

# ELISAPEE OF THE ARCTIC:

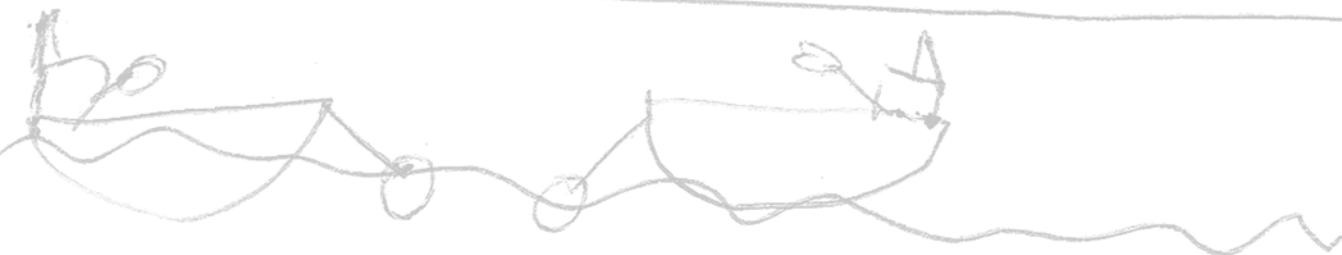
MALLIKJUAQ ADVENTURE





# Elisapee of the Arctic: Mallikjuak Adventure

By: Arn Pootoogook  
Joanne Weedmark  
Stephanie Weedmark  
with Angie Littlefield





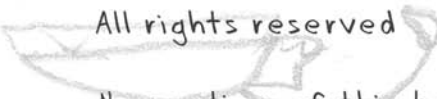
# Elisapee of the Arctic: Mallikjuak Adventure

Elisapee of the Arctic: Mallikjuak Adventure

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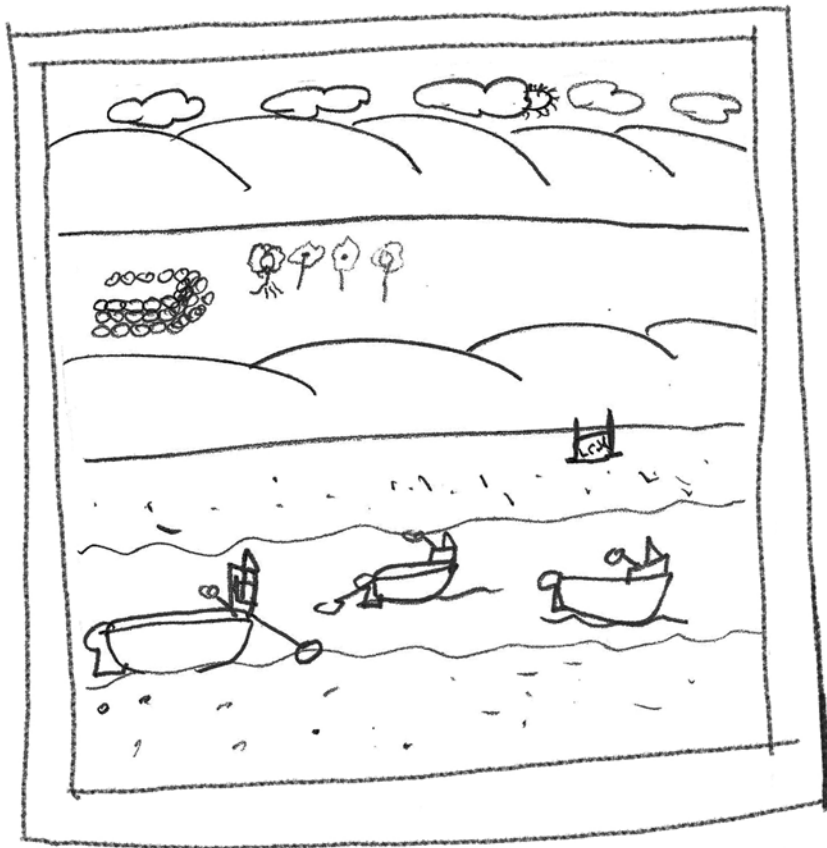
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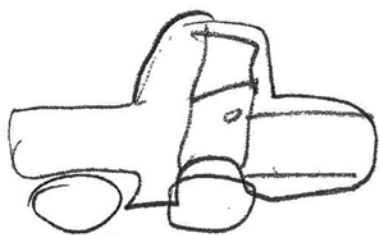
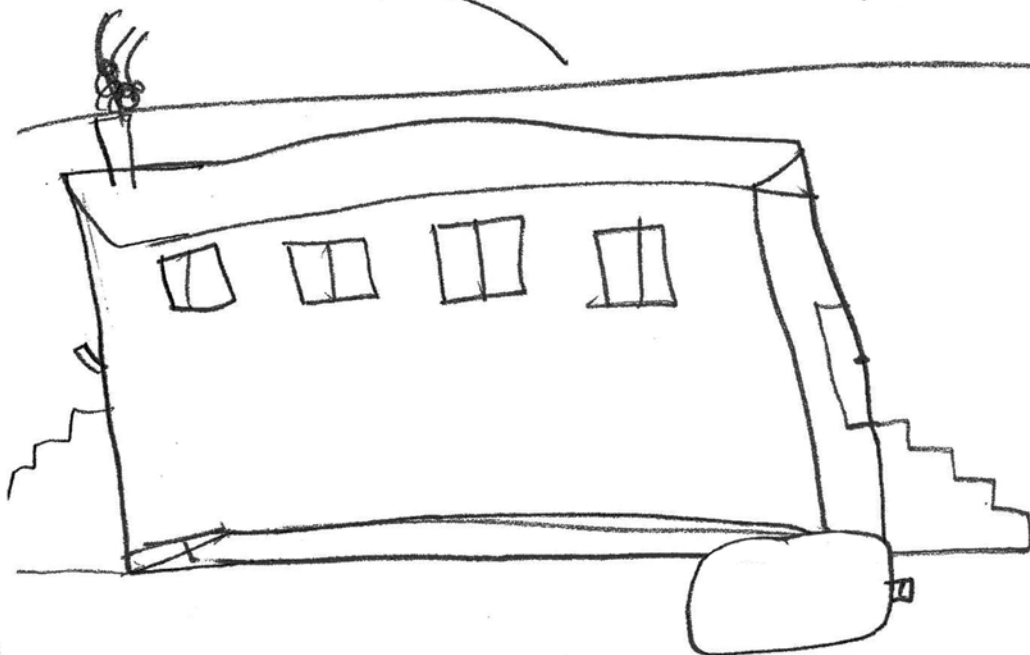
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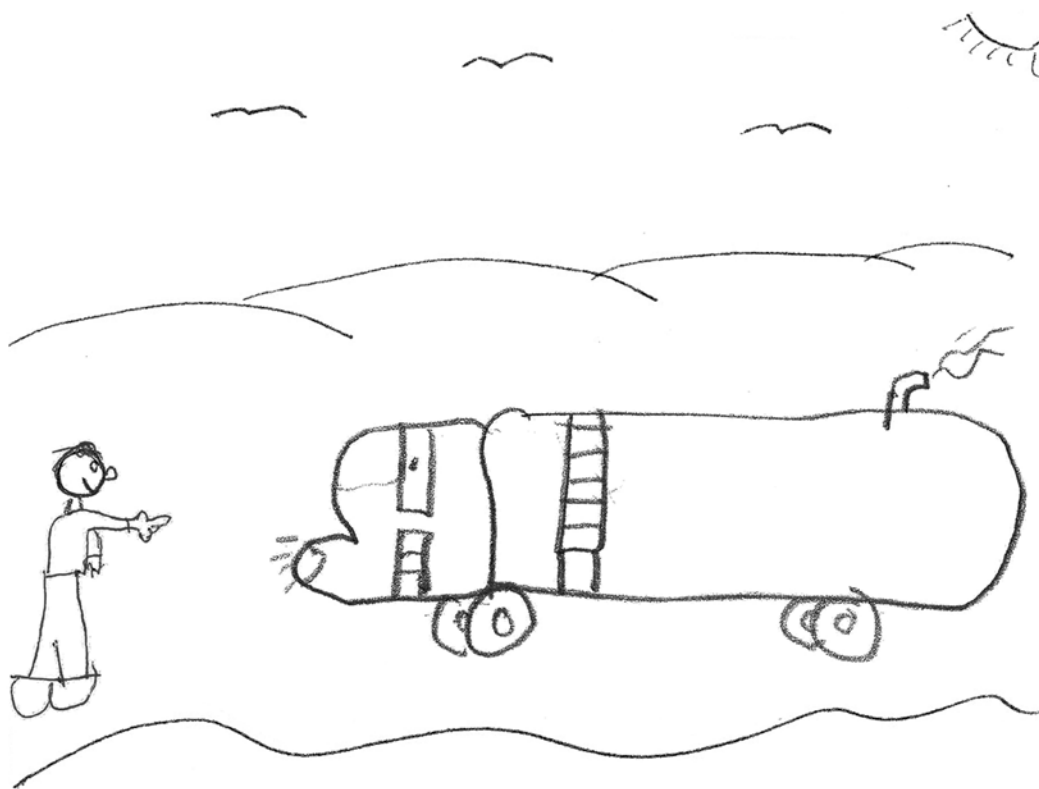
## Part One

Elisapee Adla liked to look outside. The view from her window was special because the summers were short in Cape Dorset. She delighted in the boats on the dark blue water, the eagles soaring in the sky and the solid mountains rolling along in the background. She could just make out the sign for Mallikjuak Park across the bay where she imagined even more flowers among the tundra than the yellow poppies and white arctic cotton that bloomed on the roadsides in Kinngait, the name the older Inuit used for Cape Dorset.



The Pootoogooks' brown frame house in Ichiraguak Valley was the only home Elisapee remembered. Sometimes the smell of cooking

clams, caribou stew or her stepmother Qatauga's smell reminded her of when she was a little girl. Those smells had hung in her parents' clothes, before they had drowned.



Elisapee could hear Malitu Pootoogook get into his work clothes to make his first round through Kinngait with the water truck. She adored her tall stepfather who was always nice to her; he was the only one who bought her things.

She glanced across the sleeping bodies of her stepsister Saizula and elderly aunt Omalluk to look at the treasures on the one shelf that was her own. There lay the camera, jewellery and teddy bear her stepdad had given her.

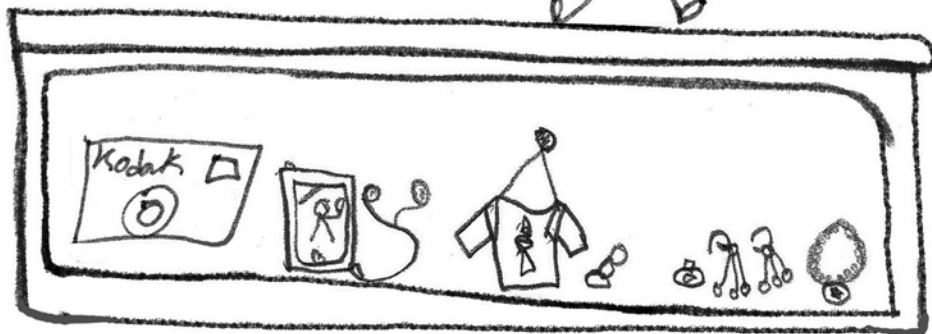
Where was her

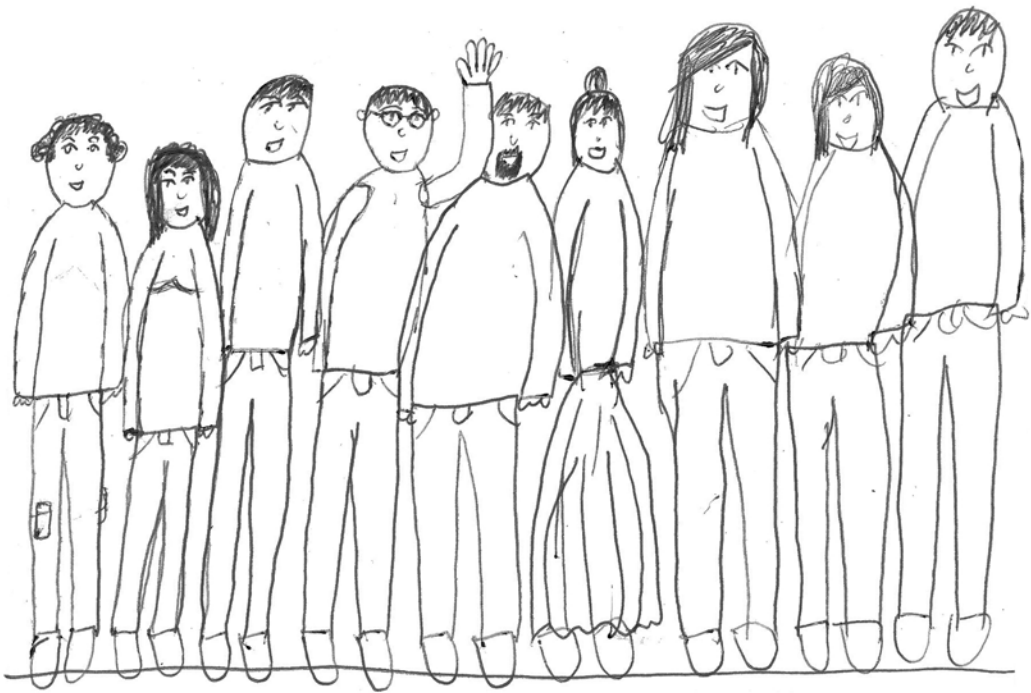


?

Oh that Charlie!

Qatauga had already once told him off for stealing her diary. She wanted to storm right into the room Charlie shared with his brother Sam but she'd once gotten into trouble for disturbing the grandparents. She couldn't risk waking up the whole house.





Elisapee tried to think of good things to get her mind off that pest Charlie. Images of a photo of her parents on their wedding day flashed before her. She thought of the good times on birthdays and at Christmas when they had cake. She loved the parties when there'd been a good hunt: seal, caribou and walrus. She dreamed about living on the land the way her parents had. When women broke into throat singing Elisapee thought she remembered her mother throat singing at feasts and whispers of, "I love you."



Oh that Charlie! Thinking of him reading her secrets turned her mind to bad things: the loud barking of dogs in the night, her step-parents fighting, the whistling of the wind, especially when it blew so hard that she could hear the swings in the yard moving up and down.

Suddenly something flew past her head. Startled, Elisapee picked up what remained of her diary. It had been ripped in half! In a rage, she ran into the boys' room where Charlie pretended to be sleeping and she punched him as hard as she could in the arm.



"She punched me! I was sleeping.  
I didn't do anything to her,"

whined Charlie to his mother  
who had started breakfast  
in the kitchen.

"Yeah, Charlie was sleeping,"

agreed Sam.

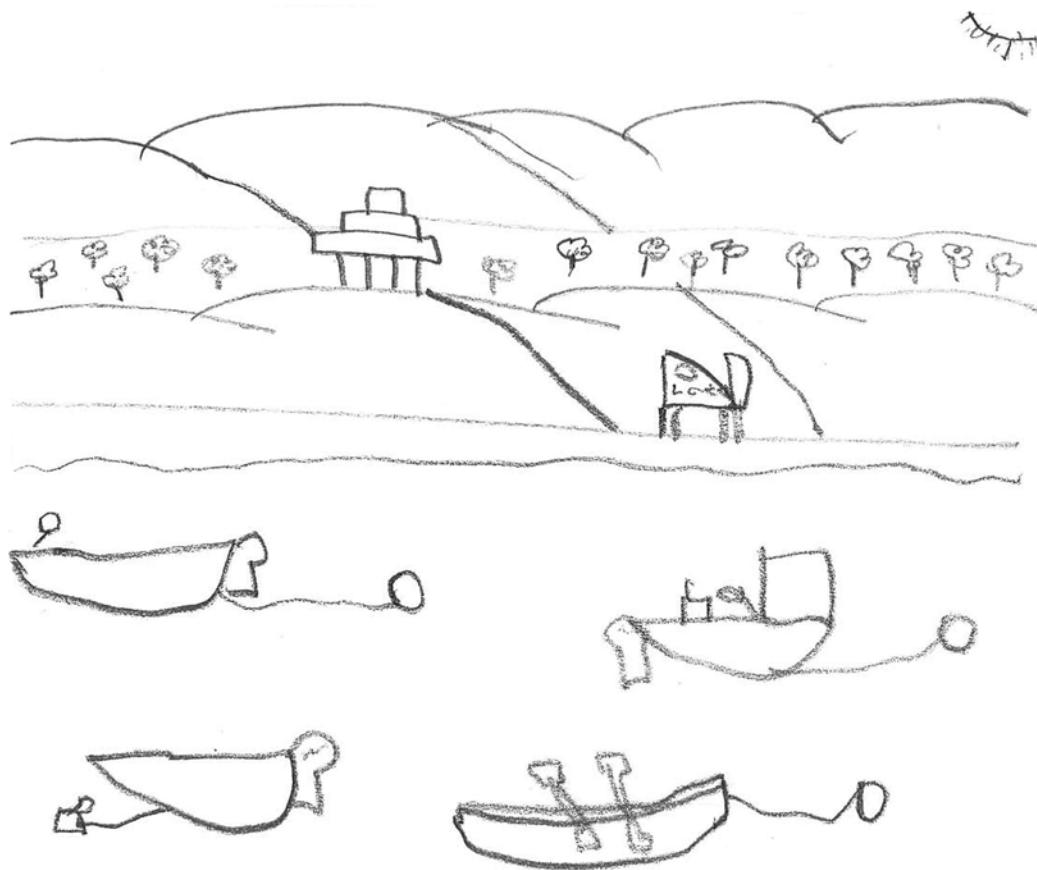
They were all up now and staring at her.  
What was the use trying to explain?

No one understood her.

Elisapee ran to pick up the remains  
of her diary and then out of the house.

She slammed the door hard.

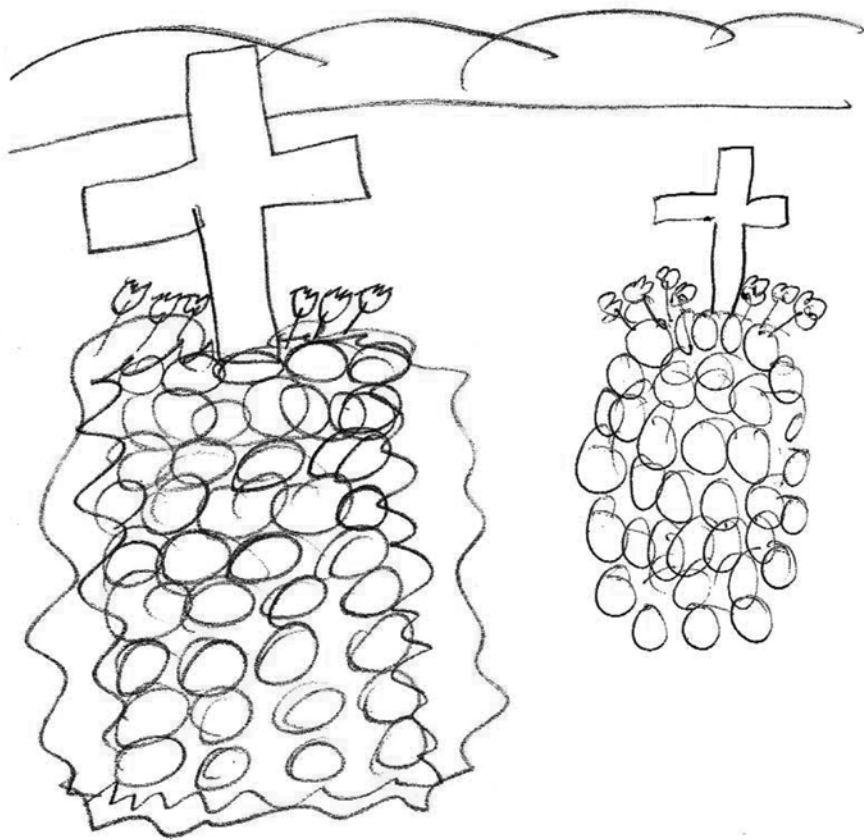




## Part Two

It was about 2 km to Mallikjuak Park. Elisapee knew that from looking out her window. Two paths of rocks showed at low tide; they led to the island where there were supposed to be ancient houses made of heavy rocks, a pond full of very old bones and some graves. Although they had studied the Thule people who had lived in the Kinngait area more than a thousand years before, no one at Sam Pudlat School had been over to the island to see their traces.

As Elisapee sat on a grave behind the green Anglican Church looking past her house towards Mallikjuak, she planned her escape into the past. She would wait for Qatauga, Malitu and the children to leave the house.



When they were finally gone, Elisapee crept back. She stuffed potato chips, an apple, three cans of pop, black gloves, her pink winter hat, a scarf, her teddy bear, diary and her grandmother Adla's



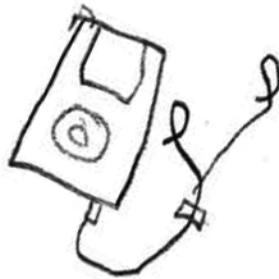
ulu into her backpack.

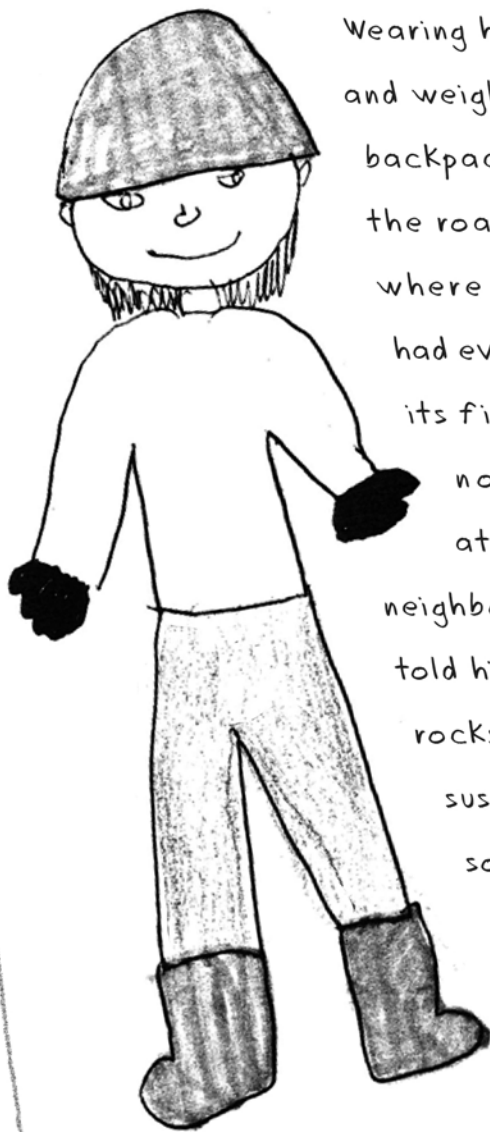


She put her yellow jacket over the blue jeans and sweater she was wearing and pulled on her waterproof pink boots. She knew that at high tide the strait was full of water and she wanted to make sure that she had enough supplies for the other side.



She even took along toilet paper.





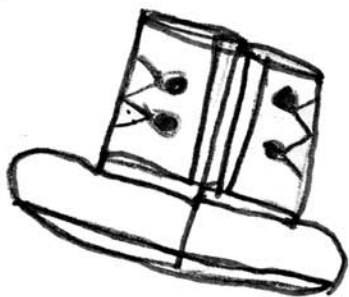
Wearing her warm outer clothes and weighed down with her loaded backpack, Elisapee headed down the road towards the metal dump where every piece of metal that had ever come into Kinngait found its final resting place. She had not gone very far when she attracted the attention of her neighbour, Mr. Kingwatsiak. She told him that she was collecting rocks but he looked at her very suspiciously. She ran quickly away, so quickly that the dogs began to bark.





With her head down,  
upset by the lie she'd told, Elisapee first heard  
the car and then saw the Honda that sped by leaving her  
in a cloud of dust. She didn't lift her eyes again until a red  
metal barrel broken in half told her she'd arrived at the dump.  
Among the heaps of metal remains Elisapee spotted a yellow  
bulldozer without windows and with only three wheels; its  
door was busted. Behind the dozer was a burnt out big old  
car that looked like the ancestor of the Honda that  
had just passed her.

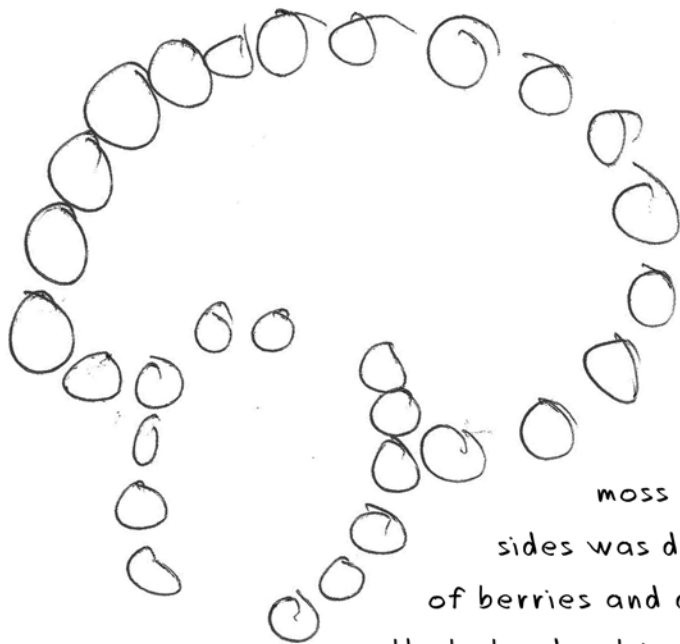




After a few more turns through metal relics, Elisapee made it to the shore. She walked along the beach, bared by the receding tide, towards the path to Mallikjuak. She was glad for her pink boots as she waded through little rivulets of water. She saw shells of snails and sea lice that were small and peach-coloured and soft to the touch. There were lots of squishy, brown seaweeds with long tails, slimy green things and crusty white shells clinging to the rocks. She had to be careful where she walked as she could not risk getting wet.

Elisapee knew she had made it safely to the island when she started to notice things left behind by others such as old plastic spoons and knives and even some plastic sheeting. She saw parts of a gamutik on the island's shoreline of grasses and rocks, reminders of someone's winter visit. She also saw the severed spines of two whales washed up against the grasses. The water had pushed them as far as they could go.



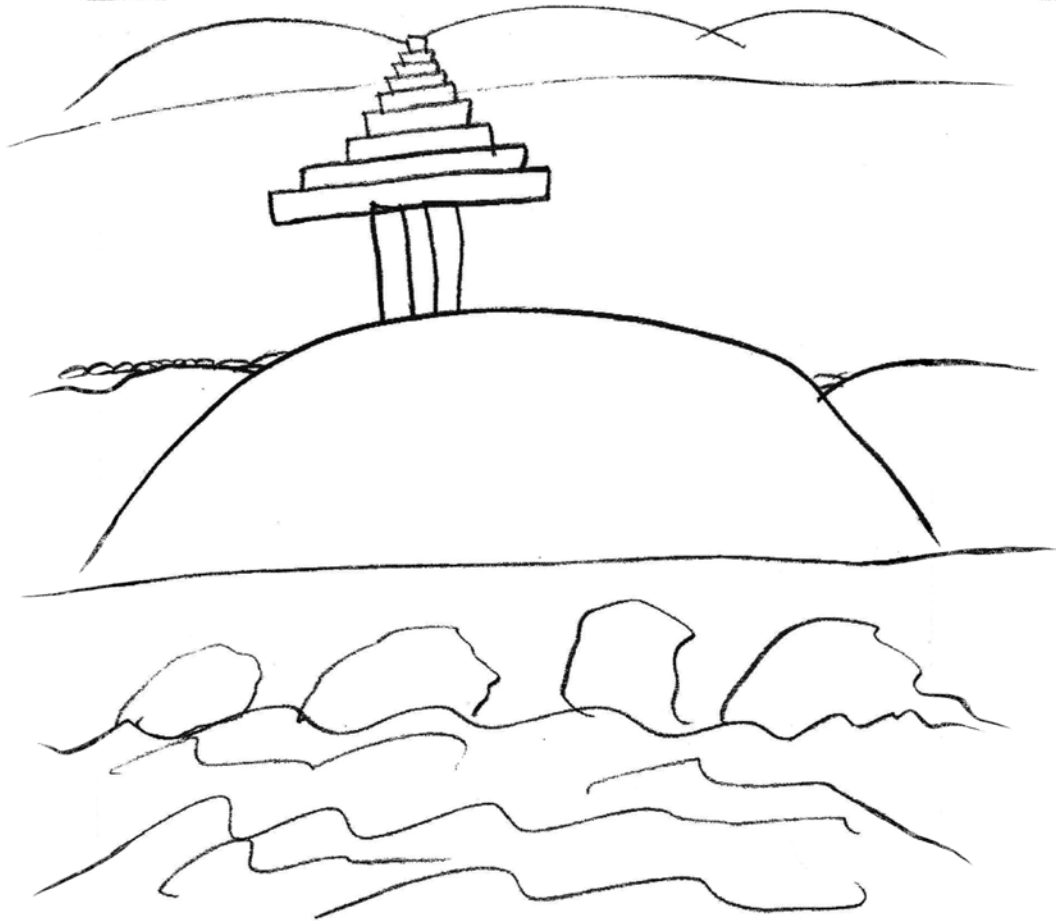


Elisapee walked up  
the rise of land  
in front of her.

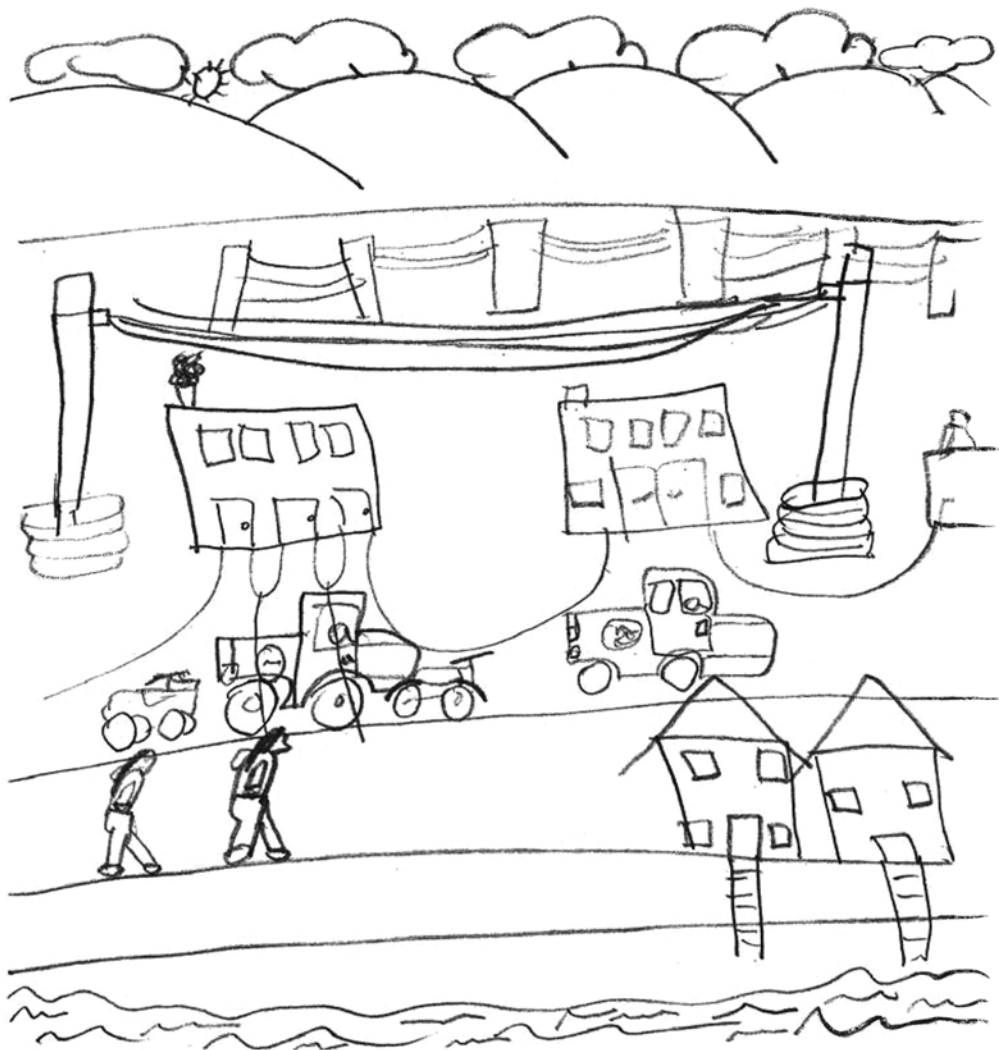
The soft, spongy  
moss with stone on both  
sides was dotted with islands  
of berries and dark pink flowers  
that stood out in the bright sun.

Finally in the distance on the flat plain at the top of the rise she saw the glimmer of a pond. The circular stone ruins that sat at the edge of the pond looked as if they could be from the Thule. The houses had fallen down on themselves and there was lots of grass on the rocks. There was a ledge, maybe a rock bed, halfway up from the stone floor. The houses looked as if they once had higher walls. Elisapee thought the houses must have had a roof made of sealskin. She imagined that the people from the past would have had to crawl inside the small igloo-like entrance to lie down.

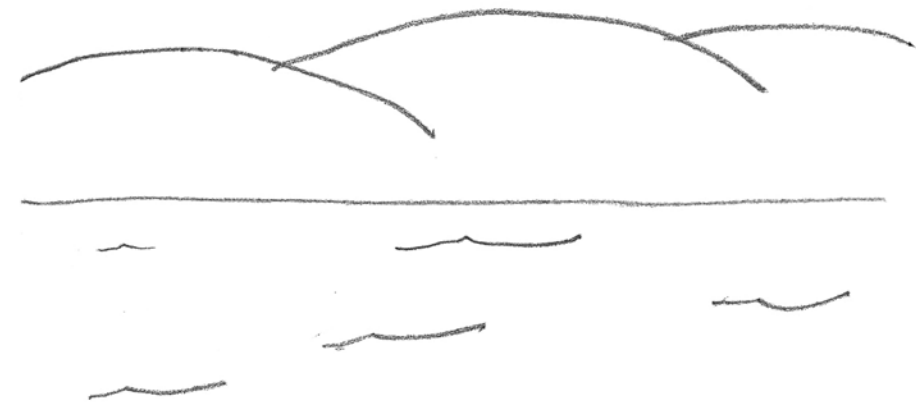




Before Elisapee thought to rest, the path to the far side of the island called out to her. She followed a narrow brown dirt road to lonely graves on the far shore. She inspected the piles of glistening rocks fallen somewhat apart, releasing the spirits. It was a beautiful spot for a final resting place. Screeching gulls flying overhead led her eyes to an inukshuk. The ancestors had signposted the way.



Elisapee made her way back, past the pond and the circle houses to have one last look at Kinngait. She saw a few lights in the houses. There were lots of birds over the bay and boats busy on it. She noted the movement of big trucks and heavy equipment. She could make out the long air strip, power lines and even people walking. And, around it all, were the big, rocky, protecting mountains.



The tide had risen.

Elisapee was cut off from it all.

She dragged plastic sheets  
from the shore back

with her to the circle of houses.  
She took the brown ulu with its half circle shape  
from her backpack.

She'd watched her stepmother cut caribou meat with it.  
She headed towards a patch of dry moss to cut it away  
from the rock, as flesh was cut away from hide. The moss  
crumbled until finally Elisapee found just the right consistency.  
She cut underneath the moss and pulled up rectangles.  
The plastic made a perfect sled to take her moss carpet back to  
install on the sleeping platform of the most preserved circle house.



After gathering blueberries, Elisapee sat on a wall staring at the hundreds of bones in and around the pond and enjoying the warmth of the sunshine. She recognized the bones of bowhead whales, bearded seals, narwhals, walruses and caribou. Among the smaller bones were those of ducks, grebes and fish. Some rough old bones were black and white and had holes in them; other broken bones were covered with grass and had bugs on them.

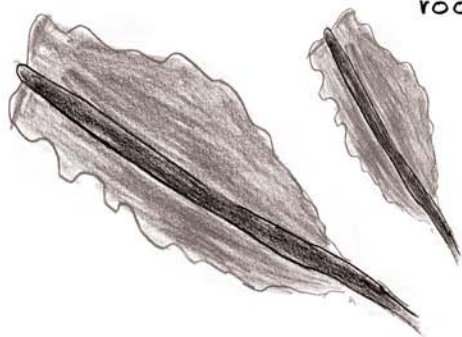
Elisapee imagined the story told by one bone. The story started with a Thule hunter who had killed a huge whale. His people had the biggest feast they had ever had; everyone was there. The bone said

that the Thule had used his bones to make the

roof of the house. Elisapee imagined

that the smaller seal and caribou bones were used

to play with—toys especially for children.



As Elisapee thought about the bones, she saw a grey falcon in the clear blue sky making a sound like, "Whoa, whoa".

She enjoyed the sights, sounds and tastes until the setting sun reminded her she had to prepare for the night.

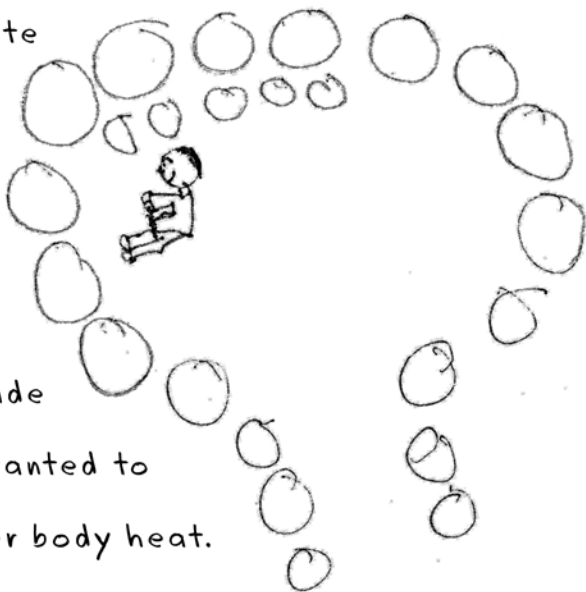
Elisapee placed the rocks she'd gathered to weigh down the plastic sheets over her corner of the Thule house.

She stuffed moss pieces into her empty backpack and placed it against the rock of the house as her pillow.

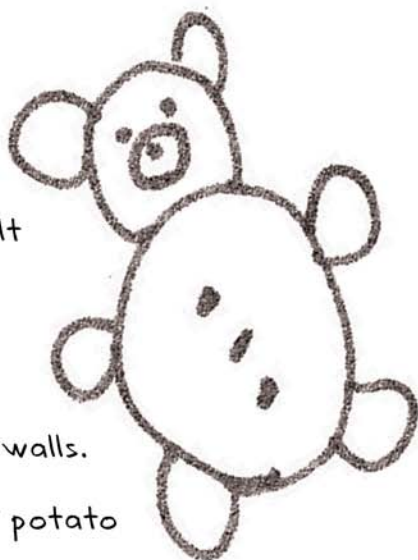
Before she would complete the small walls around

her sleeping area, she headed out one final time with her toilet paper.

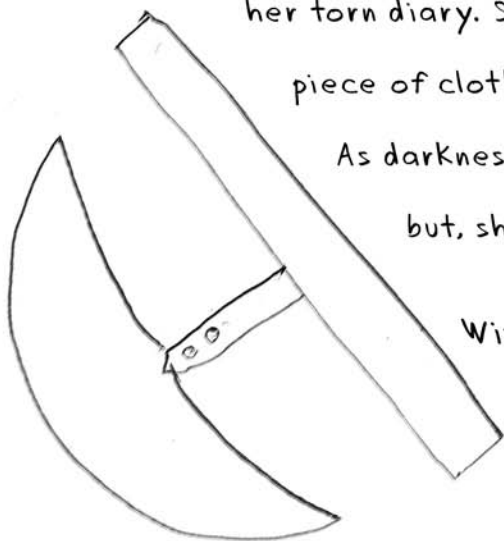
Once she was sealed inside for the night, Elisapee wanted to make sure she kept in her body heat.



In the last light of the day, she built  
low moss walls around her carpet,  
heaping up pieces carefully just as  
the Thule had done with their stone walls.  
She'd kept one pop and one bag of potato  
chips which she now drew into her small nest.



Also within reach were the ulu, her teddy bear and  
her torn diary. She was wearing every  
piece of clothing she had along.



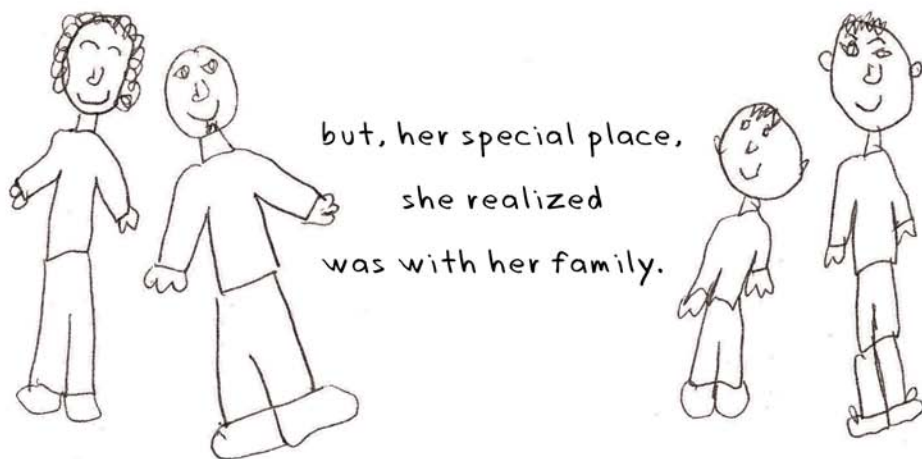
As darkness fell, Elisapee wasn't cold,  
but, she was anxious.

With the darkness  
came new sounds.

### Part Three

The last few rays of light filtered through the plastic creating a weird effect. Elisapee felt the rocks of the Thule foundation beside her for comfort. Some were very large and others quite small, yet, each stone had its special place. Did she have a special place?

The Youth Centre in Kinngait was her favourite place,



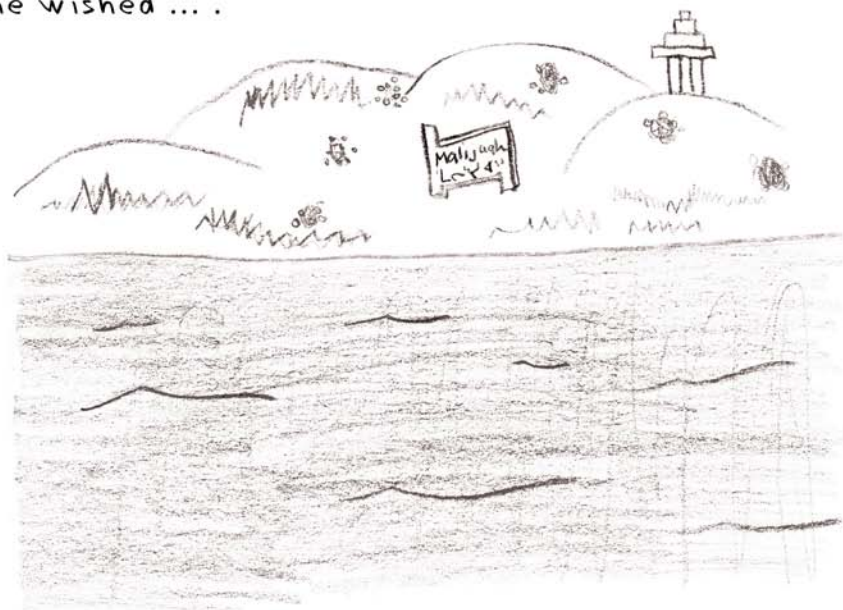
Nearby squeaking broke into her thoughts. Lemmings! The small, grey animals that clicked and squeaked were the size of her stepfather's fist. Elisapee was worried they might bite and poison her. Charlie and Sam tried to catch lemmings; Elisapee didn't want them anywhere near her.

As she tuned her ears to the activities of her lemming neighbours, Elisapee heard other sounds in the distance. She wondered if the spirits from the graves on Mallikjuak wandered at night. Were lonely ghosts seeking her warmth or was the Qalupalik calling? Legend said that the Qalupalik, a scaly half sea creature, stole naughty children. Hadn't she run away without telling anyone? What had she done? Each new sound brought new fears. Was that shuffling sound from the wind or from a polar bear roaming nearby? Was the raspy faint barking from foxes or wolves? What animal was lapping at the water of the pond?





With ears strained to the sounds of the night, Elisapee finally fell into a tense sleep. She wished that the Qalupalik would pass her by. She wished her parents were back in her life. She wished there were no fighting in her stepfamily. She wished ...



The dream of wishes sent Elisapee into deeper, happier sleep. She dreamt that she was a Thule child with bone toys playing with dolls in houses she'd made from rocks. She didn't fight with her brothers. In the winter they slid down the gentle hills of Mallikjuak on sealskins and in the summer they helped fetch water.

It was the sound of water that woke Elisapee even before the birds' morning songs. In the half-light of dawn, she thought of her journey home. She was sure that she would get into trouble but she missed her family and would have to face them.

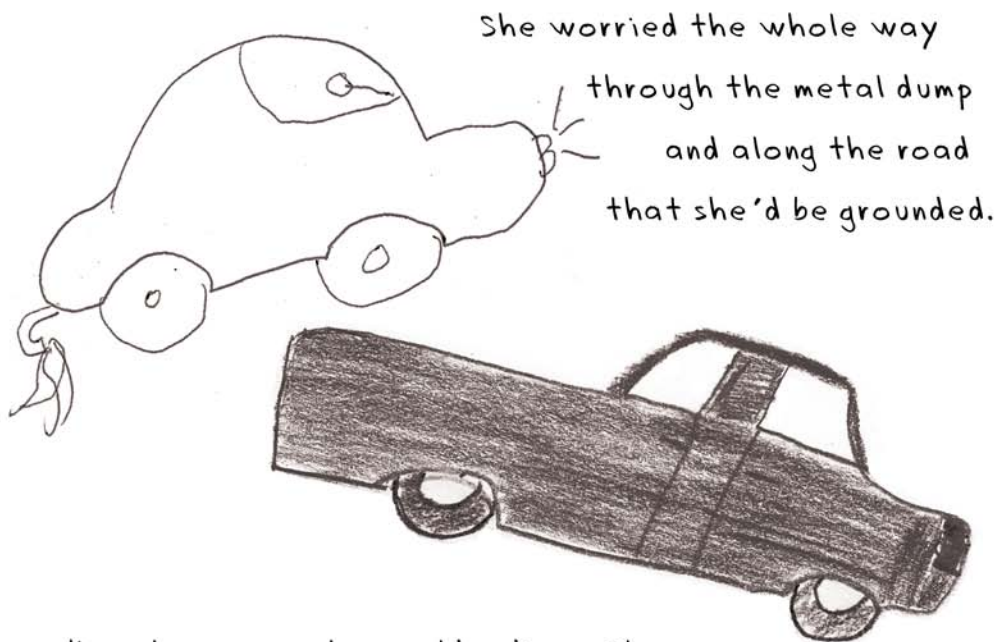
Slowly she began to hear  
Kinngait sounds. An early  
morning plane flew overhead;  
a boat left the harbour; dogs  
barked; seagulls fought over food.

Even as the Kinngait sounds drew her home,  
Elisapee was sad to leave. She wanted to  
learn more about Mallikjuak and its  
ancient people.

She gathered up her things and  
lifted away the plastic sheet. A gush of cool morning air  
greeted her. She saw the path home glistening in the  
dusky rose of the sunrise. The causeway was clear.

She trod carefully among slippery rocks and  
seaweed noting a boat moving on the  
bay and crows cawing overhead  
—nothing else.





Her step-parents would ask angrily,

"Where have you been?"



On the outskirts of town, Elisapee imagined faces behind windows. There were always people in Kinngait who didn't sleep. Everywhere she felt eyes on her.



As Elisapee crept quietly into the house,  
her grandmother surprised her with,  
"Where have you been young lady?  
You're in a lot of trouble."

"I was at Mallikjuak",  
said Elisapee putting down her heavy backpack.  
"How dare you go without telling anyone!"  
"I wanted to be alone because Charlie was bugging me."  
Elisapee added quickly, "I took a walk across the path and when  
the water blocked my way back, I stayed there all night.  
Oh, granny, you can't imagine how beautiful the sunset and  
sunrise were. And granny, I made it through the night all on my own!"

When her grandmother saw how Elisapee shimmered with self-confidence, she calmed. She told Elisapee to go to her room; she would speak with her parents. As her aunt was still sleeping, Elisapee quietly took out her special objects. She placed a small shining black stone and a blached white bone from Mallikjuak on her shelf. They would remind her of her ancestors. She took out the plants she'd gathered to press and hid them between the pages of her torn diary. They would help her learn about Mallikjuak.







As she lay on her bed Elisapee heard a heated argument in the kitchen.

What were they going to do?

Elisapee was proud that she'd stayed all alone on the island. Through the sounds, fears and bad dreams of the night, she'd stayed strong.

As the voices rose and fell, Elisapee's thoughts went up and down too.

It wasn't right to make everyone upset.

It was time for her to face the consequences.

Granny and her step-parents turned as Elisapee entered the kitchen.

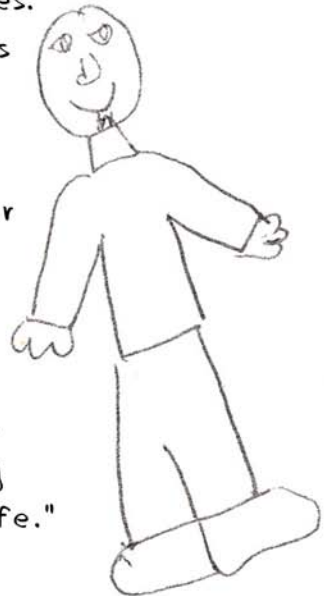
No word was spoken for a long time.

Elisapee saw the red rings around her stepmother's eyes. She had been crying.

Finally, Elisapee's stepfather broke the silence.

"Tell us all about Mallikjuak", he said.

"We are angry with you for not telling us about going; happy that you are safe."



Elisapee nervously rattled on about the island, the houses, the bones and what the old days must have been like for the Thule. She even told them about the Thule graves and the spirits she thought roamed there at night.

She could tell that her stepfather was impressed with how she had managed her safety, her hunger and her fears. He was proud that she'd stayed strong. In the end, however, it did not change the outcome. As she suspected, she was grounded.

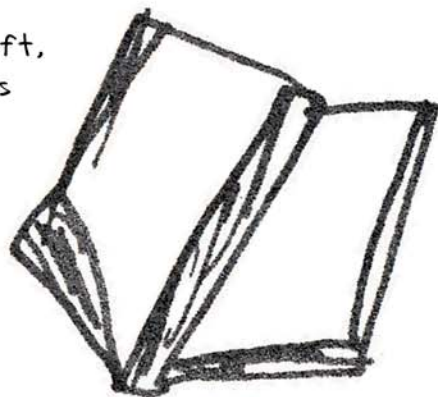
Elisapee heard Charlie and Sam having fun outdoors. She stood at her window looking at the barely visible sign for Mallikjuak Park. Across the glistening water she heard the ancestors' spirit-song.

"Keep going. Do not give up. Keep trying. Stay strong!"

When she turned back to her bed, Elisapee saw the new diary. Where had that come from?

As she gathered up the surprise gift, Elisapee finally heard the spirits in her own home. Why had she not heard them before? They whispered reassuringly,

"Do not stop.  
You can do it.  
Keep going ...".



Confidently, Elisapee picked up her pen and began to write ...

## Glossary

**Caribou** – Caribou are members of the deer family which includes moose and elk. The South Baffin Island Caribou population with more than 60,000 animals does not migrate into woodlands

**Grebe** – Grebes are water birds similar to ducks but without webbed feet. They live in freshwater ponds and lakes eating fish, water bugs, and snails; they are good divers

**Inuit** – Inuit are Canadian aboriginals living in Canada's arctic regions. The word Inuit derives from "Inuk" meaning "human being" in Inuktitut the language of the Inuit

**Inukshuk** – A monument made of stones traditionally used by Inuit to navigate, mark a place of respect, migration routes or to act as a memorial for a beloved person. "Someone was here" in Inuktitut

**Kinngait** – Kinngait means mountain or hill. It refers to the protective rock hills that surround the community of Cape Dorset

**Lemming** – Lemmings are small, furry, arctic rodents active both day and night. They do not hibernate, burrowing through the snow for vegetation and stashes they've left

**Mallikjuak** – Mallikjuak means "big wave". The name refers to Mallikjuak's low rolling wave-like hills

**Qalupalik** – In Inuit legend Qalupalik is a female half human, half sea creature that snatches young people who do not listen to their elders

**Qamutik** – The qamutik is a wooden sled. Until the modern use of skidoos, qamutiks pulled by dog teams were used as winter transportation in the arctic

**Throat singing** – Inuit throat singing is typically performed by two women competing to see who can outlast the other. One leads with short deep rhythmic sounds to which the other responds filling in the gaps left by her competitor with her own rhythmic sounds

**Thule** – Thule culture is the forerunner to the modern Inuit culture. Thule lived on Mallikjuak Island about a thousand years ago. Their stone houses were topped with frames made from whalebones. Hides and sod placed over the foundation and bone ribs created an igloo-like, permanent structure

**Tundra** – Vast, flat, treeless, arctic regions where the subsoil is permanently frozen

**Ulu** – An ulu is an all-purpose knife traditionally used by women to skin and clean animals. Once made with caribou antler or walrus handles and slate blades they now have wooden handles and metal blades

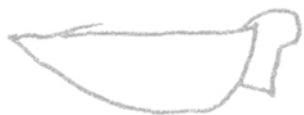


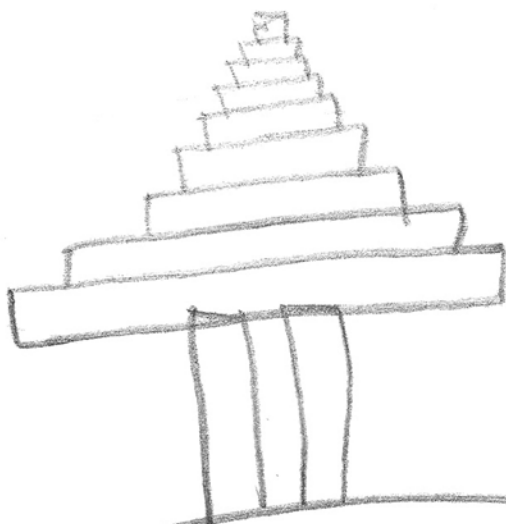


# Acknowledgements

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When I visited Mallikjuak Territorial Park by Cape Dorset I thought it would be great if local students heightened awareness of this marvel so close to their community. Sam Pudlat School grade five teacher, Scott Knox, found volunteers to work on the extra-curricular Cape Dorset Storytelling Project. I provided a story template with a rough outline of a young heroine's adventure. The template provided writing and drawing prompts to stimulate the inclusion of local colour and the feelings the young people had about family life. In the three days I worked with the students at Sam Pudlat, we decided on character names and ages and spoke about how they as writers/artists would have to co-operate to keep consistency. Each person would add his or her own details and feelings, but, ultimately there would only be one agreed upon telling.





Before I left, Arn a student, Scott and I, with Omalluk went to Mallikjuak. Arn knew it was up to him to provide the leadership for Part Two. As the story details arrived by mail in Toronto, I wrote drafts. The drawings went to Dani Crosby so that she and Mary Cook could work them into the design for the book. Before Arn, Stephanie and Joanne had even ended the story a mock-up went back to them with editorial prompts. We wanted to make sure that the story and images reflected their ideas.

It has been an incredible gift to draw out the creative talents of these young people. Dani, Mary and I thank Scott Knox, Omalluk and Saizula for their support. I would also like to thank the patient sounding-board, Mary Cook and the newly-graduated graphic artist Dani Crosby for volunteering their prodigious talents to this project. The Spanish expression "poco a poco se va lejos" fits well, because working together, little by little, we have gone far.

## Mary Cook

Photographer and designer Mary Cook has been delighted to be part of this project and is looking forward to the next in the series as Elisapee grows. "I hope one day to be able to visit Cape Dorset to see firsthand the places mentioned."

## Dani Crosby

Dani is a freelance illustrator and art teacher, graduated from the Sheridan BAA Illustration program. Dani is currently based in Oshawa, Ontario, and believes visual art is powerful enough to change anything from a person's perception of a brand to a person's perception of the world at large. She is honoured to have been part of the passionate team of artists and writers who worked together to make this book a reality.

## Scott Knox

Scott Knox, originally from the Maritimes, is in his second year teaching at Sam Pudlat School. "I have really enjoyed how insightful the students have been during this project. I feel they know much more than they let on. I think that working on this project has helped the students start to see how strong they really are."

## Angie Littlefield

Educator, writer, curator Angie Littlefield twice visited Cape Dorset. "As an English teacher for over 20 years I loved to help young people develop their stories. It has been a pleasure seeing Arn, Stephanie and Joanne bring Elisapee to life." Angie's publications include: *Angelika Hoerle: Comet of Cologne Dada* (AGO 2009), *The Art of Dissent* (Holocaust Education Centre 2008) and *The Thomsons of Durham: Tom Thomson's Family Heritage* (Durham West Arts Centre 2005)

## Saizula Putugug

Saizula worked at Sam Pudlat School as a Student Support Assistant during this project. She enjoyed working with students so much that she is now in a teacher training program. Saizula really helped the project run smoothly and provided much advice about Kinngait and its young people.



Twelve year old Arnakadiak (Arn) Pootoogook is the son of artist Maliya Pootoogook. As well as drawing, Arn enjoys playing with friends and video games. "It really helped seeing the stone houses at Mallikjuak. I could picture how the old people lived there. I lay down with all the bones at the pond just to feel how great it is to see the sky with the clouds from there."



Joanne Weedmark is 12 years old. Her father drives with the water truck around Kinngait. Joanne likes to drive skidoos and hang out with friends. "I live in a house with a large family so it wasn't hard for me to imagine Elisapee's life. I really liked that we decided to write about the history and culture of the Inuit."



Stephanie Weedmark is Joanne's younger sister at 11 years of age. She is in grade 5 at Sam Pudlat School. Stephanie's favourite activities include running and soccer. "Deciding on the details for the story was really hard. The drawings were the fun part. I really think we've shown the fun, excitement and happiness in life here."

The young authors Arn Pootoogook, Joanne and Stephanie Weedmark have done a great job in producing this book. I was in awe of how they have great imagination to create such a story of a young girl taking an adventure away from home. I congratulate them for a job well done. Way to go Arn, Joanne, Stephanie and Angie Littlefield for getting their young minds into story telling as their ancestors have done, but verbally.

Elisapee Nutaraluk, Igaliut

We thought this book was amazing. We think kids would like reading about Elisapee's journey. I liked the scenes where Elisapee was looking around and discovering new things such as all the bones. (Charlotte)  
I loved how Elisapee learned her lesson about never leaving home because home is the place for you when you're a kid. (Samantha)

Charlotte and Samantha Bernardo, grades five and four, Toronto