"Polar Bear"

There was a village, they say, on the coast. It was a big village. And a husband and wife lived in the middle of this village. At the downriver end of the village, a poor, dear grandmother and her granddaughter lived. From time to time, the old woman would go up to the village. She would go to find out what was happening in the village, and then she would go back home. As for this young hunter, a very powerful woman was married to him. She was tough and very strong. Whenever he looked around outside, she would suddenly attack him and beat him up. "You looked outside at other women. Why are you looking at the women walking around?" she said to him.

Then he paddled up to shore. He didn’t even look about, but he was really getting tired of her. So at last he thought, "It would be better if she left me alone. Why, if I so much as look out at women, she always fights with me," he said, thinking. He went back down into his kashim. He towed seals to shore. In his big boat, he went hunting on the sea. I don’t know where he paddled, but he hunted seals and towed them back. Then this woman, his wife, would go down to the end of the village.
Two Tellings by Belle Deacon

and give food to that poor, dear old woman all the time.
With that food, she raised her granddaughter.
They lived there a long time.
Everyone liked them and spoke kindly of them.
As for him, he had a good reputation.
He never looked around, because she was jealous.
So, then, things were all right.

Then one time he paddled back out [to sea].
He was gone a whole day, and
in the evening, far out on the ocean,
they looked for him, and far out on the ocean there was a kind of
black spot.
It was him, paddling back in.
He paddled back to shore.
All the people came out to the bank and looked at him.
The women, too.
He towed a great many sealskins to shore.
They were impressed when they saw them.
"He gets so many!" they thought.
At that, that wife of his got angry again!
I-i-y!
She started fighting with her husband right there on shore.
Meanwhile, all the people up there said,
"Why does she do that, that one?
She ought to just leave him alone.
She's just jealous, doing that again to the one she lives with," they said.

So then he went to his kashim.
In there she gave him a black eye.
She punched him in the face.
And then when she brought food in to him, he didn't eat.
He was very, very angry.
That was that.
He thought to himself,
"I should paddle away,
somewhere far across the water to where my bones will lie.
It's better that I should paddle away, for I'm really tired of her.
Well, for a long time now,
even though I don't speak with women,
she has been beating me with no reason," he thought.  
She brought food to him, but he didn’t eat.  
“Well, eat,” she said, but he didn’t; he just looked down all the time.

Meanwhile, down at the end of the village, 
the poor, dear orphan girl was growing up.  
She reached puberty, and 
her dear grandmother raised her.  
She didn’t let her go out.  
She went out only early in the morning.  
“Don’t look from shore out to sea.  
Just keep looking down at your feet and come back in,” she told her.  
“That is how we [behave] whenever we menstruate,” she told her.  
So she did just that.  
Early one morning the young hunter got up.  
There on the beach was his big boat, with his big paddle in it.  
He went down to it there.  
He launched it in the water.  
He started to load it.  
He stuffed it full with all his blankets and all the furs from his cache.  
As it was just starting to get light, he paddled away from shore.  
Meanwhile, in the village, everyone lay sleeping.  
The one who was menstruating went out.  
She looked out on the ocean and saw a black spot on the horizon, 
so she quickly averted her eyes.  
But then she did not tell her grandmother.  
Then out onto the ocean, outward he moved, on water so calm it seemed frozen.  
Then he paddled out to sea all day, 
until at last the sun started to set in the west. 
At last, being hungry, he ate some food, 
and after that he rested, and then he started paddling again.  
He paddled all night.  
All night it was as calm as if it were frozen.  
The next day he paddled all day again.  
For two days and one night he paddled.  
Once again, it started to get dark.  
Poor thing, he paddled this way for two more nights and two days.
Then on the third day, at last, far across the water, he saw signs of shore appearing.
"I-i-y," he thought, "How tired I am! Thanks! Land is visible," he thought.
He kept paddling quickly until very soon there he was, paddling right up to the shore.
Meanwhile, all around him seals and whales were swimming about.
He didn’t look at them or pay any attention to them; he just kept paddling; what else could he do?
He paddled to shore and landed on a nice beach.
He paddled on upstream [on a river there].
And just then, there, back from the shore, there was a slough.
He paddled to its mouth.
He stood still there.
After a while, he thought to himself, "I ought to paddle up [the slough]; it seems good up there.
Up there I’ll look for a suitable spot for my bones to lie," he thought.
So he just started paddling up [the slough].
He hadn’t paddled very far when he saw a house standing back from the river.
And a cache was standing up there, too.
"E-e-ey," he thought.
"I wonder who lives there?
I hope it’s a man’s place," he thought.
"I hope it’s not a woman’s place," he thought.
He paddled to shore, and up on the bank, a big woman came slowly out of the house.
He looked at her.
I-i-y, she spoke to him in the other [Eskimo] language.
Then he said to her,
"I’m trying to go to where there are men.
I am doing this to find a place for my bones to lie.
I don’t want a place where there are no people," he said.
"Don’t say that; come up here and rest.
Why ever are you saying that?
Come, spend the night," she said to him.
So he walked up [the bank].
A big fish camp was there.
I-i-y, all around outside a lot of sealskins were hanging up; nothing was lacking.
King salmon and plenty of everything was there.  
It was after spring breakup.  
Then she cooked and she fed him,  
and he went to the bench across the room.  
She handed the dish toward him over the fire.  
"Come, have a little something to eat.  
Then you can go to bed, you seem tired," she said to him.  
"That's true—  
While I paddled for three nights and three days,  
fortunately it was calm for me."  
"Come on," she said to him.  
"Go to bed, go on," she told him.  
She went to bed on one side [of the fire] and he on the other.  

Meanwhile, during all this time, across the water—in his absence  
across there—  
his wife, i-i-y, got furious.  
She went out in the village, wrecking things.  
"Where is my husband? You hid my husband!" she was saying  
angrily.  
She rushed down to the end of the village, and she knocked down  
the cache there.  
"Why, we didn't hide him. What are you doing anyway?" they  
said, but it was no use.  
She rushed down to the end of the village, and  
she went to that old woman, that poor, dear old woman.  
"Now my husband is missing.  
Now they've hidden my husband," she said.  
"Now I'll kill you all unless you tell me something.  
Now he will never [be able to] stay away from me," she said.  

"What are you saying anyway? Why they didn't hide that one.  
Here is a corner girl, in puberty seclusion.²  
Well, she stayed there several nights.  
Having gone out, although I told her not to look out to sea,  
even so, she glanced out to sea," [the old woman] said.  
E-e-y,  
"She looked out, and she saw someone paddling out to sea,"  
she told her.  
"Aha ... well, I've wanted to know this.  
I've been wrecking the village;
I should have spoken to you first," she told her.
"Tomorrow I’ll just get a canoe, and I’ll go in the canoe.
Then I’ll paddle after him," she said.
“And as for this corner girl,
I’ll take her along in the canoe, too.”

“Oh, no,” said the poor, dear old woman.
“You really mustn’t do that.
Why, one who is having her period doesn’t go in a canoe.”

“Well, I’ll just take her in it anyway, that one,” she told her
[laughing meanly].
Then she loaded the canoe, and
putting that corner girl in the canoe in front of her,
she paddled out to sea.
How could they stop her?
“I’ll kill you guys,” she told them.
Terrified, they just put [the comer girl] into the canoe.
All the way across [the sea], then, it seemed calm to them.
Far across, she paddled over to shore.
I don’t know how long she spent in doing this.
She was so angry that she paddled along very fast.
She paddled to the beach and on up [to the shore].
There was a slough.

And as for the others [the husband and his new wife], this is
what was happening with them:
“Well, okay,” [the new wife] said.
“Your wife, your wife has gotten smart.
Your wife has paddled after you.
You mustn’t go outside now.
You go here under the blanket,
while I go to meet her alone.”

“What will we do with one another?
I already married her, but I married you, too.
I already took her [as my wife] so I better not [hide];
I’ve already stayed with her a long while.
I still love her very much,
in spite of her always fighting with me,
but finally I got tired of it, and I came here,” he said.
Here, it seems, that woman [the new wife] made a noise [making medicine],
while she [the other wife] paddled there.
“She’s paddling along near here. 
That’s why I’m saying this,” she said.
“Wait! Don’t go outside,” she told him.
Meanwhile, she ran back in.
“She’s paddled into the slough, and
her boat is coming out there,” she told him.
Mmm.
“A big boat is starting to appear,” she told him.
“Get underneath this mat here,
for I don’t know what we’ll do to each other,
but if she attacks me first, I’ll fight her,” she said.

Then, down in the water, a boat was approaching shore, while
someone said “Yey . . .,” from out on the water.
“Adey, you have stolen my husband from me.
Can you keep living when you’ve stolen my husband from me?”
she asked.

Meanwhile, [the new wife] stood up on the bank.
She began to descend toward the shore, walking along very slowly.
“Yey,” [the first wife] said, and suddenly she charged up the bank
at her.
Charging up the bank at her, she grabbed her, and they started
fighting.
Meanwhile, down below, that corner girl
hid down in the canoe, while
out by the shore,
the ground started to shake.
The place was shaking and shaking, and
there was not another sound except the shaking.
After a long time it quieted down, and
[the new wife] came back inside,
The woman of this place.
“It’s all right now,” she said to him.
“Well, she did it to me first.
Don’t feel sorry or be sad.
Whatever I did, she did to me first;
she wronged me.
"Don’t be sorrowful," she told him. "Come on now, get up from under that blanket," she told him. "Go back outside," she told him.

Yey, outside everything was destroyed!

His wife was out there, and she was in pieces; she had torn her to pieces.

She had torn her up.

He went back inside and started crying,

Saying, "My wife," he started crying.

But she went back to him.

"Don’t cry anymore," she told him.

"For a long time she has mistreated you.

I will be your wife.

I am a woman, too," she told him.

Thereupon he stopped crying.

Her hands and her fingers were nothing but blood.

For she had torn her entirely apart.

Having gathered all the pieces together and having piled them up, they took the things down there in the boat, and they piled them onto it, taking everything, and then they set it on fire.

And all of a sudden, as they were unloading the canoe, there was a woman sitting in it, that young girl.

"Have pity ...," she said to [the new wife].

"Have pity ...," she said.

"Have pity on this poor little orphan," she said to her.

She was crouching down there in terror.

So the woman picked her up and brought her up the bank.

"Don’t worry about it; you can stay up there and we’ll adopt you," she told her.

Meanwhile, she put all those things into the fire.

The big paddle and the big boat were also out there.

They started living there.

The young man worked and started to do well.

He started hunting for her a lot.

He started hauling caribou back from the uplands.

He brought back a lot of caribou.

One day he woke up and his voice was gone.

"What’s wrong with you?" she said.
"I just remembered my village; that’s why I’m this way. This girl she brought with her was being raised by a poor person back over there. Maybe her grandmother wants her,” he told her. “Hey we’re living here quite well; why are you saying that, anyway?” she said to him.

“We ought to go across there to get the news,” he told her. So they loaded the boat; there was a big paddle in it. “Let’s use the paddle that I paddled over here with; let’s use that one,” he said to her. “Oh, no . . .,” she told him. “We will be safe only if I use my paddle.” “Your paddle is too big,” he told her. So they got into the canoe and left. When they got out onto open water, a storm overtook them. I-y, it got so cold; the waves were as big as mountains and the boat pitched and tossed. With the fourth wave he paddled through, the paddle shattered. They capsized. Up on the waves, the child came to the surface, that little girl. Half of her was woman and half of her was fish. And her hair streamed ahead of her, floating on the surface of the water. Out in the ocean, she came up to the surface: “Grandchild! Grandchild!” she said. At the same time, that man and his wife came to the surface. One of them, the wife, suddenly had become a big, white bear, a polar bear. Her husband also surfaced as a polar bear. All right then, it is finished.

"Polar Bear"

Once upon a time, there was a big village on the coast. There’s a big village in there. In the middle there was this man and his wife. They live with them. This woman, she wouldn’t even let her husband look at another woman. As soon as he turned little bit towards other woman, she get so jealous and then she start. She just beating him
up all the time. And he had to look at his feet. Never look around nowhere because he’s scared of her, because she’s too powerful.

There was an old lady and her grandchild was below in the village, and every time that married man goes out to sea, he hunt for seal. Whale and seal and he kill lots, and he tow them. And then people comes and help him out. On the beach. And they skin it, all those women. They skin it. So they give them lots of whale meat and things like that. And they give this old lady some all the time ‘cause she was good, that old lady and that little girl.

But this little girl was start[ing] to grow up. She never came up to the village. [The jealous woman took food] down to them and give them some meat and things to eat. These other womans, they’re good to her, but they cannot look at her husband because she’s too jealous of him. So they have big kashim where they give a party. She cook lots of meat, and she pass it all around to the older people and everything. And that way she has lots of friends, but her husband got no friends because she’d be too jealous of him. So at last he started thinking to himself, “Maybe I might go away.”

One day he went out again, out to sea, and he killed lots and he came back, and all the womans came to the banks and look[ed] at him. “My!” they say. “What a good hunter. He sure brings in lots of things every day.” And she heard that. She got really mad, and she just beat up her husband, right in front of everybody. “You fellas admire my husband. You’re not going to have him,” she say to them. So he, he went into the kashim. She brought some food to him, but he wouldn’t accept it from her. [She sit] by him, and he wouldn’t eat. He just feel so bad because his face and everything was just swollen up. She was hitting him so bad and just beating him for nothing. He decided, “Maybe I’ll go away from her. I’m getting tired of this woman. I’m going to go someplace where my bone[s] will be. Where I’ll die, and nobody [would] even know where I’ll die. I’m going to find a good place where I’m going to be laying [down], and that way I wouldn’t live. I don’t want to live anymore,” he was thinking to himself.

And this little girl, at the same time down there, she got pretty big. And she became a corner girl, you know. She had period. At those times they wouldn’t look around [at anybody] till one year [later]. They’re in the little place, and they let them stay, and there’s nobody [would] see them, their faces or anything. So she wakes up early in the morning before the sunrise, and she goes out and look around.
She look at her feet, but this time she look way out to sea. And she see somebody going way out. She see black thing moving out. She keep looking and [it looked] just like a canoe or something. So she went in, but she never even told her grandmother about it.

Then [the jealous wife] woke up. Her husband was gone. Never come back. And she went to them, and she just bust their cache down. “You hide my husband, you hide him!” “No, we didn’t do nothing. He’s just not around here.” She just beat up them people and just start to tear up the village, and pretty soon they tell her not to do that to them because it’s just no use. “You know we’re not powerful like you. We cannot take your husband away from you.” And she went down to the old lady. She told the old lady and the little girl, “If you and your grandchild don’t tell me anything, I’m going to kill you, both of you,” she said to them. “No,” [the old lady] said. “My grandchild, you know we never go up to the village. We don’t know nothing.” “Well, you must know something,” she start[ed] to tell them. Then she grab this little girl: “You know anything?” (You know she’s a comer girl. She’s not supposed to look around.)

[The man paddled and paddled for three days, and he came to a slough. He paddled up the slough, and he saw a house. A big woman came out of the house and invited him in. Meanwhile, his wife started to paddle after him. She took that young girl, the comer girl, along with her.]

And at the same time, that one woman back there said, “Your wife is coming. You got to hide under the blanket, under our blanket. Because she [won’t] leave me alone. She’s going to fight with me because she is very mad already. I’m not mad, but I’m going to try my best to do what I can to her. Because I don’t know, maybe she’ll beat me up or I’ll beat her up. But don’t get sad.” But he said, “That’s my own wife. I love her. I love her very much. But I can’t. I got tired. That’s why I came this way, because I wanted to die someplace by myself alone,” he said.

“Don’t you ever think that way, because you’re going to live with me,” that woman told him. Soon she came in and said, “There’s a boat coming out around the corner. Pretty soon she’s going to land. We’re going to start. I don’t know what she’s going to do to me. If she’s not going to bother me, I’m not going to bother her.”

So [the jealous wife] stop, and gee, she got awfully mad. She said, “You took my husband away from me. I’m going to just beat you up and tear you up,” she [told her].
“Well, try it,” she said, this woman. “I never fought before, but if you want it that way, we’ll just start in anytime you feel like it,” she said.

So she just came out, and they just started fighting. That place where they stayed, it was just shaking everything. The ground was just [going] bang, bang, and just no [other] noise, nothing. Pretty soon they were fighting quite a while, and all at once it just [became] calm. And [she] came in that place [and she] said, “I’m finished. I got ready for your wife. She started it. Now I tore her all up. I tore her into pieces.” He say to her, he started crying, “You shouldn’t do that to my wife. I love that woman.”

“Well, we can’t help it. [If] we never do that to her, she’d tear us both up,” [she] say. “Well, we’ll take the scraps up, and we’ll burn her up with all that stuff she brought in that boat. We’ll pile it up, and we’ll put wood on it, and we’ll put oil on it and burn it, burn her up.” And so they did that. She wash her hand. Her hand was all full of blood and everything. Her clothes, she took off her clothes and she changed into new clothes. She was a beautiful woman, too. And they started to bring things up, and all at once they see this girl was sitting in amongst the things [in the boat]. She pack her up in her arms and brought her into the house. She tell her, “Don’t feel bad, ‘cause we’re going to keep you good. You’re going to be our little girl.” But her husband say, “No,” he say. “She’s a corner girl and maybe her grandmother wanted her. Maybe we’ll bring her back across, where she belongs to.” “Well, I don’t know,” she say. “I don’t feel like going, but if you feel that way, we’ll go over.”

I don’t know how long they stayed there, and then they started to go across. She got big paddle, was just like big tree, was the paddle. Two big ones. “If I use this one, we’ll be alive all the time. But if we take your paddle, the one you came with, we’re not safe,” she said. “No,” he said. “We’ll be safe. Leave your paddle in there; it’s too big. That’s too big to handle, that big paddle.” So she said, “It’s your will. It’s not my will, but we’ll do that. I’ll take your word for it. And it’s not safe,” she said.

So they went out, they started to go out. It was calm weather. Way out they paddle all day and that night, and the next day this big wind came up. It was big wind, and the waves were so big it’s just like hills. Maybe more than twelve feet high, the waves. And the fourth wave they start to go over, the paddle just bust. And that’s the time that girl came up, you know. Half girl, half fish. And her hair, it’s hang[ing] down on the water, you know, saying this: “Choyalim’,
choyalim’. From way long time ago. "It's going to be big flu [and] that's the [only] time they'll hear me on the coast." [When people had been starving, and there was going to be a big flu], they hear it. Some people hear it on the coast, this kind of half-fish, fish animal saying, "Choyalim'." They couldn't see it, but they hear it. Something say, "Choyalim', choyalim';" way off on the coast.

And these polar bear, man and wife, they became polar bear. That's why they're on the ice all the time on the coast. That's the story, Indian story. That's the end.

Notes

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1. Belle thinks the story takes place in the Norton Sound area.
2. The term corner girl refers to a menstruating woman. It comes from the practice of sequestering these women in corners of houses.