

"So Hago"

By Maria Bolanz

"SO HAGO...SO HAGO...SO HAGO..."

"Return...Return...Return..."

(Continued from last week, the poignant story of a Tlingit woman, Chin Kley, separated from her infant son at his birth and dying from tuberculosis in a hospital far from the spruce forests and snow-capped mountains of her homeland. Her loneliness and homesickness impels her to write letters to her little son, telling him of the rich heritage of the Tlingit people.)

March 2

We are entering now into the first month of spring, and do you know what we call this month? The moon of the herring eggs. It is the beginning of spring and of so many wonderful things. Somehow my joys is complete just thinking of it. The sea lions are going north and the herring are coming into spawn and the eulachons will be running soon in the Nass River. The deer are grazing higher on the mountains, and the bears are coming from their caves, and the birds are returning. All the changes that have been going on in the forest are now suddenly all apparent. It is as if one had looked away for a long, long time, and then glanced back again. For the earth is alive and man is moving with her.

From my window I lie and watch the changes that take place. Already the grass is green, and I have watched in the far distance the mantle of snow growing smaller on the mountains. Yes, just as at home, I have seen the snow on Deer Mountain diminish on the ridge. Now here each day I look forward to following the line of snow. Strange how one's pleasures are set in these moments...where once I ran, now even to walk from my bed to the chair would be too much. I must just sit up in my bed for four hours without growing tired or developing fever again.

Do you know, I like writing to you this way. Even when I am not writing I am thinking of the things I want to tell you, that I must say and that you must know. I think constantly, "Oh dear, I must not forget to mention this, or when shall I tell my son that, or how am I to begin these things?" It is very difficult for me, and with the routine they have planned for me here it is impossible to write all that I

want to at any one time. But I think I have found a way. After dinner, in the twilight that follows, I lie here in the growing darkness and plan all the things I will say to you next time. I used to lie here and be so lonely, but now I am happy to have these moments.

Yes, I lie here and I even see beauty in this place which I had refused to see at first; the rolling meadow that surrounds it and which was covered with snow until now; the high mountains in the distance-even a few have jagged summits; and the woods (I could not call it a forest). One thing I like is that we are out here alone, and there is the quietness of the forest. A river flows near here, but I have not seen it. I often think of it, and wonder what it is like; the coolness of the water and the sound that it must make...I think it must flow quietly and peacefully-if it moves at all.

From my room I am permitted a really splendid view through two great windows that come halfway down the north and west walls. Thus I am able to see north and west and at the corner where the windows meet I see the northwest. I lie here and often watch the clouds by day and the stars by night. At my side, through the largest and longest window you have ever seen, my eyes can follow north to the mountains that lie out there. But it is in front of me, in the west, that I have for these two months looked constantly across the flat snow-covered earth at the few leafless trees and wanted to follow the trail that after many, many nights and days would lead me to my homeland. This makes me feel very sad and weary even to follow with my eyes, and I come back here amidst these walls that are the color of young spring grass, and close my eyes and weep.

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(Continued from Page Two)

March 4

But enough of this. It is not these things which are important or even matter. Here we are talking of all sorts of things, and not of my other life or of the things that you must know about yourself. Your father may not tell you, because he is a

white man, and his life has been different. It is with him an intellectual curiosity... and then, perhaps he will never tell you at all. You will learn, my son, that one cannot be certain of anything...

I remember the summer night that Shah Wat Auth came to me. I was in the time when I had become a woman. My childhood days were over, and I

was preparing myself for the life of a woman who would soon or must soon be prepared for a husband and the life that is to follow. I was not isolated, as of old, when high-caste girls were put away for several moons, and saw only their mothers. No, I was simply sleeping alone on my mat in my tiny room. I remember I was subdued then, and this new problem filled me completely. I did not know whether to cry because I could not run and play any more, or to laugh because I must be treated with respect now by the same children I had played with. I was shy, and I was sad and pensive as it was all such a great mystery which I could not understand.

I was not asleep, but was lying quietly there, thinking. How well I remember it. I heard the soft footsteps of a woman; it was Shah Wat Auth's. The night must have been cold, for she was wearing a blanket. She loosened it and sat beside me. She sat there quietly, and then she began. "Chin Kley, you are thinking very seriously these times, and you are frightened. But that is good. You are, at least, concerned. There is something else I must say to you now. Auth and I were just talking, and so I came to tell you. You know that we have been hearing from your father's people; and now that you

mother is gone they have been asking to have you come with them."

I began to cry softly, but she sat there with her hands folded in her lap as she continued: "These are serious things of which you must think. You are half white, half their offspring. Life, neither here nor there, will be easy for you, but you must see them both to know what you want. They are, we understand, people of great rank; so they can provide for you and show you the best of the white man's ways."

I started to speak, trying to control my voice, but she held up a finger and silenced me. "No, listen, there are things you should know. This is an important time of your life, and decisions are to be made now. Auth and I have been speaking of it for many days, even months before this thing happened to you. And we have noticed things, as it is that we should, when one has a girl who is to become a woman. We have noticed the man, that man—how do you call him, the one who studies our ways and writes them down in a book?—who comes for a few months each year among our people. We like him, for he is not like the traders or the merchants. He is an unusual white man who learns our way."

She was speaking of your

father, and she did not know, nor did I, that there are those whose profession is studying other people's culture. She still does not understand how someone can do it and it is called earning a living. I remember she used to say over and over again, "But what does he really do to live?" And yet, even though she did not understand, she knew he was different from the other white men there. She believed in him, and that he was honest.

But she went on, "He is aware of you, my child, and he watches you. It is not with lust, as the young animals in the spring watch one another... no, no, no. It is with other eyes. We have seen it. We are simple people, Chin Kley; but we must do what is right for you. I fear at times that later on if you were a woman with your own family, and your husband a brave of our own people, you would sometimes regret it. And then your whole life would be unhappy because you had missed the other. Now is your chance to go with your father's people, to live among them and see if you want to remain there or here. And this man, if you want him, it would be better if they took you and educated you first. Then he would know also if you were really what he wanted. True, he is older, but in the white man's world things are not done always as in ours. And these things you must learn!"

She was not crying, but I knew that each word hard for her, that each word she uttered cut into her and caused her more pain than any of her pains of bringing forth the children.

"Do you want me to go?"

I asked meekly.

"Only if you want."

"I will be very lonely," I said.

"You can always come back."

"I will come back," I said firmly.

I think she must have smiled then through her silent tears, as she said, "Yes, and I am sure that the young Kush Kan will even still be waiting for you."

That was why I went away... and have yet to return. Do you know our word for return, or come back? It is so hago. And how it runs through my mind. How I hear their voices calling me... So hago... so hago... so hago... And like those birds I am watching, I would take flight... I would take flight

(Continued next week)