

## THE ORIGIN OF THRAYMSEM

(A Haida version recorded by William Beynon in 1954, from Solomon Wilson, of Skidegate.)

A village of the Haida [Cape St. James or Ninstints] stood at the southern end of the Queen Charlotte Islands. There in the darkness, a great chief lived with his wife, and most of the animals we know lived alongside. They had as a slave a great double-mouthed monster [the Dragon] who brought them food, but it ate nearly as much food as it brought in. Every day the monster would capture a whale or a sea-lion, and the people got only a small portion, as the monster would devour nearly all of it.

The world at this time was in a most complete darkness, and it was with great difficulty that the people moved around. They could not travel any great distance. The chief and his wife had a young son who seemed quite clever and was much loved by his parents. The young boy took ill and died. The people grieved greatly, and the chief erected a burial pole (or grave box) upon which he put the coffin of his son. Here, every day he and his wife would come to mourn. Once, when the chief and his wife had come to mourn, they saw what seemed a bright shining light issuing from the box containing the remains of their son. As they drew closer, behold, a young boy<sup>1</sup> sat upright. "Look," the mother cried; "our son has been returned to us." Both were extremely happy, and at once the bright shining boy was brought down. He said, "Because of your continual weeping and mourning, the chief of the Heavens has not been able to rest. So he has sent me back to you."

The chief and his wife were very happy, as were the whole tribe. Wherever the young man went, there was brightness, making everything visible in the near vicinity. He went about like the others but would not partake of food. He kept on asking, "Who has the daylight? Where is it?" A wise man said. "It is in the keeping of the great Chief of the Skies, who lives in the country at the head of the Nass River, the river where the oolichans come from. This is a long way from here."

All the time the chief and his people worried about the young prince who would not eat. Every day the double-mouthed monster brought food of all kinds, and the people had their share of it; they all ate, except the young prince. The monster gulped it down in huge quantities, so the prince asked him, "Why do you eat so much?"—"Because I eat my scabs. This makes me always hungry. Why don't you try it?" So one day the prince took a small scab he had on his own body and put it on a piece of whale meat. He ate this, and as he did, he became very hungry and could not be satisfied. He began to eat up all his father's food, also that in the houses of his father's people. Soon the folk began to worry, as all their food would soon be gone.

<sup>1</sup>Called Larah'ways by the Tsimsyan.

The great chief was much shamed by the way his son was eating. Finally he said to his wife, "We must send our son away where he may gather his own food, for here he is eating all the food of the village. He has been speaking of going to get the daylight ball. We will encourage him and give him whatever may help him." He then called his son, "My son, you have wanted to go for the daylight ball. Let me give you my Raven cloak, which will enable you to fly. You may also take along many pebbles, which you will cast in the waters so that islands will rise out of the sea. These will be resting places on your way. When you come to the Nass River, you will fly to the headwaters until you see some very high mountains. There you will find an opening, through which you will fly. Then you will arrive in the country of the great chief who controls the light ball."

Next day, the chief gave his son his Raven garment and many pebbles, and the young man set out. With the help of the cloak he flew away, but soon he began to tire. So he dropped a pebble into the sea. At once an island sprung up; upon this he rested. The following day, he continued his flight, and toward evening he again began to tire. He dropped another pebble, and an island rose out of the sea. There he rested and grew very hungry.

The next day, he kept on going, and as before, he dropped another pebble, and once more an island came up. This he did until he reached the mainland. Then he travelled up the Nass River and followed its course until he encountered high mountains. As these were too high to fly over, he began to look for an opening in the mountain to fly through. He finally found this passage and watched it opening and closing. As soon as it opened, he flew through, and just as he had passed through the passage, it closed, nearly crushing him. Then he saw a wonderful bright country with a big lake and a splendid house, very bright. He knew that he had arrived at his destination. He would now plan to get into the house.

While he was planning, he sat like a raven, on a large spruce tree, near the water-hole. Soon a young woman stepped out of the house. So the young man turned himself into a spruce needle and floated into her drinking vessel. The young woman drank the water, and in her thirst swallowed the spruce needle; then she walked back to the house. She became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy. This pleased the great chief (her father) very much.

Every day the chief would take the child and stretch it until it had grown quite large. The child used to crawl about in search of the ball of light. He saw many boxes near where the great chief slept, and would cry out "Mæ, Mæ!" The people were at a loss as to how to pacify the child. They tried everything, but it kept on crying, "Mæ, Mæ!" Finally an old man said, "He must be crying to play with the daylight ball. See if that will pacify it!" The daylight ball was brought down and taken from the box. They gave it to the child, who took it immediately and rolled it about on the

floor and was pacified. "See!" said the wise man, "That was what was wanted." The child played with the ball until he tired and then crawled away. This the child did every day, until the people saw that he did not damage the light ball in any way but merely played with it.

After that, they paid no attention to him when he played with the light ball. Seeing this, the child began rolling the ball toward the doorway and then would leave it there. The attendant paid no heed. One day early in the morning, when nobody in the house was watching, the child again played with the ball, and rolled it to the door and then outside. At once the child grew up and ran to the spot where he had hidden his Raven cloak. Wearing it, he flew away with the light ball following in the direction he had come from. Soon he arrived at the passage through the mountain and flew through it, as he had done the other way about. He soon reached the mouth of the Nass River, where the oolichans were. Thraymsem wanted some, yet he intended taking the light ball away out to his Haida country without a stop. He was so hungry that he called to the Ghost people, who were fishing the oolichans in the dark, "Give me some oolichans, my friends."—"If you want oolichans, come fish for them yourself," the Ghost people answered. "Come, my friends, give me some oolichans." But they paid no heed to him. "Give me some oolichans, or else I shall break the light ball and you will have to stop fishing."—"Do not lie to us, Thraymsem; we know you too well. How can you break the light ball, when it is in the heavens, in the keeping of the Sky Chief. Go on your way; do not try to fool us!" This made Thraymsem only the hungrier. He now called out: "If you don't give me oolichans now, I will break the light ball; then you Ghost people will suffer." They laughed at him, and it made him very angry. So he took the light ball and burst it. As he did so, the light descended from the headwaters of the Nass River and spread all over the world. This was the origin of light and the ruin of the Ghost people. Thus it was that Thraymsem stayed on the coast of the mainland, instead of returning to the Haida.