

122. Tlatla:qokw'ap Sees the Thunderbird and Gets Power
From a Sea Egg (William)

He went out, it is said, from Ts'isha:. He was whaling and went far offshore; all the small islands sank out of sight. He saw a Humpback whale, speared it, and then started fighting it. There were many whales and they all disappeared. The weather was nice as he started chasing after it. Then from far offshore came a cloud all bunched up. The whale he was after stopped coming up. It had been coming up and going down in a hurry. Then the dark rain came, passing right above. Uh, it got light! The whale came up and stayed on the surface. They must have known of it. He got scared. They must have seen the cloud long before. Then it thundered. He stopped and got alongside the other canoe with his younger brothers. The whale was headdown in the water but did not go under. It started to hail - big hailstones, hurting. He took the bow duckboard and laid it over his head. The whole crew covered themselves, all who were in the canoe.

It took his whale with its claws. He was the one who saw what it was like; he saw clearly that it was a man there with a mask on his head. It really picked up his whale with no trouble, lifting it by the head, then dropped it on the water. Then he could not see it because it was hailing again. It was doing the same as before, grabbing the whale with its claws, lifting it up by just the head, and letting it go again. It lifted it once more; for the fourth time the whale was seized by the talons and released. Then it went off to its land and was not seen any more.² They killed the whale there at the same place on the water. Tlatla:qokw'ap spoke:

"You guys be sure and say that you saw and remembered what the bird looked like. I will keep it," said he.

They tied the whale to the stern and started towing to Ts'isha:. Then he saw what the dorsal fins looked like: one was small and one was big. He'd never seen such before. He stayed home, not going home. His mind told him that he would make a valuable property of what he saw and that he would keep it.

Then he went out again. This time his younger brother speared, and they started capturing a whale once more. It wasn't a long struggle before it died, and they started towing. Now they saw what this one was like: it had a one-sided tail. It must have been what is referred to as "One-Behind." They towed it towards shore. As they were doing so the man fell asleep and while sleeping he heard this song about what they had got. It was singing a song he found out in his dream.

Then he went out again. He was out but didn't see anything; they were out all day and saw no whales. He went home, just came

back ashore. When they came close to shore they saw a whale and speared it right away. It must have been what is called "Broken-Tail": its tail looked broken. They got ashore, went home and stayed there.

They cooked the dorsal fins from the three whales and gave feast inviting all the people including the children. Then he revealed what he had seen. He had it on a wide board: he had a Thunderbird on it because it had tried to take away his whale in its talons. He told his fellow villagers of what had happened to him. He made a family property of it to have to pass on to the future generations; that's where I got what I had at the time I³ started to go after sea otters. They went out whaling again, reaching the place way offshore. They started capturing and got two, one apiece.

"Let's just look after this many," they said.

They towed the two in to shore. They stayed home for three days before going out again. They speared again. This time it was Nanatla:2op who speared, the youngest brother. They wanted him to capture this one; the older brothers just wanted to help. They could not kill it. After two days and two nights they got tired of trying and quit for a while. They rested a while before starting to try to kill it again. Evening came, and they had not killed it! The one who was trying to capture went to sleep. Then it spoke to him:

"I will not die. Stop trying to kill me," it said to him in his dream. "Sing to me. Only then will I come ashore."

"Wake up you guys," he said to his older brothers.

He got ready, putting on his regalia. He started singing and the whale went down. The whale started running; it swam! They gave up trying to kill it. It was swimming, diving as it went along. They simply hung on. It took them all the way to Ts'otsit, arriving just after noon. Then it died while still running just as it reached Ts'otsit. As soon as they reached Ts'isha: they began butchering. It must have been what is called "Liver-Inside."⁴ In it were two liver-like organs and that must have been the reason it could not be killed. It had fat inside. It had a small dorsal fin.

He went out again and saw an island of shallow dry rock⁵ not very far offshore. When he got close it was a supernatural thing. He stopped on the water and saw a big halibut there. They must have seen what they call Ch'oya:.⁶

"What should we do?" he asked his younger brothers.

"Let's spear it!" said the second oldest who wanted to.

"Let's not," said the oldest brother. "We can't. We might lose our equipment."

"Let's do it anyhow. Let's kill it!"

"All right!"

Then it came up shallow like a reef, not going deep. He speared, and the halibut went down and ran. He suddenly realized that all the floats had gone out of his canoe, the halibut ran so fast.⁷ They were gone for quite a while, then floated up all together.⁸ It must have come off. The halibut was soft and must have come off. The harpoon pulled out. They lost it entirely, not knowing where it had gone. Then they started looking for Humpback whales again. The older brother speared, and it died. They didn't fight it long; it died at once.

"Let's look after many," they said.

The middle brother speared, and his also was killed. They went closer and did the same again, tied the whales together. The other one speared, and the eldest brother killed it for him. Then the youngest brother speared. There were four of them, towing in four. They put in two nights and came ashore. For a time they stayed home, rested a while.

Then they went out again. They stayed out on the sea two days and went home without anything, the ones who never failed. He was sad because he wasn't used to failure. In the evening they went for a walk, going to the seaward side of Ts'isha:. He took his clothes off and started to bathe that night which was moonless and dark. He swam towards Ts'otsit. It's far offshore, Ts'otsit.¹⁰ Then he saw something big that looked like a round trap. He dove down, going after whatever the thing was that looked like a round trap. When he grabbed hold it stuck right through his fingers.¹¹ It must have been that special sea egg spoken of.¹² He held on to it as he swam on to Ts'otsit where he stepped ashore at daylight. He set off to the top and made medicine of what he found. He discovered that inside it was nothing but fat. He left it hidden at the very top and stayed at the bottom until evening. As soon as it grew dark the younger brother set out looking for his elder. The younger brother didn't know whether he had gone that way and sat down on the rocks to look out on the sea. He clearly saw a man there who then appeared up out of the rocks. It had to be his older brother! He ran to meet him.

"Is that you?" he cried.

His teeth were rattling he was so cold, for he had been swimming a long time coming in from Ts'otsit. The older brother was helped up the rocks.

"I found something supernatural," he started telling the younger brother. "You go home now. I won't be going home for four days."

So the younger brother came out of the woods and went home. Four days went by. Four days he did not sleep, four days he did not eat. Then he came out of the woods. He didn't eat, he set the proper time of ten days before he ate. He stayed home ritually occupied.¹³

Four days went by, and he went out whaling. Just as he came to the seaward side of Ts'isha: he saw a whale and speared it, not taking long to land it. Then he went out to sea. The youngest brother had a canoe and he towed it in towards Ts'isha:. Then he came back out, making up his mind that he would look for his older brothers. He looked for them, met them out there, and found that they were already towing on their way to shore. Coming ashore at Ts'isha:, they went home. They caught three whales on the one trip. This was because of the fact that he got, as medicine power, the Tl'imy'aqtl¹⁴ sea egg. He began to always be thus: getting two at a single outing. He started going after the fat ones. He was foremost among the three canoes because he now had good medicine. That is what used to happen whenever they found a supernatural thing; they alone got like that. But those didn't find it whose minds were not strong. Just the ones with strong minds got that sort of medicine power and the weak-minded didn't.