



Komo Kwelshan and His Two Wives



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Komo Kwelshan, a very tall and handsome young man, had two wives, as was the custom of his tribe. One was named Clear Sky; the other, Fair Maiden.

For several years Clear Sky was Kwelshan's favorite wife. She was the more beautiful of the two, and she had borne him three children. Fair Maiden was less beautiful, but she was always gentle and kind.

At last she won Kwelshan's love through kindness, though as a result she gained Clear Sky's dislike. Clear Sky had a jealous and bitter nature. Soon there was quarreling in the lodge.

One day Clear Sky scolded Komo Kwelshan at great length and concluded, "You should love me more than Fair Maiden. I am the mother of your children."

Kwelshan smiled and said nothing.

Clear Sky became angrier.

"I'm going away," she said. "I'll leave you and the children and go away."

She expected him to answer, "Don't go away. You're the mother of my children, and I love you most. Don't go."

But Kwelshan did not beg her to stay. Though he loved her and didn't want her to leave, he was too proud to say so. Instead he told her,

"If you want to, you may go as soon and as far as you wish."

Slowly, taking her time, Clear Sky packed her things. She packed all her seeds and bulbs, packed her roots and berries, packed all her flowering plants.

At last she was finished, and her children cried loudly when they saw her leaving. This pleased Clear Sky, who felt sure that Kwelshan would call her back when she had gone a little distance.

She started down the mountain valley slowly, alone. When she had gone a short distance, she stopped and looked back.

But Kwelshan did not say, "Come home."

She went a little farther and paused on a hill to look back at Kwelshan and the children. When she stood on tiptoe, she could see them.

But still Kwelshan did not say, "Come back, Clear Sky."

She went on farther south. She was still among the hills and mountains, mountains not so high as Komo Kwelshan. He still did not call her, though she stood on the very tips of her toes.

Farther south she climbed to the top of a high hill, rose on tiptoe, and made herself as tall as she could. That way she could just see Kwelshan and the children, and they could see her.

By this time she had stretched herself so often that she had become much taller. Sure now that her husband did not want her to return, she decided to make camp where she was. At least on a clear day she would be able to see her family.

So she put down her packs and took out all the seeds and bulbs and roots. She planted them around her, and there she stayed, cultivating them.

Fair Maiden lived with Kwelshan for a long time. One day she said to him:

"I want to visit my mother. I'm going to have a baby, and I want to see my mother."

"How can you go to your mother?" asked Kwelshan. "There's no trail, nothing but rocks and trees and mountains between us and Whulge."

"I don't know how I can get there, but you'll have to make a passageway for me. I want to see my mother."

So Komo Kwelshan called together all the animals that have claws - the beavers, the marmots, the cougars the bears, even the rats and mice and moles - and told them to dig a big ditch. The animals dug a deep one that was wide enough for two canoes to pass. Then Kwelshan turned all the water from the mountains near him into the ditch until there was enough to float a fair-sized canoe.

Today the stream is called the Nooksack River.

Before starting, Fair Maiden gathered many kinds of food to take with her. Then she went down the river and out into the salt water of the Whulge.

She ate mussels at one of the islands and left some there. That's why mussels are found on the same island today.

She ate clams at another island and left some there.

She ate camas at another, and that's why a lot of camas grow on Matia Island today.

She ate devilfish and berries at another island and left some.

At every island on her journey she left some kind of fish or root or berry, and that's why the Indian names for these islands are the names or food.

When she got to Flat Top Island, she decided to stay somewhere near it. She stood looking over the water for a long time, trying to choose the best place. The winds blew round her tall figure and made a number of whirlpools. The whirlpools sucked many people in, even some who lived far away, and devoured them. Fair Maiden kept on standing there, and the winds kept on blowing round her. At last the changer came to her and said, "Why don't you lie down? If you stand, the winds will create whirlpools, and the whirlpools will suck all the people in." So Fair Maiden lay down, and the Changer transformed her into Spieden Island. When her child was born, it was a small island of the same shape as Spieden and lying beside it. Today it is called Sentinel Island.

Kwelshan, left with his children in the mountains of the Northwest coastal range, kept stretching upward, trying to see his wives. So did his children.

The Three of them grew taller and taller and became high mountains. One is Shuksan, a little east of Kwelshan and almost as tall. Some people say the others are Twin Sisters, a little west and south of Kwelshan.

A long journey south of them stands their mother, Clear Sky. You know her as Mount Rainier, (seen in the 'Paramount' pictures at the end of movies, in the cinema! - Red.)

The seeds and roots she planted there grew and spread, and that's why the lower slopes bloom with flowers of every color. Often on a clear day or night, the mountain dresses in sparkling white and looks with longing at Komo Kwelshan and the mountain children near him.



Clear Sky



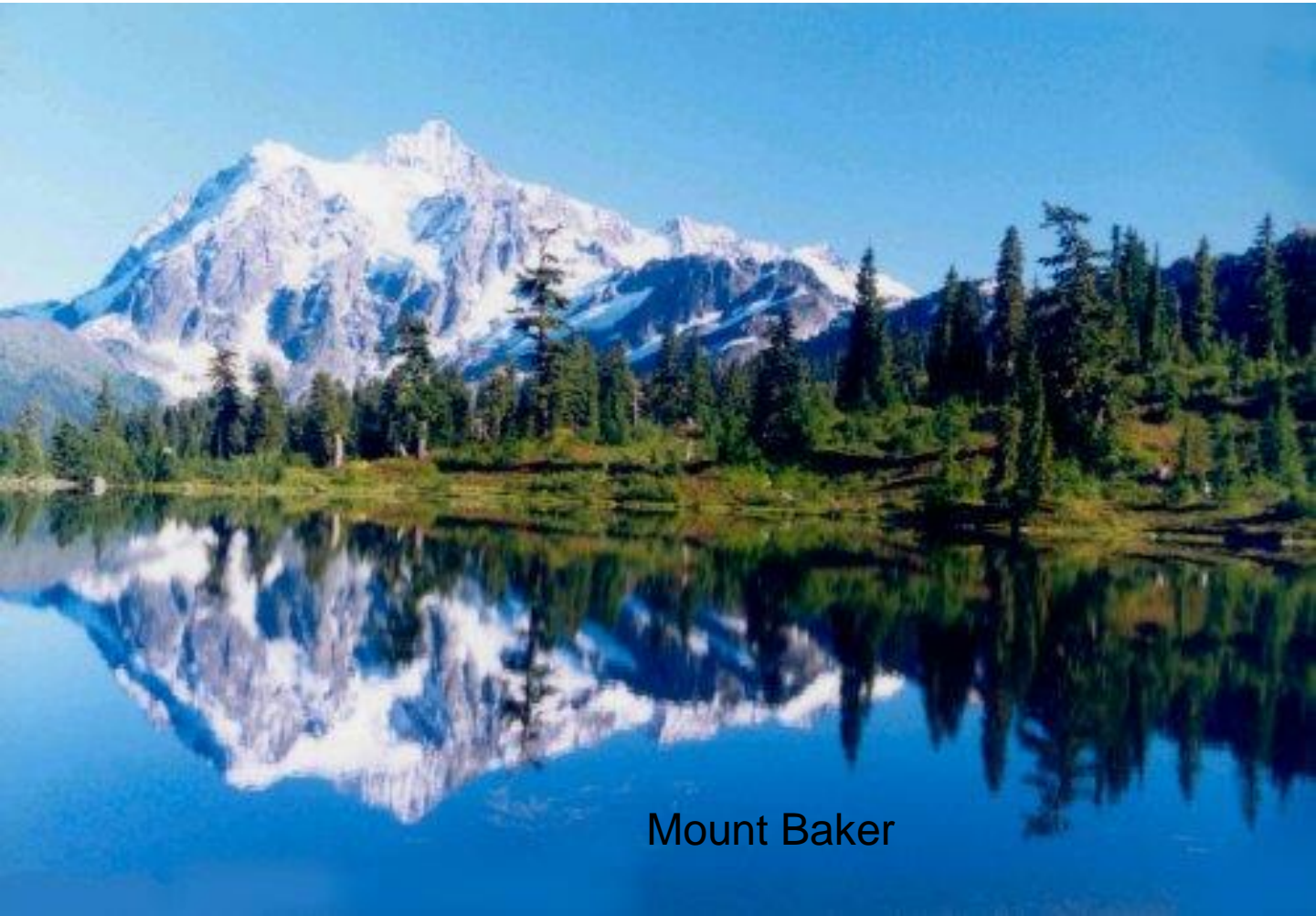
Clear Sky



Mount Baker



And on your left, Mount Shuksan, looking so close you feel you could reach out and touch it.



Mount Baker



Mount Rainier, at 14,411 feet, is the loftiest of the Cascade peaks. It is located southeast of Seattle and/or Tacoma.





The flower in the photo is called Indian paintbrush



Mount Rainier is noted for its wildflowers growing right next to snow.; these are called little purple flowers.



Twin sisters and Komo Kwelshan



Speiden Island



15 acre **Sentinel Island** is located just off the southwest shore of **Spieden Island**, north of San Juan Island



Mount Baker as seen from the Gulf of Georgia. San Juan and Orcas Islands in distance at right.



Looking down at the raging North Fork Nooksack River