

The Thunderbird: A Tillamook Legend

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Once upon a time there was a man who lived at Slab Creek. One day he went up the creek to spear salmon. When he started out the sun was shining, but soon dark clouds came up and it began to thunder and to rain. Then it cleared up again, but soon a new shower came on and he was unable to secure a single fish. He became angry and said, "What is that great thing that always darkens the water and prevents me from seeing the fish?" He went on and came to a tall spruce tree in which a large hole had been burned by lightning. He looked into it and discovered a little boy. When he looked closer he saw the boy coming out. As soon as he had stepped out of the hole he began to grow, and soon reached a height taller than the spruce tree; his skin was covered with feathers. Then he said, "Now you see how tall I am. Don't look at me; I am the one whom you have scolded."

Then the speaker, who was no other than the Thunderer, took the man's salmon spear and blanket. He leaned the spear against the tree and hung the blanket on to it. He took the man under his armpits and flew with him towards the sky. When they reached a considerable height the man almost fell from under the Thunderer's armpits, and the latter descended again and allowed him to regain his strength. He thought: "Where shall I put him in order to prevent his falling down?" He said, "When we reach a great height, close your eyes, so that the strong wind which prevails up there will do you no harm." Then he flew up again and ascended in large circles. Each flapping of his wings was a peal of thunder, and when the noise ceased the man knew that they had arrived at the Thunderer's home and he opened his eyes. On the following day the Thunderer told him to go and catch salmon. The man went to the beach but did not see any salmon, while many whales were swimming about. Then he went back to the house and said, "I do not see any salmon, but many whales are swimming about."

"Those are the fish I was speaking of," replied the Thunderer. "They are our food. Catch a few!" The man replied, "They are too large, and I cannot catch them."

They went out and the man saw that the people were catching whales in the same way as he was accustomed to catch salmon. The Thunderer told him to stand aside, as he himself was preparing to catch whales. He caught the largest one and carried it up to a large cave which was near by, and when he had deposited it there the whale flapped its tail and jumped about, violently shaking the mountain, so that it was impossible to stand upon it.

One day the man went up the river and saw many fish swimming in it. He thought, "I am tired of whale meat and wish I could have some fish." He went back to the house and spoke to the Thunderer, "Grandfather, I have found many fish, and I want to catch them." He made a fish spear, which he showed to the Thunderer. The latter looked at it, but found it so small that he was hardly able to feel it. It slipped under his fingernail and he was unable to find it again. The man said, "How large are your nails! They are just like the crack of a log," and the old grandfather laughed.

The man made a new spear and went fishing salmon. Before he went the old man said, "Don't catch more than you are able to eat. You may take four or five." "I cannot even eat one." Then the grandfather laughed and said, "If I should eat one hundred I should not have enough."

The man went out, caught one salmon, and brought it home. He was going to split it, but was unable to find a knife small enough for cutting the fish.

Then the Thunderer split a rock, as he thought, into very small pieces, but the smallest of these was so large that the man was unable to lift it. Then the Thunderer broke it into still smaller pieces and said, "I fear I have spoiled it, for it has become dust so fine that I cannot take hold of it." The man went out, but even then the smallest piece was so large that he was unable to lift it. After the Thunderer had broken it again and the man had selected the smallest piece, he said, "It is still too large, but I think I must try to make use of it. Then the Thunderer told him how to cut the fish. He followed his commands and cut the fish, as the people of the Thunderer were accustomed to do.

He roasted it and ate it, but was unable to eat all. Then his grandfather laughed and said, "Put it aside and go to sleep. When you awake you will be able to eat more." When the man awoke and wanted to continue to eat the fish it was gone. He had returned to the river from which he had taken it. He took his spear and went down the river to catch another salmon. There he saw one half of a fish swimming about. It was the one he had been eating. He caught it, roasted it, and finished eating it. The next day he caught another fish,

and when he had eaten half of it and went to sleep he tied the rest to a pole in order to prevent its returning to the river. But when he awoke he found it had returned to the river. He had burned one side of the head of this salmon, and the next day on going to the river he saw the same salmon swimming about. It had taken some grass into its mouth and covered one side of its face, as it was ashamed to show how badly it was burned. The Thunderer said, "Don't burn the salmon when you roast them, for they do not like it. They might take revenge upon you."

The next day the Thunderer again went whaling, and the man asked him to be allowed to accompany him, as he wished to witness the spectacle. The Thunderer granted his request, but when he came home in the evening he found that the man was badly hurt. He had been unable to stand on his feet when the whale was shaking the mountain, and was hurt by falling trees and stones. But on the following day he asked once more to be allowed to accompany the Thunderer. He tied himself to a tree, but when the Thunderer came back in the evening to fetch him he found him again badly hurt, as he had been knocked about by the swinging trees.

Meanwhile the relatives of the man had been searching for him for over a year. They had gone up Slab Creek, where they found his spear and blanket leaning against a large spruce tree. They did not know what had become of him. They believed him to be dead, and his wife mourned for him.

One day while he was staying with the Thunderer he thought of his wives and children and longed to return. He said to himself: "Oh, my children, as you still alive? There is no one to provide for you, and I am afraid you are dead." The Thunderer knew his thoughts and said, "Do not worry, your wives are quite well. One of them has married again. I will take you back tomorrow." What the Thunderer called the next day was actually the next year.

The following day he took him under his armpits and put him back at the foot of the spruce tree from where he had taken him, and then flew back home. The man believed that he had been away only four days, but it had been four years. He did not go to his house, but stayed in the woods nearby. There his son found him. He asked the boy, "Who are you? Is your father at home?" The boy replied, believing him to be a stranger, "No, I have no father; he was lost four years ago. For a long time they looked for him, and finally they found his clothes and his salmon spear." Then the man said, "I am your father. The Thunderer took me up to the sky, and I have returned." Then he inquired after his wives, and the boy replied, "Mother is well and all my brothers have grown up and are also well. Your other wife has married again, but Mother remained true to you." Then the man sent him to call his wife. The boy ran home and said, "Mother! Father is in the

woods!" His mother did not believe him and whipped him for speaking about his father. Then the boy went out crying. He said to his father, "Mother did not believe me." The man gave him a piece of whale meat and said, "Take this to your mother; I brought it from where I have been." The boy obeyed, and took the whale meat to his mother, who said, "I will go with you, but if he is not your father, I shall beat you." She accompanied her son and found her husband. He returned with her into the house, and she invited the whole tribe. The man danced and became a great shaman. For ten days he danced, and the people feasted. Then he told them where he had been and what he had seen, and said that whenever they wanted to have a whale he would get one.

After some time the Thunderer came back and took him up once more and he stayed for 10 years with him. Then he came home and lived with his people.

One day he went elk-hunting, and came to a small lake, where he found a small canoe. When crossing the lake he heard a voice calling him from out of the water, and on looking down he saw a hole in the bottom, and a human being in it which called him. He jumped overboard, went to the bottom of the lake, and stayed with the supernatural being for 10 years. Then the latter sent him out in company of the beaver to gather some skunk-cabbage. They followed a trail and came to a parting of the roads. The man did not know where they were going. Then the beaver asked him, "Do you know where we are going? This trail is Nestuka River, which we are now descending." They followed the trail to its end, where they found a large cave, from which the man emerged to the open air, while the beaver returned to the lake. At the entrance of the cave the man flung down two skunk-cabbages which he had found, and ascended the mountain. Ever since that time two stems of skunk-cabbage have been growing at the entrance of the cave.

His two sons found him on the summit of the rock. They took him home and invited the whole tribe. He danced and became the greatest shaman among his people. When a person died he was able to bring back his soul and restore him to life.