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Kluskap and His Twin Brother

Viola Solomon

Henrietta Black

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Story: "Kluskap and His Twin Brother"

Storyteller: Viola Solomon and Henrietta Black

Town: Maliseet, NB

NA 179 T228

Collector: Geraldine Hegeman, Dolores Daigle, and Marilyn Daigle

Date: November 14, 1962

Motif: T575.1.3 (Twins quarrel before birth in mother's womb) and K975.1 (Pretended exchange of confidences as to the one thing that can kill)

Note on the transcript and audio file: the short section early in the transcript marked with { } is very difficult to hear due to a problem in the original recording. We do not recommend turning up the volume as it becomes loud again quite suddenly.

The story heard here is one of many Wabanaki tales of Kluskap. Kluskap - alternately spelled Glooscap, Gluskabe, and many other ways - was a Wabanaki culture-hero like Cú Chulainn in Irish mythology or Prometheus in Greek, not a god. He was neither creator of the universe nor judge of humankind; he was rather a transformer. He was often described as simply a man with supernatural powers moving through a marvelous landscape. In short, the world was here when he was created; he just worked on fixing the place up a bit to make it more habitable. He performed such feats as taming the ferocious squirrel down to a manageable size, tempering the winds, and releasing the waters by killing the giant frog Aglebemü who held them back. In his hunting and other adventures he left behind all kinds of things that are now part of the landscape, among them a snowshoe in the St. John River and his canoe near Castine.

The story heard here is a combination of two common Kluskap tales: the good and bad twins, and the fight with beaver. These tales were, as previously stated, common among all Wabanaki tribes. The Wabanaki (literally translated as "Dawn Land People") are a confederacy of five Native American tribes - the Abenaki, Mi'kmaq, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Maliseet - located in New England and the Canadian Maritimes. They also fit in the larger language group of Algonquian speakers, which spreads over a large portion of North America. The storytellers here are Maliseet, or *Wolastoqiyik*, meaning "People of the Beautiful River," a tribe native to the St. John River valley in what is now Maine and New Brunswick. The storytellers are both originally from the Maliseet reservation in New Brunswick, but their stories of Kluskap and others represent stories that would have been told all over Maine, New Brunswick, and the rest of the Northeast. There were so many tales of Kluskap, Henrietta Black said, that her mother would start telling them in the fall and it would take her until the following spring to work through all of them!

As mentioned earlier, the stories explain certain natural features, in this case rock formations in the St. John River. One is Pokiok Falls, which was a waterfall where the Pokiok Stream emptied over a ledge into the Saint John River. The high water level of the Mactaquac Dam reservoir submerged the waterfall and the Pokiok Gorge in 1967. The number of rocks thrown by Kluskap is unclear, but it seems at least four rocks landed in the river over a long span: at Pokiok, south of Perth, at the confluence of the St. John and Tobique rivers (north of Perth), and finally at Grand Falls. Another important feature of the story is the character *Malumsa* (or *Malum*, meaning "wolf" in the Wabanaki languages), but according to Wabanaki elders the wolf was never viewed as a malevolent creature in their culture (though it is worth noting that here the character is a wolverine). The correlation with the wolf and evil, as well as

the duality of good and evil in this story, suggests the story is heavily influenced (as folklorist Frank G. Speck noted) by the Iroquois.

Transcript:

Mrs. Solomon: And this Kluskap had a twin brother... Before they were born they even had a consultation about it. [Kluskap] asked his brother, "Which way do you want to be born?"

So Malsumsa said (that's the wolverine), "I'd like to be born – burst right into life, even through death to life." That's the way he wanted to be born. {So he asked Kluskap, "Well, how do you want to be born?"

[Kluskap] says, "I don't want to be born any different than the rest of the people."}

Well, so it comes to pass that they were born, and [Kluskap] was born just like any other human being, and then this Malsumsa, his mother died giving birth. Malsumsa is the Indian Devil... that's the Wolverine.

So anyway they brought themselves up. And they were always together, 'til one day they tried their strength against each other, which one would have more power than the other although they were twins. Well, [Malsumsa] said, "How would a person kill you anyway? How could a person kill you?"

Well, he said (that's how he got his name), this Kluskap told his brother a lie. He said, "All you gotta do is to go and pluck a feather out of this white owl's tail and hit me over the head with it when I'm sleeping. I'll never know what struck me."

Well anyway they went on a hunting trip. And soon they'd be pulling up trees right by the roots, you know, and they seemed to think that Kluskap was stronger. Anything they tried Kluskap was always the strongest of the two. Malsumsa didn't like it; he envied his brother all the time. Well one day he seen a white owl while Kluskap was sleeping. So he went and plucked a feather out of this white owl's tail. It was in the night when the moon was shining bright. He could see that white owl just as plain, so he caught this owl and hit his brother with this tail feather. My god, Kluskap just woke up! It just woke him up.

"You found out that I was just telling you a lie. You just struck me hard enough to make me mad," he said. "Now because you are so wicked I shall turn you into a beaver."

[Malsumsa said,] "If you turn me into a beaver I'll just always eat up your woods."

Well [Kluskap] said, "I shall drive you away from this territory." He picked up three rocks.

This beaver went and jumped in the river, flapped his tail and said, "Try and hit me [if] you can."

[Kluskap] picked up a rock and tried to hit him, but this beaver was too smart, too fast for him. He went up the St. John River and the first hiding place he came to was going up on that Pokiok Falls. That's where he struck the first rock; that's where the first rock landed. So this beaver thought that was too much for him. So he went further up the St. John River, and right now you can see them rocks. I mean you can't now, since they built the dam they're all under water. (To Mrs. Black: "You've seen them, huh?" Mrs. Black: "Mm-hmm.") They call [them] "Two Big Rocks." There's one about three miles below Perth and one right here at the mouth of the Tobique. Well, a little below. (Aside: "Oh, right here!")

I thought it was over in the point!" Laughter.) And one at the Grand Falls. That's what made the falls.

Mrs. Hegeman: You said this is how Kluskap got his name?

S: That's how he got his name.

H: Well, what does it mean?

S: Well, it means a liar in Indian. Kluskap: a person that lies. You know, a person who tells lies.

H: Did he retain his strength?

S: He retained his strength and the name. He kept that name all the time.

H: but he was a – although he was a liar, though – he was a good person?

S: He was a good person, yes. He only told that lie. He only told that lie to his brother, his twin brother.

Sources: Ives, Edward D. "Malecite and Passamaquoddy Tales," *Northeast Folklore* VI (1964); & Speck, Frank G. "Penobscot Tales and Religious Beliefs," *Journal of American Folklore* 48, No. 187 (1935), 1-107. For more on the Malumsa controversy, see Parkhill, Thomas. "'Of Glooskap's Birth, and of his Brother Malsum, the Wolf': The Story of Charles Godfrey Leland's 'purely American creation.'" *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 16, no. 1 (1992), 45-69. More stories from Viola Solomon and Henrietta Black are transcribed at <http://umaine.edu/folklife/publications/online-publications/northeast-folklore/kluskap-tales-from-the-malecite/>