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The Story of the Bear and His Indian Wife. A Legend of the Haidas of Queen Charlotte's Island, B. C.

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THE STORY OF THE BEAR AND HIS INDIAN WIFE.

A LEGEND OF THE HAIDAS OF QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S ISLAND, B. C.

LOOKING over my papers a few evenings ago I found the following tale, bearing date of May, 1873, the time when it was recorded. My informant was a very intelligent Haida, by the name of Yak Quahu, whose memory was stored with legends like the following, which he used to repeat of an evening, seated by the camp-fire : —

Not long ago, as our old people tell us, the bears were a race of beings less perfect than our fathers were ; they used to talk, walk upright, and use their paws like hands. When they wanted wives, they were accustomed to steal the daughters of our people.

You ask me to tell you something of bygone days. I will tell you a tale, as I have heard it told round the evening fires by the old people.

Quiss-an-kweedass and Kind-a-wuss were a youth and maiden in my native village, she the daughter of one of our chiefs, he the son of one of the common people. Both being about the same age, and having been playmates from youth, their fondness for each other was such that it was frequently said of them, " If you want Kind-a-wuss look for Quiss-an-kweedass ;" and this youthful fondness in later years ripened into a love so strong that they seemed to live for each other. While they thus loved each other, they knew that by the social laws of the Haidas they could never live as husband and wife, both being of one crest, the Raven. A man who is of the Raven crest is at liberty to take himself a wife from any other except the one to which he himself belongs. By the social laws of the Haidas a mother gives her name and crest to her children, whether Raven, Eagle, Frog, Beaver, or Bear, as the case may be.

While they thus continued to love each other, time passed unnoticed by. Life to them seemed a pleasing dream, from which they were rudely awakened by their respective parents reminding them that the time had come for each to choose a partner in life, from among the youths and maidens of the Haidas, such as would be in unison with their social laws. Seeing that these admonitions passed unheeded, their parents resolved to separate them. In order to effect their purpose the lovers were confined in the homes of their parents, but with them, as with more civilized people, " Love laughs at bolts and bars." They contrived to meet outside of the village, and made their escape to the woods, resolved to live on the meanest fare in the mountain forests, rather than return to be separated.

In a lonely glen by a mountain streamlet, under a shady spruce,

they built a rude hut, to which at nightfall they always managed to return, no matter in what direction they went in search of food. While wandering about they were careful lest they should meet any of their relations who might be in search of them.

Thus they lived until the lengthening nights and stormy days reminded them of approaching winter, with its cutting winds and deep snows. Then it was that Quiss-an-kweedass found it necessary to revisit his home, and resolved to make the journey alone, Kind-a-wuss preferring to remain, rather than face her angry relations. Having to stay in the solitude of the forest, she urged him to promise to return before nightfall of the fourth day, a request to which he readily assented. Early next morning he made ready to go. While he was making preparations, Kind-a-wuss thought she would accompany him part of the way, in order to shorten the length of his absence. As they walked along together they discussed the probability of his receiving a welcome, until she thought it advisable to return to the hut, which she did, little thinking what would happen to each before they should meet again. Leaving Kind-a-wuss to find her way back to her mountain home, let us follow Quiss-an-kweedass on his way to his father's house. Leaving her he loved so well, he felt ill at ease for her safety.

When he reached home his parents kindly welcomed him, made inquiries as to Kind-a-wuss, and her whereabouts since they had departed; and he told them all. When they heard how they lived, and that she had become his wife, their wrath waxed hot. They told him he should never go back, for they would keep him until she also should return, as they would make him their prisoner, which they did. How and where they kept him, tradition, as far as I am aware, does not tell.

When he could not get away he felt ill at ease with regard to her he left behind. He urged his people to let him go and save her life, for she would never return alone. They listened to his appeal, yet thought differently, and still detained him. Seeing this he grew determined to effect his escape, which he did, after being confined a considerable time. As soon as he was at liberty he made all haste to reach his mountain home, hoping to meet Kind-a-wuss, yet fearing something might be wrong.

When he arrived at the place where he had parted from her, he found by the footprints on the soft earth that she had started to return. Drawing near the hut he listened, but he heard no sound, and saw no traces of any one having been there lately. When he went inside he was surprised and horror-stricken to find that she had not been in the place from the time of their departure. Where was she? Had she lost her way while returning? Hoping to find some clue

to her whereabouts he searched the hut, looked up and down the stream, through the timber up to the mountains, calling her by name as he went along, — “Kind-a-wuss, Kind-a-wuss, where art thou? Kind-a-wuss, come to me; I am thy own Quiss-an-kweedass. Do you hear me, Kind-a-wuss?” To these appeals the mountain echoes answered, Kind-a-wuss.

After ineffectually searching the country for a number of days, sorrowful and angry, he turned his footsteps homeward, grieving for the dear one whom he had lost, and angry with his parents, whom he blamed for his misfortune. Reaching home, he called the attention of the villagers to his trouble, and claimed their assistance, to which appeal a large number responded, among whom were the two fathers, one anxious for his daughter’s safety, the other disturbed because he had detained his son.

Early on the morning of the third day after Quiss-an-kweedass arrived, this party, with himself at the head, set out for a final search, determined to find her dead or alive. After a search extending over ten days, during which time nothing was found except a place where traces of a struggle were visible.

As weeks gave place to months, and months to years, Kind-a-wuss seemed to have been forgotten, her name was seldom mentioned, or only as the girl who was lost and never found. Yet there was one who never for a moment forgot her, — her lover, who believed her still alive, and did all in his power to seek her. Having been so often foiled, he thought he would visit a medicine man, or *skaga* (skak-gilda, long-haired), who was clairvoyant, in order to see whether by means of his gift this man could reveal anything. On this idea he acted.

When he came to the *skaga*, Quiss-an-kweedass was asked if he had with him anything which she had worn. On leaving the hut he had brought with him a part of her clothing, which he gave the *skaga*, who, upon taking it into his hand, thus began: “I see a young woman lying on the ground, she seems to be asleep. It is Kind-a-wuss. There is something among the bushes, coming toward her. It is a large bear. He takes hold of her, she tries to get away, but cannot. He takes her away with him. They go a long way off. I see a lake. They reach the lake, and stop at a large cedar tree. She lives in the tree with the bear. She has been there a long time. I see two children, boys. She had them by the bear. If you go to the lake and find the tree, you will discover them all there.” This was cheerful news for Quiss-an-kweedass, who lost no time in getting together a second party. This party was led by the *skaga*, who by means of his gift soon found the lake, and also the tree. There they halted, in order to consider what was best to be done in case of anything

happening. It was agreed that Quiss-an-kweedass should call her by name before venturing up a sort of step-ladder which leaned against the tree. After calling her several times she at length looked out, and said, "*Keesis tout ah ejin*, where do you come from? and who are you?" "I am Quiss-an-kweedass," said he; "I have sought long years for you; now that I have found you I mean to take you home with me. Will you go?" "I cannot go with you yet, because my husband, the chief of the bears, is not at home; I cannot go until he returns." After a little familiar conversation she consented to come down among them.

After they had her in their power they carried her off with them, making all haste homewards.

When they reached their home her parents were glad to have their lost child again, safe and sound, and Quiss-an-kweedass to recover his loved one. Although at home, and kindly welcomed, she felt ill at ease, on account of her two sons, and wished to return for them. This her friends would not allow, but offered to go and bring them. To this she replied, that their father would not allow them to go away, "but," said she, "there is a way by which you may get them;" that is, the bear had made for her a song, which he used to sing; if they would learn it and go to the tree and sing it, he, the bear chief, would give them all they wished.

After learning the song a party went to the tree, and began to sing it. As soon as the bear heard the song he came down, thinking Kind-a-wuss had returned. When he saw that she was not there he felt bad, and at first refused to let the children go, but afterward consented when they threatened to take them by force. I shall here leave the party on their way back with the two boys, and give the story told by Kind-a-wuss, respecting the manner in which she fell into the power of the bear. After she turned back toward the hut she had not gone far before she felt tired and sick at heart for her lover; in order to rest a little she lay down in a dry, shady place, where she fell asleep. While in this state the bear came along and found her.

When she found herself in the bear's clutches she tried hard to get away, but found her efforts useless, as she was completely in his power. So he took her an unwilling captive to his home, which was near a large lake. As the entrance to his house was rather high above the ground he had a sort of step-ladder made, whereby he could get easily up and down, and sent some of his tribe to gather soft moss wherewith to make her a bed.

When she thought of her lover and her relations she used to wonder why no one came to seek for her; and when the bear saw her down-hearted he would tell her to cheer up, and do all in his power to make her happy.

As time passed on into years, and none of her relations nor her lover came near her, she began to feel more at home with the bear ; and by the time the search party arrived she had given up all hope of ever being found. The bear did all he could to make her comfortable, in order to please her ; he used to sit and sing, and for that purpose had composed a song, which to this day is known among the children of the Haidas by the name of the Song of the Bears. I have heard it sung many a time and should be glad if I could write it down ; but unfortunately my ability to write music is deficient. I am sorry that it is so, because there is a host of ancient songs and tunes among the people which I would like to preserve, but cannot on that account.

With regard to the words of the bear's song, I have long tried to get them from this people, but was unable to succeed until 1888, when I obtained them from an old acquaintance. Whether he gave them correctly or not I cannot say, but shall give them as I got them from him. They are as follows : —

“ I have taken a fair maid from her Haida friends as my wife. I hope her relatives won't come and take her away from me. I will be kind to her. I will give her berries from the hill and roots from the ground. I will do all I can to please her. For her I made this song, and for her I sing it.”

This is the song of the bear, and whoever can sing it has their lasting friendship. On this account large numbers learned it from Kind-a-wuss, who never went again to live with the bear. Out of consideration for her, as well as the many troubles of the lovers, they were allowed to live as man and wife, and dwelt happily together for many years in her native village.

As for the two sons, whom I shall call Soo-gaot and Cun-what, as they grew up they showed different dispositions, Soo-gaot keeping by his mother's people, while the other, following his father, lived and died amid the bears. Soo-gaot, marrying a girl belonging to his parental tribe, reared a family, from whom many of his people claim to be descended. The direct descendant of Soo-gaot is a pretty girl, the offspring of a Haida mother and Kanaku father, who inherits all the family belongings, the savings of many generations. The small brook which flowed by their mountain home grew to be a large stream, up which every season large quantities of salmon run. That stream is in the family to this day, and out of it they catch their supply of food. This is the story of the chief of the bears as told to me by Yak Quahu in 1873. I have heard it a number of times since, and at each time of telling a great deal of the original is lost or forgotten, showing that after a few more years many of these old legends will have passed away. In giving names I have employed the names

of Haidas known to me, being unable to get the original ones. Quiss-an-kweedass means one who measures the ground, Kind-a-wuss a half-caste. The girl of half Kanaku descent is now, in 1889, a full-grown woman, the mother of two nice boys. The bear seems to be a Haida tribe or clan rather than an animal. Until lately there was the Bear tribe, the Skannah tribe, the Kinguestan or Frog tribe, and the Tsing or Beaver tribe, known as the Bears, Skannahs, or Kinguestans, as the case might be. All had their chiefs, and a tomb in which they were buried. For instance, the Frogs had their tomb after the following fashion: A house about twenty feet square was built, in which was placed a wooden image of a frog, around which in boxes were laid members of the Frog tribe as they died. These houses were called in Haida language *Sathlinum Nak Kinguestan*, House of the Frogs, and so on with all the rest. *Sathlinum*, or *Sathling-un Nak*, means dead-house. In this legend there is a remarkable resemblance to the old story of Valentine and Orson.

*James Deans.*

OAK VALE, B. C.