

Egg Island

By Cindy Hardy &
Lorraine A. Masterman

Illustrated by Putt Clark

Egg Island is a fictionalized account of how people from the southwest part of Bristol Bay engage in collecting, sorting, and storing murre and kittiwake eggs. Many of the contributors to this story have participated in the activities described in Egg Island. Some of the characters in this story are people from Togiak

The story is written from the point of view of a second-grade girl living in Fairbanks, Alaska, who visits her relatives in Togiak and then participates in “egging.” The story provides an interesting portal into present-day Yup’ik Eskimo life along the southwest coast. It provides students with a way of learning about cultural traditions, geography, ecology, and subsistence living.



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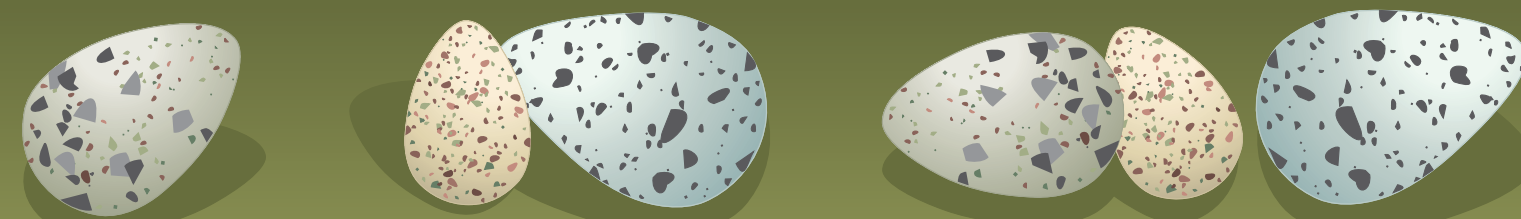
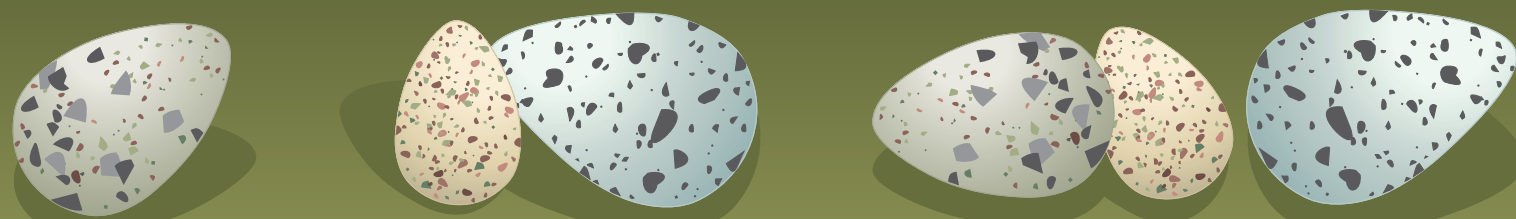
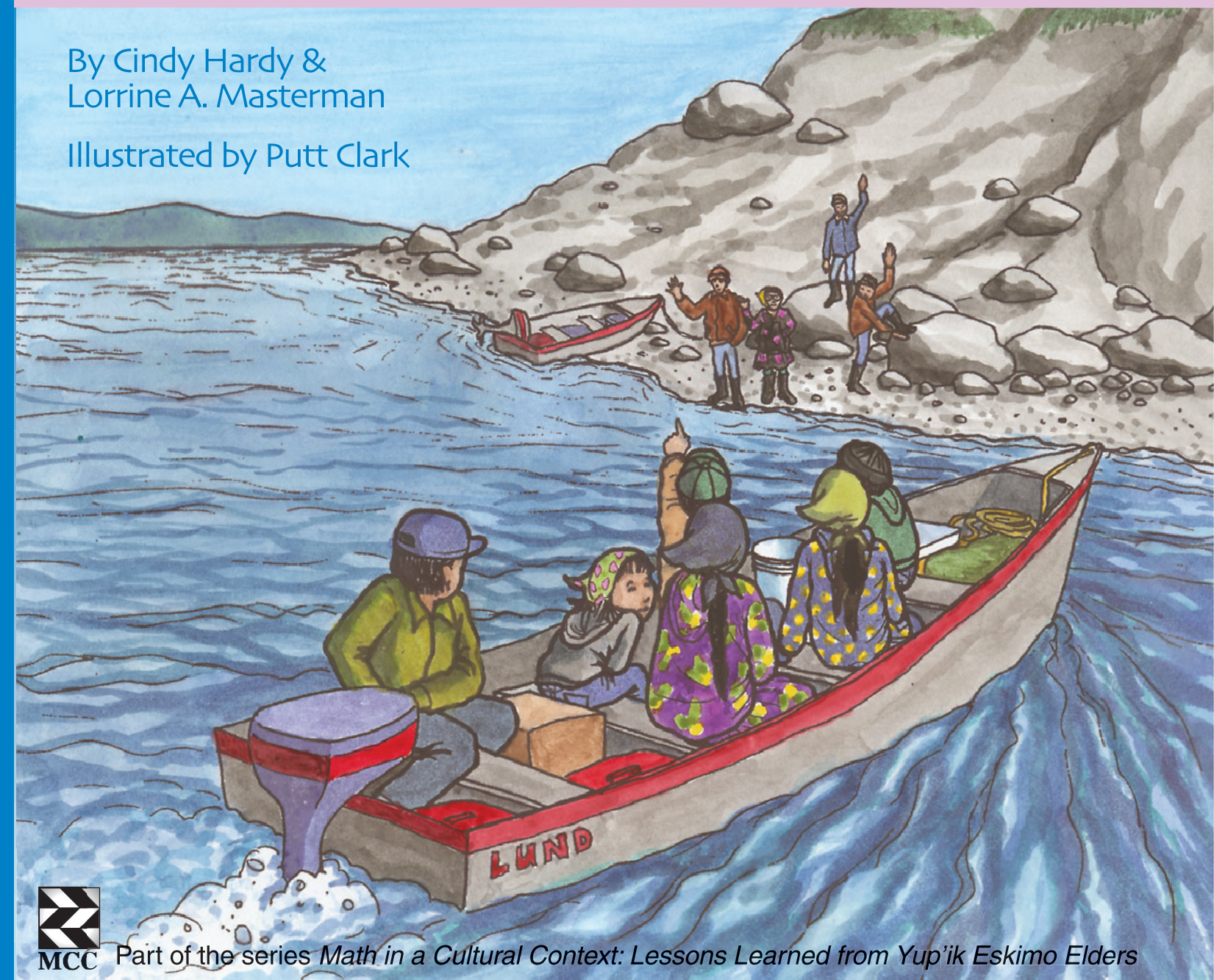


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Part of the series *Math in a Cultural Context: Lessons Learned from Yup’ik Eskimo Elders*



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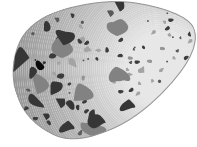
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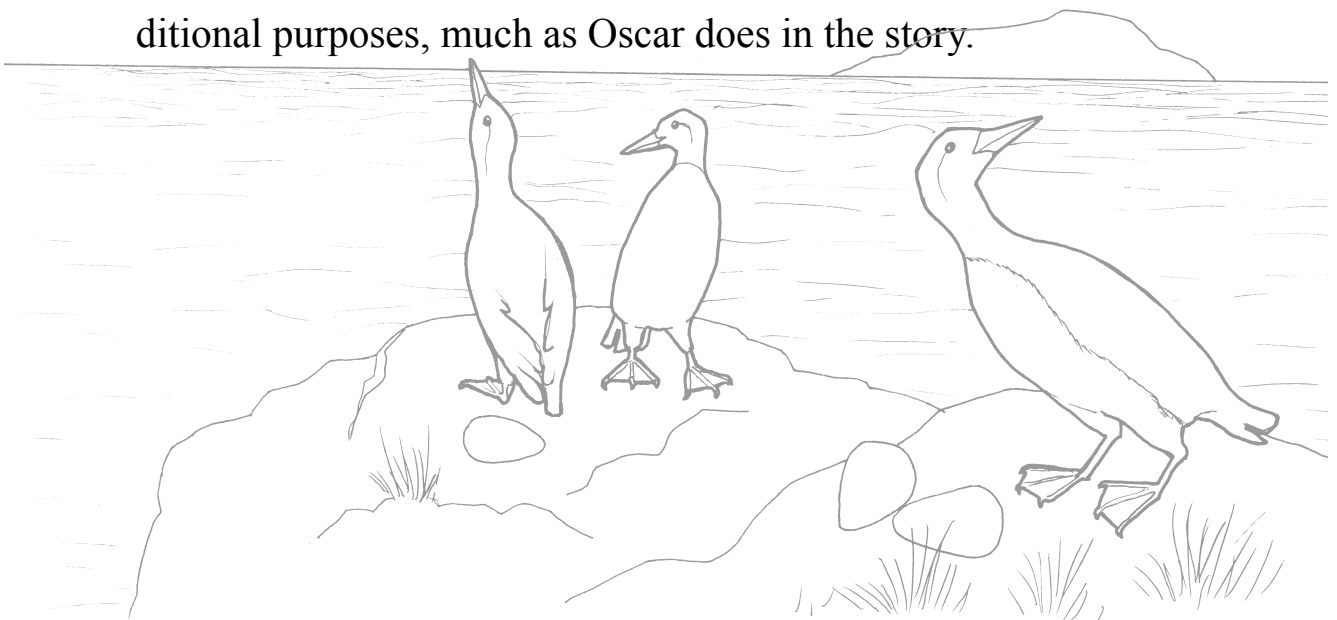
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About *Egg Island*



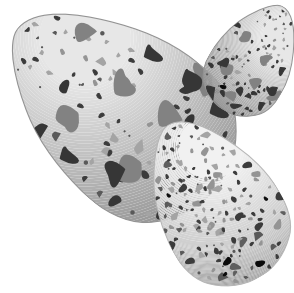
This story is a work of fiction based, in part, on oral narratives from the Togiak region. Except for Annie Blue, who is a Togiak elder, all characters are fictional. The action and details in the story, however, are based on actual activities that go on in Togiak and in the region. The events of the story have been written and revised in consultation with elders working with the Adapting Yup'ik Elders' Knowledge Project. The story told by Annie Blue is taken word-for-word from a transcript of a story she told for this project, and the Yup'ik counting method is drawn on a method she demonstrated for the project. The Yup'ik abacus was invented and designed for this module of the Adapting Yup'ik Elders' Knowledge Project and is not a traditional part of Yup'ik culture. However, Yup'ik culture traditionally takes advantage of the exchange of technology with other cultures, adapting new technology to fit traditional purposes, much as Oscar does in the story.



Acknowledgements

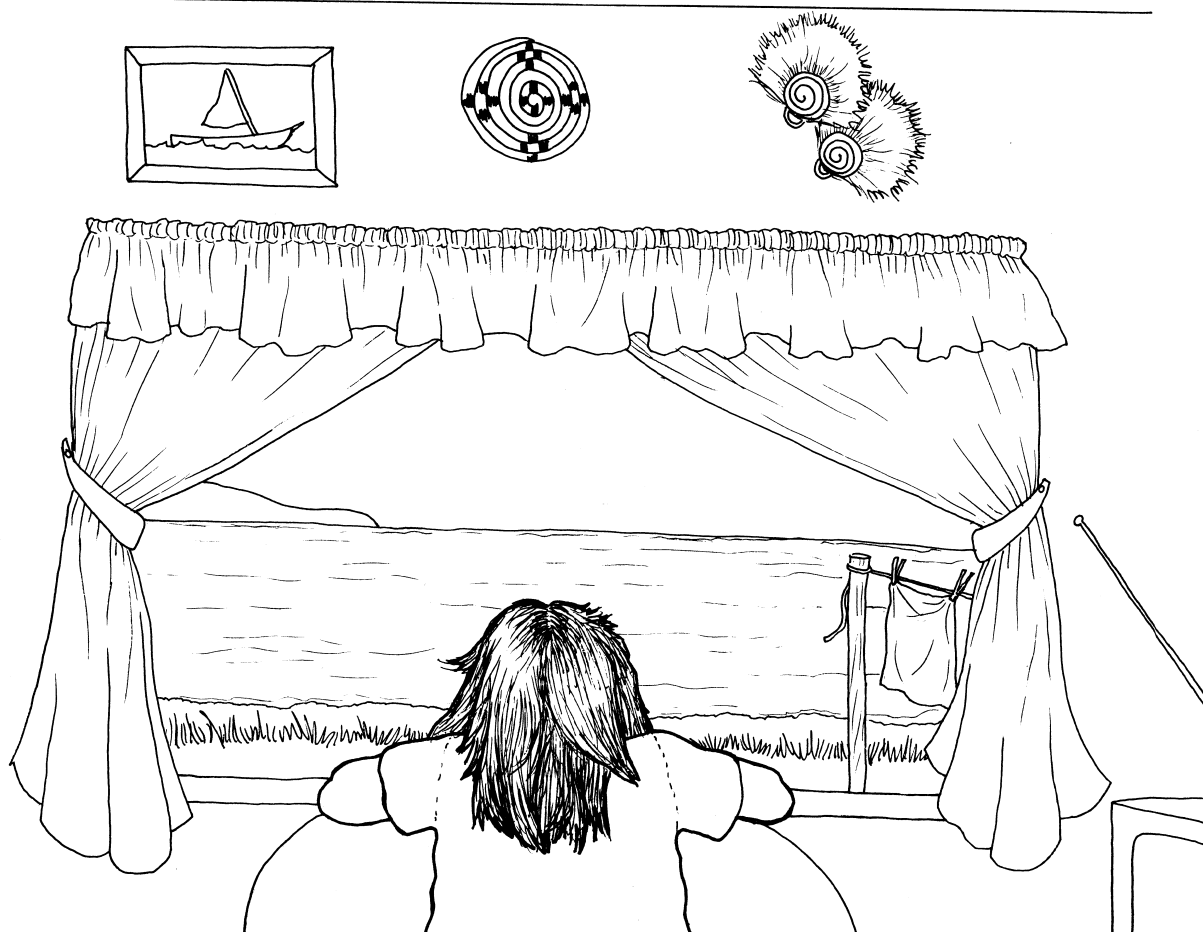
We would like to thank Annie Blue, Nancy Sharp, and Evelyn Yanez for their contributions to the *Egg Island* story. Their first-hand knowledge of “egging” on the islands of Togiak Bay contributed greatly to the details that compose this story. Annie Blue’s telling of the “Stone Lady” provided additional cultural information. We wish to thank all the others elders and Yup’ik teachers who contributed to this effort.

I Jennie's Visit



When the phone rang, Jennie woke up. She and her cousin Oscar were sprawled out in their sleeping bags on the living room floor where they had been sleeping during her visit to Togiak. She could hear her Auntie Lauren in the kitchen at the other end of the room, talking to her husband, Uncle Willie, on the phone. Auntie Lauren was stacking five-gallon white plastic buckets (*qaltat*) while she





talked. Jennie sat up and hugged her sleeping bag around her. She could hear the wire handles clattering against the sides of the buckets, and she could smell coffee from the pot on the stove. Auntie Lauren hung up the phone.

“Auntie, what are you doing?” Jennie said. Beside her, on the floor, Oscar rolled over, rustling his sleeping bag.

“Your Uncle Willie called from the boat,” Auntie Lauren said. “It’s a good day to go egging.”

Jennie listened to her aunt moving around in the kitchen.

“Auntie, what’s egging? How do you know it’s a good day?” Jennie asked. She leaned toward where her aunt was working.

“Questions, questions,” Auntie Lauren said. She carried a stack of buckets over to the door and set them down. “Look out the window and tell me how hard the wind is blowing.”

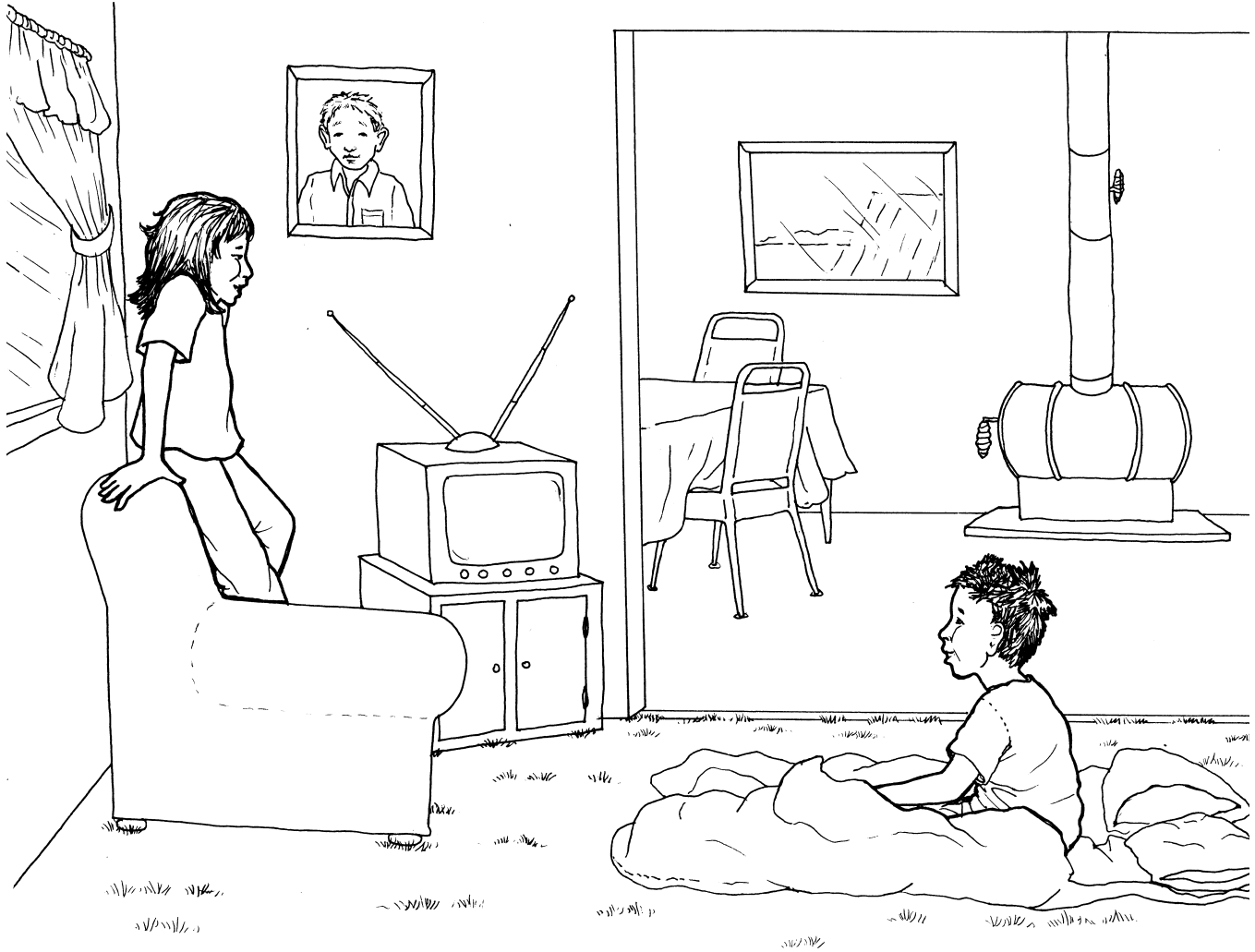
Jennie unzipped her bag. Oscar looked up at her from his green sleeping bag, then squeezed his eyes shut. Jenny pulled her feet out of her bag and walked to the big chair under the window. She kneeled on the chair and looked out. Beyond the beach, the sea stretched out, silvery and flat and shining. On the beach, the grasses waved only a little. Next door, the clothes hung down straight on the line where Maurluq, her grandmother, had pinned them.

“There’s not much wind, Auntie,” Jennie said. “The sea is flat. I see little round clouds.”

“So, that’s when we go egging,” Auntie Lauren said. “Oscar, get up. Carry these buckets to Maurluq’s house.”

Oscar rustled around in his sleeping bag some more, then sat up, yawning, pretending he had just woken up. Jennie turned in the chair so she could watch him. His shirt was wrinkled, and his hair stuck up in the back like the grass on the beach. He grinned at Jennie and raised his eyebrows. Auntie Lauren still had her back turned, moving around by the sink, packing things into a blue cooler. Jennie grinned back at Oscar, like they had shared a secret.

Jennie had come to stay at her Auntie’s house two weeks before, right after school was over and she had said goodbye to her friends in second grade. Her mom was going to school at the university in Fairbanks and studied all the time, so she had sent Jennie to this place she called “home,” Togiak, where Jennie could stay with her auntie and Maurluq for a few weeks during the summer.



“You’ll do all the things I did when I was a girl,” Mom had said. “You’ll be with your cousin.”

Jennie had fun sleeping on the floor or going with Oscar to feed the dogs or riding with Uncle Willie on the four-wheeler, but sometimes she missed her bed at home and the sound of her mother tapping the computer keyboard, doing her homework at night.

“Jennie,” Auntie said, “get the bag of beach grass from the entry (*elaturraq*). We need to take it along for the bottom of the buckets.”

Two days after Jennie had arrived, she, Oscar, Auntie Lauren, and Uncle Willie had gone out on the beach to gather grass. She remembered how the high rubber boots she had borrowed from Oscar flopped around her legs. She nearly fell trying to jump over a wet place in the too-big boots. Oscar had laughed when she tripped, then reached out his hand to her.

“Here,” he said. He pulled her hand a little so that she splashed down into the water, spraying both of them. In her boots, her feet felt warm and dry, though, and she laughed, too. After that, they stuck together all day. She found out that, even though they were the same age, he had only just finished first grade. She didn’t say anything about that and he didn’t say anything about her nearly falling.

All that day they had gathered the driest, softest beach grass, which they stuffed into a black plastic garbage bag and then strapped on the back of the four-wheeler. When they got home, they put the bag in the entryway, next to the tools, gas cans, fish-nets, and boots.



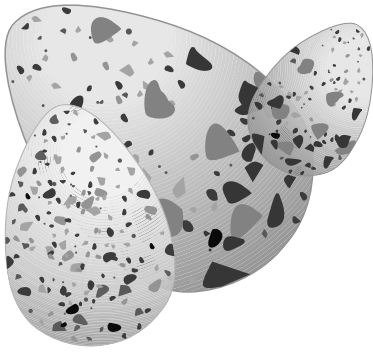


Now, Jennie threw her arms around the bag of beach grass and carried it back into the house, walking stiff-legged with it, like it was a big belly. She set it down by the buckets. Oscar sat on the floor, pulling his boots on over his sweatpants.

“Auntie,” Jennie said, “what’s ‘egging’ mean?”

“She doesn’t know what egging is,” Oscar said.

“She’ll find out,” Auntie Lauren said. “Both of you go over to Maurluq’s with buckets and the beach grass. Tell her I’ve got the coffee and the cooler.”



Getting Ready to Go Egging

When Jennie and Oscar stepped outside the house, Jennie could feel and smell the ocean. Every time she smelled it, it surprised her. At home in Fairbanks, the air smelled like nothing all winter, and like dust and exhaust all summer. This air smelled like salt fish, and she could feel it on her face: tiny drops of water she couldn't quite see but could feel.

Jennie carried the bag of beach grass. Oscar took the stack of buckets—three big buckets and two smaller ones. They came up above his waist. He pulled the wire handle of the bottom bucket up over the rest of the stack and walked along the path beside Jennie, dragging the buckets. They bumped and rattled over the ground, leaving a line in the dirt like a brown crayon mark.



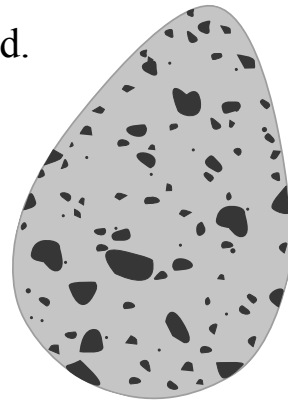
“What kind of eggs do you like?” Oscar asked.

“You mean, like, scrambled?” she asked. Oscar didn’t usually talk much to her. She’d gotten used to doing things with him and saying nothing, just listening to the sounds all around them.

“No, what *kind*?” His eyes closed slightly as if he were enjoying a joke.

“The white kind, what else?” Jennie didn’t like eggs much. At home she ate cereal for breakfast. She liked all the colors and shapes of different brands mixed in together.

“I like murre eggs (*alpaq*). Yum. And the little tern eggs.” Oscar held his thumb and pointer finger a little bit apart, as if he were holding a thumb-sized marble.



Murre Egg

“Eggs are eggs, I think,” Jennie said. “What’s a murre?”

They were coming up to Maurluq’s house. Maurluq was standing beside the steps to her house, watching them. She had on her *qaspeq*—a loose, straight dress with a big ruffle-like skirt around the bottom, by her knee—and black rubber boots like Jennie and Oscar’s. Her long gray



Murre



braid hung down from under a blue scarf (*pelatuuk*) tied around her head.

“There you are,” she said. “Bring those things over here.” Jennie plopped her bag down by the bottom of the steps where Maurluq had set a plastic shopping bag of clothes. Oscar set the stack of buckets beside the bags. Jennie could see a red line on his palm where the wire had pressed as he dragged the buckets.

“It’s a good day to go egging,” Maurluq said. “There’ll be lots of birds.”

“Today I might climb the rope,” Oscar said. He looked beyond the beach, to where the islands lumped up out of the sea.

“If you grow big as your cousin, Rudy, you will,” Maurluq said. “Help me put grass in a bucket.” Maurluq pointed to a place by her feet. Jennie brought the bag of grass over to where she had pointed. Oscar pulled a big white bucket from the bottom of the stack. Maurluq sat on the middle step, then patted a spot on each side of her for them to sit.

“Mom’s making sandwiches and coffee,” Oscar said. Maurluq nodded. She opened the bag and began pulling out the dry grass. She put a big handful in the bucket.

“For the eggs,” she said. “We’ll carry the grass in this bucket to line the egg buckets with.” She looked at Oscar, then at Jennie, and Oscar reached down into the bag, grabbed a handful of grass and put it into the bucket. Jennie reached into the bag, too. She forgot sometimes that Maurluq talked to them with her eyes and her face, that she expected them to know what she wanted by watching her. All three of them reached into the bag, grabbing armfuls of grass and filling the bucket with it, packing it down.

“I remember the first time I went egging,” Maurluq said. “I was lots older than you two. Back then, we never took kids. You had to be a teenager.”



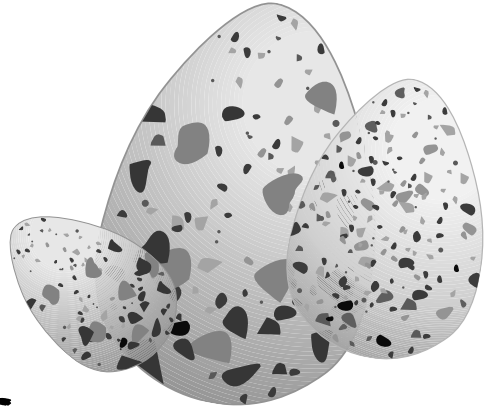
“Not us,” Oscar said, and Jennie said, “Not us.”

“No,” Maurluq said. “You are two grown-up kids.” Jennie thought Maurluq was smiling, the way she said that, but her face didn’t really change.

“Tell me about egging,” Jennie said.

“Well, we don’t just go for the eggs,” Maurluq said. “Sometimes the men hunt some seal (*issuriq*) if we see any. We go all day. One time, we went out and took too long and had to wait for the tide. I fell asleep, and when I woke up there was a big ship and lights everywhere. I don’t know how it got there. It was like a big cliff covered with lights, right in front of me.”

Maurluq stopped talking, and Jennie looked over at Oscar sitting on Maurluq’s other side. Oscar raised his eyebrows at her, then ducked his head back behind Maurluq where Jennie couldn’t see him.



Birds of the Bering Sea

“When we get to Egg Island (*Ingriakcuar*) you’ll see thousands of birds flying all around. My brothers used to take their twenty-twos and shoot at the island to make the birds fly up. They’d fly right over our heads—skree, skree!—and I’d always think they were going to fly right at our skiff.”

“What’s a murre?” Jennie asked. She wondered if Oscar really knew.

“You’ll see plenty of murres,” Maurluq said. “They have the best eggs.”

“Hand me a stick,” Maurluq said. Oscar jumped down off the steps and came back with a short stick in his hand. He handed it to Maurluq. Maurluq moved the bucket and bent over the steps. She drew in the dirt with the stick.

“Murre eggs look like this,” she said. Jennie watched her draw something like a sideways ice cream cone with a rounded point.

“It’s pointy,” Jennie said. Oscar squinted at her across Maurluq’s lap.

“That’s so it won’t fall off the cliff,” Oscar said.



“They roll around the point instead of rolling sideways,” Maurluq said. She began to draw again, small ovals and bigger ones. She tapped the stick in the middle of the larger ovals, making speckles. She pointed to the little ovals.

“These are tern eggs (*teqiyalinraat*)” she said. “These bigger ones are gull eggs (*naruyinraat*). We’ll get all of these.”

“And kittiwakes (*iingirayak*)” said Oscar. He looped his thumbs together and flapped his fingers like a bird, swooping across Maurluq’s lap towards Jennie.

“What’s a kitty wake?” Jennie said. “I never saw any cats here.”

“Not ‘kitty,’” said Oscar. “It’s a bird. It only lives on cliffs out in the sea.”

“Joke,” Jennie said. “You thought I didn’t know.”

Maurluq brushed her hands down along the skirt of her *gaspeq* and looked first at Oscar, then at Jennie.

“You’d both better get ready to go. Do you kids have hats?” she said.

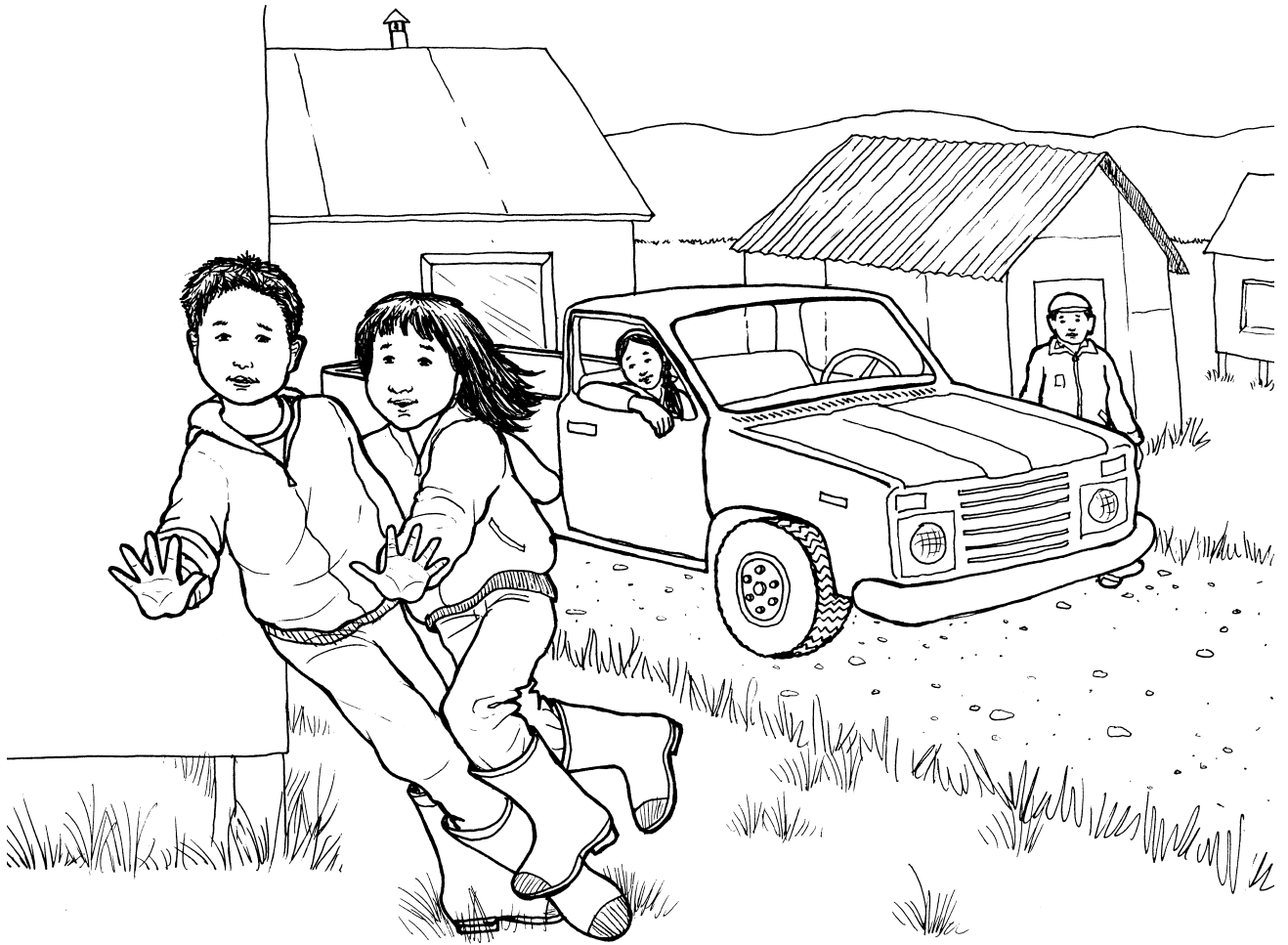
Oscar stood up on the step, pulled a knit hat out of the pocket of his jacket, and jumped down the steps to the ground. He waved the hat at Maurluq and Jennie. Jennie looked up at Maurluq. She could see some gray hairs straggling out from under the blue scarf tied around her head.

“I want to wear a scarf like you do, Maurluq,” she said. “Show me how to tie it.”

Maurluq put her arm around Jennie’s shoulders and squeezed.

“Okay,” she said, “But you have to watch what I do and don’t ask so many questions.” She stood up and went back up the stairs to the house. Oscar flapped at her with his hat.

“Question girl (*apqauryungellria*),” he said. “City girl.” Jennie stood up and reached at the hat to snatch it from him. He zigzagged away from her, and waved it at her again. She started to run towards him, but he stopped, looking at something behind her. Jennie turned to look, too, tripped, and crashed into Oscar. They both fell into the tall grass beside Maurluq’s house, giggling. A man in blue jeans and a tan canvas jacket, Jennie’s Uncle Willie, Oscar’s dad,



walked up to where they lay. He looked down at them and shook his head. His pickup sat in the street in front of Maurluq's house. Auntie Lauren looked over at them from the cab.

"I thought you two were ready to go egging," he said. "Oscar, carry the bucket of grass over to the truck. Jennie, you help Maurluq."

Jennie liked Uncle Willie. He was the only person here that she had known back in Fairbanks. He had come to town and visited with Jennie and her mom in their apartment a couple of times. He had gone to school there, too, once, but got homesick and had come back to Togiak. Now, he reached down and gave her hand a

tug and pulled her up to her feet. Jennie could see Maurluq standing on the porch, holding a flowered scarf.

Oscar grabbed the handle of the bucket of beach grass and dragged it to the truck. Uncle Willie and Jennie walked over to Maurluq.

“Willie,” Maurluq said, “if you carry the buckets, Jennie and I will bring the dried fish and extra clothes.”

“Okay, Mom,” Uncle Willie said. Jennie thought that was a funny thing to say. He was taller than Maurluq. He picked up the buckets that she and Oscar had dragged from Auntie Lauren’s house, tucking the whole stack under his arm.

“We’re all ready,” he said.

Maurluq bent down towards Jennie and smoothed Jennie’s hair back with her hands. She took the flowered scarf and draped it over Jennie’s head. She gently pulled Jennie’s head forward, lifted up her hair and tied the ends at the back of her neck. Then she tugged on the point of cloth behind Jennie’s head so that the scarf slid back from Jennie’s forehead just a little. It felt tight over her ears.

“Why did Uncle Willie call you ‘Mom?’” she asked. Then she put her hand over her mouth. She hadn’t meant to ask another question.

Maurluq looked over toward the part of the sky where the water met the air and made a line between the bumps of islands.

“He’s my little boy,” she said, “just like Oscar’s his and your Auntie’s little boy and you’re your mom’s little girl.”



They stood there for a moment, looking at the sea, wearing their scarves. Jennie wished her mom could be there to go egging with them. She thought of something surprising, then.

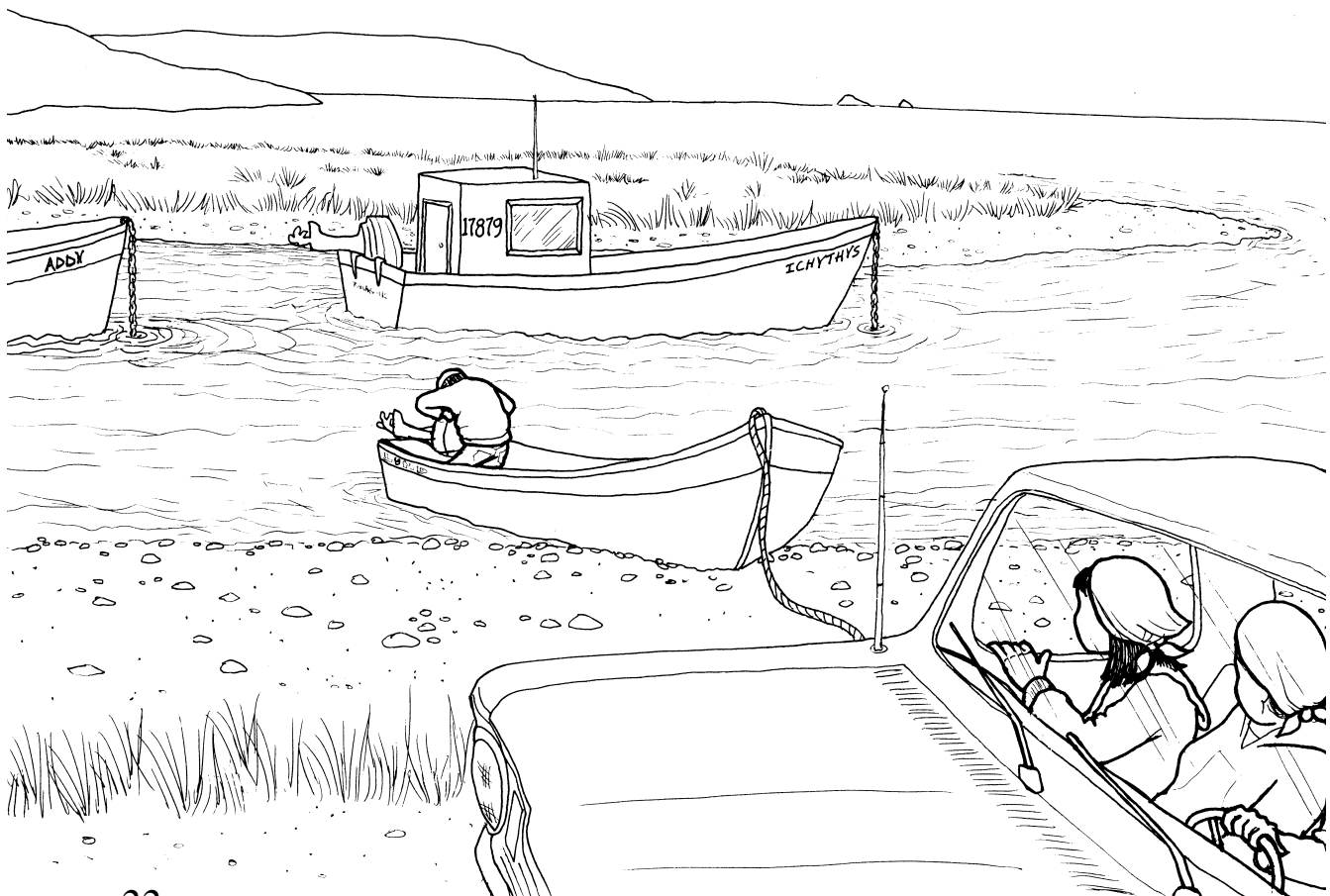
“And my mom’s your little girl, right?” she said.

“We’re all each other’s,” Maurluq said.



Heading Out

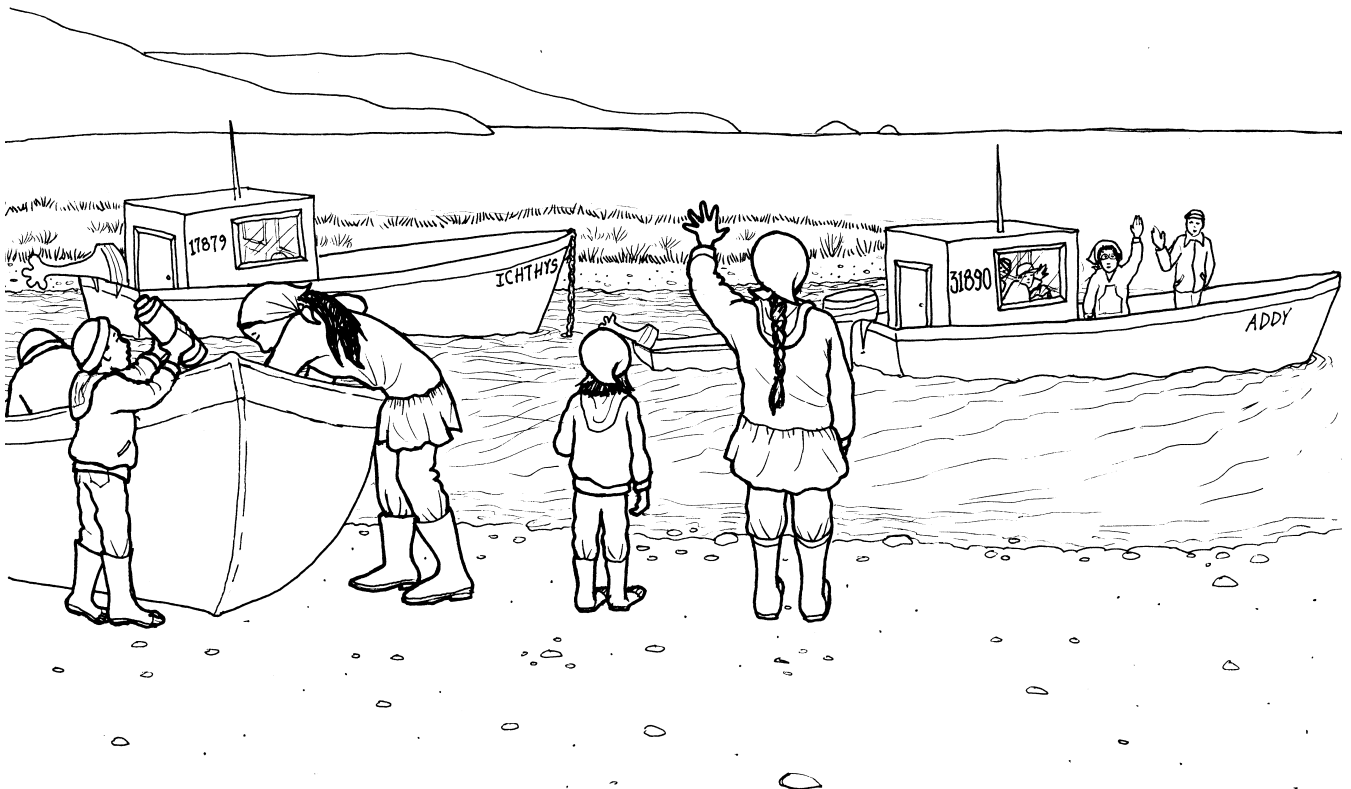
They rode in the truck through the village to the slough (*kuik*), a long narrow bay where the boats were kept. Jennie could see Uncle Willie's fishing boat, anchored a little bit from shore. It was a big aluminum boat, low in the front with a tall cabin in the back and two long poles spiking up on either side. They drove up to the edge of the slough. Jennie noticed that the water came up higher on the shore than it had the last time she'd been there. The Lund, a



smaller, flat silver boat like a long rowboat with a motor in the back, nosed up to the shore. A man about Uncle Willie's size, her cousin Rudy, was in the back of the Lund, fooling with the motor.

They all got out of the truck. Auntie Lauren lifted the blue cooler and set it down inside the front, or bow, of the Lund, where the sides joined to form a point. Oscar stood beside her, holding two thermoses: the coffee for the grown-ups. By Auntie Lauren's feet in their rubber boots, Uncle Willie stacked two cases of pop, a red one and a blue and green one. Maurluq pointed to the cases of pop, and Jennie set the extra clothes on top of them.

Down the slough, a boat engine started up—a low, bubbling hum. As the boat came toward them, sliding across the flat water of the slough, Jennie saw three men and an older woman, wearing a green scarf. Maurluq waved and the people in the boat waved back.



“That’s Annie Blue and her grandsons. We might catch up to them at Summit Island (*Qilkiq*). They’re spotting seal and walrus,” Maurluq said.

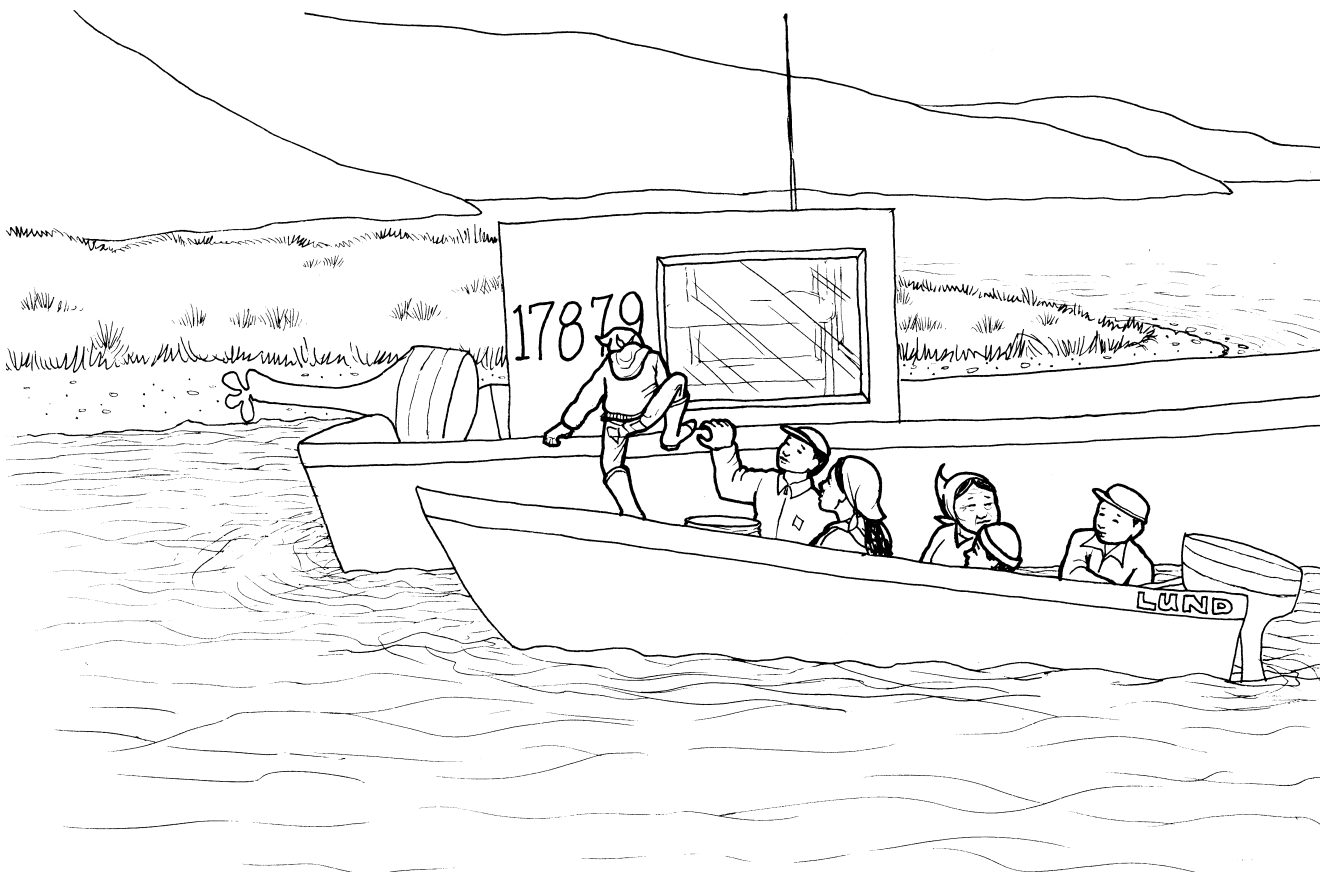
Jennie wanted to ask about Summit Island, but she knew that if Maurluq had mentioned it, she’d find out soon. At school, she was always the first to ask questions; her teachers liked it. Here, though, adults expected her to watch and keep her mouth shut. Even Oscar teased her, calling her “Question Girl.” She watched the other boat glide down the slough toward the bay, two waves trailing behind it like a long “V.” She could see a dark streak of ocean at the end of the slough.

“Come on in the Lund,” Auntie Lauren said. “It’s a good thing you’re wearing that scarf.” Oscar scrambled over the side of the Lund and began to walk to the back, his boots clomping on the aluminum floor of the boat.

“Stop rocking the boat,” Uncle Willie said. Oscar stopped, then started walking again, this time more carefully, balancing as he went. Maurluq reached down and gave Jennie a boost over the side of the boat.

“You sit here,” she said, pointing to the seat in back of the bow, where Auntie Lauren had stowed the food and extra clothes.

Uncle Willie pushed the Lund off the beach and got in next to Jennie. Rudy started the engine and the Lund made a circle in the water then headed straight for Uncle Willie's big boat. Rudy steered the Lund up beside the fishing boat so that the side of the Lund was up against the side of the bigger boat. One by one, they all climbed over the side of the Lund and up into the fishing boat. Rudy handed the cooler to Uncle Willie and then handed him the buckets and the extra clothes and everything else. From the deck of the boat, Jennie stood watching the two men working and the dark, still water below them.



“Come on,” Oscar said. “I want to show you my dad’s boat.”

Jennie could feel the floor of the boat tip slightly beneath her feet as Rudy and Uncle Willie got in. Oscar showed her the big poles that held the seine net and the long radio antenna. He showed her the hold, where the fish were kept, and the cabin at the back, where Maurluq and Auntie Lauren sat at a table, drinking coffee.

“It’s like a little house in here,” Jennie said.

She could hear Uncle Willie and Rudy climb up to the wheel house above them. She could hear them talking, but not what they were saying. Then the engine started, rumbling hard enough to make the cabin vibrate.

“Let’s go outside,” Oscar said. They hurried out of the cabin and stood holding onto the rail along the side of the boat. Then they were moving slowly over water as flat as glass. For a while, the boats and houses along the slough slid by them. Ahead of them, the patch of dark sea water that was Togiak Bay grew wider, till the land beside them slipped away and they were completely surrounded by water.

From the house, the water had seemed flat as a tablecloth. Now that they were out on it, it rose and fell slightly—Uncle Willie said they were swells—so that riding in the boat felt like being in a slow rocking chair. Uncle Willie revved up the motor till it growled, and they began to rush towards the gray islands on the horizon. The water slapped the bottom of the boat. Jennie could feel it bumping below her feet.

“Look there,” Oscar said. He pointed to a small rock island in the shape of a standing woman. “There’s the Stone Lady. Maybe



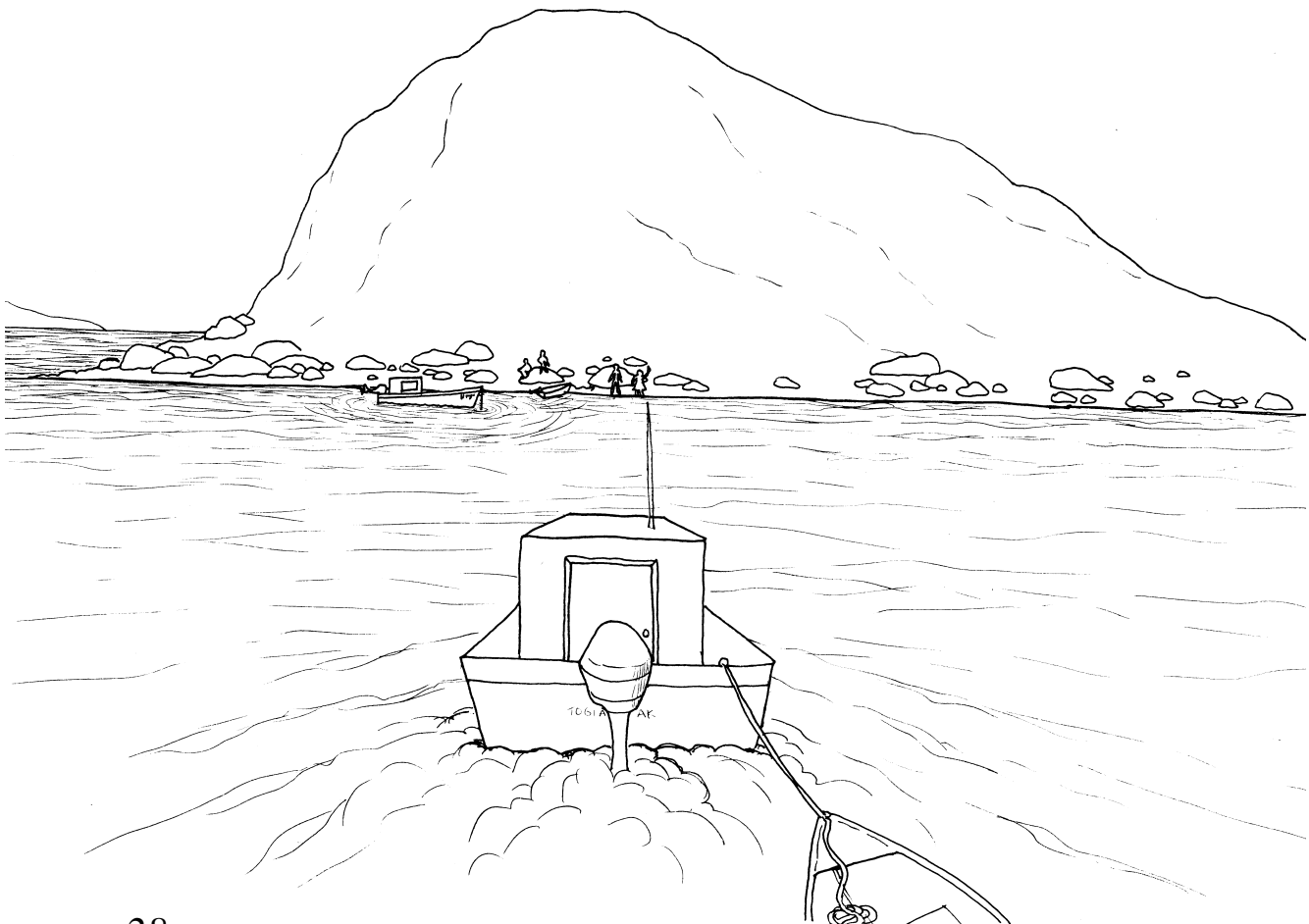
we can stop there on the way back, and then we can look at the faces in the rocks.” Jennie looked at the Stone Lady as they passed to see if she had a face, but she couldn’t see one.

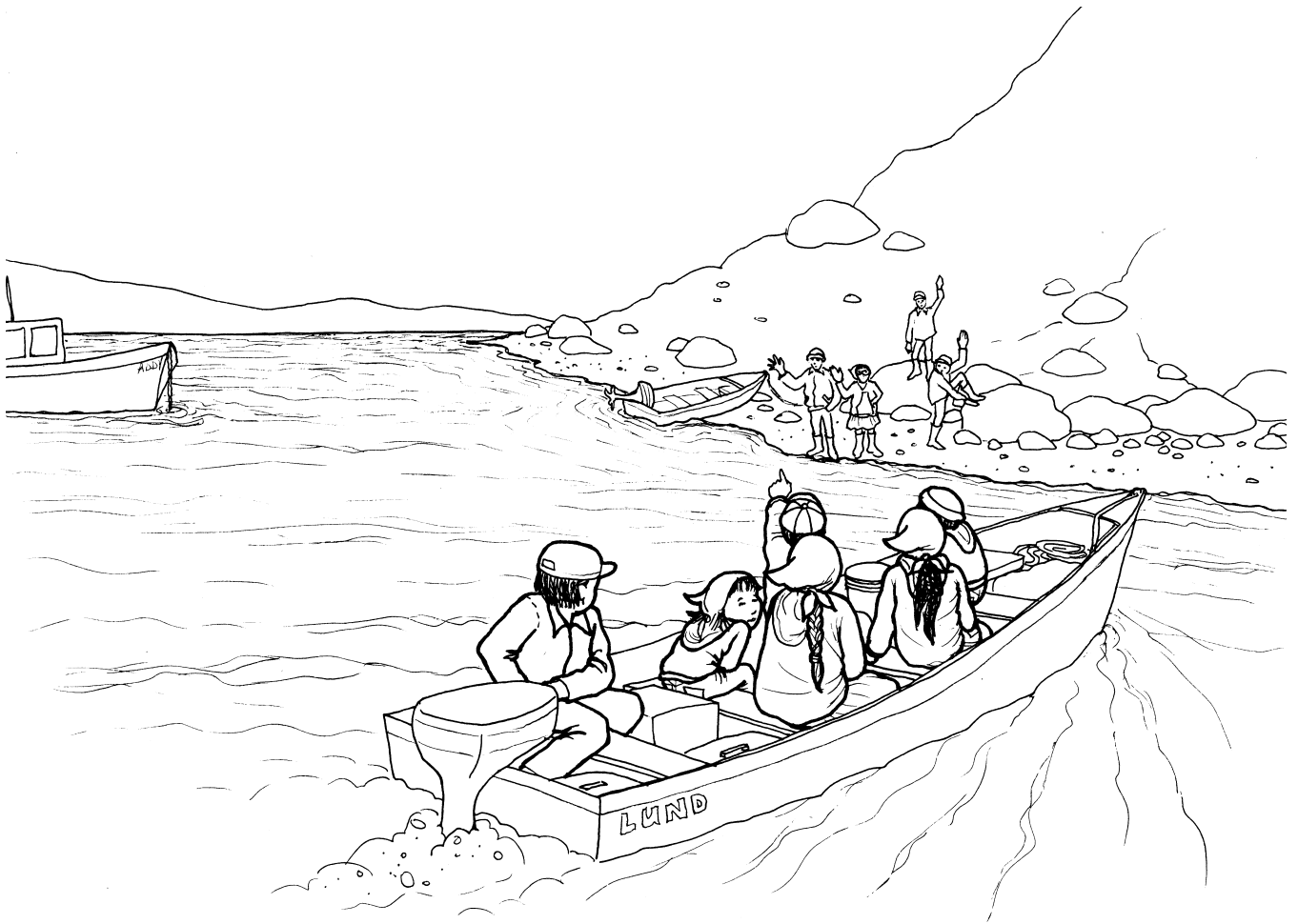
Oscar grinned and lifted both his hands above his head. Jennie felt how tightly she was gripping the side of the boat. Oscar waved his hands back and forth over his head each time the boat bumped over another swell. Jennie let go of the boat. Even though they were going fast and the wind was making the point of her scarf flap, she didn’t fall down. She bent her knees a little, like Oscar, and felt how the bumping of the swells made her rock. Oscar winked at her, and they rode like that till their arms got tired.

V

Summit Island and Annie Blue

After a while, one of the lumps on the bay started getting larger. An island with steep rocky sides jutted out of the bay in front of them. Below the rocks, a flat gray area of smaller rocks and sand spread along the water's edge. Another boat was anchored in the bay, and a Lund like theirs rested partly on the beach and partly in the water. Jennie could see four people waving. One had something green on her head—Annie Blue.





Uncle Willie slowed the motor and steered their boat up beside the other one. While Uncle Willie lowered the anchor, Rudy grabbed the rope to the Lund and pulled it around to the side of the boat. Then, Jennie, Oscar, Mauluq, Auntie Lauren, and Rudy climbed back down into the Lund. Rudy started the Lund's engine, and Uncle Willie handed the cooler and the thermos down to Auntie Lauren and got in the Lund, too.

They headed over the water to the beach. Rudy swerved the Lund around some low rocks along the way. Then Jennie could feel gravel grinding the bottom of the boat as they came up on the beach. The woman with the green scarf walked up to them. When she got close enough, Jennie could see that she was even older than Mauluq.

“I’m ready for some hot coffee,” Annie said.

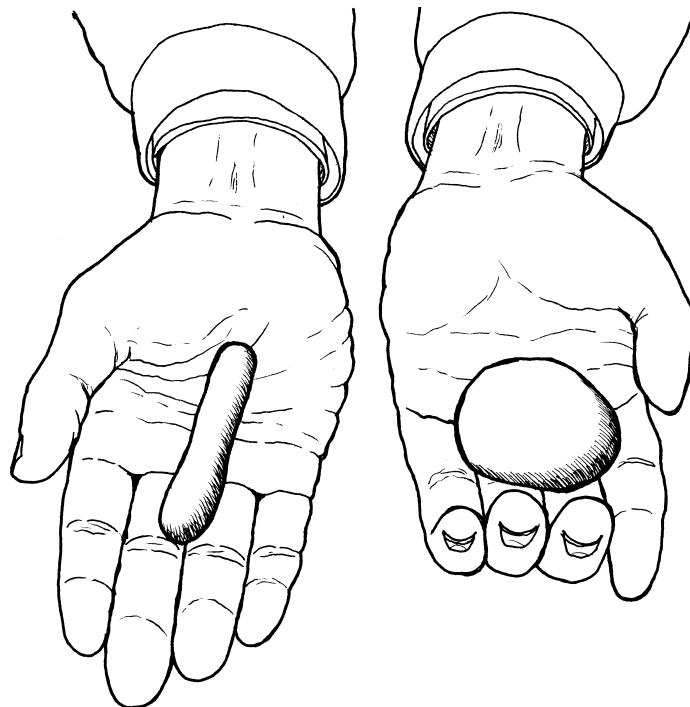
“Get the thermos for Auntie Annie,” Auntie Lauren said. She splashed over the side of the boat and then reached out her hand to help Maurluq. Uncle Willie and Rudy moved up to the middle seat and got out there, too, where the water was shallow. Oscar reached under the bow of the boat and got out a thermos. Then he crawled up on the bow and held it out to Annie. He jumped off the bow, and Jennie followed him.

Annie twisted the cup-shaped lid off the thermos and poured coffee into it. She took a long sip, cupping her hands around it.

“It’s good and hot,” she said, then passed it on to Maurluq.

“This is Jennie,” Maurluq said, “Agnes’ daughter.”

Annie looked at her a little longer than most adults did. Jennie looked down at the beach pebbles beneath her feet.



“I’ll play you a game,” Annie said. “*Kaataaq*. Do you know it?”

“I do,” Oscar said. Annie handed him the thermos.

“Hold this,” she said. “I didn’t ask you.”

“Show me,” said Jennie. Having Annie there felt like having two Maurluqs, and she liked it.

Annie bent over and picked up two rocks, a thin one and a round fat one. She held one out to Jennie, but when Jennie reached for it, she closed her hand around the rock and pulled it away.

“Okay. Here’s the game,” she said. “The thin one’s a woman; the fat one’s a man.” She put her hands with the rocks in them behind her back. “Guess which hand the woman’s in,” she said. Jennie pointed to her left hand, the one that had had the woman rock in it. Annie brought it out from behind her. It held the round, fat man-rock.

Oscar laughed, hugging the thermos in his arms.

“That’s too easy. Try me,” he said.

“You wait,” Maurluq said. She reached for the thermos and poured more coffee in the cup. Annie had her hands behind her back again. Jennie pointed to the right hand this time. Annie brought it forward; it held the man-rock.

“You have to think like the other person to win,” she said.
“That’s what happened to a hunter I heard about.”

Maurluq handed the thermos back to Auntie Lauren and handed the cup to Annie, who sat down on a rock. Oscar sat down on the ground in front of her and Auntie Lauren motioned for





Jennie to sit, too. Murluq perched on the rock with her back to Annie, leaning slightly against her.

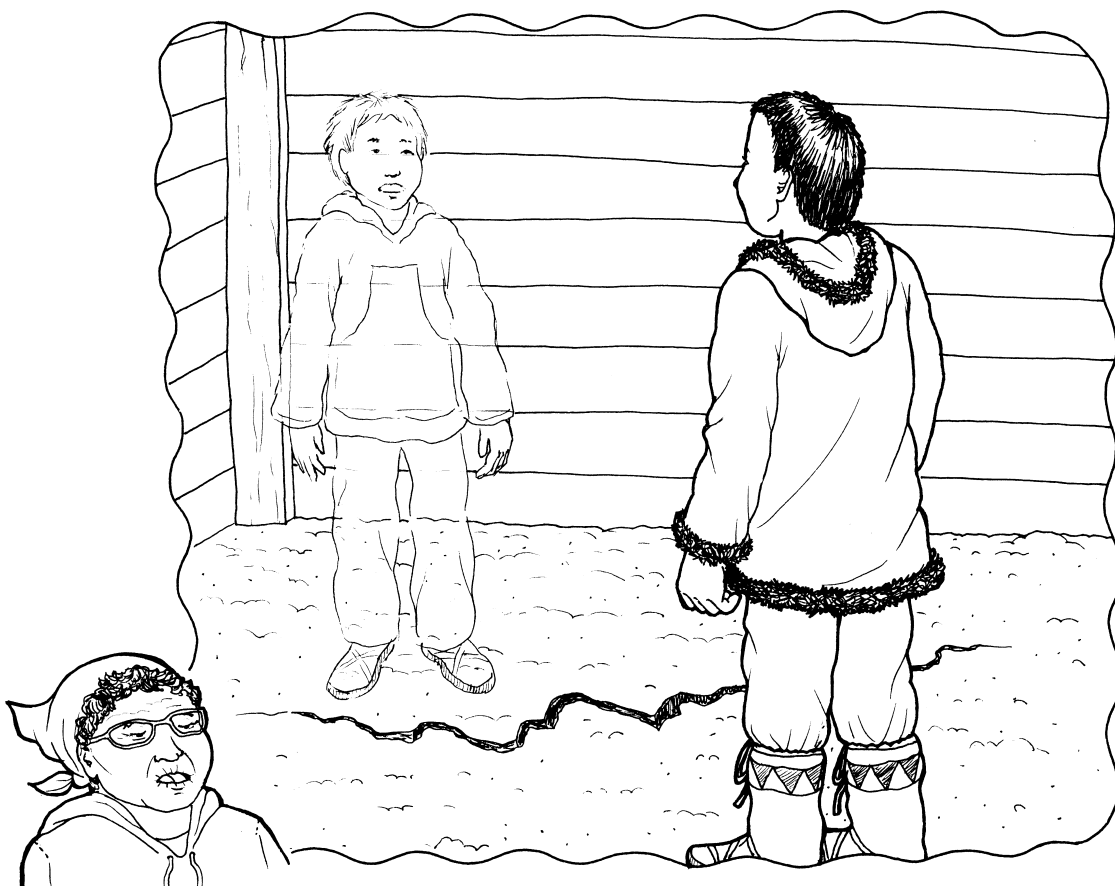
“Here’s what happened,” Annie said. “You can gamble with this game, *kaataaq*, and that’s what this hunter (*nukalpiaq*) did. He lost everything in the game. He first lost his material belongings. Then, when he had nothing more, he lost his family members: his wife and children.”

Jennie raised her hand like she was in school. “He gambled his wife and kids?” she said. Oscar looked at her and raised his finger to his lips.

“They could do that then,” Annie said. “After he lost everything, he went to a place called *Angvaneq*, and there he played *kaataaq* with a ghost (*carayak*).”

Annie stopped talking and sipped her coffee. A white bird flew in a half circle above them then soared back out to sea. “The hunter entered a house in the evening and started to hear a cracking noise in the ground. This cracking noise was actually someone singing, coming closer as he sang a *kaataaq* song. Then a ghost, his opponent, came in and said that he was here to play the game *kaataaq*.” Annie bent toward Jennie and Oscar as she said this. “A crack opened up in the ground between the hunter and the ghost. ‘Whoever loses,’ the ghost said, ‘will be pushed into this crack in the ground.’ So they played, and because the man was playing well against the ghost, the ghost was afraid.

“When the man won, he said to the ghost, ‘Okay, let me push you now.’ When the hunter pushed him, the ghost fell into the



crack. The hunter could hear the echoes of the ghost's body bouncing on the sides.

“As soon as the echoes stopped, the crack closed up. The man went back and won back all his possessions, including his family, his house, his elevated cache, his kayak, and all his other hunting devices. When he was done, he went back home with his family.”

Annie drank a little more of her coffee, then passed the cup back to Lauren. Jennie wondered if there would be more to the story.

“I always like stories where people beat ghosts,” Maurluq said. “We’d better get going now. There aren’t many birds here.”



VI



Yup'ik Counting

They walked back down the beach to the Lund, where Uncle Willie and Rudy were talking to Annie Blue's grandsons. Maurluq and Annie Blue walked slowly, talking in Yup'ik. Auntie Lauren walked ahead of them to join the men by the boat. Oscar tugged at Jennie's hand.

"Come on," he said. He took off, running down the beach, kicking up a few pebbles behind him. Jennie watched him run, but stayed beside Maurluq, listening to the women talk, trying to catch some words she knew. She liked the way the words sounded.

She thought she heard Maurluq say her mother's name, then her name. Both women looked over at her. Annie Blue smiled and nodded and winked at her. Down by the water, near the Lund, Oscar waved and called.

"What did she say, Maurluq?" Jennie asked. She wished that, if she just listened hard enough, the words would make sense to her.

"She said you're just like your mother when she was your age," Maurluq said. "Agnes always asked a lot of questions, too."

"I bet you like school," Annie Blue said. Jennie looked down at the sand and small rocks, trying to walk only on sand and miss the rocks. She did like school, but she guessed that Oscar didn't.

“I wish you could come to my school,” she said to Annie Blue.
“You could teach us Yup’ik.”

They had reached the group of people standing around the Lund. Oscar was helping to load the picnic things, standing inside the Lund while Auntie Lauren handed the cooler over to him. The tide had started to go out and the Lund seemed farther out of the water than it had before. Jennie didn’t want to leave Annie Blue.

“Annie Blue,” she said, “Can you come with us in the boat?”

“I could,” she said. “My big grandsons don’t need any help to spot a seal.”

“If we get lots of eggs,” Maurluq said, “you can help us count them. We can teach the kids to count in Yup’ik.”

Uncle Willie looked out across the bay. The sky arched above them, bright blue, dotted with little puffy clouds. The sun glittered off the water.

“We need to get going,” Uncle Willie said. “The tide’s going out.”

“Annie Blue’s coming with us,” Jennie said. “She’s going to teach us to count in Yup’ik.”

Standing in the Lund, Oscar stopped what he was doing and looked at her. “I already know how,” he said. Jennie wondered if he was mad at her for not running with him.

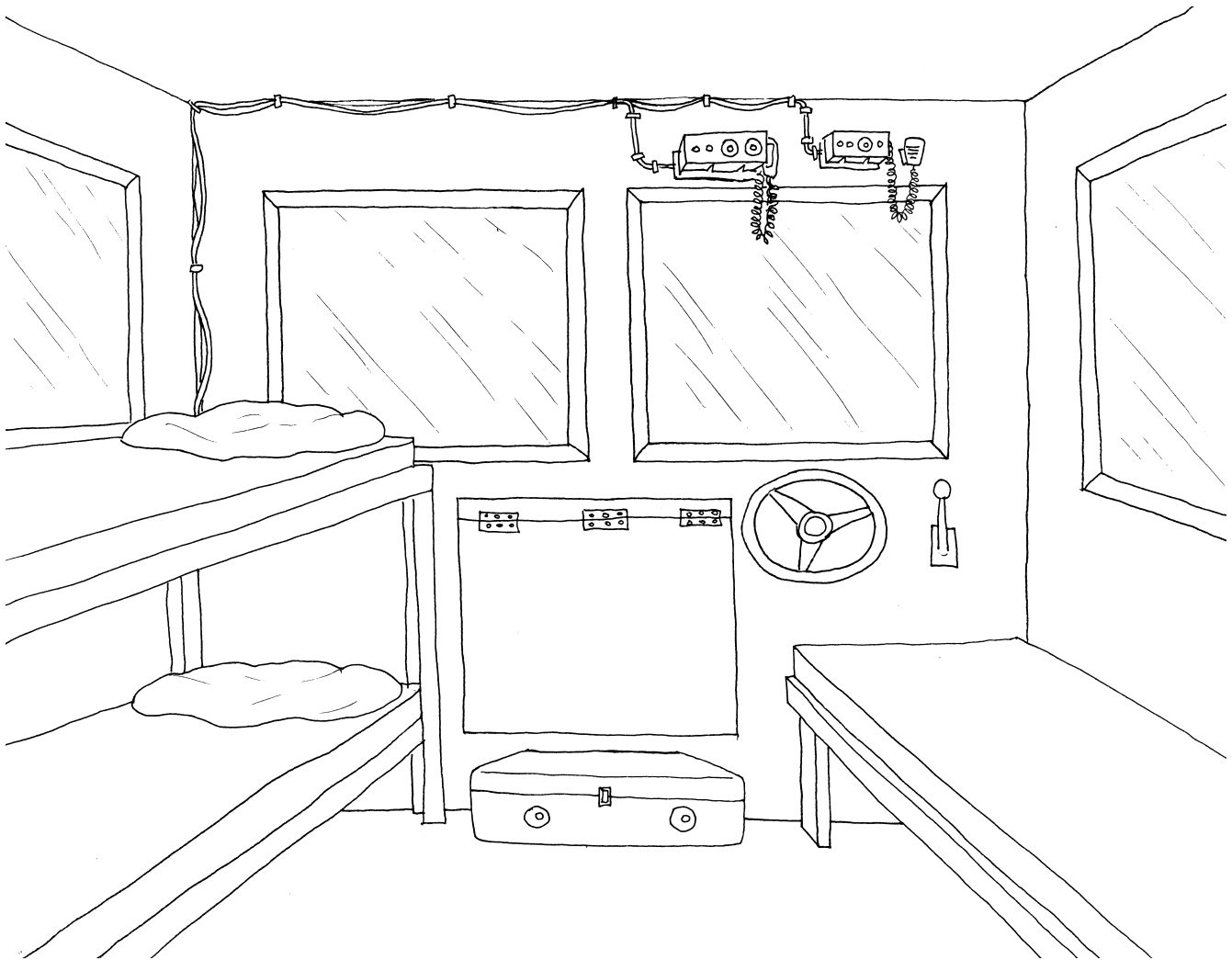
“You can help teach her,” Maurluq said.

They climbed in the Lund, this time with Annie Blue sitting next to Maurluq. Rudy started the engine, and Annie Blue's grandsons pushed on the bow until the Lund floated free in the water. Then Rudy revved up the engine so that it whined, and they skimmed over the water to the big boat, out where the rocks stuck up.

When they got in the boat, Annie and Maurluq stood for a while by the rail, watching Annie's grandsons push their Lund back out into the water. Oscar followed Uncle Willie and Rudy up to the wheel. The engine started, gurgling, making the boat vibrate a little. Oscar called to Jennie.

"Come on up," he called. The boat began to move backwards, slowly. Jennie walked across the deck, feeling the boat move under her. It made her feel a little dizzy. She reached out and grabbed the rails alongside the ladder and began to climb. She could feel the boat moving forward now and picking up speed on the wide water of the bay.

When she got to the top of the ladder, Oscar reached down and held out his hand to her and pulled her up the last step. The wheelhouse was full of switches and dials. Uncle Willie sat on a high cushioned stool and held a wheel like a car's wheel, but bigger. He watched the water ahead of him through a low windshield. Beside him, the black mouthpiece of a two-way radio dangled. Rudy stood next to him, watching the water, too.



Oscar was standing on a metal box against the front of the wheelhouse, so he could see. He motioned to Jennie to come up beside him. It was noisy and windy there; she could feel the wind tugging at her scarf. Oscar leaned over to her.

“I do, too, know how to count,” he said. “I can add, too.”

“I know that,” Jennie said. She had to shout just a little because of the wind. “I just want to learn Yup’ik,” she said.

“We learn it at school,” Oscar said. “Don’t you?”

“No,” she said. “Our teacher doesn’t know it. But we learn some Japanese.”

They leaned against the wall in front of them. When the wind didn’t blow on her, Jennie could feel the sun on her face, nearly warm.

“Are you kids up there?” Maurluq called from the deck below them. “We have hot chocolate.”

Oscar looked at Jennie and opened his eyes till she could see white all around the brown pupils. “Yum!” he said, and hopped off the box. Jennie hopped off, too, waved at Uncle Willie and Rudy and followed Oscar back down the ladder.

In the cabin, the three women—Auntie Lauren, Annie Blue, and Maurluq—sat at the table with mugs (*saskaq*) in their hands. The whole room smelled sweet and chocolatey. Auntie Lauren pushed two mugs toward Jennie and Oscar.

“I hear you’re going to learn some Yup’ik, Jennie,” Auntie Lauren said.



“I want to,” Jennie said.

“She only knows Japanese,” Oscar said.

“So she can teach us,” Annie Blue said. She had taken her scarf off and her hair was short and dark and curled up off her forehead.

“Okay, kids,” she said, “Stand there. Now hold out your right hand.”

Jennie and Oscar held out their right hands. At the table, Annie held her right hand out toward them in a fist. “If we want to count the people here, we start with this little finger.” She unfolded the little finger on her right hand. “*Atauciq*,” she said. “It means ‘one.’”

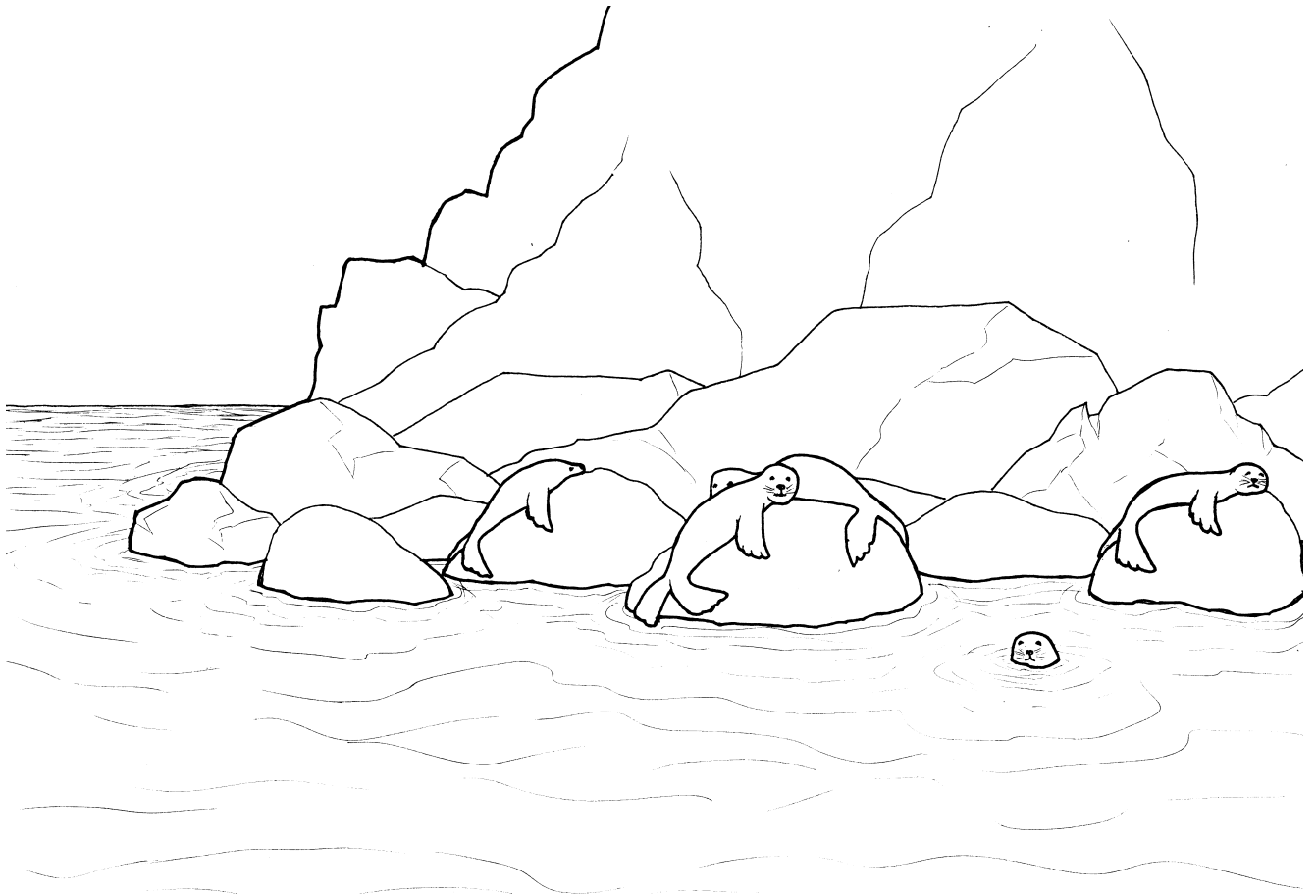
Jennie and Oscar extended their little fingers.

“Then we count over to the thumb,” Annie said. Looking around, she unfolded one finger for each person in the room, then held the right hand forward in front of her. “*Talliman*,” she said. “It means ‘one hand’.” Then she held out the other hand with five fingers extended. She clapped her hands together. “That’s what we call *qula*. Ten,” she said. “Now we go to the feet.”

She moved one foot forward. “*Akimiaq*,” she said. She moved the other foot forward. “*Yuinaq*. Twenty. So we count using the body. We group everything in fives and twenties. Now you do it.”

Jennie and Oscar practiced saying the words and holding out their hands and feet. Out the window of the boat, they could see islands going by.

“Look,” Auntie Lauren said, “Seals.”



Jennie and Oscar went to the window. On the rocks around the small island they were passing, they could see gray-brown seals sunning on the rocks. Some held their heads in the air, watching the boat. A few swam in the water nearby. They popped their heads up out of the water to look at the boat, then dove back under the surface again.

“*Talliman*,” Jennie said, holding out her right hand.

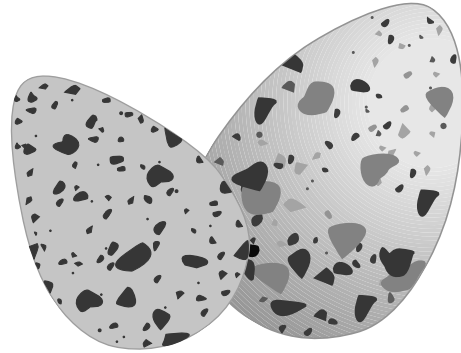
“*Qula* on the rocks,” Oscar said. “No, *atauciq* went in the water.”

Annie turned to Maurluq and said something in Yup’ik. Jennie looked at Oscar to see if he understood. He shrugged and turned back to look at the seals on the rocky island now slipping away behind them.

“Some day, I’m going back to hunt them,” he said.

VII

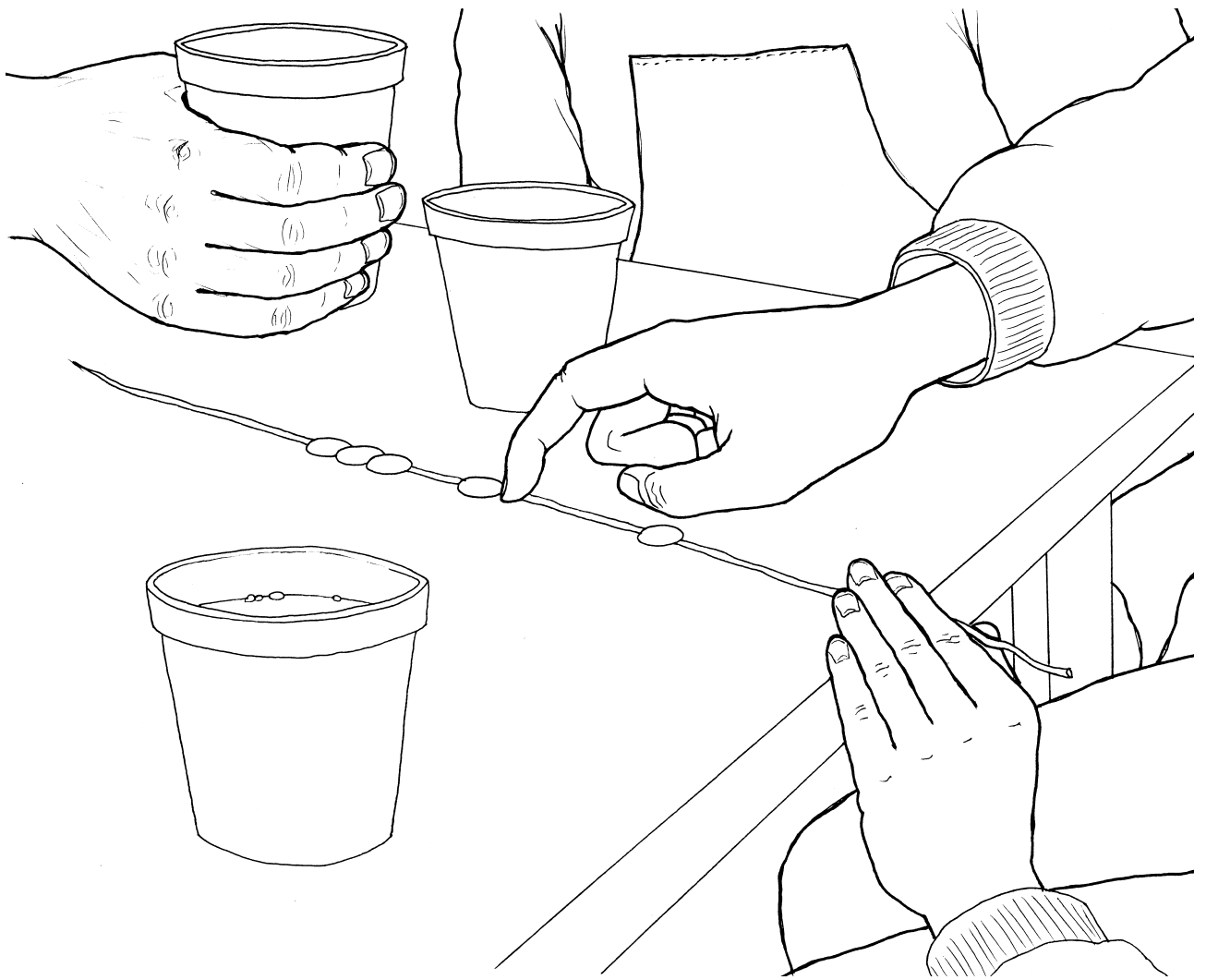
A Yup'ik Abacus



They rode over open water for a long time. Jennie and Oscar sat on a long bench by the table, playing *kaataq*. From time to time, they would kneel on the seat to look out the window at the water going by, counting birds or seals or even people in other boats. Auntie Lauren and Maurluq and Annie Blue took grass out of the big white bucket and put layers in the bottoms of all the other buckets, even the little ones.

“Jennie,” Maurluq said. “Tell us about Japanese. How do they count?”

“In school, we learned about the abacus,” Jennie said. “It has beads and you push them along a wire to count. Like this.” She took a long strand of beach grass from a bucket and stretched it flat on the table. Auntie Lauren had gotten out a bag of M&Ms and passed it to Maurluq. Maurluq took a few and handed them to Jennie. Jennie took five M&Ms out of the bag and placed them in a



line along the strand of grass, separating four yellow and red ones from the fifth one, a blue one.

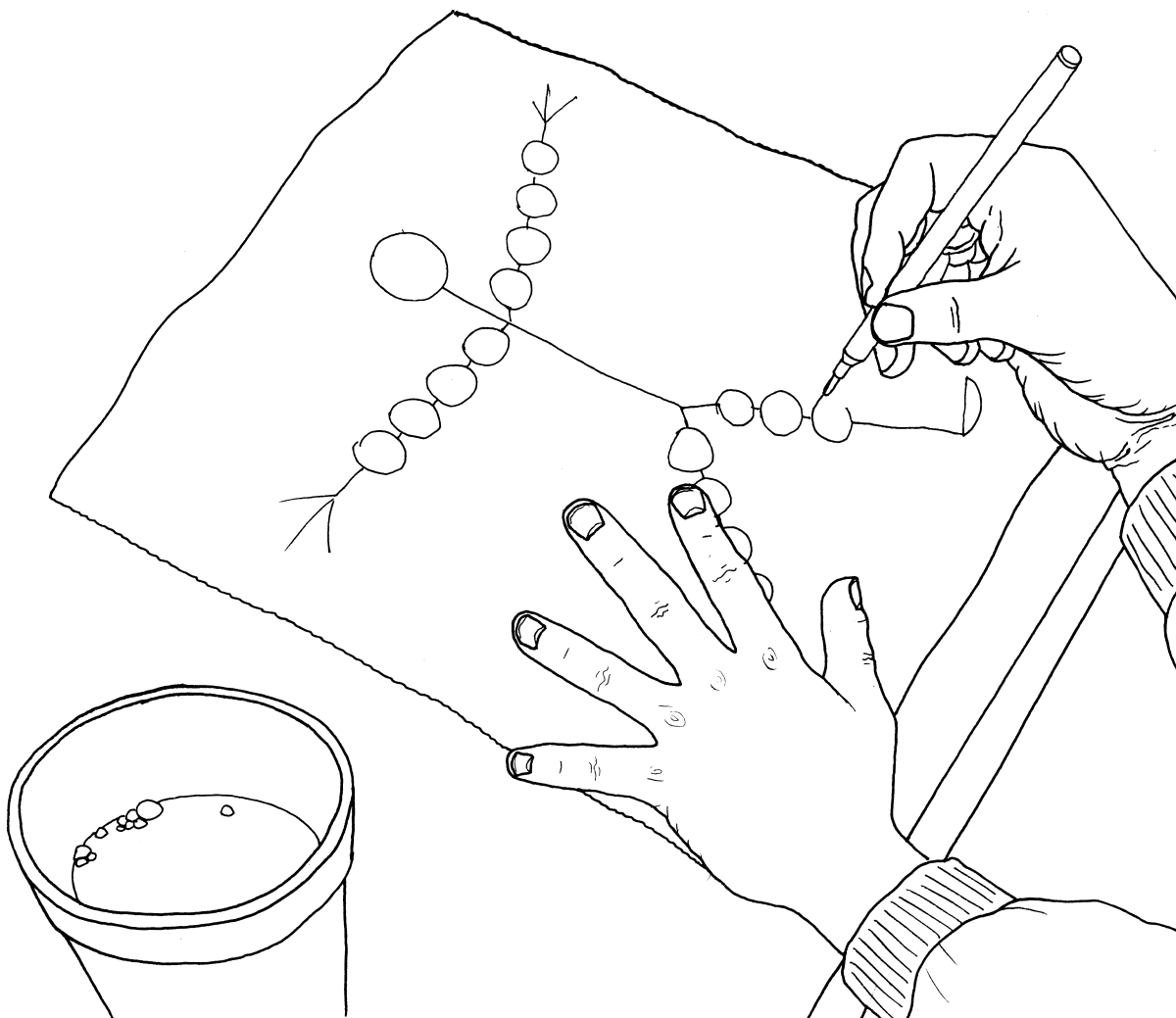
“You push these up like this.” She pushed four M&Ms along the piece of grass. “Then you push this one for five.” She pushed the blue candy down and pushed the other four away from it along the strand of grass. “There are lots of these beads on wires. They’re in something like a picture frame.”

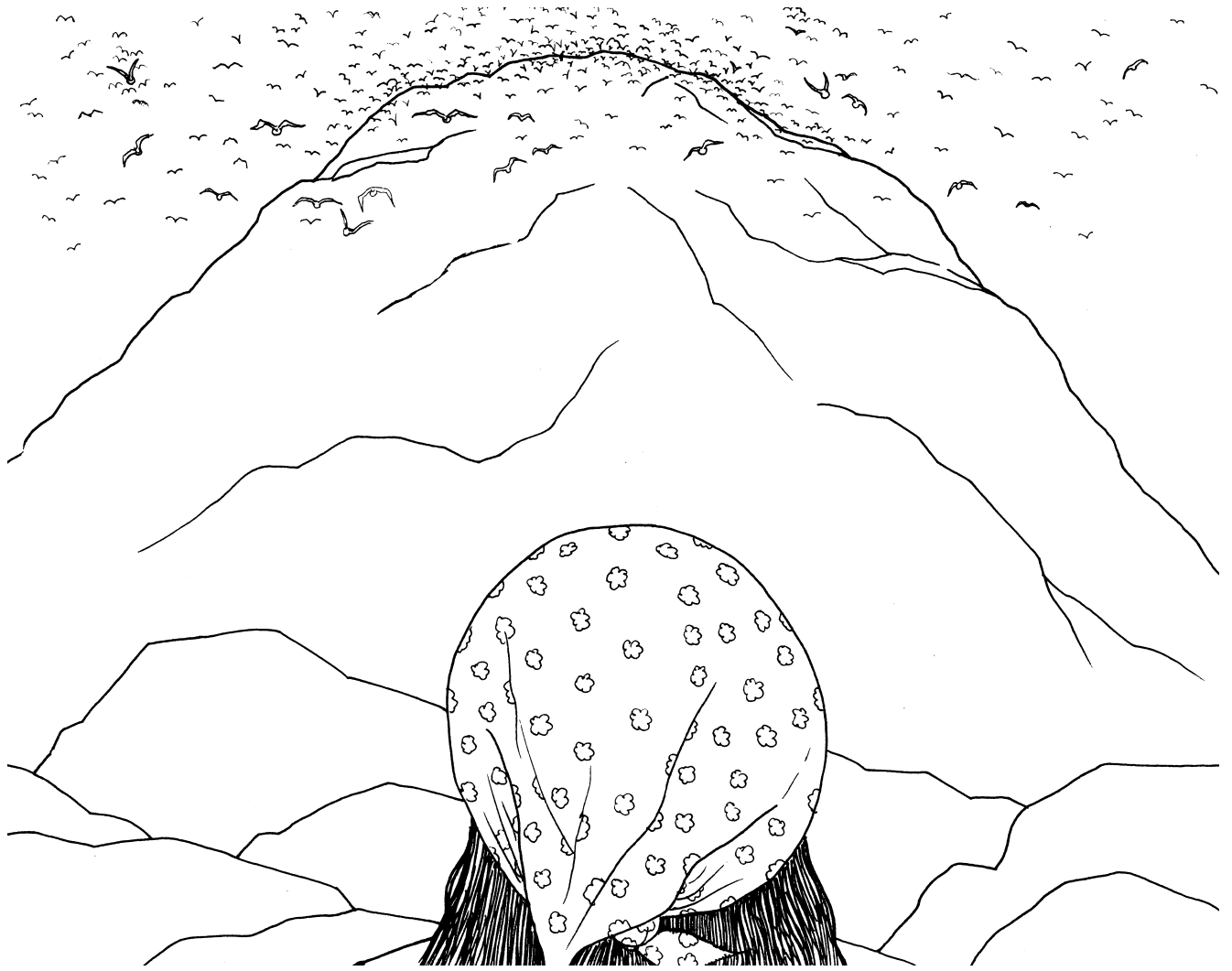
“They count in fives like we do,” said Annie Blue.

“Look,” said Oscar, “I’m an abacus!” He began counting in Yup’ik, holding out his arms and legs. “We could make a Yup’ik abacus that looks like a person.” He pulled a paper towel off the roll on the table, then looked around for something to write with.

“Here,” Maurluq said. She handed him a felt-tipped pen from a jar of pens and small tools at her end of the table. Oscar drew a stick figure, with circles on the arms and legs. For hands, he drew five lines sticking out at the end of the arms.

“See,” he said. “These circles are the beads. You can move them up to the hands.”





Jennie watched Oscar work. She didn't know he could draw. She didn't know he liked anything that was like school. "That's great," she said. "You should show that to your teacher next year. Maybe you could really make it and count on it."

Uncle Willie called down, "Jennie, look over there."

Jennie and Oscar went to the other side of the boat and looked out the window. An island like a big black rock stuck up out of the sea. The rock looked blurry; something white hovered over it like a moving cloud.

"What's all that white?" Jennie asked. Oscar didn't answer; he was staring at the rock, too.

As they got closer to the big island, Jennie could tell that the white cloud was actually birds flying around the rocky cliffs. They made a high, squealing chatter, like a crowd of people talking all at once. Uncle Willie slowed the boat as they got nearer. He steered the boat around big rocks sticking up out of the water near the island where little waves splashed white.

“We’ll anchor here,” Uncle Willie said.

Auntie Lauren and Maurluq picked up the buckets and carried them to the side of the boat. Jennie carried one of the smaller buckets and Oscar carried the other one. Oscar leaned close to Jennie.

“I’m going to climb the rock,” he whispered. He looked back over his shoulder at Uncle Willie stepping down from the



wheelhouse. Jennie looked up at the rock. The gray jagged sides of the island went straight up. She could see a yellow rope hanging down the side, but she couldn't see the top. White birds with yellow beaks, black birds with white bellies, and smaller white birds with long black-tipped wings flew back and forth over them.

Maurluq, Annie Blue, and Auntie Lauren handed the buckets over the side of the boat to Rudy, standing in the Lund. Oscar walked over with his bucket and swung his leg over the side. Uncle Willie reached out from behind him and held his jacket.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Egging," Oscar said. "Up the rope."

Jennie looked at Oscar then over at the island. Where the rope hung down, the rock looked steep and bumpy with no place to stand. Auntie Lauren handed the last bucket to Rudy, then turned to Uncle Willie and Oscar.

"They can stay in the Lund with me," she said.

Uncle Willie looked at Oscar. Oscar stuck his chest out a little, not looking at Uncle Willie, but Jennie thought she saw him look sideways at her quickly, as if he were just showing off.

"Annie Blue and I will stay in the boat," Maurluq said. "We can talk or take a nap if there's no kids here."

Oscar began to grin. Jennie wanted to stay with Maurluq and Annie Blue, but she wanted to get closer to the birds, too. And she didn't want Oscar to think she was scared.

"Okay, then," Uncle Willie said. He nodded at Oscar and at Jennie, and they followed him into the Lund.

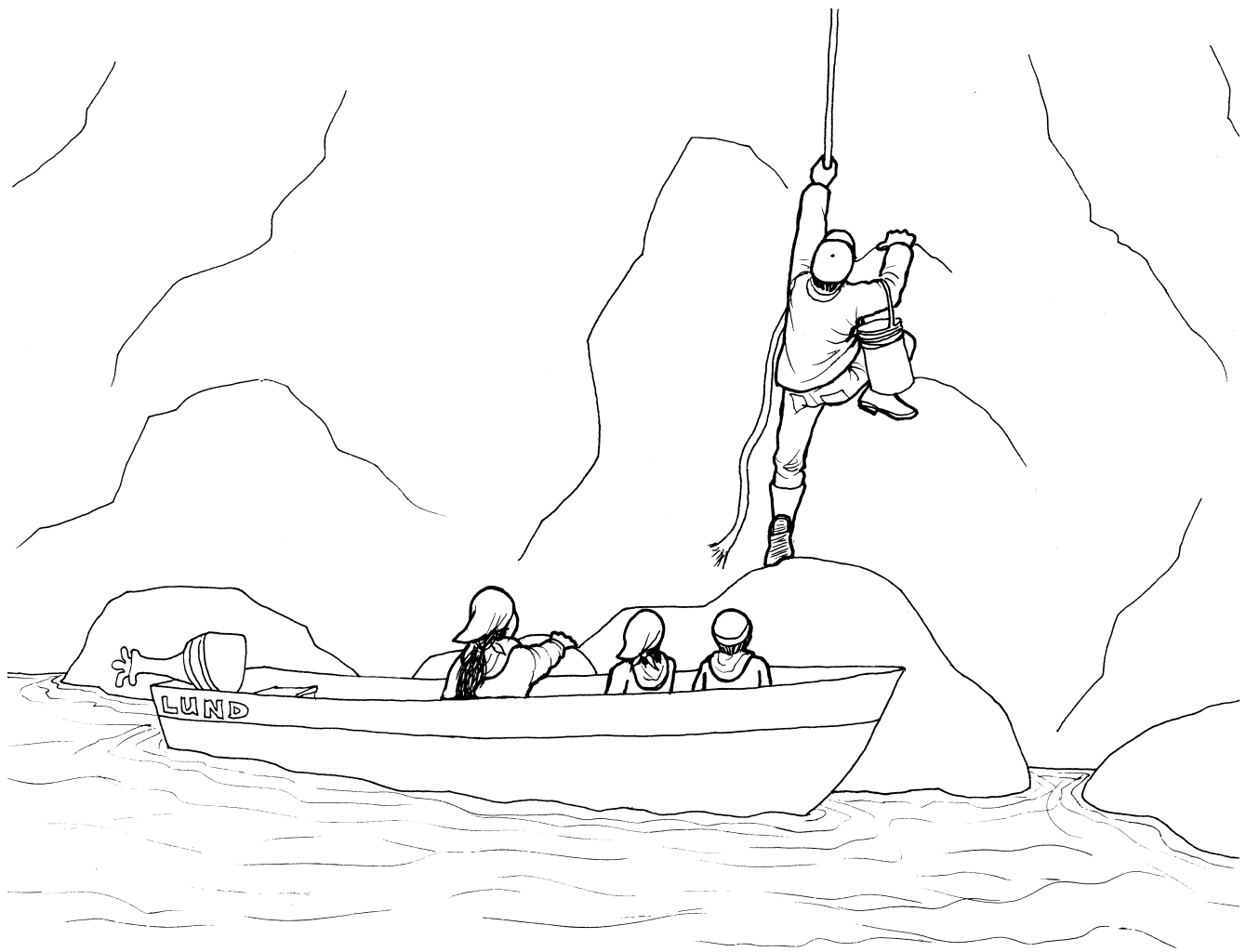
VIII



Gathering the Eggs

When they got to the island, Jennie realized that there was hardly any beach at all, just jumbled up rocks and pebbles. Rudy ran the Lund up to a pebbly area, and he and Uncle Willie got out. Jennie could hear the crunch of pebbles under their feet wherever they stepped. Auntie Lauren reached for a rock sticking up from the beach and held the boat steady.

Rudy and Uncle Willie each took a couple of buckets stacked together, reaching them out of the bottom of the Lund. Then, holding the handles in the crooks of their elbows, they began to climb up the rocks. The men reached up and held onto the yellow rope with one hand and reached for the rocks above them with the other. They put their feet in dents in the rock that seemed almost like steps made for them. The rope swayed back and forth against the rocks as the men climbed. From where they sat in the boat, holding the rocks, Jennie could almost grab the end of the rope. Oscar leaned out of the Lund, reaching for the rope, then turned back to Jennie and laughed.



Jennie sat by Auntie Lauren, watching the men climb and looking around at the rocks and the birds. At each step the men took, she could hear pebbles clattering down the side of the cliff. The sides of the rock were streaked with something that looked like white paint. Every so often she could smell dead fish.

“I want to see a kittiwake,” Jennie said.

“Here, kitty,” Oscar called.

“Look up there,” said Auntie Lauren. Above them a bird soared. From underneath, it was as white as if it had been carved out of soap, with two black feet tucked against its belly and black tips on each wing.

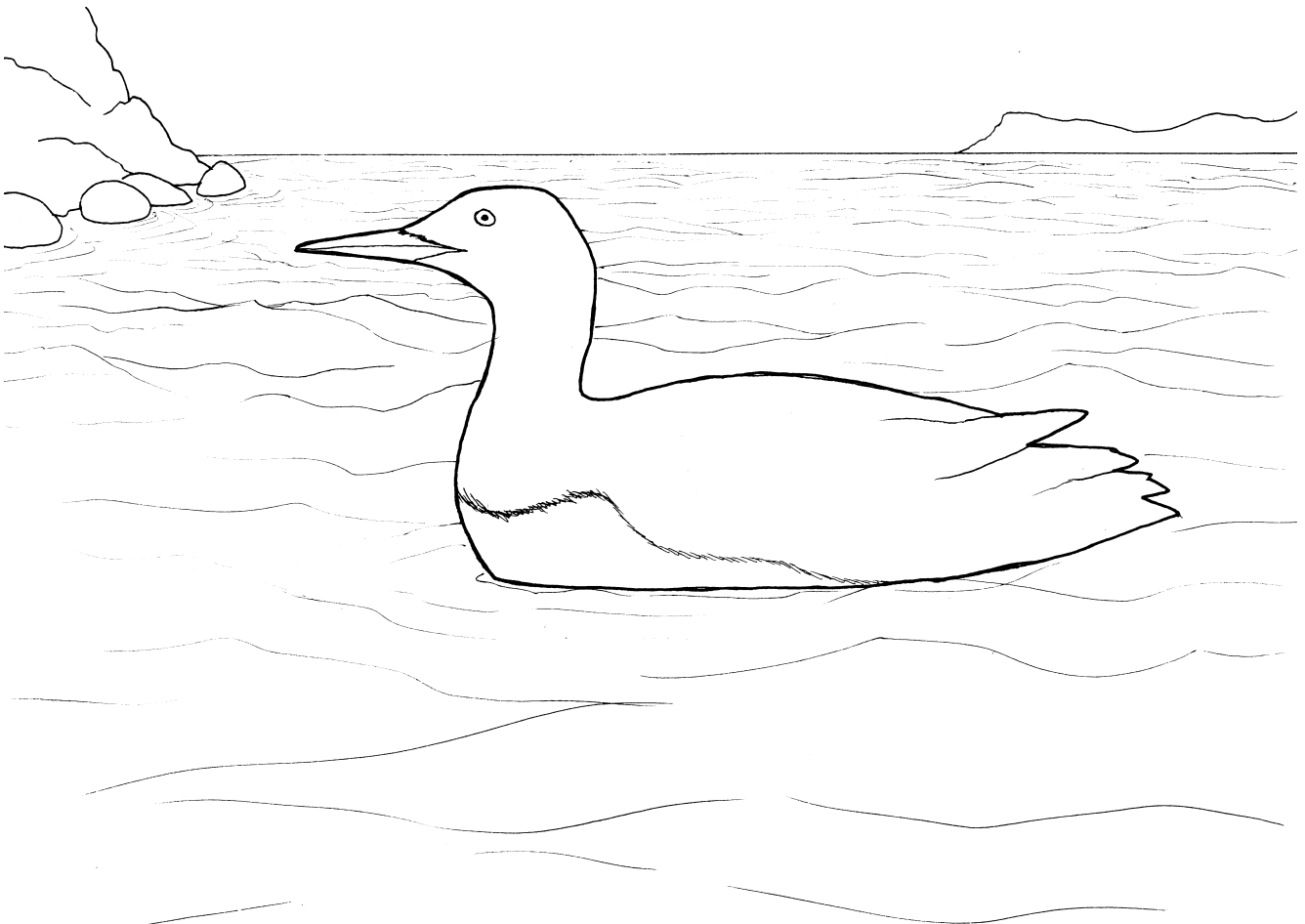
“See that black bird on the water?” Auntie Lauren said. A bird bobbed in the water just off shore. It was dark on top and white underneath. It looked to Jennie like pictures of penguins she’d seen at school, only it seemed smaller and skinnier. Suddenly, it dipped its head and disappeared under the water.

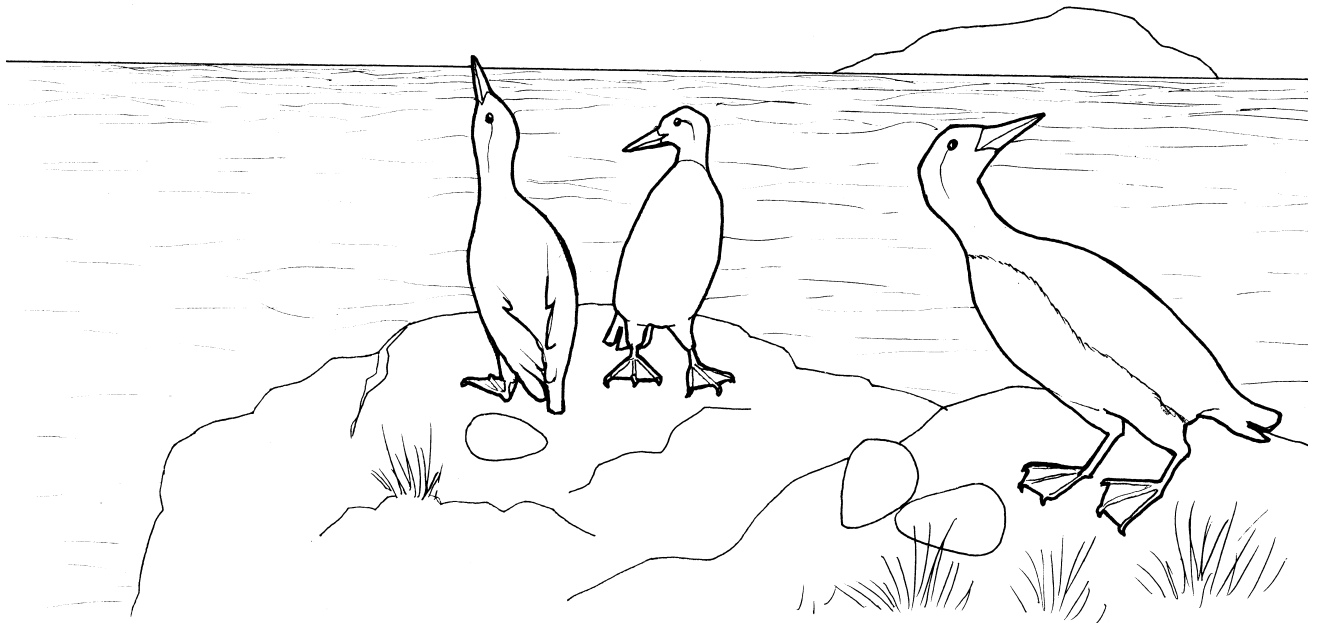
“That’s a murre. It’s gone to get a fish for its lunch,” Auntie Lauren said.

“I’m hungry, too,” Jennie said. Oscar kicked at one of the small buckets stored under the seat where he sat.

“Me, too,” he said.

Auntie Lauren reached into her pocket and pulled out a plastic bag with something dark in it.





“Mmmmm. Dried fish,” Oscar said.

Auntie Lauren handed them each a piece and they chewed on the tough, salty strips of fish until it softened in their mouths. Then, they pulled the boat around the rocky island, grabbing from rock to rock, looking for eggs or egg-shaped pebbles for their small buckets. Jennie could hear the voices of the men climbing above them. From time to time, Jennie looked back at the water and at the boat anchored out there where Maurluq and Annie Blue were.

“Why aren’t we finding any eggs here, Auntie?” Jennie asked.

Auntie Lauren pointed up the cliff where the birds flew back and forth, away from and back to the island.

“Those birds have their nests way up there on ledges of rock. They want to be high up so no animals can get their eggs,” Auntie Lauren said.

“But we get them,” said Oscar.

“Yes, we do,” said Auntie Lauren. “But we don’t take them all. We leave some of them for the birds.”

“But there are no trees here,” Jennie said. “They can’t build nests.”

“They don’t need trees,” Auntie Lauren said. “They lay their eggs on the rocks where they’re hard to reach. The murres don’t even build nests. They just put their eggs right on the rock and sit on them.”

“Murre eggs look like ice cream cones,” Jennie said. “Maurluq said they don’t roll off the cliff.”

After a while, she could hear the men coming down the cliff. Auntie Lauren and Oscar pulled the boat right under the place where the rope hung down, and they sat watching the men. Rudy and Uncle Willie still had the buckets hanging from their hands,



heavier now. They lowered themselves down the rope, step by step, until they got to the place where they had started up the rock.

Uncle Willie had just barely touched his foot to the ground when he set his bucket on the ground and reached up for Rudy's.

He set that bucket on the ground beside his bucket and Rudy climbed back up the rope. Uncle Willie lifted the full buckets into the Lund and Auntie Lauren shoved them under the seats by Jennie and Oscar's feet. Uncle Willie went back to the rope where Rudy was climbing back down with another bucket. Willie took the bucket from Rudy, who let go of the rope and hopped down the last two feet.

Jennie looked in the big buckets by her feet. They were full of eggs mixed in with beach grass. Jennie noticed that the eggs were pointy and blue.

"No one told me that murre eggs were blue," Jennie said.

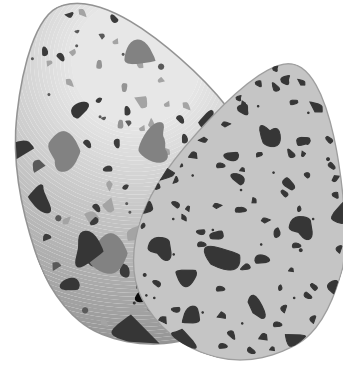
"Sort of blue," Uncle Willie said. "They blend in with the rock." Uncle Willie stood on the shore and put one foot on the side of the Lund and held it steady while Rudy climbed in and sat on the seat next to Oscar. Oscar showed Rudy his small bucket.

"That's a good bunch of eggs," Rudy said, picking out a small round rock from Oscar's bucket. He held it in his hand, then put his hand behind his back, as if he were playing *kaataaq*. "*Kaataaq* eggs."

"I can use them for my Yup'ik abacus," Oscar said.

"I didn't know there was one," Rudy said.

"I'll show you," Oscar said. "I drew it on the boat. You can help me make it."



Counting and Sorting the Eggs

As Rudy started the motor of the Lund, Jennie looked out at the bigger boat, anchored off shore. Maurluq and Annie Blue stood by the stern, waving. The boat had turned around since they had anchored it to go to the island and was now pointing away from them, as if heading out to sea.

“Auntie, the boat has turned,” Jennie said.

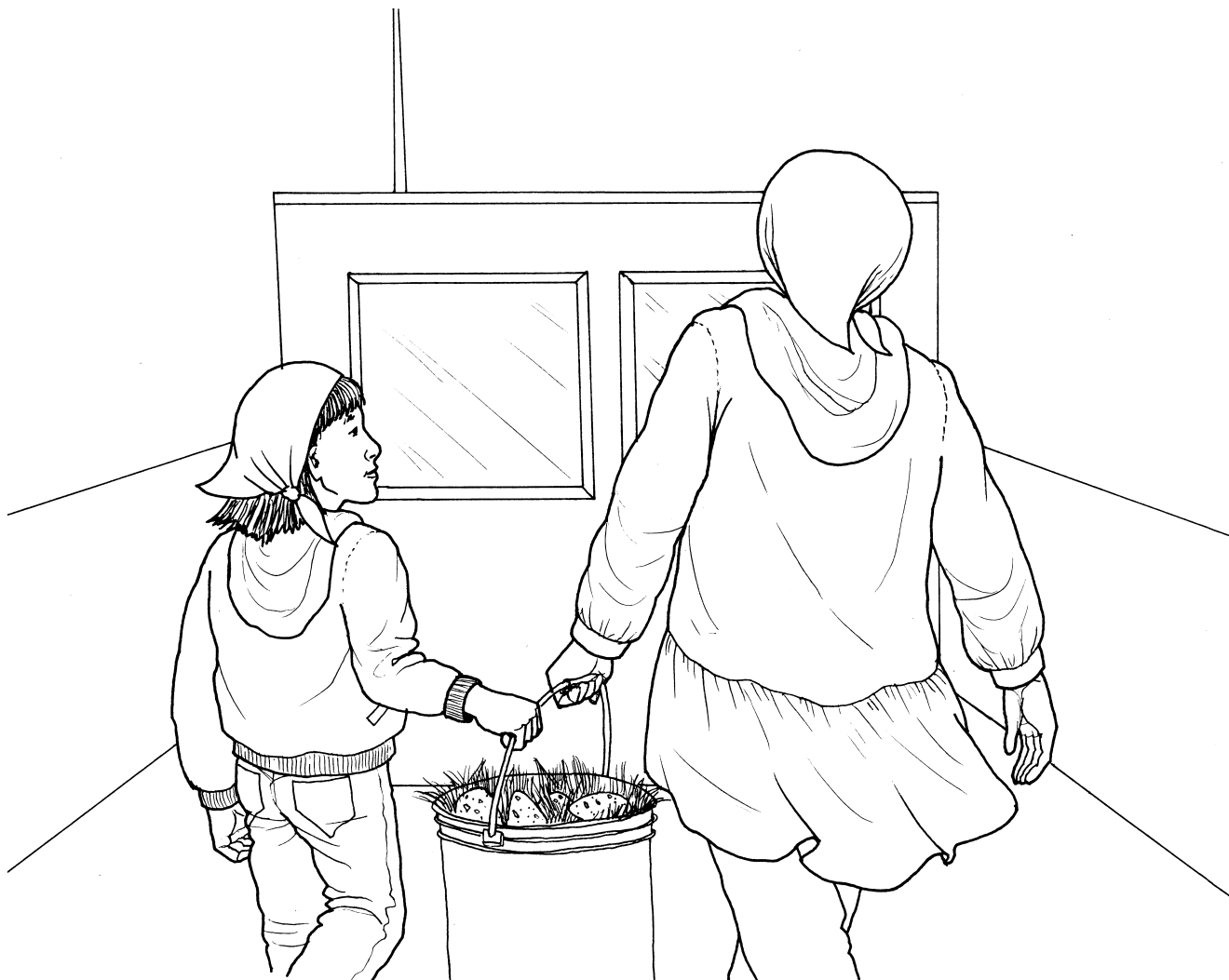
A little wave washed along the shore as the Lund’s motor churned and the Lund began to back away from the island.

“The tide’s coming in,” Oscar said. “See the rocks?”

Another little wave broke on the rock a little below the place where Auntie Lauren had held on to it.

“We’d better head back,” Uncle Willie said. “We need to get home while the tide’s high enough.”

They rode the Lund back to the bigger boat, going slowly so the eggs wouldn’t break. When they got there, Uncle Willie lifted the buckets of eggs one by one up to Maurluq and Annie Blue, who leaned over the side of the boat and reached for them. Then Jennie



and Oscar climbed out of the Lund and into the boat, followed by Auntie Lauren. Uncle Willie tied the bow of the Lund to the back of the big boat while Rudy shut down the engine. Then they both climbed into the boat, too.

“Help me with this,” Maurluq said to Oscar. She bent over and picked up the wire handle of the bucket and Oscar bent over and put his hand on the handle, too. Walking carefully, they carried the bucket of eggs between them to the cabin of the boat.

“You can help me, Jennie,” Annie Blue said. Jennie reached down and grasped the wire handle of the second bucket near where Annie Blue held it. She could feel the bucket jiggle a little as they walked, but she was surprised that it didn’t feel heavy at all. Annie

Blue's hand on the wire looked wrinkled, with dark veins like a net running under her skin. Annie Blue walked smoothly over the deck of the boat, carrying the weight of the bucket so that Jennie hardly had to do a thing. Annie Blue and Maurluq were stronger than they looked, Jennie thought. She wondered if anyone else knew this. Uncle Willie did, she knew. He did whatever Maurluq asked. When she thought of it, so did other people.

In the cabin, Maurluq and Oscar emptied out the rocks from the small buckets. Oscar counted out twenty small ones and arranged them on the table in an X.

"These are for my abacus," he said.



Maurluq and Annie Blue got out the last of the beach grass and lined the small buckets. Then they sat down with the big buckets in front of them.

They put the two smaller buckets and the bucket that had been full of sea grass beside them.

Annie Blue pulled out a blue-and-speckled murre egg and laid it gently in the grass in one of the smaller buckets.

“It’s blue like you,” Jennie said.

“And it’s my favorite kind of egg,” Annie Blue said.

“I like the kittiwake eggs,” Maurluq said. She handed another blue egg to Jennie to put in the other small bucket.

“Oscar, come help,” Jennie said. Oscar kneeled on the bench by the table, moving the rocks around and drawing on the paper towel with the felt-tip pen.

“I’m working on my abacus,” he said. “Rudy’s going to help me build it. He can make anything he wants to.”

Auntie Lauren, who had been doing something at the front of the cabin, walked over to Oscar and looked at what he was doing. She had refilled the mugs with hot chocolate and put one down on the table by Oscar. He looked up at her quickly, then focussed back on his drawing.

“Well, I think the four of us women can sort these eggs,” Auntie Lauren said.

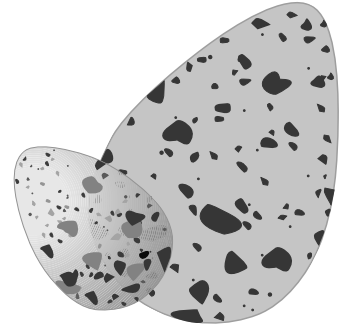
Jennie liked to be one of “us women,” especially these women. Maurluq and Annie Blue and Auntie Lauren handed her the eggs, and she nestled them in the buckets, being sure that they didn’t bump against each other and that there was plenty of sea grass between them. The eggs felt smooth and a little warm, still.

Out the window, Jennie could see the tops of islands as they passed. She recognized the one where they had seen the seals earlier. As she stood by the buckets, cradling the eggs in her hands and lowering them into the sea grass, she could feel the boat’s motor vibrating her feet and could hear the hum of the motor.

Maurluq started singing softly, a slow rhythmic song in Yup’ik. Annie Blue and Auntie Lauren sang along, repeating what Maurluq had sung. Their singing reminded Jennie of the hum of the boat motor and the rhythm of the waves that she had been hearing all day. She put the last egg Auntie Lauren handed her into its bucket, then sat on the bench by the table. She sipped her hot chocolate and leaned against Maurluq, feeling the smooth cotton of her *gaspeq* and how the sound of Maurluq’s singing made her throat and chest tickle like she wanted to sing, too. The cabin was warm and the hot chocolate was warm, too, and she felt sleepy.



Heading Back and Distributing the Eggs



Jennie felt something tapping the top of her head. She pushed her head closer to Maurluq's warm *qaspeq* sleeve, keeping her eyes shut.

"Wake up," Oscar said. "It's a whale."

She opened her eyes just a bit. She could see the zigzag shadows of her eyelashes.

"Where?" she said. She didn't feel like moving, but she wanted to see the whale.

"You have to look," Oscar said. "It's gone under water."

"She's sleeping," Maurluq said. "Let her sleep."

Maurluq put her arm around Jennie. Jennie could see the flowers on Maurluq's *qaspeq* sleeve and she felt warm and cozy, but her eyes stayed open.

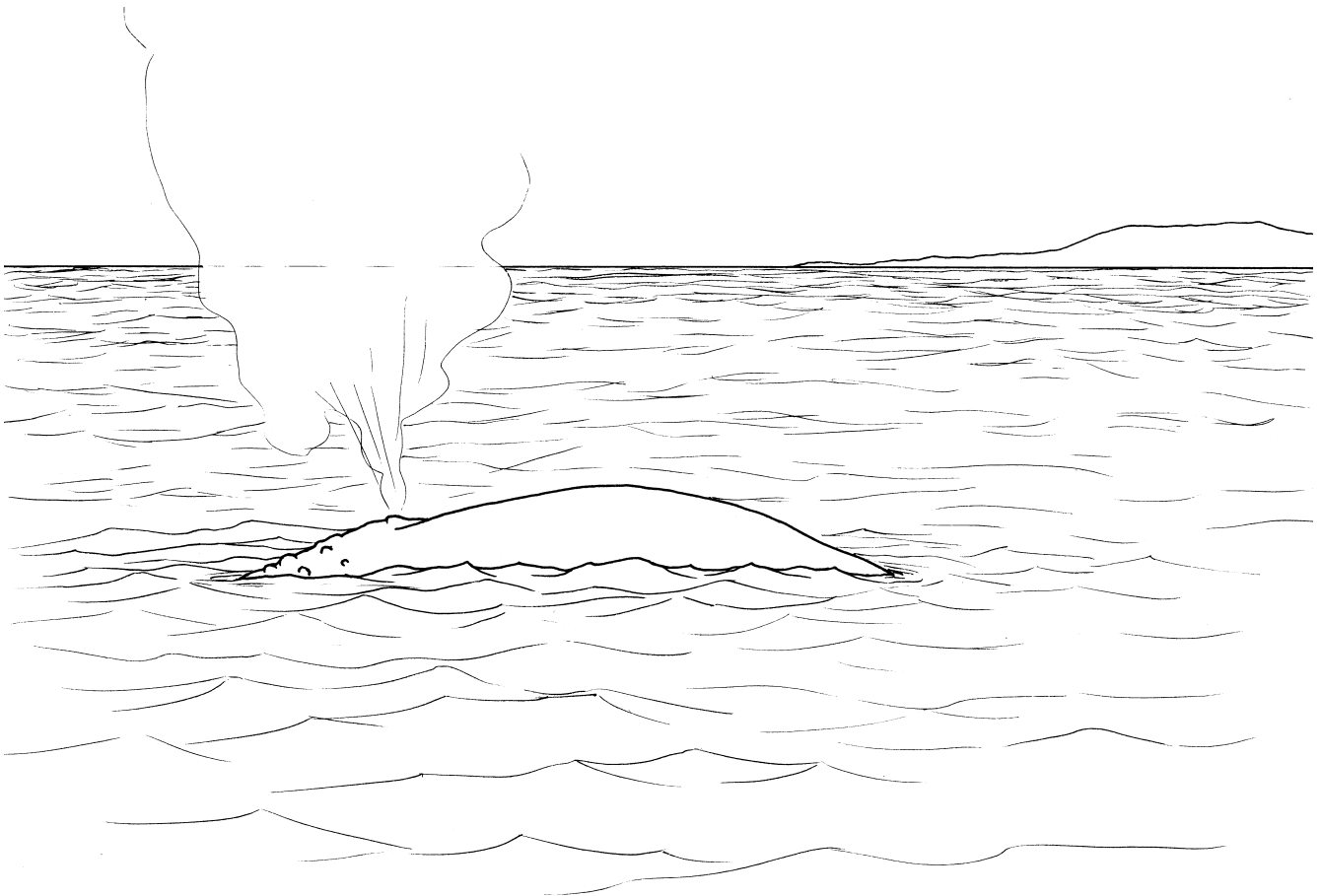
"It's okay," she said. "I want to see the whale."

Oscar was kneeling on the end of the bench by the window, staring out at the water. The surface was no longer shiny and sparkly, but a dull, dark blue. A little wind had come up, so the water seemed like rough fur, with wrinkles of waves going all directions. Oscar pointed to a spot slightly ahead of the boat.

“That’s where I think he’ll come up,” he said.

Jennie watched, but all the water seemed the same to her. Maurluq and Annie Blue and Auntie Lauren came over to the window, too. Uncle Willie slowed the motor to a slow chugging sound.

“Look,” Oscar said. She looked in the same direction he was looking. Out in the water she could see a place where the waves seemed to go in a different direction from the rest—a small line of ripples. Then, what looked like a smooth black rock or a large log came up through the surface of the water. It seemed to be moving in the opposite direction from them, away from Togiak. Above the whale’s back, Jennie could see spray, like a faint mist, rising into the air. The whale continued to float with its back just above the surface for a few seconds, then sank back down.



Jennie and Oscar pushed their shoulders together on the window end of the bench, watching the water to see if the whale would come up again. Annie Blue and Maurluq sat down beside each other at the other end of the table. Auntie Lauren left the cabin and climbed up to the wheelhouse. Jennie could hear her talking to Uncle Willie and Rudy. Annie Blue said something to Maurluq in Yup'ik and they both laughed. Jennie turned to look at them, still hoping to hear a word she understood.

“He came here to see you,” Annie Blue said, “so you won’t forget us when you go back to Fairbanks.”

The two women sat side by side like they’d been friends forever. Their *qaspeqs* came down over their knees, over the tops of their rubber boots. Annie’s curly hair and Maurluq’s braided gray hair touched as they leaned their heads together to talk. Jennie could feel Oscar’s shoulder pushing against her upper arm as they squeezed together to look out the window. She wondered if she and Oscar would be friends for as long as Maurluq and Annie Blue.

Way off to the side of the boat she saw a tall standing rock.

“There’s the Stone Lady,” she said. “Are there really faces in the rocks?”

“They’re closer to Togiak. You watch when we go by,” said Maurluq.

“You ask so many questions,” Oscar said. He shrugged his shoulder back, tipping Jennie where she was kneeling on the bench.

“That’s how I find things out,” she said. “How do you do it?”

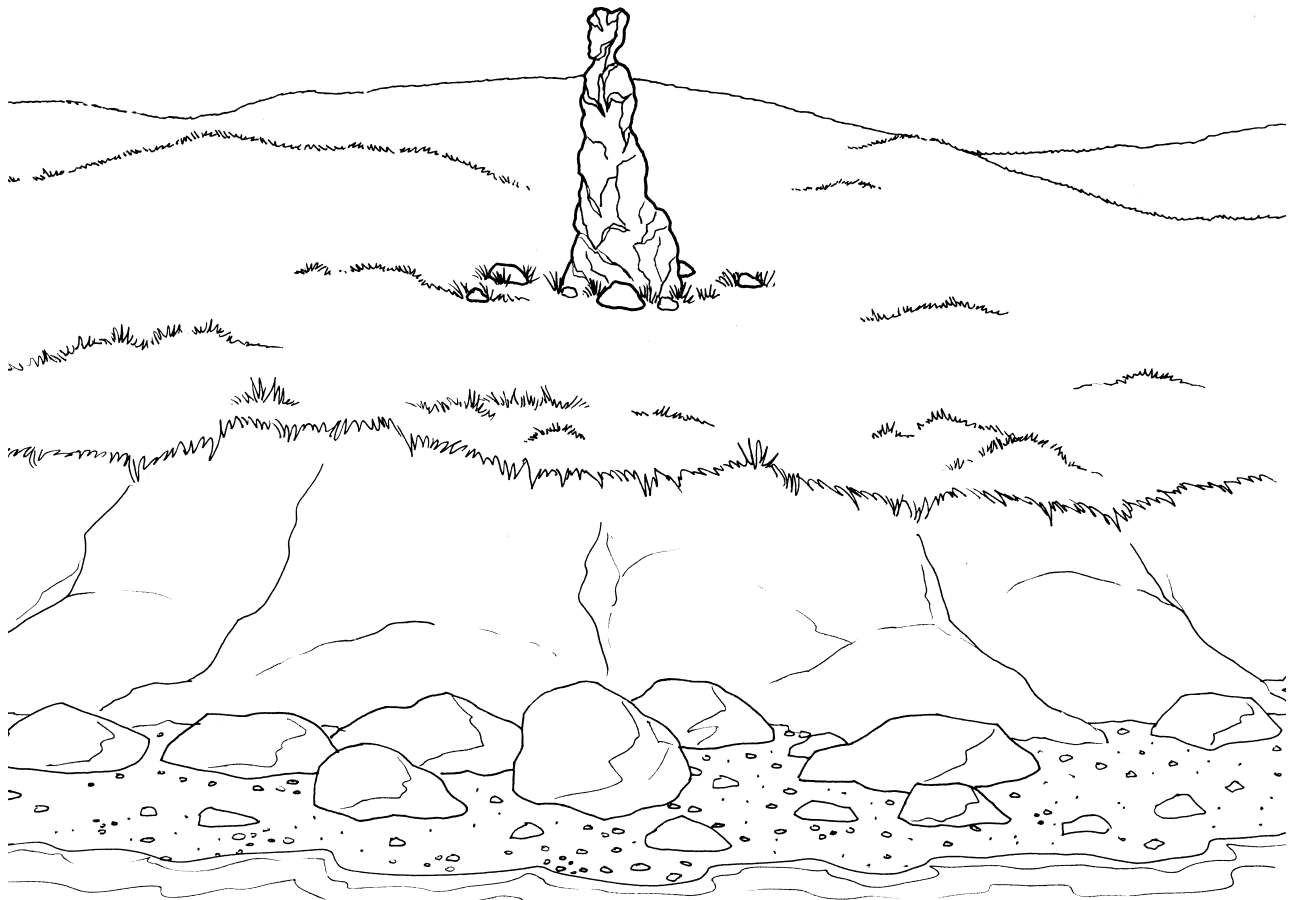
“I just watch,” Oscar said. “I figure it out by looking.”

After a while, Uncle Willie steered the boat closer to some rocks in the water and slowed down again.

“There,” said Annie Blue. Jennie could see waves splashing up the sides of the rocks as the tide came in. “She turned children into rocks, then drew faces on them,” Annie Blue said. Jennie looked closely as they passed. She could see faint lines that looked like smiley faces traced in the rocks.

“How did those faces get there?” Jennie asked. Oscar shoved her with his shoulder again.

“The Stone Lady,” he said. “She just told you.”



“Nobody really knows,” Maurluq said. She looked at Oscar, squinting a little. He looked back at Maurluq and climbed down from the bench.

“I’m going back outside,” he said. He nudged Jennie again as he got down and left the cabin, scuffing his boots on the floor.

“He’s used to getting all the attention,” Maurluq said to Annie Blue. She reached out and pulled Jennie over to stand beside her. “He’s a little jealous of a smart girl like this.”

“I think Oscar’s smart,” Jennie said. “He made up the Yup’ik abacus.”

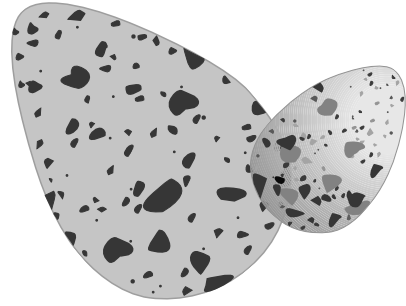
“He doesn’t know it yet,” Maurluq said. “He can learn from you.”

Jennie leaned against Maurluq’s knee and watched the shore of Togiak grow closer. She had learned so much from Oscar about living here—about birds, and weather, and seals, and whales, and counting in Yup’ik. He was smart in ways that had nothing to do with school.

“When we get back to Togiak,” Maurluq said, “we’ll divide up the eggs and put them into bowls. You can help us give eggs to the elders.”

Jennie didn’t say anything. Who could be more of an elder than these two women?

“They all want to meet you,” Annie Blue said.



Back to the City— Jennie's Gift-Giving

Jennie was tired when the boat anchored in the slough. She got in the Lund and waited there with Annie Blue and watched while the others lowered the egg buckets, the cooler, and the bags of supplies back into the Lund. Everyone moved a little more slowly than they did in the morning. Oscar tried to help, but he was fidgety and kept getting in the way. Jennie wondered if that was how he showed that he was tired, too.

When they got to shore and got into the truck, Jennie looked back at the slough and at the dark water of the bay, now far away. The summer sky still arched light and blue over Togiak and the bay. It would be like that all night, except for a few hours when the sky would get pink and dusky where it reached the sea, but Jennie felt night-time sleepy.

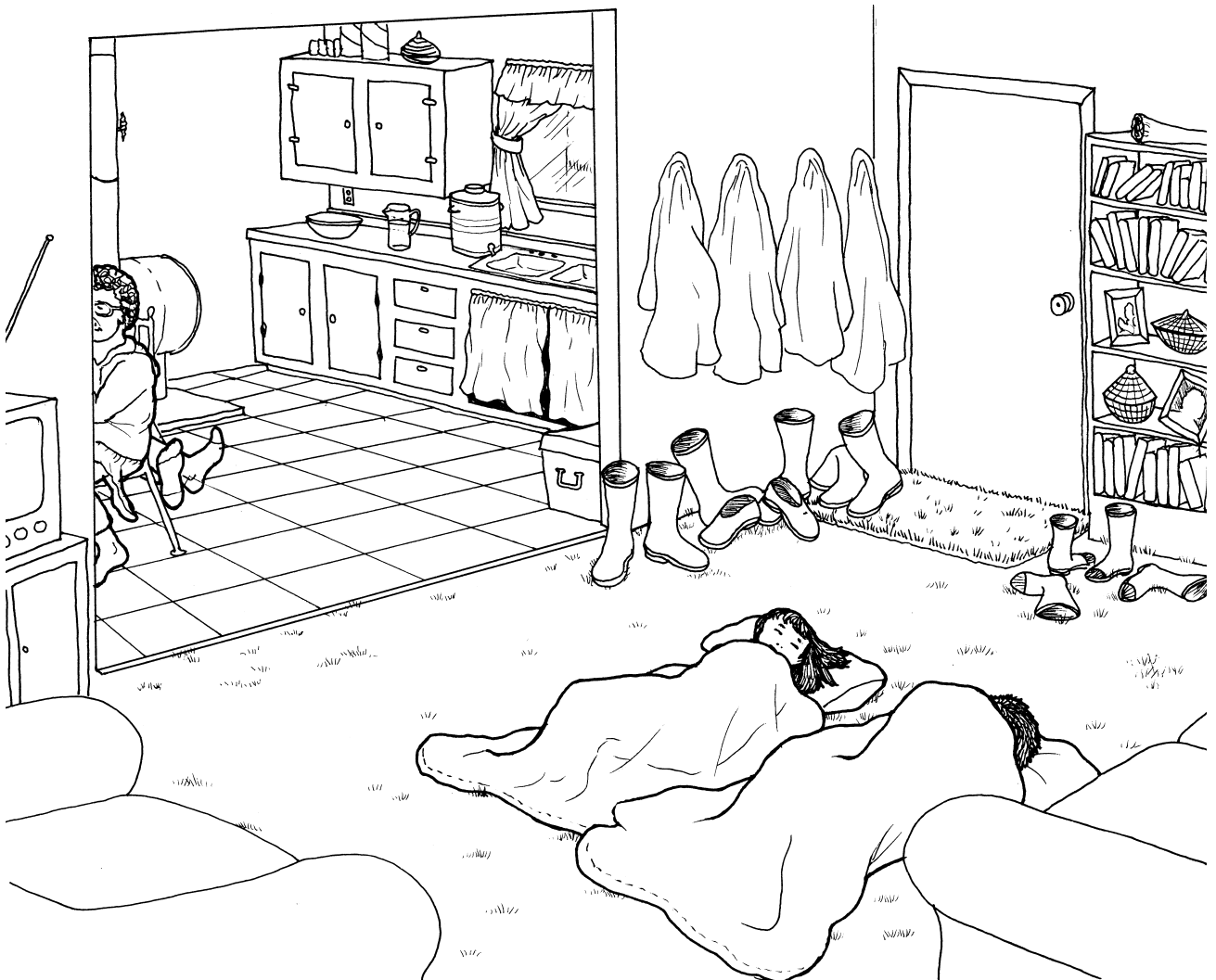
Back at Auntie Lauren's, she crawled back into her sleeping bag and fell asleep, listening to the voices of Auntie Lauren, Uncle Willie, Maurluq, and Annie Blue. At one point she felt something thump her back. She opened her eyes just enough to see Oscar's

sleeping bag lumped up on the floor, too. He was sound asleep, but his legs thrashed around like he was still running on the beach. She fell back asleep till morning.

The next day, Oscar and Jennie went back to Maurluq's. Uncle Willie had unloaded the egg buckets from the truck at her house the night before so they could sort them into bowls for the elders.

"There's our city girl," said Maurluq. "You're a Togiak girl now, Jennie."

Maurluq was standing by the steps of her house, just like yesterday. She had a stack of small plastic buckets on the top step and the bigger buckets of eggs lined up by her feet.





“I want to be a city girl, too,” said Oscar. “I’ll ask questions all the time.”

Maurluq handed them each a bowl.

“You can’t be a girl, Oscar,” Jennie said. “You’re a boy.”

Oscar made a face at Jennie. Maurluq reached in the buckets and took out some eggs. She held a murre egg in each hand and set them carefully in a bowl.

“Maybe Oscar can come visit you in Fairbanks,” Maurluq said.

“You could come to my school,” Jennie said. Maurluq put eggs in each bowl, then bent down to the bucket for more. Oscar shook his head.

“Yuck. School,” he said. “I’ll only come if I can see the abacus.”

Maurluq put two more blue murre eggs in each bowl. The bowls looked like shiny Easter baskets, with the colored and patterned eggs. “Okay, set those down on the top step,” Maurluq said, “and get two more bowls.”

They worked like that for an hour or so. Auntie Lauren came over with another big bowl of something Jennie couldn’t see, covered with aluminum foil. She went into the kitchen, and Jennie could hear her working there.

When they finished filling the bowls, Auntie Lauren gave them each a sandwich. Jennie and Oscar sat on the porch eating their sandwiches and watching people in the village go by in their trucks or four-wheelers. Some people walked from house to house. Jennie could see someone walking straight towards them—Annie Blue.



“Don’t eat too much now,” she said. “Save room for eggs and *akutaq*.”

Jennie loved *akutaq*, or “Eskimo ice cream,” made of berries, dried fish, something fat like Crisco, and lots of sugar. She always got it all over her hands at potlatches in Fairbanks, but it made her happy to eat it.

“I’ve got to go,” Oscar said. He brushed the sandwich crumbs off his lap and stood up. Annie Blue nodded.

“I think Rudy’s waiting for you,” she said. Jennie wondered what was going on and why he didn’t ask her to come with him.

“Jennie, You come in the house with me,” Annie Blue said.

In the house, Auntie Lauren and Maurluq had uncovered the bowl of *akutaq* and were spooning it into paper cups. A big shopping bag sat by the door, stuffed so full that the things inside made bumps and lines in the plastic. Hanging from the door to Maurluq’s bedroom Jennie could see something in a black plastic bag.

“I’ll finish that,” Annie Blue said. “You two help Jennie.”

Jennie almost said, “Help me with what?” but she stopped herself. If she waited, she’d find out, and she was learning that waiting to find out for herself, watching and listening carefully to everything around her, was more fun than being told the answer.

Maurluq and Auntie Lauren took down the black plastic bag and gestured for her to come in Maurluq’s room. In the room, besides Maurluq’s bed, Jennie could see Maurluq’s winter parkas. There was a velvet one with ribbon sewed on it, long and fur lined so that it puffed out a bit as if Maurluq were still in it. There was the seal-skin parka, too, yellowish-gray with black spots flecked all



over it. It looked as if one of the seals they had seen on the egging trip had come to shore and was hiding in Maurluq's room.

Auntie Lauren lifted the black bag off the hanger and let the bag float down to Maurluq's bed. She held up a flowered *qaspeq* like Maurluq's, but smaller—Jennie's size.

"Try this on," Auntie Lauren said.

Jennie held up her hands and Auntie Lauren slipped the *qaspeq* over her head. The cotton felt cool and the *qaspeq* hung loosely from her shoulders into a little ruffle of skirt around the tops of her legs.

Maurluq smiled at her. Jennie guessed that Maurluq had been making this *qaspeq* for her since she had first come to Togiak.

“Okay,” said Maurluq. “It fits. Now we have to go outside. You stand by me on the steps and look down, like we were taught when we were girls.”

Jennie nodded. She imagined that she was holding her hands over her mouth to keep in the questions she wanted to ask. They walked back through the kitchen. Another woman was there with Annie Blue and they had put the cups of *akutaq* on cookie sheets and carried them out the door. Maurluq and Jennie followed them out, with Auntie Lauren behind them.

Outside, Jennie could see that a group of people had arrived. Uncle Willie was handing out the bowls of eggs. Jennie saw people she had met during her stay in Togiak and others she had never seen. Some were older than Annie Blue, short women with scarves tied over their heads and long *qaspeqs* and men, one with a cane, bent over slightly, glasses flashing under his baseball cap. There were people Auntie Lauren and Uncle Willie’s age, too. Jennie wondered if they all had known her mom when she was a girl. A few kids played together off to the side.

When all the eggs were gone from the porch and every one had a cup of *akutaq*, Auntie Lauren handed Maurluq the big shopping bag.

“Look down now,” Auntie Lauren said. Jennie looked at her toes. She hadn’t seen Oscar. She wondered where he was.

“This is Jennie’s first egging,” Maurluq said to the people standing around the step. She reached in the bag and brought out a handful of combs, barrettes, pens, and other small things. She tossed them into the crowd, and the children ran through the adults to pick them up. Maurluq tossed some other things, then reached in



again and brought out a roll of paper towels. It spun through the air and the woman standing next to the man with the cane caught it.

“I need this,” she said. Everyone laughed.

Maurluq kept tossing things into the crowd until the bag was empty.

“Jennie’s first egging,” she said each time. When she was done, the people began to leave, licking the last of the *akutaq* from their fingers and carrying the eggs and gifts. Jennie looked up as they left. She saw Oscar and Rudy coming down the street towards her, carrying something in a paper bag. They walked up to where she stood on the top step in her *qaspeq*. Oscar looked very serious. Rudy handed him the bag.

“You have to give it to her,” Rudy said.

Oscar walked up the steps to her and handed her the bag. He looked down as she took it from him. She could feel something heavy and flat and hard inside. She opened the bag and pulled out the object inside—a round piece of wood with what looked like arms and legs sticking out in an X. On wires on each of the arms and legs were five beads that could move along the wires.

“What is it?” she asked.

“You always ask questions,” Oscar said. “It’s the Yup’ik abacus.”

“I’ll take it home and show it to my teacher,” Jennie said. “When you come see me, you can show her how it works.”

“Okay,” Oscar said. “Maybe I will.”

And she knew he would.

