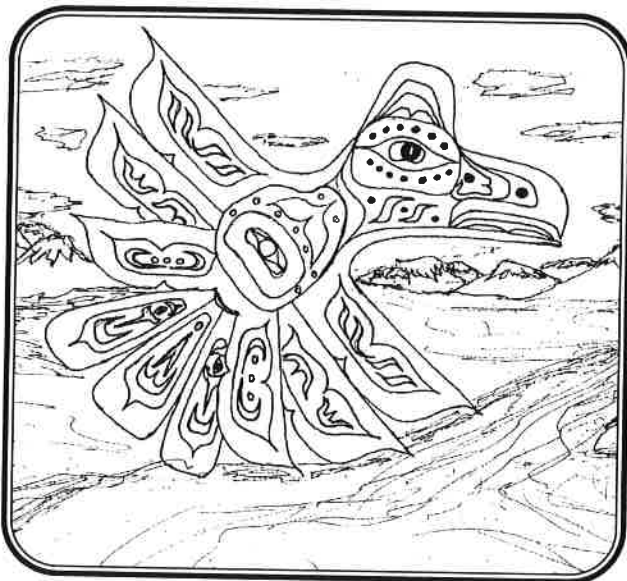


Txamsem Steals Light



TXAMSEM STEALS LIGHT

There came a time when the rains deluged the earth and it seemed as if they would never stop. For days and weeks and months the sky dropped its heavy burden until the nimble creeks became forceful rivers, the shimmering puddles changed to soupy lakes and the vast valleys held seas of swirling brown water. From the mountain tops water cascaded in sheets and all the rising and raging waters joined into a world-wide flood.

When at last the earth-swallowing waters receded, there began a dreary time, for the world was in darkness. Txamsem wanted to see how many people had survived the flood, so he decided to travel all over the land of the Alugiyet. But his efforts were frustrated, for straining his eyes as he might, he could see very little in the blackness below. Txamsem wished for light.

Now Txamsem knew that the Great Sky Chief, Simoghet Laha, owned the Ball of Light. No one was ever allowed to come near it and the Sky Chief guarded it jealously. The more that the cunning Txamsem thought about the Ball of Light, the more he thought he might be able to find a way to trick the Sky Chief and get it. Txamsem said, "I will go to the house of Simoghet Laha."

The thought of the Ball of Light gave Txamsem endurance and strength as he flew over the mountains, valleys and forests that he could barely see below him. After many days he came to the chief's long house and perched quietly and gratefully in a pine tree near the entrance. As he

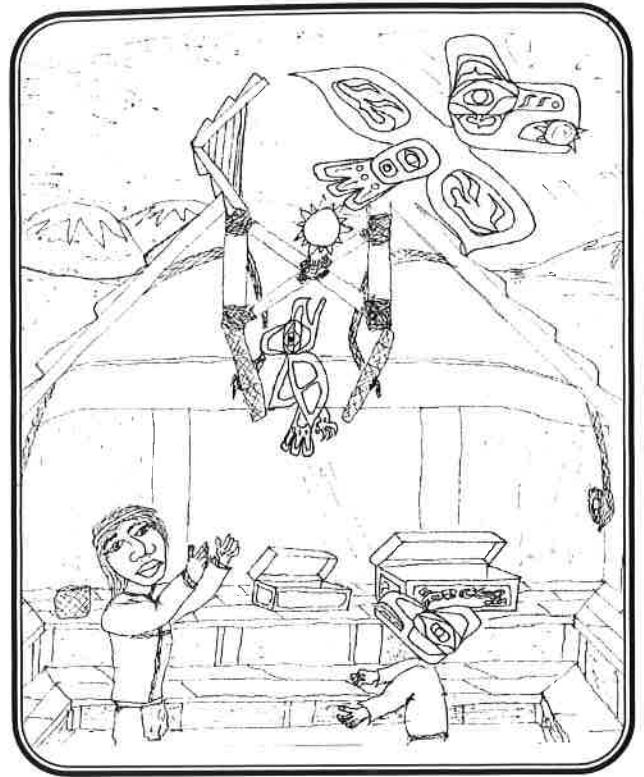


rested, Txamsem fixed his beady eye on the carved frontal pole and cocked his head to one side as he listened to the voices within. He pondered and plotted.

While he was watching, Txamsem discovered two important things. First he learned that the Sky Chief kept the Ball of Light sewn up in a bag made of hide. He kept the bag in a small wooden box. The box was then placed inside a bigger box. He placed each successive box in another until there were ten boxes in all. The boxes with the Ball of Light inside were kept in the chief's house. Txamsem knew that his first challenge was to find a way to get inside the house in a form that would not create suspicion in the minds of the family who lived there.

Txamsem also learned that the Sky Chief had a beautiful daughter. No one was allowed to go near her because he guarded her as jealously as he guarded his Ball of Light. She was allowed out of the house once a day. When she came outside she would usually go and take a cool drink from the silver stream that wound like a ribbon through the forest. Her lustrous black hair shone in the darkness, the passing of her light step trembled the grasses and her gentle sighing awoke the breezes. The girl sighed often for she was lonely in the house of her father and she longed for a companion and laughter to lighten her days. But the girl was as dutiful as she was obedient and did nothing to oppose her father's wishes or to incur his wrath.

From his vantage point, Txamsem looked forward to seeing the girl every day and while he



watched, a shrewd and daring plan was hatched in his devious brain. He would use the chief's daughter to gain entrance to the lodge that housed the elusive Ball of Light. Impatiently, Txamsem waited for the next day when the chief's daughter came to drink. Txamsem used his magic powers and changed himself into a pine needle that floated down into the stream. As the girl filled her cup, the pine needle floated in unseen. Savouring every drop, she swallowed the sweet water and with it, the pine needle. Refreshed, she returned to her father's house, unaware of what she had done.

Before long the chief's daughter gave birth to a baby boy with feathery dark hair and a knowing twinkle in his eye. Although this was not the companion for whom she had wished, her heart filled with happiness for suddenly her days were filled with laughter. The child also brought much joy to the old chief who quickly grew very fond of the alert and chuckling baby. The chief often stretched the boy's arms and legs so he would grow quickly and was most satisfied when he did. Soon the clever baby was an intelligent toddler making demands for attention and keeping everyone busy fulfilling them. Txamsem's laughter and cries rang freely throughout the house as everyone, especially his grandfather, tried to give him everything he wanted.

Often little Txamsem would cry and point to the boxes. After a long while and many tears, the boy's persistence would be rewarded and the chief would order that the smoke hole at the centre of the roof be closed. Txamsem would crow with

delight and good humour as his grandfather began to untie the boxes. The revelation of the Ball of Light was done slowly so that the eyes of everyone in the room could gradually adjust to its brilliance. By the time his grandfather had reached the hide bag, Txamsem would be hopping and dancing with excitement. As the light gradually filled the room, all the rich colours usually hidden in the gloom appeared. The little boy loved the deep rich browns of the carved wood, the red designs on the boxes, the yellow of the cedar mats and the soft whites of his grandfather's robes. As he eagerly filled his eyes with the sights, so too would he reach out to touch the brilliant yellow orb.

Little Txamsem was happy playing with the golden sphere. He would roll the ball the entire distance of the long house and with a curious hopping run, chase after it. When he bounced the ball, he would tilt his head to one side and with a keen eye follow its path. Sometimes he would toss the Ball of Light till it grazed the ceiling beams and would jump up to meet it on the way down. Watching Txamsem play filled everyone with humour and even the stern Sky Chief would chuckle aloud at the toddler's antics. When play was finished, the ball would be tied back up in the hide bag and carefully replaced into the ten boxes.

One day the grandfather forgot to close the smoke hole when he took the Ball of Light out for the boy to play with. This was just the chance that Txamsem had been waiting for, and with great energy he ran around bouncing the Ball of Light. It bounced higher and higher. Suddenly, the chief



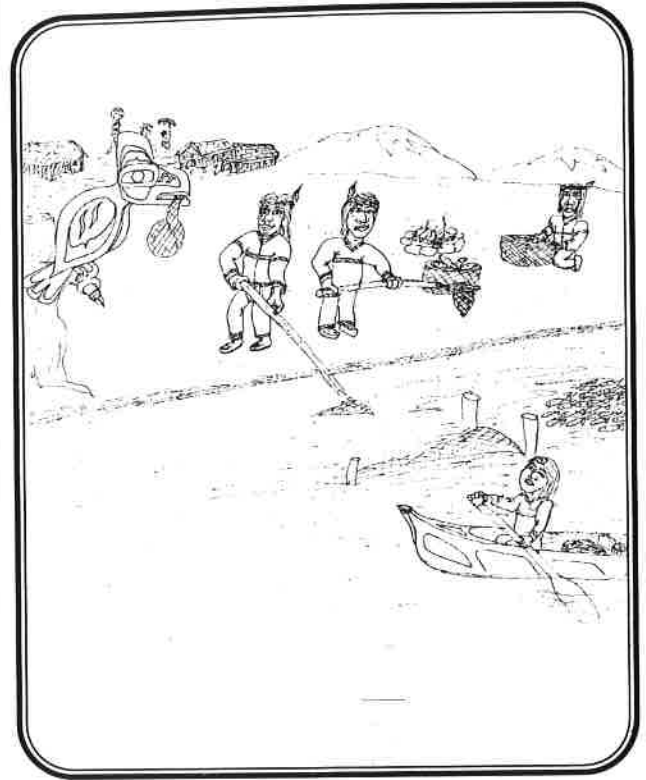
noticed that the smoke hole was open and he turned to warn his grandson. Quickly, T χ amsem bounced the ball so hard that it seemed to leap towards the smoke hole.

Too late, the grandfather ran. Instantly, T χ amsem transformed into Raven. He snatched up the hide bag, shot through the smoke hole and out into the sky, catching and stowing the Ball of Light as he went. Raven did not look back at the speechless and stunned man and woman who had thought they were his grandfather and mother. As T χ amsem winged swiftly from the land of the Sky People, the Sky Chief realized that he had been tricked out of his precious Ball of Light.

To return to the land of the Alugiyet, T χ amsem flew to the west. As he winged over the forests, valleys and mountains he was already thinking of the admiration and glory that would be his. Success and pride gave him endurance and strength for the long journey and he gloatingly sang.

I cross over the mountain
That touches the sky.
I am flying, I am flying
To the land of the Alugiyet.

At last, tired and hungry, T χ amsem flew over Ksi Lissims, the Nass River. He noticed many people on the river fishing for oolichans, the greasy, silver fish that appeared in large numbers in the spring of each year. The fishers were working hard to catch as many of the shiny, flashing fish as they could for they, knew whatever they caught now



must last them for a year. The oil from the oolichan would be used to make other food tastier.

Oolichans were a favourite of Txamsem and he called down to the fishers, "Give me some oolichans and I will give you the gift of light."

Now the people had been tricked by Txamsem before and did not trust him. They knew also that Raven was a glutton and could eat many of the shiny fish they had worked so hard to catch. However, they very much wanted to have light so they cautiously replied, "We know you're a liar, Raven and you are just trying to fool us. Prove what you say is true."

Txamsem was angry that the people did not believe him and he said, "I will prove that I have the Ball of Light."

He changed back into human form, this time as an old woman. Perhaps, he reasoned, the people would believe him if he were in a more kindly and trusted form. Gently he opened the hide bag just a crack so that the light could shine out. The people were amazed and excited at the glimpse of light shown to them so they were generous with the oolichans they gave him. Excitedly they said, "We see that you tell the truth, Txamsem. Here are fish to satisfy your hunger."

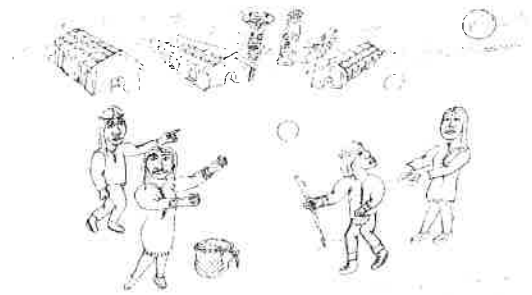
Txamsem ate the oolichans with great enjoyment. While the fishers watched in awe and impatience, he reached into the bag and broke a piece from the Ball of Light. He crumpled it in his hand until it was in small fragments and then scattered them across the dark sky. Grandly he said, "These will be the stars which will help you

find your way at night." The people gazed in wonder as the pin-points of light began to twinkle and dance far over their heads.

Again Txamsem reached into the hide bag. This time he used both hands and he pulled out a pale, glowing ball. As the astonished people watched, he hurled it into the air and gravely pronounced, "This great light will brighten the night sky."

But Txamsem was not yet finished and with a flourish to show its importance, he took the bag and whirled and twirled it, finally letting the Ball of Light escape. It travelled with such great force and great brilliance that the land was now flooded with light and the people were scarcely able to glimpse its passing as their eyes burned from the sudden, unaccustomed intensity of the glare. The Ball of Light travelled all day until it sank over the edge of the western sky.

Txamsem said simply, "This is the greatest gift of all for it is Life Giver. This treasure belongs to all people and is for all living things."



Deke Hanger '97

