

### THE RAVEN AND THE BALL OF LIGHT

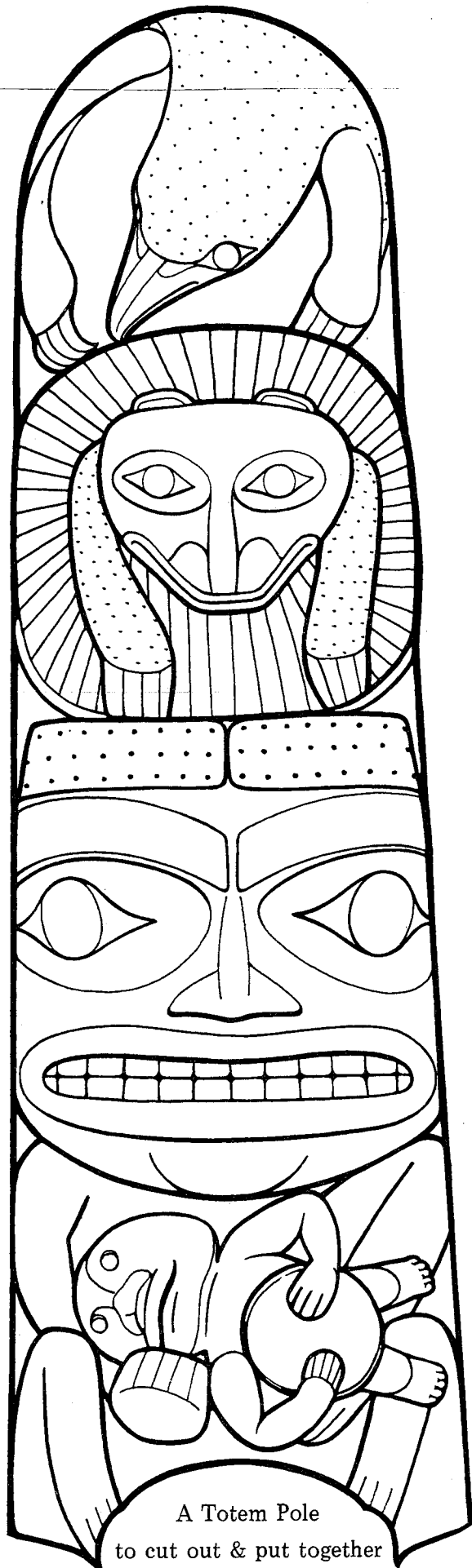
Darkness had covered the earth for a long time and the Raven was fed up with it. He couldn't see a thing, not even himself in this dark world, as his black shiny plumage was indistinguishable from the ever-black night.

One day, he heard a rumor that the old fisherman who lived alone except for his pretty daughter at North Island kept a ball of bright light hidden in his big house by the sea. The Raven wanted to end the age of darkness in which he was living, so he decided to steal the light and release it in the world.

The next summer, that is, during the season when salal berries ripen, he changed himself into a dark green shiny salal leaf. The fisherman's daughter was gathering salal berries in a wild fruit patch and while eating some of the small, juicy blue fruit, she swallowed the leaf. As soon as the Raven entered her body, he changed again from a leaf to an unborn human baby, who in the fullness of time emerged in the normal way, much to the surprise and baffled annoyance of the girl and her father.

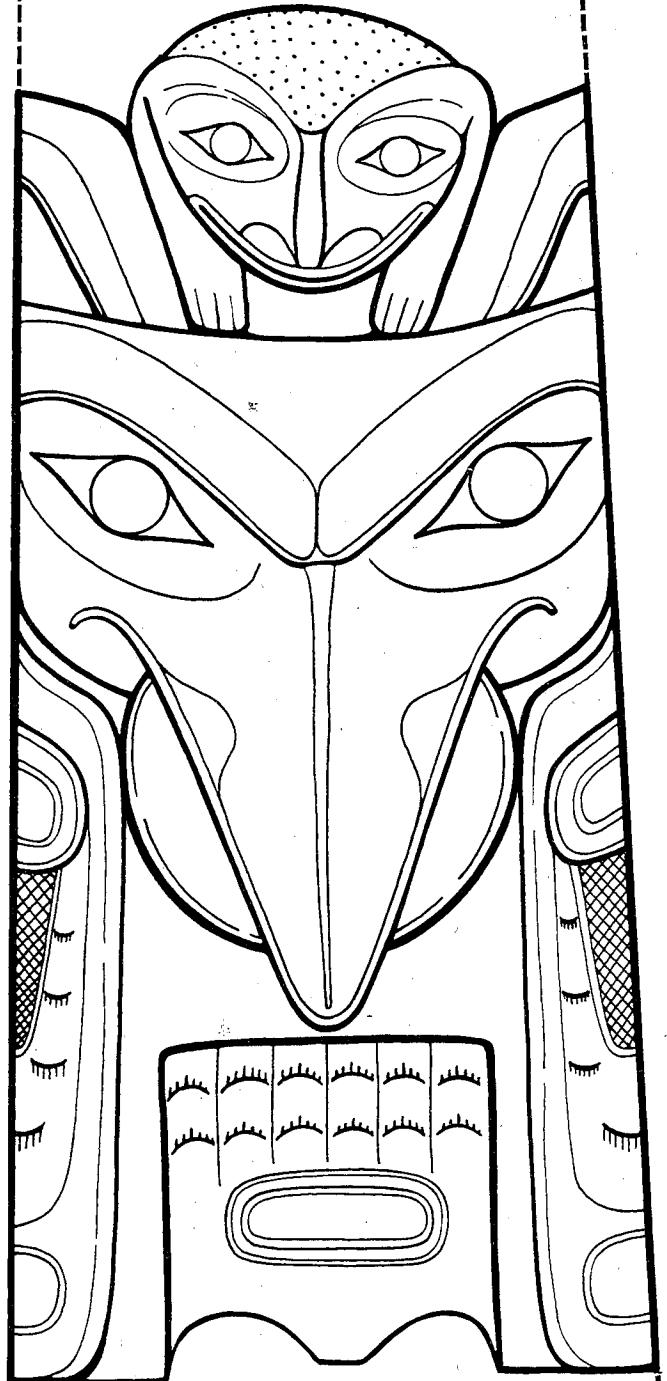
The baby grew with amazing speed and soon became a very mischievous child and at the same time a very appealing one. He soon became a great favorite of his grandfather. The old man gave him everything he wanted, until one day he began to cry for the ball of light which was kept in a bent corner box. For many days the grandfather refused this request but finally, by begging and crying, the Raven overcame his resistance and persuaded the old man to give him the light. "Give my grandson what he is asking for; give him the ball of light," he said to his daughter. The young mother went behind the screen at the back of the big house and brought back the wooden chest beautifully ornamented with abalone shell in which the bright ball of light was kept.

She opened the box and in it was another box, which she also opened. She found a third box, a little smaller, inside; after the third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, until she reached the tenth box. This last box was very carefully wrapped in a fine net made of nettle fiber, which she removed to get at the



A Totem Pole  
to cut out & put together

Above: the Eagle & the Bear in a halo;  
below:  
the little boy, held by his mother, holds  
the ball of light



Raven holds the disk of light, the Frog sits  
on his head; below, Beaver gnaws a stick

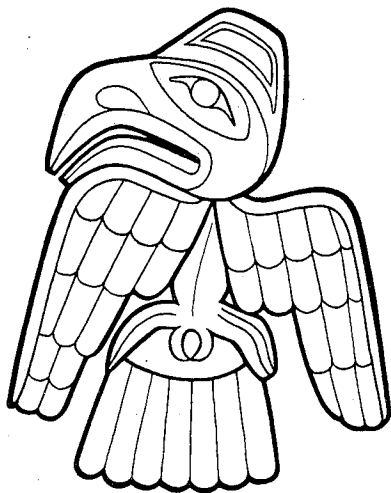
lid. She lifted the lid and a flood of light filled the big plank house as the sun itself appeared, for the first time, free, bright and round like a ball.

"Here's your light," said the young mother to her son, throwing it to him with a deft hand. "Take it!" The child caught it in its first flight through the air with great joy. But he soon began to whimper again, and his whimpering turned to tears and sobs.

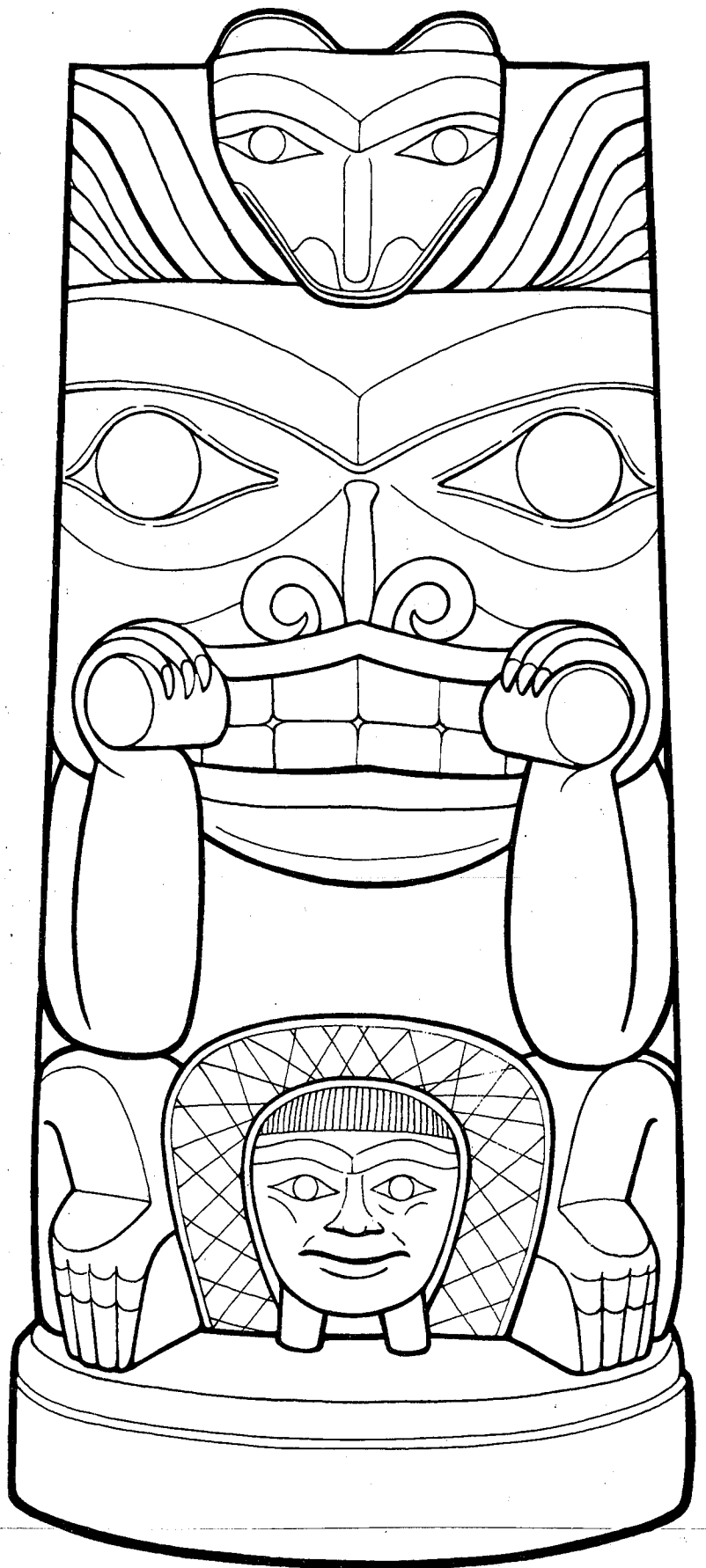
His grandfather, who could not bear to hear him cry, asked his daughter, "What is the matter with my grandson now?" She found out that the child had still another wish. The smoke hole of the big house was closed by the roof boards and the child wanted them removed. "Open the smoke hole for my grandson," said the grandfather.

No sooner had she opened the smoke hole to the opaque black sky than the child immediately transformed himself into his real shape, that of the supernatural Raven. With the sun in his bill — some say under one of his wings — the Raven flew out of the smoke hole in the roof of the house.

As he was flying away with his prize he encountered the Eagle who chased him and forced him to drop it. It fell and broke into many pieces, the large ones forming the Sun and the Moon, and the small ones the stars in the night sky.



Eagle from an argillite plate c. 1882,  
National Museum, Washington, D.C.



From a large (this size) & outstanding argillite totem pole  
carved by Charles Edensaw, National Museum of Canada



The Frog, which is not found in the Queen Charlotte Islands, came into Haida art along with the myths which were acquired by conquest or marriage with the people from the mainland. The Frog is associated with Volcano Woman. Volcano eruptions were often caused by ill-treatment of animals.

The Nass River volcano erupted for just such a reason. Once there were two large villages in a canyon with a year-round supply of salmon and wild berries. Since the people of these villages had what they needed to eat, they were wealthy.

But the young men of the villages began to disregard their people's customs. They killed or wounded animals for amusement and left their carcasses for crows and eagles to eat. The elders said, "Don't do this; the Great Chief in the Sky will take revenge if you keep on doing it." But the young men did not listen.

When the salmon began swimming upstream, the young men threw stones at them as they swam through shallow water. Then one young man thought of a new sport: catching humpback salmon, slitting their backs open, inserting slivers of pine pitch and lighting them on fire.

They did this by night, putting burning pine torches into the salmon's backs while they swam upriver. The elders were very perturbed and warned the young men again and again against such impious acts.

At the end of the salmon season, the tribes began to prepare for winter festivities. Then began a faint beating noise, as of the huge feast drums which hung from the house rafters. The young men scoffed at the noise, saying that ghosts were awakening, but the elders warned that they had brought great danger by mistreating the salmon and needlessly killing game.

The drumbeat was heard each day, but then it stopped, and the young men ridiculed their elders for their fears.

Then the drum beat began again, louder than before. Even the young men were now afraid. The elders asked why they were frightened of the drumbeats and why they had stopped boasting.

When the noise of thunder began and the river turned to fire, everyone tried to escape, but most perished. This catastrophe had been caused by the young men who put burning torches into the backs of salmon and so had offended the Chief of the Skies.

#### HOW THE RAVEN LOST HIS BILL

Once upon a time the Raven saw Rhausrhana, an old, blind halibut fisherman, sitting alone in a dug out canoe. His long kelp fishing line had devilfish on the hook as bait, and the Raven wanted the devilfish. Wrapping his wings around his body, he dived deep into the water and took the devilfish off the hook. Rhausrhana felt the line jerk and pulled on it so sharply that he broke the Raven's beak and pulled it up with the line. When the end of the line reached the surface, the fisherman was puzzled by the bill; he felt it, but did not know what it was. Once on shore, he asked his daughter to put it on the end of a stick on the roof of the lodge so that its owner might find it.

Meanwhile the Raven, wet and muddy, made his way out of the water. He had taken the form of a human, except for his wings and tailfeathers, so he was able to search the lodge for his bill without being easily noticed. When he spotted the bill on the stick on top of the lodge, he jumped up after it and tried to put it back where it belonged. But, as he flew away, the bill fell from his face and dangled beneath his chin.



Top: Bear eating a salmon; bottom: Raven & the fallen bill, from an argillite pole, private collection