

## Txamsem and Salmon Woman

There are many Txamsem stories. In this story, Txamsem meets Bright Cloud Woman and becomes very rich. He has a good life. Then Txamsem becomes bored and the adventures begin. He learns about respect for nature and Spirit Beings.

### About the Illustrator

Born in Terrace, British Columbia, in 1961, Stan Bevan lives in the village of Kitselas on the Skeena River. Most of his life has been lived in Kitselas and surrounding Hazeltons. Stan is Tahltan-Tlingit through his mother's side and Tsimshian through his father's side.

Stan spent a number of years studying under his uncle, Dempsey Bob. He attended the Kitanmaax School of the Northwest Coast Indian Art in Hazelton. Stan has also learned the traditional dance of his maternal forefathers. His dancing has become an important inspiration for his work.

Stan has carvings and artwork in the Canadian Embassies in Germany and Finland. His artwork is found in private collections around the world, in galleries, in corporate and law offices, and now in schools.



*Photo Credit: Harold Dmeyer*

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First Nations Education Centre  
Terrace, British Columbia

# Txamsem and Salmon Woman

First Nations Resource Centre



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*illustrated by* **Stan Bevan**



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# Txamsem and Salmon Woman



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This Tsimshian version of the legend is adapted from the works of anthropologists Franz Boas and William Benyon in the early twentieth century. The legend is an oral history with special significance to the Tsimshian of Canada's Northwest Coast. It was previously given to the general public to learn about Native societies, and is considered in the public domain for sharing. The three societies—the Tsimshian, Gitksan and Nisga'a—were referred to as Tsimshian by Boas and Benyon because of their cultural similarities. Additional information was obtained through research.

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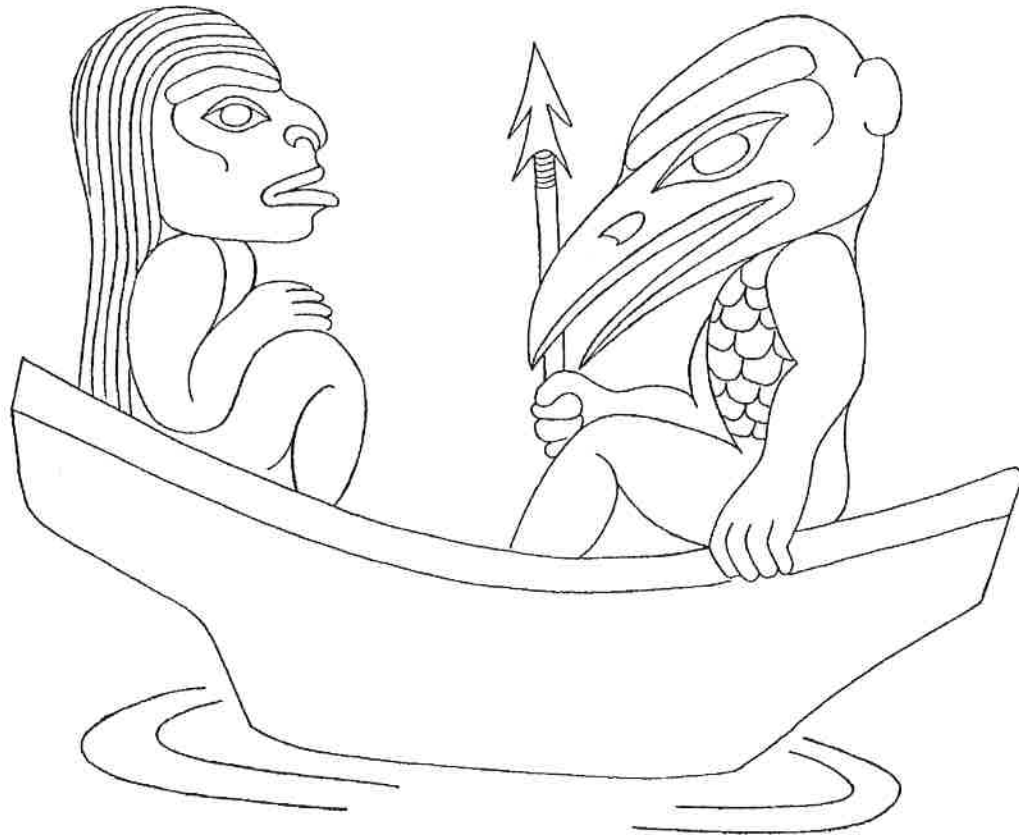


Txamsem, the giant, wanted to be by himself for awhile. He went down to the river and built a small house. Then he made a canoe and a spear. These were the things he needed to survive.

One fine day, Txamsem went out on the river with his spear and canoe. He was hungry and had hoped to catch a fish for his breakfast. He saw something shiny in the water. It moved quickly around and under his canoe. He lifted his spear and aimed to throw it. Suddenly, the sky darkened and he was surrounded by fog. He could not see anything and he was afraid.



Then, at last, the fog began to lift. There, in the bow of his canoe sat a beautiful young woman. She seemed to be shining in a pool of bright light.



Txamsem couldn't believe what was before his eyes. He smiled at the beautiful woman. She smiled back at him.

He said, "I want to marry you."

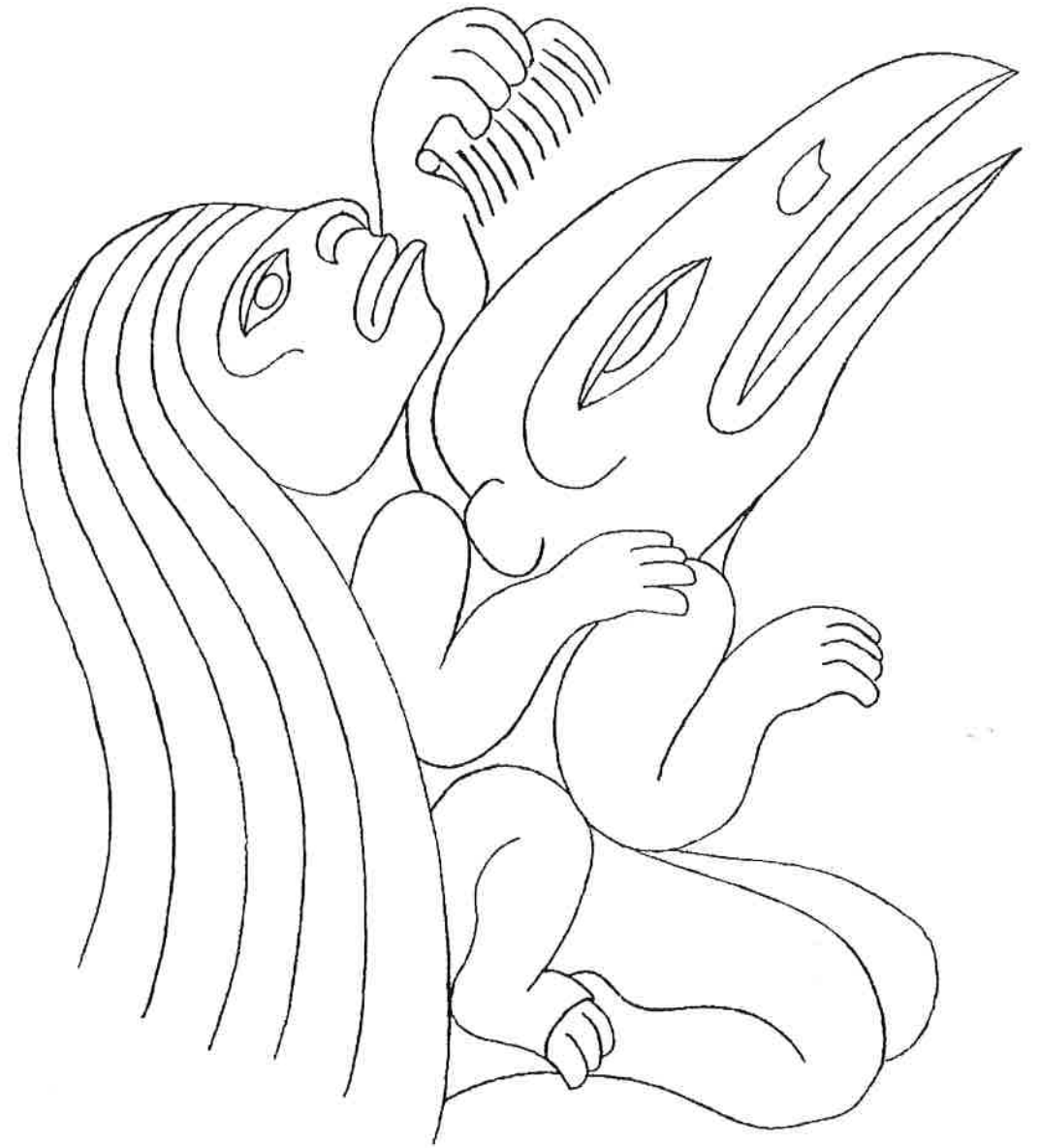


She replied, "I will go with you, Giant. But remember, I am the Salmon. You must take care and not harm me."

Txamsem said, "I will remember. I promise I will never harm you. I will call you Bright Cloud Woman because I found you shining through the fog. Let's go home to the house I have built."

They went to the small house on the beach and they began to live as husband and wife.

Txamsem had not cared about the way he looked when he was living by himself. His hair was wild and tangled and his skin was rough and dry. Each day Bright Cloud Woman took her fish-bone comb and gently combed his hair until it was smooth and straight. She rubbed his skin with oils and gave him a bath in sweet smelling rose petals. Each day Txamsem loved his wife more and more.

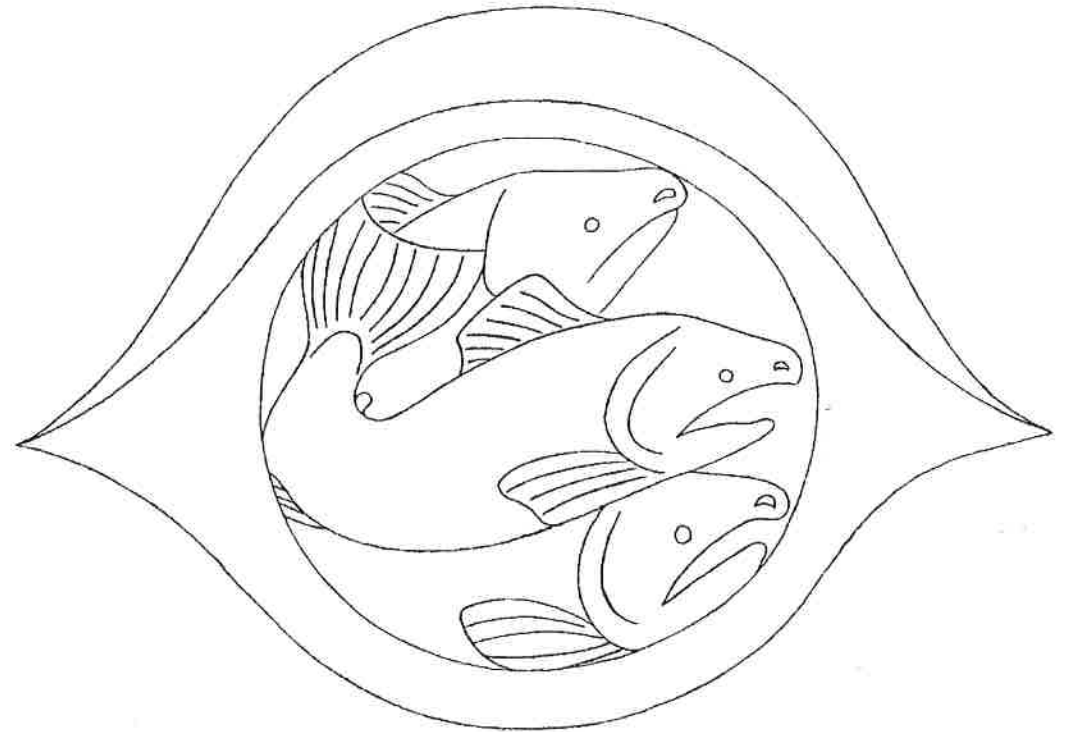




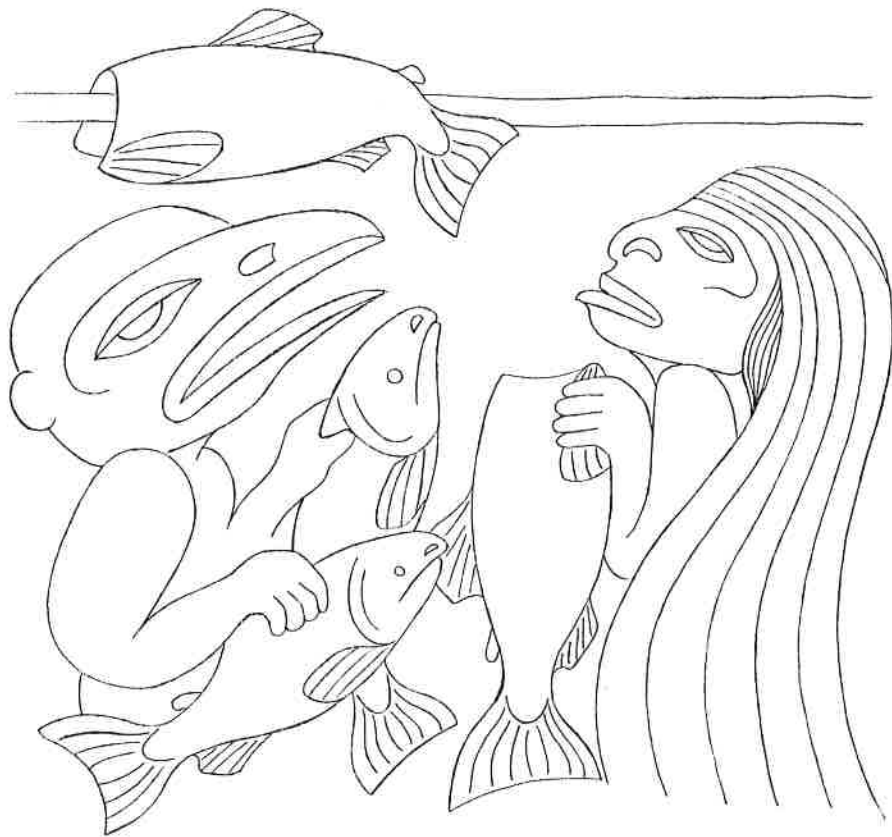
Early one morning Bright Cloud Woman got up and quietly went down to the river. She waded into the chilly water up to her ankles. Then she wiggled her toes.

Suddenly the river was alive with thousands of spring salmon sparkling in the sunlight. They were as plentiful as the stars in the sky at night.

Bright Cloud Woman went back to her husband to wake him up.  
“My dear husband, come and see the miracle in the river.”



Txamsem was amazed.



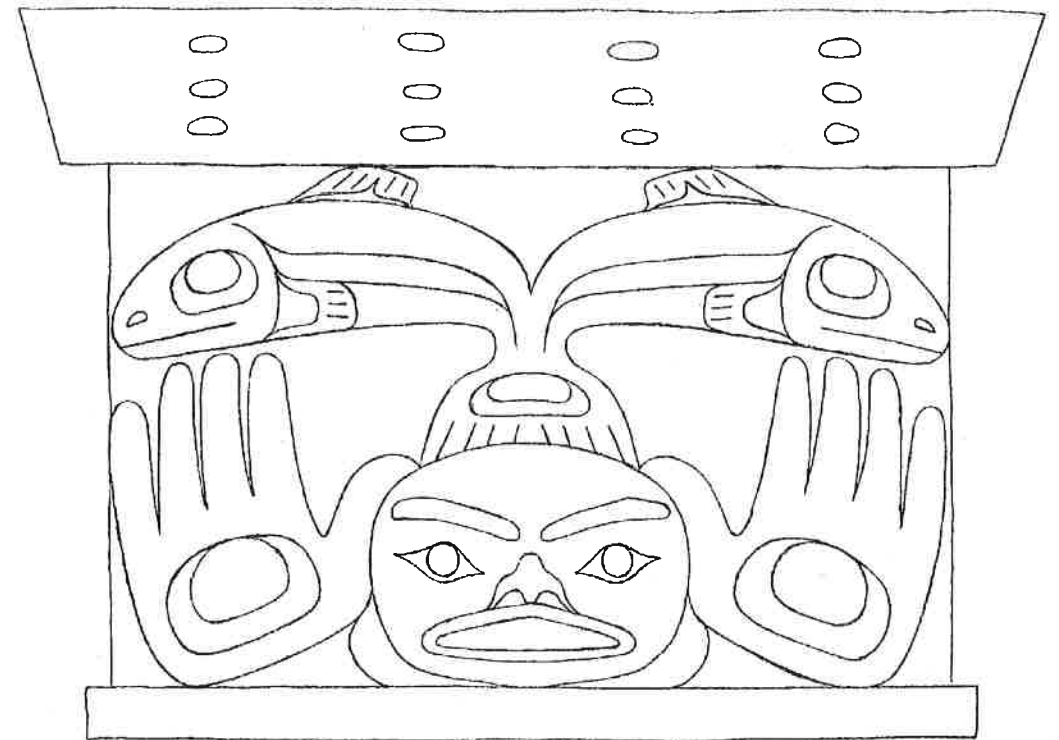
Each day after that Txamsem went to the river and speared many spring salmon. He took them to his wife.

Bright Cloud Woman said, "Go and find some thin poles to make a drying rack."

She cut and split the fish with her mussel-shell knife. Then she hung the fish to dry on the drying rack.

Txamsem got wood for a fire. The smoke from the fire would cure the salmon.

Txamsem and Bright Cloud Woman worked hard together. They wanted to have enough food to last them for the winter. Finally Txamsem's storage house was full.



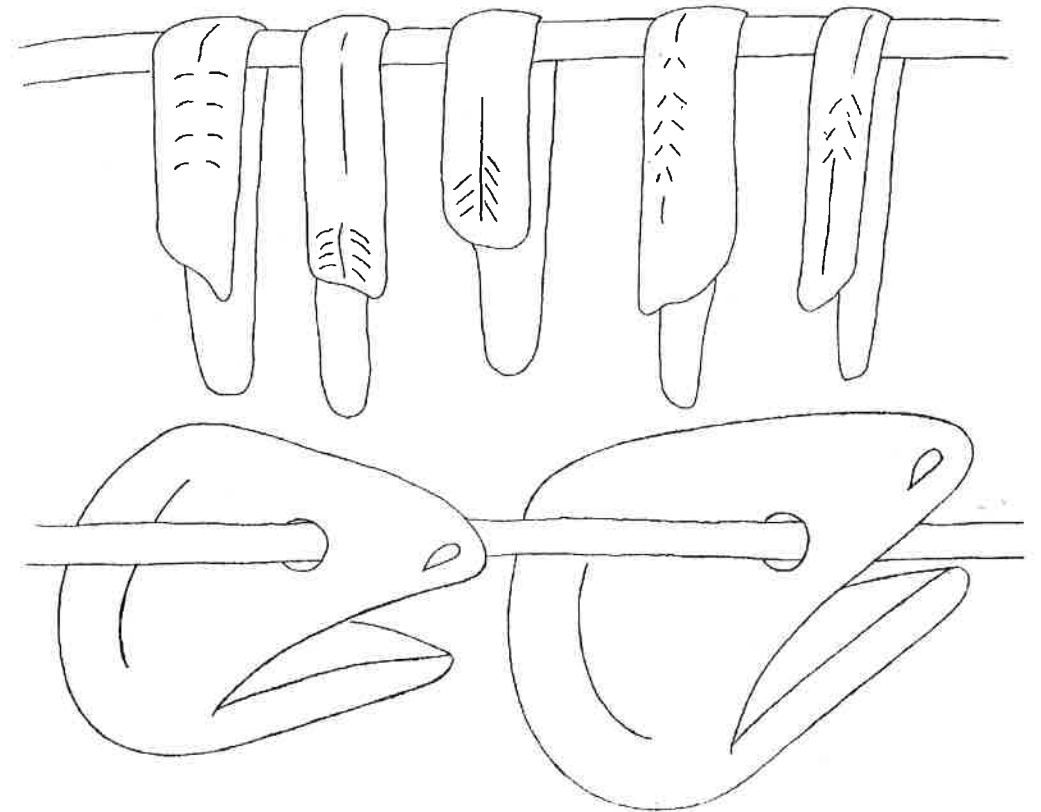


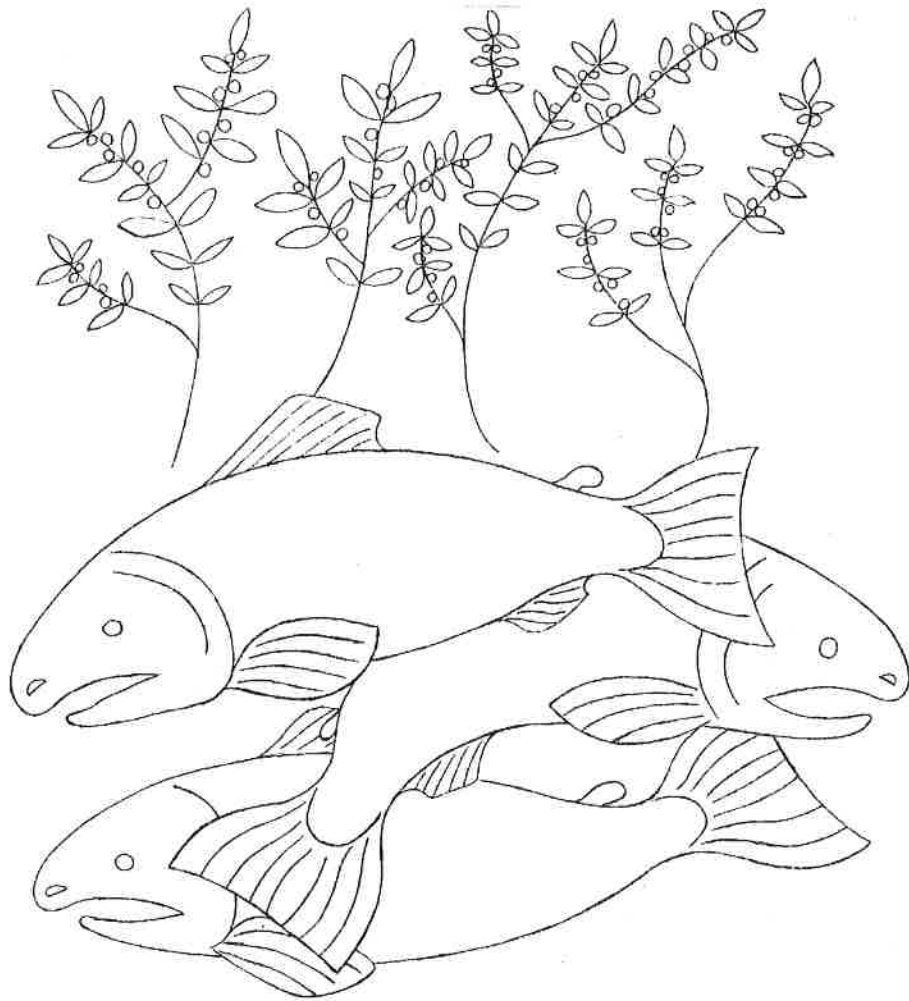


Early one summer morning Bright Cloud Woman went down to the river. This time she waded in up to her knees. She wiggled her toes.

Suddenly the river was full of silver sockeye salmon. They were as plentiful as pebbles on a beach. It was as if you could walk on them.

Txamsem built a second storage shed. Again Txamsem and Bright Cloud Woman set to work to dry and smoke the fish.

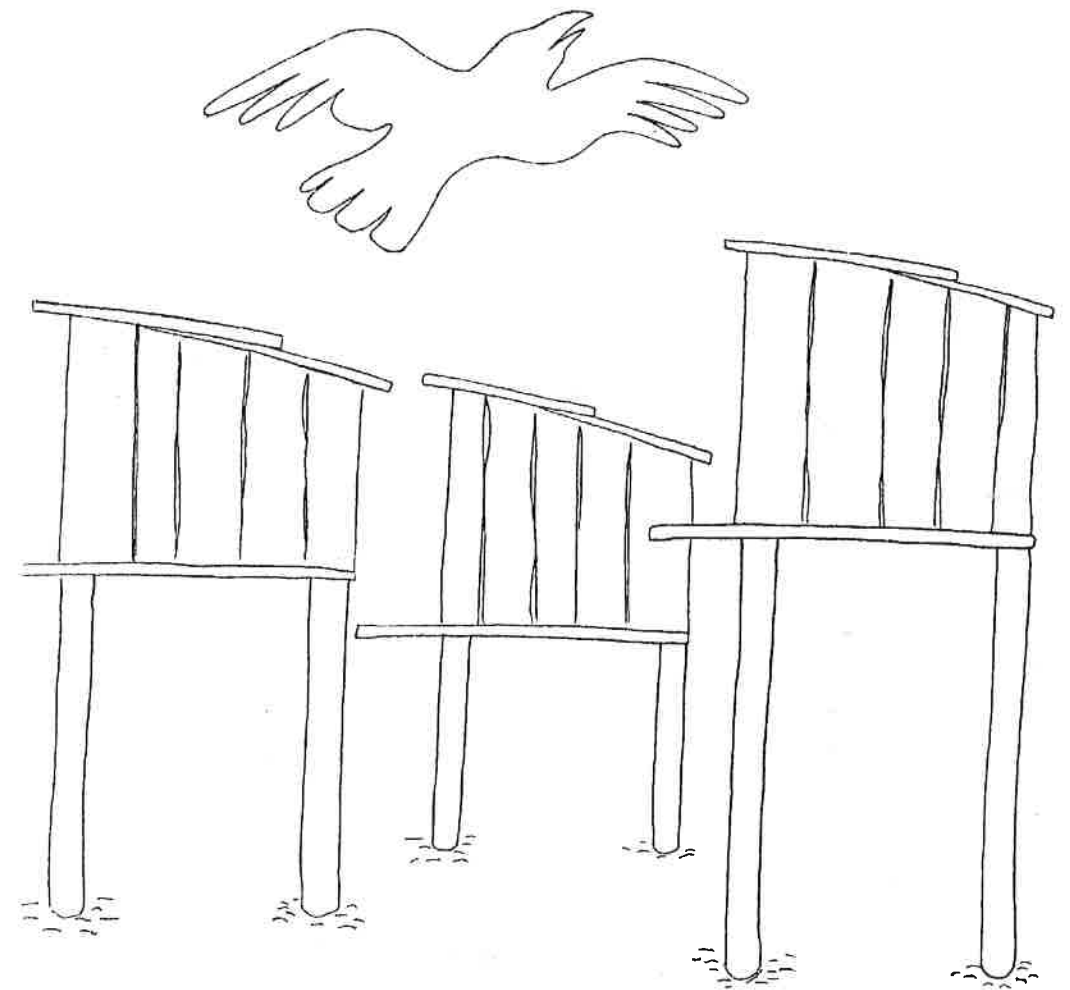




In the fall when the blueberries ripened Bright Cloud Woman waded into the river once more. This time she went in up to her waist. She wiggled her toes.

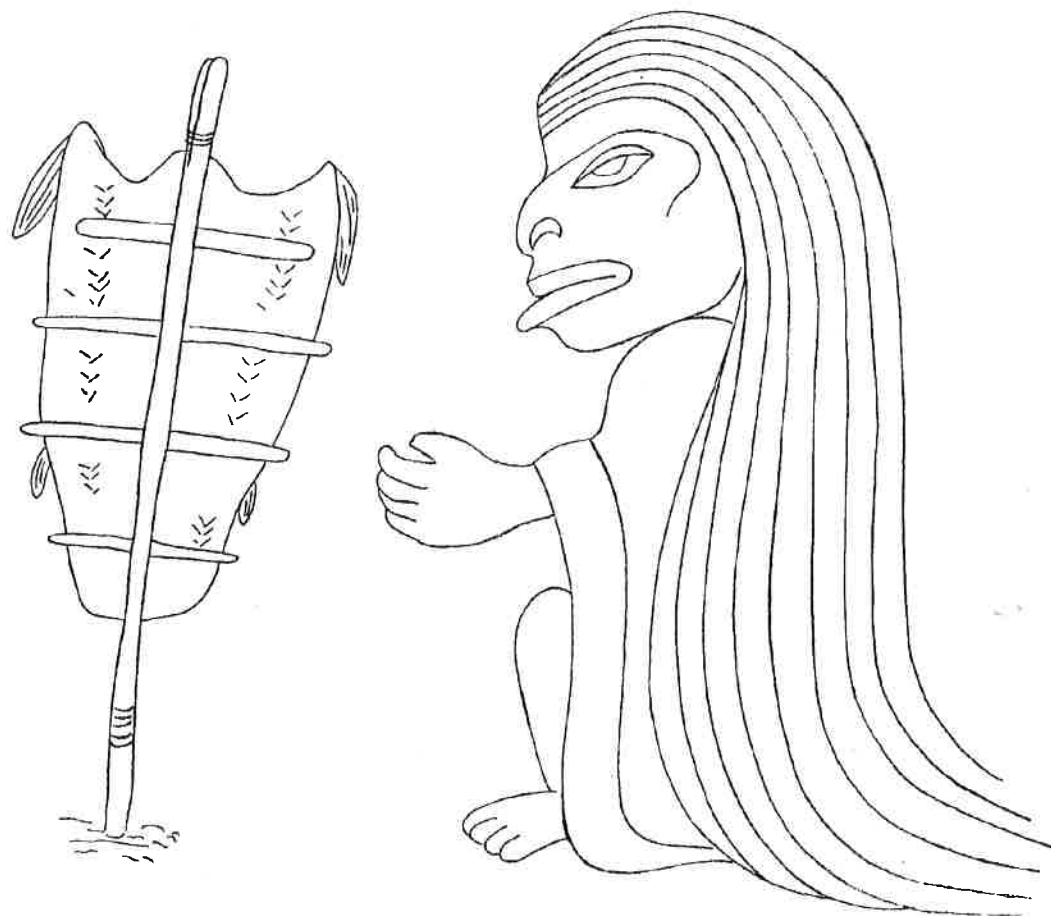
Suddenly the river was full of coho salmon. They were as plentiful as the blueberries on the bushes.

Txamsem had to build a third storage house. It was soon filled and there was room for no more.



Txamsem was now a wealthy man. He had more food than he and his wife needed. He could trade dried fish for many other things that he wanted.

Now that the food was ready for winter, Txamsem did not have much work to do. He became bored and restless. One day he left his house very early in the morning and returned late in the evening. Bright Cloud Woman had his supper ready for him when he came home. She did not ask him where he had been.



This went on for four days. On the fourth day Txamsem returned in a rage.

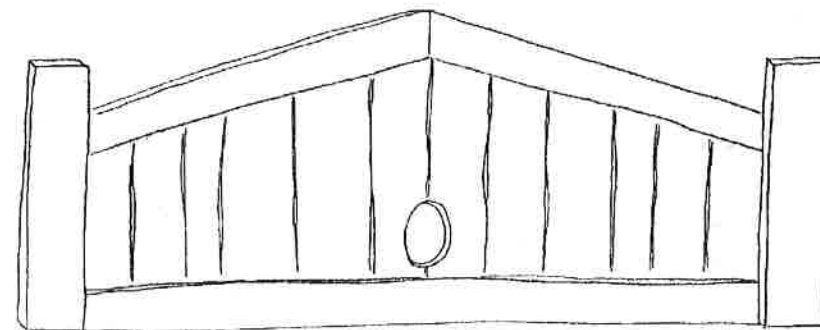
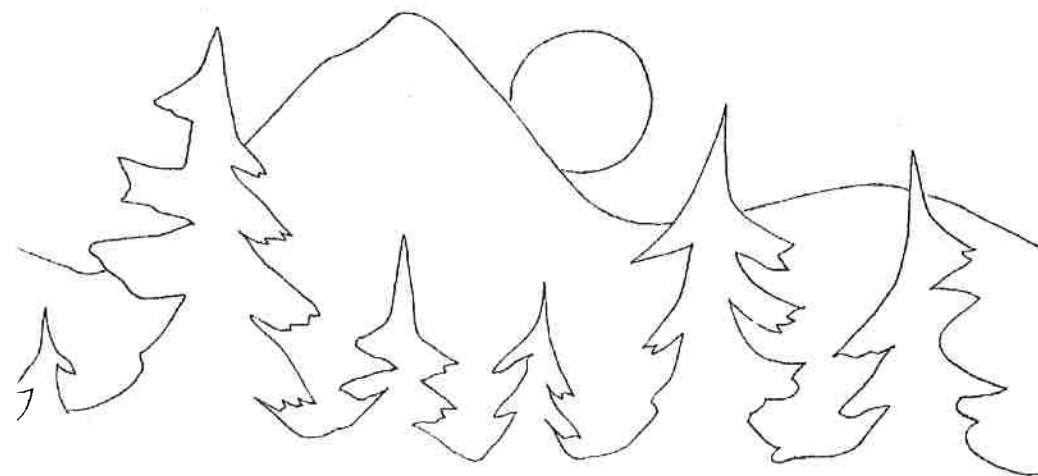
“What is the matter, dear husband?” said Bright Cloud Woman.

Txamsem yelled at her. He said, “I have been gambling every day for the last four days. At first I was winning, but now I am losing. I know you are the reason why!”

Bright Cloud Woman answered, “I have done nothing to make you lose.”



That night when Txamsem went to bed he was still angry. He did not remember the promise he had made when they first met. Bright Cloud Woman cried all night. Txamsem had never treated her like this before.





The next morning Txamsem woke up and dressed. He told his wife he was going for a walk. She took out her comb and quietly combed his hair as she did every morning. Txamsem was in a hurry to leave. He stood up suddenly and the fish-bone comb pulled his hair. He yanked it out and threw it in the corner.

“You’re just like that no-good lying woman,” he said to the comb. “I’d be better off without both of you!”

Bright Cloud Woman hung her head and cried at these mean words. Then, without speaking, she got up and walked to the river.



She dipped her bare feet in the water, turned around and whistled.

“Come, children,” she said sadly. “Let us go back.”

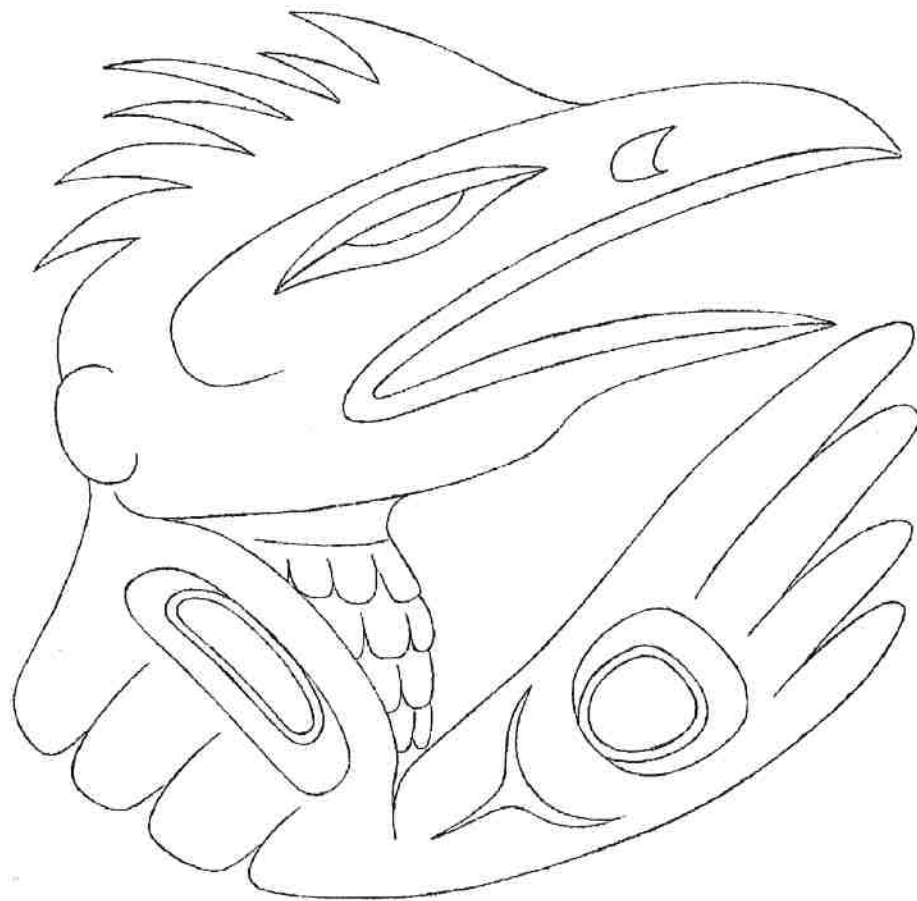
All the dried salmon rose from the storage houses and became live fish once more. They flew through the air and dove into the river. Then they swam downstream to the ocean.



Txamsem's beautiful hair suddenly became scorched and ugly. He ran after his beautiful wife.

"Please don't leave me! I am sorry for what I have done. I need you, my beloved one."

He tried to put his arms around Bright Cloud Woman but she vanished into the morning mist.



Txamsem was all alone. He was poor and he was wretched. His hair was scorched and he was uglier than he had ever been. He had no food and he was hungry. He had no wife and no one to comfort him.

He sat on the beach and cried for all the things he had lost.



Salmon Woman was now gone from the human world. In her wisdom and sense of fairness, she decided that all people should not go hungry because of Txamsem's wrongdoing.

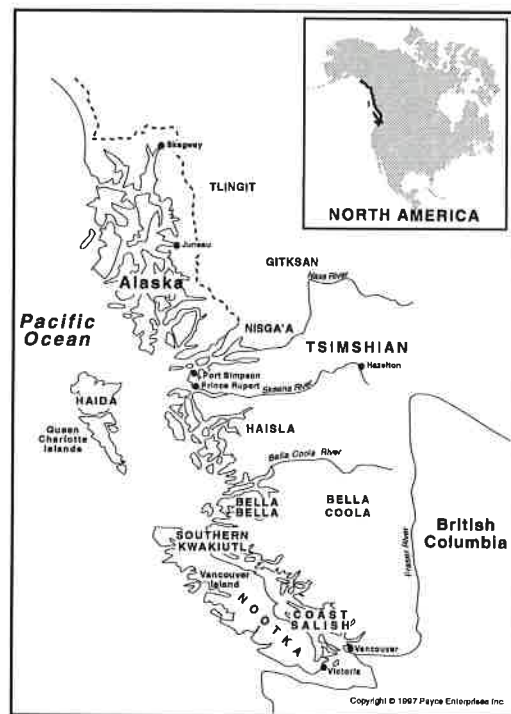
Although the salmon do not stay in the rivers all year long, Salmon Woman sends her children every year on their upstream journey.



# About T<sub>x</sub>amsem

In the Tsimshian Nation, T<sub>x</sub>amsem is known as a trickster, a spirit being and a transformer. In the beginning, T<sub>x</sub>amsem travelled around the world and throughout the cosmos, finishing the job of creation. There are also stories about his greed, dishonesty, foolishness and vanity. Sometimes T<sub>x</sub>amsem had such a craving or thirst for something he would do whatever he had to do to get it without being concerned about any consequences.

There are many T<sub>x</sub>amsem stories. In this story, T<sub>x</sub>amsem meets Bright Cloud Woman and becomes very rich. He has a good life. T<sub>x</sub>amsem becomes bored and the adventures begin. He learns about respect for nature and Spirit Beings.



Northwest Coast Cultures

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