



# *Kalopaling*

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales

North American

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*Intermediate*  
*5 min read*

Ka-lo-pa-ling is a strange being who lives in the northern seas. His body is like that of a man except that his feet are very large and look like sealskin muffs. His clothing is made of the skins of eider ducks and, as their bellies are white and their backs are black, his clothes are spotted all over. He cannot speak, but cries all the time, “Be, be! Be, be!”

His jacket has an enormous hood which is an object of fear to the Inuit, for if a kayak upsets and the boatman is drowned, Ka-lo-pa-ling grabs him and puts him into the hood.

The Inuit say that in olden times there were a great many of these creatures, and they often sat in a row along the ice floes, like a flock of penguins. Their numbers have become less and less, till now there are but a few left.

Anyone standing on shore may see them swimming under water very rapidly, and occasionally they rise to the surface as if to get air. They make a great noise by splashing with their feet and arms as they swim. In summer they like to come out and bask on the rocks, but in winter they sit along the edge of the ice or else stay under water.

They often chase the hunters, so the most courageous of the men try to kill them whenever they can get near enough. When the Kalopaling sits sleeping, the hunter comes up very cautiously and throws a walrus harpoon

into him. Then he shuts his eyes tight until the Kalopaling is dead, otherwise the hunter's boat would be capsized and he be drowned. They dare not eat the flesh of the creatures, for it is poisonous; but the dogs eat it.

One time an old woman and her grandson were living alone in a small hut. They had no men to hunt for them and they were very poor. Once in a while, but not often, some of the Inuit took pity on them and brought them seal's meat, and blubber for their lamp.

One day the boy was so hungry that he cried aloud. His grandmother told him to be quiet, but he cried the harder. She became vexed with him and cried out, "Ho, Kalopaling, come and take this fretful boy away!"

At once the door opened and Kalopaling came hobbling in on his clumsy feet, which were made for swimming and not for walking. The woman put the boy into the large hood, in which he was completely hidden. Then the Kalopaling disappeared as suddenly as he had come.

By and by the Inuit caught more seals than usual and gave her plenty of meat. Then she was sorry that she had given her grandson away, and was more than ever sorry that it was to Kalopaling she had given him. She thought how much of the time he must have to stay in the water with that strange man-like animal. She wept about it, and begged the Inuit to help her get him back.

Some of them said they had seen the boy sitting by a crack in the ice, playing with a whip of seaweed, but none of them knew how to get him. Finally one of the hunters and his wife said, "We may never succeed, but we will see what we can do."

The water had frozen into thick ice, and the rise and fall of the tide had broken long cracks not far from the shore. Every day the boy used to rise out of the water and sit alongside the cracks, playing, and watching the fish swim down below.

Kalopaling was afraid someone might carry the boy away, so he fastened him to a string of seaweed, the other end of which he kept in his hand. The hunter and his wife watched for the boy to come out, and when they saw him they went toward him. But the boy did not want to go back to live with his grandmother, and as they came near he called out:

“Two men are coming; one with a double jacket, the other with a foxskin jacket.”

Then Kalopaling pulled on the string and the boy disappeared into the water.

Some time after this the hunter and his wife saw the boy again. But before they could lay hold of him the lad sang out:

“Two men are coming.”

And again Kalopaling pulled the string and the boy slipped into the water.

However, the hunter and his wife did not give up trying. They went near the crack and hid behind the big blocks of ice which the tide had piled up. The next time when the boy had just come out they sprang forward and cut the rope before he had time to give the alarm. Then away they went with him to their hut.

As the lad did not wish to return to his grandmother, he stayed with the hunter, and as he grew to be a man he learned all that his new father could teach him, and became the most famous hunter of the tribe.

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