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Smiler's Bones



Synopsis

A striking, fascinatingly told novel based on the harrowing true story of Minik, an Eskimo boy seized in the name of exploration and brought to New York at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1897, famed explorer Robert Peary took six Eskimos from their homes in Greenland to be "presented" to the American Museum of Natural History. Among the six were a father and a son. Soon, four were dead, including the father (whose bones, unbeknownst to the son, were put on display). One returned to Greenland. And the other -- the young boy -- remained, the only Eskimo in New York for twelve years. His name was Minik. This is his story. A story of lies and deceptions. A story about the price of exploration. A story about discovering the truth of a culture.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

The name "Robert Peary" conjures up vague images from the pages of our history books. A robust, heroic, determined explorer who discovered the South Pole sometime in the 1800s. "Smiler's Bones" is the story behind the story, and what Robert Peary really did on his explorations. Robert Peary and his assistants spent time in Greenland, associating with the Polar Eskimos who were fascinated by their guns, small gifts, and iron tools. Peary and the Museum of Natural History were interested in studying authentic specimens, so shipped 6 Eskimos to live

permanently in N.Y.C. Among them was 8 year old Minik, who came with his father. Unfortunately, within months, five of them had died from consumption â “ a sickness brought by the explorers to their homeland that had also killed Minikâ ™s mother. The Museum buried his father, and sent Minik to live with one of their workers. Now an orphan, Minik spent most of his life as an object of curiosity and scrutiny. As was the custom of the day when it came to Native Americans, he was paraded at Fairs, reported on falsely by newspaper men, laughed at and ridiculed. As an Eskimo he was seen as subhuman, so no indignity was too small. When he was 14 years old, he found out the Museum never buried his father but had given his body to science, then macerated the remains to create a skeleton they planned to display. Despite this indignity happening in 1898, it took until 1993 for the Museum to reluctantly release these skeletal remains to the Polar Eskimos of Greenland for a proper burial. It seemed like heartache and anger followed Minik his whole life until, at age 19, he decided he had endured enough. He wanted to go home, but Peary had other plans.

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