand. We got her out of there. She had been able to breathe in a cavity the avalanche had left.

"Sorlark", she whispered in Jensingoak's ear.

It was Aalavoq who found her. When he licked her face, she moaned. She was alive.

When the sun was over our heads, nine members of our family were stretched out inert and frozen on the aput. Their spirits were biting their bodies to bring them back to life. They were in a state of shock, shaken by their feathery lightness and their frozen-sky transparency. They were at the mercy of the tragedy that had just struck them down, entangled in the bad smell of memory, not knowing where to go or what was going to happen, they were waiting for a sign.

Three persons were alive: Sorlark, my sister, and another of Tuglavina's wives, in very poor condition. We learned, through my sister, that no one remained under the snow. Tuglavina had gone hunting with the two boys.

Aalavoq, although exhausted, was chosen to return to Nain to seek help. Before leaving, he hesitated a lot, took a few steps, changed his mind and returned to lick Sorlark's face, then ran off speedily.

In the debris, we found two kudliks, a pouch of dried moss, some fat, a niggit¹, and some large bearskins. We decided to build a small improvised igloo, then we stretched the three survivors out on some furs, in the warmth of the kudliks.

I undressed Sorlark. I wanted to slip her under my amuti, directly on my skin, but she was too big. So I got undressed myself and we buried ourselves under some bearskins. Nattoralik did the same with my sister. And Jensingoak took care of the other woman, still so young, almost a child.

Because my sister couldn't manage to abandon herself to Nattoralik's warmth, the latter whispered in her ear: "Take the warmth your son gave me long ago."

And she took it.

Jensingoak, his eyes fixed on the igloo's shimmering dome, was warming the child-woman. Her leg was bent back on the side, the knee out of joint, the bone springing out of the flesh. She was trembling like a leaf in his arms, and he hesitated to wrap himself around her. The eyes of the young woman were probing the death around her, seeking to join the others, the light ones, the shadowless and painless ones. Jensingoak sang a very long hymn to calm her. But there was despair in his actions, and this activated the blood. To bring her back to life was to bring her back into terrible suffering. Nevertheless, time did its work. Jensingoak's hands could no longer stop, it could have been said that they were gull's feet searching for something to eat in a marsh. The girl grabbed on to his hair, relaxed her grip, tensed again, let go. He prayed for her to live, prayed for her to die; her will was lying flat like a dog awaiting a decisive crack of the whip.

He crushed the girl's chest against his torso. A tear slid down his cheek. Was it due to the smoke, to pity, to regret?

At one point, he turned toward me and threw me a glance which even today remains in my memory like an ivory carving. In it I read reproach. But what reproach? I still don't know.

For a very brief moment, his look veered toward Nattoralik, and then there was a touch of disdain in his reproach. Then Jensingoak's hand moved on the girl's bare shoulder. He stopped short. Then I saw, in a tiny corner of his eye, the spark of a desire that perished in an anxious suffocation.

All the rest of my life, I was going to scratch and carve this look with the conviction that it carried an infinite drama. It was will against desire... It was desire changed into rancor... It was life turned against itself... It was Cain killing Abel... It was Jensingoak still hooked to the ruins of his church. But that day, I saw just the reproach; I didn't see the whole story.

So, under Jensingoak's cutting eyes, I slipped my provocative eyes on to Nattoralik's happy cheeks. I aroused in him a blade of jealousy that I savored after that like cloudberry juice.

Some days later, Jensingoak embarked on the big sailing ship with Mary, Daniel, and Brasen's son, whom they had adopted. The boat disappeared behind the islands. My solitude came home in the image he had prompted, one which argued against me. For my people and for the Brothers, I was scoffing at men, but my heart was like a fish wriggling on the snow.

Aalavoq died of exhaustion in Sorlark's arms. Nattoralik and I carried his body to the top of the white bear hill. Ravens wheeled around the summit. We were alone, driven back on each other by the Brothers' condemnation and the rejection by our own people.

Liebisch, the new surgeon, had no choice but to amputate the leg of Tuglavina's youngest wife. Despite all the care lavished on her in the great house, she gave up the struggle.

When Tuglavina finally returned from his expedition and learned of the death of those who had remained at the lake, he was devastated. He went back to the mountain alone, without a dog, nor a woman, nor even a knife.

At the end of the summer, the *Amity* brought Jensingoak and Mary directly back to Okkak, but without their sons, who remained in Germany to perfect their education. The boat was late because it had had to zigzag in order to avoid the pirates, who had gone north because of the American war. They had passed through many dangers, and, once again, their safety had confirmed the sacred character of their mission.

The community of Okkak was developing in a more harmonious way than Nain's, and this made Jensingoak happy, solemnly happy, to the point of no longer paying attention to the mountains, to the colors, and to the ravens which hung around the big house.

Hopedale

In 1779, Jensingoak and his companions erected a large assembly building at Okkak, with wood that the Brothers had found south of Nain, in the area of Avertok. Twelve Inuits were baptized in a single year.

The same year that the long common house was erected at Okkak, Jensingoak, Schneider and Lister once more explored the fragments of taiga that carpeted the valley bottoms in the Avertok region. The idea was to open a third mission where small forests bordered the rivers and streams. Exchanges between the three communities would then be possible.

Even more important was that nearly all the families who gathered on the coast of Labrador could then be united, directly or indirectly. For the Brothers, this was bringing the sun into the North's icy night.

Jensingoak and Mary were sent to Avertok. There couldn't have been any better founders than these two: he, indestructible, built, gathered, organized the work; she, dedicated, won the women over. Their austere marital happiness encouraged monogamy, and the community took charge of the neglected widows.

At Avertok, the Inuit gathered at the same spot where, in 1752, brother Erhardt was supposed to have been murdered. The mission was named Hopedale, in memory of the *Hope*, the ship which had brought the Moravian explorer to the coast of Labrador.

The mission took some time to establish, because the Brothers' sloop made the shuttle between Okkak and Hopedale passing through Nain, thus a very long distance, and perilous coastal navigation. Continually, there were problems to resolve, difficulties, risks of famine, of storms. Numerous Brothers were devoted to evangelism; Jensingook and others found themselves overloaded with manual labor.

The settled Inuit didn't dare to take any initiatives. In the winter, they were for all practical purposes captives of the winds and the great cold coming from the sea. Those who settled down often did it because they felt vulnerable because of age, illness, or because an evil spirit was hounding them.

A year came when the supplies at Nain were completely exhausted. Morale was at its lowest. The Inuits sank into despair. Nattoralik and I were still living at Tasisuak Lake. Thanks to a net we were able to place under the ice, we ate, not much, but we ate.

The Brothers of Nain, with a single guide, took the risk of venturing over the sea ice route with the idea of reaching Okkak, in order to look for dried fish there. On the way, they came across an Inuit komatik returning emptyhanded from the hunt. The hunter signaled them to stop and called over the Brothers' guide. The two Inuit, at quite a distance from the sleds, were digging a hole in the snow down to the ice. The hunter asked the guide to listen. The latter put his ear against the ice. He clearly heard a roaring, but dull and very distant. The guide went back to the Brothers, conferred with them for a while, and it was decided to continue the route. The hunter had already departed, headed at full speed toward the coast.

Two hours later, at the moment when the sun was beginning to sink, a terrible wind arose. The sea ice began to crack: a wave ran in the water, breaking enormous plates of ice. Very quickly, the view was blocked by blowing snow.

The dogs were not listening to the men any more. They were charging, probably due west, judging by the final rays of the setting sun reddening the snow's horizontal screen. Complete panic, but a saving panic, for the dogs were leaping over the crevasses and all the sled could do was follow them, to the last degree of their last hope. Alas, the group was facing Cape Kiglapait. At that spot, there is practically no beach in front of the cliff.

Nevertheless, the Brothers, assisted by the dogs, succeeded in reaching a needle of rock and hauling themselves up on it. They found shelter there, higher than the spring tides and yet lower than a point of rock which protected them from the wind. There they managed to construct a hut of snow and light a kudlik. Twice, sea spray driven by the wind pierced holes in their makeshift igloo. They sealed them with great difficulty, because there was little snow: to make some of it fall on their igloo, they had to climb part of a cliff.

The storm lasted four days. They nearly died of cold and hunger. But on the second day, when the verticality of the zenith resembled the arm of a corpse descending from the sky and plunging into the sea, a Brother found a hare killed by a bird's beak just in front of their igloo's paak. "A gift from God!" he thought.

It was at the end of their rope that they reached Okkak. They regained their strength there, loaded two sleds with dried fish, borrowed additional dogs and went back on the road. They arrived at Nain much later than planned. Of the ninety-two Inuit who had stayed in the community, only thirty-five had survived.

This terrible famine drove the Brothers to consolidate the mission: the three villages should specialize. Avertok would furnish the wood, Okkak, the fish, Nain, the fat and the meat. Only in the summer of 1782 could the construction in the South be completed. Beginning that year, Jensingoak and Mary lived mainly at Hopedale. They were like two worn old rocks connected by dry sand. Everyone asked themselves by what mystery they were still holding out against hell and high water. And it was on them that they relied.

It had been a long time since Tuglavina had come down from his mountain. But had he even been there? He had returned to Nain with two young women, sisters he had gone a long way in search of, toward the west, near the great bay. There was no question of marriage, these were women who followed him naturally and freely to help him with the tanning of skins, for he trapped the white fox and the wolf better than all the other hunters combined. Even though those others didn't see the use of hunting animals that aren't eaten. My sister, who remained his legitimate wife, swore that he didn't touch the others. So he was not polygamous, and they could hope to be baptized, he and my sister. Sorlark was growing up in the family group.

In the summer, Tuglavina had fished in the Okkak region, while following the lessons given to the catechumens. With Jensingoak's help, he had built his own sloop, rather small, but very sturdy. Abraham, a baptized man from Nain, was his companion in this work. The two men, assisted by my old father and the three women, would be able to sail along the coast between Okkak and Nain. A jolly enough crew who didn't fish, but knew how to avoid shipwrecks and spot the white foxes which ran on the coasts and the large islands.

Since they didn't go to Hopedale, I settled down there with Nattoralik. Our status had changed. Everyone was surprised that "the two women bound by a katajjaq that doesn't end" had survived up to that point without the help of their families. And since with us respect always goes to survivors, we had gained respect. What happened in our qarmat under the moon was of no interest to anyone, except for a few Brothers perhaps. As for Jensingoak, he was cutting wood far away in the valleys, fleeing a sadness and a fatigue that stuck to him like an old dog.

The Brothers doubted Tuglavina's sincerity. Because of this, they refused to baptize him, but welcomed him unfailingly with warmth and generosity. The *Amity*, which came every year, wouldn't take his skins, repeating every time that it wasn't authorized to trade with the Inuit. Consequently, the family had accumulated more than a hundred high quality skins.

Thus it was that at the end of the summer of 1782, while we were completing the construction of the house, Tuglavina's sloop arrived at Hopedale. He came down from the boat alone. I was with Nattoralik, cleaning seal skins.

"Women, your foolishness is finished", he said, approaching us. "We need a guide and an interpreter. So you're coming with us, and you're not bringing that bitch along, we don't want her."

I got up, and threatened him with my ulu. He burst out laughing, caught my arm, pressed it so strongly that my knife fell to the ground. When Nattoralik wanted to throw herself on him, she received a kick so violent that she bent in two and collapsed without breathing. He twisted my arm and I found myself belly down over his shoulder. Then he threw me on the deck of the sloop and we departed.

Toward the south

Because of my detestable memory, I knew every danger as far as Chateau Bay, a considerable distance: Cape Makkovik, Kikkertavak Island, the great Lake Melville's complicated delta, then the worst shoals, the rocks and small islands down to the Strait of Belle Isle. There were about twenty of us on the boat, a very dangerous crowding. And no one in Tuglavina's ridiculous crew, not even my father, could ensure the success of the enterprise. I watched with the eagle's piercing eyes.

I was the hostage, I was the guide of a sloop threading its way between the reefs. I wanted to run it aground and die. I hoped with all my strength that it would break up on some shoals. But I also wanted, more than everything, to protect my daughter from the ocean's dangers. For my child was part of the crew, and if the sloop was the worst of prisons for me, I had to guide it with an energy much greater than if it were simply a matter of saving my own life. I was in a state of perpetual conflict.

By what mountain of lies and perversions of family ties had my father been persuaded to participate in this adventure counter to the Brothers' will and the family's interests? Nothing but an affront! I didn't know who had decided it, but I could guess. The famine at Nain had no doubt served as a decisive argument: they must no longer depend on the Moravian Brethren, who were strangers in this land. The English or French kablunats were the masters. And the good life is always at the masters' side.

The Inuit families needed to have guns. The necessity of trading had surfaced in their minds. It must have wandered in the bottom of their thoughts well before the decision was made. This

had been gradually clarified, organized, imposed almost without Tuglavina and my father knowing it, according to a complex plan of pressure, recruitment, and equivocation, in order to accumulate the tools, build the boat, prepare the material, learn navigation... All that was lacking now was me, the only sure guide.

If my family returned with the same weapons and tools as the Brothers possessed, they would be masters of the region...

My father must have also considered my break with Tuglavina and my sister as an infidelity, and my relationship with Nattoralik as a betrayal. That we had succeeded in hunting, in fishing, in living, was a violent attack against the hunters' pride...

We had dreamed, Nattoralik and I. We had dreamed like idiots, pretending to be white bears on the sea ice. The dream had been crushed in a single moment. And all the men's jealousy and the women's envy had fallen upon us by the hand of Tuglavina and his pack.

Strange situation! Sorlark, my sister, my husband's other wives, my father, Tuglavina, and the entire crew depended on me, and yet I was at their mercy. Driven by necessity and also by vengeance, they were ready to risk everything. They were going over an unforgiving sea, zigzagging between the rocks with the innocence of their pride and the fog of their ignorance. One mistake on my part, and we were all dead. A weapon in my hand. But Sorlark was there, on the boat, so no one was afraid of me. They believed I was invincible and incapable of treachery. They thought that I was going to implore all the tornaqs, all the elders of Mount No-Shadow and God the Father himself for the success of the voyage... And that was what I did.

In her inmost self, Sorlark felt this power as a perfect delight, and she surely intended to make use of it. So I stood on the prow, my eyes attached to the sea's smallest signs, more thoroughly bound than if cables had held me to the mast, for then at least I could have slept.

My daughter took pleasure in bringing me food while making me feel her scorn. She threw fish heads in front of me, like you do to a dog. In her young adolescence stuffed with pretentiousness, she was making me pay for all the renunciation she had imposed on herself. She liked to humiliate me all the more given that she was only a bait in Tuglavina's hands. The toy ensuring his success! In the evening, she snuggled in her father's arms and looked at me as if she were shielded from the sky and from the earth.

At the end of a week, fatigue crushed me. My brain was beating in my skull, which threatened to explode, my throat was nothing any longer but a cave where dry fir was burning, my skin was like birch bark cracked by salt, and a horrible maritime cold came into its fissures. My insides were like burning stones exploding under the dripping of icicles. If only I had had a

single moment's respite to sleep or die... But the worst of executioners was watching me: myself, my mother-self devoted to the child who spat on me.

Tuglavina was enjoying the show. He never wanted to come near a harbor or to cast anchor. He liked to watch me struggle against the light and against the night, hear me moan for sleep like a dying person asks for water. He liked to see me freeze on the outside and burn on the inside. He sucked up every moment when the cable of motherhood was tearing at my chest. He palpitated my heart in his hand, kneaded it like a quivering mass, like a small animal that could be crushed at any moment. He chewed his long, his interminable meal of vengeance.

I was in agony.

For several years, I had slept in Nattoralik's tenderness. Now, I felt the lack of her like we feel the lack of air when anxiety suffocates us.

I was suffocating. Now I saw anxiety, raw and naked before me: a pile of torn connections. The opposite of fear, for fear is an obstinate rope that makes us hold on to life. But anxiety possesses the infinite, it is flesh torn by an unbearable absence, it is a sudden, uninhabited solitude.

I was smothering.

The sun, the wind, the cold, the salt... my executioners stretched out time. By what miracle was life continually spitting me back out of death, into my bag of suffering? I was slowly falling to pieces. My tendons were giving way, my bones were separating from each other, subjected to superhuman forces. In my cave of pain, my attention's kudlik didn't weaken, though.

I protected the life of my daughter like the eye of the last witness. "One day, she will see what she doesn't see." I told myself. "Then she will drink all the love I have for her, it will be the milk of my grandchildren and the path of life that will deliver her from the shadows on the day of her death." That is why I stayed awake. Standing on my mountain of fatigue, I scrutinized, I spotted the reefs, and I guided the sloop toward the south. Sleep wanted to deliver me, but I struggled against it, so it sat down on me with its whale-heavy mass and its walrus tusks.

The leaden sun reigned over its skinning-ground. Sorlark was having fun with the fish. I was weakening. A cloud approached, it had seen my skin lacerated by salt, by cracks and fissures. It wept on my shoulders. I couldn't hold out much longer.

With what remained of my strength, I cried out to Sorlark:

"Finish me off... because right at this moment, I love you more than death."

My words were smashed against a stone wall, because how can a child imagine the love someone could have for death? Add to that a sky and a mountain, and you come close to the love of a mother for her child. All that the visible and the invisible contain is this: the love of a mother for her child. Nothing else visible exists in all the universe. The aurora borealis is that love, and without that love, all things collapse into the night.

How could she forgive me for loving her that much?

The escape

A red dawn trembled on the violet sea. Tuglavina slept in his white fox blanket. My sister's face, shiny with sleep, stood out of that fur. The two other wives, lying on his legs, were creeping into the man's dream. My father kept watch on the rudder. He looked at me, swaying between pity and submission. A tear slipped down his cheek.

At his feet, Sorlark's bitterness had grown tired. With the patience of winter, the cold was purifying her soul. She was still a child, she was barely beginning to lie down on her own pains and feel the pulse of life's gravity.

I didn't fall asleep any longer. There was something unreal about the colors. I signaled my father to direct the boat toward the cove, because there were shoals making the water spray out ahead of us. He obeyed.

Suddenly emerging from behind an island, Jensingoak's sloop came straight toward us. He was going ahead at a disconcerting speed. He was going to split us in two. Then he abruptly pivoted around. From the stern, Nattoralik threw me a buoy. I leaped into the water, swam and caught the float. She drew me toward her. Jensingoak grabbed me, and I found myself in the whistling the boat made, sails unfurled, full of a light breeze that now was heading out to sea.

Moving like an experienced sailor, Nattoralik tilted the sail and rolled it up precisely at the moment when Jensingoak pushed on the rudder. We were going directly between two small islands in the bay of Lake Melville. The strait was now opening up in front of us. Nattoralik furled the sail and we gently slipped into the narrow passage of the lake, which the Innu call Uinipek.

We penetrated it with flapping sails. The wind had stayed out to sea; the lake slept like a sated giant.

While the weather was getting quiet, allowing us to enter the lake, Jensingoak looked at me. The reproach had been inverted. This second look has, it also, been printed in my memory forever: the look of a great hunter of space, fleeing all that belittles a person, seeking what broadens. A look tinged with weariness also. Jensingoak was tired of the Brethren and the

Inuits' "yes, yesses". He looked at me as a wild and pure country, as an inumarik looks at an inumarik, because in reality, only a solitude can love another solitude.

He was leading us, Nattoralik and me, not as a savior, but as a man who saves himself from the terrible pettiness of the fearful, of the unbearable abdication of the submissive. He was fleeing the docile citizen, the unnatural man, to join the Innu people of Nipishish Lake, to reach the great plateaus of the unexplored back country, and conjoin at last the vastnesses with the human race.

The boat came aground in a cove. It was deliberate. We camped in the peace of a woods, in Innu fashion, faces wavering in the light of a fir fire, hair like sparks, floating in the mellow air which stuck to the walls of the night. "The Innu, gentle people covered with spruce, in their green fur and their summer warmth, their curing marsh and their children immersed in peace, will welcome us."

The fire was hot. Nattoralik's eyelids shone from the droplets of sweat falling from her eyebrows. Her forehead reflected the moon. Her lips were sleeping on a secret song. She was leaning on Jensingoak's right shoulder. He had closed his eyes.

Inuit, listen to the dream of Torngarsoak, listen...

If the twig isn't connected to the little branch, if the little branch isn't connected to the big branch, if the big branch isn't connected to the trunk, if the trunk isn't connected to the earth, if the earth isn't connected to the sky, if none of this is connected to different vastnesses, then who could live, who could drink the sap?

There must surely be an indestructible joy somewhere. For if there is not an indestructible joy, the little trembling leaf would not want to struggle for its life. It follows, then, that someone already has taken on the unhappiness of the world. It was me, it was him and her, it was us. It was so long ago...

Suddenly an enormous tide engulfed the cove, and I woke up in the stern of Tuglavina's sloop. We had just touched a roll of stone that, fortunately, had worn smooth. In front of us, a reef rose out of the sea and threatened.

"Papa", I cried, "lie down on the rudder!"

Everybody woke up. The misfortune was only beginning...

The return

On September 6, 1784, Tuglavina's sloop returned to Nain in a pitiful condition, sails torn, hull breached, spewing garbage. There were guns, alcohol too, and misfortune up to the brim.

Of the nineteen who left Nain, all had been baptized at Chateau Bay, except for Abraham, who had already been baptized at Nain, and me, who never would be. Of this group, six were dead. Daniel, drunk and delirious, had fallen overboard and drowned. This was after throwing my sister in the campfire. My father, Nerkingoak, had in fact denounced my sister, because she was sleeping with Moses. David, seized by a jealousy that wasn't his own, had gone crazy from it. Abraham had hung himself out of disgust after he drinking alcohol and raping a young teenager at the town's bordello. Timothy had been murdered by Tuglavina: his first gunshot, fired to avenge Deborah, one of his wives. Drunk, Timothy had publicly humiliated her in a bar. Deborah had been stabbed in the brawl that followed. On the way back, Tuglavina had thrown Moses in the water because he judged him good for nothing.

Alcohol and guns had done their work well.

Sorlark, who spoke good English, had remained at Chateau Bay. As soon as she arrived in the South, the director of the trading post had hired her as a waitress. Tootak, whom she found there, had spoken in her behalf. Two trappers were also living at Chateau Bay. They had sold their guns for alcohol. Tuglavina had refused to take them back, and they were probably still rotting in one of the town's dives.

So on the return trip there were nine of us in all on Tuglavina's patched-together sloop, nine, and twelve guns, powder, cartridges, alcohol, nine and soaked with shame.

The Brothers of Nain bought back the guns, threatening the troop with expulsion. Tuglavina accepted, but brother Liebisch had to concede to the trapper permission to use a gun when accompanied by a Brother who made sure he wasn't drunk.

During all the winter, Tuglavina and my father told everyone what had happened down there in the South: the bread, the molasses, the meat from farm animals, the low-priced alcohol, the bordellos, and all the other benefits that baptism permitted. But there was the "bad luck", too. Then they lowered their heads to hide their disgrace. Like smallpox, this illness was spreading at great speed, because people wanted the bread and molasses, and were convinced they could avoid the "bad luck".

Taking advantage of the winter's early arrival, I harnessed the dogs and ran off to join Nattoralik and Jensingoak at Hopedale.

I arrived there on a Sunday. The baptized were assembled in a small chapel adjacent to the Brethren's house. They had told me she was there.

I didn't dare to enter. A black cloud turned around me. The dogs howled, unable to calm down. I trembled on the chapel steps. I felt as if I were covered with filth: a cold sweat slipped down my back, I stank. My place was in the bottom of a marsh, not in front of the chapel. Throughout my sequestration in Tuglavina's circle, I had lived in self-degradation.

Drachart was right: the Inuit is a devastator like the others; it is just that he is preserved by the ice, the cold and the necessity of feeding himself. He is like a frozen fish: if he is transported to the South, he rots as surely as any other fish. I was no different.

What was I doing there in front of the chapel? I was frozen in horrible reminiscences. I looked at the door the way someone looks at a wall.

Behind me, a man was leading his dogs away so that their howling wouldn't disturb the ceremony. The man hadn't recognized me. I was an old woman now. I heard the wind whistle in the furrows of my face. I thought of the time when I flew off with the flapping of an eagle's wings. From up there, I saw him, he, my friend, and all my people in peace.

On this day, I was in my black cloud like a mollusk in its shell, unable to free myself from all that I had seen: the damaged man, the ravaged man, the man who ravages. In reality, the kablunat is neither a man nor a woman, it is a state of sickness which makes us strangers to ourselves, then strangers to each other, then enemies of ourselves, and finally enemies of the grandmother who carries us and feeds us. This sickness is advancing toward the North, there is no cure for it. We brought it with us. This was me in front of the Hopedale chapel. "No one will resist the saucepans, the flour, the salt, the molasses, the guns, the alcohol, the government, the schools, the good life... All things will pass through it."

I wanted to vomit. I already had vomited. I wanted to see Nattoralik. Alas, I couldn't bear the idea that she could see me. Jensingoak, I could accept his observing me, his examining me, his casting his famous look of condemnation on me. I wanted him to drive me away and tell me to go croak somewhere else.

The sun threw a cloud of shining spots on the snow in front of the chapel. And then, the tone of a bugle crossed the plank door. Jensingoak alone could make it vibrate that way, like a moaning of the soul. And then, a woman's voice, high like the cry of the wind, tore through the moaning. It brought with it other voices, and the whole choir stood out from the cloud; one might have said it was a great heron, taking flight from a reef.

And me, I was the naked gull covered with black ashes, degraded like the raven, crushed by shame. The voices seized me under the arms, lifted me like a child. The doors opened in front of me... She was in front of the congregation, facing me. She was the first voice, her hair put up, her ears exposed, the fine neck, the beauty...

She was singing in the chapel choir accompanied by three brass instruments playing the overtures and the conclusions. She didn't see me, she was swallowing up great spaces with the beating of her wings. I was witness to it.

When I was in the South, I asked myself: "Who is happy? Where is he, that man or that woman, that ancestor or that free spirit who has climbed out of that great cavern? Show him to me, and I will empty my bottle of unhappiness on the bare ground." But I didn't see him, I couldn't even manage to imagine him.

She was there in the chapel. I saw her. I was witness of it. I asked myself: "But where does that joy come from? The music is its expression. But the source, where is it? I want to know, where is the source of that music? From where does it come, the light that illuminates that face? I want someone to take me there. For without that joy, nothing can subsist."

I listened to Nattoraliq, to all the other voices adjusting themselves to hers, and Jensingoak's bugle giving them the impetus for climbing, for descending, for dancing. Was it a miracle? Not only was I hearing it, but I was seeing it. They were feathers grafted on to the naked and humiliated gull, feathers of lightness, serenity and freedom.

Nattoraliq seemed to come from before Cain, an original purity. Jensingoak arrived after the drama. He had conquered the sickness. Yes, I saw him, he had finally conquered the sickness through Nattoraliq's care, for she, she was pure. Together, she, the beginning, he, the end, secreted the cure like the spruce tree secretes gum. They formed the two ends of a broken story, of a desecrated world.

I wanted to live between them.

Kangiqsualujuaq

The days had gotten longer. I had built my qarmat close to the Brothers' house at Hopedale. I participated in the chores, I ate as little as possible, I kept silent. When I was free, I went to hunt caribou far away on the plateaus, I disappeared in the infinite spaces.

I know now why the plateaus are immense, why the horizons are all drowned one after another in the sea, why the sky is so vast and the stars so numerous: it is so that it would be impossible to grant the slightest importance to that unhappy, divided, black and smoking stain a human heart is after a fallen life.

Yes, I certainly was a stain, but tiny. From an eagle's viewpoint, I was an insignificant stain. After so long a fall, there was no greater relief than to be buried in the North's infinite whiteness.

While I was disappearing, my two friends were getting bigger, she, the innocence, and he, the culmination. Having become imperceptible, I no longer feared being seen, so I looked at my

two friends with all my love. Seeing them consoled me and revived me. Hearing them sing transported me.

I participated in all the readings, the ceremonies, the lessons. As much as possible, I placed myself in the right spot to watch Nattoraliq. She had been baptized Mary Magdalen. She lived in the house, like the Sisters, and no man would have thought of approaching her.

I had aged, she had grown younger. Now she was like a prepubescent girl, laughing, uncatchable, running like notes of music on rays of light. I would have liked her to skip like a pebble on my lake, wanted the tickling of the little stone to sing over my silent soul... I would have liked the lake of my soul to stop trembling, in order not to reflect anything except her happy face. But I wasn't yet calm enough.

I would have liked him to have seen her, but Jensingoak's eyes were blurred beneath the cataracts that now pearly over his pupils. It was irreversible, he was growing blind. He had seen too much.

He too wanted to leave, hoping never to return. To just skip over the water, and then skip over the sound of the water, and then grow still, reflecting the sky. He wanted to use up what remained of his sight on limitless expanses of whiteness and glimpse, perhaps, the Torngat mountains and Caubvick, Torngarsoak's holy mountain.

We were now the same age, he, the missionary, and I, the "prodigal child", as the Brothers called me, one foot in the sled, one foot in the wind. This is why we sat down at the same time so often, at a short distance from Nattoraliq, he to hear her sing, I to watch her shine.

He had meticulously prepared this last expedition. This time, he wanted to pass through the interior, through the high plateaus, reach Mistastin Lake, follow the Akilasakalluq River and go up as far as possible toward Kangiqsualujjuaq. He wanted to hear the laughter of the Inuits up there, the inumariks of the high whitenesses. For the final time, to travel on wild nature's inviolate fringes, cross the caribou's breeding grounds. From Kangiqsualujjuaq, if the temperature had no objection, follow the Korak River and feel the pure mountain, the immaculate summits of Caubvick. Perhaps he would catch a drop of it between the pearly plates of its cataracts!

We set out, with two sleds and twenty-four dogs, Jensingoak and brother Rhodes, Ulluk and Tuktuk, two very experienced hunters, baptized a short while ago, as well as Nattoraliq and myself, the only one not baptized, but the one person who knew the Akilasakalluq River. I even had family among the clans who watched the birthing of the caribou and went with the herd as far up as Kangiqsuallujjuaq. Nattoraliq sang like the birds of the taiga, she even

squeezed tears out of the rocks: she might be able to prepare the nest for a future mission. Her Gospel was irresistible.

The risk was great. But the three communities, Okkak, Nain, and Hopedale had accepted it, because, they said, "the life of the Moravian Brethren is revived by new missions; without them, the air is corrupted and faith runs aground on the dismal island of habits and certainties."

The sleds' runners sang on the aput. The sun exploded in its own bowl of light, spurting out crystals of flint that cut our eyelids. Fortunately our split-bark spectacles pushed these crystals back into the whiteness.

We were seeking our way by subtle indicators. We were barely able to follow the Notakwanon fissure, in Innu territory. We relied on the dogs, who undulated in front of us like glittering waves. We were running on the sea of whiteness.

Our heads were freed from our hoods. Our hair was twisted in the light like the bearded lichen of the last spruce of the cold. The mild air came in under our coats. Our skin breathed. Our whistling race on the smooth aput tickled our ears. Our shoulders shook with freedom.

When the sun began to go down and slowly turn yellow the white ocean we were drowned in, we pushed our spectacles over our foreheads. Our vision, relieved at last, could cover as much space as it desired; it encountered no dark spot. A pearly plateau traversed by pinkish, bluish, or greenish nuances, such was our home. Colors saturated by white, none could stand out sufficiently to produce a form, or even the embryo of a form; the colors swam in each other, penetrated each other like animals with neither skin nor bone.

"We all have cataracts," brother Rhodes said, laughing.

As the tired sun descended into this white fat, the latter darkened, widened, and was laminated like a pile of furs. There were no bodies on the aput, no mountains, no blocks, not the slightest vertical line or smudge of a shadow, nothing but wavering horizons which evaporated on each other as the sun collapsed and the aurora borealis cut the vertical flesh of the sky.

Yes! At night we had another landscape over our heads: green and wavering blades cut the sky's black gelatin. Everywhere, in the firmament as on the earth, colors were searching for their skins and their muscles, feelings wandered naked, chasing their thoughts in rags, hearts no longer had ventricles, blood no longer had veins, marrow no longer lived in bones. All things had left their forms, their restrictions, their oppressions: escapees.

On our sleds, even counting the dogs who were pulling to the end of their breath, we were too few bodies for so many free spirits. At every moment, we were washed by one light after another, by one color after another, by one tone after another. We were no longer anything but

successions of free spirits which passed through us like breaths. We were the only resonant tubes in the world, bugles that had no other pleasure but the projection of sounds in the resonances of brass.

We knew it, such was the solemnity of the moment: if this stopped passing through us, we would again be nothing more than little black spots closed in on themselves, pummeling old pains. This is why the dogs pulled relentlessly. All the space contained between the aput and the stars, this was our movement from now on.

The nomad lives and sings because the wind blows and passes into his soul of brass. When the music resonates in us, we vibrate in it. Without this passing through, we become bugles in a closet, instruments of dead metal, strangers on earth. To avoid such a tragedy, our dogs ran, our sleds whistled.

Grandmother

One mild evening, a dark spot formed on the horizon's cutting edge. The dogs went to it. As we were approaching, the spot divided into two unequal parts: a tiny point next to a small undulating square. That day, the light remained in its furs, the scattered sun refused to gather into a ball. A white ghost was attempting to erase the two spots that attracted our dogs.

A dome formed a shadow near the spots. So it was two Inuits beside their igloo. One was a child.

The komatiks crunched on the aput. Time was dragging its feet. The dogs were panting. The light had leaned over, pouring out a red liquid which now slid over the aput in the igloo's direction. Evening was approaching us. The red liquid bypassed the two Inuits as it sketched their wavering forms. The forms grew larger and more precise. The amuti of a grandmother... She was probably alone with the little one, for if not she would have brought the family out for the traditional welcome.

Our eyes slipped over the four horizons, unable to get a grip on the too-smooth ice. No point, no dash, no spot... No hunter returned to the grandmother, there was only her and us.

She was standing, motionless. The little one was standing, motionless. There was no dog, no sled, no trace of a man. There was nothing beside the igloo, neither stick, nor pole, nor harness, nor harpoon, nor caribou antlers.

Time had scratched the aput a bit more. The diffuse light roamed as it smoked red vapors. A gentle warmth had turned the grandmother's round face pale. The wrinkles were neither tense nor twisted, as if life had flowed there without an obstacle. Three rows on each cheek, three on the chin, three on the forehead tattooed the face with the laughing eyes. A woman from Kangiqsualujjuaq.

The little one burst out laughing as he looked at our dogs, sitting down with their muzzles in the air and their tongues hanging down. He had a small bow in his right hand, that was enough, he wasn't afraid of anyone. The sky behind the child resembled a skinned seal.

All the time that we were advancing, the grandmother and the child hadn't budged. As soon as it was possible to make out the lines of their faces, their smiles had begun to get bigger, their smiles as well as their eyes, which now resembled the beaks of birds.

From the afternoon until the evening, the wind too had stayed motionless. It was the sled's movement that sang, and it alone. There had been no other whistling, nor hissing, nor humming. Our mouths had stayed silent, because the grandmother and the child had stayed motionless.

It was she who broke the silence.

"You are on the right road. Come and rest."

-- We are going to Kangiqsualujjuaq, brother Rhodes answered. The woman's serenity visibly intimidated him. The information was unnecessary since we were following the Akilasakalluq River.

-- In a week, we will be there", the grandmother interjected.

Why had she said "a week", when four days would have been amply sufficient? Why had she said "we will be there"?

The igloo was large. The hunters were going to return soon. Jensingoak asked the grandmother if it wouldn't be better to construct our own igloo.

"Stay with me and the little one", she answered. "They left too long ago, they won't be coming back."

The drama was now palpable. It had no place in the igloo, however. Nattoralik brought out the dried fish, the fat and the meat. We ate slowly and in peace, for we had to let the grandmother and the little one catch up with their hunger, probably considerable, without their being embarrassed about prolonging the meal.

The cold hesitated. In the igloo's paak, a warm night showed its face. The air came in and went out like breathing. The kudlik, swaying, kept watch. Our bodies, relieved of their coats, smoked in the mild air. Spring was not far off.

The meal terminated, Jensingoak wanted to follow the tradition. He spoke first, recounting the story of the Brethren, their arrival on the coast of Labrador, the terrible first winter, the beached whale that saved them... When he had spoken several sentences well lubricated with silence and words held back, the grandmother took over.

"My family comes from the Torngat Mountains, the mountains of the She-bear who speaks. We have heard the story of the Moravian Brethren. This doesn't bother us." She cut herself a piece of fish, ate it and continued: "In the fall, our families go up the Akilasakalluq River, when spring is near we go back down it again; thus we eat caribou and seal."

Her voice was very melodious and her eyes cooed around the words she pronounced. Jensingoak glanced into her silence to see if she didn't fear, a little at least, the arrival of strangers so far into the country.

"The Brothers can pass," she said, "we will love them as much as the rest. We are in peace between the shoulderblades of our grandfathers. The fire of our kudliks wriggles like the fish of the river. Perhaps my grandson will have a metal knife and his wife will melt snow in an iron kettle, but we always end up by digesting even a big meal, and in a thousand years, we will still be walking on a coat of snow in a sky of colors."

-- But the hunters haven't come back! brother Rhodes exclaimed. Who will bring you fat and meat?

-- You have seen us from very far away. Dogs don't make any distinction between an old woman and a girl. So, here you are, my new husband and my new brother, and here is your son or your grandson, whatever you like. Be in peace, we won't be heavy to carry.

-- And if we hadn't passed by here... brother Rhodes said.

-- Then we wouldn't have been here on the aput, the grandmother replied. A wave doesn't exist without the sea, so one wave calls another wave... You are here because I am here."

She burst out laughing, because brother Rhodes' face was as long as an egg whose shell has just been broken.

With her mischievous eyes and her tattooed sunbeams, she made the round of the white and Inuit hunters. Then she examined us, Nattoralik and me, Mikak, the face ravaged by the South. One by one, she caught us and drew us into her story, and it was a single sea in several waves. There were not several stories, but one alone, and it could not be broken apart, or fall to pieces, because the sea undulates in the wind.

Brother Rhodes' mouth remained open. It was as if the cords of his bark spectacles had suddenly broken, and his naked eyes were sliding on the grandmother's cheeks in a liquid state.

A mild night had set in over the igloo. It was good to know that we were born with the whole world and that we would remain with the whole world. We had to make the count. There was Ulluk and Tuktu, middle-aged and very cheerful. There was Jensingoak and brother Rhodes, both astounded by what they were seeing and hearing. There was the grandmother, who savored the presence of the new hunters who wouldn't abandon her. There was the young Nattoralik, without husband, nor child, and yet this very day a mother. And I, Mikak, who was

coming back from a long, hard road. It was impossible that there was anything anywhere that was indifferent to our story.

We went to sleep, all pell-mell, women and men on the grandmother's big fur.

The water of drunkenness

I awoke a little before dawn, giddy from the breathing of the sleepers. The little one, who had probably rolled in his sleep, was sleeping on Nattoralik's chest, his feet on my shoulder. The furs covered us, and so did the darkness. The only thing that glowed even slightly were the joints of the blocks on the dome. A plug of snow closed the paak; no light came from there.

I had to go out to urinate. I pushed on the block that closed the igloo. Outside, the air was icy. A biting cold crystallized the humidity. The first pale light of dawn arrived like salmon, flesh exposed, in a hurry to flee to the west.

As I got up, I saw two human forms on the frozen river. I went back in to get dressed, because winter had returned in all its force, then went back out, closing the paak. I motioned to the dogs not to budge. They were fishing on the lake. I slowly approached those I thought to be hunters. They were not hunters, but the grandmother and Jensingoak. I sat down on a big rock that emerged from the aput. I looked at them.

With the wooden shovel and the ice pick, they had dug a hole big enough to remove a seal, if there had been any. The water gleamed, black. The grandmother rolled up a big fur which appeared to be in very poor condition. She compressed the roll at one end so that it was slightly conical, a little longer than a man, thick as the body of a common seal. Imitating her, Jensingoak had made a similar roll with another fur, just as old, and of just about the same size. They tied the two muzzles of fur together with a running knot. Then they plunged them into the hole of icy water. After tying them together, they slipped a skin under the two cords to keep the skins in the water.

It was obvious that Jensingoak was obeying the grandmother blindly, without understanding what she had undertaken. His actions were like those of a son.

They sat down facing each other in order to warm their hands and talk a little. They slapped their mittens together lightly to make their hands burn, for the hot flash then opens the veins and the blood acts like a kudlik.

I couldn't manage to distinguish what they were saying, but above all it was the grandmother who was talking. A story about the mountain that I didn't know, for otherwise I would have guessed it from the few words that came loose in my ears. However, perhaps it wasn't the story that was important, but the filiation these fragments of history seemed to sew as they went from the grandmother's mouth to Jensingoak's ear, piercing painful little holes, returning with

nerves and blood. Two ancestors were sewing the furs that had always formed on sleeping rugs: fine, precise sewing, so that nothing falls between the stitches.

They had brought caribou antlers. The grandmother went to get them and placed them between Jensingoak and herself. She studied them. After a while, the grandmother cut one with a small stone saw knotted to a bone handle. A patient and exhausting work which she executed without a pause. Next, she gave another antler to Jensingoak, indicating to him where to cut, which he did. The grandmother burst out laughing, for Jensingoak took a breath, stopped, and checked to see if the saw was really entering the antler. Nevertheless, he finished the work.

Jensingoak had brought two big fish which he had stuck in the snow like sticks. The grandmother split one of them full length with the little saw. She hadn't delivered any blow. She had simply placed the blade on the fish's back and, with back and forth movements, cut through it, then separated it, splitting the head and then the tail. The two pieces looked surprisingly equal. She handed the saw to Jensingoak, who had a lot of trouble doing the same thing with the other fish. The result made him laugh at himself.

They were waking up now in the igloo. Seeing what was happening outside, the men decided to go and fish a good distance away from the grandmother, because they all sensed that something was alive there that made the winds as well as the spirits draw back out of respect.

The morning light dried the air. The dry cold slowed movements. Steps crunched on the snow. Fur clothes softly hissed in the white air that fell like ashes. The grandmother's laughter nibbled the ear. Before dawn, I had understood nothing of what she said; now, I understood even what she didn't say.

Nattoralik joined me, bringing some work. The little boy, who had followed her, came and cuddled in her arms. The child was growing too fast, the grandmother had begun a new pair of pants for him and a hood, and Nattoralik wanted to finish the work. We sat down beside each other, sheltered by a rock, in a hollow of snow from where I could continue to watch the strange ritual taking place before me. Cutting and sewing, we were entranced by the grandmother's actions and words.

The boy had torn himself away from Nattoralik's arms. He was playing at building a little sled with sticks he had put together. He reconstructed it in every way imaginable. Nattoralik threw glances at him. The child latched on to them. They became mother and child.

The grandmother, aided by Jensingoak, took one roll of fur out of the water, then the other. She detached the first roll and unrolled it, the leather on the side of the ice, the fur towards her. Jensingoak imitated her with the second roll. She deposited the two halves of fish on the fur, head turned toward the end that had formed a muzzle. Then she rolled the wet fur very tightly around the two halves of fish, but this time crushing and firmly flattening one side, as if to fashion a beam with a slight narrowing on the side where the two halves of a fish head stuck

out. She tied the flattened roll with some sinew, applying all the strength she had at her command, to the limit of the sinew's resistance. After which, she walked and jumped on the crushed roll, causing water to spurt out.

During this time, she had been observing Jensingoak, who was imitating her the best he could, and corrected him several times. They spread out the two strange packets of fur very carefully on the perfectly flat snow.

The sun had risen and was brilliant; its rays froze the air.

At noon, we all went back into the igloo, to eat some fish around the kudlik. After the meal, each of us returned to our occupations, the men to fishing, Nattoralik, the child and I to sewing, the two elders to their incomprehensible ritual on the river.

The weather and the cold had worked hard.

When the grandmother turned the frozen packets on their narrow side, I suddenly understood the meaning of all this work. Hardened by the biting cold, they were sled runners. And I recalled a very old story which told about this improvisation, especially effective since in this way, the weight of two still usable old furs and of a little still edible food was integrated into the sled itself.

With an accomplished strength and skill at knots, the grandmother attached the caribou antlers to the runner to make the bridge of the komatik. She made use of the hollows the sinews had made in the rolls of skin in order to keep the ties from slipping and ensure that the flat runner remained as smooth as possible.

Next, she turned the komatik over, runners toward the sky. The grandmother went to look for a pouch of moss. They dug a basin beside the hole in the ice. They molded the moss and, with bare hands, laid it on the smooth side of the runner and meticulously smoothed it.

Now all that remained to be done was to let the cold work on the sled. They sat down again facing each other, warming each other's hands. The grandmother had slipped her own into Jensingoak's sleeves, and he had imitated her. Eyes in each other's eyes, they laughed.

But who was this man who was always a brother: ancestor or father?

I remembered... He had told me...

One night, when he was still a young man, he had awoken with a feeling of extreme solitude. There was no moon. The darkness was opaque. He had wandered in strange streets with barricaded facades. He had gotten out of the city. He felt lost, far from every habitation, no longer having the faintest idea of what a house could be. Hands were strangling him with anxiety; he felt that he was at an infinite distance from home, an insurmountable distance. An

inhabitant of a lost and distant star, absolutely alone, on a dark planet, with no means of returning home.

Had he believed in death, he would have killed himself in order to be done with this anguish. But how to believe in death, how to imagine nothingness, to imagine falling out of existence? That was an illusory hope. He kept on walking, for it was impossible for him to remain immobile, even for a moment. He returned to the city, hoping that the facades of the houses would calm him down.

The world that was there was the world already made, stones that were given, blocks to take or leave, all that we know and yet is the stranger to us, like the little stone is the stranger of the hungry man, like the drydock is the stranger of the sailing ship, like arrogance is the stranger of the great sails. Imagine the wind. Captured and confined in a cube without doors or windows, it is paralyzed there. In ten thousand years, will it remember that it was the wind, and not the air? This is how Jens Haven felt that day. He was searching for the sea, for space, for movement. He was suffocating.

A girl passed by him singing an unknown tune as she went toward the bridge with a jar. Dawn had risen. That voice, that tune, that song freed him little by little from his anxiety. The song slowly placed itself on the world. First on the tallest trees, the highest leaves. He saw them lose their envelope, rid themselves of their grayness, begin to shine with their true colors. And what colors! The song descended on the branches, slid on the roofs, spread out on the ground. The cobblestones sparkled with every color. The world was now naked and vibrant before him. It was his trembling country, his grandmother quivering with a vital music for her little ones...

But the song went away with the girl, and the world once more put on its dreary shroud that suffocates the colors, and the air as well, the lungs and the blood vessels. Jens ran to catch up with the song and the girl. Alerted, the girl stopped singing, tripped, and almost dropped her jar. So he stopped short and watched the world be transformed again into a corpse, into shreds, into rags, into inert things.

In the space of an instant, he understood that life is a song of the soul, a song that is formed between the human soul and the soul of the world. It isn't given. It has to be sung. Without that song, man is only a trumpet in its case. What can it know about itself if it has never produced the slightest note? It might think it is a pipe, or a funnel, or even a club. What could it know about the world? It would be only a heap of scattered matter. And if it were asked to believe in music? The trumpet, in its agony, wouldn't even understand the question.

Could it be that since the murder of Abel, man and his fellow creatures are separated by the implacable cases of death? An entire orchestra in us, before us, around us: instruments covered by a leaden silence, colors gone back into forms, thoughts enclosed in ideas, feelings walled up in fear, lovers entrenched in their bones... Could it be that, like cataleptics buried alive in a tomb, we gnaw our limbs, we suck our marrow, we rip out each others' hearts?

So, for the first time, Jens asked himself: "All that the singers don't sing, the caresses, the kisses, the pleasures between man and his fellow human, where do these sweet things go, where do the children of these sweet things go? Could it be that a universe of unfulfilled lives exists? This world a thousand times greater than our own, our tiny universe containing all that we have aborted, I will go and find it."

Starting from that day, he became Jensingoak, the explorer, the one who runs in order to hear the wind sing.

The grandmother had leaned over the water hole. She sucked up some water, got up, went back to the overturned sled with its runners toward the sky, and, blowing the water over the smooth edges of the frozen moss, she smoothed them to perfection. Jensingoak did the same. In the end, they had a light sled endowed with an impressive glide. The grandmother could carry all her things, take her little one and Nattoralik, his new mama. There were plenty of dogs for them and for us.

On the lake, I had seen two old skins and some caribou antlers transformed into a sled, thanks to the patient work of the cold and a warm filial love. And now the sled glided with no resistance over the frozen river, playing a symphony that was perfectly Moravian and yet totally Inuit. During this time, a child was making himself a mama out of a young woman dangerously close to the clouds.

Soon the great bay would open up in front of us, foaming and frothy, tongue stuck out, sun in its throat ready to cradle us. Nattoralik couldn't keep herself from singing the hymn *The Wedding of Cana*: water transformed into a means of transportation.

The mother says to her son: they have no wine.

The water is enough, he answered her.

And the kiss of lovers made them drunk.

Spring

The Akilasakalluq led to the great bay of Ungava, but it widened well before it and the coastal sea ice went deep into the structure of the plateau. The gathering place was located in a bend that formed a barachois, about half a day's journey by sled above the mouth.

Spring had exploded. The aput no longer carried either sleds, or dogs, or men; it was like a bog. The sea ice had grown dangerous. The hunter's freedom no longer had for a span anything more than the bare rocks of the shores, the ridges connecting the summits of the hills, all that wasn't white: you could have said it was an old brown carcass on a marsh covered with fresh snow. It was on this carcass that some qarmats could be seen, joined by a mysterious marrow.

We had found a place on a mossy knob rather high up on the barachois. Consequently everyone saw the grandmother's qarmat being set up, since this was the family's location. They didn't yet know that the hunters were lost and that others, strangers, had replaced them. It was in spring that families make the count of the dead and the living: consequently they were in no hurry to go and get the news.

However, an arm of the river was free of ice at a spot where it was easy to trap fish. So it was that the liberated waters brought the whole community together for fishing, about thirty people. They brought stones to make a kind of basin where the fish would come and be imprisoned in the rising tide. Next, they would close it before the tide lowered, then they would have fun knocking out the fish. A large basin, because the river itself, which in this gravelly part of the barachois had taken on a very rounded form, had already done a good deal of the work.

Even as we busied ourselves with these tasks, we let ourselves look. Between them and us, the marrow was forming; the peace of our actions encouraged trust; our nervous laughter did the rest.

When a rising tide arrived, they naturally assembled around the grandmother's qarmat. It was time to tell about the winter. Since everyone was really in a hurry to hear the grandmother; they let her speak after the third story.

The Brothers were much surprised by her account: she began by recounting the disappearance of her two sons, of her son-in-law and of a nephew, then went on to the arrival of the unaccustomed komatiks as if they were the same sleds, the same family that had returned, renewed however, like a natural result, like a river that goes under the ice at one spot and comes out, just like that, at another. The most surprising thing was that this was obvious to everyone's ears.

So much so that brother Rhodes wanted to show the difference, and he ventured to bring up the story of Jususi who died out of love and led them across the most dangerous seas to the coasts of Labrador. But even this story glided along with the same naturalness as the grandmother's.

Another one spoke. His grandfather had surprised a pack of starving wolves attacking a cache of seal meat. The stones covering it were big and sharp. They skinned the paws of the desperately scratching wolves until the blood came. The grandfather had pity on them. He set his dogs and his komatik in front of the wolves, and when the latter began to chase them, he drove them toward a herd of caribou which hadn't followed the great migration and were lingering miserably in the bottom of a valley where there was nothing to eat. In this way, he relieved the wolves' hunger while shortening the caribou's agony and preserving the caches of meat.

All of these stories were slowly swallowed one after the other at the same time as the fish. Beside our qarmat, we had lit a small fire with driftwood. The grandmother laughed and came

out with some ayayas. We had arrived with a good quantity of food. We had some dried caribou left, enough for a large number of stories.

In the smoke that stung our eyes, a young hunter turned a shining gaze toward Nattoralig, who blushed like a teenage girl. To overcome this timidity, she straightened her back and head and launched into the canticle of Francis of Assisi as adapted by the Brethren.

Praise to you, my sister sun, who illuminates us.

Praise to you, my brother moon in the clear sky.

And you, my friend the wind, the calm air

and all the weather mild or bitter.

Praise to you, my sister water,

so humble and so useful.

Praise to you, my brother fire,

who warms me.

Praise to you, our mother the earth,

who sustains us and feeds us,

in your flowered gown.

Praise to you, pains and tribulations,

who make us strong.

Praise to you, happiness and times of peace

who make us gentle.

Praise to you, sweet death

with disconcerting arms.

How good it is to live all together

on this white earth.

Suddenly, through this canticle, something had come out from the customs and known things, and yet the song was simply like the springtime.

The young hunter tilted his head as if he had just passed his sixtieth birthday and was putting an end to his long love life with the Inuit woman who sang like a bird of the forest. He felt as if he had already consumed all of that love's blood in a single moment. He could die, it was done, life was behind him. Love's thousand acts had become, all at once, memories engraved in his bones.

Summer

The Brothers had finally learned the art of meeting the Inuit. Their knives, their needles, their hooks now stayed tightly tied up in their baggage. From now on, they used only the traditional tools. They needed the Inuit, and this gave them the humility of a guest. The flies, not yet numerous in this beginning of spring, didn't annoy anyone. They kept to the old stories, those that for a long time go in circles.

The ice was taking steam baths. White whirlwinds rose in tipsy columns. The sun transferred all this water into immense umiaks that glided over our heads. Under these great gray umiaks of the sky, it didn't rain, however, except for a few drops that spilled out from time to time. The sun had arms that pushed these boats toward the south, caressing the backs of our necks at the same time.

The heat that was crushed beneath these giant portages was like broad hands that rolled the snow into piles and threw it into the sea. The rocks shook themselves like dogs coming out of the water, climbing higher on the coasts so as to better see the snow disappear. In the sun, they put on green, the moss making a curly beard around their muzzles, and the color rose to their faces. The warm lichen penetrated the pores of our feet, and the veins in our thighs pumped a burning blood that reddened our cheeks. Women set their lunar perfume free, men climbed up on the hills to smell the season.

In the river, the girls to be married laughed as they splashed water on their bare backs. The young hunters, perched on rocks, were waiting for the caribou's passage, but looked toward the river. A kind of marrow full of blue sinews connected these young people. The parents looked the young ones up and down, scrutinized their gazes, shiny with sap, and smiled.

At twilight, the breezes lost their clothes. So, here and there, some small, very temporary tents were added, no more than driftwood supporting old torn furs. The wind came in them and immediately went out; it had died laughing. Hands touched, hands pulled necks; heads found themselves snuggled on shoulders; a new smell cooed like a water hen. Wings wrapped around chests, sharpnesses filled fissures, and the sap of life set out again for a good twenty years with children to feed, troubles to dry, and weights to carry.

On the plateaus, seagulls were struggling in the snares set by the children. Further away, on the fields, female caribou were giving birth to their little ones. The Inuit grandmother climbed up

there and gorged her eyes with happiness. In the distance, the caribou's birthing ground was swarming with fawns. Before long, the little ones and the mothers would become a standing people who would dash at full tilt over the great seas of rocks. "Spread out, branch out, stretch out the life-giving stamping of hooves. Wear out the wolf, shake the rocks with drumbeats, tear tears out from the eyes of the sun. May all things tremble!" the caribou murmured in the grandmother's ear.

She had sat down on a high stone and her spine was vibrating. Flowers came out of the mosses and trembled in the wind. All the colors sparkled. The eye, worn out in the whiteness, rested now in the variety of colors. The salmon were coming back up the rivers with the frantic eagerness of youth. On the large stones facing the sun, a reassuring abundance was drying. "We will eat this winter."

The spring had been bright, sunny, and dry. The flies were amazed at their life, buzzed in our ears, took off toward the rocky valleys, and collapsed from thirst before they got there.

Brother Rhodes went from one family to another as if he were searching for an unhappiness in need of salvation; he found only happy couples and cheerful children. His crucifix stayed well hidden in his pocket. He no longer talked about anything but silence, boats and fish.

The summer walked the sun quite high above our heads, as slowly as the memory of a love fades. Our hair grew as hot as kudliks, and our hearts burned in the oil like wicks. The child ran toward its mother, the man followed the woman, the old man searched for youth, the friend gave his companion his hand, and nothing came to separate them.

The night was just the opposite; it passed with the speed of a grandfather in a hurry to go to his grandson's wedding. The day came out, warm and triumphant even before dreams had vanished on eyelids. And then the sun lit up space again, and the one who wanted to be loved fell into the hands of the one who wanted to love.

Everything was there: history, the world held together by unbreakable connections, the movement in the stretched and intertwined skins of animals and men...

Grandmother was no longer to be found. They didn't look for her. She had set out toward Mount Caubvick, in the Torngats, with three dogs white as snow.

Nattoralik remained with her adopted son, down there at Kangiqsualujjuaq.

Jensingoak, blind, and Mary, worn like driftwood, returned to Europe so as not to become a burden for their community. Mary met her two sons there and died.

At Fulneck, Jensingoak lit a kudlik before his community's wondering eyes. Those who came to meet him weren't able to leave their chairs until he had finished telling one of his famous stories.

EPILOGUE

Since his departure, I wander alone on the shores of Tasisuak Lake. I had a big faithful dog and a small komatik that was falling to pieces. Last week, the dog fell into a fishing hole and drowned, taking the sled with him.

This morning, I spread my necklace out on the snow, in the middle of the frozen lake. The necklace is complete: inside, there's snow, outside, there's snow, and the seashell in the center is pink like the princess of London.

I'm trying to remember the whole story...

I've wanted to tell it for a long time, I even went to check certain facts and certain dates in the Brothers' archives at Nain. My story is accurate and true.

I was ready to speak long before this morning, but no one came. The Brothers have their own story, the Inuit have theirs too, and mine might undo some strings they took great care to tie securely. So, they don't want to hear me!

That would have been a great relief for me. For when you tell a story, memory does a job in the listeners' minds, and this puts the narrator back on her feet again. What hurt so much and made those who listened shiver returns as a victory to us. The hero of that story holds her head high: what had weakened her reinforces her, what had been wrested from her regains its place, all her wanderings now make up the beauty of her story.

Sky and earth turn over, passing through the narrator's mouth. The narrator immediately changes her point of view: the sky, which had appeared empty and indifferent as she was living the story, ends up like a rock at her feet once the story has been told; the foundation of the earth, which had seemed compact and rough to her, surrounds her with its light and serene atmosphere once the story has been told. Returned in this way to her values and her proportions, the poorest, the most excluded, the unhappiest of heroes, is refeathered with all of her birdlike attributes. The gull can fly away with the sun in her mouth.

Otherwise, the story remains dead, and suffocates us, and crushes us like an avalanche. To die before being heard is an abomination. All that we have lived, and above all what we haven't lived, crushes us.

This is why my grandfather told me the story of the blizzard that had made an inumarik of him. This is why Jensingoak never stops talking since he has stopped seeing. Neither one is here to listen to me.

Tootak calls himself Palliser; he is a trader. Sorlark is an interpreter. They are fascinated by the South. Their old mother, the crazy woman, is out of her mind. What have they to do with that!

There is no one now on Tasisuak Lake, still half frozen in this end of spring. They are all at Nain or at Okkak, they are at Hopedale or Chateau Bay. Down there, it's trading, guns, alcohol, white flour, molasses. Europe is established in America. Nothing will escape it, the white foxes, the whales, the cod, the winters and the peace...

The lake is going to give way, with me and what it sweeps away... They have nothing to do with it.

It is noon on Tasisuak Lake. It is warm. The breakup of the ice is imminent.

My necklace forms a circle on the melting snow. To the north, the fastener; to the south, the pink shell. To whom does this necklace belong? I haven't found a single neck that wanted it.

On the lake, the ice is falling to pieces.

How many unheard stories are there? Perhaps the entire landscape, the hills around the lake, the stones, the abandoned bones, all these rigid materials are motionless and hard for the simple reason that they are stories no one listens to. Who listens to the stones, or even the trees? Perhaps the whole universe has never been listened to. Perhaps it will become supple, light, ethereal, will no longer harm anyone, the day when it is heard. Because we don't listen to it, it grows mean and grumbles. The mountains fall on our heads because we don't listen to them...

The water threatens because the shores no longer have ears to listen to the lake. They have all departed.

An old raven arrives... I'm not dreaming! A raven really is there in front of me, on the lake, and looks at what is happening around him. His wing is lame. He isn't from here. If he were, he would know where to find something to eat and wouldn't venture out on a lake that risks giving way at any moment.

I'll be! He's coming closer, apparently interested in the necklace, even though it's only a series of old vestiges of life no longer containing anything to eat, oysters opened and swallowed a thousand times by time.

"What are you doing here? Go away, go into the grove down there, you'll find some lemmings. At this time of year, they're very active in their tunnels in the snow. Go away. It's dangerous here. The water is breaking the ice. Soon I'll fall in..."

He stays there, drinking a little melted snow. He seems to be listening to the old Inuit woman talking all alone.

"You come from the west. No! from the east? Yes, you come from the east. You probably followed a sailing ship, you perched on one of its masts. You ate leftovers. You broke your wing messing up a dive when an eagle was pursuing you..."

He said nothing. Absolutely nothing. A mute raven. Have you ever seen that!

"For your punishment, you're going to have to listen to me..."

He shrugged his shoulders and threw me a sorry look.

"Ah! You've already heard it all. Everything I told. You were there the moment I sat down in the middle of the lake. So I wasn't absolutely alone. You were listening in secret."

Cracking, still more cracking... He pecks at a few snow crystals and looks at me again.

"So you've heard grandfather's story, and then the arrival of the one who was thought to be our ancestor, the first song in the igloo lashed by the wind, the boat that took me away to the princess, the man who freed me, the settling of the Brothers, the frozen whale that saved our lives, the peace of the mother bear who also saved our lives, the Inuits' slow death in the "good life", Nattoralik's baptism, the avalanche that swept away almost all the women in my family, the sleazy bars of Chateau Bay, the fall of my two children, the South that goes to the North, setting it on fire, our great journey to grandmother, and Jensingoak's leaving, pure and simple..."

He nods "yes". With his head, and even with his whole body, he repeats that he has heard everything.

"So tell me: What is my life? Tell me, for I see it spread out on the snow, a circle I don't understand, and it's horribly useless, empty and deadly."

He meets my gaze for a moment and lowers his head again. I raise my eyes to look at the condition of the lake. Large fissures have formed. The water moves between the separating blocks of ice. The pack ice ripples.

The sun is working like an ax today. Perhaps this evening it will all be over...

"Continue," the raven suddenly implores.

-- I've said everything.

-- But the necklace?

-- The necklace?

-- Yes, the necklace.

-- It's there, the necklace, it's there, my daughter and my son won't have anything to do with it, nor Nattoralig, nor Jensingoak.

-- Perhaps, but me, I'm here. I've been listening from the beginning. So I deserve to hear you bring your story to a brilliant conclusion.

-- But I don't understand a thing about that story. Look at the knot, it could have been anywhere, but it's there, pointed toward the north.

-- Yes, but before the knot.

-- Before the knot, before the knot, how do you think I could know it? I was like a drop of water in a lake, a noise in the middle of bird songs, a whiff of odor on the sea ice... What got into me to want to live? I'll never know it.

-- Is that all! What else?

-- I came out of Sedna's sea. I think it's something like that. I separated the night from the day. I lowered the valleys and raised the mountains. Like the naked gull, I made everything draw back, and everything surrounded me instead of submerging me. It was then that I felt alone. Without realizing it, I had put all that was light over my head and all that was heavy under my feet. Then, like a baby, I stretched out in the space I had made. I tore myself out of my mother's womb. Then I tore myself from my mother's nourishing breast.

"To keep death a paw's length from my nose, I drew a first cold and irritating puff from the surrounding air. And I did this job over again millions of times. A ridiculous stubbornness. All things considered, death is at exactly the same distance, the distance of a single breath. All I had to do was not repeat this rather stupid action, and there I'd be immersed once more in Sedna's infinite sea.

"But no! I still grab my puff of air and I begin again. Tirelessly. The lake is melting and looks at me and laughs, but I grab my cursed puff of air and I begin again.

"I milked my mother. Suckled in the effort to make her retreat -- death, at five paws from my mouth. To drink, I always had to milk a rock, some ice, a small river or a big river, to make her stare at me, she who was already licking her chops, five paws away from me. And I had to kill the seal and the caribou to keep her a few steps more away! Dozens of caribou, of seals, of fish have passed through my body... And the distance has never been as short as now, since for the past five days, I haven't been eating any more, I'm not drinking any more, and the sun is softening the ice that supports me.

"During all these years, one breath at a time, one swallow of water after the other, one piece of flesh after another, I've kept slightly out of rhythm, one step behind death, like an echo. A cause lost in advance. And now, the water is drooling around me.

-- But how did you get away from death the first time? And why? What went through your head? the raven asked.

-- I don't know. The rest I did by myself. I am the one who took every one of these breaths. I am the one who melted the snow on the kudlik to drink a little water. I am the one who drank the blood of my brother the caribou, of my sister the mother seal, and of her little one. I drank the blood to keep her away the short distance necessary for my consciousness. I did it. But the first step, it wasn't me. It was only later that I killed in order to eat.

"My brother caribou, my sister seal, my friends the fishes, thank you! From the bottom of my solitude, as I am giving way, thank you! Thank you a thousand times. Nothing would do me a greater honor than to pass into one of your holy bowels. Fishes of the lake, wait, I'm coming...

"I can't complain to anyone, it truly was me who grabbed all this air for the pleasure of my lungs, all this water for the enjoyment of our veins, all this meat for the warmth of my bones. It would have been easiest to dive back in immediately and, in the great white fog, see nothing. I worked desperately hard not to die right away, to put it off... Hoping to love.

"I lived the life I didn't want, I dreamed the life I wanted. I haven't found love, but, and my necklace is a witness, I have felt it; a hundred times, a thousand times, I have felt it. And now that I'm preparing to surrender, I would like to know one thing, one single thing: Why be brought out of the deep if it's only to return to it?

-- I know nothing about it. But I know one thing, the raven answered, just one thing: it's not an accident...

-- You came to tell me that! That's the whole mystery of my necklace. There were two peoples, one very close to Sedna, still soaked with water, the other very close to breaking, barely fastened to their bones. The too much inside and the too much outside. The child who is carried and the child split in two, the Inuit and the possessor. And you say that the story might have worked, except for one detail: one is not the savior of the other. We were not lost. We were a possible people, a possible love, a possible way of continuing the story.

-- No! No! I am not saying that it might have worked, I am only saying that the story goes forward with you, just as death does, for all things are Torngarsoak. When you go forward, all things go forward. Daughter, do you finally know the price of your existence?

-- But why didn't they stop at the foot of their cross? If they had understood that one carnage, they wouldn't have felt the need to do it over again with the whole earth.

-- Come, let's go. I'm going to tell you again about that storm and the unbreakable thread of your necklace. Even with a broken wing, I can carry you away. Thousands and thousands of necklaces turn around Mount Caubvick tied by one and the same thread, and it is with these thousands and thousands of necklaces that it is preparing its return."