

IAN R. MacLEOD

TIRKILUK

Radio transmission from Queen of Erin via Letwick to Meteorological Intelligence, Godalming. Confirm Science Officer Seymour disembarked Logos II Weatherbase Tuiak Bay July 28. Science Officer Cayman boarded in adequate health. No enemy activity sighted. Visibility good. Wind force 4 east veering north. Clear sea. Returning.

Noon, July 29th, 1942

Stood watching on the shingle as the Queen of Erin lifted anchor and steamed south. I really don't feel alone. The gulls were screaming and wheeling, the seabirds were crowding the rocks and just as the Queen finally vanished around the headland, the huge gray gleaming back of a whale broke from the water barely two hundred yards from the shore, crashing in billows of spray and steam. I take it as a sign of welcome.

Evening, August 2nd

Have been giving the main and backup generators a thorough overhaul. Warm enough to work outside the hut in shirtsleeves -- but you only have to look around to see what winter will bring. The mountains north of this valley look as though they've been here forever, and the glacier nosing between down from the icefields is just too big to believe. It's twenty miles off, and I can barely span it with my outstretched hand. Feel very small.

Noon, August 3rd

Spent a dreadful night on the bunk as the blackfly and mosquito insect bites began to swell and itch. The itching has gone now, but I'm covered in scabs and weeping sores. Hope that nothing gets infected.

Evening, August 6th

Wish I'd had more of a chance to talk with Frank Cayman before we exchanged, but there were all the technical details to go over, and the supplies to unload. He did tell me he was part of a Cambridge expedition to Patagonia in 1935, which, like my own brief pre-war experience with the solar eclipse over South Orkneys, was seen as proof of aptitude for maintaining an Arctic weather station. He's a geologist -- but then the pre-war specializations of the Science Officers I met at Godalming made no sense, either. Odd to think that many of us are scattered across the Arctic in solitary huts now, or freezing and rocking through the storms on some tiny converted trawler. Of the two -- and after my experience of the Queen of Erin, and the all pervading reek of rancid herring -- I think I'm glad I was posted on dry ground.

Frank Cayman looked healthy enough, anyway, apart from that frostbitten nose. But he was so very quiet. Not subdued, but just drawn in on himself. Was impressed at the start with how neat he's left everything here, but now I can see that there is no other option. You have to be organized.

Evening, August 9th

My call-sign response from Godalming is Capella, that bright G-type sister of the sun. It means, as I expected, that Kay Alexander is my Monitoring Officer. Funny to think of her, sitting there with her headphones in that drafty hut by the disused tennis courts, noting down these bleeps I send out on the cypher grid. An odd kind of intimacy: without speech transmissions, and with usually just a curt coded reply of Message Received (no point in crowding the airwaves).

Find that I'm re-reading the two requests I've received for more specific cloud data, as though Kay would do anything more than encode and relay them, chewing her pencil and pushing back strands of red hair.

Too late for regrets now. And at the moment I miss the stars more than the people, to be honest. Even at midnight, the sky is so pearly bright that I can barely make out the major constellations. But that will change.

Evening, August 12th

A great bull seal came up onto the beach this morning as I was laying out my washing on the rocks to dry. Whiskered, with huge battle-scarred tusks, he really did look like something out of Lewis Carroll. Think we both saw each other at about the same time. He looked at me, and I looked at him. I stumbled back toward the hut, and he turned at speed and lumbered back into the waves. I'm not sure which of us was more frightened.

Evening, August 30th

Really must record what I get up to each day.

I'm usually awake at 7:30, and prime the stove and breakfast at eight. Slop out afterward, then read from my already dwindling supply of unread books until nine. After that, I have to go out and read the instruments. Twelve-hour wind speed, direction, min and max temperature, air pressure, precipitation, cloud height and formation, visibility, sea conditions, frequency and size of any sighted icebergs -- have to do this here at the hut, and then halfway up the valley at the poetically named Point B.

Every other day, if conditions permit, I also have to send up the balloon. On those days -- lugging the gas canisters and getting the lines straight, then hauling it all in again -- there's time for little else before evening, when I have to read off all the measurements here and then trudge up to Point B again.

On the alternate days, there's all the domestic trivia of living. Cooking, cleaning, washing, collecting water from the river, scraping off the gray mold that keeps growing on the walls of this hut. Then I have to encode the information and prime up the generator so that valves are warmed and ready to transmit at nineteen hundred hours local time. Then dinner, and try as I might the tins and dry reheated blocks all taste the same.

Then listen to the BBC, if the atmosphere is reflecting the signals my way. Thought the radio would be more of a comfort than it actually is. Those fading voices talking about cafes and trains and air-raids make me feel more alone

than  
gazing out of the window ever does.

September 10th

Saw another human being today. I knew that there are Eskimos in this region, but when you get here everything seems so vast and -- empty isn't the word, because the sea and the valley are teeming with birds and I've glimpsed caribou, foxes, what might have been musk oxen, and hare -- unhuman, I suppose. But there it is. I'm not alone.

Was up at Point B, taking the morning measurements. Point B is a kind of rocky platform, with a drop on one side down to the valley floor and the river from which I gather my water plunging over the rocks, and ragged cliffs rising in a series of grass-tufted platforms on the other. I heard a kind of grunting sound. I looked up, expecting an animal, fearing, in fact, my first encounter with a polar bear. But instead, a squat human figure was outlined on the clifftop, looking down at me, plaits of hair blowing in the wind, a rifle strapped to his back. In a moment, he stepped out of sight.

Frank Cayman told me that he hadn't seen any Eskimos, but he showed me on the map where there were signs of a campground. The tribes here are nomadic, and my feeling is that they must be returning to this area after some time away, probably stocking up with meat on the high plains below the glacier before moving south as the winter darkness rolls in.

They're likely to be used to seeing white men -- the Arctic Ocean was a thriving whaling and fishing-ground before the war -- but I was warned at Godalming to be very wary of them. Was told that Eskimos are thieving, diseased, immoral, not averse to selling information to the skipper of any stray German sub, etc., etc.

I suppose I should keep my head down, and padlock my hut and supply shed every time I go out. But now that I know I'm not alone, I think I might try to meet them.

September 14th

A long, long day, and the preternatural darkness that fills the air now that the clouds are moving in and the sun is sliced for so long by the horizon gives the whole exploit a weird sense of dream.

I found the Eskimo encampment. It lies a little west of the place Frank Cayman showed me on the map, and was easily visible once I'd climbed north beyond Point B out of the valley from the rising smoke at the edge of the boggy land before the mountains. It's only about ten miles off, but it took me most of six hours to get there, and my boots and leggings were sodden.

No igloos, of course, but it was still odd to see Eskimos living in what looks remarkably like a red Indian encampment from an American western movie, and even more so because peatsmoke and the dimming light gave the whole place a sort of cinematic grainy black-and-whiteness.

Was unprepared for the smell, especially inside the tent of caribou skin and hollowed earth that I was taken into. Seem to regard urine as a precious commodity. They use it for tanning -- which is understandable -- but also to wash their hair. But for all that, I was made welcome enough when I squelched toward the camp yelling "Teyma!" (Peace -- one of the few Eskimo words I can remember) although the children prodded me and the dogs growled and barked. A man called Unluku, one of the elders, could speak good English -- with a colorful use of language he'd learned from the whalers. He told me that they knew about my hut, and that they didn't mind my being there because I wasn't eating their caribou or their seals. Also asked him what they knew about the war. Stroking the head of a baby who sat suckling on his mother's lap beside him, he said they knew that kaboola -- whiteman -- was killing himself. They strike me as a decent people; strange and smelly and mercurial, but content with their lives.

September 15th

Rereading my encounter with the Eskimos, I don't think I've really conveyed their sense of otherness, strangeness.

The liquefying, maggoty carcasses of several caribou had been left at the edge of the campground, seemingly to rot, although I gathered that this was their store of food. And, although the people looked generally plump and cheerful, there was one figure squatting in the middle of the rough ring of tents, roped to a whalebone stake. The children would occasionally scoop up a pile of dog excrement and throw it at him, and Unluku took the trouble to walk over and aim a loose kick. He said the figure was Inua, which I assumed to be some kind of criminal or scapegoat, although tried to look it up, and the closest I can come is a kind of shaman. Perhaps it was just his name. I don't know, and the sense that I got from those Eskimos was that I never could.

September 20th

Supply ship came this morning -- the Tynwald. Was expecting her sometime today or tomorrow. I was given a few much-read and out-of-date copies of the Daily Mirror, obviously in the expectation that I would want to know how the world and the war and Jane are getting on. And more food, and spare lanterns, and a full winter's supply of oil. And fresh circulars from Godalming, including one about the pilfering of blotting paper.

Stood and watched the ship turn around the headland. Say they'll probably manage to get back one more time before the route between the islands becomes impassable. Already, I'm losing the names and faces.

October 1st

Looking out through the hut window now. Venus is shining through the teeth of white mountains in the halo of the sun where the wind shrieks and growls, and

the Milky Way twines like a great river across the deep blue sky, striated by bands of interstellar dust, clearer than I've ever seen before.

I seem to have come a long way, just to make some sense of my life.

October 12th

The Eskimo encampment is gone. Climbed up from Point B to the edge of the valley this morning when the full moon was shining, and my old prewar Zeiss binoculars could make everything out through the clear sharp air.

No moon now. The edge of the sky is a milky shade in the corner that hides the sun, and the wind is up to force 6. There were snow flurries yesterday, but somehow their absence today makes everything all the more ominous.

October 16th

Three days of dreadful weather -- only managed one trip up to Point B, and the balloon was out of the question.

Then this. Been out for hours, slowly freezing, totally entranced by Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights. Like curtains of silk drawn across the sky. A faintly hissing waterfall of light. Shifting endlessly. Yet vast. There are no words.

I think of charged particles streaming from the sun, swirling around the earth's magnetic field. Even the science sounds half-magical. I must --

An interruption. A clatter outside by the storage shed that sounded too purposeful to be just the wind. And the door was open -- forced --flapping to and fro. Must say I felt afraid, standing there with the wind screaming around me in the flickering auroral half light. I've re-fixed it now (cut my thumb, but not badly) and I've got the little .22 rifle beside me as I sit at this desk, as though that would be any use. But must say I feel lonely and afraid, as these great hissing curtains of light sway across the sky beyond my window.

But -- being practical -- it simply means that some of the Eskimos haven't gone south, and that they have light fingers (although I can't find anything missing) just as I was warned by the trainers at Godalming. Suppose this is my first real test.

October 20th

Out today in better weather taking readings in the pallid light before my fingers froze, I saw a ragged human figure about quarter of a mile down the freezing beach. I assume this must be my Eskimo-thief. Once I'd seen him, somehow didn't feel afraid.

Went down along the beach afterward. I made out a gray lump in the darkness that the waves were pushing up the shore. It was the body of a long-dead seal -- not

something that I would ever like to consider eating, although from the fresh rents and the stinking spillage over the rocks this was obviously exactly what the figure had been doing.

Was he that desperate, or, in view of the rotting caribou I saw at the campground, am I still stuck in the irrelevant values of a distant civilization?

Was always impressed by the story of those Victorian polar explorers like Franklin, who ended up eating each other and dying in a landscape that the Eskimos lived off and regarded as home.

But still, I feel sorry for my Eskimo-thief, and am even tempted to put something outside the hut and see what happens, although I'm probably just going to attract the white wolves or foxes, or the bears. It might seem like an act of foolishness, but more likely it stems from gratitude toward my Eskimo-thief, and for the fact that I don't feel quite as afraid or alone any longer.

October 22

My Eskimo-thief is squatting in the hut with me now. Eating, I have to say, like a dog. There's a gale howling, and alarming drifts of snow. Easily the worst weather so far. He was hauling himself across the beach on hands and knees, crusted in ice, trying to grab a broken-winged tern. He still hasn't spoken. His clothes are filthy, moulting caribou hair all over the hut, and he looks almost a child. Very young.

I think he was probably the figure I saw roped to the whalebone stake, which I suppose means that he must be some kind of criminal or scapegoat. The tribe has obviously moved south and left him behind. I recall the stories of how the Eskimo are supposed to leave their ill, elderly, and unwanted outside in winter for the cold and the wolves to finish off.

He wants more. If he can devour unheated pemmican like this, he must be very hungry.

But he can't be too ill.

Evening

I've made a stupid assumption. My Eskimo-thief is a woman.

October 24

The storm has died down. The twilight is deepening but I still get the sun for a few hours around noon and the bay as yet hasn't iced over.

My Eskimo-thief is called Tirkiluk. I discovered her sex when, after she'd finally finished eating, she pulled down the saucepan from over the stove with some effort, unwound her furs and squatted over it to urinate. She's terribly malnourished. Painfully bare ribs, a swollen belly.

October 27

Hard to tell under all those layers of fur, but Tirkiluk seems to be improving.

She still mostly wanders up and down the ashen shore muttering to herself, or sits rocking on her haunches under a sort of awning that she's rigged up in front of the hut out of canvas from the supply shed and driftwood from the shore. Did I really save her life? Was she abandoned by the tribe? Was I just interfering?

October 29

The supply ship came today. The Silverdale Glen. Tirkiluk started shrieking Kaboola!, and I ran out from the hut and saw the red and green lights bobbing out in the bay. Thought for one odd moment that the stars were moving.

I got many knowing looks from the sailors when they saw Tirkiluk sitting on a rock down the beach. Many of them fished these waters before the war, and of course there are the stories about Eskimo wives being offered as a gesture of hospitality. So, and despite her appearance, the crew of the Silverdale Glen assume that I've taken Tirkiluk to comfort me through the months of Arctic night, and I know that any attempts at denial would have been counterproductive.

They've gone now, and I'm alone for the winter. It's likely as not, I suppose, that word of Tirkiluk will get back to Godalming.

November 1

Went out to collect water this morning. The storm of the past few days has died entirely, and waves are sluggish, black as Chinese lacquer. Down on the shore, discovered that the water around the rocky inlet where the river discharges has formed a crust of ice. You can almost feel the temperature dropping, the ancient weight of the dark paleocrystic ice cap bearing down through the mountains, the weather changing, turning, tightening, notch by notch by notch. Soon, I think, the whole bay will freeze over.

Tirkiluk still sits outside.

November 6

Tirkiluk and I are making some progress in our attempts to converse. Her language bears little resemblance to the Inuit I was taught, although she's surprisingly adept at picking up English. Often, as I try to explain what the place I come from is like, and about the war and my monitoring of the weather, or when she describes the myths and rovinings and bickerings of her tribe, we meet halfway. Don't think anyone who ever heard would understand a word of it, and a great deal of it is still lost between us. She seems to speak with affection for the tribe, and ignores my attempts to discover why she was left here when they moved on.

November 12

The bay is now solid ice, and the weather has cleared. Earlier, I stood outside with Tirkiluk, pointing out the brightest stars, the main constellations, naked-eye binaries. She recognized many stellar objects herself, and gave them names -- and myths or stories that were too complex for our pidgin conversation to convey. The Inuit are deeply familiar with the night sky.

Everything is incredibly clear, although somehow the idea of measurement and observation seems out of place. There's an extraordinary sense of depth to the Arctic sky. Really sense the distance between the stars.

One of the oddest things for me: is the almost circular movement of the heavens, and the loss in the low horizon of stars like Alkiad, although in this dazzling darkness, many others have been gained. Counted fourteen stars in the Pleiades when my usual record is eleven, and Mu Cephei glows like a tiny coal. There is still some degree tilt to the stellar horizon. Aquila (which Tirkiluk calls Aagyuk and has some significance for her that she tries to but can't explain) has now set entirely.

November 20

The gales have returned, and Tirkiluk and I now share the hut. Much to her puzzlement, have rigged up one of the canvas awnings across the roof beam, which makes for two very awkward spaces instead of a single moderately awkward one. She sleeps curled up on a rug on the floor. When I lie awake listening to the wind and the ice in the bay groaning, can hear her softly snoring.

November 22

Must say that, despite reservations about her personal habits, I welcome her company, although I realize that I came here fully expecting -- and wanting -- to be left on my own. But she doesn't intrude, which I suppose comes from living close to many other people in those stinking little tents. We can go for hours without speaking one hardly noticing that the other is there, so in a sense I don't feel that I really have lost my solitude. Then at other times, we both become so absorbed in the slow process of communication that yesterday I forgot to go out and knock the ice off the transmitter wires, and nearly missed the evening transmission.

She told me an Inuit story about the sun and the moon, who came down to earth and played "dousing the lights" -- a self-explanatory Inuit sex-game of the kind that so shocked the early missionaries. But the sun and the moon are brother and sister, and in the steamy darkness of an Eskimo hut, they unwittingly broke the incest taboo. So when the lamps were re-lit, the moon in his shame smeared his face with lantern soot, and the sun set herself alight with lantern oil, and the two of them ran out across the sky, where they still chase each other to this day, yet never dare to meet. It all seemed so poetic -- and the story was such an effort for Tirkiluk to get out -- that I didn't attempt to ask what happens when there's an eclipse.



November 98

This morning, took a shovel from outside to clear a way through the crystal drift that half-covers the supply shed. Hands were bare, and the freezing metal

stuck to my skin. In stupid panic, I ripped a big flap of skin off my palm. I staggered back out of the gale into the hut, dripping blood, grabbing the medicine box and trying to open it one-handed. But Tirkiluk made me sit down, and licked the wound -- which was oddly soothing -- breathing over it, muttering

what I imagine is some incantation, making me stretch my fingers. The weirdest thing is that it hardly hurts at all now, and seems to be healing already. But I've dosed it in iodine, just to be safe.

December 1

Hand almost completely healed.

Better weather -- the low cirrus sky glows with an odd light that could be the hidden moon or refracted from the sun or even the Northern Lights. Tirkiluk and

I went out walking along the flat glistening bay. With her encouragement, I took

out the .22 rifle, and had a lucky shot at a seal that was lying on the ice. The

bullet was too small to kill it, but Tirkiluk ran over to the creature as it lumbered around, apparently too lost or dazed to find its airhole, and slit it wide open with the bone-handled knife she always carries. Blood and hot offal spewed everywhere, dark as ink, and the flanks quivered and those big dark eyes

still stared as she proceeded to eat the steaming liver, offering it to me to share.

Somehow, I would never have considered killing any of the local wildlife without

Tirkiluk. But with her, and despite the churning in my stomach, it seemed oddly

right. Against Tirkiluk's protest, I have lugged the carcass back to the hut and

left it outside to freeze. Did have plans to try to cook it, but now I'm just wondering how I'll ever get rid of it in the spring.

December 2

Needn't have worried. I was woken last night by a shuffling and grunting outside

the hut, and by Tirkiluk's smelly hand pressed hard across my mouth to make sure

I stayed silent. We crept to the window together and cleared a small space in the dirty crust of ice. There was a polar bear, dragging off the carcass of the

seal. An incredible beast. Know now why Tirkiluk didn't want me to drag the seal

back to the hut. And understand the Inuit word *ilira*, which is the awe which accompanies fear.

December 7

Looking back at this journal, I see that I imagined Tirkiluk's name was Inua when I saw her at the campground. She tells me now that Inua is actually some

fingerless hag who lives at the bottom of the sea, although she can't or won't explain why there should be any connection with her.

December 13

Beyond the edge of the bay, hidden in a steep ravine that I must have walked past many times without even noticing, Tirkiluk has shown me a place of bones. Somehow, the ice and snow hardly settle there. Thought at first that it was simply a place where unwary caribou and musk oxen had fallen and died over the years, but to my horror, and in the eerie light of a clear moon, I saw that there were many human skulls amongst the rocks.

Said her tribe has several places like this, where they leave their dead. I suppose there's little chance of burial with the ground frozen for almost half the year, and any bodies left out would be dragged away like my seal. But she's matter-of-fact about it. She kept pointing and saying something about herself, and repeating bits of the story of "dousing the lights," and the sun and the moon. There's some message I don't understand.

December 18

Understand now why Tirkiluk was abandoned. Discovery is of far more than academic curiosity. Hardly know where to begin.

Have seen her semi-naked a few times. She doesn't exactly wash herself, but she goes through an elaborate process of scraping her skin clean with her knife. Although I've tried hard not to look at this and other aspects of her toilet, it's difficult to have something like that going on in the hut -- usually accompanied by her rambling half-spoken songs -- without taking notice. She's put on some weight, but I'd assumed until now that the continued swelling in her belly was a by-product of earlier malnutrition. Now, I realize the significance of the sun and moon incest story that she keeps telling, and the reason why she was thrown out of the tribe.

Tirkiluk is heavily pregnant, by a half-brother named Iquluut. Think he was the hunter I saw looking down at me from Point B all those weeks ago. He's a senior in the tribe, twice her age, and apparently as the male he's regarded as blameless in the liaison, even by Tirkiluk herself. I shouldn't try to judge, but I know that in many ways the Inuit treat their women badly. A "good" wife is regarded as being worth slightly less than a decent team of dogs, and a "bad" one is unceremoniously dumped. And love doesn't come into the Inuit way of life at all, although lust -- male, and female -- certainly does.

But there's nothing I can do about all this. Winter has closed in, and Tirkiluk and I are stuck together like Siamese twins in this hut. Just hope she can find a better life with some other tribe in the spring -- although she says she'll have to travel what she regards as impossibly far to reach any of her people who will take her. Have to see if I can't wrangle her a passage down to one of the

southern ports on the supply boat when it finally comes in the spring, although I saw enough of "westernized" Eskimo life around the docks at Neimaagen not to wish it on anyone. Least of all Tirkiluk.

December 19

Have looked in all the reference books I've been provided with, and wasn't surprised to find that there was no guidance about childbirth. Can't bring myself to radio Godalming for advice. Not sure whether that's pride, or the certainty that they wouldn't respond.

Christmas Day --

and I've opened the bottle of rum that I've been saving until now. Tirkiluk spluttered and spat out the first sip, but then a wide grin spread across her broad face, and she held out her cup and asked for more. Eskimos are obviously used to drink. Think, in fact, that she's holding it better than I am.

Did my best this morning to tell the Nativity story -- very appropriate in the circumstances. Tirkiluk knows all about Christian heaven and hell. She thinks hell is a warm place where only whiteman is allowed to go. Can think of worse places than hell. Even now, in the cheery glow that comes from the drink and the

light of the stove and the lanterns, the cold penetrates easily through the triple insulated walls of this hut, and a sense of damp chill slides like an embrace around your back and into your bones. You can never escape it. As far as

I can tell from talking to Tirkiluk and rereading the books, the Inuit don't believe in an afterlife. The spirits just drift and return, drift and return.

Even today, the war must go on. Both trekked up to Point B to take measurements

from the few instruments that haven't frozen solid. The wind was biting, driven

with gravel-like ice, but I taught her Once In Royal's David's City as we felt our way in the wild gray darkness. Somehow managed to sing, even though had to turn our heads away from the wind just to breathe.

Could stand my frozen beaverskin coat up on its own like a suit of armor when we

returned to the hut, and somehow it made an odd, dark presence. I think of that

line about "the other that walks beside you" in The Waste Land and Shackleton's

account of that terrible final climb over the mountains of South Georgia. Tirkiluk's matted and moulting furs work far better, although that's probably simply because it's she who wears them.

Lost the blood from my right foot entirely today, and after nearly roasting the

dead white flesh on top of the stove, gave in to Tirkiluk and let her hold it and rub it against her hard round belly, clicking the odd-shaped stones and polar bear teeth that she has strung around her neck. For the first time in my life -- and in the oddest imaginable circumstances -- I felt a baby kick. But, as usual, she muttered some incantation, and as usual, it seemed to work.

I've just radioed Godalming, was rather hoping for more than the usual Message Received code I got in return.

\*

Godalming no transmission stopped No ship for months Must live with this pa

\*

Leave my possessions to my beloved Mother in the ho

Strong enough to keep record now. Important if things turn for worst. No  
excuse

for it. My clumsiness. Not Tirkiluk. Stupid accident. I was drunk. The lantern  
went over. Should have gone out. But lid was loose. My fault. Idiot. Flaming  
oil. Everywhere.

Tirkiluk and I are sheltering by a wall of rock and of drift-ice, with what  
remains of one wall of the supply hut for a roof. The fire was terrible. Much  
worse in this cold place. The wind so strong. It and the flames fueling each  
other. Supply hut went up too. Gas canisters. The oil drums. The lanterns.  
Explosions. Nearly killed. Everything.

Easier to list what we do have. Thought to drag out our clothing before too  
late. Some of the bedding. Some canvas. Managed to get back in and save some  
food, not enough to last the winter. Tirkiluk breaks the cans open with her  
knife. Contents are ice. No way of warming them. Eskimos carry fire with them  
through the winter. A tribe's greatest treasure.

Beam of roof fell. Hit my legs. Tirkiluk's all right but can hardly walk and  
there's the baby. Haven't moved for don't know how. Cold incredible to start  
with there's no pain no cold now. Fever, then this. Can't feel my legs.

Graphite

breaks and paper is brittle, but if I'm slow writing is easy.

Can watch the stars turn. Everything freezing. Ice drifts through gaps in  
canvas

and roof like smoke. Place stinks of us and the flames. Remember Tirkiluk now.  
How she healed me. Chanting, salt ice on my lips, teeth chattering. The hard  
cold holding me in white bony arms. Lights in the sky. Other lights. Could  
feel

the spirits, whispering, gathering round. Smoke and ice. Cold breath. Their  
names tumbling on the wind. So many, so old. Wizen faces. The spirits don't  
mind the cold. This is their home. I don't belong. I leave my bones in a quiet  
place where the wolves can't get them.

Scratches of light. January meteors The Quadrantids. Izar a dark binary. I'm  
freezing. I don't feel cold. Dreamed that Tirkiluk had lost her fingers.

Snapped

off like icicles. She was Inua, fingerless hag, muttering under dark ice in  
the  
depths of the ocean.

Tirkiluk is near her term. Tells me everything in her own language, and now I  
understand. Our lips are frozen as we speak, but perhaps the truth of it is in  
our minds. She tells me that she can't move now and that the bleeding is  
coming  
and that she and the baby will die.

The tins are useless. Need proper food. Water too. Must make the effort.

Foolish

kaboola whiteman with my own bare hands. Must try.

Small victory today, but think we now have a chance.

Went out onto the ice with a spear fashioned from hooked and sharpened transmitter strut, aerial cable for a line. No bleeding. Legs gave way once, but otherwise no problem. Knelt down and licked and scraped the new ice with my bared teeth, tasting the salt that is still in it. Thickness impossible to judge by sight alone, but taste is a clue. At the thinnest point lies a clear circle of water, and a tiny ridge of ice around it that seal-breath has made. The ridge tells who and when and how many have used it.

Crouched down. Waited. Time froze over. Just me and the hole in the ice and the cold stiffening my clothes and the mountains like the shoulders of the gods behind me and stars turning in the endless glowing darkness. Silence was incredible. Silence is the thing that's struck me most since the burning of the hut. Always associated fear with noise. But fear is silence, and if you face the silence and listen to it and go through it, you eventually come to a dark place of deeper peace, like diving into that black circle of water as I wait for the seal, becoming part of everything. Found I could stop my breathing, and the slow ragged thump of my heart. Felt I was no longer real yet knew I would snap back into existence when the seal surfaced to breathe.

Over in an instant. Thought of Tirkiluk. Felt no hesitation, no pity. The grunt and gust of salt air, a face like a dog's. Drove the spear down hard, and felt the shock of it strike back into my body. It began to thrash and pull, but the line held, and the sea turned foamy red. Felt the ice cracking and the ocean bubbling up as I heaved it out. Frozen splashes. Somehow found the energy to haul the seal back to Tirkiluk, the heat of it sliding in my hands. She sliced and bit and tore. The way she did before, when I was so disgusted. She offered it to me. I took a little, and the taste of it was good. But all hunger seems to have left me, and even the fresh water she lifted from the gray sack in the seal's belly slaked a thirst I didn't feel.

She made me take the bladder back to the bloodied hole. Dragged it there somehow, partly on hands and knees. It floated, a wounded sack, then was drawn down by a rippling current. Suddenly alive, swam away into the darkness. Tirkiluk tells me the spirit has returned. There will now be seal to hunt again.

Such terrible guilt about the stupidity of the accident. Not just my own life and Tirkiluk's I've endangered. The weather has turned even more against us now, as though it knows, and we've packed the snow around to make walls -- a rudimentary kind of igloo, although Tirkiluk didn't even know the word. The wind bites though, threatening to excavate or bury us. Can feel the great anticyclone the icecap inland like a presence, a ghostly conjurer drawing gales out of the Arctic waters. And I think of the lonely men in huts like the one I destroyed, or the convoys in the Atlantic, and rounding the terrible North Cape toward Murmansk.

Cold here is quite incredible, yet Tirkiluk feels it more than me. Almost a

blessing. Looked at my legs today, cut back leggings that snapped like stiff card. Black skin, a section of dirty white where bone is showing through.

Never

thought to see my own bone. Wounds that should have gone gangrenous long ago. Think only the cold keeps me alive, a kind of sterility.

Tirkiluk has shown me how to tame the wind. So simple I should let the boffins at Godalming know. Would have laughed if the fractured skin on my face would allow. Rattled those teeth around her neck, and called on Inua. Tied three knots, and the gale stilled, and a quarter moon brightened over the bay. Says she needs a time of quiet now that the baby is near. Says she needs the blood and the liver and the fresh water of the seal.

I resharpened the spear. I went out. Me, the pale hunter.

When I hunt, the cold disappears. Silence engulfs me. I love the bright darkness, the glassy emptiness. Can hear the glacier moving, and understand that

one day it will eat the mountains. Ice is stronger than heat or rock or even the

ocean. Was there at the start of the world, and will close over everything at the end, when the stars blink out. I wait. Then flash of movement, and the blood-heat that burns like a fire from the open body of the seal. I leave the cutting of the flesh to Tirkiluk, who eats and drinks most of it anyway, and burrows deep into the warmth. I must keep back. Not out of squeamishness, but because I fear the heat.

Return the bladder to the ocean and let the current draw it away, so that the seal will return for me to hunt again.

The baby came. A boy. A living boy. It's like the Aurora -- there are no words.

Leaned on her belly as she pushed. The incredible heat of her flesh, my fingers

like cold leather, and fear in eyes through the pain at what I had become. We made a clean space for the child, brought in the fresh falling snow. She cleaned

him and laid him on the skin of the seal. Then she gave him his first name.

Naigo. Could feel the spirits crowding in, joining with the baby which is at its

oldest when born. Filled with the memory of other lives. That's why a baby cries

before it can laugh. Said she wanted to call him Seymour too, when my name floats free.

Tirkiluk fears that the wolves and the polar bear must come soon, drawn by the blood-stink of life and death that surrounds this dreadful place. I do not believe that she and the baby will survive, yet I know that I fight for their lives.

Keeps Naigo against her flesh. Will hardly let me see. Says the spirits will be

offended. I know my grip is as cold as the glacier now, and that I must look awful, yet still I wish she would relent. The child feels half-mine. Yet I know

from the wild fear in Tirkiluk's eyes that something is wrong. She sense's it greatly now that she has Naigo, now that the whispering ancient spirits are gathered around her and the baby. It's me. Something more than the fire and the

cold and this terrible place. I know, yet I cannot bring myself to face it.

Inua was once a young girl just like Tirkiluk, yet she committed some crime, and her parents rowed out with her into the ocean in their umiak, and threw her overboard. When she clung to the side, they cut off her fingers, and they tossed a lamp to her as she sank down into the dark water, so that she might find her way.

Think that Inua is still out there, somewhere at the edge of this bay where the ice meets the black water in shattering, half frozen waves. Her long hair streams out in the currents like dark weed, uncombed and verminous because she has no fingers, and her lantern shines up at me as I peer down through the ice waiting for the seal to rise. Or perhaps it's Aquila I see glittering deep down in the water, which Tirkiluk tells me will soon rise back above the horizon. Or some other drowned star.

I sit outside now, leaving Tirkiluk and Naigo with what little warmth and shelter there is. The breath, the damp, the slight radiance that still comes from her half-frozen body, had become intolerable to me, although I think that she is also happier now that she does not have to see me when the ice cracks from her frozen eyelids and she looks up, and when the baby mews and she draws it out from somewhere inside her.

In starlight, I stand up and I pull back the frozen, useless furs. I can see my hands, my arms, my chest. If I drop the furs now, they skitter across the rocks and ice, shattering like filthy glass. Underneath, there are darkened ropes of chilled muscle, pulled tight by shriveled skin. My fingernails have peeled back like burned and blackened paint. From what little I can feel of my face with these hands, I have no nose, and my lips are stretched back so that my teeth are permanently bared.

The snow has returned. It gathers on these pages, and the flakes do not melt as I brush them away. It forms drifts, sculpting my body. I settle back into the downy comfort. I lie back as whiteness falls. My jaw creaks and the softness fills my mouth, settles on these eyes that do not blink. Soon, I will be covered, buried.

I think of Godalming. Of that hut by the tennis courts, and the sagging nets that no one has ever bothered to take in after the last set was played before war and the place was requisitioned. I think of Kay Alexander, her face sprayed with freckles, listening to the hissing seashell silence that drifts down from space.

She looks ragged from worry at the loss of the broadcasts from Weatherbase Logos II as she sits each evening at her receiver, although she knows that there's a war on and that this and worse will happen on every day until it's won. She remembers the shy man who was sent there, who sometimes came across the lawns from the main house in the summer, and would sit nearby at the edge of a table and fuss with the cuffs of his uniform or a pencil, barely meeting her eyes,

talking about things without somehow ever really saying. Kay's hair is ragged now. Even in Surrey it is winter and the night comes early and the lanterns glow beyond the blackout blinds, and the stars drift down and leaves are tangled like fish in the rotting tennis nets. Kay's red tresses hang in verminous fronds, and as she lays out the code grid and lifts her headphones from the hook where she keeps them, the chill engulfs her and her fingers snap off one by one.

Nearly covered in forgetful snow now. Cannot see. But Tirkiluk is hungry. She and Naigo need blood warmth. Must not give way. Must go and hunt the seal again.

I know her face now, the mewling of her pain, the hot scent of her death spilling across the ice, the way the warmth of her blood makes my frozen, blackened flesh liquefy and dissolve.

The sun is starting to pearl the horizon, and Aquila will soon return. Tirkiluk's Aagyuuk. It signals the thaw.

The polar bear came along the frozen beach at midday. He came with the changing wind, just as the sun was rising. I knew that he would have to come, just as the seal always returns, bringing Tirkiluk and Naigo the gift of her life.

A terrible, beautiful scene, the mountains glittering nursery-pink. Then the white pelt, the lumbering flesh. He raised his snout, smelling fire and life and slaughter. He grunted, and howled.

Naigo began to cry in the shelter behind me, and Tirkiluk sang to soothe him, her voice ringing clear over the keening wind, knowing that there was no hiding, knowing that the beast sensed the warm meat that was waiting on their bones. I thought for a moment of the seal, and how death was a kinder thing here than the winter, and that if I could truly finish with dying and return to life, it would be to a warm place with faces and smiles, crying with the grief of ages, hooded in silver drifts of placenta. But the bear had seen me, and smelled the death that my own lungs and mouth no longer have to taste and smelled that I was an enemy.

I grabbed the harpoon as the bear lumbered toward me, driving it hard. It struck near the massive chest, reddening where the wind riffled the pelt. The beast was slowed, but still he came toward me. I had an odd strength in me-- the strength to throw a harpoon harder and faster than the wind-- yet I was light, thinly bound by rigored muscle and spongy ropes of blood. The bear reached me and tumbled me over and his jaw opened and teeth closed over my arm and shoulder. The teeth gave me no pain. It was the carrion-hot breath that terrified me.

Somehow, I pulled away from beneath him, dragged back on the bones of elbows and knees. I think he sensed then that he already had victory. Gray strands of ligament hung from his mouth, and my right collarbone dangled beneath. He



shook  
it away. There was something playful and cat-like about the way he struck out  
a  
t me with the massive pad of his paw. I was blown back as if by the wind as  
the  
claws striped my chest. I struck an outcrop of rock, feeling my left hand snap  
and roll away, and my leg break where the wound had exposed the bone, raising  
a  
pointed femur. The bear leapt at me, coming down, blocking sky.

My broken femur struck into his belly like a stake. He bellowed and the blood  
gushed in a salt wave. I knew that I would have to get away before the heat  
dissolved me entirely.

I didn't kill the bear. He ran back up the beach, trailing blood. The wound,  
which seemed so terrible as it broke over me from his belly, will probably  
heal  
easily enough. Spring is coming soon, and life will regather itself, and the  
bear will survive. I wish him luck, and the flesh of the seal when we have  
finally finished with her. I use the harpoon as a kind of crutch now that I  
can  
no longer walk easily. I have lashed the remains of my left arm to it, and  
struggle along the shore like a broken-winged bird.

I have to keep the harpoon lashed that way even when I hunt, but the seal now  
comes easily. She has died for us so many time now that she no longer fears  
death.

How I envy her. The bear's blood-heat and his teeth and claws have exposed and  
melted the flesh of my chest and belly. I can look down now as I shelter by a  
rock from the long ice-glittering shadows of the gathering sunlight. The dark  
frozen organs inside their cage, furred with ice.

I look up at the rim of the sky. Aagyuk is rising. Across sixteen light  
years,  
Altair winks at me. While I still have time, I must catch the seal again.

The thaw is coming now, as Tirkiluk said it would once Aagyuk had risen.  
There  
is faint light much of the day, and sudden flashes of the blazing rim of the  
sun  
through the clouds and glaciers that lie piled on the horizon. The wind is  
veering south. The seabirds are returning.

The ice in the bay booms now, and cracks like thunder. For Tirkiluk and Naigo,  
even though I know that there will be bitter storms to come, death has  
receded.

She came out to see me today when the sun was sailing clear of the horizon and  
I  
was crouching in the ice-shadows where the cold wind drives deepest at the  
eastern end of the shore. She brought Naigo with her, gathered deep under her  
furs. She wept when she saw me, yet she held the child out for me to see. He  
slept despite the chill. Gently, I let the ragged claw of my remaining hand  
brush against his forehead, where the marks of birth have left his skin  
entirely. Then she drew him away, and held him to her breast and wept all the  
more. I would have wept with her, had I any tears left in me.

I went today to the place of bones. I've known for some time that it is where  
I  
should seek to avoid the gathering heat. I stood at the rim of the shadowed

ravine with rags of my rotting flesh streaming in the wind, gazing down at those clean and serene skulls. But I know that the souls live elsewhere. They live on the wind, in the ice, and beneath the soft lids of Naigo's sleeping eyes.

I write with difficulty now as the skin sloughs off my fingers like old seaweed.

These pages are filthy from the mess I leave, and I can only go out when the wind veers north, or in the cold of the night. Why should I strive to continue now, anyway? I can think of no reason other than fear.

A wide crack has appeared in the sheet of ice that covered the bay. It runs like a road from the horizon right up to the shore. Somehow, I believe I can smell the sea on it, the salt breath of the ocean.

Must write before I lose the fingers of remaining hand.

Went out onto the beach. As I gazed at the widening gap in the ice, the seal emerged from the wind-ripped water. She lumbered up across the rocks toward me, and stared without fear with the steam of life rising from her smooth dark pelt.

I could only marvel and wonder, and feel a kind of love. She forgives, after all the times that her life has been taken. She turned then, and went back into the water and dived in a smooth deep ripple.

I thought then I stood alone in the wind, yet when I looked behind me, Tirkiluk was there. A dark figure, standing just as I have stood so many times at the edge of this shore, looking out at the crystal mountains, the glacier, the bay. She let me hold her, and touch the baby again. I knew that we were saying good-bye, although there were no words.

I can hear the seal mewling on the midnight wind. She is out on the shore again. Calling. Waiting. All I must do now is stand, and lift these limbs, and walk down toward the glittering path of water that spreads out across the bay. And the seal will lead me to the place in the ocean where a lantern gleams, dark hair streams, and fingerless hands spread wide in an embrace.

From there, the rest of my journey should be easy.

From the log of John Farragar, Ship's Captain, Queen of Erin. 12 May 1943.

Sailed 1200 hours Tuiak Bay SSE toward Neimaagen. A fire has destroyed Logos II Weatherbase, and a thorough search has revealed no trace of Science Officer Seymour. Have radioed Meteorological Intelligence at Godalming and advised that he should be listed as missing, presumed dead.

Also advised Godalming that an Eskimo woman and infant survived amid the burnt-out wreckage. They are aboard with us now, and I have no reason to doubt that the truth of this sad matter is as the woman has told me:

Seymour befriended her when she was abandoned by her tribe, and the fire was caused by an accident with a lantern at the time the broadcasts ceased. He died

soon after from injuries caused by his attempts to recover supplies from the burning hut, and the body was subsequently taken by wolves. The later journals I

have recovered are undated, and clearly the product of a sadly deranged mind. I

would not wish them to reach the hands of his relatives, and I have thus taken the responsibility upon myself to have them destroyed in the ship's furnace.

Tirkiluk, the Eskimo woman, has asked to be landed at Kecksamet, where the tribe

is very different from her own, and the wooded land is somewhat warmer and kinder. As the deviation from our course is small, I have agreed to her request.

Her journey aboard the Queen should take little more than two days, but I am sure that by then we shall miss her.