

They Laugh at Raven

In one big village lived families of bear, deer, ravens, kingfishers, sparrows and others. It was a time when there was not much to do.

"How shall we pass the time?" the people of the village wondered.

"Let's get the families together and sing and eat," suggested Raven.

"Sure," said Kingfisher, "that's a good idea. Let's start tomorrow. You can all come to my place."

So Kingfisher got his fine spear ready. He went down to the river and out to the end of a long tree that hung over the water.

"Oh boy," the people thought as they watched. "Maybe we'll have a salmon feast."

Kingfisher could see a shape under the water, moving up river. He struck, embedding his sharp spear into the fish behind its gill. He

brought the salmon out and soon had two more.

The next day the people all came to his home for the feast. They were very happy, laughing, singing and eating. Then one asked, "Who is going to be next?"

"That's me," said Raven. "I'm going to be next. May I borrow your spear in the morning?" he asked the kingfisher.

"I don't know....," said Kingfisher. "It's a really good spear—the only one I've got. You might break it if you miss a salmon and hit the rocks on the river bottom."

"Oh, I won't do that," Raven assured him. "I'm good at spearing salmon. I will be very careful with it."

So the next morning Kingfisher lent his spear to Raven. Raven went out on the same tree hanging over the water that Kingfisher had fished from. He waited till he saw a large salmon swimming up the river, then drove the spear as hard as he could. It pierced the salmon close to its tail and the big fish pulled Raven into the water. "Help! Help!" he cried.

The people gathered on the river bank to watch. Raven did not let go of the spear because he did not want to lose it. Someone went into the water finally and pulled him out. He was a mess of wet feathers.

"Why did he do that?" the people questioned. "He's not good at spearing fish."

Sparrow said, "I'll give the next feast. Come to my place tomorrow." The people wondered what the little bird could give them.

The next day Sparrow asked the people to help him bring berry bushes into his house. There were no berries left on the branches. When lots of bushes were stuck into the dirt floor and all the people had gathered, the little bird sat on one of the limbs and started to sing a beautiful song. Suddenly berries came out on all the bushes—fat berries that looked like clumps of fresh salmon roe. They were salmonberries and enough for all the people.

The guests were enjoying themselves very much. They asked one another, "Who will be next?"

"I'm next," shouted the raven.

"What are you going to give us?"

"Salmonberries, just like the sparrow," retorted Raven.

So they all went again to Raven's house where Raven had got his helpers to stick a bunch of bushes into the floor just like the sparrow had. They watched as he tried to sit on one of the branches. He was so heavy the bush wobbled. It could hardly hold him. Raven started whistling and trying to sing like a sparrow. One or two blossoms came out on the bush and only one half-rotten berry.

"He's always imitating someone," exclaimed

the guests as they turned their backs on him in disgust.

The next day they were all invited to the deer's home for a nice roast of venison. The raven would not go. He was thinking about his past two failures and how all the people laughed at him.

"Come on, Raven," they called.

"No, I won't," Raven sulked, but then he smelled the delicious meat cooking and changed his mind.

"It's too late now," he was informed, "but if you want some meat, you can stick your beak through that knot-hole and we will give your some."

So he put his mouth through the knot-hole. They gave him a strip of meat. It was wrapped around a small stone that had been heated red hot in the fire.

"Gwa-gwa-gwa!" cried Raven when he tried to gobble it down. Then he flew away.

But when all the people had gathered the next day at Harbor Seal's house, Raven was there too. The harbor seal had made a big fire in his house and lined up several wooden pots beside it. He bathed and stood close to the fire, holding his hands to the flame. Oil started dripping from his fingers into the pots and, when they were all filled, he divided the oil among the people.

"Who is going to provide the feast tomorrow?" the guests asked as they were happily leaving for home with their good oil.

"I am! I am!" shouted the raven.

"What? What are you going to give us this time?" the people queried, but the raven did not answer.

The next day the raven built a big fire in his home. Then he bathed in the river. He looked strange with his feathers dripping with water. He held his feet to the hot fire, but only one drop of oil came out. You could hear his skin cracking. That is why Raven has such rough skin on his feet today.

"Why do you try to do what everybody else does?" the people asked. "Why don't you do something of your own?"

"Tomorrow you will have salal berries from me," stated the bear to those assembled. They all turned to look at him.

"Where will he get them?" they asked one another. All the bushes around camp had been stripped.

The next day the bear bathed thoroughly. When the people came to his home he asked the biggest of all his brothers to come and slap him on the backside as hard as he could. The biggest bear gave him a mighty whack and all the wooden pots were filled to the brim with

salal berries—nice clean berries with no stems on them.

Of course the raven tried to copy the bear. He too bathed in the river and assembled some wooden pots. Then he asked a bear to smack him on the bottom.

Smack—and the raven went tumbling across the room. All that came out was some dirt. The people went home, laughing again at the raven.