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Version 4, told by Johnny Fraser

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The Narrator

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Johnny Fraser is an elderly man who was born in 1883. He can trace his ancestry to the Tlingit trading settlement of *nuqwa ik'* which flourished on the upper Alsek River in the mid-19th century. Neskatahin or Old Dalton Post, where he was born, was a Southern Tutchone fishing camp to which some of the *nuqwa ik'* people moved after a devastating epidemic and decreased Tlingit-Athabaskan trade forced them to abandon their own settlement. Other *nuqwa ik'* people went back to the coastal town of Klukwan from which they had come. Johnny himself spent part of his youth in Klukwan, and he speaks both Tlingit and Tutchone. He is the ranking man of the *ganaḡadi* sib in the present Southern Tutchone village of Champagne and is considered to be an authority on matters relating to Tlingit culture.

When I first met him in 1948, Johnny was also the elected chief of the Champagne band. He took his duties as chief rather seriously, looking out for the welfare of Dorothy Ranier Libby and myself when we stayed at the Champagne fish camp of Klukshu in the summers of 1948 and 1949 and instructing us in what he thought was proper for us to know.

Johnny told this story to Dorothy and me in our cabin on July 25, 1948, on the evening of our return from a trip to Haines and Klukwan, Tlingit villages on the coast. We had also tried to get

down to Neskatahin (Old Dalton Post), but an impassable road had kept us from getting there. I do not know whether our account of the trip influenced Johnny's choice of this story as the first one he told us. He had remarked just before we departed that our going away for a few days would give him a longer time to think about the best stories to tell us—evidence of his concern with his role as a teacher.

Both Klukshu and Dalton Post are notable for the number of grizzlies in the vicinity, for they, like humans, are attracted by the salmon runs. We may well have been talking about bears, since they had been coming through the camp, but I have no notes on the precise conversation that preceded the telling of the story.

Since this was our first long meeting with Johnny and we were new at field-work, we were uncertain about his reaction to note-taking, and we did not write down the story while he was telling it. Immediately after he left, we put together, from memory, the version which follows.

As a boy, Johnny had spent a year working for a white man named Dr. Fraser, from whom he subsequently took his surname. Although he has had considerable contact with prospectors and other whites throughout his life, his English had remained at a rather low level.

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The Story

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This is a story my grandmother told me. It happened at Dalton Post. Four young girls were out in the woods berrying. They saw some bear droppings. The last girl slipped on the droppings, and she

said bad words to it. They went home.

Soon they went way up the hill a long ways from camp hunting wild rhubarb. They got lots of rhubarb, and they were packing it down to the old

people in the camp. The last girl had such a big pack that she couldn't keep up with the other three, and she was left far behind. The other three returned to camp safely.

The fourth girl soon saw a handsome young man. He talked to her, and she talked to him. She was out of her mind. That man was really a bear, but she thought he was a handsome young man. They went along together for a long time.

Pretty soon they got married. It was getting late. It was October, and it was time for the bear to make his den. He dug a den. She marked it by hanging blackberry and willow branches real high.

The bear said, "Why did you make those marks?"

She said, "I didn't make any marks." But he said,

"You did!" [Johnny commented: "I don't know how he knew. He just knew."]

All the time the bear looked like a man. But one night the girl woke up and saw that it was really a bear sleeping beside her. She couldn't do anything about it.

They went to sleep. In January he heard a dog. His wife was sitting beside him. He wanted to go after the dog. He said to his wife,

"I'm going to go get that dog!"

He rushed out. He threw the dog back into the cave, and he said,

"You kill this. I want to go outside!"

There were four men outside around the den. They were all ready to kill him with their bows and arrows. The arrows had long detachable copper heads. In the old days they got the copper from the Copper River Indians.

They killed the bear. Then they sent the youngest brother up to get the copper arrowheads.

The girl was in the cave, and she called out to him.

"Are you my brother?"

He was afraid. So she called him by his own name. Then he was sure she was his sister. She told her brother to tell her mother to bring her clothes. She was all hairy now—all over her body and limbs—like a bear. And all up her front and up her back.

The boy went way back down where they had taken the bear and told his brothers about her. When they heard, they didn't want to eat the bear. They went home. They told the villagers about her. Some of the people wanted to kill her, but two of her brothers said, "No!"

They decided to go out and bring her back to the village. So they took her clothes up to her. They brought her in. She had trouble getting used to the smell of humans. She didn't like their smell. When she first came down, she could hardly come close to camp, because the smell of humans was so strong.

Later when she would look high up on the hillside, she would see something that looked like a fire burning. She would tell them that they would find a bear there, and they would. That's the end of my story.