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Jimmie Killigivuk (Asatchaq, 1891-1980)

Tom Lowenstein, translator

Jimmie Killigivuk tells the story of "Aleenuk: The Man Who Became the Spirit of the Moon" in Inupiaq.

1976

KUAC radio announcements

Edna McLean announces the name of the program -The things that were said of them: Eskimo stories from Point Hope, Alaska. She said the whole phrase, the things that were said of them, is only one word in Inupiaq. It can also be translated as – the things that were left behind. McLean said Jimmie Killigivuk will be telling the story of Aleenuk. It is about how the moon and sun acquired their spirits. She said it is important to remember in the Arctic the sun and the moon are seldom seen in the sky together. The sun is not seen for two and a half months during the winter and is continuously above the horizon for two and a half months during the summer. She talked about the contents of the story. It is not a story for children. The story was told by men in the community house and at winter hunting camps after the children were asleep.

Jimmie Killigivuk tells the story and Tom Lowenstein translates. Aleenuk was a man and lived at Tikigaq. He had no wife. He had a younger sister and this sister did not have a husband. When Aleenuk would come home from hunting he would go to his qargi, his ceremonial house. Sometimes when Aleenuk's sister was alone in the igloo she saw the seal oil lamps go out. She did not understand how the lamps went out. When the lamps went out, she found that a man was coming. In the darkness the man would make love to her. When she knew the man was coming to her in the darkness, she made some preparations. She went to the lamp and dipped her fingers in the bottom where there was soot and burnt seal oil. When the man was lying on top of her she could brush her fingers on his forehead. When the man came to her in the darkness, she brushed his forehead with the oil on her fingers. The next evening when Aleenuk was at his qargi his sister left the igloo to search for the man with marks on his forehead. She went out to find the man among the qargis. There were six of them in Tikigaq. Aleenuk always spent his evenings at his qargi. Aleenuk's sister looked down through the skylight. She could see the men inside. It was her brother with the oil on his forehead. She discovered this by herself. It was he who had humiliated his own sister. She went back to her igloo and defecated and urinated in her chamber pot. She took her ulu and cut off her breasts. She chopped them up and dropped them into the chamber pot. She picked it up and returned to the qargi and went in. She came in through the entrance hole. She gave him the chamber pot and said since you love me so much take my breasts, blood, excrement and urine and eat. Aleenuk was silent. He stood up and gathered his tools. He started to go around the seal oil lamp as the sun goes. His sister picked up the chamber pot and followed him. She said since you love me so much take my breasts, blood, excrement and urine and eat. Aleenuk

continued walking and avoided his sister. The sister followed in a circle around the oil lamp. When Aleenuk was under the skylight he started to rise from the floor. His sister followed and started to rise after him still carrying the chamber pot. She left the qargi through the skylight. When they reached the air still circling Aleenuk called to her. He said I am a man and you are a woman. You don't go hunting. You go to the sun. I am a hunter and I will go to the moon. So Aleenuk's sister went to the sun. Aleenuk went to the moon. That is why the sun is red when it rises and sets. It is the blood from the breasts of Aleenuk's sister. Aleenuk went to the moon. He became the owner spirit of the moon. That is the story.

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Lowenstein said when he started working with Asatchaq it was one of the only stories he knew and could request. The Aleenuk story is recurrent over the entire Inuit Arctic. Hearing the story in the context of the village was a revelation to him. This was in 1976. On clear nights the moon was small and cold over the village. The light in the mornings without sunrise had a powdery blue texture. Around noon each day Lowenstein would walk over to Asatchaq's cabin to check on his stove which was giving him trouble. Asatchaq asked him if Lowenstein had seen the sun yet. Lowenstein hadn't been watching for the sun's reappearance. He went out that afternoon and there at the base of the far cliffs was an orange bloody line. It was the sun's upper edge flat on the southeastern sea ice horizon. During that week Asatchaq told the story of Aleenuk. During the week Asatchaq told the story he had a revelation. Here was the old storyteller and the story and the village and the high moon at night and the blood orange sun's edge and all the connections between them were local and intimate. Earth and sky formed a single and continuous space and within whose area kinship and communication seemed logical and part of the given order. It's the feeling of unity of these worlds he would like to emphasize here. There is an element in that closeness which is oppressive. The myth can be upsetting. He said with later stories in the series there is frequently an element of struggle between man and woman. Within the conflict there is seldom a true victor. The result seems more to consist of a shared partnership of energies. In the story Aleenuk becomes the moon spirit and his sister becomes the sun spirit. Their struggle continues. On the one hand the moon pursuing the sun's course through the heavens without ever catching up with her except during eclipses when there are earthquakes in Tikigaq with a repetition of primal catastrophe. On the other hand, the power of the sun and moon distributed each with its dominant period in the high contrast of seasonal Arctic light and darkness. The hunter moon in motion from fall to spring and the sun rendering Aleenuk's sphere invisible all summer. He asked Asatchaq one night what are the stars. Asatchaq said villages like Tikigaq. The whole system moved light years closer to him.

Edna McLean said the program was produced by Karen McPherson with technical assistance from Phil Falkowski. Funds were provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and KUAC-FM at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[00:18:13]

Inuit songs and drumming with unidentified place and performers.

