

## CHAPTER II

# A PROBLEM IS BREWING

*“We must hurry, we haven’t got much time,”* said the Inuit, who was carving a wooden mask.

*“Who are you?”* Amy inquired; she knew he was a shaman because they were conversing through their Inuas.

*“I am Tagak,”* answered the Inuit, *“The Old One told me you and your brothers are powerful shamans so I sent my spirit helpers to find you. We haven’t got*

A PROBLEM IS BREWING much time. The People are starving. I have appealed to the lesser spirits and tried to appease them but they will not hear me. Sedna must be very angry; I believe some serious transgressions have been made. Sedna will not let the animals loose so that the people can satisfy their needs. The men hunt all day and yet there is no meat to show for their efforts. There is no happiness in the igloos, no oil to burn to give warmth and no meat to fill the children's bellies. The women are sad because they have no food for their children." All the while he kept carving on his wooden mask. He had already carved a number of little amulets in the shape of seals and two small thumb less hands, which he would be attaching to the mask. Also feathers were nearby and ready to be attached.

The kids understand the status of the shaman and his duties to his people. To carry out his duties he needed help from the Inuas, the spiritual occupants of all living and inanimate things. These in turn would help the shaman complete his tasks, he called them spirit helpers. All Inuas possess a human face but only rarely is it ever revealed.

To further complete his tasks the shaman is at times in need of face masks or masks as big as a man. These masks were usually made by the shaman himself or by a skilled craftsman under the direction of the shaman. Wood was mainly used for

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their construction with feathers or small carvings attached to it. The masks were often used only for a single performance or ceremony and then tossed, as it was believed that their powers were spent after being used. Some of the masks have broad beneficial powers, while others were made for a specific purpose and often discarded after use, as their powers would be depleted. Each mask derived its powers directly from the thing it represented and therefore was usually made in its image. No two masks were ever alike; the shaman would design them on an impulse or an inspiration. When the shaman wore the mask it was believed that the spirit dwelt within him, giving him special powers. These colourful and imaginative masks represented the powerful deities believed to control natural phenomena or the spirits of animals and other creatures.

*“What can we do?”* asked Amy.

*“When I am finished with the mask I will summon the villagers to the meeting house and using the mask I will ask the deities for forgiveness for our sins. When the dance is finished we will journey to find Sedna and beseech her to free the animals,”* Tagak replied.

*“Have you consulted with the Tungat to see why the animals are not available to the hunters?”* Amy inquired.

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*“Yes, only yesterday I journeyed to the moon to plea to the Tungat, they wouldn’t hear me. I confessed the sins of the people and begged the Tungat to release the animals but my pleas fell on deaf ears. On my return I stopped and talked to The Old One. He told me about you and said that you have powerful medicine and you would help me. That’s why I sent my spirit helpers to find you. There, I have finished the mask; now it is time to begin,”* Tagak said, as he stepped back and inspected his handiwork.

Amy noted the mask looked like a bloated grotesque figure resembling a human face. There were two eyes, a nose and a mouth visible on the mask, with a hole in the forehead. The mouth was large and smiling with many large teeth. Two little thumb less hands were attached on either side of the mask. Around the hole in the forehead were attached little amulets of seals. The thumb less hands and hole in the forehead showed the willingness of The People to allow the animals to slip unmolested in and out of the domain of the Inuit. Tagak had used charcoal to colour a black band across the eyes to show that the deities see all and man was in the darkness when it came to the deities’ powers. The smiling red mouth showed the happiness of the Inuit when they are allowed to feast on the animals, which give life to their village.

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A thin black line of charcoal was drawn between the nose and mouth to show the separation of the air from the sea. For the mouth eats all creatures supplied by Sedna, the mother of all living creatures. The nose breathes the air supplied by Sila the air goddess. For the two could not be mixed. The feathers showed the freedom the animals would enjoy while in the land of The People.

Amy considered the thought and care that had gone into making the mask and felt that Sedna would truly be honoured by the labours of the old shaman. If only they were able to get to her before it is too late to save the starving villagers.

Tagak sent his assistant to assemble the villagers in the meetinghouse. Tagak and the Trapps proceeded to the meetinghouse to prepare for the dance. When all were assembled Tagak started the sacred chants of the shaman accompanied by his assistant on the drum. As Tagak danced wearing the mask he called on the spirits of his friends and relatives dead and alive to come to his assistance to persuade Sedna to free the seals. He made promises to the Tungat and to Sedna that proper respect would be shown by every villager to the animals if they were made available to the village's hunters. He told Sedna that he was bringing a respected and very powerful shaman with him when he visits her.

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He hoped that this would please her and the new shaman would win her favour. Tagak knew that the deities respected powerful shamans and it always enhanced one's position to have powerful friends.

"AIIIEEE," the eerie chant of Tagak shattered the silence and echoed across the land. Methodically Tagak's assistant beat the drum, boom-boom-boom, as he called out to his spirits.

Amy, Ty and Parker joined Tagak in his cry for assistance from the spirits. Their cries echoed across the land as they pleaded for guidance and strength to complete their journey. "AIIIEEE," they chanted as the drum went boom-boom-boom.

Suddenly Tagak stopped dancing, he took off his mask and flung it into the fire, the dance had ended as suddenly as it had started.

"*Why did you throw your mask in the fire?*" Ty demanded to know.

"*Yeah, I thought it was neat. We could have taken it home if you didn't want it any more,*" Parker informed Tagak.

"*Now that the ritual is over, the spirits no longer dwell in the mask. It has to be destroyed lest it be inhabited by a Tarrak. You should know this!*" Tagak remarked looking suspiciously at the kids.

"*All masks are not destroyed after they are used,*" Amy declared.

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*“That’s true, you are right. Some shamans do not destroy their masks but I destroy all masks after I have used them,”* Tagak boasted.

The assistant continued to methodically beat the drum while Tagak called on his friends’ and families’ spirits to help him find the way to Sedna. *“AIIIEEE,”* Tagak chanted, *“Come to me and help me on my journey,”* he cried, *“keep me strong, lend me your inyusuq* (the powerful forces that reside within individuals and serve as the source of good health, stamina, will power, and energy – all elements that give a person life), *to drive out the evil spirits,* (healthy friends and relatives would give their inyusuq to a sick person), *let me share your knowledge.”*

The Trapps found themselves calling to their friends and relatives to lend them their inyusuq to assist them on the journey they would be taking with Tagak.

The villagers sitting in the meetinghouse encouraged Tagak and the Trapps to be strong during their journey. They called on the spirits to show them the way and protect them.

Amy looked at the assistant who was beating the drum. ‘That’s odd,’ she thought. ‘This drum has a seal for a handle.’ Other drums she had seen had a human shape for a handle. The methodical beat of

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the drum was inducing a trance-like state. Boom-  
boom-boom, went the drum.

Above the chanting in the meetinghouse they  
heard Tagak cry, *"I see the way, it is starting to open  
up, we must follow the road-of-darkness to find Sedna."*

The villagers cried, *"Be brave and strong on  
your journey, return to us for we will be waiting."*

Once again the Trapps had the feeling that  
they were falling through the drum to begin their  
journey. Amy likened the feeling to diving into a  
lake.