

*In the Shadow of a Rainbow*

*In*  
*the Shadow*  
*of a Rainbow*

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*The True Story of a  
Friendship Between  
Man and Wolf*

*by*  
*Robert Franklin Leslie*

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*By Robert Franklin Leslie:*

READ THE WILD WATER

HIGH TRAILS WEST

THE BEARS AND I

WILD PETS

*For younger readers:*

WILD BURRO RESCUE

WILD COURAGE

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To  
my good friend  
Gregory Tah-Kloma,  
wolf-man of the Kitiwanga

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## *Author's Note*

Late one afternoon in the summer of 1970, a young Indian beached his canoe near my Babine Lake campsite in the backwoods of British Columbia. Clad only in shorts, he was tall and muscular, and wore his hair shoulder length. The young man introduced himself as Gregory Tah-Kloma, and told me he was a Chimmesyan of the Tsimshian band. That evening Greg sat by my campfire and grilled salmon filets for both of us.

During the weeks that followed, Greg and I became staunch friends. We canoed, hiked, prospected, and camped as a team. I learned that he had worked in various mills and mines to pay his way through college. His hands still bore calluses from that work. He was now a graduate student in mineralogy, and spent his summers at placer gold deposits along drainage systems footing British Columbia watersheds. We were both on the way to prospect Babine tributaries when we met.

Night after night, until the black frost of October drove us toward civilization, we sat by the campfire and talked. Gradually Greg told me the remarkable true story of his devotion to a threatened pack of timber wolves, a story that included his search to relocate the amazing female wolf-pack leader, known as Náhani, whose unusual company he had first enjoyed in the summer of 1964. His compelling

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drive to find the wolf and her pack before trappers and bounty hunters could destroy them reached unique proportions. His fascination for the wolf often took him to the brink of disaster.

I asked Greg's permission to write down his story, and he agreed. He had kept a log in which he listed events in chronological order, and a diary in which he entered his personal feelings and reactions. He allowed me to draw freely on both.

In order to protect the privacy of living individuals and to protect Náhani—who is still very much alive—certain place names and locations have been changed, and various encounters between humans have been slightly altered. However, none of the facts of Gregory Tah-Kloma's adventures with Náhani and her wolf pack have been changed. They are as he told them to me.

Robert Franklin Leslie  
March, 1974

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is rapture in the lonely shore,  
There is society where none intrudes . . .  
I love not man less, but nature more.

—George Gordon, Lord Byron

*In the Shadow of a Rainbow*

# *I*

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## *Náhani of Nakinilerak*

**A**long the southern belly of British Columbia's north-central wilderness stretches the lake country. Narrow troughs of water up to 130 miles long wind through the canyons and resemble wide, gentian-blue belts—their names are Babine, Takla, Tchentlo, Trembleur, Stuart, Nakinilerak, and fifty more.

The longest of these southern "belly" lakes, Babine and Takla, lie in trenches between the Babine Range to the west and the Hogem Range to the east. A knifely Bait Range separates these two lakes. Through a broad glacial canal at the Bait's southern terminus, a series of five smaller lakes, the basin tarns, drain through short creeks that feed Takla.

An ancient Indian trade trail through the Babine-Takla region connects several primitive mountain settlements,



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often fifty miles apart. The route skirts the upper beach of Friday Lake, northernmost of the five basin tarns. A narrow flume drains Friday into Nakinilerak Lake. Of a winter the trade trail serves aged Carrier Indian trappers who follow ax blazes on the hemlock trunks high above seasonal snow line. Of a summer, possibly half a dozen die-hard sordough prospectors may dream their way along this obsolete footpath, but no agency maintains or supervises the uninhabited route.

Seven miles south of the old trade trail, a short morning's hike by game runs, lies Nakinilerak Lake, a wilderness gem five miles long, half a mile wide.

In a clump of Sitka spruce and quaking aspens, Gregory Tah-Kloma's campsite straddled a breezy, bug-free peninsula near the lake's intake flume. The year was 1964. About two months remained before a late September or early October snowstorm would hurl him back over the archaic trade route to the totem-pole settlement of Hazelton, where he had left his station wagon with a friend. Prospectors cursed that sixty-mile trek between Friday Lake and Hazelton as a backbreaker, full of deadfalls, winddowns, devil's-claw, icy fords, and landslides. But Greg wasn't worried. His pack would be lighter because he would hide his tools at the "diggin's"; his food supply would be exhausted; he would throw away his dirty clothes. Much of the route would skim downhill, paralleling the right bank of the Suskwa River.

During the first ten days of July, Greg had panned the stream bed between Friday Lake and his campsite. Thousands of years ago receding Ice Age glaciers had deposited pockets of placer gold nuggets the size of pinheads

## Náhani of Nakinilerak

—and smaller—along bedrock riffles beneath everything from a two-foot overburden of glacial mica up to mountainous moraines.

One morning shortly after breakfast Greg sat rocking back and forth on a driftwood log near his campfire. He liked to finger the two pounds of "dust" he had accumulated in a canvas bag—a bonanza to supplement his winter salary at the refinery near Prince George. If gold came in any other color, he reflected, nobody would prize the metal half as much. Chimmesyans say, "Gold is sunshine stored in a rock."

As he zippered his precious loot into a rucksack side pocket, he noticed a man trudging up the beach from Nakinilerak's *southern* end.

From a distance the stranger appeared middle-aged. Probably a Carrier, Greg surmised, by the way the man stooped under a tumpline basket tote. Plainly bushed after his long cross-country journey, he leaned heavily upon an alpenstock every four or five steps. With a carbine balanced and clutched at the breech, the man's left arm swung like the shank of a pendulum.

Greg tried to imagine what the Indian had been doing afoot in that stony wilderness south of Nakinilerak Lake—maybe he, too, was a prospector, maybe a bounty hunter.

"Good morning, sir!" the stranger said as he shuffled up to the smoky campfire. His buck-toothed smile reminded Greg of cartoons depicting friendly beavers. "My name is Eugene Charley. You have been here long?"

Before giving Greg a chance to answer, he quickly explained that he had been visiting relatives and hunting

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wolves on lower Takla Lake. He belonged to the Carrier band. (Because of French language influence, Canadian Indians generally say "band" instead of "tribe.")

"I came before the Moon-of-Walking-Thunder," Greg said. To an Indian that meant early July, because the full moon occurred on the twenty-fourth in 1964. "I'm Chimmesyan—part Haida, part Tsimshian."

"You must be gulch-happy. What about *Náhani*? Have you seen her?" As Eugene Charley pronounced the name, he raised his upper lip like a nickering mule. He lowered the lever of his Winchester to check the chamber. The sun shot a brassy glint off a breeched cartridge rim.

Greg urged the man to sit down on the log and remove his heavy pack, the weight of which he bore by the tump-line strap across his deeply grooved forehead. He grinned when Greg offered him a cup of coffee and a pipe stoked with India House tobacco.

"Who is *Náhani*?" Greg asked.

Charley spat into the fire. "You say *Náhani*," he said. "Accent on the *Ná*."

"I don't give a rusty damn how you say it. Who the devil is *Náhani*?"

"The great silver she-wolf. Queen bitch of the deadliest wolf pack in all Canada. Is this *Nakinilerak* or Friday?" "Nakinilerak."

"They den somewhere near here. I've studied them for a year or more, ever since a sweet price was put on *Náhani*'s head. Those wolves are hunting somewhere south of here. I wish to hell I knew where. When they come back, they'll gnaw your Chimmesyan bones. *Nakinilerak* is where they winter." With a speculative squint he probed Greg's expression for a reaction.

*Náhani of Nakinilerak*

"Why should anybody be afraid of wolves?" "Are you armed?"

Perhaps Eugene Charley suspected a rich "poke" of gold. While he smoked, his glance kept shuttling between Greg's gold pan and trench shovel.

"I'm prepared to defend myself," Greg said without admitting that he carried no firearms. He considered everyone trustworthy until proven otherwise; but this Eugene Charley somehow seemed to speak from two faces. "Tell me more about your *Náhani*, whose name you pronounce with such reverence."

"*Náhani* means 'one who shines.' Carriers call her Silver Skin. Color, you know. She's too gummy for a timber wolf—and too damned big. Eight, maybe ten years old. She leads twenty, maybe thirty killers. Who knows? Nobody ever gets a shot at that pack. She can smell a gun a mile away. Livestock killed, traps emptied, and now lately *people* have disappeared. When they raise the bounty enough, I'll bring her down. You'll see."

Greg concealed his relief when Eugene Charley declined an invitation to rest the day and night. He was headed for Pendleton Bay on Babine Lake. Carriers had to hurry, otherwise the lumber mill would hire Tsimshians to peavey summer-felled logs into the dog-chain lifts. Instead of following the trade trail between Takla and Babine lakes, Charley was short-cutting the route through the brush in order to save time and miles "and maybe bring in a skin."

"I'll guarantee you a horrible death if you stay here," he said as the two men shook hands. "*Náhani*'s phantom *renégats* will eat you alive!"

"Weasel words!" Greg said aloud. To himself he thought: small-bore talk from a Carrier with a forked

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tongue, a bounty hunter who builds bad reputations around predators in order to get local authorities to hike the rewards.

Nevertheless, Eugene Charley's brief visit set in motion an exciting new trend of thought. Greg's past experience with wolves attested that Náhani and her "phantom *renégats*," if they existed other than in rum-soaked Carrier imaginations, weren't as dangerous as Charley claimed—unless, of course they were indeed demented renegades, possibly an entire pack infected with sylvatic rabies, blindly revenging themselves against man. He remembered that a leading Canadian newspaper had for years published an offer: a substantial cash payment for any documented record of a wolf having attacked a human being without provocation. No one ever claimed the money. That thought was consoling on a dark and rainy night—yet rabies fell consummately into the category of provocation.