

# The Tragedy of Wrangel Island.

## An Eskimo Woman the Sole Survivor.

(Continued.)

Even when the walrus finally came out on the ice, bad luck still enmeshed the expedition. The boys killed two of the beasts, but lost some of the meat through accidents and bad weather. A boat bringing supplies was jammed at the island in the first gummying, but it could not reach harbor, and 100 miles of ice, winter came through with its sickness, loneliness, despair and death. Knight was ill, and the three other men set out for the Siberian coast to bring help. It was at this stage, back in the two "poor tents" on the island, that the Eskimo woman became the leader. Noice writes of her:

Ada Blackjack, brought up in the mission in Nome, had learned to read and write, to sew and cook. To shoot, to trap, to carry on the trail, to be the naked element of these she was almost as ignorant as the white woman of Nome. In those days, while Lorne Knight lay in his sleeping-bag, death through heavy snows creeping toward him, the Eskimo girl passed through a brief period of despair, which Knight records in his diary. Then her Eskimo heritage rose up in her. She assumed, one by one, the tasks which the white men had dropped—look up the challenge where they laid it down. Every instinct in her surged to the battle with the relentless forces which had already destroyed her companions. Knight describes her, as he grows weaker, she takes the chores, one by one, from him. She chops the wood, she melts the ice and melts it for water, she pushes through the storms, visits the traps and brings home the foxes. Ultimately she learns to handle that murderous invention of the white man, of which she has always been afraid—Knight's rifle.

The still able to keep his record of her life, Knight is powerless to do much else. On February 7 he notes: "Ada took a short walk to a few of the traps, but no luck. She and I (mostly she) cut a little wood to-day, and I while so doing (He'll) fainted and was out for a few seconds. The woman, I am sure, did not realize until then that I was really sick. And when came to, she was scared stiff. I got to my bag and am all O. K. excepting a very slight fever which I now have."

"The woman is a great deal more frightened over my condition than I am. I don't deny that it is a rather mean position in which she finds herself, but she is wonderfully cheerful, and is now busy sharpening the wood-axes. She insists on doing practically everything, and I willingly permit her to do so."

At this time the temperature reports in Knight's diary cease. In speaking of them he says: "The woman can not read the thermometer, and I do not wish to get out of my sleeping-bag, so the readings will be discontinued for a time." Still Knight did not suspect the full seriousness of his situation. He expected, even then, that the break in a record would be only a question of days.

More and more he pins all his hopes upon the arrival of a bear. Fear is being appalled by the appearance of inquisitive animals, as in the fifty days of their stay on the island, Knight asks nothing of life but that bear shall walk right into camp. "I can see that I can not go far away from camp, and unless a bear walks into camp, I see small chance

Knight died, she was compelled to stay indoors because of her snow-blindness. To quote Mr. Noice's record:

"She writes briefly: 'I didn't go out nowhere to-day on account of my eyes on beam.'"

Realizing the necessity of becoming a good shot Ada practices even when she is not hunting. On June 17 she writes: "This evening I made a target and shot two times with the rifle. And I took my target in and showed it to Knight and he says it's pretty good shooting."

On the twenty-first of June, the day before Knight's death, Ada writes: "Knight is getting very bad. He looks like he is going to die." Curiously, there is no mention of Knight's death in Ada's diary. Her entry on that day is very brief: "Move to the other camp to-day and I wash my dishes and I get in some wood."

Her days of nursing are over. Her last act in Knight's behalf was to put up the barricade of boxes, which I was ultimately to take down, and thus to protect his body from marauding animals. She told me later that she could not nerve herself to bury him.

In the report of her entire trip, which she penciled laboriously in the tiny cabin we set for her on board the Donaldson, Ada wrote of Knight's death:

"I had hard time when he was dying. I never will forget that all my life. I was crying while he was living. I try my best to save his life but I can't quite save him."

On a single sheet of white paper picked out on Galle's typewriter, Ada made this official notation:

Wrangel Island, June 22nd, 1923. The daid of Mr. Knight's death. He died on June 22nd. I don't know what time he die. tho. Anyways I write the daid just to let Mr. Stefansson know what month he died and what daid of the month.

Written by Mrs. Ada B. Jack. Earlier on that same day she wrote a letter to Galle, apologizing for using his typewriter. The pathos, the courage, the amazing sense of responsibility that permeate the entire story of this Eskimo woman speak through the lines of her letter to Galle:

Wrangel Island, June 22nd, 1923. "Dear Galle,

"I didn't know I will have very important writing to do. You well forgive me wouldn't you. Just before you left I've told you I wouldn't write with your typewriter. So I made up my mind I'll write a few words, in case some happen to me, because Mr. Knight he hardly know what he's talking about I guess he is going die he looks pretty bad. I hope I'll see you when you read letter. Well, if nothing happen to me I'll see you. The reason why I write this important notice I have to go out seal hunting with the rifle. I was after seal on 18th of June. I shot two times to one seal but didn't hit the seal. And it was foggy so I think that's one reason why it's more hard for me to hit the seal. I didn't go out again because I didn't see anymore, but I try hard enough to get some eider duck but I could not hit any eider duck. On 19th of June I got one female eider duck. Of course Knight wouldn't eat any meat he always say he's got one seagull egg. On 9th of June I found one seagull egg and I saw bunch of seagulls on one place and I found six more new nests but didn't have any eggs. When I was coming back there was flock of geese and I took a shot there. One drop My! I was glad. Came home with one geese egg and after four days I went up again and I found nine eggs, that is seagull eggs. Oh yes, the goose that I got had one egg and two small ones the largest one had almost shell on it not quit through. That's about all I well say in this notice I write. I may write some more some times if nothing happens to me in few days. "With lots of best regards to your self from me Yours truly Mrs. Ada B. Jack."

Other entries in her diary continue up to the day of her rescue. Evidently she left the sheet in the typewriter, says Mr. Noice, and each day added a line or two giving her whereabouts, in case Maurer, Galle or Crawford should return during her absence. The record runs: "June 24th. I'm going over to the other side of the harbor mouth to some duck hunting."

"June 25. Going same as yesterday. I got seven eiders."

"June 26. I'm going to take a walk to the small island. I saw two Polar bears when come back from little island. It's four o'clock now. I write down when I saw them. I don't know what I'm going to do if they come to the camp. Well, God knows."

"June 27th. I'm going hunt seal to-day. I'm going after the seal that I saw when I went the old camp the other day. It was about two hundred yards from the beach I got a seal. I shot it with the rifle. Oh I was glad when I got the seal and when I come home I cut the seal and hang the meat to dry."

"June 28th. I clean the seal skin to-day and lat this afternoon Polar bear and one Cub was very close to the Camp and I didn't take any chances. I was afraid if I didn't hit it right I'd be in danger. I just shot over them and they went away. I was glad thank the living God."

On July fourth she ends her description of an unsuccessful day's hunting when her gun went off unexpectedly with: "The seal went down and I stand up and say Fourth of July. It was a surprise rifle boom so I have my Fourth of July."

The next day she shops at two seals and kills one of them. After hauling it home, skimming it, hanging the meat and stretching the skin, she exults a little in her efficiency with: "All done in one day and this evening I took a bath. Thank the Lord Jesus."

Later Ada kills another seal, but polar bears take possession of it, and she sees them devouring her prize before she can haul it to camp.

Up to the very last record in the diary, which is dated August 19, the day before our arrival for rescue, Ada works early and late in her struggle for food. She makes a seal-net. She builds herself a canvas boat. When it is blown away, she makes another one, which she is careful to tie up. "I finish new canvas boat. Oh yes, I made oars for my little boat. I thank God."

On the morning of August 12 she gets up to find that in the night, polar bears have eaten a full can of seal-blubber, left standing just outside the door of her tent. Conscious how narrow had been her escape, she writes: "I thank the Lord Jesus keep me from danger."

With driftwood Ada built a lookout above her tent and many times a day she climbed to the top of it and searched the ice with field-glasses for signs of open water.

On August 18 she sees that the ice is moving and records the fact cautiously: "The wind blowing hard from the west and the ice is going out slowly. A few days ago I thought it was going out but it didn't go very far."

The following night, which was to be Ada's last alone on the island, she makes her final entry: "I finished my knitted gloves to-day. I am on my last biscuit box. The ice is over the top of the horizon. I thank the Lord Jesus and God His Father."

The Eskimo woman had no sooner finished building her morning fire than a strange sound came through the walls of the little tent. It was vague at first, muffled by the fog, then unmistakable. Ada grabbed up her field-glasses and dashed from her shelter. She climbed to the lookout and peered through the fog until her

eyes finally caught sight of a ship's mast.

Elsewhere I have described our meeting. "I was so glad that I cry," Ada wrote of it. "I hardly believe that it was a ship. And I thought I will see Crawford and Galle and Maurer. And they told me nobody knows anything about those three fellows. Gosh, that was sad news to me."

So ends the chronicle of Ada. She is now living in Nome, Alaska. Her harrowing experience did not shatter her nerves. She is as well as she ever was. "The boys are gone, concludes Mr. Noice, but—

"The work for which they gave their lives goes on. Twelve Eskimos and one white man are now on Wrangel, carrying on the task which Mr. Stefansson began, inspired by his vision of a northward moving civilization. It is his resolve that never again shall this island be uninhabited. Wrangel has been definitely claimed from the wilderness, irrespective of what Government finally takes it over. Although now valuable chiefly for its furs, it is as a future airplane and airship base that Wrangel Island promises interesting developments. For it is a stepping-stone on the shortest route from England to Japan. Some day, perhaps, the shores where Ada wandered in search of food and where Knight died will boast gigantic hangars. Searchlights may sweep the heavens, playing upon great dirigibles. This region, desolate since the world began, may hum with human life.—Literary Digest.

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