

116. Sa:ya:ch'apis Meets a Storm (Sa:ya:ch'apis)

A gentle wind was blowing as we were out sealing one day. Every one of us got back on the schooner that evening. We had caught three, Si:xo:lmi:k and me. I was now steersman while he was the seal hunter, Si:xo:lmi:k.² The weather glass showed that the wind had started up. Our Captain wanted to go ashore. Santo was the one who didn't want to go ashore.

It happened when it got a bit late at night, at ten o'clock I think. Then it became stormy; the sea started to get big waves. Our Captain was called Louie.³ ?Alipe:k⁴ was the name of the schooner we were riding.

Next day it was stormy. We could hear the ropes sounding like thunder as the wind blew through them. Our boat would be thrown out of the sea, then it would land upright again. Just like ?I:hwanim Mountain,⁵ that's how big the waves were. Louie shoved some caulking into a sack. Then he put oil on it, pouring on coal oil. He put two sacks like that out; that's why it caused the sea to calm down. The waves were broken up from what were now tied onto us at sea; that's how we got through till daylight. The young men would go out and look.

"We're already dead now," they'd say.

Then I thought I should get dressed up. I took my warm shirt and put it on. I put on my heavy thick vest. I put on my coat, a very thick one. I had paid five dollars for it at Hiko:l to Mr. Newcombe.⁶ The Ts'isha:?'ath were sleeping. I think we were half dead. One still had the voice to speak up, P'ish?aktlim was his name. Then I got mad at those who were going out from time to time and just saying,

"We're already dead now."

"Nice things you all there are saying! Hey now, you guys quit saying that!" I said, speaking harshly to the young men. "We will live. 'Only the Ts'isha:?'ath came ashore alive,' the tribes will be saying about us."

"Keep saying that, O you Chief!" said ?A:m'a:qchik⁷ to me. "Do something extraordinary, something supernatural, for you are powered by what's called Chiefly. Let me live. Take me ashore."

I went out. I had tied a long muffler on tightly around my head but as soon as I peeked out, it fell off my head because the blowing of the wind was so strong.

"You guys give me a string," I said to my shipmates.

I tied this little rope on, tied together under my chin. Then, like that, I went out again. The one called Tik followed me.

Now then two went forward to the mast there, but I went to the mast aft and stood on the deck beside it. Then I yelled, uttering what was the late Na:we:ʔi:k's spell to yell out when he got into a storm out whaling to make the storm abate. So then I put forth the spell. I spoke along in the speech of the mountains. I spoke of the head of Ts'o:maʔas,⁹ telling what I had at sea with me.

"Let this cause you to calm down as I stand in this boat with good feeling towards you," I said, "Which always causes you to make it calm for me whenever I go this way in prayer to you, O Chief!"

I mentioned the name of my medicine power for making it calm that belonged to Na:we:ʔi:k, his calm weather medicine. Then I went to the stern when I was finished.

"Don't you weaken in your belief in what the Indians say," Louie said to me because he wanted to make it to shore.

"We are alive because of the fact that we are offshore. There's no shelter now towards the land," said our Captain to me. "We will all die if we miss the mouth of Alberni Canal; that's the only possible place to get in. I've come to tell you that we should not go ashore because that's how we're staying alive, because we didn't go ashore."

"Give me that raincoat. Bring the rainhat with it too," said Louie to the cook.

I stood alongside Louie holding the tiller, keeping our boat pointing the right way. We only wanted our stern to be facing away from the seas. I think it was about an hour after I finished praying: then, son of a gun, something happened to the sky! A greenish light came through the rain, right from where it was raining, and a strong shoreward wind was blowing. Hey, the bastard, green came through, breaking out straight above us!

Hey, then it bounced up at the bow again, like it was doing all the time because our schooner was underwater. Damn! The jib, which was tied up, became untied from the storm! The sailors sprang into action, the rascals. It was impossible for the jib boom to come out of the sea because our jib was full of water. They would be gone for a long time under the water, the Whitemen, when the bow went down. He turned the steering wheel, the rascal, at the right time. Hey, sure enough, that made the sailors come up out of the water. They tied up the jib as before, the sailors did. We were sailing along fair wind the length of the time the sailors took to tie it up. Then we

noticed that the jib boom, the bowsprit, had sprung out from where it sticks in the boat! Four fingerwidths it had sprung out, the end of the bowsprit, shifted out that far from the deck - sprung out four fingers, the rascal! Louie got all into an uproar about what had happened to his schooner.

"How are we now? Are we not abreast of our land?" I asked Louie.

The sun started shining, shining through the clouds. Louie took a fix on his chart.

"We are now at ... I see we are straight off Village Island,"¹⁰ he said.

"All right, let's go to land taking advantage of the fact that, as you say, we are still off Village Island," I said.

"Hang up some male fur seals. Call them," he said to me.

I called them, all the crew,

"Make them four fat ones," he made me say.

Santo did not come out up on deck, he was so ashamed that it was his fault they didn't go ashore, that they would scold him. Everyone was scolding him, the entire crew. Hey, we set out sail! The topsail boom was stuck in against its bottom. Its head was lifted off the deck, just the top end. All the reefs were tied and the sail folded up. The jib and amidships sail were also reefed and folded up. Hey then, Louie started sailing his schooner towards the land! Then the Son-Of-A-Gun schooner started to sail! Our fur seals were suspended with long ropes, five fathoms I think being the length of the rope tied to two fat seals, two of them being tied on each side of the bow. We had tied on four fat fur seals. They belonged to Tich'i:nim,¹¹ and had had their skins taken off for the fur.

The schooner we were riding in started sailing. It was as if came alive, quivering as it began to sail hard. We would nearly turn and heel right over when we got onto a wave and surfed, the waves were so huge! The waves would break in half on account of the oil from the fur seals. We were not sailing for long. Hey then we saw land, recognizing that it was Ch'itokwa'chisht!¹² Hey, we saw land again, another one! We recognized it again, that it was Ts'isha: (Hawkins Island)

"Where shall we go in?" Louie, our Captain, asked me.

"Let's go in at Ts'isha:. It must be closed up by the waves, Village Island. I don't think there's a channel there now."

We saw in the rough seas that there were two schooners. We saw that one of them had three masts. They were at the point of Ch'ito:kwa?chist. One of them must have had two masts. The other was a big three-masted ship. We found out later that they were both loaded with lumber. They were goners. They couldn't hoist their sails for they were drifting onto the rocks, nearly getting thrown into the breakers on shore. He looked through his glass at the schooner drifting in, the ship. Right away he saw that it had canoes on it, the schooner that was drifting ashore.

"You rascals go aloft! They must have a channel there! The schooner with the canoes aboard is going in. Get up the masts, you guys, and untie the sails!" the Captain said to his sailors, by golly.

Even then it was the two-masted one that unfurled its sails first. The ships, the scoundrels, started sailing, going along the breakers close to shore. It seemed as if it was very narrow there in between the rocks at Ts'isha:, as if there was foam across it. The Ho:m'o:w'a (Village Island) channel was breaking right across. The kelp in the bay was closed in by the breakers: there was no more channel because the storm got real bad. Hey, the scoundrels also came in where we came in, the two ships. It was now blowing onto the land so they could not tack along the shore. They went just one way drifting shoreward, sailing in towards way over there at ʔAto?yaqtlis¹³ back of Hi:kwis, the ships did.

Our schooner anchored at Tl'atl'ingowis,¹⁴ and the Ts'isha:ʔath, launching their canoes, got off. We were the last to get off because our canoe was at the bottom. As soon as we came near Ch'ili:t we saw the big waves. Ch'ili:t was going underwater, the waves going right over even though it was high the storm was so bad, the ocean waves so huge! Si:xo:lmi:k looked back astern at me with a deep frown on his face for he got really frightened from the big waves where we were going along. That's how it was that I joked with my canoe mate:

"Keep going. Ch'i:naxt'a is in the canoe,"¹⁵ I said in Nitinat, imitating Nitinat speech.

A Ni:ti:naʔath said this while on a raiding party. One of them was showing the way who knew the place. Then just when they neared the rocks, something spoke as they were among the breakers.

"Hi:mt," it said, as if the land said that.

"You buggers back up: they're trying to swallow us!"¹⁶ they said.

They thought the land was going to swallow them up. That's

when one of them said,

"Keep going. Ch'i:naxt'a is in the canoe."

They thought that the name belonged to their pilot, but the name Ch'i:naht'a belonged to where the Ni:ti:na'ath were going on a raiding party. That's what I imitated when I joked with Si:xo:lmi:k because he looked so afraid of the bad storm. We were out on the sea a little ways offshore at Ho:m'o:w'a, waiting for a chance to get into harbour. The canoes were all upsetting on the beach. They were going ashore, their canoes breaking up from the rough surf, the breakers on the beach.

"Don't you be worried," I said to Si:xo:lmi:k. "I own this ocean. I'll calm it down," I said to him just to give him hope, for how scared he was now, watching those canoes upsetting on the beach.

The breakers would come around the point and right to the beach at Ho:m'o:w'a. I was judging which one of the waves I would go to and follow along on. Hey now, I pronounced the spell! I used the spell belonging to Na:we:'i:k used for calming the sea. Then it was as if it was as flat as this floor. It got calm as we came to shore at Ho:m'o:w'a. We headed straight in to the shore, not even a drop of water splashing onto us, it was so calm!

The ʔAho:s'ath lifted up our canoe together with us in it. The surf was going up to where the ground was; that's why our canoe was put right up against our house. There were twenty canoes of ʔAho:s'ath on the schooner anchored off Tl'atlingwis.

The sea became rough once more after we landed. There was no more chance to land again.

"It is now become clear that you are empowered with something, O Chief," said the ʔAho:s'ath to me. "Only your canoe calmed the ocean on this beach. All right, that showed your power. None of the other tribes have ever done that. Now you tell us."

"The ocean is rough out there on the open sea. I never saw anything like it," I said. "I'd be amazed if a schooner isn't wrecked."

The ʔAho:s'ath gasped together: "God, the Qiltsma'ath! Something's gone wrong for the Qiltsma'ath. Their schooner wasn't very seaworthy."¹⁷

As it turned out later, the Qiltsma'ath did die out there. This is as far as we went.

Next morning I made Si:xo:lmi:k invite the ʔAho:s'ath. I paid them for pulling up our canoe. I used to take things seriously,

whatever was done to me by other tribes. On the vessel were the Chief from Hashsa:th and the former N'an'achp'iyok. The ?Aho:s?ath came as guests, walking over the island to the feast. There were forty, for there were forty on the schooner. A pot of rice was put on the fire. When it got cooked our pot tipped over and some of the rice spilled out but not much.

"Go and get Tik," I said to Si:xo:lmi:k because he was playing lahal down on the beach.¹⁸

Sure enough, he brought him into the house.

"You go and call the people. Run around fast! Invite all the Ts'isha:?ath people. Say to them, 'You are to go see him'," I said.

My, it was not long before all the Ts'isha:?ath came in! Hey, I sang my spirit song! Hey, the Ts'isha:?ath were yelling!

"He is ashamed because the pot spilled while a Princess had it on the fire," I made him say even though there was very little spilled.

Then we sang a song. I gave the Chief of Hashsa:th double, two together edgewise. Then I distributed one apiece. I gave twenty people one blanket each, one at a time. And again I gave twenty dollars to twenty people, one dollar for each. Not one of those upsetting on the beach did this; not one paid the ?Aho:s?ath though they were the ones who rescued them. For a long time the ?Aho:s?ath held me in high regard, saying that none of the other Chiefs of the tribes compared with me. That is what happened to us. We paid back for what was done to us.