

'Rumpelstiltskin' Tickles Uncle Nayukuk's Funny Bone

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Uncle Nayukuk was actually chuckling. It was homely the way he was doing it because he tried to muffle it and it caused his chuckles to come out in ragged grunts. It was unbelievable because, up to that moment, all this silent man occasionally did was smile a little.

I had been the recipient of these infrequent smiles because I always tried to be helpful to him. I had come to think of them as something special because they made me feel happy inside.

When Uncle Nayukuk hunted, which he did much less often than other men in the village because he was kind of lazy, I would meet him and helped him drag seals home, and occasionally some polar bears. He was a fine hunter when he did hunt but he had the habit of falling back into laziness and only went hunting again after Aunt Mumangeena nagged him unmercifully.

Silent Man

When I met my uncle to help him drag his catch home, he would smile. I would ask him all kinds of questions, and his answers were simply, "Ee" ("Yes") and "Nahka" ("No").

Uncle Nayukuk was not a man to elaborate. He only did so on extraordinary occasions, such as the time he was charged by perhaps the largest polar bear ever taken and which he managed to kill after courageously lunging toward the massive animal aiming for the space between the huge legs. (The story of this incident can be found in the May 20, 1963 issue of the Tundra Times.)

Hilarious Moment

And now, Uncle Nayukuk was actually chuckling! He sat there and shook as if vigorous guffaws would pour out of him but he was keeping it muffled which caused him to come out with jerky grunts.

What he was chuckling about did not matter at that moment. His unbelievable mirth became a hilarious moment instead. Aunt Mumangeena and I couldn't help but join him. We guffawed, not at what my aunt and I were

doing, but the effect it had on my uncle.

Two nights earlier, Aunt Mumangeena had interrupted my story telling at my parent's home. For sometime my mother, Keshorna, had been interested in the fairy tales I had been telling in the evenings after dinner. My aunt had become suspicious and worried about my coming home late. She did not fully understand about the stories I was telling.

The Interruption

One evening, I had been putting Hansel and Gretel through the throes of suffering from a cruel stepmother who wanted to leave them deep in the woods to starve them out.

I was in the sinister part where the old witch was fattening Hansel for a tasty morsel and tried to trick Gretel into going into the hot oven. Gretel had turned the table on the old witch and put her into the oven instead, when Aunt Mumangeena burst into the house. The family was huddled around me as I was telling the exciting tale.

"So this is the way mother has been spending his evenings! What is this, some sort of a meeting?" my aunt said somewhat heatedly. (She always called me "mother" because I was named after her mother.)

"Sister," Mumangeena continued, "you should be more considerate of mother's future. How do you expect him to be a good hunter if you are going to keep him up evenings like this? He should be staying home with me."

"Woman, you can do something decent for once and you can do it by becoming silent at once!" Keshorna retorted sharply.

Mumangeena was taken aback for a moment. To my aunt's distress, her younger sister never made any attempt to follow the old Eskimo practice of always respecting one's elders.

"Remember sister, I'm older than you are," my aunt warned. "I'm older than you are! I'm older than you are! How many times have I heard that! You sound like a squirrel. All you do is chatter," Keshorna mocked her sister.

"I should of raised you myself instead of having our mother spoil you," Mumangeena said.

Keshorna laughed. "I think I should of raised you. There is a chance you would have been more sensible. If you would shut up a while, your mother here can finish the story he's telling. Besides, I don't see why you're so anxious to have him. You should be happy you haven't had to feel him all these evenings. How this young man eats. Look at the size of him — I don't see where he puts all that food."

"Go ahead son, you may continue the story."

Mumangeena made a whining sound and became quiet.

I resumed the story feeling somewhat deflated due to the account of my food-eating capacity.

Mumangeena Impressed

By the time I finished the story, Mumangeena had forgotten the sharp exchange of words with my mother and she was impressed with the remainder of the story although she didn't catch on to the plot. She was fascinated because I was telling it from a book.

"Sister, you should let mother tell me a story one evening. Besides, he should stay home with me anyway," Mumangeena requested.

"He can tell you stories after tomorrow night. He said he wants to tell one about an ugly duck, or some such thing tomorrow evening," Keshorna relented.

Rumpelstiltskin

The Telling of The Ugly Duckling was a memorable one. My family followed the story of the poor abused bird with great sympathy. They were very happy when the ugly duck became a beautiful swan, which he didn't know he was.

The next day, I went straight home to Aunt Mumangeena and Uncle Nayukuk. My aunt was happy to see me come home so early. Nayukuk had not gone hunting that day. He was cleaning his 30-30 rifle, the usual good sign that he would go hunting the following day.

After Aunt Mumangeena happily served dinner of seal meat, strong tea, (Uncle Nayukuk liked strong tea) and sourdough biscuits, she was anxious for me to tell her a story.

"Mother is so clever and so bright, Nayukuk, that he's been telling stories from that maqpi-

qaq (paper or book). It's a mystery to me how he does it," she said to her husband.

Uncle Nayukuk puttered around without seeming to hear.

"What is the story going to be about, mother?" Mumangeena asked cheerfully.

I had decided beforehand what I would tell. I thought it would be one that would be unusual and complicated for Aunt Mumangeena to comprehend.

"RUMPELSTILTSKIN!" I answered quickly.

"Rum — Rum — what?" Mumangeena said, surprised.

"RUM-PEL-STILT-SKIN," I answered, emphasizing each syllable. "See if you can say that, Aunt Mumangeena. Like this, Rum-pel-stilt-skin."

"Mother, you're asking the impossible. How can anyone ever say such a thing? It sounds like a crooked knot on a driftwood."

"I can — Rumpelstiltskin! I demonstrated, saying it rapidly."

Mumangeena laughed. "Mother, so you can. I can never say it, you know that. Now get to work and go on with the story."

"Wait a little while, Aunt Mumangeena, see if you can say it first."

I repeated the title of the story slowly carefully emphasizing each syllable and urged my aunt to repeat it.

"You can't expect me to say that knotty thing, mother."

"Try it anyway. You might be able to say it," I encouraged. "Say it like this, Rum-pel-stilt-skin."

"Rum — skii — Rum — sil-keen — Rum-Rum —, Now mother, stop it! I can never say it if I tried the rest of my days. Let your uncle try it," Mumangeena surrendered.

Strange Noise

A strange noise echoed in the room. I must have had a surprised look on my face because Aunt Mumangeena's face looked surprised. We looked automatically at Uncle Nayukuk. A sort of a chopped-off chuckle had come out of him and he was wearing the widest grin I had ever seen him wear.

He was convulsing and shak- ing and he seemed to be trying hard to prevent guffaws to come out. He was letting out portions of guffaws and they came out in jerky, grunting sounds. This was

unbelievable coming out of Uncle Nayukuk! He was actually laughing but trying mightily to keep it muffled, partially succeeding.

Enjoyed Guffaw Immensely

Aunt Mumangeena and I were utterly amazed at first but we joined my uncle in unrestrained laughter, not at what we were doing but with the joy of laughing with Uncle Nayukuk. This was a totally new experience and my aunt and I enjoyed it immensely.

Aunt Mumangeena and I had, unintentionally, tickled my Uncle's funnybone we thought he never had.

When our laughter subsided, my aunt asked, "What is the story about?"

"It's about a little old man and a beautiful girl," I answered.

The Flourmaker

"Taimaguq imna flourloqti," (There was once a flourmaker,) I called the "miller" flourmaker so my aunt and uncle could understand what I was talking about.

He was very poor but he had a very beautiful daughter.

"How can a flourmaker be poor when we pay so much for flour," Mumangeena queried.

"That's what this book says. He was very poor. Just listen, Aunt Mumangeena and find out what this story is all about," I said.

"I still think the flourmaker wasn't very poor. We're the ones who are poor because we have to pay so much."

One day the flourmaker talked with the King whom he wanted to impress, and told him he had a daughter who can make gold out of grass. The King was surprised and happy so he told the flourmaker to bring his daughter to him.

"How can anyone make money out of grass. I think that man is a terrible father. He's going to get that nice little girl into trouble," Aunt Mumangeena predicted.

When the girl was brought the King gave her a wheel they used to make yarn and threads, too, I guess, and put her into a room full of grass.

"Now go ahead and make this grass into gold and if you do not finish making it into gold by morning, you shall die," the king said as he locked the door and left her alone.

Sad Listener

Mumangeena's expression on her face saddened considerably.

"How senseless can people get! Imagine a father, just because he wants to be noticed by that umealik (King) he got his own daughter into a tragic situation like that. That selfish father should shoved under the ice."

"And that umealik! He's so greedy he wants money out of grass! And that poor little girl — how is she going to get out of this situation?" Mumangeena asked sadly.

(To be continued)