Some of the social problems in the Arctic discussed in current newspapers and periodicals come to life in this novel. The story centres on a young artist, Randall Tait, who leaves his comfortable life in Montreal to paint the people and their environment in a small settlement on Bylot Island about six hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle. He is both uneasy and excited at the prospect of living for a year in a land about which he knows nothing, except from what he has read of the hardships.

Before he has the chance to become acquainted with the settlement, Tait is pressed into part-time teaching by Carl Hobden, the principal of the school, who is short of staff. Although Tait is loath to interrupt his painting, teaching does give him an opportunity to get to know the people through their children; but the friendships that develop, particularly with the young Eskimo woman, Taggak, are deeply resented by Hobden. Most of the Inuit and white people attempt to understand him, but he makes no effort to understand anyone; his bigotry, which causes constant friction throughout the settlement, is expressed in his parting words to Tait as he goes off in a dogteam with Taggak and her brother to visit their father's new camp: "I don't like it at all! Mixing with the native people the way you are doing can only create problems. It will erode the position you've acquired in the community . . . ." Dramatic incidents follow in quick succession, and Tait becomes involved in all aspects of life in the settlement including, unhappily, conflicts between the People of the Seal and the People of the Walrus. These are accentuated during the winter when outdoor activities are curtailed and alcohol flows. Tait's despair and indiscretions during that period, and his joy at the coming of spring and the sun, are poignantly described, as are the beauties of the landscape and wildlife seen through his eyes and those of Taggak.

In spite of the disastrous ending to his stay, brought about by a paranoic action on the part of Hobden, Tait, like many other visitors to the North, finds that he can be happy nowhere else, and the book ends with his expressed determination to return.

Except in a few instances, the author's style is simple and vigorous, his natural gift for story-telling makes the characters of the novel live.

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