

Traditional story from Old Man Japhet of Tuluksak, told by Elizabeth Peter

Elizabeth Peter: I suspect that this is a true story that Japhet of Tuluksak had told.

There was a place between Bethel and Napakiak. A man and his wife moved there to that place. They ran out of food back out there. When her husband died from starvation, the woman and her child returned to fish camp. When the mother and child arrived at the fish camp there was a girl there. She had had five brothers who had all been proficient hunters. That girl was used to eating only fresh foods and never old foods. She was the only one left there.

When the woman and her child arrived there—since it is said that buried roe, fish eggs, never loses its nutritional value even though it may have acquired the consistency of flour after the individual eggs have burst out of their membrane—she would dig out some roe and cook it and drink the resulting broth whenever they did not have anything else to eat. One day as she was digging out the roe and putting it into a container, the girl came over and invited her to her house. She told the woman who had recently arrived there at that fish camp, “This is the first time I am enjoying eating the food I eat.”

The woman went over to the girl’s house and when that one had set a plate before her, what the woman saw looked like human parts! Then the woman told the girl, “I have never eaten this kind of stuff before. I have not eaten this kind, and I do not eat this kind.” She did not want to eat it and gave it back to the girl. Going back to her camp she cooked the roe that she had collected. Then she and her child drank its broth.

There the mother and her child stayed, depending on each other for strength, and the girl was in the fish camp, too. One day the girl came over to the woman’s house seeking to trade something for the woman’s *ulu*. Since that woman had her wits about her, she told the girl, “Already while we were on our way here I traded my *ulu* to someone else for a little food.” Actually, she had taken good care to hide her *ulu*. “I already have traded away my *ulu* for a little food. I do not have one anymore.” She told the girl that since she was aware that she might be killed.

They used to put away the dead where they had placed posts here, here, here, and here, and then they’d put the dead body there. There was a gravesite back there. One day the woman went out in the morning and she saw the girl back there. She was cooking back there making a lot of smoke. The smoke was going straight up. Then after that incident the girl was no longer to be seen. Since this was worrisome the woman went to check on her at her house. When the woman went into her house the girl was sitting down, with one eye directed toward the door and the other eye toward the window up there. She felt scared. The girl was dead.

So the dear woman with her dear child did not remain there but went away from that place

That was where he ended the story. He stopped telling the story there. Perhaps the story ended here. The story makes one so scared that one's heart beat quickens.

Sophie Kasayulie: I wonder why her eyes were looking in different directions.

Elizabeth: When she felt scared. One eye was looking at the door and the other was looking at the window. So scary. It was probably that a ghost had cut off her way to escape. They used to say that the ghosts cut off the exits. So if she had not gone out to push the ghost with the weight of her hand into the ground because she was so overwhelmed with fear, then that happened to her.

Louann Rank: Thank you.