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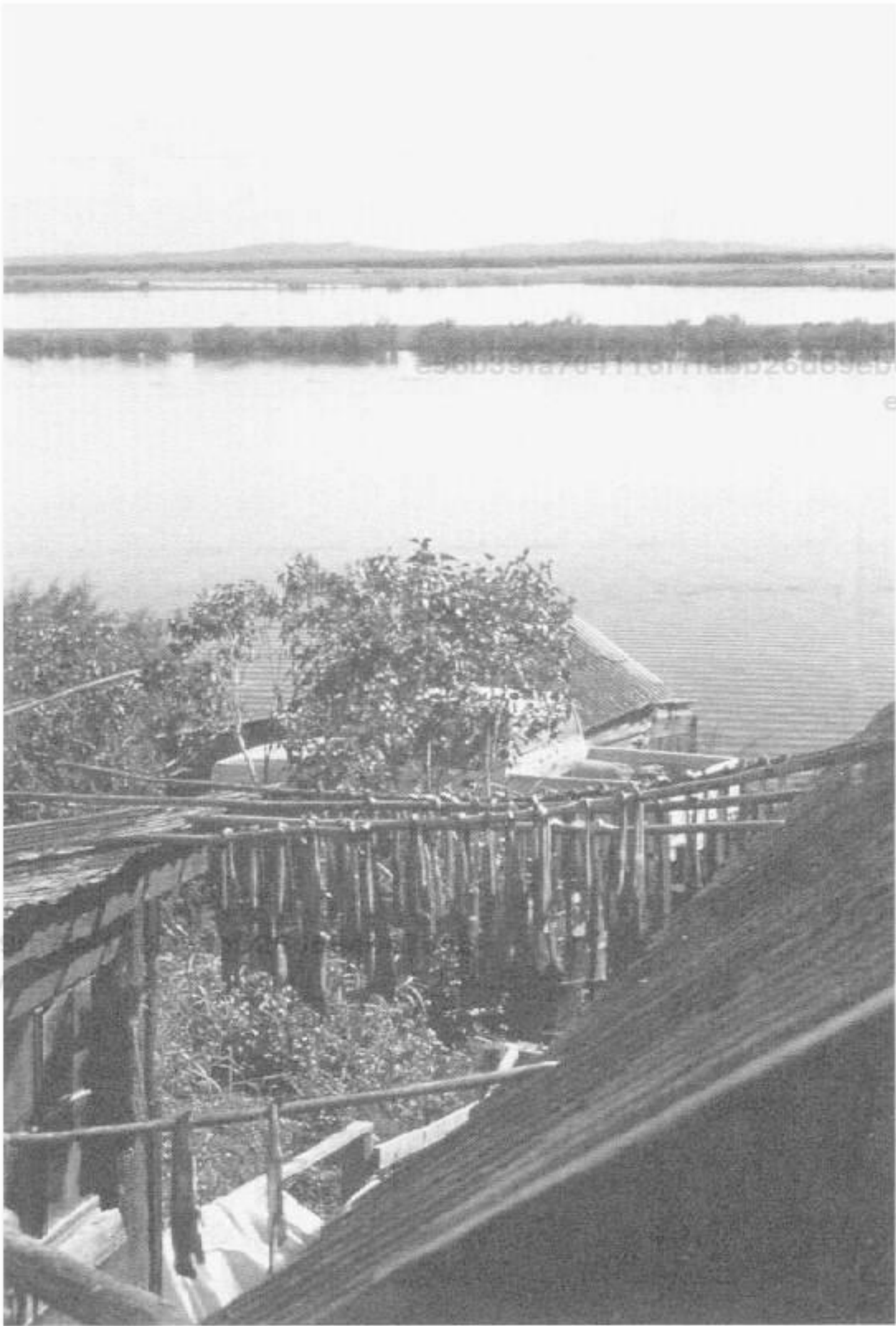
Nanai Storytelling in Nergen and Naikhin

The village of Nergen lies at the end of a long bad road. But the reward is a charming place on a hill beside the river. People there grow gardens, fish, and walk to the central well with buckets slung over their shoulders on poles. Village children bring to school archaeological finds that they have dug up in the garden – in Soviet times, when wearing Nanai clothing was forbidden, people hid their jewellery in the garden and sometimes forgot where it was buried.

We stayed with Violetta Khodzher and her mother. Violetta had started a society that employed local people in ecologically sensitive logging and construction. They also had a small store. “We’re trying to find a way for our men to work without breaking their backs. But we need a bit of equipment. It’s hard to know which way to turn with the economy so bad.”

Violetta was unusual among young women of the area in

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Salmon drying at the home of Violetta Khodzher, Upper Nergen.

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being unmarried. Her drive and initiative are also exceptional, but she comes from a line of strong women. They rarely even talk about men, except in long recitations of who married whom. The men seem to fish and drink, while the women move ahead.

On the way back from the *banya* (Russian bath) Violetta told me several legends, standing in the road under a starry sky. These are distinguished from magic tales in that they are about events that happened within the memory of the people Violetta heard them from.

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VIOLETTA'S LEGENDS

There used to be an island in the middle of the river. It was formed from the body of a girl who was turned to stone on her way to her wedding. The island had the form of a girl with all her things. No one lived on the island, but people used to go there to be healed. There was a certain hole in the rock. If you could go through the hole you would live – if not, you would die. We found round stones there with holes in the middle. They weren't common, and when I found them I'd put them in my pocket. But my mother made me put them back. "You must not take anything from that island," she said. It was a sacred place. The Soviets took stone away from the island to use for building, and it has now disappeared.

There once was a shaman who said, "When I die, take me to a place where there are no people. And don't come back for three days and three nights. I will come back to life." Well, of course some people couldn't resist – they came close on the first night and heard the sound of a far-away drum. The second night the sound was closer. The third night one of them coughed and they all ran away. The next day they came and saw the body of the shaman

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on his hands and knees. He had almost come back to life.

In the Tsar's time the governor invited the shaman from the village of Naikhin to the city of Khabarovsk. The shaman showed the governor what he could do. The governor watched in amazement and then asked for more. "All right," said the shaman, "if you really want more I can turn you into a bear!" The governor declined and sent the shaman home loaded with rewards. ▼

There was one shaman in Nergen in 1993 – Olga Grigorievna Beldi. She was busy embroidering seven new dresses for her own funeral, which she calmly said was not far away. On the way to the next world she may use the dresses to pay the spirits and ensure her arrival in the land of her ancestors.

A friend from the city of Amursk was visiting Olga Grigorievna. Her name is Tomto Vasilievna Beldi and she was born in 1915. She told this story, which was translated from Nanai to Russian on the spot by Anna Khodzher.



THE MOSQUITO NET

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Pudin lived alone, without even knowing that her brother and his wife lived nearby. She hunted and fished and brought in all her own firewood. She wore men's clothes. She got moose and all kinds of food, bear, boar, and furs too. She was also a fine artist.

One day out in the taiga something fell beside her. It was a silk mosquito net. It tore the hem of her dress. She was angry and tore the mosquito net. Blood came from it.

She was afraid. She went home and sat up all night beside the fire. Before long a woman came to see her. It was her brother's wife.

"You are very guilty," she said. "You have almost killed



Historic Nanai dress. Collection of Violetta Khodzher, Nergen.

someone. Your brother has gone to try to put things right. You must go to this man and work for him and marry him.” And so they started moving her things to her brother’s place. Servants worked day and night loading things into a big boat with ten pairs of oars.

Pudin came to the village where this Mergen lived. As she stepped from the boat there was nobody to be seen. Her brother and his wife went into the village and didn’t come back. She walked along the walkway-bridge.

A Manchurian woman came and dropped her shoes over the edge and blamed Pudin. A second woman appeared, dropped her long pipe, and blamed Pudin. A third woman came and she was a kind one. She approached and invited them to come in. Servants carried her things. They cooked their own food. Pudin came in

and saw a man under a mosquito cover. He was injured. Her brother was trying to make peace but the man didn't answer. At night the man called to her to bring him water. "If you are a good woman, bring me water."

She brought it and he threw it in her face. Next he called for his pipe. She brought it and he threw that too.

The next morning her brother asked where she got the lump on her head and she said from bumping the door handle. But her brother wasn't sleeping and he knew.

The brother went away leaving people to look after her. He told Mergen not to kill his sister.

Mergen decided to go hunting. All his wives set out to sew something for him. Pudín said, "I can't, I don't know how to do anything."

She quickly cut something out and put it under her pillow. Next day the other wives complained they hadn't had time to do anything. Pudín still said she couldn't sew or embroider but she pulled her designs from under the pillow and they were magnificent. The other wives hadn't done anything.

The next time Mergen went hunting he brought the best parts to her, and her brother also brought her things. Again Mergen hunted and brought meat and the third time he went to a Manchurian town and brought wonderful things; cloth, threads, food, candy.

Mergen came in and Pudín threw out her long hair. He gathered it up, coming toward her, and they made their peace. At first she was offended but at last they made up.

And then they had the wedding. ▼

The brother knowingly marries his sister to an abusive man, negotiating with him for her well-being. It's possible that the incident with the mosquito net is a prophetic dream. Anna Petrovna drew the moral that Pudín eventually won because of her hard work, beauty, and silence, showing the way a woman could survive in such circumstances. In shamanic terms, the heroine gains control over

the evil in the abusive man and transforms it, just as women today are transforming society.

Anna then told several more tales, including one about the further adventures of frog and mouse, taking up where Maria Grigorievna left off.



FROG, MOUSE, AND MOOSE

Frog and mouse have had a falling out because of the cherries and this is what happened next.

Frog was offended that mouse wouldn't share with him, and frog couldn't climb the tree. Frog goes away and finds a barn. Mice are in there fighting and stealing grain. And so he goes on and comes to a big village. There's a big house and servants running back and forth.

Frog wanted to get in and ran between the servants' legs. He saw the master sitting on the bench and jumped right into his lap.

"Where did this frog come from? Servants, throw this frog out of here."

And then frog spoke in a human voice, "Don't throw me out. I'm not that kind of frog. I saw your barn on my way, and I saw rats and mice stealing your grain."

"Servants, go and look!"

A servant went and looked and came back.

"Yes, it is true that mice and rats are stealing your grain."

"Go and get them out of there this minute! And as for this frog, feed him well, with the best food. Dress him in silk." And so frog was given kasha and all the best food, and then they dressed him in silk.

And then frog went on, jumping along. And met a moose. "Hey, moose, let's have a race!"

"What kind of competition could that be? You're nothing but a little frog and just take a look at me!"

"Never mind, let's just race. The one who is left behind will bleed black blood and die."

"I'm sure to beat such a little frog," thought the moose, and so he agreed. Just as soon as he started to run, frog jumped up behind his antlers. Moose ran and ran and then stopped.

"Hey froggie, where are you?" So then frog jumped down over moose's antlers onto the ground.

"What took you so long?" he said, "I've been sitting here so long waiting for you that I'm freezing to death."

"What the ... All right let's try again."

Again frog jumped onto the moose's head. And moose ran as fast as he could, huffing and puffing. And again when he stopped, frog jumped down over his antlers.

"What took you so long? I'm so cold I'm trembling."

"Can I really be so bad that a frog beat me?" And the moose was so ashamed that he bled black blood and died.

Frog went on, jumping and jumping. He came to a house, and in it there was a beautiful girl, Pudín, making embroidered designs. Her hair was lovely there on the bench beside her, like snakes. Frog watched and then jumped right onto her drawing board.

"Where did that frog come from?" she said and looked for something to throw at the frog. But then he spoke in a human voice.

"Don't kill me. Go out and look. Not far from here I killed a moose. Let's go and cut up the meat."

"What kind of a frog could have killed a moose?"

"Really, I did."

She didn't believe him but all the same at last she decided to go with him. She got ready and got the sled ready because it was winter. Frog jumped along beside her. And sure enough they came to the moose. She cut it up and brought a lot of meat home. And then she went to sleep, throwing a cloth on the floor for frog to sleep on.

She slept and then woke up. "How could I have slept so long? It's already light," she thought. And she went out-

side. It was dark out there, the stars were shining. What could this be? Why was it so light in the house?

She went back in. She happened to look beside the hearth and there lay Mergen, and such a Mergen! The whole house was light from his beauty. And the frog skin was lying beside him. She quietly came up to him and took the frog skin and threw it in the fire.

Mergen woke up, "What have you done? How can I live? In my childhood I was turned into a frog to protect me from evil."

"What's done is done," she said. "Now you're a man and we will live." And so they lived together.

And there's more beyond that! ▼

When Mergen no longer needed protection, Pudín burned his frog skin, the same way other heroines burned evil creatures in tales. Some heroines hide the animal skin their man has been wearing, and others simply set it aside. In one story a woman burned a skin while the man was out hunting and then watched in horror as her husband ran from the forest in flames. It seems there are greater and lesser degrees of readiness to give up that form of protection.¹

Nadezhda Kimonko tells a story she heard from her grandmother that begins with the race between frog and moose. After winning the race, frog is thrown off onto the ice, which leads into another well-known Siberian folktale, often called "Who Is the Strongest?" The frog asks the ice if it is the strongest thing in the world and the ice says yes. The frog then sees that the sun can melt the ice, a cloud can block out the sun, the wind can disperse the cloud, and, since the winds come from the heavens, god in heaven is the strongest. Soviet versions say that the mountain blocks the cloud, a tree's roots break up the mountain, and in the end man is strongest because he can chop down the tree. But other versions of this tale go on to say that death is stronger than a man, and the shaman is stronger than death but is afraid of fire, which in turn can be put out by

water. The story has then come full circle to where it began. Nadia's grandmother's version, influenced by Christianity, stops with god in heaven, and the Soviet editions stop with man. Some versions are told without an ending. Clearly the earlier versions illustrate the cyclical nature of life on earth. In a similar way the story of frog and mouse connects to the great cycle of mythic animal tales.

Anna remembers that some stories were used to teach children how to behave. Here are two of these teaching tales.



POLE, CAVIAR, BLADDER, HAYSTACK, AND BIGEYES

Before you do something you should prepare.

In one house there lived a pointed pole named *tuchun*, for hanging fish to dry, some caviar, a bladder, a haystack, and big eyes. They lived in a friendly way and one time they decided to cook some kasha.

Tuchun went out and started a big fire, poured some water in the pot, and put in enough grain to make kasha. The fire was so hot that the kasha started to boil over.

The pole called to the caviar, "Go to the barn and get some butter!" Caviar went and took bladder along. As soon as caviar went outside, along came raven and – tup – off with caviar, dragged her away. The pole was waiting for the butter and called haystack, "Go get the butter and see where those two have gone. The kasha is boiling over." As soon as haystack went outside, the wind blew so strongly that haystack was carried to the river and away. Big eyes was all that was left. He was so big that he couldn't see. He looked and looked, and pointed pole poked out the eyes by accident.

Tuchun was left alone. The kasha was burnt. He poked his own stomach, and they all died.

We heard that story and we laughed at those who couldn't do anything, who weren't prepared. ▼



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Back of Nanai fishskin dress. The blue applique designs are also of fishskin, died with berries.



THE LAZY BOY

A boy lived alone with no parents. He slept and slept and one time he saw a dream.

Grandmother came in and said, "Why do you sleep so much? How will you grow up? Get up! Go outside!"

He opened his eyes – there was no grandmother but he

started to get up. He tried to tear his head away from the pillow but it was stuck. He tried to get up but the mattress was stuck to him. He had slept so much that everything was stuck!

Still, finally he got up. He tried to open the door but couldn't. He pushed and pushed and at last a small crack appeared and he got out. And really, it was so fine out there, birds were singing merrily.

"How could I have slept so long?" he thought. He walked along, enjoying everything. And there on the hangers he saw, what was it? Something red. Fish! He reached and reached, trying to get it. But he couldn't. And at last he fell and died.

This story laughs at lazy people. ▼

Anna's last tale includes many themes now familiar, the shamanic theme of marriage with an animal, the value of the youngest and the most despised. Storytelling is shown as a way of telling uncomfortable truths in a family, as once again a child brings about a reconciliation. "Puppy" is a raccoon-dog.



THE PUPPY

A man had seven wives. Each was dearer than the other. But the one called Nalumdye was always busy.

Once the man decided to go hunting. He asked each wife, "What will you do while I am gone?"

"I'll make you a robe," said one.

"I'll make mitts," said another.

Each one had an answer, promising something.

Nalumdye says, "I'll bear you such a fascinating child that he will interest you very much!"

None of the other wives did anything. But Nalumdye gave birth to Puppy – a child not human but like a dog.

All the other wives laughed at her, saying she had slept with a dog.

The husband came back and asked what they had done. One wife says, "Oh I was so sick ..." Each has a reason for doing nothing, nobody had prepared. He asks Nalumdye and she says, "Here is an interesting child."

And there on the bed sat the puppy. Of course the husband embraced and caressed the child. Nalumdye was still always busy.

Then once the elder wife seemed to get sick, very sick. The second wife spoke to the husband, "Our sister is sick, very sick. She may die. What will we do?"

"How can we heal her?" he asked.

"You must kill that Puppy and give her his blood."

Well, an order is an order, and from the elder wife, the mistress of the house ...

Of course Nalumdye cried. After all, Puppy was an animal but a nice one.

Her husband went to kill the child. But instead he took a puppy from one of the servants and gave the blood to his wife. He took Puppy and went into the woods and spoke to him, "Even if you're an animal, I respect you and I won't kill you. Go and find yourself a place. If you stay at home either they will kill you or they'll make me kill you. Meanwhile I'll kill this puppy to fool them."

And so he did. He let that puppy-child go, after making him a little place to live, and left him. He took the blood back and his elder wife got better.

And the life of Puppy went on. He walked day and night and at last came to a village. There was one house off to the side and there hung a blanket. He took it and wrapped up and went to sleep.

One young woman Pudín came out and called, "Hey sister. What's going on? There's no wind but your blanket has fallen. Go bring it in."

The youngest went and picked it up. And little Puppy fell out. She wrapped him back up and took him in and

threw the blanket on her own sleeping place.

"Well, well," said her older sister, "What's going on here? Why are you suddenly throwing your blanket when usually you put it away?"

"It's almost time to go to bed. What's the difference?" The time came and she lay down to sleep. Puppy was in her bed. In the morning they all got up except that Pudín.

The oldest sister said, "Why are you sleeping so late? You usually get up early."

She was silent.

Then the oldest sister said to their father, "Look at your favourite. You think she's such a hard worker but now she's just sleeping." She went up and pulled off the blanket. And Puppy was lying with her! "Look! Shame on her. Your beauty, look what she's doing! Look who she's sleeping with!"

But the father looked and he saw a handsome young man. And he said to his oldest daughter, "See, my Khar-madi, what a fine bridegroom she found!" And he was happy.

They were married. And soon a son was born to them. As in the stories, he grew fast; in five days he killed a rabbit, and in nine days a duck. Soon he was hunting all kinds of animals. And he would play and run.

One day he went far away and found a house. He went in and there were servants. The man had many wives. The boy played there.

The women said, "Who is this boy who has come in without being invited and is making all this noise and won't let anybody sleep?"

The old man said, "Quiet, let him play." And the boy played. Then it was evening and time to sleep. The old man asked, "Where do you live, far away from here?"

"No, not far," said the boy.

"Well, you can spend the night."

Every woman wanted to sleep with this boy but he refused. He also refused to sleep with the old man.

"Well, who will you sleep with?" they asked

And he pointed to one woman, the poor one. It was Nalumdye. She said, "I sleep poorly. All I have is my robe and nothing more. How will you sleep?"

"Don't worry, I'll lie beside you." And so he lay beside her. She had nothing.

The old man asked, "Can you tell a story?"

"I can."

"Well, tell us a story."

So he began to tell them their own story. About how it had all been. And when he got to the part about the lazy wives they all said, "Hey, what kind of story is this?"

The old man said, "You don't have to listen. I'll listen."

The boy went on about the puppy and the blood. Again the wives objected. And at last the boy said, "Grandfather, I am your grandson," and he ran away home and told his parents where he had been.

"Soon grandfather will come," he told them.

"How do you know you have a grandfather?"

"I know."

And in the morning the old man and Nalumdye came running. They saw this Mergen who had been Puppy. They all embraced and kissed.

This man had not valued his wife, but now he understood that he was mistaken. And he took this family home. And the other wives all hung themselves from shame. ▼

Nadia and I went on to the village of Naikhin and visited shaman Mingo Chusanbovna Geiker and her husband, Nikolai Petrovich Beldi. They were both bright-eyed and each complained loudly about the faults of the other. "He's lazy." "She's lazy." "He drinks." "She tells me what to do."

They kept their belongings strictly separate. And praised each other behind their backs.

While Nadia consulted with Mingo about the headaches Anna Dinchuevna from Gvasyugi was suffering, he reclined on the couch and told me about how dangerous fishing

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used to be on the Amur.

“Why there were so many fish jumping into your boat that you might sink! And the fish might hit you on the head and knock you out!”

I mentioned hearing that the Beldi clan was descended from the tiger.

“That’s so,” he said with a twinkle in his eye. “Some story about a woman marrying a tiger.



TIGER STORY

A woman was living alone and got pregnant. The man only appeared to her at night. She had two sons. When they grew up she got them well dressed one day and told them not to go out. “I’ll show you your father,” she said. She took them to the shore and washed them. When they came home, there on the bench lay a big tiger. “That is your father,” she said. “Don’t touch him.” ▼

My ancestors used to go to that house all the time to make sacrifices to that tiger. Even my father and his brother went there all the time, although my father’s brother was head of the local *kolkhoz*. But when I was growing up I didn’t know about any of this.

“One time I went hunting with my mother’s cousin. He didn’t believe in anything – not shamans, not Christianity or the devil, nothing. Well, one day we were out hunting together and we saw tiger tracks. I was young, about fifteen, and thought it was a bear track. Anyway this uncle suddenly dropped down on his knees and bowed his head to the ground. I thought maybe he was sick. My eyes got big. What was the matter? I asked him why he bowed down and he said to me, ‘The tiger is our ancestor. You have to bow to the tiger tracks.’ Just imagine, a man who didn’t believe anything else, but he believed that!”

Nikolai told a story about the powers of a famous shaman of the Passar clan. Although he told it mostly for a laugh, it contains several important shamanic themes: death and rebirth, the importance of dreams, and the way the life force is contained in a bone – in this case the shaman's finger. Like Anna Khodzher and Valentin Geiker, Nikolai connects legend with history and the idea of death and rebirth with the revival of his people.



THE PASSAR SHAMAN

A famous shaman of the Passar clan lived on one side of the river. Every day he went down to the river and sat there fishing. On the other side lived a powerful Manchu prince. The prince's daughter dreamed of the Passar shaman and got pregnant. The father was angry and questioned his daughter. "Where have you been? Who have you been with?"

"I haven't been anywhere," she replied. "But I dreamed of the Passar shaman."

The father sent soldiers across the river to kill the shaman. They cut his body in pieces with their swords.

The next morning the Manchu prince looked out and saw the shaman fishing in the river as usual, still alive.

Again he sent his soldiers. The soldiers cut the shaman up and came back and reported to the prince.

Again the next day the prince looked out and saw that the shaman was still alive, sitting beside the river fishing. He sent his soldiers again.

And so it went every day. At last the shaman got sick of it! Every day, the soldiers coming over and cutting his body into pieces! He gathered all his Passar relatives together and told them to move away from that place. "I'll stay behind," he said.

The next day the soldiers came to kill him again. This

time the prince himself came with them to find out how the shaman was reviving. "How can I kill you?" he asked.

"You'll never kill me," said the shaman. "Take me across with you."

So the prince took him over.

"If you can cut off my middle finger I will die completely," said the shaman. "But you will never find the finger."

They cut off his middle finger, but it flew away and they couldn't find it. The shaman died. The finger flew to the north of the river Sungari. All the relatives were gathered there. That finger turned into a woman shaman.

The prince went looking but all the people were gone. The soldiers rode after them, chasing them. Snow began to fall and those soldiers were in summer clothes. They turned around and came back.

The Passars went down the river to the area around Khabarovsk and Sikachi-Alyan. Just one Passar got as far as Omi, but now there are many of them there. ▼

Mingo said nobody in Naikhin bothered her about being a shaman. If people want to live, they come, she says – if not, they don't. She told us one anecdote from her life, about relations with the spirit of the forest. This spirit, called *Podya*, appears as male or female at various times and embodies the spiritual essence of a given place, its earth, trees, fire, and water. By whatever name, people all over Siberia give offerings to *Podya*, a custom that survived the Soviet period intact.



APPLESAUCE

During the war I had to go hunting. That's supposed to be a man's work, but all the men were away. When my husband came home afterward he was sick, so I kept on going hunting. One time a group of us went out. After the war

some new foods came to our area and we had some applesauce with us. We gave *Podya* an offering of applesauce. During the night, the leader of our group saw a dream. In it *Podya* spoke to him, saying how much he liked this new flavour. And our hunting was successful. I got sixteen sables! ▼

Mingo let us watch as she did a shamanic ceremony for a woman who was in the hospital in Troitskoe. The woman had sent a bottle of vodka for the spirits and Mingo poured out a glass which she set in the corner. Then she took her drum and chanted for the woman. When she was finished she had me and Nadia take a drink of the vodka and then made it clear that the ceremony was over and we should leave.

During the year between this visit and the next I attended a workshop in Washington state given by Mingo and three helpers, Lilia and Olga Beldi and Nadezhda Duvan. Here I learned much more about Mingo, her heritage, and her practice. Mingo's shamanic lineage is in the Zaksor clan. She says they were the first Nanai shamans and are very powerful. When she described her life as a shaman, Mingo spoke in the third person.

"In the lineage of shamans, a child who will be a shaman is noted immediately at birth and grows in a special way. She resembles a crazy person. As soon as the child starts to recognize herself in this world, to see her own paths and future road, life becomes very complex. She meets not only good spirits but bad ones – *amban*. So the shaman must make her peace, come to terms with these evil spirits. On the way she meets much that is fearful." Here Mingo added details which she asked us not to repeat, saying that it is dangerous to talk widely of such matters.

The story of her inner journey reminded me of many of the magic tales I have heard. The difference between the inside and outside views of shamanic initiation is striking.

Her interior journey takes her to places both beautiful and fearful and she speaks with various beings. For instance, she described a place where shamans keep the souls they have recovered from evil spirits before returning them to a body – a kind of hospital where souls receive the care they need until they are strong enough to sustain life in a body.²

From the outside, however, the new shaman looks crazy. “She may run outside naked when the temperature is minus 40,” said Mingo. “She may go into freezing water. No one can hold her – she kicks and bites them furiously.”

Mingo spent ten years exploring these roads. At the end of this period all the shamans gathered together, the great shamans – those who accompany the dead – all the healers except those in the lowest category, those who heal only themselves.³ Mingo wore a special hat made with wood streamers. She says that there was one special shaman at her consecration whose job it was to drive the evil spirits away from her. That older shaman caught the evil spirits and bit them, and she bit Mingo too, so hard that she passed out. Nobody touched her – she came to in her own time. When she came to herself she started to sing. The new shaman had awakened.

During her travels she had also searched for the instruments she would use as a shaman. All these things were now in the barn ready to be also consecrated. The drum (*unuchku*), the stick and belt (*yampa*). The spirit images she had found in her travels were prepared during the consecration. The wood for the rim of the drum and the skin for its top had been prepared a year in advance. The future shaman pointed out the tree to be used for the rim and her relatives went out to get it. The drum head was made from the skin of a roe deer killed in summer and the striking stick was covered with suede from the leg of a roe deer killed in winter. The glue was made from salmon. All this was ready for the day of the consecration.

The ceremony was a big, solemn, celebratory occasion. People come from villages near and far. It went on for three

days – every shaman present participated in the *kamlanie*, or shamanic activity. Everybody could dance but only the shamans could drum. The feasting went on for several more days but only the people closest to the shaman stayed for the last few. Mingo added slyly that some people even fell in love at this time!

During the ceremony, *sevéns* (spirit figures) were prepared of wood, silver and other metal. The new shaman determined which craftsman was to cut the tree and make the *sevéns*, which are earthly representations of spirits. One test of the new shaman was that she must tell which side of the tree had been cut to get the wood. There are special rituals for empowering the drum and *sevéns*. Songs and prayers help the objects to come alive, as their spirits enter them. Mingo says that the *sevéns* should be empowered on the same day they are made.

After this the new shaman was ready to practice. Mingo worked in her village throughout the Soviet period until her death in 1997.

This was the end of my first Amur journey. But before going home I stopped back in Khabarovsk where I met one more Udegei woman, a medical doctor named Lyuba Passar. Lyuba lives outside Khabarovsk and works with alcoholics, using hypnosis and bioenergetics.⁴ She told about the magnificent taiga around the village of Krasnyi Yar, the mountains and waterfalls, and the excitement of hunting for ginseng. Ginseng is not easy to find, she said – its spirit reveals itself only to certain people at certain times. If you find some you must shout loudly, so that the spirits know that you appreciate their gift.

Lyuba said that all the grandmothers of Krasnyi Yar went out and picketed the government buildings in Vladivostok with Greenpeace to stop the logging. The logging company office is now locked up and deserted – for how long, nobody knows.

Lyuba went through a period where she thought she

needed new glasses, and then realized she was seeing auras, energy patterns and colours around people's bodies. She became very ill for several months and then enrolled in a course on bioenergetics or energy healing. She learned refined techniques that are proving very effective in her work with alcoholics and other sick people. And she herself is perfectly healthy. Perhaps this is how the spirits are choosing their workers these days. When I saw her during a quick visit in 1997, Lyuba told me that she had learned that she has shamanic ancestry. She promised to try to keep the loggers out of Krasnyi Yar until I come back. I want to know if the spirits will let me find ginseng!

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