

The Bear Mother Legend

A young woman known as Xbi'suundt invited many others of her own age to go on a berry-picking trip. While they were there up in the hills Xbi'suundt stepped on the excrements of a bear and she became very angry, making slurring remarks on the bears. When the girls had finished picking berries, they went back down to the village down the hills. On their way down, the rope holding Xbi'suundt's pack broke. She walked on, but every little while, the straps snapped, and she stopped, to repair them. Meantime, her companions had gone ahead. She called them and said, "Come, my brother, to help me with my pack." They were now half-way to the village, and only two of her companions were left with her. These she sent on ahead, as it was only a short distance to home. After these companions had gone on, she looked down the trail, and she saw her two brothers coming to meet her. They were wearing their bear robes, which the people at that time were in the habit of wearing. They came and took her pack and placed her between them. They lifted her pack and placed her between them on the trail. They had not gone far, when they arrived at a large strange house. She stood in front of it, while her companions went in. She heard a voice inquiring, "Did you get whom you went for?" They replied, "Yes, she is sitting outside." Then they came out and brought her into the house. She was placed at the rear of the house, and while she sat there among strange people, someone touched her side. She looked and saw Ksm-wadziin, Mouse-Woman, she said, "The Bear people have taken you as a captive for ridiculing the excrements." Then she instructed her: "When you go out to stool, dig a hole, and when are finished, cover the hole up, and, where you sat, place one of your copper bracelets." This the woman did. She was then followed by her sister-in-law, as she had now married (one of) the men who had led her to this house. When the sister-in-law saw the bracelet where the woman had sat, she picked it up and brought it into the house for the chief said, "This woman was very right to ridicule our ordinary excrements, for hers are of copper."

The young woman was now missed in her village. Her brothers saw her trail in between those of the two bears. They reported this to the village. Then her other companions remembered how she had ridiculed the bear's excrements. Then all the people of the village realized that the Bears had taken her as a captive.

It was now going into the Fall, and the woman was living among all these Bear people around her. There were human-like and had all their bear robes hung up on the side walls of the house. She thought it strange that many times members of this tribe would go and never return. These were the bears that had been shot by hunters. It was now approaching Winter, about November, and time for the bears to hibernate. They discussed what they were to do with the woman among them. At her home village, her four brothers were preparing an expedition to hunt for her. She had left behind her pet dog called 'Mask Red'. The brothers started out to hunt for her now. First one brother would go and kill a number of bears in their dens. Then another brother would go and do the same thing. Spring was now approaching. Each one of the brothers went out singly according to their age. When the turn came for the youngest who was always accompanied by the woman's dog, 'Mask' scented the dens for him. He went across the Kalum River to Wii'gwanks, Large-Spring (Beaver River is the white man's name). The young brother now came to a clearing at the foot of a mountain which was heavy with snow and almost impossible to climb. The dog 'Mask' had picked up a scent, going up towards the top of the clearing. The young woman recognized who it was from the distance. She picked up some snow in her hand leaving the imprint of her fingers on the snow. This she threw it down the slant, and it rolled to the feet of her brother. The dog went up ahead after the young man who had picked up that snow and was barking furiously. Then the young man saw that the dog had learned its ears back, recognizing (the place where) its owner was. The young man then started up this mountainside, although it was difficult. As he was going up he saw his sister coming out of the cavern of the mountain. The young man then called upon her to come out and follow him back home. She then had offspring, little bear cubs. These she wanted to take with her. The young brother said that he would not kill the bear who had kept her captive. So when Xbi'suundt and her young brother went back to the village, the girl's father erected a pole upon which the Bear cubs, the offspring of that young woman, where to play and climb. The cubs would go up to the top of this pole and gazed at the dens of other bears. Then they would come down and tell it to the villagers that their grandfathers were at a certain part of the mountain. The hunters found out that it was true, and went to shoot the bears. The mother, feeling sorry for the bears, took and liberated these clubs, so that they could no longer tell the places of the bears to the hunters. Xbi'suundt had a sister who was called Wii'nluuġ, Large-Nest (of Eagle). She (Xbi'suundt) became angry and went off into the hills. While she was up there, she saw a huge bird of the sky, which she called Asa'waalgyet. At this time the Ganhada had the Gaax (Raven), the Ganaaw (Frog) and the Kamaats (Starfish) as crests. When this woman had seen the Asa'waalgyet, her people added it to the other crests of their house.