The Village of Women

After she told Yaabaa Teeshaay stories in Athabascan, I asked Ellen to tell them again in English. It was very difficult for her to do, but she quickly put herself into doing it.

Oh, Connie, it’s hard for me to repeat.

That wild man, he came to all over in the world.
That’s his . . .
Her wife, he started walk,
and then he stopped in to this big village,
just only girls’ village.
No man, no . . . man in there.
He got nothing but girls.
And he gots in there.
He give a gift to his wife
so he want wild man sleep with . . .

I really don’t want talk about . . .
He sleep with every woman in that village.
And every woman have a children.

The boys. Yaabaa Teeshaay got bunch of son in that village.
They make it more and bigger in that village.

And Yaabaa Teeshaay, his wife got rich in that village
’cause he give his wife gift for her husband sleep with these woman,
The Adventures of Yaabaa Teeshaay

to have children.

In that village, whole village,
all girls, every one of them have boys.
What he do, he trade other one her baby
and other one her baby and he traded in.¹
And they grown up to be married to . . .
Indian marriage.

And um . . . that’s how in that village,
getting’ so big.

Yaabaa Teeshaay go out, prepared food for them.
Whatever girl can’t do,
he prepare everything
in that village for all those woman.
And he did it.²

From there, his wife started walk.
All of a sudden he asked his wife,
“What we goin’ do?”
His wife give an order what to do.
He will do whatever his wife . . .
That’s her wife,
go with halfway

³ In standard English this would read: “That’s his wife. She went
with him halfway around the whole world.” Ellen’s first language
was Tanacross Athabascan, Healy Lake dialect. Interestingly, whenever
Ellen told a story, there was a cadence to her voice that could
be most readily transcribed in a poetic format.

¹ This appears to be an explanation of how the world became popu-
lated. The women exchanged babies and later took as partners men
born of other women in the village.
² Traditional Indian marriages in the Upper Tanana in earlier times
included bride service, during which time the husband would live in
his bride’s village and help her family for a few years while learning
the land and becoming better acquainted all around (see Callaway

And from there,
he gots to tell his wife:
“We gotta go now.”
And his wife has so much stuff,
don’t know what to do.
So he asks his wife,
“What we goin’ do?”
“Oh, we make big . . . raft,
float down to on the river.”
So Yaabaa Teeshaay did.
He make big raft ’n all those stuff
gets in.

And from there, his wife tell,
“What you goin’ do?”
And his wife tell him,
“Why [don’t] you make mark under that big hill over
there?”⁴
He say, he say, “What I goin’ do?”
She say, “Make sign.
If you think this is the end, you gotta
make sign.”

³ Ellen believed this to be the hill called Ch’inchedl near Sand Creek.
David Joe, also from Healy Lake, stated that Tatel Ch’eeeg (another
name for Yaabaa Teeshaay) went on to Moose Creek Bluff, nearer to
Salcha on the Tanana River, where petroglyphs have been found.
Indian *seyh*,\(^5\)
He make mark on that big hill.
For everybody know.

Right now, young children
from Healy Lake search around in there,
but they don’t find yet.
I don’t know if they goin’ find
or not.
Maybe ground growing.\(^6\)

---

\(^5\) *Seyh* is the Healy Lake word for red paint. Native craftsmen traditionally painted the edges of snowshoes and drums with this red paint. It was used in a sacred way, possibly because it had been passed forward a priori.

\(^6\) Ellen implies that the mark may have been hidden by many years of ground cover.