

“The myth of the Dragon-Fly. A young unmarried woman of this clan, whose name was Yaw’l, broke her seclusion taboos to play with her brothers. Although it was summertime, a heavy fall of snow covered the ground at night. When the brothers and sister looked outside, they found themselves in a strange country; their house was nearly covered with snow. Huge-Belly, a monstrous being, appeared from time to time, calling the young taboo-breakers outside, one by one, in order to cut them open with his long, sharp, glass-like nose, and hang their bodies on the rafters of his lodge to smoke and dry like split salmon. One of them managed to kill him. The slayer took to flight with his sister and remaining brothers, but to little avail. A female being of the same kind, Ksemkaigyet, who could draw out her nose into a sharp knife, pursued them. As they hid in a tree at the edge of a lake, she detected their shadows in the frosty waters and dived several times to capture them, until she was quite frozen. Then they killed her. But before she died, she declared, “The people will always suffer from my nose.” From her remains were born the mosquitoes and other pests.”

—Marius Barbeau, Totem Poles: 1950

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The Tale of the Blacked Out Sky at Noon. That winter the snow had blanketed the Nass River Valley, but the old man Ksemkaigyēt barely noticed. He had secluded himself from the village, found comfort in the solitude of his work—splitting open dragon flies, determining their inner workings. But each specimen he opened revealed something different. Some were filled with sand, others with blood or pine needles. He allowed himself to crack open only one each day. But Ksemkaigyēt’s desire to know how they worked soon became a ravenous hunger. And he found himself splitting open every specimen he had until he came upon one dragon fly that was filled with smoke—wreaths upon wreaths—and ice water. Ksemkaigyēt was stunned. The smoking creature he held in his palms was not a dragon fly at all, but a spirit in disguise. The glass-nosed spirit rose from the smoke and spoke in a language that he did not understand. But before Ksemkaigyēt knew what had happened the spirit transformed into a dragon fly once more and flew out of the lodge. He followed the spirit out into the woods and saw that the sky had become blackened with the beating wings of dragon flies, that all those wings together were melting all of the snow. He had indeed found himself in a strange country.