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NENNOOK—THE WHITE TERROR

The Great Ice King of the North

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THE storm-sprite held high revel 'midst the Arctic wastes. In from the ocean he rushed tumultuously, borne on the snow-whitened wings of the stinging east wind. At the blasts of his breath the waters rose wrathfully up and piled themselves in fury on the seaward edge of the broad northern ice-field that capped the polar regions. By the vehemence of their onslaught, huge cakes were torn off and hurled far inward on the icefield while the floe heaved and groaned in painful protest as the restless billows shouldered their headlong way impetuously beneath it. To leeward of the broken, wildly-tossing fringe of wave-churned fragments that marked the edge of the floe, the snow swept hurriedly along over hillock and mound, blanketing everything with a restless covering of uniform white. It smoothed out the deep wrinkles on the face of the floe and its ever-thickening carpet covered up even the blow-holes through which came Kirolik, the seal, from his fishing expeditions.

It was a wild time to be aboard, but Nennook, the white bear, heeded not the warring of the elements. He was too hungry to pay much attention to the storm, too well-used to the vagaries of wind and sea to be hindered thereby in his persistent search for food. Noiselessly he padded along, his great bulk showing as a dull, yellowish-white blur against the drifting storm scud. The searching wind was powerless to penetrate his heavy, shaggy covering of fur and the hairy pads on his great paws kept him erect against its fiercest onrush even in places where the wind-squalls had swept the glassy ice clean of snow. So he shuffled persistently onward in the very teeth of the gale, his long pointed head bent low, his wide nostrils snuffing eagerly at the snow-carpet as he made his tedious way toward the windward ice.

HE halted at the seaward side of a rounded mound of ice. Just why was not apparent. There was not a sign of life to be seen either on the ice or in the air. Above his head whistled the snow-laden gale; beneath him was the solid floe. There was nothing to shelter him in this strange resting-place and the snow speedily began to drift and pile round his big body as they lay there prone and unmoving. The gleam and twinkle of his great brown eyes showed that the halt had not been called for fatigue. This was his manner of hunting and Nennook, the great white terror, was waiting, waiting for what the food instinct had told him was near.

A long time he lay there in the storm, scarce changing position by an hairsbreadth, his eyes staring steadily at the ice a foot or so away. A tremor of excitement shook his huge form and his whole attitude became tensely alert as the snow at the spot under his observation slowly lifted up like the cone of a miniature volcano and then suddenly burst open to show the dripping brown head of Kirolik, the seal, as

he poked his bewhiskered nose for a whiff of the fresh air. Slowly he faced round, keeping a wary eye on the ice, but ere he was aware, the white terror had smitten him from behind, crushing his skull with one mighty, well-placed blow of a heavy, claw-armed paw. A moment later and Nennook had the limp warm body of the hapless seal safely on the ice and was feasting in contented forgetfulness of many weary days of enforced fasting.

The long, tedious spring slowly merged into the brief Arctic summer. Gradually the cold, damp days of the foggy east winds gave place to bright, clear weather and the heartening sun completed what fog and rain had commenced. The high snow-drifts rapidly shrunk and disappeared, rivulets ran rejoicing down the side of every ice-mountain, the frost-bound streams were loosed after dreary months of captivity and rippled onward smilingly to the ice-strewn ocean. The floe which had been Nennook's winter hunting field, went rapidly to pieces, and, as often as not, in his travels, he was swimming lakes and channels of salt water, wherein he was almost as much at home as on ice or land.

A STRONG offshore wind overtook Nennook one day as he made his way coastward to fish. So it happened that when he reached the edge of the field the gale had opened a gulf four or five miles wide wherein huge waves ran races with each other to the landward fringe of the floe. But Nennook did not hesitate. One mighty leap and he was in the storm-lashed water, fighting his way toward the coast with powerful, untiring strokes. The billows buffeted him, they beat him down, they tossed him sportfully from crest to crest, but he struggled doggedly on across these weary miles of tossing water, with many a splutter and grunt, until at last, tired, but successful, he mounted the standing ice that formed a narrow fringe along the shore.

Later, Nennook took up his station on a big

boulder near the mouth of a stream. Patiently he watched the dark, swift, running waters for signs of life, crouching as far back as possible from the edge of the boulder, one paw held ready to strike. The dark back of a salmon showed dully through the water as the fish moved slowly up-stream to its breeding-place. Swift as the lightning's flash was the stroke of Nennook's paw as he struck out and down. Splash! and a silvery form was withdrawn from the water, impaled on these terrible claws. For a long time the bear fished from the teeming river and then, surfeited with feasting, he ambled off to sleep in comfort and content in the warm, cheery sunshine.

Winter was close at hand when Nennook met his mate on the Arctic floe. She was hunting, like himself, on the coastward ice, and in bulk and strength of form was no whit his inferior. Uncertain of temper and insatiable of appetite she was none too amiable or attractive. Still the pair got along well enough together in their restless wanderings during that long northern winter. The sun disappeared beneath the horizon and a night, whose duration was reckoned in cheerless months, came on; the frost king set his seal on river and sea; snowstorms swept the ice-floe and stung the eyes of the wild creatures like a pitiless lash, but Nennook and his fierce mate minded none of these things. Together they hunted when the driving snow scud hid ice and sky or the bright stars twinkled through the frosty air; together they feasted when Aurora Borealis hung its mystic, waving curtain from the sprinkled vaults. And Nennook felt that it was good indeed to be thus accompanied and cheered by his mate on his many trips abroad over the homeless wastes.

A SECOND summer passed and when winter was again at hand Nennook's mate bethought her to seek out some hole or burrow, wherein she might spend the long season and rear a family. To leeward of a small hummock she dug out a cave into which she crawled and the restless snowdrifts soon sealed her snugly in. Here two frisky cubs were born and the delighted mother affectionately fondled and fed them at her breasts all through the

tedious winter, herself lean and starving from the long fast. For the sake of her little ones she dare not unseal her den and venture out on the storm-swept floe in search of food. One blast of the deadly frost and their tender lives would have been at once snuffed out, so with true mother self-sacrifice she remained in her snow-bound cave.

Nennook disappeared soon after his mate started house building in the snow. His absence was unavoidable. Hunting one day along the fringe of broken ice that marked the seaward edge of the floe, he had fallen asleep after some big feasting and the pan on which he rested was carried many miles to sea by a sudden gale, ere the white bear awoke to the fact that he was foodless and adrift.



Nennook and his mate at play.