

SNOW EAGLE

by

SHIRLEY A. ROE

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Dedication

*To a people whose lives were ruled by nature and whose love of all things enfolded into their own spirit, making them ONE with the “Great Spirit”.
To all present day seekers, may we all find “Oneness” and peace.*



Anthropologists, paleontologists and archeologists have discovered the remains of ancient logs that form massive, man-made structures once used to catch caribou, just beyond Old Crow Flats in the northern Yukon. The structures, which consisted of log walls higher than the caribou were known as “caribou corrals.” The log walls were fashioned with stone axes suggesting the corrals were used in prehistoric times. The animals entered at a place where the corral was about five kilometers wide. It gradually narrowed until the caribou were trapped, providing a convenient bin of both live meat and warm hides to feed dozens of families over the long Yukon winters. Carbon dating of fossil bones in the corrals determined they were 30,000 years old.

Notes from the Author

The **Tlingit** (pronounced "klink-it") are an Alaska Native tribe and Canadian First Nations people. Their name for themselves is **Lingít, meaning "people"**. The Tlingit are a matrilineal society who developed a complex hunter-gatherer culture in the temperate rainforest of the southeast Alaska coast and the Alexander Archipelago..

Before the arrival of non-natives in the southwestern Yukon, the Tagish language faced pressure from the culturally dominant Tlingit language and was in the process of replacement. The Tagish people intermarried with the Tlingit and adopted their customs and language. Descendants of the Tagish identify culturally with the Tlingit.

The name **Tagish itself** is a place name, **which means 'it (spring ice) is breaking up'**.

Due to the difficulty in pronouncing the Tlingit and Tagish names, the author has chosen to use their English equivalent. Here are some names, as they would appear in Tlingit for the reader's information.

Snow Eagle	dleit ch'aak
Red Hawk	x'aan shaayaal
Black Rain	t'ooch s'oow
Little Fawn	yagootl
Gray Wolf	law'ux gooch
Sunflower	gagaan k'eikaxwein
White Fox	xaldleit
Clouds of Thunder	goos xeitl
Songbird	t'sitskw
Charging Elk	watsix
Buffalo Woman	esevona'e
Earthquake	yoo aan ka.a'

Some of the tribes that the Tlingit traded with lived in the same area of Alaska, British Columbia and the Yukon.

Tlingits	Southeast Alaska and Prince of Wales Island
Tagish	Yukon and Northern British Columbia
Eyak and Chugach Yupuks	Gulf Coast of Alaska
Haida and Tsimishians	Queen Charlotte Islands
Athabaskans	Northern Alaska
Chilkats and Chilkoots	Chilkat Valley and Lynn Canal

As a proud Canadian, I hope you enjoy this fictional story set in a background of true historical fact. The mores and customs of the people are represented as accurately as possible to give a realistic account. Please understand that without a written history, folklore and legend is our most accurate basis for how the Tlingit lived. Enjoy!

CHAPTER ONE



Snow Eagle stood on the ridge above the village, surveying the valley and hills that surrounded their chosen place. His buckskin pants flapped mercilessly against his legs in the wind's fury. Small particles of dirt blasted his bare shoulders; he hardly noticed. His arms were folded across his chest almost defying the strong gusts to move him from his perch. A few stray dark hairs escaped their leather binding, assaulting his face as the thick gray clouds rolled over the valley like an avalanche of snow. His firm square jaw was set, his brow furrowed in deep concentration. His dark eyes methodically scanned the mountainous horizon and the village below. The summer village reminded him of a field of mushrooms. The round huts made of pelts had been adapted from tribes farther north. In winter, the Tlingit lived in permanent large, plank houses by the ocean. The pelt huts made it easy to pack up camp and move when the warmer summer months came to an end. Everything appeared peaceful at the moment, but for how long, no one knew.

A small ptarmigan appeared in the rocks pecking precariously at the ground; its spotted brown plumage showing patches of white was a sign that colder weather was approaching. Snow Eagle knew that soon the bird's entire body would be covered in white feathers, making an excellent camouflage against the snowy landscape of winter. This was only one of nature's signs that it was time to move.

After several minutes, satisfied that there was no danger, Snow Eagle turned and began his decent. Every step carefully placed as leather contacted rock and earth; aware that one wrong move and he would tumble to his death. His large, calloused hands caressed the rocks,

smooth from years of wind and water; his palms could feel the wisdom of the ages in their surface. Their energy mingling with his as he gripped each handhold steadily and without fear. Muscles strained as he reached for hand and footholds. His bulging thighs moved his body powerfully down the cliff. Snow Eagle loved high places. As his name reflected, the eagle was one of Mother Earth's highly revered creatures and he was honored to bear its name. The wolf /eagle and raven, were the totem animals of the Clans of the north. Sweat mingled with water droplets on his bare back and chest, as darkening clouds released their heavy burden. It felt cool on his skin, refreshing. Snow Eagle smiled as he thought of Little Fawn waiting for him below. How beautiful she was; her raven black hair dappled with gray hung to her slim waist, her eyes as black as the night and full of wisdom. She would be irritated with him if he tarried much longer. Women worried about such foolish things, he thought to himself; however, he increased his pace without sacrificing his safety.

“Snow Eagle, where have you been? You know there is an important council meeting tonight. As Shaman of the tribe you have much to prepare, now get busy.” Her small hands rested on firm trim hips, a few gray hairs mingled with the raven black strands cascading down her back. He could not help himself. He reached out and pulled her to him, feeling the warmth of her small body against his. She wrestled against him in annoyance “This is no time for that, now where is your sage for smudging?” He laughed a deep rich laugh that made her feel warm all over. She looked up into his brown eyes and felt herself drawn toward him. Resisting the urge, she turned and continued stoking the compact fire in the center of the large round hut. Smoke drifted gently to the small cracks in the pelt walls, tiny flames awakening to her gently prodding.

“I was up on the ridge. It is important that no one surprises us during the council meeting. Stop worrying, I

will be ready in time. Am I not always dressed and seated before everyone else? Now where is Gray Wolf, he will have to be here for tonight's discussion?" He moved towards a tied bundle in the corner of the hut and began to organize his ceremonial items, a large intricately carved pipe, headdress of eagle feathers, a leather pouch of tobacco and sage. The headdress was unusual in Tlingit society. Most Shamans wore a woven hat or carved wooden mask. The eagle feather headdress had been handed down to Snow Eagle from his uncle, the Great Shaman of the Tlingit people. Snow Eagle's uncle, now deceased, had taught him well. He was proud to wear it. The interior of the hide hut was warm and cozy but the wind and rain beat out its rhythm on the roof. He removed a packet of dried sage from the bundle and poured it into a large flat shell, ever conscious of nature's heartbeat in his ear.

"Your son is off causing trouble I am sure. He is head strong and stubborn and I fear that he will get all of us killed if someone doesn't convince him he is making a terrible mistake." Little Fawn, wiped the perspiration from her furrowed forehead with the back of her tiny hand. In the other, she held a large stick used to roast a chunk of rabbit over the fire. "The Elders are angry. Does he not realize that he is putting all of us in jeopardy with his war raids and now this, what was he thinking?"

"He is young and fearless. Although he is a fine warrior, he does not have the patience and cunning of his namesake. A gray wolf knows to lay in wait for the prey, not rush head long into a confrontation that could get him killed. He is also a young man whose body demands physical satisfaction. Sometimes a man's desire overcomes his head. Wisdom will come with age, but we must ensure he lives long enough to learn." The mention of Gray Wolf caused him to feel anxious. He didn't like confrontations of any kind and tonight; there would definitely be one. Snow Eagle loved his son but because of his own spiritual nature,

he could not understand how a man took such pleasure in war and killing. Even hunting, made him sick, but Gray Wolf could kill a deer with one arrow, straight to the heart. He shook off the anxiety. Snow Eagle took his sacred rattle from the bundle and laid it beside the shell of sage. At the end of the rattle was a carved eagle's head, eagle feathers hung from worn leather strips over the full length; the wooden body of the rattle was rubbed smooth from years of use. It was one of Snow Eagle's prize possessions, handed down from generation to generation and he handled it reverently. As the tantalizing odor of roast rabbit and wood smoke filled his nostrils, he realized that he was hungry. He had not eaten since early morning. He moved towards the fire, anxious to fill his growling belly.

In another small hut in the village, Black Rain paced back and forth, his steps slow and hindered. His back was hunched under his wolf robe, his eyes downcast as he searched his mind for a solution. "We have to do something with Gray Wolf. He is a threat to all of us. This latest stunt will get all of us killed in our sleep. I'll suggest we send him off on a mission of some kind while we plan our move. Perhaps he could go to scout the way across the mountains toward the sea?"

"You know as well as I do, that our grandson would never agree to that and even if you order him, he would find a way to get out of it. He is cunning that one. It is sad that his impetuosity prevents him from being the great warrior he could be. He reminds me of another hot headed warrior many years ago." The old woman pulled her deerskin robe tighter around her thin body as the wind blew through the narrow opening in the doorway. She rose to secure the hide that covered the door. "A nasty night, we will have to meet inside the long hut instead of at the sacred fire." A shiver ran through her body, caused not only by the cold wind but also by the sense of dread that filled her being. Red Hawk was one of the most revered women of

the tribe and her ability to see and sense future events was well known throughout the territory. There were times she wished that she could not see the future. Once again her thin body shuddered; wrinkled sad eyes rested upon her husband, who continued to pace on gnarled, arthritic legs. She remembered when he was strong, young and impetuous like Gray Wolf. But Black Rain had learned to control his impatience and had grown to be a strong responsible leader, one of the greatest the tribe had ever known. Her son Snow Eagle, on the other hand had been born with a more spiritual, gentle nature, which suited him well in his position as Shaman. "Snow Eagle will come up with something. Our son is wise, like his mother." A small chuckle escaped her lips. Red Hawk's brother had been a great Shaman, as Snow Eagle's uncle, it was his responsibility to teach his successor. She sprinkled crushed Devil's Claw root into a small bowl of hot water and handed it to Black Rain. Hopefully, it would ease his aching legs. She placed a chunk of roasted grouse in a wooden bowl. "Now sit and eat, we have a council meeting to go to." Her words rang positive, but in her heart the darkness grew.

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