

THE BLOOD WAS still warm. It ran from the seal's nose and formed a dark puddle in a shallow, saucer-shaped depression on the ice. The child shook off his glove, dipped his fingers into the blood and licked them. His mother pushed him away; the blood had to be stored for soups.

The boy's father grinned and rolled the animal on to its back with his fur boot. He knelt and pulled out a skinning knife. He pinched the soft skin of the seal's belly between his fingers and made a small cut—then he stopped. He turned and held the blade out to the boy.

"Oka is eight summers old," he said. "It is time he learnt to undress his own food."

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It was the beginning of a good season. The seals were fat, lazy and numerous. The boy, Oka, ran off his baby-fat beside the lean body of his father. He wriggled and slid his way across the thin lichen that coloured the sparse ground near the seals' breeding ground. He watched his father stalk the choicest animals, his young eyes hard brown with excited interest. Then, in September as the days grew rapidly shorter, his father put his arm round the boy's shoulders and held out his rifle.

"Take it, Oka," he said. The boy looked at him, round-eyed. His father pointed ahead, over a hummock of winter ice, sun sculpted like some ancient monolith. "Go, son. Kill me the last seal of the summer hunt."