

THE STORY OF THE BLIND HALIBUT FISHERMAN

Guujaaw

A blind man lived at House Point on Kiis Gwaayee with his wife, his daughter and his son. When the weather was fair, the men prepared to go fishing. The blind man's wife prepared his fishing gear and brought his mat to the beach near the canoes. She approached the men and asked that her husband go with them. But even the canoes of his uncles and his brother-in-law did not wait for him. After all the canoes were gone, his wife took his mat and hook back to their house. When the canoes returned with halibut, nobody could face the blind man. Nobody brought halibut to his family and there was nothing for his children. When he went to bed, the blind man could not stop weeping.

The following day was fair weather again and the men prepared for fishing. The blind man's wife brought his mat and fishing gear to the beach near the canoes. Again she asked if her husband could fish with them and again no one would take him. While she was on the beach, the blind man put on his hat and crawled into the forest. He moved about aimlessly, not knowing where he was going. He felt many nights fall upon him and listened for the ravens to know that the morning had come. Many days and nights passed while his wife did not know where he was.

In the forest he heard a voice and followed it until night silenced the day. In the morning he heard many voices, one of which approached him. The voice told the blind man, "The Great Chief is calling you." He led the blind man into the Chief of the Seagull's house. The Chief let the man know that he already knew his heartbreaking story. The Chief called the man to sit near him, facing away. He put his hands upon the blind man's eyes until blood came out. When the blind man opened his eyes, he could see a little. When the Chief asked if he could see, the man said no. Again the Seagull Chief put his hands over his eyes until they bled. When the blind man opened his eyes, he could see very well. When the Chief asked if he could see, the blind man said, "a little." The Chief again covered his eyes until they bled. He asked the man if he could see to a certain point. The man responded that he could see beyond two points.

The Seagull Chief then fed the man oolichan from Nass River. Then he fed the man oolichan from the Stikine. And finally the Chief gave the man salmon eggs from the Skeena River. Then the Chief called out and someone brought him a box. Inside the box there was another, then another and another. When the boxes filled the house, the Chief came to a small one. The small box was put under the man's arm.

The Chief told the man that when he went home, even his wife should not know that he could see. He told the man what he must do and what would follow. He told the man to have his children and his wife look into the box. The Chief finally said he must continue to behave as a blind man. Even in the forest the man did not look about, lest he be observed. When he got to his house, he crawled out of

the forest. His wife tended to him and gave him food. The man had his wife make a medium-sized basket and fasten a cedar-bark rope to his anchor.

When the other men prepared to go fishing, she again took his mat and fishing gear and asked the men to take her husband, and again they refused. When the fishermen left the beach, the man prepared to launch his own canoe. The children were in the bow while the basket was set beside the man, as the Chief had instructed. The man went fishing without any bait, as he had been told. He waited for a voice that told him, "That is enough," then he dropped his anchor. He turned to the stern and said, "Give me bait," as the Seagull Chief had instructed. Oolichans poured into his basket. He put an oolichan on his hook, and when he put it on the bottom, he caught a halibut, then another and another, until his canoe was filled. He was home before the other fishermen and he unloaded his catch. His wife dried all of the fish and wasted nothing.

The man and his family went out as before and continued until their house was full of halibut. Then, as the Seagull Chief had told him, the wind began to blow and nobody could go fishing. The village people soon ran out of food and came to him. He followed his instructions and sold them five strips of halibut for one slave or a copper, two and a half strips for an elk skin blanket. As the supplies diminished he gave only three and a half strips for a copper or a slave, while for an elk skin, he gave a strip and a half, as he had been told. With his wealth, he potlatched, calling the people together many times.

When the halibut was almost gone, the wind grew fair and he potlatched for the ninth time. While the people still thought he was blind, he opened his eyes. He called forward his children and had them look into the box. He told his son, "You will be a Chief." He told his daughter, "You will be a Chief Woman." He told his wife, "Let no one do as me. His eyes will become rotten behind the houses. You will be a Chief Woman, but I will burst with riches." He potlatched for a tenth and final time and gave out many things. When he had finished giving and all the people had left, he went behind the house, burst and was no more.