

---

A Kadiak Island Story: The White-Faced Bear

Author(s): F. A. Golder

Source: *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 20, No. 79 (Oct. - Dec., 1907), pp. 296-299

Published by: American Folklore Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/534479>

Accessed: 10/02/2010 13:18

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=illinois> and <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=folk>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



University of Illinois Press and American Folklore Society are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of American Folklore*.

## A KADIAK ISLAND STORY: THE WHITE-FACED BEAR.

IN one village there lived a mighty bear-hunter. For three years he had been constantly hunting that animal and had killed so many that his friend tried to persuade him to stop hunting, for fear he would get himself into trouble. For, said his friend, if he persisted in hunting one more year he would come across a very large bear who might kill him. The hunter, however, made light of this advice and said that he would attack every bear he came across.

A few days after the above conversation he went out hunting and saw a bear with two cubs. He decided that this could not be the bear of which his friend had spoken and he attacked the mother and, after some difficulty, killed her. The little ones in the mean time ran away. On the hunter's return home, his friend questioned him of the doings of the day, and when told of the adventure, attempted once more to get him to give up hunting, but without success.

Not many days later, while on the way to the hunting-ground, he met a stranger who, in the course of conversation, told him that near his village there were a great many bears. "Many of them," continued the stranger, "did our hunters kill, but there is one who is invincible, and who has taken the life of many of our men. Each time that he kills a man he tears him, and examines him carefully, as if in search for some marks on the body. He is unlike other bears, in that his head and feet are white." Here they parted. The stranger continued his way, while the hunter proceeded to the hunting-ground. On his way he stopped near a fish creek, hoping to find game there. He waited all night without seeing any, and in the morning went on farther. First he walked up a high hill, then down until he came to a small bluff. Below was a level tundra on which many bears were to be seen. Not judging it wise to attack so many at once, he concluded to wait until they separated. Among the number he noticed one whose head and feet were white. The words of the stranger then came back to him, and he decided that this must be the dreadful bear of which he had spoken; and so he (the hunter) made up his mind to keep an eye on him, and kill him the first favorable opportunity that offered itself.

The history of the white-faced bear is as follows. At one time he was a human being and a very successful bear-hunter. In fact, too successful for his own good; for he aroused the envy of his friends, who plotted to kill him. They went to a shaman (medicine-man) who lived in the woods and begged him to transform the man into a beast. He advised them to kill the bear and secure the skin up to the joints. This was to be tanned and placed under his pillow, and when he had slept on it he would become a bear. After the skin had been prepared, the shaman

with some of the hunters started for the man's hut. The skin was put under his pillow, then all hid to see the result. In due time he came and went to sleep, but on awaking found himself a bear. The shaman told his companions that the only way to distinguish him from his companions would be by his head and feet, which were white.

Towards evening all the bears that had been on the tundra began to separate except the white-faced bear. He was about the last to move, and, when he did get up, he shook himself three times and acted in every way as if he were deeply enraged. His next move was towards the bluff, where the hunter sat perfectly quiet, hoping he would not be noticed. But the bear approached him, and when face to face asked: —

“What are you doing here?”

“I came out to hunt.”

“Is it not enough that you have killed all my family, and just recently you have killed my wife, that you now come to take my life? Had you injured my children the other day, I would now tear you to pieces. I will, however, spare your life this time on the promise that you will hunt bears no more. All the bears you saw to-day are the children of my brothers. Should I ever run across you hunting, I will tear you to pieces.”

Too glad to get off so easily, the hunter started straight for home, not even hunting on the way. His friend met him and inquired what luck he had, especially, whether he had come across a white-faced bear. When he had replied in the affirmative, the friend cautioned him against attacking. For a whole week the hunter remained at home, and then decided to go again, and begged his friend to go with him, but the latter refused on the plea that he was no bear-hunter and would not know what to do. Six others were, however, persuaded to go along. During two days they hunted at various places without finding anything to kill. On the third day the hunter conducted them to the creek where he had been before, and there they passed the night. In the morning he led them to the bluff, from where many bears were to be seen — but the white-faced bear was not noticeable among them. Thus encouraged the hunter told his companions to follow him. As they advanced one of the men exclaimed, “Look at that strange-looking beast. His face and paws are white.” When the hunter caught sight of him, he ordered his fellows to go back as quietly and as swiftly as they could, as that particular bear had a bad reputation. They went around another mountain where more bears were seen. Here they attacked and killed seven, one for each.

Loaded with their spoil they started homeward. They had advanced but a short distance when they heard a noise behind them, and, on looking around, saw the white-faced bear hurrying after them. As he came closer the hunter aimed, and as he was on the point of shooting his bowstring broke. The others shot, but without producing any effect. “Why do you shoot at me?” said the bear to the friends of the hunter;

"I never harmed you. This man (pointing to the hunter) has killed my wife and nearly all my family. I warned him that, if I ever found him hunting, I would tear him, and this I shall now do. You may go. I will not harm you."

Glad to be left alive, the six men hurried away as fast as they could, while the bear turned to the hunter and said:—

"You have killed all my family, and I had you in my power and I let you off on the promise that you would never hunt bear any more, and here you are back again. This time I will do to you as you did to mine." The man pleaded to be allowed to live one night more, so that he could go home. At first the bear refused, but he finally consented, even to spare his life altogether, if he would tell him who transformed him into a beast. To this the hunter agreed, and it was arranged that on the following evening the two should meet at a certain place and proceed together to the home of the shaman.

On reaching home, the hunter found his six companions there talking excitedly of the day's events. They were not a little surprised to see him. He told them that he was going back to-morrow, and asked their company. They positively refused, and even attempted to dissuade him from the undertaking; but he kept his word and met the bear at the fish creek as had been previously planned. The two walked a long time until they reached a village in the midst of a forest. A light shone from every *barrabara* except one, the home of the shaman.

"This is the place," said the man.

"I will remain here," ordered the bear, "and you go in and tell him that there is a man outside wishing to speak to him."

The man set about carrying out the order, but found the skin-door tied; and therefore reported to the bear that the shaman was out. The bear contradicted his statement and sent him back again with instructions to cut the door and walk in. He did so; and on entering heard some one say: "Who is that that dares come in here?"

"It is I," said the hunter.

"What do you wish?"

"There is a man outside who wishes to speak to you."

If the shaman had not been sleepy he would have suspected something wrong and would not have gone out, but under the circumstances his mind was not very clear, and he fell into the trap. When the two men came near the bear the old man was very much frightened and was about to withdraw, had not the bear blocked his way, and said: "For a number of years you have tortured me and made my life a burden by keeping me in this condition. I now demand that you give me back my human form immediately, otherwise I shall tear you to pieces." The shaman promised to do as he was asked if he would follow him into his hut. Before going in the bear told the hunter to meet him in that neighborhood the next day. All night the shaman worked hard with the

bear, and by morning succeeded in getting the skin off, so that in place of the bear a human being appeared. The shaman asked for the bear's skin, which the man gave him, except that of the face and paws, which he cut off and kept. In taking leave, the man-bear told him never to transform any one again for, if he did he would surely come back and kill him.

As agreed upon, the bear-man met the hunter and cautioned him against going out to hunt bear. Among other things he said: "You may hear of people gathering together to hunt and kill me, for I may become a bear once more; but join not with them. If I find you in their company, I shall kill you."

With this understanding they parted; and for the three or four weeks following the hunter remained at home, apparently intending to keep his promise. But one day he met two young men from a far-off village who had come to beg assistance. They said that about their village there were a great many bears, of whom many had been killed by the hunters. But there was one bear, whose head and feet were white, whom the hunters could not destroy, although all the hunters of the village had attacked him at once. Realizing their helplessness, it was decided to ask aid from the other villages. This bit of news excited the hunter very much. He knew at once who the bear in question was, and was therefore eager to hunt him; yet at the same time fear restrained him from any hasty action. He finally hit on the plan of changing his clothes and painting his face so that his former foe would not know him. In this disguise he arrived at the village, where he saw a great many hunters making ready for the grand hunt. Some were making new bows and arrows, others were repairing the old ones, and all were excitedly talking about the bear. The morning after his coming a large crowd of men, including the hunter, set out on the trail of the bear, whom they found without much difficulty. On seeing them approach, the bear raised himself, then shook himself, his hair stood up straight, giving the impression of great anger. This whole performance he repeated a second time, frightening very much the hunters, who said, "We are all in great danger and cannot escape; but must stay here and fight."

These actions over, the bear made a jump, stopping before the hunter, whom he accused of perfidy and ungratefulness, tore him in pieces, pawed out a hole and covered him up. The others were terrified more than ever on hearing the bear talk, and at the same time were too excited to do anything. Before they could collect themselves he turned on them, accusing them of attacking him without cause, and proceeded to revenge himself. He chased them back to the village, tearing them up as he went along, not resting until he had them all, including the old shaman. This done he turned back to the woods and fields to rest undisturbed.

*F. A. Golder.*