THE INLAND WHALE

by Theodora Kroeber

Foreword by Oliver La Farge

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Foreword

ONCE, in the middle of World War II, a general sent some of us a note concerning a job of no great importance but of considerable difficulty that we had done, the memorable lines of which were, "I did not think it could be done. You have done it very well." The same words can be applied to Mrs. Kroeber's achievement.

The literary value of a great deal of primitive literature, whether myths or tales, is *nil.* That of much of the rest is apparent, in the raw form, only to connoisseurs, while those who undertake to retell some of it often achieve only emasculation. In my limited experience, I know of no body of such literature of which these depressing generalizations are more true than they are of the enormous mass of stories of all kinds told—out of sheer boredom,

I sometimes expect—by the tribes and tribelets of California. Yet here, in *The Inland Whale,* we have a selection from that mass that is truly impressive. Here is literature, in the best sense of the word; here is fine readability.

Just making the selection of these stories must have been a huge task, in view of the numbers from among which they were drawn. Mrs. Kroeber must have used a great deal of self-control as she got her choices narrowed down, excluding the almost good ones, the pretty good ones, the ones that were good but not quite tops, and those that were ethnologically fascinating but would carry nothing to the ordinary reader.

There are, or were, more than thirty major tribes in California, speaking languages of several quite unrelated stocks, having a wide variety of cultures from very simple to quite elaborate, with very different beliefs and philosophies of life. Out of all this variety has sprung an equal variety of stories, prayers, and songs, presenting the editor, as she was at this stage, with the always difficult problem of judging between unlikes.

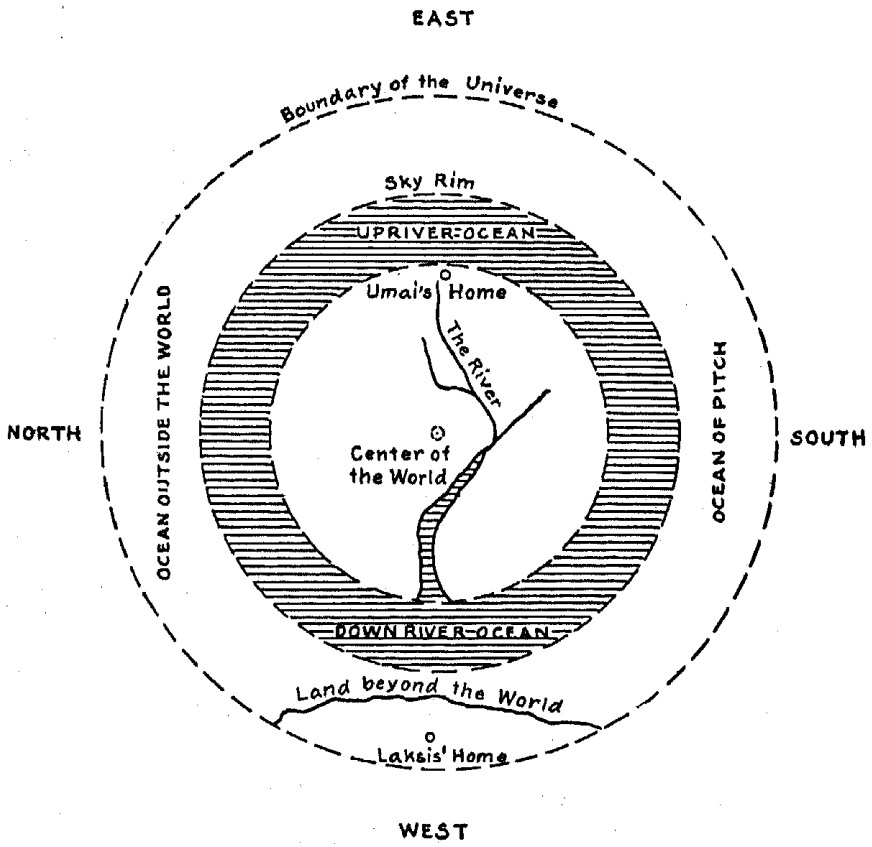
She then turned writer and retold the stories, a dangerous process here successfully applied. The retelling, one might say, is ethnologically honorable. The stories have not been prettified, elaborated, or laden with pseudo-literary trimmings. They have simply been put into a familiar idiom, with restraint and good taste, and in some cases purged of the insistent repetitions and cluttering detail that primitive people often stuff into their stories

for ulterior purposes. For instance, I believe that in the Mohave story of the hero (in the Irish usage of "hero") Ahta and his bride, Tesilya, a grand narrative, we have been relieved of the remorseless naming of every least geographical point that anyone visited, to which the Mohaves are addicted.

Mrs. Kroeber sees these stories, not as discrete phenomona relating only to the American Indian, but as belonging in the long, universal stream of emergent literature. This view she sets forth effectively and interestingly in her commentaries. It must have been the governing concept from the beginning of her undertaking, for it is the one above all others that would have guided her to select as wisely as she has done.

Much to this writer's surprise ("I did not think it could be done") I am enriched by these stories, much more than merely printable, from the California Indians. Impressive stories they are, some fanciful, some mysterious, and one, "Dance Mad," a delight of simple good fun.

OLIVER LA FARGE



ANCIENT YUROK WORLD

Introduction

THIS is a selection of stories from the native Indian literature of California, made for the adult reader who has a general interest in comparative literature, but not in technical folklore or linguistics as such.

The stories are authentic. A list of their sources will be found at the end of the book. The plots and persons are the stories' own, but in my retelling the focus of interest changes, almost imperceptibly in some, sharply in others. All carrying over of an art, whether it is plastic, musical, or literary, from another age and culture and language into our own brings with it some change of focus. We associate the texture and whiteness of marble with classical Greek sculpture, whereas the Athenians of Praxiteles' day were accustomed to a vivid and multicolor painted

sculpture. We hear an Arcadian wistfulness and a whispering delicacy in "baroque" music, which to its own age was passionate and full-bodied. And so it is with literature. We are less interested in the routes they traversed and in the exploits of their heroes than were the Indians, and more interested in the character and personality of the hero or his wife or an old uncle. A work of art has more facets than are turned to the light at one time.

My objective has been to transmit in some measure the sense of poetry and drama which these tales held for their own people. This has meant leaving out episodes which are intractable to transmutation or which were present in the original because the storyteller and his audience were not averse to borrowing episodes from other stories; and it has meant making explicit many things which the native listener would not need to have included, because they would be commonplaces to him. The alien reader must be given enough background fact so that motivation and behavior are understood. He may need to know something as simple as the floor plan of a house, or the native concept of geography or etiquette or belief.

In the latter part of the book there is some general discussion of the place of an oral literature within the family of comparative literature, followed by a review of the literary and the human aspects of the stories, comparing them one with another and with the categories of modern Western literature.

Within each tale is a portrait of a woman, some scarcely

more than a shadowed outline, some fully revealed. It seemed best to have a unifying *locus* since the possible choice is various and wide, and a heroine is a heroine, young, beautiful, or old, or evil, whether she is Indian or English. I have tried not to revalue, not to judge the women whose stories I tell, but to bring them to you, to whom they are strange, as they were seen by their peers. Some stories I started, and then regretfully dropped, unsure of their cadence and feeling tone. I am conscious of a staticness, an absence of the visual as such, a quality as of the archaic smile in all my women. It is as much as I am sure I see.

THEODORA KROEBER

The Inland Whale

THE house Pekwoi is in the village of Kotep, close to the Center of the World. It is the custom among the River People for the wealthy and aristocratic to give names to their houses, and such a house is Pekwoi.

The pattern of Kotep, which is in the canyon, is that its named houses are built in rows high above the river, with sun and view. Below them, the rows begin to straggle and only an occasional house will have a name. And at the sunless bottom of the canyon cluster the mean and ramshackle and nameless houses of the poor.

Pekwoi's sunny terrace of matched stone looks upriver as far as the bend and downriver as far as eye can see. Its round doorframe is carefully carved; the redwood planks of its walls and roof bear marks of the finest adz-

ing. Inside, it is dry against the rains, tight against the winds.

Long, long ago, for Pekwoi is old, a fire burned night and day in the pit. Around the four sides on the main floor and on the shelves under the eaves were stored the long boxes filled with treasure and the great baskets filled with the fruits of ocean, river, bush, and tree, fresh and dried. In the pit close to the fire lay the deerskin blankets for sitting comfortably or for sleeping warmly.

Such was Pekwoi in the time when Nenem and Nenem's father and mother and grandparents lived there. Nenem and her proud and aristocratic family were known and respected all up and down the river. No Jumping Dance took place in Nenem's time without the wolfskin headbands and the civet aprons from Pekwoi; no Deerskin Dance was complete without the priceless pure white deerskin of Pekwoi.

Nenem herself had a tender rhythmic sort of beauty. Her heavy hair, parted in the middle and held with mink-skin ties, lay straight and shining over her shoulders and breasts. Ear disks of polished abalone shell framed a gentle face, high-bred in its modeling, with long eyes and crescent-moon eyebrows and a gracious mouth. She was small and she moved with a light proud step, so smoothly that the many-stranded shell beads around her neck and the hundreds of strings of seeds in her apron and the heavy polished abalone and obsidian pendants which hung from her buckskin skirt made only a soft shu-shu-shu-shu accompaniment to her walk.

Her father expected to receive the highest bride price for Nenem when she should choose to marry, and he expected her choice to be made from among the most eligible. It came out quite otherwise, however. Nenem fell in love with a young man there in the village, the son of a widowed and impoverished mother, obscure and without family. He and his mother lived in one of the most primitive of the shacks along the river's edge. They were so poor and so little known that at this distance of time not even the name of the young man is preserved to us.

Nemen's nameless lover must, nonetheless, have been a person of some positive attributes of person and character for Nenem truly and wholly loved him. When she knew that she was to have a child by him, he and she went to her family and told them and said they wished to be man and wife. Nenem's parents and family were shocked and outraged. Her lover could not pay a bride price that would have been other than insulting to this family.

He knew this and he said to Nenem's father, "It is my wish to be full-married to your daughter; to earn her and to deserve her. I will, if you will have it so, work faithfully for you and do whatever you order me to do and be a good son to you. If you will not have it so—here I am—kill me. This is your right." But the father was too proud to kill one whom he considered so far beneath him. "Then take me as your slave—do with me what you will," he said.

But it was intolerable to the father to so much as look

at his daughter's lover. He could not bear to have him at Pekwoi or even in Kotep.

Nenem, in deep disgrace, was not allowed to leave Pekwoi. Her lover, without money or powerful friends, was quite helpless. In despair, he left the village and was lost to Nenem and to his mother. Neither they nor anyone ever heard of him again. It is believed in Kotep that he was murdered in the lonely hills beyond the river.

Her parents' fury turned full on Nenem as soon as her lover was gone from Kotep. In their hurt pride and the disappointment of all their hopes for her, they drove her out of Pekwoi and declared her to be no longer their daughter.

What the distracted Nenem might have done, one can only imagine. Before there was time for her to make any of the desperate decisions of the disgraced and abandoned, the mother of her lover, the old woman Hunè, took her home to the shabby dwelling by the river's edge where she and her son had always lived. There she cared for Nenem and comforted her and loved her as her own daughter. And in the same humble house, Nenem bore a son after some moons, and Hunè was mother and midwife and nurse to her. And not even in Pekwoi would the elaborate ritual of the birth and first moon of a son have been more rigidly enacted than it was in this same house.

Nenem called the baby Toàn. He was a strong, happy baby. Hunè cared for him and his mother, and she had the joy of recognizing his first words and of watching him learn to take his first steps on his short sturdy legs. The

moons waxed and waned and the seasons were new and grew old and went and came again. Toàn lost his first roundness and the sturdy legs grew longer and carried him, running, tireless, at her side.

The river gave them salmon to eat fresh and to smoke and dry. Hunè's storage baskets bulged with fat acorn gathered from the oak trees that the people of Kotep harvest. Hunè and Nenem searched the sunny hillsides of late spring and early summer for the grasses with which to weave hats and cooking and serving baskets, and they picked up any pieces of pine root they found for repairing the heavy old storage baskets. They kept themselves decently and cleanly dressed in fresh bark skirts and aprons. They set snares for rabbits and they were warm in winter under rabbit-skin blankets.

With no man to care for it, Hunè's house was becoming little more than a patchwork of old planks somehow renewed when she and Nenem found a discarded board along the river or when a canoe broke up and they were able to salvage parts of it for a new door ledge or other replacement. The noonday sun shone through holes in the roof now.

Hunè lived for one more World Renewal ceremony and then before spring came, she died. This was a heavy grief and loneliness to Nenem, and as long as she lived she missed Hunè and cried in loving memory of her.

The summer after Hunè's death came and went without event and it was time for the World Renewal ceremony again. The dancing was to be upriver from Kotep this

year and almost everyone in Kotep was already on his way there, either by canoe or trail. Only Nenem and Toàn remained at home. Nenem was leaching acorns by the river, when several canoes filled with people from downriver came by and the people recognized her. Their voices carried to her across the water, "Nenem! Nenem! Come along with us—we've plenty of room!"

"Oh—thank you—thank you!—I can't go—I'm not ready —I—" Nenem's answering call showed her reluctance.

One of them who knew her well, called out coaxingly, "Nenem! Surely you are not staying away from the dancing!"

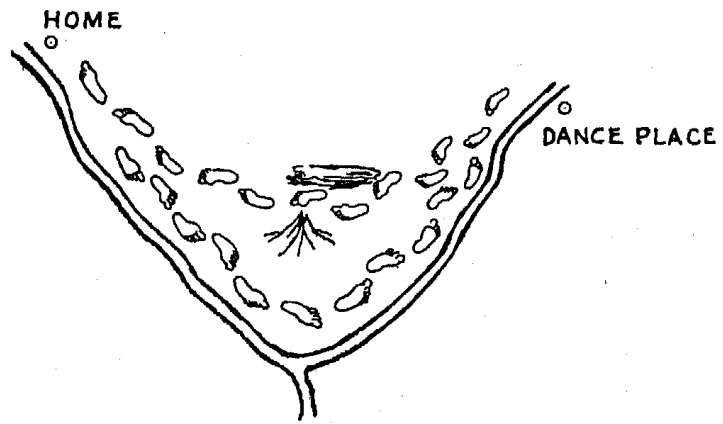
Nenem hesitated to admit that indeed she had meant not to go at all. Instead, she answered, "I'll be a little late. You mustn't wait—I'm coming—I'll be there in time for the Ending Dances!"

Her friends in the canoes went on since she seemed really to wish it so. When they were gone, Nenem, having said she was coming, did get herself and Toàn ready and, taking some food and such other things as they might need, she set off by foot trail upriver.

She reached the dancing place in time for the Ending Dances as she had said she would. Everyone was there. It was evening and the fire illumined the faces of the dancers and of the onlookers equally. There were four dance teams. One of them was dancing and the other three were standing in formal lines, waiting their turn.

The onlookers were arranged with equal formality. Closest to the dancers on the right side sat the men of the

great families of the river; and on the left side, the women of these families. The common people stood behind, but separated in the same manner—the men on the right and the women on the left. Nenem joined the group of standing women. She was gentle-mannered and gracious as always and thanks to Hunè's example, she and her small son were as carefully groomed and dressed as though they had been carried by canoe straight from Pekwoi itself.



There was a slight rustle as the women in the front row moved over so that Nenem might join them there. They motioned to her to come up with them and one of them took her arm and guided her to her seat and made her sit among them. They all greeted her, and between the dances they showed her the customary courtesies of friendliness and the special and formal ones due the honored daughter of a first family.

Nenem's own blood relatives ignored her—her coming —her son—her being seated.

Nenem did not know how to refuse the kindnesses and courtesies shown her by everyone except her family. She was already upset and when she saw the white deerskin of Pekwoi on its pole in the dance, she could not bear to sit there, so close, and in her old natural place. She slipped quietly away, little Toàn asleep in her arms. It did not occur to her friends that she was leaving for more than the moment. No one saw her start back down the trail toward Kotep, carrying Toàn and crying bitterly, bitterly.

Nenem kept to the river trail as far as Atsìpul Creek where there is a fork. Here she left the river, taking the fork which leads back through the hills and around Kewet Mountain and rejoins the river trail only a little above Kotep. This is a rough and steep way to go. Nenem chose it because it is not much used and it would bring her home without going through any of the larger villages along the river. In her present unhappy state she dreaded meeting anyone.

Toàn wakened and wondered much at his mother's tears, for she continued to cry. It was a clear night with a moon. Nenem put Toàn down and let him walk and the two of them wandered on up through the hills as far as a small mountain lake called Fish Lake. By this time Nenem was quite worn out and she made camp. They slept there the rest of the night by the lake.

To a world in balance, the flat earth's rise and fall, as it floats on Underneath Ocean, is almost imperceptible, and nothing is disturbed by it. Doctors know that to keep this balance, the people must dance the World Renewal dances, bringing their feet down strong and hard on the earth. If they are careless about this, it tips up and if it tips more than a very little, there are strange and terrible misplacements. One of the worst of these occurred before Nenem's grandparents' time and her unhappy father traced his own troubles to it. Most people along the river would agree with him.

This was the time when the earth tipped so far that Downriver Ocean came over the bar and flowed up the river, filling and overflowing the canyon, carrying its waters and its fish and other sea life far inland, past even the Center of the World—farther than it had ever penetrated before. With prayers and dancing, balance was eventually restored and the ocean flowed back down the canyon and outside the bar, carrying the fish and other sea life with it, except for a young female whale who had been washed all the way into Fish Lake and was left stranded there.

Ninawa, the whale, had lain there all this while, scarcely able to move, for she reached almost from one side of the lake to the other; and when she slapped her tail as whales do, she threw mud as far as the encircling meadow.

She was quiet the night Nenem and Toàn slept beside her. She listened to Nenem's crying in the night and in the

morning, for Nenem's tears started again as soon as she wakened.) And she heard what Nenem said through her tears. Then Ninawa knew why Nenem cried and she was glad that the ocean had brought her and left her stranded here. For Ninawa was no ordinary whale. These things about her were special: she had great power; she was compassionate to all suffering but particularly to Nenem's suffering. And this was because Ninawa was a bastard like Toàn.

Ninawa dared not move, lest she frighten Nenem and Toàn, and she had determined to help them. She lay still, making herself look as much as possible like a log fallen across the lake, and thinking and willing one thing all of the time: that Toàn should sit on her or climb on her; that he should somehow come and touch her if only for a moment, so that some of her power might flow into him.

Nenem would have followed the Kewet trail around the lake when she was ready to leave in the morning, except that Toàn distracted her from doing so. He had been playing at the water's edge all morning, and now he went a little farther and a little farther, until he was wading in water quite deep for him. And there beside him was Ninawa—something solid and rough and most tempting to climb. Toàn climbed; and when Nenem looked around for him, he was on top of what she, through her tears, took to be an enormous old water-soaked log, lying like a bridge across the lake.

Nenem was frightened, realizing how easily Toàn might slip or stumble. She had the wisdom not to cry out or startle him. She merely waded out as he had done and

climbed up on Ninawa, following after him as fast as she could go. She knew that if anything were to happen to Toàn, she had no wish to live. But nothing happened to Toàn. He ran along ahead of her, on Ninawa's broad back, and when they came to the other end of their "log," they climbed down, waded to shore and went on their way to Kewet Mountain.

Ninawa shook ever so slightly when Toàn first touched her and she trembled as he left her. Toàn would recall this many moons from now, but he and his mother did not think much about it at the time.

Nenem had never been inland before. It was a long day's walk for her, carrying Toàn much of the time, around Kewet Mountain. She was relieved when the trail finally came back to the river and she knew she had not lost her way.

It was after dark when she and Toàn reached home. They ate a cold supper and went to bed without lighting a fire. As soon as her neighbors saw the smoke from her morning fire, they came to make sure she and Toàn had come to no harm. After all, no one had seen them, either at Kotep or at any of the villages along the river for two nights, and they were fearful for them. They did not press Nenem to talk—they saw her tears were yet too close. But her sore heart was eased; she knew she had come home to friends.

Nenem and Toàn had another friend—Nenem's father's father, Toàn's great-grandfather. It is not the way of the aged, if they are wise, to raise their voices against the de-

cisions and actions of the household. And this great-grandfather was wise. He watched Nenem and Toàn and waited.

The day came when great-grandfather took his tools and the wood he was carving and sat down close to Hunè's house where Toàn was playing. Toàn, full of interest and curiosity, came and sat beside him and watched him carve. Great-grandfather appeared to be making a boat. He explained that it was not to be a boat, however, but a box; a hollowed-out box with a cover that would lash on and close tight. Toàn wanted to make a hollowed-out box, too. With great-grandfather's help, he gouged and cut and whittled until, by the end of the afternoon, Toàn's box was finished. It was a very small box, but it was complete with its own small lid and lashings. (Great-grandfather had contributed a piece of moccasin lace.)

Great-grandfather suggested that, having a box, he might collect pretty bird feathers and store them in his box. Toàn collected fallen feathers and soon the box was full and he and great-grandfather carved out a bigger box. To fill this one, they no longer contented themselves with collecting feathers. Great-grandfather made bow and arrows and brought light sharp arrow points from his store of them. Then he taught Toàn to shoot and to hunt.

As Toàn grew older and went hunting alone or with other boys, he continued to bring to his great-grandfather little birds, then bigger birds, and especially the red-

headed woodpecker, and then the fur animals—whatever he could hunt or trap. Together, they cleaned the feathers and scraped the skins and stored them away in their boxes. As they needed them, they made more boxes, always bigger and handsomer ones, and these, too, began to be filled with treasure.

Toàn sometimes hunted inland on Kewet Mountain and as far as Fish Lake. Whenever he was at the lake, he wondered what had become of the log on which he had climbed that first time, with his mother, for it was no longer there. He recalled how it had trembled under his touch and he thought again of how his mother had cried. He had not known there were such tears in the world until that day.

All this great-grandfather did for Toàn without once raising his voice against his son or his daughter-in-law in Pekwoi.

Great-grandfather died as Toàn was coming to his first manhood. He left a great-grandson looking forward to a different sort of world from that Nenem had feared he would be facing. For there in Hunè's house were many, many boxes, carved by a sure young hand and filled with the prowess of a remarkably skilled young hunter.

Great-grandfather was dead. There was the funeral and there was the mourning. Toàn went to Fish Lake alone, for he was bereft and grieved by this death. He lay down by the lake and went to sleep. As he slept, he dreamed.

Ninawa came to him in his dream, and she told him many things. She told him that she, Ninawa, was the In-

land Whale; that she was the "log" on which he and his mother had crossed Fish Lake; and that, after they were gone, the Inland Spirits came and carried her to another lake. She did not tell him where the lake is, for it is not given to anyone but an occasional Doctor in trance or, briefly, to a specially purified person, to see or know this lake. Ninawa said of it only that it is far, far inland, that it is big enough for a whale to live in comfortably and to slap her tail without striking mud, that it is boat-shaped and ringed round with oak trees.

In the dream, Ninawa slapped her tail as whales do, and spoke. "Toàn," she said, "Toàn, you should know that the winter moons are children of no-marriages—bastards like you and me. I listened to your mother crying over you for a night and a day, when you were too young to know why she cried, and I pitied you.

"Then I remembered—it is the bastard winter moons that bring the rains and the strength to the Earth for the budding and blooming and gathering of the full-marriage moons of spring and summer and autumn. And I determined that you, too, should have the strength of a winter moon, and I willed you to come to me. You came to me, and when you touched me, I trembled. Do you remember, Toàn? That was because I so much wanted you to come and dreaded lest I with my great size might frighten you away. But you had no fear and you climbed up and walked on my back. Do you remember that, Toàn? Here in Fish Lake it was. You walked from my tail to my

head, and while you walked, I made my power flow through you.

"You will go on as you are. You will be a good man as you are a good boy; you will be a great hunter; you will own much treasure and wealth, and you will be remembered as the greatest of the sons of Pekwoi.

"Remember all that great-grandfather taught you. Cry also to the bastard winter moons when you pray. And never forget that once you walked on Ninawa's back." This is what Ninawa said to Toàn.

When Toàn wakened, hours later, Ninawa was not there. He lay still, recalling her words, memorizing them so that as long as he lived, he remembered them.

Nenem taught Toàn the words and gestures of greetings and of leave-takings, the ways of holding the elk-horn spoon and the basket when eating, what to do with the hands and the arms and the body, how to speak and to modulate the voice, the rules of precedence—the whole complicated etiquette of the aristocrat. He learned from her example the courtesy and graciousness and openness of the well-born.

One thing more Nenem taught Toàn before he was big enough to go to the sweat house: the severe and rigid code of a proud house. Toàn learned earlier than do most boys to fast and to purify himself and to practice control so that pain, anger, greed, excessive feeling of any sort did not show in his expression or in his actions.

By the time he went from Nenem's instruction to that of the sweat house, he was well accustomed to discipline and restraint. And once he went to the sweat house, he followed its pattern of behavior. He went far off to gather wood for the ceremonies there; he prayed long and exhausting hours at the shrines in the hills; he adhered to the rules of fasting, chastity, and purification imposed on the hunter. When he fasted and prayed, he cried out to his great-grandfather and to the bastard winter moons as Ninawa had said to do, and through it all, Toàn never forgot that once he had walked on Ninawa's back.

Five times the moons of the winter rains gave way to the moons of the first green buds. Nenem looked at her son. She saw that he was a proud and brave and good man as Ninawa had said he would be, and Nenem was satisfied.

Toàn was scarcely full grown when his bulging boxes could outfit a Deerskin Dance upriver and a Jumping Dance downriver at the same time. Such an accumulation of treasure by one so young had not happened before on the river and perhaps has not happened since. And it was the more remarkable, since the power and wealth and prestige of Pekwoi were denied him. Ninawa had supplied, in her own way, more even than Pekwoi withheld.

Ninawa's power sent his arrows farther and straighter, but the tireless hunter was Toàn. From hummingbird to blackbird to woodpecker to eagle to condor; from weasel to mink to civet cat to wolf to deer—Toàn snared and netted and trapped and decoyed and hunted. He cleaned

and tanned and glued and cut and sewed as great-grandfather and his mother had taught him to do.

It was Ninawa's power that spread the word of this hunter who might sell or trade his surplus. She started the flow of those with money for purchasing and those with sea lion tusks and rare obsidian and flint, who sought him out. But the buyers and traders came again and again because they were pleased with him and with what he offered. Trading and selling far upriver and downriver to the sea, Toàn gradually filled a large box with the precious long strings of dentalium shell money.

At last Toàn could afford to hire the skilled old craftsmen of Kotep to work moon after moon after moon, making up his feathers and furs and skins and ivories and flints and obsidians into treasure of incredible beauty and value. And Toàn was free to go farther and farther afield, searching out the rare, the unique, and the beautiful, in bird and animal and rock and shell.

Meanwhile Pekwoi stood—a proud house—whose present occupants fed their pride on its past.

Nenem's father died, the last of the older generations.

Then the younger men of Pekwoi, Nenem's brother and his two sons, came with all of the principal men of Kotep, to Hunè's house. The brother was their spokesman; in their name and his own, he invited Toàn to live in Pekwoi and to be the head of the house. When he was finished speaking, the others urged Toàn to accept his uncle's invitation.

Toàn turned to his mother. "What should I do, mother? What do you want me to do?" he asked her.

"You should go, Toàn. I wish you to go," was what Nenem answered.

That is how it was that Toàn came home to Pekwoi, and the people of Kotep and of the other villages felt this to be a right and good thing. And far away in a boat-shaped lake ringed round with oak trees, a bastard female whale trembled and slapped her tail as whales do. And Nenem gazed up the steep canyon side to where Pekwoi stood, its round carved door open to the sun, and she smiled from a serene and grateful heart; then Nenem turned and went inside Hunè's house.

The boxes and treasure and money went with Toàn to Pekwoi. But Nenem did not go. Her brother invited her and everyone at Pekwoi wanted and expected her and Toàn urged her almost frantically. It was no use. Toàn had to leave her where she was.

She told him, "You must go. What would you do here—how could you live here? It is no sort of place for the First Man of the village and the family you will have one day soon. But this is my home and I have no wish to live anywhere else—ever."

So Nenem lived on in the house which had sheltered her and her baby. Its shabby walls, its old baskets and keepsakes were home to her, her near neighbors were her dear friends. Toàn understood this but he was never wholly reconciled to her staying there, and he asked her over and over to come to Pekwoi; and when Toàn bought himself a wife from one of the great houses of Olegel, up-

river, his wife too urged her mother-in-law to come to them, and after a while there were grandchildren, and they asked her to come.

She always answered the same way, "Some day, some day," putting them off.

She protested when Toàn wanted to give her house a solid roof. She loved the briar and manroot vines which had grown up the sides of the house and over the roof, filtering the noon sun which shone in briefly through the holes and screening them from the rain. She and her friends called the house "Briar Roof" and she would say coaxingly to Toàn, "Don't you see? I too live in a named house now!"

Toàn did as much as his mother would let him do to make the house more habitable for one no longer young, and to keep it in some sort of repair. But after many winter moons had shone on "Briar Roof," he said firmly she must come to them before another season of storms, else he must certainly build her a new house on the site of Hunè's old one.

Nenem did not want that. She said, "No! I will come to your house—to Pekwoi—with you."

So, at last, Nenem, too, came home to Pekwoi.

Nenem fitted Pekwoi and completed it. She was the grandmother it had been missing. Toàn saw how his children liked to be near her. He watched her going up and down the little ladder to the pit and in and out of the low round door, her step smooth and light as always. He liked best to find her sitting, feet tucked under, on the sunny

terrace, working at one of her perfect basketry pieces. Then he would sit on a redwood block, close by, carving or watching her. He would have been at peace then—there really was nothing more he desired—except that he sensed something not wholly right in his mother.

One day, they were sitting so and Toàn said to her, "What is it that troubles you, my mother? Can you tell me?"

In her usual, quiet voice Nenem tried to tell him, "It is that I know I won't live much longer, and . . . and . . ."

But Toàn, dreading lest his mother see that in his heart he knew this to be true, interrupted her, speaking as lightly as he could, "You must wait awhile till I kill a very special deer so you can have the most beautiful skirt in the world to wear when you die . . . would you like that?"

Nenem reached over and put her arms around him. "No . . . no . . . Toàn . . . that is what I've been wanting to tell you . . . in my grave I wish to wear a maple bark skirt and apron like the ones your father's mother always wore—nothing else. Will you dress me so when I die?"

"If that is what you wish . . ."

"And . . . one thing more . . . I want to be buried beside her. Will you do that, Toàn?"

"I will bury you beside her," Toàn promised.

"There is nothing else, my son." Nenem smiled her tender smile and Toàn no longer saw the look of trouble in her eyes.

Before the last moon of winter was full, Nenem was dead.

Alone, Toàn observed the full burial ritual. This was his wish. His wife and Nenem's close friends, who helped him dress her and make her ready, took the grapevine cord which was used to lower her into her grave, and passing it slowly down over their bodies, handed it to Toàn, thus passing on to him their contamination from the dead.

Alone, Toàn cried and fasted for five days, speaking to no one, drinking no water, eating only a little thin acorn gruel. Each night, he made a fire on his mother's grave to warm her until she should have had time to make her journey to the land of the dead.

At the end of the five days, he went to the sweat house where an old man of Kotep performed the ceremony of burial purification. He washed Toàn with an infusion of roots and aromatic herbs, meanwhile praying to each of the Inland Spirits who live along the river and blowing a puff of the sacred tobacco smoke from his pipe toward each of them in turn. And so he came finally to the Spirit who lives at the mouth of the river, just inside the bar. The ritual response of this One, after the prayer and the smoke offering, was that the corpse contamination was removed. Toàn's purification was now complete, and he was free to return to his wife in Pekwoi and to go hunting once more.

Toàn had remembered his promise to his mother. He dressed her only in a fresh maple bark skirt and apron and he buried her beside the mother of her lover. Their graves

are still there today, at the river's edge, close to a grassy hollow which is all that is left of Hunè's house. Toàn cared for them and kept the tops clean as long as he lived, as did his children and his children's children, after him.

Nenem had taught Toàn, long ago, that it is wrong to grie e too much for the dead, that it is dangerous for those near to you even to think too much about one who has died; and Toàn remembered this teaching. He passed his mother's grave whenever he went to the river, and sometimes he took his carving and sat near where she lay while he worked, as he had sat near her all his life. He cried to her sometimes, but for the most part, her tender smile and the shu-shu-shu-shu rustle of her step came into his memory and out again, soft and passing as a river breeze.

Loon Woman

THE INLAND WHALE

by Theodora Kroeber

Foreword by Oliver La Farge

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The Stories in This Book

1. THE INLAND WHALE

"THE Inland Whale" is a story told by the Yurok Indians. It shares with "Umai" and "About-the-House Girl" a story style accurate, clear, concise, and with an unusual sense for niceness of exact meaning. The Yurok homeland is along the lower Klamath River, to the sea. Details of geography, ours and Yurok, and of the Yurok world concept, I shall leave to the discussion of "Umai," where they are more particularly relevant.

The Yurok, and the Karok upstream from them, lived differently from their neighbors to the east, on the other side of the coast range, and (as did the Mohave of the great valley of the Colorado in comparison with their near desert neighbors) they lived better. From the Klamath came salmon—all

anyone could eat fresh or smoked or dried. From the ocean came sea lions, sea otters, an occasional whale, surf fish, mussels—the wealth of the cold and unpolluted Pacific waters. In the hills behind the ocean and above the river, but never far from either, were elk and deer, and tan oaks for acorns; and lining the canyon walls were redwood trees for canoes and houses.

This small and well-stocked world of the Yurok allowed for the accumulation of wealth, and in their mores wealth was a positive virtue. To possess money—strings of dentalium shells of exactly known value and a customary medium of exchange —to own property, to live in a good house with a name of its own, to be spoken of up and down river and on the coast, oneself and one's family, as people of substance and virtue, this was good. To have handed down to one, and in turn to hand on to one's son, the ceremonial flints and obsidian knives of great antiquity and sacredness, to own cylindrical wooden chests full of the incredibly sumptuous featherwork regalia used in ritual dances, perhaps to own a rare white deerskin, these were good things.

The ideal and bent of the culture was aristocratic. While it was of course desirable to acquire as much as one could of goods and money, it was better to begin from a platform than from the ground. Wealth tended to be kept in a family, to descend from father to son to grandson. It was also good to marry well, to choose one's wife for her virtue and good looks, and from as well-regarded and wealthy a family as could be managed. And so one paid the father of one's bride with money and gifts, and the more one paid the more honor accrued to bride and groom and their families.

With aristocracy and wealth went puritanism and an elaborate code of allowed deportment. Wealth was not come by nor kept unless one prayed as well as worked, observed correct ritual and secular behavior toward the gods and one's fellows, restrained the impulse to greed in eating or to any other coarsenesses, to laziness or any laxness, to indulgence in sex.

By a happy chance "The Inland Whale" was told to me before I or anyone else had recorded it, and under circumstances in which the telling was as nearly spontaneous and full as is possible for a Yurok speaking in English to a non-Yurok.

Robert Spott told me the story. I realize only now, writing this, that, well as we knew Robert, I cannot give you his Yurok name. The matter of the personal name is one that is left in abeyance unless its owner chooses to tell it, and Robert, so far as I remember, did not ever do so. He belonged to one of the best families along the river. His looks, his bearing, his manners, remained benevolently aristocratic and his devotion to Yurok values undeviating, despite the almost total breakdown of his own culture, and despite his participation in the world of today. He went to school, he won a personal citation from the French Government in the first World War, he was the foreman of a road-building crew in Humboldt County, he was spokesman for the Yurok in dealings with government or sportsmen, all of whom claimed river rights, and all of whom trusted Robert.

He owned his own home, a small, immaculately kept house in Rekwoi, with a terrace like that of Pekwoi, except that it was not stone paved. From this terrace he looked steeply down onto the mouth of the Klamath River and out over the ocean. His "aunt," Fanny Flounder, the last of a Yurok line of famous doctors, lived nearby in a house similar to Robert's. She and I were sitting on her terrace in the sun one day and

looking down at the river which had only just broken itself a new opening through the bar. Fanny watched intently as the surf from an incoming tide seemed to push back the river and to overspread the wide river mouth. "You see there what is wrong with the world," Fanny said to me, pointing to the break-through. "The earth tips too far and the ocean comes up the river. That is not good. Even whales could come into the river when it is this way. It happens because there are not enough Yurok anymore; not enough people dancing and stamping their feet down hard on the earth. That is what used to keep it from tipping, and what kept whales outside where they belong."

The day Robert first mentioned anything of an inland whale, he was with us in the Napa Valley. He had finished smoothing and leveling a circle about ten feet in diameter on the rough hillside by our house, and building a wall of stone breast high to enclose the eastern or "land" side of the circle. St. John's Mountain, the Valley of the Moon, and a low coast range intervene between the Napa Valley and the sea, but he had nonetheless made sure that the seaward facing direction of the wall for what we regarded as an outdoor fireplace was as it should be for a *tsektseya,* or altar as one might call it. Robert's *tsektseya* exquisitely symbolized the Yurok view as contrasted with our own. For us, he had made a concave wall of stone within which a large outdoor fire could be safely burned in California's rainless and dry grass summers, leaving a half circle for sitting around it, warm and sheltered from the night down-canyon draft.

Robert's view was, you might say, inside out. For, used as a *tsektseya,* a person would sit within and against the encircling walls, introvertedly sheltered and alone, looking to-

ward the open sea. The Yurok have numbers of such structures in their own hills above the river at particular spots reserved for them since time immemorial. They are places of retreat for a man or a woman who, seeking power, goes to them to pray, to cry, to smoke, to fast: in short to engage in ceremonial lonely ritual, these being places of solitary mystic communion. They are good places, Robert said, to sit and listen to the songs of the different birds, learning from them to throw the voice high in the strangely frenetic falsetto singing which accompanies the sacred dances. More important of course, they are where one hopes to hear the distant Spirits who may listen and take pity on the one praying there, a place for gathering one's resources in many ways.

Robert was pleased to have built a *tsektseya* so far from home, and, since his Yurok world was immanent wherever he was, he was reminded of those altars at home where he had prayed and fasted, and of others which he had found abandoned and fallen apart. From this there followed anecdotes of one person and another, among them a man who was poor and without family, in fact, a bastard. Such a one, plainly, was of low caste and would in all probability remain so, but again, perhaps not. There was always the inland whale. Robert's English, like his inner orientation, remained grounded in Yurok, but he had a nice sense for the precise. He explained, "When I was fifteen years old, my father told me of the inland whale, and I learned from him that I must always be compassionate of bastards." Then came the magic beginning words, "After the waters which covered the world went down . . ." and the story followed, told with clarity and passion, a Yurok phrase or a Wogè prayer weaving in and out without self-consciousness or interruption.

As I listened, it came to me that I was being treated to an oral precursor of the novel.

It is necessary to be quite specific as to what I mean by this. I do not mean that one afternoon, by chance, I discovered *the* seedling novel in a literature without writing and, so far as we understand it, without "true" or developed poetry.

Poetry seems always to have preceded the novel. We know how heavily epic and narrative poetry have contributed to the western novel. The Chinese and Japanese did not have epic poetry, but the Japanese had history, romanticized history, done in a rhythmic *recitatif,* and the Chinese had lyric poetry which included realistic, domestic elements, before their earliest novels. The novel is a late and complex configuration, impure in the sense that earlier forms lie half-concealed within it, and that it lacks the definition of any of these others. One is reminded of the opera, which is also impure, borrowing and adapting from drama, song, and dance, more fluid and less defined than any of the three.

It has followed that no two critics agree in all particulars as to what is and what is not a novel. Is *Eugene Onegin* a novel, though poetry? Is Madame de La Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* a novel, or a romance? But within the differences there are agreements. The time span may vary to cover one life, or generations, or to be contained within the rising and setting of a single sun. A novel is fictional, a work of the imagination, but, properly speaking, realistic: it "could be." Its people could be actual people, the words put into their mouths could have been said, the events of the story could have taken place. Its *locus* is, more often than not, one in the real world, either so designated or thinly disguised or generalized; or, if imaginary, again within the realms of the "could be." A novel is longer

than a novella or short story, but is more especially distinguished from them in that it explores more widely or more deeply. It is presumed to be born of moral conviction and hence to have scope sufficient to compensate for its sacrifice of the elegance of precise structure.

So, when I say that "The Inland Whale" appears to me to be a precursor of the novel, I am speaking of its structure and scope and the focus of its story. It is of skeletal brevity but the sort of frame upon which novels have been hung. For, swiftly told, bare and concise as is the tale, it encompasses the history of a house, its pride, its decay, its restoration, through four generations of the family which peopled it.

And it is realistic, although embedded in ancient Wogè belief, and despite the inland whale herself. Mystic belief, even miracles, and surely the sense of awe and divinity can belong in a novel, to be understood literally if one so believes, or symbolically if one prefers. The inland whale is no more demanding in this regard than *Kuan-Yin* or the Virgin Mary, both of whom she resembles in her pity for the unfortunate and low-born.

The story is laid in *Ko'otep,* anglicized as Kotep, once an actual village on the Klamath River. *Pekwoi* is the name of a real house, now fallen in with only its pit left. The graveyard by the river, Robert said, is now merely a bare grassy place, but its location is exactly known. The journey undertaken by the young mother of the story is accomplished as such a journey on foot would be today (see the map accompanying the story): by trail from *Ko'otep,* skirting the river to the spot on Camp Creek where the Deerskin Dance was held. The return follows the same trail as far as Red Cap Creek; then inland away from the river, passing alongside Fish Lake and by

Kewet Mountain, thus bypassing the populous village of *Weitspus,* coming out on the river again at *Murek,* and from there on downstream to *Ko'otep* once more.

The distances from place to place could be travelled on foot in the time the story allots them. All this is in interesting contrast to "Umai," the other Yurok story, in which distances and time are treated idyllically, consonant with Wogè, not human, conceptions and capacity.

On the other hand, the story is fiction. It pretends to be the story of the family that really lived in the house *Pekwoi. Pekwoi* has not been occupied for a long time, however, and no one can now relate its former owners to living Yurok. The story gives to it the sort of family which would have occupied such a house, and tells what might well have befallen its members. There is also the ideal, the wish fulfillment, the rags to riches aspect of the story. Given the Yurok inheritance pattern, and the rarity of the objects of great worth, and the difficulty of acquiring wealth when starting from nothing, it is improbable that in real life Toàn the hero, could have accomplished all that he does in the story.

His achievement remains within the possible, however, and the way he brings it to pass, and his deportment—even to returning at long last to the ancestral home—are kept within the bounds of realistic and probable behavior. No one at any time in the story does anything fanciful, fantastical, or unreal. No one is given a character that sits unnaturally upon him; no one acts other than believably, or expresses himself in any way incompatible with the nature he has been given.

The story can be read in depth microcosmically, its delicate clues leading down and down into the Yurok psyche; and macrocosmically, its nostalgia and its passion being also quite

simply human. I know of no other story from the California Indians in which the treatment of character and material so strongly suggests the novelistic approach. Always rare in folklore, this approach is one which has a way of rising to the top in collections of favorites. (Look at the Lang and Björnsen collections.) Any extensive collection of folklore, any discussion with someone who has recorded and collected in Africa, Oceania, Asia, or Europe, bears testimony to such occasional novelistic treatment of material the world over. This suggests that the characteristic techniques of the novel are older than is commonly assumed in discussions of its history and origins. Not as old as songs and lullabies and prayers, nor as the stories of creation and custom and belief, but old.

Once a people has satisfied its need for these primal literary modes, and if there are stability and an audience ready for introduction to something more sophisticated, and more individual, the creative imagination begins, apparently, to play with form, and poetry or organization akin to poetry emerges; and to play with content, with the actual human condition, to memorialize it in fictional, realistic, narrative dramatization. And that this should be so is heartening. For the artist as novelist is artist as "human-ist," his ideal the celebration of living, erring, struggling, achieving man. It is good to realize that the impulse to give expression to this may be as old as the first time man looked upon his fellow men, not in fear or in need, but with inner security and objectivity sufficient that he could feel toward them curiosity and compassion.