

PART I
TSIMSYAN TEXTS

THE GITRHAWN OR SALMON-EATER TRADITION

(Recorded by William Beynon, in 1952, from Robert Stewart (Gitiks), an Eagle chief of Kincolith, a Niskæ mission village at the north of the Nass River. He was 70 years old. He had learned it from uncles and maternal aunts and stated that he had heard a number of versions among the Niskæ. But as he does not himself belong to this Eagle clan, he could not say whether the following version is the correct one.)

The Larhskeek (Eagles) came at various times from the north. We, the Gwenhoots (Fugitives) hailed from Larksai'le (Cape Fox village), near what is called Gæsayks Bay. It is not clear where they originated except that they had come from the Stagyin (Stikine) and did not belong to the same group as the Gitrhawn Eagles; they are of Haida origin. At a village on the Skeena, at Gitsemrælem, there were many people. Their chief was an elderly man, and the nephew who was to succeed him was a young and handsome prince. One of the wives of the elderly chief was a woman of the Eagle clan, which had originally come over from the Niskæ people. This young woman was very clever. She trained an eagle to be her pet, when she raised it from the time of its birth. When it was fullgrown, it stayed near her always. She put a copper band around each foot of the bird. If the princess entered the house, the Eagle would perch on top of the house. When she would go to the woods to gather berries, the Eagle would follow her and always stay near her. At night the bird perched on a tree near her, watching over her.

The old chief was very proud of his young wife and would not allow her to do any work. Because of this, his other wives were very jealous. The young prince who was to be the chief's successor soon fell in love with her, and she in turn loved him dearly. They used to meet in secret places and abandon themselves to their love. Whenever the uncle would go away, the young prince would sleep with his uncle's wife, and soon this became known to all the chief's household. Someone said, "It does not matter, for when his uncle dies, he will inherit her, as he is taking his place as chief." Others feared the wrath of the old chief, who, if angered, would not hesitate to destroy both the prince and his unfaithful wife.

The chief, who was a great hunter, noticed that he was not getting as much game as formerly, and many of his snares, although sprung, remained empty. When he used his bow and arrow, he missed the target. This had been happening to him for a long while until, finally, he suspected that all was not as it should be at home, for bad luck in hunting was one of the signs. So he went back to his village.

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On his arrival, he found everything to his satisfaction. His young wife met him and was affectionate to him, and his nephew seemed not to pay any attention to her. After a few days, the chief announced, "This time, I will be going to new hunting grounds and will be gone a long while. There may be much game there as I have not hunted there for many years, for it is a long way from here." Then he prepared as for a long trip and set off with his young men.

As soon as he had gone away, the prince and princess again met and that night, when all in the house were asleep, the young man came to his uncle's wife's couch, and they slept together. As they were very tired, they fell into a heavy sleep. Then the chief, instead of travelling from the village, turned back and hid in the woods, together with his other nephews. Just before daylight, he entered his house and saw that his wife was not sleeping alone. So he crept close, and taking his knife, he killed the interloper. Turning the man's body over, he saw it was his own nephew, who was to be his successor. In his indignation he cut off his head and threw the rest into the river. Next day, he took his wife and wrapped her in costly robes and placed her inside a box. Then he laced the box up and put it into a canoe. He set the canoe adrift, and it floated away in the swiftly running waters.

The woman, unable to liberate herself, felt that the canoe was travelling fast, as she could hear the swift current. Sometimes the canoe would touch the shore, and she felt the bumping. She had no way of knowing where she was, or how many days she had travelled. Feeling around in the box with her hands, she found some food. This had been placed there secretly by one of the chief's other wives, who pitied her. She began nibbling at it, taking only a little at a time. Eventually she was able to crawl out of the box; she was very thirsty. It was raining; she took the wooden bailer and laid it so as to catch the rain drops, which quenched her thirst. With the large box with its food cache as her shelter, she was somewhat relieved both from hunger and thirst. All she knew was that she was on the sea. No land was visible anywhere. As she was getting weaker, she knew that she would soon perish. She would lapse into long sleeps, and this went on for days. Now she could hardly get out of the box. While she had slumped into one of these heavy sleeps, she woke and felt that the canoe no longer moved. An eagle shrieked near by. This was the voice of her own pet eagle, but she was too weak to move. So she remained lying in the box.

The canoe had drifted across the open sea. Now it was headed for the end of the great sand bar (*weehoo*) which is known as Rose Spit (Queen Charlotte Island). At the end of the Spit stood the Haida village of the Gitgau. That morning the chief came out of his house, and looking out to the end of the sandspit, he saw what looked like a canoe. It was high and dry on the shore. Beside it an eagle kept shrieking continually. The chief called

his nephews, "Come, let us go and see that strange object on the sandspit. Something must be in it, for the eagle is shrieking as if it wants to draw attention to it."

As it was some distance away, it took a while to get to it, and when they did, they saw a canoe containing a large box. The eagle flew in circles above them and did not fear them. "Carry the box onto the beach," the chief bade his followers. They carried it from the canoe, and behold, as they opened the box, they saw a very beautiful woman, half asleep! She was dressed in strange garments. Recognizing the Eagle crest woven into her blanket they knew she belonged to the Larhskeek phratry.

The Haida chief was a Raven, and he said to the nephews, "Take my visitor to my house. She is very weak. There must be a reason for her coming to us." A man packed the woman on his back. Others carried the canoe and placed it in front of their chief's house. The woman was taken into the Raven house. The Eagle had followed them along this long sandspit. It now sat on the house into which the woman had been carried. As the young people tried to chase it away, they saw on its legs copper rings. The older men cautioned the young people, "Do not harm the Eagle, for this is no ordinary one. It may have supernatural powers, and should we bother it, it may do us harm." So they left the Eagle alone.

The woman quickly recovered her strength, and the chief's nephew took her to be his wife. As soon as she was able to understand the language of her husband's people, she told them where she had come from and the name of her uncle and his rank. "My husband was an old chief and very jealous. One day in a fit of anger and jealousy, he bound me and placed me in a box. Then he set me adrift in the canoe where you found me. I also have a pet Eagle. I trained it from its birth. Do not harm it."

In time, the woman gave birth to three children, two boys and a girl. These she trained in their Tsimsyan tongue, as well as in the ways and language of her Haida husband. Her children were very clever, more so than their companions, and showed themselves superior in games. This angered the Haida boys. In belittlement they said, "Who are these boys who have no maternal uncles? They seem to have an obscure origin. Why are they so clever? It makes them proud while among us, who are real people."

The brothers felt humiliated. They went to their mother saying, "Mother, why have the other boys said of us that we are of an unknown origin, that we have no uncles of our own? Why do you not tell us where we belong?"

The mother answered, "I have been expecting this question. Now I will tell you. We are not Haida. Your uncles are great chiefs of a large country on the mainland. Now that my husband's people are ridiculing us, we must make ready and try to go back to our own country."

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She went to her husband, who loved her much, and said to him, "My children have been humiliated by your people. I feel sad. It would be well that they return to their own country, as they will always be to your people children without origin. Let me take them back to their own people, where they belong. I ask you to help me."



1. The Mountain goat of Stek-yawden, on a miniature totem of argillite.

The man did not reply at once, but finally said, "What you say is true. I will help you. First, I will train my sons in the ways of hunters and warriors. Then we will make a large canoe, for the way you must go is over wide sea. Also they must have much wealth to bring to their uncles, as the do not belong to a poor tribe." So he and his wife began preparations. Th

chief took his sons and trained them as sea hunters. Soon they had much food and furs. They built a large canoe, which they were to use in their long journey. All this time the mother's pet Eagle stayed close to them, and always perched in a tree near the house in which they lived. When they went to their fishing camp, the pet never lost sight of them.

The boys were now fully trained. The canoe was finished, and much fur and food were stored in it. The father gave his boys many new war weapons and a sea-lion shirt to be used as armour, as arrows could not penetrate it. These were devices unknown elsewhere, for the Haidas were great sea hunters and warriors. The mother and sons were now ready to set out.

Just before daybreak, they started off, and as they paddled away the great Haida chief sang his *'alooos* until the canoe had gone out of sight. He had instructed his wife in the direction to take; also he had placed three slaves to assist in the handling of the canoe. The pet Eagle now flew ahead of the canoe in the direction they must follow, and if they happened to take the wrong direction it would return and perch on the bow of the canoe. There most of the time it would remain.

The travellers had been sailing a long while when the mother saw the mountains of the mainland coming into view. The pet Eagle flew up into the direction they should follow. When night came, it went toward one of the islands, and the woman steered the canoe into that direction. They found a sheltered place on the island, and taking with them their fire ball they landed there. They started a fire on the beach, prepared their food, and retired to rest.

Early next day, they set off again, and the pet Eagle flew into the air, showing the woman the direction that she should follow. Again night approached. They made a camp on the shores of what seemed like a great river. She recognized this as the Ksan (Skeena River). So they were not far from the village of her people. Next morning, they set off. The slave men paddled, and just before sundown they arrived at the village of Gitsemrælem. As they approached the village, the mother sang the paddle song that her husband had sung as they were leaving the Haida village. Great excitement prevailed in the village when the folk saw the Haida canoe landing. They did not recognize the woman. Everybody believed that she had perished, and they considered her dead. She also sang a dirge belonging to her uncle, and when they heard it, they recognized her. Her old husband had been dead for many years. She led her children to the house of her uncle. To him she said, "This is I; I was set off in a canoe to perish. Now I have returned, bringing you much wealth and food. And here are my two sons, who will help you, also my daughter." She turned to the slaves, and speaking to them in Haida, she told them to carry all that was in the canoe into the house. These gifts she presented to her uncle.

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She and her children belonged to the Gitrhawn house at Gitsemrælem on the Skeena River.

The time arrived when the people would go to the Nass River to gather oolichans and to make grease. This woman and her children, who were now almost fullgrown, went along with the tribe. When they came to the Niskæ, followed as ever by their pet Eagle, the bird perched itself on whatever house its mistress was staying in. While they were here, they met a Raven chief at Larh'angyedæ, who took the woman as his wife. She was still a fairly young woman, and she had children by him. This was the foundation of the Gitrhawn house among the Niskæ. Already there, was a group of that same Eagle clan that had settled after the Gwenhoot Larhskeek had migrated south from Larksai'le. These were Gitiks, Sara'uwan, Menæsk, among the Niskæ; Skagwait and Nees'wamak, among the Tsimcyan; Lutkudzemte, among the Gitrhahla; Gulrhærh, among the Gitsalas. These Eagles formed as many more subdivisions.

This Gitrhawn woman stayed on the Nass for a while and had many children; later she returned to her own village at Gitsemrælem. The women there used to go to a place near Klarhkyæls Lake to get mountain blueberries. Once on their way to this place, a group of Git'amat raiders ran into them and captured them. Among these was the woman of the Gitrhawn house, who had come from the Haida. After the raiders had taken her with other captive women to Git'amat, the Raven chief there saw her and recognized her. She became his wife, and here she stayed for years and had still more children. This is how the house of Gitrhawn was established there, through this woman's children. After the household was established, she returned to her original home on the Skeena, at Gitsemrælem, as she was getting old.

GITRHAWN OR SALMON-EATER OF THE HAIDA

(Tradition recorded in 1952 by William Beynon from Mrs. Brian Peel, 73 years old, member of a Wolf clan at Gilarhdamks, upper Nass River. She heard it at a feast given by a former Gitrhawn, at Fishery Bay, and again at Larh'Angyidæ, about forty years ago.)

On the Queen Charlotte Islands (Larh-Haida) stood a very large village. Its warriors frequently used to raid the coast town and take captives; among them were some women from among the Niskæ. There was one particular tribe the Haida wanted to take revenge on for a serious indignity they suffered at the hands of a woman, so they put Git'winksil in charge. This woman belonged to an Eagle clan; her name was Lu'mihlgai.¹

¹ *Lu'mihl'nagaih*, in burnt wings; *rhkyæk*, of the Eagle: In the burnt wings of the Eagle.