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Published by Ronald Caplan on 1991/1/1

Kopit Feeds the Hunter A Micmac Legend Told by Ruth Holmes Whitehead

INTRODUCTION: This tale is from a remarkable new book called *Stories from the Six Worlds: Micmac Legends*. They are told by Ruth Holmes Whitehead in a voice trained through years of devotion to Micmac culture. Ms. Whitehead has gone back to the printed and manuscript tales, and she has been with the older Micmacs. She has shared and re-heard, marking the changes and the meter, and looking for what they mean to the teller, what they might have meant. She has brought her persistent, patient attention to the Micmac world she has come to see • and she has told us what she knows in a voice carefully tuned to all she has absorbed. We are unlikely to get any closer. This book is a remarkable achievement, and a beautiful production, a thoroughly enjoyable reading experience. And it is more: Ms. Whitehead's detailed introduction to *Stories from the Six Worlds* is about the best, most exciting attempt we've seen to comprehend the Micmac world view. It is a valuable registration of differences and a guide to approaching one another. Only at our peril do we think of this as history, past. We are fools if we do not recognize this book as current affairs. *Kopit Feeds the Hunter* The Old Ones of the People are camped in the forest by the sea. Now it is the moons of winter. The dead time. Hunting is bad. No one has anything to eat. The hunters do not bring home any meat. They cannot find the moose. They cannot find the caribou or the beaver. No one has seen bears, or any little animals like rabbits or partridges. There is a woman living in this camp of the People, and she says to her husband, "Go out once more. Maybe you will have good luck if you try just one more time." So he puts on his snowshoes and goes out into the snow. After he has walked for a long time in the white forest, he sees something. He sees the tracks of other snowshoes. It looks as though a number of other hunters have been that way. "Well," he thinks, "there are so many people in this part of the forest, I may not get any game. But perhaps they have something to eat." So he follows their tracks. By and by he comes to a lake, and at the far end of it he sees something. He sees a wigwam sitting all by itself. Smoke is drifting out of the smokehole at the top. When he gets up to it, he calls out and goes in. An old man is lying asleep on the other side of the fire. A caribou head is roasting over the coals, dangling from a long twined string, which slowly twists and untwists. Fat is dripping onto the coals. The

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FLOWERS Serving Port Hood, Judique, Inverness and Surrounding Areas P. O. Box 179, Port Hawkesbury, N. S. BOE 2V0 Telephone 625-2215 or 625-2717 GILLIS 'ibmecare • ?iBUILDING CENTREHHi sbeciai/zk' in rfodse Paeiaa'es & ' Tja'd-lo-rinal wm'Wi THAT NEW HOME I CALL US FOR AN ESTIMATE FLOOR & ROOF TRUSSES located behind Foodtown IGA Kings Road & Lewis Drive KINGS ROAD SYDNEY RIVER 539-0738 hunter's mouth waters, but he says nothing. The old man wakes. "Greetings," he says, "come in and welcome. Did you see any young men in the forest?" "No," said the hunter. "I saw only tracks." But by and by, the old man's sons returned. They had brought home great sled-loads of caribou meat. Their father wants to know why they are so late. "The caribou head has been done a long



time," he tells them. They are soon sitting around the fire eating it, and their visitor shares it with them. After they have eaten and smoked, the old man asks politely where the stranger is from, and that one tells him a little of his camp: how the hunting had been so bad, and how all the people were so hungry. "We are in great trouble," he says, and the older man is quick to reply. "We must help our friends back there in the forest; you boys tie up for him a good back-load of meat for him to take home." So it is done, and then this man leaves to bring that welcome food back to his own band as soon as possible. When he reaches his own wigwam, he drops the load of meat outside, as is the custom, and goes in. His wife is sent out to fetch it in: "There is a small bundle of something outside," he says quietly. But when she unwraps it, behold! It is not meat at all. It is mWiey maskwi, poplar bari