The Eskimo Storyteller

FOLKTALES FROM NOATAK, ALASKA

Edwin S. Hall, Jr.

DRAWINGS BY CLAIRE FEJES

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1975.
Up Kobuk way there was a village. It was on the river across from a big bank. Two brothers lived there, of which the youngest brother was married and had kids. When the youngest brother's wife had their youngest baby they went out berry picking on the high bank. The woman always left her baby on the ground. She would dig a little hole and put some berries in it, then leave the baby alongside so that he could eat if he wished.

One time when they were picking berries they went back to check the baby and he wasn't there. They looked all over and couldn't find him so they went home. The boy's father had bought a bead band (with one bead) from an old man and it was tied to the boy's wrist. The man looked all over for him.

The baby boy was crawling. He didn't know which way to go. He could not find his mother. He was crying, but nobody could hear him. He didn't eat. Finally he got to running water, a little drip running down a bank. He stopped to rest and saw some trees a little ways farther and crawled up there. He sat on top of a big hump and rested; then he went into the trees. When he got inside he saw a little
ebrulik. He thought there was someone inside so he went through
the door. He found nobody there so he went in and went to sleep.
When he woke there was food and water on the floor. He went over
and ate and drank. There was no sign of people and he did not know
how the food had gotten there. He stayed in the ebrulik and every
time he slept he woke up to find new food and water. This happened
for many days.

The boy got bigger and his clothes were tight on him now. Early
one morning when he woke up he found new clothes as well as food
and water. He put them on and ate breakfast. He grew bigger and
now was walking around, but it was hard being away from people.
Still he stayed there. When he got to be a big boy he woke up and
found a bow and arrow. He went out and saw some birds (kermuluk,
Canadian jay) in the top of trees which had been cut off. He tried to
shoot them with the bow and arrow. He tried all day. He wondered
why the birds stayed on those cut trees. He went over and looked and
saw pieces of caribou fat tied there. The birds were trying to eat them.
The boy didn’t know who had put them there. He practiced with his
bow and arrow and finally he began to kill jays. He stayed out every
day trying to kill birds.

He was a big boy now and his clothes got small again. One morning
he got new clothes and put them on. He started walking farther from
the ebrulik than he had before. He came to the dripping water where
he had stopped when he was a baby. He followed it downstream. He
saw something moving in the willows, with long legs, a little tail, and
horns. He aimed at it and shot it. He took it home and dried it up.
After that he got caribou every time he went out walking.

One morning before he had left the ebrulik he heard two people
talking. They came up to and in the ebrulik. It was two boys. One
said, “We have come to get you. The one that raised you wants you.”
The lone boy said, “I’m not going even though you come and get me.
The one that raised me let me suffer, not taking me home in the first
place when I was a baby. I am not going.” The two boys went out
saying, “If you don’t come the one that raised you will come and kill
you.” The lone boy answered, “If he comes, maybe I’ll kill him.”

The boy stayed there. He got caribou and brought them home. He
is expecting the man that raised him to come and is watching closely.
One morning he heard people talking. He got his bow and arrow, ran
out of doors, and hid in the shadow of a tree. He saw three men coming. They got close and one went around the house. When he got to the door the boy shot and killed him. The other two were going to run, but he shot one more. The third ran off. After a while the boy went to check on which way the man had run off. The man was already way up there. Those three men were wolves that had become men. When the boy saw that man running he had changed back to a wolf.

The boy stayed there in his little place for awhile. Springtime came and it seemed real warm, so he started walking in the morning looking for something to hunt. He went towards the river. He started climbing a hill and when he got on top he saw the river. He looked around and saw a man walking. He sat down and watched the man. The man clapped his mittens together. The man walked back and forth clapping his mittens together and the boy saw ptarmigan in front of the man. The man had willow traps (puuak) nearby and was chasing the ptarmigan towards them.

The boy came down to the man chasing the ptarmigan and when they met they started talking. The man told the boy that he had a wife down there and took him home. When they went in the man’s wife fed him, and the boy started telling the man that when he was a baby he crawled and didn’t know which way he was going. He told them that when he got to a little house he went in and stayed there until he grew up. The man said that there was a whole group of people in the place where he was now living. Once when a baby boy had gotten lost the people had moved farther up the river. But this man and his wife had stayed behind. They were expecting the boy to return home sometime.

They talked further and the boy let the man see his wrist. The man recognized the bead that his youngest brother had bought from another man and had given to his baby boy that was lost. The boy had met his uncle. The man found out that the boy was his nephew. Then the man told his nephew that his parents were in a place called Siksikpuk, not far from that present place. The boy said, “I am going to see my parents.” His uncle told him, “If you go up to your parents, I don’t think you’ll come out alive because your father has become a man-who-always-kills-people. When you got lost he suffered so much he became a man-who-always-kills-other-men.” The uncle wanted
him to stay, but the boy wanted to go and he told his uncle, “Maybe I’ll kill him.” He said, “He never looked for me; he let me suffer. If he had looked he would have found me.”

When the boy wanted to go over to his parents his uncle took him to Siksikpuk and they went straight to the karigi. When the boy went in he looked around and saw a young boy who looked just like him. That was his brother. The man-who-always-killed-people asked the boy all kinds of questions, and finally the boy let him see the bead on his wrist. After the man-who-always-killed-people saw the bead he still didn’t believe that the boy was his son and said, “You killed my boy and then put the bead on your wrist.” He got mad and said, “You’re not my son. I’m going to kill you.” And the boy said, “I will kill you. I killed the one that raised me and his son. They were wolves. I can kill you; you are only one.”

The man-who-always-killed-people still didn’t believe the boy and told him again, “You killed my boy and then put this bead on.” While they were arguing the uncle said not to kill the boy but to see where he got the bead from. So the man-who-always-killed-people took the bead off from the boy’s wrist and showed it to the older people in the karigi. They looked at it and one old man said that he had sold this bead to the man-who-always-killed-people.

After they found out that about the bead the man-who-always-killed-people still did not believe the young boy’s story. When he still didn’t believe the story, the other young boy in the crowd who looked like the first young boy got up and came over to his side. The boy from the crowd said to the man-who-always-killed-people, “Don’t we look alike?” And the man-who-always-killed-people said, “You boys look alike.” And he went to the boys and begged them to forgive him. He had found his son. When they found each other the two young brothers started wrestling to see which one was toughest. They both were the same; they both had the same strength. Their father took them home from the karigi. The End.

Frank Glover told this story.

D113.1 Transformation: man to wolf; D313.5 Transformation: wolf to man (MacKenzie River—Jenness 1924:76); F1041.21.1 Illness (psychological) from excessive grief; H79 Recognition by physical attributes; H80 Identification by tokens; H1385 Quest for lost persons; R13 Abduction by animal; T617.1 Future hero as child isolated from world kills increasingly larger game. A variant of PM154 in this volume.