

The "Farthest North" Elopement



THE STORY OF HOW
THE OFFICERS
OF THE THETIS
LENT THE DUDS OF
FASHION TO AN
ESKIMO WEDDING,
AND OF THE
DISCOMFITURE OF ANUK
WHO SLAVED
TWO YEARS
FOR A BRIDE HE DID
NOT GET

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ITOK lives at Point Barrow, Alaska, the most northern point of North America. In the early summer, when the ice pack moves off enough to allow the whales to work northward, while still presenting an impenetrable front to the whaling vessels, Ittok goes out on the ice with his neighbors and plunges harpoons into the whales. And he fires bomb guns at them and misses three-quarters of them. And the whales go off somewhere and die with harpoons or bombs in the vitals.

But Ittok doesn't care, so long as he catches a whale once in a while. When he does get one, his party divides up the whalebone and the blubber. Ittok takes his share of the blubber and dries it for his winter food, while the bone is sold later to a whaler, a captain, missionary or other trader for much less than its value. The proceeds are expended for flour, calico, cartridges and other necessities, which the same people let him have at exorbitant prices.

Of course, this means that Ittok must wander along the verge of starvation toward the end of the winter. But he is used to that. His fathers and mothers for generations have starved each year, for a season, before the ice loosens around the short line of Point Barrow.

Tramping through the snow and over the drifted ice floes is very wearing on mukluks. Now, no self-respecting Eskimo man will chew the skin of Ugaruk, the big hair seal, to make the soles of his mukluks. That is woman's work. In fact, most of the work of an Eskimo village is woman's work. When the schooner Vine was unloaded at Cape Smyth last summer the women joined with the men in lugging bags of flour, coal, salt, everything in her cargo, up to the beach to storehouses out of reach of the winter ice. And the only difference between the labor of the women and of the men was that the burdens of the women were generally heavier.

Hence it is desirable for an Eskimo man to marry.

Ittok appreciated the advantages of married life in the Arctic. He had come to the conclusion that Tereedlok, the adopted daughter of old Antonio and his wife Belle, could sew skins, chew boot soles and tote coal better than any other young lady in his set.

So he sought the company of Tereedlok. In the wrestling bouts of the village Ittok always did his very best when Tereedlok was near. He affected gayly ornamented clothing. The variety of clothing at the village was not great. But bright red calico is much more alluring for an outer garment than is blue dungaree or a gunny sack.

And Tereedlok smiled upon Ittok. But her smile was sad. Her stern guardians, the Portuguese Antonio and the Eskimo Belle, had promised her hand to another, to one who had come nearly three years ago from St. Lawrence Island, away down to the southward, beyond Bering Straits. He came from a land so distant that the midnight sun could be seen only from the tops of the higher mountains, and then but for a few days in the year.

What right had this interloper from the far south to come into Ittok's village and to thrust his unwelcome bulk between him and his sweetheart?

Ittok and Tereedlok did not know that, from the beginning of history, stern parents have continually tried to force their daughters to marry eligi-

ble suitors. For did they know that lovers have generally managed to elude the vigilance of the jailers. The situation was absolutely new to both of them. But they met it in the same old way. They eloped.

Difficult Arctic Elopement

An elopement is an easy thing when all the accessories needed are a ladder and a dark night. But Tereedlok lived in a one-story hut dug into the ground and covered with turf laid over the jaw bones of whales. A ladder was distinctly out of place. And by the time that they had finally decided to steal away the long winter had passed and the sun, having risen, refused to set again and it was daylight all night long.

So Ittok thought and thought. It takes an Eskimo a long time to think anything. Finally Tereedlok, who had been thinking too, suggested that Captain Hamlet, who was then coming north on the United States revenue cutter Thetis, might marry them.

Marry them! Ittok hadn't thought of that. His parents had never been married, nor their parents before them. Had there been accurate records in the village, which there were not, he would have known that marriages had been very, very rare in his family history.

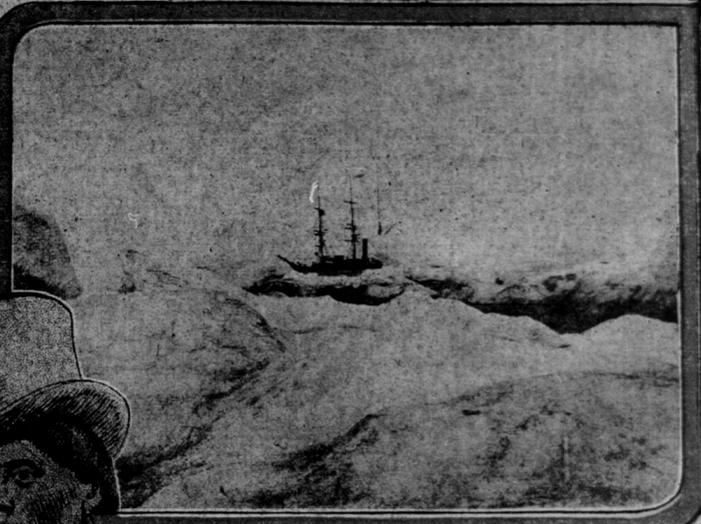
Tereedlok's family had been equally unconventional. If not more so. But she had heard that white men and white women married one another. She knew that white blood was suspected to be in her own veins; and she so represented the case to Ittok that he fell in with the idea of a regular marriage, with an elopement to break the force of the blow.

The Arctic steamer Thetis had been steadily pushing her way to the north. Never had she seen the ice floes piled so high. She had carefully threaded her way through the leads between immense floating cakes of ice, around dangerous and incorrectly charted shoals as far as Point Belcher and the Sea Horse Islands. There a solid barrier of ice extended, so far as the Thetis had been able to find out, clear across the Arctic Ocean. She had already run into several blind leads and in each instance had been forced to scuttle out at full speed to keep from being crushed as the ice closed in on her.

On August 12, 1906, the Thetis lay off Pingosharun, one of the Sea Horses, moored fast to a grounded field



ITOK AND HIS BRIDE, TEREEDLOK



THE "THETIS" IN THE ICE, WHERE THE WEDDING OCCURRED

rounded chin. These marks showed her to be a woman, and to be worth from two to three of the native male inhabitants of the Arctic zone.

First the visitors had breakfast. If you stop at an Inuit village in your travels you are welcome to their scanty fare. They expect you to extend the same courtesies to them when they visit you. And you always do so.

After breakfast they plunged into the business of trading, a business which is at the same time their most alluring recreation. The men of the Thetis used the few Inuit words at their command with a wastefulness that was not in keeping with their scanty store. But the Eskimos prefer to hoard whatever English words, if any, they have acquired from fifteen years or so of missionary school teachers.

It was several hours before it occurred to Ittok that he was one of the central figures of a romance. It was Tereedlok who finally drew herself reluctantly away from the delights of trading and suggested that the umalik be asked to marry them. So, with the aid of Tommy, the interpreter from Cape Prince of Wales, they went bashfully into the presence of Captain Hamlet.

It was a surprise to the captain to have natives ask to be married. He had joined many couples, principally white beachcombers and native women in the holy bands of matrimony, but always heretofore at the instigation of the authorities on shore. So he was delighted to grant their request.

The captain set the time for the wedding at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and sent messengers all over the ship with verbal invitations. Then the ship's company took charge of all the arrangements. It was found that the bride had come from Point Barrow with her trousseau on her back. Neither she nor Ittok had a change of clothing. What is the use of lugging clean clothing around for a year or so with no chance to use it?

Gowning the Bride

So they found an old skirt that had been brought from San Francisco to trade with some native for a polar bear skin or perhaps a Russian sable or two. They made her a waist by winding part of a bolt of spotted blue calico about her and pinning it here and there to make it look as much as possible like a Delineator wood-cut. The bridal veil was a mosquito net when the Thetis was stationed at Houolulu.

The bridegroom looked very uncomfortable in a cutaway coat and trousers, part of a white shirt, collar, necktie, old campaign stovepipe hat and a fancy vest that he mustn't touch with his hands on account of the black marks that hands always make on loud vests.

He placed on the finger of his bride a ring with a sparkling gem, a ring that had attracted the eye of one of the crew of the Thetis as it lay on the counter of a 5 and 10 cent store in civilization, and Captain Hamlet pronounced Ittok and Tereedlok husband and wife amid the clicking of cameras and the cheer of the ship's company.

Then the principals had to stand in line and be photographed. On the right of the picture is W. N. Landers, Assistant District Attorney for the Nome district, who gave the bride away. Next comes Tereedlok, then Ittok. Next to Ittok is Captain O. C. Hamlet, U. S. R. C. S., commanding the U. S. S. Thetis, and United States Commissioner for the Northern District of Alaska, who represents the newly discovered "law of God or man, north of fifty-three."

On the extreme left, on the other side of the hose reel, stands Mr. Thomas Illo-yak, whose name alone shows his familiarity with both the English and Inuit languages. He was the best man. He is one of Mr. W. T. Lopp's natives from Cape Prince of Wales and now helps teach the school children at that settlement. Lopp understands the natives, has devoted his life to them, has never tried to use them for his personal profit and, as a result, his natives show progress and the settlement at Cape Prince of Wales is prosperous, clean and happy.

After the ceremony Captain Hamlet provided a wedding breakfast of candy and chewing gum for the Eskimo guests, and then the wedding party got into their umiak and paddled merrily toward the shore, the bride wielding toward the shore, the bride wielding (Continued on Next Page.)



CAPTAIN HAMLET AND THE BRIDAL PARTY