



**AND I AM GUILTY.** Disgusting Orgies? I am guilty of it all. Blood dripping off my godless fangs, black in the flame-light roaring in the centre of the great-house. Cavorting heathens. Me: legs kicking up, naked member swinging, masks of bear and wolf and raven turning all about, carved wood mouths clack-clacking. My fingers clutching at some poor waif, his blue eyes wide-open-terrified, fed on blood and liver till he was fattened up sufficient for the pot. A blow from a blade, and the fair-haired little wretch's organs spill out on the ground for my appreciation. Me—with all them naked savages about me, screeching and hollering—here's me scrabbling in the dirt to raise up a steaming kidney, a liver, a heart.

My name is George Hunt: Indian Man-Eater, Mutilator of Corpses, Cannibal—and Man of Reason. There's the rub.

Ten days have passed now, since the trial finished back in Vancouver, and I am come here to the city of New York. A whole continent traversed in a week! And after all those days on the train, I arrived late last night, creeping in like some errant husband what's been out rousting longer than he ought. The wind slapped rain at the window of my hotel room as if it were the middle of winter instead of April. I saw long avenues of stone, lights winking on and off in windows, the odd lone soul rushing between the street lamps to be somewhere, the passing of a carriage, hood drawn up tight against the weather. I thought it strange to see this city near to sleeping, as if such a place—the very heart of the world!—could ever sleep.

Now I am here in the American Museum of Natural History, amidst the dusty beams of sunlight what break the shadows to sharp angles. A long gallery stretches off to either side of me, filled up with rows of glass cases. I stand before this mannequin, with its eyes glassy balls of black, a fat mop of what looks a horse's mane perched up on its crown as hair, a moustache to match, and its face painted in the deepest brown—a face what might seem a demon's, if the sheen of its skin was not so matte, so completely barren of all life.

It has been dressed in an antique suit of body armour, arduously carven out of cedarwood and painted black. This suit of armour what is the cause of all my troubles these past weeks. It has come on ahead across this land. And now it is here.

I reach out and run my fingers along the body of the Sisiutl, the double-headed snake carved on its chest, the two mouths joining tongues at the sternum. The Sisiutl, what's coils lie twined beneath the earth. The world, and all there is in it, rests upon those coils and is subject to their movements. I see again the chieftain, Big Mountain, standing proud above the carcass of the deer, saluting the initiation of his son into the society of the cannibal dancers, and wearing this suit his ancestors had also worn for all the long generations before him.

I have been brung here to the museum as an expert—an authority on the Indians, no less. I have the book I wrote with Professor Boas in my hand (with the rumpled newspaper clippings tucked away inside). And all the past days of travelling, I have been studying its detail. *The Social Organization and Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians*, by Franz Boas. My name is there, in the acknowledgments. *I am indebted to ... without whose assistance ...* Truth is, I know the book as a priest knows his cursed bible. I have been reading it over and over like some schoolboy learning his dates in history, till I am so filled up with clans and family relations, with stories—myths, as Boas calls them—manners, ways of cooking, hunting, the powers of chieftains, men of medicine, and the rest, that I am ripe enough to be rotten with facts. I am to aid in cataloguing the Indian artefacts here—most of which I have collected for them myself, these past fifteen years or more, and many of which do fill up the glass cases, the walls and columns of this place.

How did this black armour come to be at the centre of my troubles? It is what Professor Boas will want to hear about. He will demand every detail. His own assistant, tried as a cannibal, no less! *Disgusting Orgies!* as it was written in the newspapers. *George Hunt accused of assisting at savage hamatsa cannibal dances where human bodies were consumed!* I imagine Boas crowing with glee when first he did hear of it. He'll poke me, like a boy with a stick at a clam, till he has drawn all nourishment from its

telling. He'll glory in it, so he will. He will dissect me, measure me up like one of his skulls.

Yet the events what led up to the trial are still so scrambled in my head. David's death coming at the same time as the charges laid against me. The ritual they did accuse me of and the rituals of David's funeral all tangled together. David's death the beginning of it all. Big Mountain's suit of armour at the heart of those charges what was laid against me. A mess. A tangle indeed.

When I think on that, and on all my failings, and as I look to find some gleam of something—life? mercy? spirit?—in those black glass eyes, I realize it all does begin with yet an older tale.

It was full forty years ago and more, back when I was still a young man. At eighteen, I had come into my own by getting married. My wife was an Indian of high Kwagiulth stock—Kwakiutl, as Boas always writes the word—from one of the noble families back then in my village of Fort Rupert, at the north end of Vancouver Island, and I became a noble Indian myself by marrying her. My mother was of a tribe from further north, but my father was a white man. He was factor for the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Rupert when I was growing up, before the company pulled out, bringing poverty on the people thereabouts. All of which is to say I am a half of each race, white and brown and maybe neither for being both. Growing up with such a mash of languages, I hardly know at times what dialect I am speaking in.

I had a friend whose name was Making-Alive. Some time after I was married, Making-Alive says to me, "Get up here to my village and we will teach you the ways of being a man of medicine, now that you is become a chieftain among the people, though you still be but a breed."

I did not believe in the ways of the men of medicine. Shamans, as Boas calls them. The word's from out of Siberia or some such, and the Indians on our coast the same as the peoples of that far continent. It is all too strange.

Anyhow, I thought here is the perfect chance for me to learn their tricks and fraudery, and, after, to expose them for the liars and the cheats they are—me being half-bred to reason, as I might put it. So up I goes to

Making-Alive's village and learned all these tricks and words and games of making medicine.

Some months after I had finished my learning, I was away in my canoe trading for the Hudson's Bay Company. It was night and I had thrown my anchor stone. I lay in the bottom of the boat and sleep was close on me, or else it had come. Now perhaps I slept and dreamt, or else it was in truth that a killer whale come up then right by my canoe. It lifted up out of the water, and hung over me, the ocean falling off its body like a waterfall. All those tons of its flanks in black silhouette against the stars, fins as wide as my canoe was long.

It spoke then, saying its name was Lagoyewilé—which means Rolling Over in Mid-Ocean. Then it changed itself into a huge man with great long arms and slick black skin like that of a seal in the ocean at night, and after that it turned to a killer whale again. So are the ways of spirits.

Its voice sounded like a wave breaking inside a cave. It told me that I would do my first healing the day after. Then it told me all the rituals I would need. I calls them rituals now, but I did not know that word then, long before the anthropologists came up the coast calling them such. Back then, they was just things as must be done.

The next day, I paddled the waters to Teguxste village, which I came to late in the day. I pulled up my canoe upon the pebbles and an old chieftain was waiting there to greet me. "Walas gigamé," says he. "You have come." The chief tells me how his sick grandson had dreamt, that very night past, that I was the only man who might save him. And now here I was upon the village shore, like as if the spirits theirselves had sent me.

Now up until I saw that killer whale, I had learned the medicine tricks but had not thought ever to put practice to them, and especially not in treating a youngster gasping on its sickbed. I thought I was white man enough to know the quackery I'd learned, and to put my faith in the ways of modern science when it came to maladies of the body.

But there I was, and now all the village was out and looking on me. I suppose the memory of the killer whale, and then the tale of the child's dream, had throwed me enough that I said I'd do whatever I could.

I stayed the day in the old chieftain's home. I didn't eat nor drink nor go out, except to wash myself in the waters of the ocean. The people steered clear of me and I did the sorts of mysterious mumblings and whisperings of preparation that was expected, those I had been taught by the medicine men of Making-Alive's village.

In the evening, they came to bring me to the greathouse. I passed along the shore in front of the buildings. All the painted totems of the village, eagle and fox, beaver and wolf, stared down upon me, till I might have run straight to my canoe and paddled off, if I'd but had the chance.

I arrived outside the entrance to the greathouse. Up to that moment I had been making arguments in my head for when the child would still be sick the next morning. But now it seemed like I was being pushed at and kept from entering inside that wide door, shaped like it were the mouth of a wolf, canines of blackened timber spiking down as if they'd gobble you up should you came close enough.

A voice came whispering in my mind. It told me I had need of cedar bark. So I spoke out and the old chieftain brung me a neckring, wristlets, and anklets of red cedar. I covered them in eagle down.

But the eagle down did something to me when it touched my skin. Later, the people said I ran away into the woods, and when they did bring me back, I was singing a sacred song.

Inside the greathouse, my senses came back to me. The village's men of medicine were sitting in a line, blankets wrapped about their waists, bare chested and daubed in black paint, eagle down upon them and red cedar rings. Their eyes glared in challenge. I knew they had not been able to save the sick boy themselves; that I was a threat to them should I succeed. Their hard eyes did put the fear to me quite powerful. I felt myself then very much the boy I still was.

The sick child was lying between the shamans and the huge fire what roared at the centre of the room. Its flames burned to the ceiling, till a man must be sent into the rafters to douse the steaming timbers there. All the people of the village was gathered, lining the walls, and all of them silent, the only sound being that of the fire. My sweat poured down me and I

was fearing even for my life if I should fail. Fearing perhaps that my white blood might betray my brown.

I followed the instructions Lagoyewilé, the Killer Whale Spirit, had given me the night before. I lifted up the boy and carried him four times round the fire. Then I sat down with the child on my lap, and the fire raging before my face.

I put my mouth to the boy's chest, where the killer whale had told me I should. I sucked, hard enough for the skin to bruise. Something came into my mouth and I spat it out into my palm. It lay there, black in the firelight, a bloody ball of sickness, a clinging, greasy worm.

I held it up for the people to see, and there was sighings and murmurings then all about. That moment when all their night terrors was made evident before them. All the proof of devilry. All of it was there in that bloody mess in my palm. So I rolled it in cedar bark and chucked it into the fire.

Then I stood the child on his feet, and fed a ring of white cedar bark down across his body and had him step out from it. I put the ring on a stick and carried it round the fire, then set it to the flame as well. I watched it burn to dust.

When I woke the next morning the boy was healed.

What was it in my hand? What was it? Well, I says it was the sickness.

Or do I say that? Making-Alive pleaded with me—when he was dying, when he knew I was writing stories of the people for the anthropologists—Making-Alive says, “Please don't tell our secrets to the white men.” But there ain't nothing set in stone these days, and all secrets come out in the end.

So there I was, young muttonhead, before the people, with the sick child at my feet. The sickness what was resting in my hand: the sickness what I had earlier made it up in the forest, when I fled in the condition of my trance, with the men following behind. All right, I do confess it: my false trance! For truth is, I was but making pretense of my disposition then. Already, the lies come sloping in like wolverines to a carcass.

I had the sickness stored away in my pocket, tufts of it, given me by the shamans—tufts of eagle down. The secret sickness: eagle down! I put

those tufts in my mouth in the forest, between gum and cheek. Later, with the boy in my arms, I bit hard at my tongue. Then I sucked on the child's body, and at my tongue as well, until I tasted my blood. I rolled the eagle down about my teeth, soaking up the blood until it did become a globulous mess; and it was that which I spat out into my hand.

But the truth of it—and no lies now—the truth is that the child was cured. He'd been afire with fever the night before, and me thinking influenza, what has killed so many. But the next morning, there he was, walking and eating and laughing, and me the hero. Well, I didn't hang about to soak up the praise. I got in my canoe and paddled off quick as I could, the fright of it outweighing the triumph I might have felt, the glory I might have wallowed in, there in the village.

And always since, I have had this question I can't answer: how did it work? How did I save him with such lies? I do not know.

But what stays with me—what I cannot cease from thinking on—are the dreams. First: the dream of the killer whale: Lagoyewilé, what is Rolling Over in Mid-Ocean. Too many years have gone by now. Did I truly dream it? Or was it no more than things I had been told by the shamans what taught me—things that, in the intervening years, have become the stuff of dream, of fantasy? I don't know. Many things are said of memory: how time builds our truths until they become what it is we *want*, instead of what it is we *know*.

But, more than that: what is the only truly mystifying feature—what cannot be explained at any level by dint of rational thinking—the child's dream. For it did occur the day *before* I came to the village. Of that, there just ain't no explanation I can find.

I have had the memory of that ignorance-wrought success to plague me in the years what followed, as so many I knew and loved did slip through my failing fingers into death. As the skills I learned from the men of medicine, and the skills I learned thereafter from science: as all those skills did fail me, and as everyone died, one after another after another.

Right up till the last. Till Harry.