

TSIMSYAN MYTHS

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'uwān, 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.

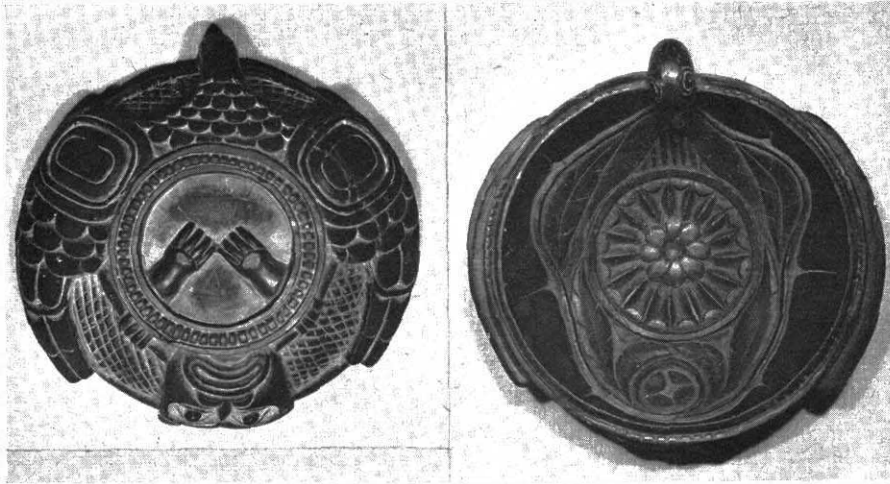
This Gitrhawn woman stayed on the Nass for a while and had many children; later she returned to her own village at Gitsemrælem. The women there used to go to a place near Klarhkyæls Lake to get mountain blueberries. Once on their way to this place, a group of Git'amat raiders ran into them and captured 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.



2. Round plate of argillite: Eagle carrying man on his back.

When it became known that the raiders were approaching, this Wolf-clan woman said "We are helpless, as all our men are gone into the hills. Only we, and the aged and children are left here. I will allow myself to be captured by the leader. I will tempt him to seduce me, and while he is in my arms, I will cut off his sexual organ."

So when the Haida raided, they met with no resistance, as there were only women and children, and aged men and women who realized their helplessness. The Haida then began to rape the women. The Haida war leader singled out Lu'mihlgai, and she offered herself to him. The chief succumbed to her charms as she was a beautiful woman who had flaming red hair. She took her knife and accomplished what she had planned. The warrior jumped up in great agony and called out, "Hædzinmihæ!"—Oh my! Oh my! The other warriors were so ashamed and embarrassed by the hilarious laughter of the Niskæ woman that they retreated, taking with them their now dying leader. As they departed, they heard the Niskæ woman mockingly calling, "Hædzinmihæ!" And they shouted taunts that the Haida men were without sexual organs. Because of this insult, the Haida always had revenge in mind.

This time, it was in early spring when the women gathered cedar bark for the weaving of baskets and mats. These women went out sometimes in small groups, sometimes alone. Coming to a good stand of cedar (Nasuga Gulf, near the Quinamas River) they would gather what was called *tsemsqæu*. One of them was off by herself when the Haida raiders appeared, and she was not aware of them. The other women escaped, and she remained alone. They took her captive. She was a young woman, very fair. She was chosen by the Haida

chief, who took her as his own. They went back to their village at Gitgao. The Haida chief then married this captive, who belonged to the household of Gitr'hawn.

The day after they had been at the Haida village, a young son of this woman, together with his two companions, paddled their canoe to a small stream some distance from the village to fish trout. They went along, and the young prince happened to look down into the shallow water. Behold, he saw lying there a Cormorant head-dress (*Gaiden hauts*: Hat of Cormorant)! He took his spear, fished it out of the water, and put it on, saying, "Now I have a warrior head-dress!"

These young canoeists kept on going to the trout stream where they caught a large quantity of trout, which they roasted before a fire on the shore. When it was ready, they put them on skunk cabbage leaves, which they used as dishes. Then they roasted more trout. Just as they were about to eat the roasted trout, a small frog jumped on the prince's leaf and began to eat the fish. The prince, annoyed, threw the little frog into the bushes. Then he took the trout and cast it into the fire. As all were hungry, they made insulting remarks about the little frog. Then they waited until the next batch of trout was cooked and put the fish on the wide skunk cabbage leaves, as before. When this was finished, they cooked more trout, and then began to eat. Just as they reached for this meal, the same little frog jumped from the bushes right into the cooked trout, and began eating of it, nibbling at each fish and crawling all over them. The young men, insulted, spat into the frog's mouth, and cast it into the forest behind them. Then they threw the spoiled trout into the fire, and still hungry, they waited the roasting of the last batch. When this was cooked, they took the fish and put them on the leaf dish, saying to each other, "Come, we must eat this before the frog appears again and spoils it for us." Just as they were about to reach for the cooked fish, the little frog jumped on it and spoiled it. This being the last of the trout, the young prince became so angry that he took the little frog, and this time he flung it into the fire. At once something strange happened that seemed to surround the young men. It felt as if there were many people about to fall on them and destroy them. It was now night, so they took their sleeping cloaks and lay down on them to sleep beside the fire.

Just as the young men were about to fall asleep, they heard a woman's voice calling out, "Where is my child? What have you done to my child? Give me back my child!" This, the crying woman repeated many times. All the while the cries were coming closer and closer. Suddenly the crying stopped. The young men, although afraid, were again almost asleep when, very close by, they heard the crying woman calling, "Give me my child! Oh my child, what has happened to you? Give me back my child! Give me the garments he wore! Oh give me back my child!" This was repeated

many times, and the young men now knew that they had done wrong in burning the little frog. It was a supernatural being (*narhnorh*). They made their fire much brighter and squatted very close to it, each carrying his urinal bowl with him, ready to throw it at any evil influence that would approach them. The crying woman seemed to have gone away again. So the young men lay by the fire to get some rest, as now they were frightened as well as tired. Just as they were about to doze, the crying woman came, this time very close to them, crying, "Come, give me back my child! What have you done to my only child? Only give me the garments that he wore! Oh what have you done to my child?" This the weeping woman kept up for a long while. Every time the young men tried to rest, the same calls disturbed them and they were now very tired.

The prince said, "Just as soon as it is daylight, we will return to our village, for something dreadful is going to happen to us." Just before daybreak, while it was still dusk, these young men went to their canoe. Just then, they heard the crying woman cry out, "Where is my child? What have you done to my child? Give me back my child's garments, only his garments, and I will be pacified." The young men paddled away as fast as they could, and just as they did they saw a woman standing on the shore wearing a frog garment. She now spoke to the young men, "When you get to the next point ahead of you, the man sitting in the bow of the canoe will drop dead. When you come to the last point before you arrive at your village, the man in the middle of the canoe will drop dead. Then he who sits in the stern, as soon as he has landed and told what has happened, he will also drop dead."

The young men paddled very fast. As soon as they arrived at the first point the man in the bow of the canoe fell back dead. The others, now very excited, kept on paddling swiftly. As they reached the point nearest the village, the man sitting in the middle of the canoe fell back dead. This left only the young prince in the canoe when it landed. Remembering what the woman had said, that he also would die after he had told what had happened to them, he dared not speak.

The people gathered round him asking, "What has happened? What have you met with?"

After a long silence he said, "When I shall have told you of our experience, I shall fall dead." He sat for a long while, and the halæit smeared urine all over his body to make it safe for him to relate all that had happened. He said, "We went to the river to fish trout and we got some. While we were on our way, I found this Cormorant head-dress, which I now wear. As we were about to eat of the trout we had prepared, a little frog jumped on it and spoiled it. This it did every time we were about to eat. Finally, in anger, I threw it into the fire. That night, a crying woman came and called out, "Where is my child? What have you done to my only child?" She kept it up all night. When daylight came, we ran to our canoe to escape, and

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as we were paddling away, a woman came down to the beach and said, "When you reach the first point, the man sitting in the bow of the canoe shall drop dead. Before you land, the man sitting in the middle of the canoe shall drop dead, and as soon as you, the prince, sitting in the stern, shall have told everything to your people, you shall also drop dead." The prince had no sooner told this than he fell back dead. There was great mourning in the village.



3. Dagger knife handle: Eagle carrying man on his back.

Many of the wise men, who were seers, said, "It is well we should leave this place, as we may all be destroyed. These are evil happenings which may mean destruction to us all." But this advice the young warriors would not heed.

Next day, the people of this village heard a distant rumbling. It gradually grew louder, and the earth began to tremble. Soon a burning light appeared on the mountaintop; then a huge roar, and fire burst from all the hills and rolled down upon the Haida village. It was swift, and happened so quickly that the people had no way of escaping this river of fire, which rushed like water down the mountains. All were killed except a young girl,

a daughter of the Gitrhawn woman who was now in the house built for adolescent girls when they got their first menses. This house was built in a cavern, back of the chief's house. At the time, she was with her aged paternal aunt. These caverns were used by the adolescent girls. When their periods were completed, they were fed by four very young princesses and princes, two males and two females, who would chew the food for them and feed them and give them water, which they sucked through a bone tube or a straw. The Haida recluse was just finishing her period in this cavern when the great fire struck the village, and only she and the paternal aunt who was caring for her survived. They came out and found that the whole village was burned. Everything had gone, and all the people had been destroyed. The old woman sat down and wept, chanting her dirge.

While she was chanting, a canoe came from outside of the village. In it sat three men. They landed, and the man sitting in the stern said, "Why do you cry, woman? What has happened?"

In great grief she said, "Something terrible has happened, as the people have all been destroyed by a ball of fire. It burst the mountain and melted it. My niece and myself escaped because we were in seclusion."

The men landed and saw that this was true. They took the old woman and the young girl along with them to their own village. It was situated at the north end of the island towards the North Wind (*Gisiyæsk*). When they landed at their village, the chief, who had lost his only daughter, saw a resemblance in the young girl and took her as his daughter. He had had only one child and had been very sad since her death. Now at the arrival of this young adopted girl, he announced, "My daughter who was dead has now returned to me." The old chief was happy as he really believed his daughter had now returned to him.

This young woman grew up and married a nephew of her adopted father. She had two sons by him, and their grandfather was very happy. But she was not happy, as most of the women were jealous of her. She was beautiful as well as clever. Her old paternal aunt realized this and one day told the young woman, "You must some day try and return to your own people. They live on a great river on the mainland, where everybody gets oolichans. In reprisal our people attacked the village of your uncle, and your mother was among those captured in the raids. The captives were brought to your father's village, which later was destroyed; only you remain. You have many relatives and a very high position among your people, so you should go back. Try and get more information from two Tsimsyan captives who are in this chief's house. These are two aged men who will help you when you need it." Soon after this the old woman died, and the young woman mourned her deeply.

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Her two sons grew rapidly, and the old chief, their grandfather, taught them the ways of warfare and hunting, and how to maintain themselves as real princes. The two boys were very clever and were much more skilful than the other youths of the village. For this reason they were hated by them and subjected to petty indignities from their playmates. One day, while they were playing, they so outsmarted the others that one of these said, "Who are these two young fellows of obscure origin? Why do they think they are so much better than we are?"

When the brothers heard this, they were embarrassed, and going to their mother, they asked, "Why is it that the other boys always call us people of unknown origin? Is this not our own country?"

For a long while the mother did not answer, for she was very sad. Then she said, "What they say is true. This is not our country. Your grandmother was taken captive in a raid on your grandfather's village. That is how we live here. The village in which I was born has been destroyed by fire by the bursting of the mountains. We must make secret preparations to escape from here and return to your grandfather's village. It is far away, in the direction of the sunrise. We must make our preparations secretly and try to get a canoe and hide it in the bushes. We will have to have food to last for a long voyage. There are two Tsimsyan here who have promised to help us. They will guide us where we want to go. Your grandfather's house is that of Gitrhawn, a very strong people. But they do not know where we have gone or who our captors are. Otherwise they would have retaliated by now."

When the young boys heard this, they were determined to escape and return to their own country. The mother went to her husband who, when he heard of it, became angry and said, "I will not allow my sons to leave me. Should you want to go back to your people, you may do so, but not your sons. They must remain here."

That spring a child was born to this woman. It was a girl. Now the woman and her children were more determined than ever to return to their homeland, because of the insults they were subjected to. So they moved away to their fishing camp and began to prepare much food. The young brothers had been able to hide a canoe in the bushes. It belonged to one of the Tsimsyan men who were going to guide them in their return journey to their own land. Every day they took a portion of the food they had prepared and hid it in the canoe, also skins of the fur seal and sea-lion, of the bear and sea-otter. They would add to their cache only a little at a time so that their father and his people, who were watching very closely, would not notice. Every day they added to their store of supplies. The mother made several large cedar-bark mats to be used for sails. After many days, everything was ready. The mother of the boys said, "To-night, there is no moon. It is the right time to leave. There is no other way but for me to kill my husband,

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who refuses to let us leave but does nothing to stop his people from ridiculing us. After all in the house are asleep, I will get up to leave. You get up too, and we will go to the spot where we have hidden the canoe. We will paddle past the village at night. The people in the village will not miss us. This will give us a long start before they try to follow us, and they will not know which way we have gone."

That night, when they had all retired to their sleeping places, the woman slept by the side of her husband. She had sharpened the knife to kill him. After she had cut off his head, she took it with her, and with it and her infant child in her arms she made her way towards the canoe. The other children followed the two Tsimcyan. They all stepped into the canoe and paddled swiftly away.



4. Dragon (Tlenamaw) painted on wooden dish.

The village stood on each side of a narrow channel, and they had to pass very close to the houses. Just as they were nearing the houses, the child began to cry. The mother had to keep on paddling to help the others, and she could not stop to nurse it. So she took the head of her husband, pulled out the tongue, and pushed a little stick through it, so as to keep it protruding. Then she gave it to the child to suckle.

They passed the village safely and were soon on the open waters. The Tsimcyan, who were of the Eagle clan (*Larhskeek*), now directed the course of the canoe. After daybreak, they neared a large sandspit (*weehoo*). "The way now lies in the direction of the rising sun. When we get across, we must hide during the day; there may be some Tlingit (*Anhlagit*) about who may take us into captivity and make us slaves, as we are now approaching the country of the Gidaraniis." Arriving at a large island, they went into a long

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inlet, and here they hid until dark. Then they resumed paddling in the direction of the mainland and headed towards the North Wind. At day-break, they again went into hiding.

The Tsimsyan who were guiding them knew where they were, and said, "We are still in the country of the Tlingit. So we must hide again. To-night, we should be able to reach the mouth of the Nass River. There we shall be safe with fellow Larhskeek. They will assist you in finding your people, who have their village near the mouth of the river. You will meet there with your folk."

That night they again paddled on. Soon they came to the mouth of the Nass River and landed at Larh'angyedæ. It was just breaking day.

Much excitement soon spread among the people, for a woman they had all given up as dead had now returned to them with much wealth. She was a daughter of the woman who had been dead a long while, and she had now returned with her children to the home of their maternal grandmother.

The grandfather, chief Gitrhawn, took these young boys and presented them before all the people. The daughter who had suckled the tongue of her father when escaping from the Haida grew up and became the wife of a Gitsemrælem chief, who took her to his village on the Skeena River. There, with her, the house of Gitrhawn was established. Eventually they became a very large group.

Later, in a raid made by the Git'amat on the Gitsemrælem village, women were taken as captives by the raiders; among them was this Gitrhawn woman. The Git'amat realized that she was of high rank. Soon she was taken by the Git'amat chief as his wife. Another Gitrhawn group was established there as a result. It is known at Kit'amat as the Sen'arhæt house. This is now the acknowledged head of the Larhskeek. From here some of these Eagles went to the Haida, with whom they met after some of them had gone to the Wudstæ group (to the south). From there they went to the Haida. In turn, they joined the Kassan group of Haida. Here the Larhskeek house of the Haida was established and that of Kusan as Sen'arhæt.

At Gitka'ta (Hartley Bay) there was another branch of the Larhskeek group established. It is also known as the Gitrhawn. Although they do not assume the name of Sen'arhæt, they have all the other names of the clan. Their principal name is Hæ'is, and the woman chieftain's name is 'Maws. This is the Clifton family, consisting of about four sons and five daughters, who all have large families. So that at Hartley Bay this Gitrhawn group among the Tsimsyan is larger than at any other place, though almost extinct at Gitsemrælem and at Port Simpson. Only a few are left at Kit'amat. There are a few at Kincolith, and virtually none left at Kassan (Alaska, Prince of Wales Island). These formed an important group among the Rhkyædet (Cannibal) *halait* society; they were the most numerous in this very restricted society.

The informant states that when he was a boy at Port Simpson, he watched a performance of initiation. He saw Skagwayt (Alfred Dudoward) initiated into the Rhkyædet *halait* group. This initiation took place after the arrival of Wm. Duncan, the missionary. Dudoward had been one of Duncan's assistants. Being ambitious, he decided to become a cannibal *halait* to outdo Legyærh, who had become a Rhæsem *halait*; these *halaits* used dogs for initiations. For this lapse, Dudoward was expelled from Duncan's church. After he had been expelled, the Rhkyædet *halait* initiations ceased to take place, and Dudoward went south to Victoria. His mother, who was married to a Government official, had acquired a high standing in the councils of the Methodist church. So Dudoward and his mother induced these dignitaries of the church to come to Port Simpson. There this church was soon to establish its Mission. His uncle (a former Git'iks, the informant's uncle) was one of the guests, and he came along as a young boy. Skagwayt was a young man. He married, and among the guests at the ceremony was the chief woman called 'Maws. She had come all the way from Hartley Bay. (She is still living—Mrs. Heber Clifton herself.) She still remembers much of the initiation ceremony, when the initiated was being led around in front of the village, looking for some victim to bite. The initiated was in a frenzy and trying to break away from those who had him under control. It was then that the woman came forward, baring her arm. She called out, "Come, great *halait*! Satisfy your hunger." 'Maws was of the Rhkyædet *halait* rank herself, and only one of her standing could have offered herself as a subject to satisfy the yearnings of the Rhkyædet *halait* "initiated one". This woman had done this same thing at several similar initiation ceremonies, so the informant has since heard, in fact all of those taking part, with the exception of Sarh'sarht, who was also a Rhkyædet *halait*, were either from Kit'amat or Wudstæ (Bella Bella.) These places were recognized as the chief ones of all the various *halait* groups.

Continuing with the Gitrhawn people, they often went to the Haida and were also recognized there, to this day, for their relationship with the Niskæ branch of the clan. This is often spoken of among the different tribal connections; that is, Niskæ, Tsimtsyán, Gitsalas, Git'amat, Gitka'ta, and Haida (Gitgyæ'yu).

THE EAGLE "FUGITIVES" FROM THE NORTH, LED BY NEES'WAMAK

(Recorded by William Beynon in 1950 from Robert Ridley, a Tsimtsyán of Ketchikan, Alaska.)

The Larhskeek (Eagle) clan dwelt mostly at Na'a (now Loring, Alaska). Here they lived together with the Larhkibu (Wolf) clan. These two groups intermarried and stayed very close together, each having its own village.