

Shaman.

swensk halait

Account of the  
Gidzartef prince who  
became a shaman

The narrative of the boy who became a foremost  
swénsk haláit

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(Beynon's note: I also recorded a similar narrative at Port Simpson years ago and if memory serves me right I think it was narrated to me by Mark Luther).

There was a young Prince who went with his companions every day /to a place/ not far from the gidzaxláá village of g.adú in Metlakatla Pass. They played at pretending to be swénsk haláits. The Prince took the part of the haláit and his companions acted as his assistants. The Prince wore an apron, a head ring of grizzly claws, and a cedar bark ring around his neck. Every day they played at this, improvising songs while one of the companions pretended to be ill. The Prince would cover the "patient" with a mat and dance about him. When they had finished singing the Prince uncovered the pretended patient and then he was well.

They played at this every day, until one day on their return to the village a small round crystal fell at the Prince's feet. He took it and at once he felt a strange sensation of being possessed of great power, and voices seemed to come to him telling him that he had acquired strange powers. He was now a changed person.

Next day the Prince went with his companions to the little hut where they had played at being swénsk haláit and then the Prince began to feel as he had indeed a great power, so it was planned that the Prince would try to use the power which had come to him in such a strange and sudden way.

The youths returned toward the village and on their way they saw a young woman who was the chief's daughter, attended by her

female companions.

The young Prince placed his crystal on his knee and made motions toward the young woman. She immediately fell lame and had to be carried to her house.. She lay in her sleeping place in great agony, unable to bend her knee. Day after day the various swénsk haláits came and went, but they could do nothing for her. When she had been ill many days the Prince sent for one of his young companions and told him: "You go casually to the home of the Princess and just say indifferently that you know of a swénsk haláit who may cure the sick Princess, then leave the house."

So the young man went to the home of the Princess and casually mentioned: "I know a young swénsk haláit who may cure the ailing Princess. He is not known, but he has wonderful powers."

Then he left. When he had gone, the mother of the Princess told her husband: "What that young man said may be very important to us. He says he knows a haláit who may cure our daughter. We have tried all the known haláits Both from our tribe and all the others, but they have been unable to help our daughter. We should look for this young man and tell him to fetch the haláit." 65

So the chief sent messengers with gifts to the young man who had told them of the swénsk haláit and they told him: "My master has sent us with these gifts to ask you to bring the young swénsk haláit of whom you spoke in order that he may try to cure the daughter of our chief, for she has been ailing a long while. These presents which we place before you are but a small amount of what he will give you if by your help the Princess is cured. The great chief has been very worried about his daughter, for no one has been able to help her."

After deliberating a long while the young man replied: All right, return to your master and tell him the young Prince who is a swénsk haláit will come to where the Princess lies and endeavour to cure her." The young man returned to the place where the Prince and his other companions were and told them of the invitation from the father of the Princess.

That night the Prince, costumed as a swénsk haláit/ and with a grizzly bear claw head dress his attendants, in the robes of haláit attendants, went to the chief's house. The Princess was carried to the centre of the house, where the Prince covered her with his bear robe. He began to dance about the Princess, and his apron fringed with deer hoofs made a great noise as he moved about. His companions sang his haláit song and beat upon a skin drum. After dancing for some time the Prince took his amulet ( the magic crystal he had found, which was suspended from his neck in a skin pouch), and rubbed the afflicted knee of the Princess with the crystal, before replacing it in the pouch.

The Princess immediately felt relieved and there was little pain. The swénsk haláit then sucked at the afflicted knee and blew through the smoke hole. The Princess felt relieved of much of the pain.

The haláit then told the father of the Princess "I will have to come again to complete your daughter's cure." Then the Prince and his companions gathered their paraphernalia and prepared to leave.

The chief called upon his headmen: "Bring out more gifts so that the great haláit may be satisfied." These were placed before the Prince, and his companions gathered up the wealth and carried it out.

The next day the young haláit repeated this procedure exactly,

and the Princess arose, ~~and~~ completely cured. All in the village were happy that the young woman was cured, and her father, the Chief, gave a great amount of wealth to the young Prince and his companions.

The fame of the young swénsk haláit spread to all the other tribes and he became very wealthy.

At this time there was lovely young Princess who was the daughter of a very arrogant chief, and he kept all suitors away from his daughter. Chiefs and Princes came from far away lands and all of the nearby tribes, hoping to marry the beautiful Princess. But her father and mother loved her so much that they would not part with her. But the Princess herself was very lonely and tired of the constant company of the young woman who had been chosen to accompany her everywhere. She longed for a husband.

One day the young swénsk haláit, who had seen this Princess, came to his mother and told her: "I want you to go to the house of the chief who is the father of this beautiful Princess, taking with you much wealth, and place this before the chief. Tell him I wish to make the Princess my wife."

The mother tried to dissuade the Prince of his desire, for she knew of the arrogance of the great chief and thought that he would refuse her son's suit. But the Prince was firm and finally the mother went to the great chief. Placing her son's gifts before him, she said: "I am placing these humble gifts in front of you in the hope that you will consider the wishes of my son, who desires to marry your daughter."

Without hesitating the chief replied: "Go, woman, and tell your son that my daughter will never marry him."

The woman returned home with her son's gifts and told him:

"The chief would not listen to my plea for you, and told me that his daughter would never marry my son."

This angered the young man, and he then gathered together his companions and declared to them: "I shall make that great chief very sorry that he has refused my suit for his daughter. We will keep watch and when she comes out tonight to relieve herself I shall cause her to become very ill. No one will be able to help her but me."

That night the young Princess and her women came out to go to the beach to relieve themselves before sleeping. The rejected Prince was hidden nearby and he took the magic crystal, rubbed it on his own belly and then waved it toward the Princess. She immediately cried out in pain and was carried into her father's house. She lay in her sleeping place in great pain? ~~AND AT ONCE HER FATHER BEGAN~~ to call in all the swénsk haláits from all the other tribes and the nearby villages, but none could bring any relief to the suffering Princess.

One day the younger brother of the great chief remembered the young swénsk haláit who had cured the girl when all the other haláits had failed , so he went to the girl's father and said: "Why do you not call the young swénsk haláit who was able to cure your daughter of the sickness before when all the other haláits failed to help her?"

The chief had refused the suit of the young haláit for his daughter yet now he was concerned over her suffering that he called his wife and told her: "Take my headmen and much wealth and go to the Prince swénsk haláit and ask him to come and cure my daughter."

The woman did as she was told . She placed all the wealth before the young Prince and said: "Great haláit, I ask you to have pity on

us for our daughter suffers greatly and we believe only you can help her."

The younger halait said nothing, and the woman left without his promise to help. Next day the chief sent his wife back again with more presents, as they thought the young halait was not satisfied about the amount of his fee. Again these goods were placed in front of the chief, but he said no word.

"There is nothing mymaster wants, except that he wishes to marry your daughter," one of the halait's assistants told the woman as she was leaving the house. The woman returned home and told her husband the chief: "The halait said nothing to me, but one of his spokesmen told me that if you let the halait marry our daughter, he will cure her. That is what you must decide now." The chief was reluctant to lose his daughter, but next day the young woman was suffering a great deal more and seemed about to die. This moved the father to send a messenger to the young halait: "Go and tell the halait that should he cure my daughter he may marry her."

The messenger came to the Prince's house and told him: "The great chief wants you to cure his daughter, then you may marry her."

"Very well, I will come" said the young halait. He gathered his assistants and with their dancing outfits they went immediately to the chief's house. The halait picked up the ailing girl from her sleeping place and placed her in the centre of the house so that he could dance in a circle around her. She was in great agony. The Prince began to sing his halait song, invoking the help of his supernatural aides, who were a white mink and a white loon. Then he took the magic crystal and rubbed this over the afflicted part.

Almost at once the woman felt relieved, and the young haláit restored her to her sleeping place. He gathered his dancing outfit and returned to his own house. This performance was repeated for several days, until the young Princess was completely well. Soon the Prince sent his mother to make marriage overtures to the girl's family. Finally the great chief conquered his reluctance to lose his daughter and the two were married.

At this time they were living at their village of gādū on Metlakatla Passage. The young haláit had become very famous and people came from great distances to be treated by him. One night he told his companions: "Tonight we shall be visited by a strange people who will arrive in a strange canoe. I will go with them to their country, for their chief is near death. You must get ready to come with me, and make ready my dancing outfit."

They were all sitting by the fire when they heard a canoe land on the beach below their house and a strange man entered and said: "Great Prince, we have come to you because your fame has extended even to our distant land. Now our chief lies near death and we have had every swénsk haláit in attendance, but he is slowly getting weaker. We are certain that some foreign haldaogit is slowly destroying him. We have heard of your fame and we have come to you in the hope that you can save our master's life. We are ready to return at once."

The visitors then began to unload a large amount of wealth in furs and copper shields, brought them to the Prince, and placed them before him, saying: "This is a preliminary payment. When you have cured our master there will be a great deal more for you and your companions."

The Prince and his friends then took their belongings down to



the beach , where a huge canoe in the form of a whale lay anchored with some of the strange people still inside it. The Prince and his companions boarded the strange craft, and soon it seemed to come to life and gain speed. The Prince saw that there were no paddles and no sails, but the canoe itself was alive. It was in fact a whale, and began to head out to sea. They travelled for a long while. The strange people seemed more animal than human. Occasionally they passed an island, after they had travelled for many days, and people called from the shore: "Did you get what you went for?"

Then the headman in the canoe replied: "Yes, he is with us now." One evening they came to an island, where the canoe landed. The headman said to the Prince: "Great haláit, we have now come to the place where my master lies ill. We will take you there at once."

So the Prince and his companions followed him as he led the way to a large house carved into the cliff. They went to the rear of the house and saw there a very large man lying in his sleeping place. He seemed very weak and in great pain.

The Prince took out his magic crystal and saw that the great chief was being bewitched. Only the haláit was able to see the arrow point lodged in the chief's back. He placed the crystal on the chief's back and the patient at once felt some relief. The young haláit then told the chief's people: "Someone is bewitching your chief, and as soon as the figure which represents the chief falls down into the haldaogit box of this haldaogit the chief will die. This person who is bewitching your chief lives a great distance away, but someone must go there and extract this image which is suspended from the lid and bring it back to me."

The Prince told them the direction to travel and the men went to their whale canoe and were gone very quickly.

Soon they returned, bringing the box with them. The Prince opened the box and discovered the little figure made to represent the ailing chief, which was found to have a thorn piercing its back, just as the arrow point pierced the back of the ailing chief.

When the prince extracted this thorn the chief was soon able to sit up as the pain left him. Had the hair supporting the image in the haldaogit box broken and let the figure fall the chief would have died.

The chief was now cured and the young Prince discovered that his patient was the chief of the **Bágwes** people, who had supernatural powers. They were able to imitate or impersonate people and could make contact with a person they wanted to be rid of. Soon after they made contact their victim would become violently insane and die soon after.

The chief of the **bágwes** people now called in his headmen and placed much wealth before the **haláit** and his companions.

There were many large logs laying on the beach and the people brought these in and they burnt at once. These logs were really huge sea lions and seals. The next day the **bágwes** chief told the Prince: "Tomorrow you will return to your village with your companions."

The next morning the whale canoe was below the village and they went aboard. After some days travel they arrived at **g.ádu**, the **gidzaxléi** village at Metlakatla Pass. The young man saw that many of the people had grown considerably older; he had thought their trip had lasted only a few days, but really they had been away many years.

The young **haláit** became famous in many distant places as people came from near and far to be treated by him.