

NARRATIVES

113. Shamans and Ghosts (La:maḥo:s)¹

All right. They were starting a N'a:chn'a:cha or foretelling ceremony.² The children were starting a N'a:chn'a:cha dance, those many children were starting the N'a:chn'a:cha. The shaman doctor was performing the N'a:chn'a:cha because, they said, the children were taken away by those people who were long dead, those who were already ghosts. The N'a:chn'a:cha said that all the children should be taken, all those that started the dance. They took those who had small children and brought them to where the N'a:chn'a:cha was. The N'a:chn'a:cha was very excited!³ She was very fierce looking now. Her name was Wawatso:po'otl, the N'a:chn'a:cha woman. The N'a:chn'a:cha said it was fearsome now: the ghosts were all excited about the children who had been taken. One of the boys did not want to participate. The one who did not want to was named Chapiqtlil. The little boy was taken, the one who protested, by his mother and she told him,

"You are now the only one not there where the other children are who are going to dance this."

The boy still said no, he didn't want to.

The N'a:chn'a:cha used to go outside, going into the woods back of the house. Lots of people followed her, men and some women. They used to come back and go inside. The woman was very fierce looking now, dirty faced. She had dirt on her face because she was digging up the ground. Then the N'a:chn'a:cha said,

"It is hard now but you should go and get the absent boy. The ghost has him inside the big rock at the ghost's house."

Again the doctor said, "You should go and get him. Try really hard. They have his soul, the ghosts do."

So then two women went to get the boy, the mother and an aunt; the two of them went to get Chapiqtlil. They arrived where the boy was.

"You are the only one absent. Come along now, you are becoming a nuisance," they said to him.

The boy then spoke: "I guess they will have to leave me in this rock."

The two women got ugly.⁴ One on each side of him they took the

boy along, trying to make him stand up, making him stand up. Still the boy said he would not do it.

He said the same thing again: "I guess they will have to have me remain in this rock."

Now the two women got very angry and started to scold the boy, just the two of them, saying he was a real stupid boy.

"You are a very stupid boy!" they kept saying to him.

The two women set out walking back to where they came from and said the boy wouldn't come.

"He really won't. Doesn't want to. We tried and gave up. He won't do it, the ugly stupid boy!"

All right then, the doctor set out walking, the N'a:chn'a:cha. She started jabbering away. None of us could understand what she was talking about because she was talking differently to the Ghost. The children went along, all of them, with those who owned them to the big rock which, they say, was the Ghost's house where he had the children's souls taken by the ghosts. They arrived there and gathered together, all those who came along. The doctor woman started to dig at the lower side of the beach. She made the dug out spot the size of her head, just right so that it entered underneath when she bent down her head. And while she was like that she would tilt her head and call out.

"Come!" she'd say, mentioning the names of those children in there.

Then she would grab at them under there while saying the names of the ones she took, the name of each child.

"This is so-and-so," she'd say and give it to the owner of the child.

The owner^s would then take the child.

"Come, I have taken you," the owner of the little child would say.

She did that until all of the children were called out.

"All right, the only one still in there is Chapiqtlil," said the woman doctor. "We could not do anything because he did not come out."

Then the doctor woman went to where she lived. The mother of Chapiqtlil was nearly crying, and his aunt as well, because he was the only one left in there with the doctor woman unable to do

anything for him. The mother and aunt were saying that they were very sad in their minds, that their child was the only one left in there. The others whose children had been called out were very happy because theirs had come out, taken out by the doctor woman, because they had gotten their children back. They began thanking the doctor; she was being thanked by all those who owned the children. The doctor now spoke:

"I can't do anything about Chapiqtlil who did not want to come out, she said. "He's being really held by the ghosts; they have him inside the house."

All right then, the doctor started to counsel the parents of the little children.

"You make them bathe," she said. "Put something on their heads, and rub medicine on their bodies."

All the women began talking among themselves, those who were there. They were sad on account of Chapiqtlil being left behind inside the rock. All right, that's as far as it went. The group of women were saying that something would happen to him pretty quick because the ghosts still had a hold of him. The people spoke among themselves saying that perhaps something should happen; they really expected something to happen to him. They were very sad, the father, mother and aunt who were nearly crying for Chapiqtlil. And yet he is alive. He was never sick as he grew up and has lots of children today. ?I:la:wopshi:l is his name now. He has never been sick all his life.

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We went to Tl'a:ʔasʔath⁶ a long time ago. I went with the one who was called Ho:kw'a:xin, a Ho:ʔi:ʔath.⁷ Ho:kw'a:xin was on a gift visit trip to ʔOsi:l.⁸ That is the name of the place to the other side of Ni:ya:. Our canoe was at Ni:ya:. From there we started walking over toward ʔOsi:l. We went with the doctor called Nopots'iqxaʔa, a doctor from Ni:ya:. He was related to Ho:kw'a:xin and was lame, the doctor, a great doctor who now lived on the other side of Ni:ya:. We set out in a whaling canoe, paddling towards ʔOsi:l at last.

We arrived at ʔOsi:l. People came down to meet us. The father of the young man who came with us was ʔAshk'iʔi:. We told them that we brought four boxes of Pilot bread. The son of ʔAshk'iʔi: said to bring two boxes to his sister. Then they brought us up the beach, inviting us. It became night, and we went to sleep.

Then it became daylight. We were invited again by someone else. Evening fell again.

All right, the next day came once more. We were told that

there were not many people living there, only about seven men.⁹ That evening we were invited again. We went as guests inside the house. We heard them getting ready, the villagers. Ha! They came, arrived at the door and began to sing in the doorway. The song they sang was a Ts'a:yiq power dance song. They came in. Tied around their heads they had headbands of beaten raw cedarbark. All of them wore these, as many as there were, both men and women wearing the raw beaten cedarbark. They all came in, probably seven women. We were watching with interest. The doctor Nopots'iqxa?a was also watching. They stopped dancing, stopped their Ts'a:yiq song. The woman doctor spoke now, an old Kwinyo:t'ath¹⁰ woman.

"I am going to see how strong my doctor powers are," she said.

She took off her shawl, didn't have it on now. Then she began singing her song, her own doctoring song, the shaman doctor woman. She took pieces of box wood, two pieces, each narrow. She was really dancing, starting the Tlo:kwa:na or Wolf Ritual dance. She put the box wood "spearing fashion" on the floor and was talking, praying that they would come alive. Her hands were shaking, the right hand held up in the air and the left one pounding the floor with the box wood endwise. For along time she did that but could not get them alive. All right, the woman then stopped singing.

All right, the other doctor took her turn, a woman again. She, too, began to sing; she also sang her song for doctoring. The woman began to do the Tlo:kwa:na. She was stronger powered than the other first doctor and caused the box wood to stand on end on the floor, her hand shaking. She was making noises, really gone into the Tlo:kwa:na. The beaters were really beating time as they were singing. All right, hers started moving around, the woman doctor's pieces of box wood started to move! The box wood really moved now, nearly going over on the floor; they began to "walk" by themselves, "spearing" themselves on the floor. They would go far one way and come back again, moving by themselves, nobody holding or touching them. They were made to come alive by the doctor! She was just shaking her hand while sitting down. Then she stopped singing. The doctor woman spoke:

"Don't you folks sit too close to the wall," she said to us. "The ghosts are moving about. There are lots of them behind the house there where you folks are sitting. The ghosts are extremely agitated now."

We moved out a little from the wall, got away from being close to the wall. We did what we were told to do. There was a graveyard on the upper side of the house close to the beach. It was truly close to the side of the house at which we sat, that's why we believed what was said to us by the doctor. She started to sing again. She did the same one again, sang the Tlo:kwa:na

song. She did not use the box wood this time; she was just singing. All right, she stopped singing.

All right, it was at this time that Ho:kw'a:xin was talking to me:

"Our doctor should try, too, so we can find out for sure what kind of ghosts are going about here because now we are afraid. I am very much afraid," Ho:kw'a:xin said to me.

"All right," I said to Nopots'iqxa'a. "You are to try now!"

"All right, for sure!"

Right away Nopots'iqxa'a got ready. He took his little sack, reached inside and got his headband of cedarbark and his small scallop shells. He had some scallop shells held in each of his hands. He took off his shirt. He rubbed red ochre on his chest, also along his legs and on his face.

All right, he now began to sing, and his song went like this: that his hands are at the other side of the "veil", that his hands went through "because I am a doctor", so his song said, the rascal Nopots'iqxa'a. He began performing the Wolf Ritual dance, began the Tlo:kwa:na, and moved to the centre of the floor. He became fierce looking. All of our crew were singing, helping him, those of us on the gift visit. The ?Osi:l'ath¹¹ now watched while they sat there. Then our doctor went outside.

"Follow him, you folks, follow him," said the ?Osi:l'ath bunch.

They were amazed that he went outside because, it was said, there were lots of ghosts out there. He went behind the house straight up to where the many dead bodies were. Then it seemed that he went to the other end of the village, our doctor, singing while moving. He was gone a long time, then it sounded like he had returned. He was heard to sing from there at the doorway. He came dancing in singing an ordinary song, not his doctoring song. He came inside dancing. We started to sing again while the ?Osi:l'ath just sat quietly. All right, he finished, stopped singing at night. It was a dark night, raining. Now the doctor spoke, Nopots'iqxa'a.

"They are not ghosts," he said. "They are not ghosts; they are live real people, those ones making noise. They are on that side over here," he said, pointing to where the Kwinyo:t'ath side was. "We will hear about it tomorrow or the day after whatever they are, what all the excitement is about," said Nopots'iqxa'a.

All right, that is as far as he went. All right, we then got ready to leave the next day. We went out and travelled homeward, went to Ni:ya: again and told about what they did to us at

?Osi:l.

Then the next morning someone came from ?Osi:l, one man, bringing the news that there was a drift whale on the other side of ?Osi:l. For two days they were there, butchering the whale. There were lots of people at ?Osi:l now, Kwinyo:t'ath, lots of people butchering. Nopots'iqxa?a became very proud that he was the only one who predicted right when he told them that maybe the next day they would hear of what the "ghosts" were making all that noise about, that he had said that they were not ghosts that were making all that noise but humans when he was performing the N'a:chn'a:cha. They were amazed that what he had predicted was true. All right, that is what I saw, something I saw myself.

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All right, a man died at wintertime, the father of Qwintin'ox. The man who died was called ?Owimiyis.¹² He died suddenly, he was not sick very long. In a little while he was put away in a box. He was pulled up¹³ from where he died; they did not even have to pack him out. Just as this happened a ceremonial whistle blew, when they lifted him up through the roof. The whistle blew again as they took him down at the back of the house onto the ground and into the woods, shrieking as they went along going towards a far off place. All right, now they threw away his possessions; everything he had they threw away. Whatever the person who died had, they threw away. But they didn't throw away his oil which was kept in stomach bladders: this was given to his widow. So that's what happened.

Then winter came, and they began the Tlo:kwa:na or Wolf Ritual which was started by the uncle, Gordon's late father. They started the Wolf Ritual dance; they took the children.¹⁴ They took the one who was now the orphan, Qwintin'ox, whose father had died that winter. Many were initiated, other children, too. All right now, they then began trying to capture the Wolves who had taken the children. It was La:maho:s and Otto Taylor's father who were capturing the Wolves. There were three persons in canoes. They had boards across two canoes. There were many people watching those who were dancing the Wolf Ritual capturing dance. Their song said they are stepping on the saltwater because, they say, they are crazy Qi:shim spirits.¹⁵ Then they did what their song said: they stepped onto the saltwater while they were far offshore. The three persons were dancing. The people were amazed that they were dancing on the water.

All right, just then those trying to capture the novices got them back from the ones trying to "bite". Now then they came into the house bringing with them the novices who were wearing ritual branches on the head. They called all the men only. The one who does the Ts'i:qa: power dance was asking for help. Then he started singing the spirit song. He started to Ts'i:qa: just

then, saying,

"There is no trouble whatsoever."

Then the Ts'i:qa: dancer stopped and took Qwintin'ox, the new orphan, into the middle of the house.

"This one saw here father, the one who was here, the Chief of this house," said Ha:ya:lim. "This girl was told by her late father the house was bright with the fire going when they poured on the oil. All right, that is all he told her."

All right, he started to Ts'i:qa: again and while singing, he stopped.

"You people keep quiet," he said while still performing Ts'i:qa:.

Then we all heard this whistle whistling. It was as if we could not find out from which direction the sound came from. It seemed as if it was up in the air, very loud! Then the whistle came from back of the house. We all ran outside; all of the people ran outside. We all ran to our homes, all of us people of the Ho:ʔi:ʔath. Those who stayed home said that it was real fierce out there, that they nearly broke down the doors, for the spirits were really running wild! The whistling stopped, the sound of many. Then came two men.

"You all go and walk to where they are dancing the Tl'o:kwa:na. Hurry!" they told us.

We went there.

"We saw something awful," he said.

The people went into the house. It was he who had died that got angry, the one who died last winter. He it was who had gotten agry on account of the fact that they did not pour his oil on the fire. The one who was sleeping was Ch'ihin'ak, she was the one asleep. They say that the famous shaman doctor was the one who saw, while she was sleeping, that the one who died got angry because they did not pour his oil, which was contained in stomach bladders, on the fire.

"Ch'ihin'ak said this," said the one who told of this.

All right, then the people found out about it, that it was a spirit, not a Wolf, that opposed them. All right, the people, all of them, got ready. They put ritual branches on their heads to perform the Wolf dance. The men got ready. The men took off their clothes, their shirts, keeping only their pants on. On their bodies they rubbed blood, and also rubbed the blood on

their faces. All finished getting ready to perform. They started making torches made from split up boards, big ones. There were to be two men to carry those torches because they were huge ones, long, thick and heavy. There were four torches all together. All right, they planned that there would be two going into the house repeatedly and two remaining outside holding the torches. On the outside they started performing as a Ts'i:qa: song was sung by two women, not young women but old women. Both of them had fierce P'ishxi:nak ritual gear: axes and spears. Some had guns with them. There were two of them who had bearskin robes on and were wearing wolf masks on their heads. All right then, they set out.

"Let's go," they said, "Let's go to the other house."

We came to the front door. We started to sing Ts'i:qa: first. All right, then the Wolf dancers began, two of them; they went in and started performing. The P'ishxi:nak also went in, performed by the naked men. They danced right around the house and out again. There was no trouble; we did not hear anything bad. We went into the house called Hilst'o'as, a big house. Then we set out again heading for the house called Saya:ch'a. We came to the front door. We repeated our performance again: the Wolves went inside, two of them. They were always the first to enter. The P'ishxi:nak also circled the house and went out again without any problems. We set out again on foot towards a house called T'akaqtl'as. We entered the same way. Again those doing the ceremony repeated their performance.

And then while there, just then we heard a whistle again from the back of the house and the sound of many. The leader of the dancers wanted to stop.

"Don't stop now; let's finish it," they started saying.

He went back and went out again. All right, we then set out on foot again, heading for the next house at the back of the village. The sound of the whistle stopped; the sound of many stopped. And while there at the front of the house we reached, the house at the back of the village, the one there said,

"You folks do this when the whistle sounds again: you folks shoot at the back of the house."

All right. Again the two Wolves went inside. The spirit singers started to Ts'i:qa: again. We were scared. Very very scared! The P'ishxi:nak, the fierce dancers, were worse, hitting everything. They were real ugly! They were like that because they, too, were scared. As soon as they were all inside the house the dancers stopped. Then it became more fierce. The whistle started very loud again from the outside. The people outside started shooting their guns off because they heard now

how fierce the sound coming from the house was. It sounded very ugly.

Then we set out on foot for home. We went straight to our homes. We did not go back to where the Tlo:kwa:na ceremony was because now it was frightening. It had become very scary now. I stayed at the house. And then I started thinking about what I should do to the one who was doing things against us. I got an axe,¹⁶ a small new one, and I got a crowbar. I also got some coal oil, one container full, a tin can full. I was thinking that as soon as they started digging under the wall boards all around the house, I would spring into action! My late mother was talking; she was praying for life. She was praying because it was now becoming very dangerous, sounding awful outside the house. It was dark, pitch dark at night. Our children were hiding. They were up at the platform near the ceiling. They were up there with their mothers; just us men were down below on the floor. We did not go to sleep. Just our Chief used to come from time to time. His name was Ho:m'is. He only came to the door.

"Are you folks all right?" he said to us.

He never came inside the house because he had barricaded our front door and nailed it tight. It was fearsome out there at the back of the house in the woods. A shrieking whistling sound was heard out there, a ceremonial whistle. We set fire to old blankets and threw them out back of the house. The blankets on fire produced an awful smell while burning. When daylight came the next day, my wife spoke to me and said,

"Say, go get your big canoe and pull it out to the water so we can move."

"Let us all go to the coastline location," the people were saying who were from different houses because, they say, it had become unbearably fearsome.

'It's very frightening!' they were all saying.

It was as if the weather was bad that day, as if it was dark at Nomaqimiyis¹⁷ even though the sun was hot. In spite of that it was dark for it was very very scary like a haunted atmosphere. It was like that now for three days. It was impossible for the dancers to perform. Whenever someone started to Ts'i:qa:, then the sound of the whistle would start outside all along the village of Nomaqimiyis. It seemed to really annoy it whenever someone started to Ts'i:qa:.

All right, then they got ready, those three who had a very strong mind. They said they would go into the woods when night came to find out what it was that was bothering us. La:maho:s took a little hatchet, the other took a spear, and the third took

along a gun, a rifle. Ho:m'is, the Chief, took a lantern along with him to light the way in the dark. He had it covered, for he had a blanket on; that is why the only spot of light showing was on the ground next to his feet which made it difficult to notice whether they had a light or not. They said they would go along slowly, listening as they went for whatever was making that shrieking whistling sound. They were gone for a long time, the three. The awful fearsome noise kept quiet. We, the people, were also quiet. It seemed as if no one was living there, we were so quiet. We were afraid because the awful noises would start when all started talking; that's why we tried very hard to keep quiet, all the people. The three men came back out of the woods and said that there was no sign of anything in the woods, just a lot of footprints made by people in the muddy areas but no evidence of wolf tracks. Then said the Chief, Ho:m'is,

"The oil of 'Owimy'is should be poured on the fire because the oil is cheap compared to the importance of completing the Tlo:kwa:na ceremony properly. That is what the doctor saw in her vision, that 'Owimy'is is angry that they did not pour his oil on the fire. Let us try that just in case. All right, you folks pour the oil in the fire."

Said the widow also, "All right, pour the oil on the fire."

The fire in the house got big where the Tlo:kwa:na ceremony was performed. Six huge flames flared up as the oil was poured on, the oil of the one called 'Owimy'is who had died that winter. The situation now became happier in the house as it got brighter. More oil was poured on the fire; it really got bright and happy in the house. The women started to Ts'i:qa: in support of the ceremony of pouring oil on the fire. Also those women who were just sitting there at home were doing Ts'i:qa: because they could not leave from where they were in the different houses since it was very fearsome outside. The awful shrieking noise could not be heard now. The oil was being poured on the fire, two men walking about on the floor. Poured on the fire was more oil that belonged to the late 'Owimy'is. **Everyone was performing Ts'i:qa:**, all the women, for that which had been happening was not happening now; the whistle did not sound again. The two men spread the news to all the houses the same day when daylight came. It was different now where it had been fearsome at night and very fearsome at daybreak. The whistling stopped when they all started to Ts'i:qa: as they poured oil on the fire, the oil which belonged to 'Owimy'is as the man was called. **The dangerous situation stopped now.** It was as if the "fire went out" just when they poured the oil on the fire.

We started walking about again, going to places where we had been unable to go; we started walking about freely again. The fearsome situation was gone, the people performing ceremonies which were started again. They began to go down to the beach

again. The danger was over. The women were doing Ts'i:qa: again. All right, that is the only time I've heard of when the Tlo:kwa:na ceremony was interfered with. It had now become apparent that the medicine woman was telling the truth when she the reason 'Owimy'is had gotten angry and used his supernatural powers was because they did not pour his oil on the fire. He had come to do us harm whenever we did Ts'i:qa: as long as we did not pour the oil of 'Owimy'is on the fire. And just when they poured the oil, the noise from his power, the shrieking whistling noise, stopped all along the houses at Nomaqimyis. It stopped, the fearsome situation. That's what happened when the woman doctor told the real truth. What she said came true. She was named Chihinak, the one who saw that a spirit came to do harm.