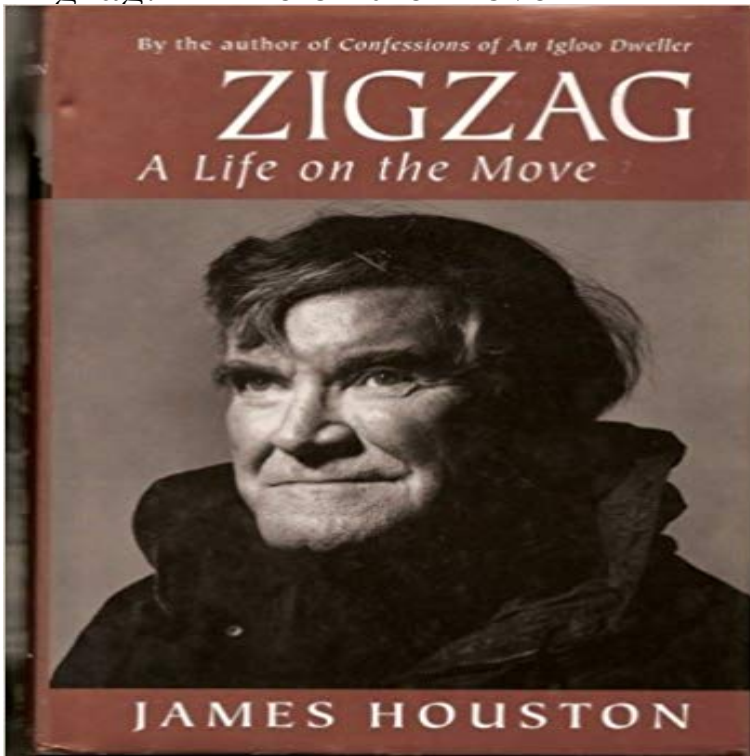


Zigzag: A Life on the Move



In April 1962, clutching a surprise parting gift from his Inuit friends and hunting companions, James Houston flew south to a new life. A few days later (after the unfortunate Montreal incident with the U.S. Immigration officer in the Ladies Room), he was living and working in the heart of Manhattan. His passage there was eased by his powerful patron Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., the head of Steuben Glass, and by Houghton's wife, his secretary, his butler, and his driver. But it was a huge and difficult life-style change, shrewdly captured here in the series of short vignettes that James Houston has used to tell his tale. Punctuated by his own black-and-white sketches, they follow not only his blundering attempts to take Manhattan, but also the incredible zigzags that his life has taken ever since, including twenty-six trips back to his beloved Arctic. In the following pages you'll meet a Master Designer with over one hundred valuable glass sculptures to his credit, a New England sheep farmer, a bestselling novelist, a Harlem art teacher, a Pacific salmon fisherman, a Hollywood scriptwriter, a prizewinning author of seventeen children's books, an Arctic film producer, a man who designed National Geographic Magazine's 100th anniversary Award (not to mention the flags of two Canadian territories), and the owner of Whistler's Mother's house. James Houston, of course, is all of those people. True to the book's title you'll also meet him as a world traveller who found himself skulking among leopards in equatorial Africa at night; drinking toasts in the Russian Arctic with a Kommissar who stripped to his pink underwear; slipping out of his own underwear on a snowy night in Japan under the eyes of many curious Japanese ladies; cruising the Mediterranean on a luxury yacht while kings came aboard; wrestling with a flustered walrus about to drown him in the Bronx Zoo; improving his sketching

in Paris while drunks wandered in to check out the nude models; or tarpon fishing among sharks in Florida with a group so well connected that President Johnson dropped in by helicopter to join them, accompanied by his favourite Scotch. James Houston is such a modest man that fear of name-dropping made him reluctant to tell some of his best stories. But it is clear that in the range of his experiences and of his achievements (although, significantly, none of his honorary degrees, and few of his many prizes and awards, are mentioned in these pages) he has led a life more interesting than almost any other Canadian who springs to mind. Clearly, this is a man who never said no to a new experience, whether it was singing duets in the shower with an unknown Manhattan neighbour (a soprano); or rounding up Inuit friends to act the role of their great-grandparents in the film *The White Dawn* (all did not go well hence the line 'What do you mean he's gone hunting?'); or helping Nelson Rockefeller's wife over a lull in the dinner party conversation; or agreeing to design the central seventy-foot sculpture in the main hall of Calgary's new Glenbow Museum, then driving the one thousand delicate prisms of his *Aurora Borealis* piece across the country; or acting at a Sotheby's auction bidding for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, armed with invaluable bidding tips; or working at the Corning Glass Works, side by side with the gaffers who wrestle with molten glass at the glory hole to give shape to the designers' blueprint creations (a process well illustrated in *Fire Into Ice*); or helping an Arctic ship's mate to remove a seal to whom the captain had grown attached; or wooing and winning the courageous Alice, the Yale professor's daughter who now shares his life. Or rather, lives. This memorable book by an engaging storyteller with a dozen lives behind him will set you reading his Arctic memoirs *Confessions of an Igloo Dweller*, and eagerly seek out his book about his life among the Haida on the Queen Charlotte Islands, *Hideaway*.

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