

The Antichrist of Stanley Park

Prologue

Kugaaruk, Nunavut

Spring

On the edge of the northern town, nestled among rocks and light brown sand, a peeling pre-fab's door creaks to let out an older Inuk hunter. Dressed in an open seal-skin coat and with its parka flopping on his back, he strides smoothly past his twenty-two year old son. The hunter is preparing his wooden sled for a last excursion on the spring ice.

A tin can of water he carries is carefully held inside the flap of his coat against the cold. The hunter's son sits sideways on a yellow snowmobile. He shakes his head at his father.

The light wooden and bone sled is tightly strapped together with leather strips. It is lying runners up. The old hunter pulls a folded cloth from an inside pocket and shakes it free of lint. The cold wind carries the lint away from the sled.

Overhead, the sharp blue sky has a sun in it, though there is no heat in its rays. Downslope from his little home on the edge of the community, a rocky shore can be seen running into a choppy Pelly Bay. The last of this season's growler ice floes still sway on the ocean between Kugaaruk and rocky islands that are an easy boat ride away. In the distance, the sea is covered in old ice that has heaved everywhere into a treacherous landscape.

The son is zipped tightly into a bright green nylon coat whose artificial fur hood tries to keep his face warm. New yellow leather boots and dark green insulated nylon pants all seem to make little rubbing noises even as he sits there in the frigid spring air. He wipes his nose ineffectually with a nylon sleeve.

"Dad, I don't know why you refuse to get modern. I can help you to screw on the plastic strips to those runners. It'll make you go easier - the dogs won't have to work so hard. I don't know why you want to keep dogs, anyway. Get with the times, dad."

Carrying on with long established motions, the hunter dips the cloth into his tin can of water. He carefully rubs the wet cloth along a runner, starting from the front. Keeping the application of water smooth and thin, it freezes quickly onto the runner. Each application is merged with the next one so that the surface stays smooth. His work is hypnotic to the young man. As the first coat is finished, the hunter goes back to do it

again. Rousing from his trance, the son sniffs and shakes his head, “All this time you waste...”

“My son, ice is more slippery than your plastic. And when that southern material chips or breaks on a rock, can you smooth it down, two days away, with the weight of a seal, in a blizzard? No. My iced runners are strong. If they chip, when I stop for tea I will make more water and smooth my runners again. Wherever I am.”

He looks pointedly at this son’s scratched up snowmobile skis. “And when I take such care with my tools, I treat them with respect.”

The young man squirms in his seat. A creak of the door alerts him to his mother emerging from the house. She is dressed in her bright clothes. Closing the door securely, she speaks to both her husband and her son. “I’m going to the church for a while. I don’t want you two arguing while I’m away. OK?”

Her son nods, head down, “Yes mom.”

As she disappears down the lane the old hunter mumbles, “Bingo.” He turns back to exchange a grin with his son.

Hesitating to bring up a sore point, the hunter starts quietly, “That new friend of yours, Mikey – we welcomed him to our place and fed him our best food. He spat it out. He gave you, not me, a bag that was full of many new things from the south. The far-seeing glasses...”

“Binoculars, dad.”

“...can be very useful on a trek.” He nods. “What is that other envelope and secret bag you are holding for him?”

Eyes down, “Nothing, dad. Just something to pass on to somebody on the next airplane. He gave me that contract. I will work for him.” He beams, sitting up straight. “And he gave me a secret mission...” then trails off, remembering the word “secret”.

Still holding the can of water under his coat the hunter shakes his head slowly, knowing that his son is not going down a path that will benefit him. “It is good to learn the ways of the southern people. Learn what they know and what they value. They have much to offer you. But you must also learn who you are and what the land will do to you. It may be that you will not need to hunt seals for your food. Your new friend, and the store,” he nods in the direction of the prominent new two-storey building in the middle of Kugaaruk, “they bring many tasty things. Some of it is food, and some of it may satisfy your tummy. But you must know that it is southern food, made for southern tummies that do not fuel you against this Arctic cold. Like those boots that you gave so many hides for. The southern animal of their hide...”

“They call it moose, dad.” He kicks at a chunk of sand and snow that is still frozen solid.

“Moose – has not walked on the tundra. Its hide will not protect you when you walk on the tundra. Seal or caribou is the only hide for kamiit that can keep you warm when the sun goes down.”

He applies more thin layers of water to the runner.

“My son, the words of the southern people carry many meanings. We have not walked on their land and they have only winged their way over ours. Some of their words carry great danger. It is not the same danger that we might see on the ice. The danger in their words, that we think must be innocent, comes from a land that has accepted violence over pieces of paper. I did not see paper until I was your age. Now paper rules everything, even here on our land. They do not know our land and you do not know their land. Southern people think that words on paper are the only thing that is important.

“I will tell you the truth that you must remember. The man who does not learn to understand and respect the land will too soon become part of it.”