



Leelinau, the Lost Daughter

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Intermediate

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Leelinau was the favorite daughter of a hunter, who lived on the lake shore near the base of the lofty highlands, called Kaug Wudjoo.

From her earliest youth she was observed to be thoughtful and retiring. She passed much of her time in solitude, and seemed ever to prefer the companionship of her own shadow to the society of the lodge-circle.

Whenever she could leave her father's lodge she would fly to remote haunts and recesses in the woods, or sit in lonely reverie upon some high promontory of rock overlooking the lake. In such places she would often, with her face turned upward, linger long in contemplation of the air, as if she were invoking her guardian spirit, and beseeching him to lighten her sadness.

But amid all the leafy haunts, none drew her steps toward it so often as a forest of pines, on the open shore, called Manitowok, or the Sacred Wood. It was one of those hallowed places which is the resort of the little wild men of the woods, and of the turtle spirits or fairies which delight in romantic scenes. Owing to this circumstance, its green retirement was seldom visited by Indians, who feared to fall under the influence of its mischievous inhabitants.

And whenever they were compelled by stress of weather to make a landing on this part of the coast, they never

failed to leave an offering of tobacco, or some other token, to show that they desired to stand well with the proprietors of the fairy ground.

To this sacred spot Leelinau had made her way at an early age, gathering strange flowers and plants, which she would bring home to her parents, and relate to them all the haps and mishaps that had occurred in her rambles.

Although they discountenanced her frequent visits to the place, they were not able to restrain them, for she was of so gentle and delicate a temper that they feared to thwart her.

Her attachment to the fairy wood, therefore, grew with her years. If she wished to solicit her spirits to procure pleasant dreams, or any other maiden favor, Leelinau repaired to the Manitowok. If her father remained abroad in the hunt later than usual, and it was feared that he had been overwhelmed by the tempest, or had met with some other mischance, Leelinau offered up her prayers for safety at the Manitowok. It was there that she fasted, mused, and strolled.

She at length became so engrossed by the fairy pines that her parents began to suspect that some evil spirit had enticed her to its haunts, and had cast upon her a charm which she had not the power to resist.

This belief was confirmed when, one day, her mother, who had secretly followed her, overheard her murmuring to some unknown and invisible companion, appeals like these:

“Spirit of the dancing leaves!” whispered Leelinau, “hear a throbbing heart in its sadness. Spirit of the foaming stream! visit thou my nightly pillow, shedding over it silver dreams of mountain brook and pebbly rivulet. Spirit of the starry night! lead my foot-prints to the blushing mis-kodeed, or where the burning passion-flower shines with carmine hue. Spirit of the greenwood plume!” she concluded, turning with passionate gaze to the beautiful young pines which stood waving their green beauty over her head, “shed on me, on Leelinau the sad, thy leafy fragrance, such as spring unfolds from sweetest flowers, or hearts that to each other show their inmost grief. Spirits! hear, O hear a maiden’s prayer!”

Day by day, these strange communings with unseen beings drew away the heart of Leelinau more and more from the simple duties of the lodge, and she walked among her people, melancholy and silent, like a spirit who had visited them from another land.

The pastimes which engaged the frolic moments of her young companions, passed by her as little trivial pageants in which she had no concern.

When the girls of the neighboring lodges assembled to play at the favorite female game of pappus-e-ko-waun, or the block and string, before the lodge-door, Leelinau would sit vacantly by, or enter so feebly into the spirit of the play as to show that it was irksome to her.

Again, in the evening, when the young people formed a ring around the lodge, and the piepeend-jigun, or leather and bone, passed rapidly from one to the other, she either handed it along without attempting to play, or if she took a part, it was with no effort to succeed.

The time of the corn-gathering had come, and the young people of the tribe were assembled in the field, busy in plucking the ripened maize. One of the girls, noted for her beauty, had found a red ear, and every one congratulated her that a brave admirer was on his way to her father's lodge. She blushed, and hiding the trophy in her bosom, she thanked the Good Spirit that it was a red ear, and not a crooked, that she had found.

Presently it chanced that one who was there among the young men, espied in the hands of Leelinau, who had plucked it indifferently, one of the crooked kind, and at once the word "Wa-ge-min!" was shouted aloud through the field, and the whole circle was set in a roar.

"The thief is in the corn-field!" exclaimed the young man, Iagoo by name, and famous in the tribe for his mirthful powers of story-telling; "see you not the old man stooping as he enters the field? See you not signs that he crouched as he crept in the dark? Is it not plain by this mark on the stalk that he was heavily bent in his back? Old man! be nimble, or some one will take thee while thou art taking the ear."

These questions Iagoo accompanied with the action of one bowed with age stealthily entering the corn-field. He went on:

"See how he stoops as he breaks off the ear. Nushka! He seems for a moment to tremble. Walker, be nimble! Hooh! It is plain the old man is the thief."

He turned suddenly where she sat in the circle, pensively regarding the crooked ear which she held in her hand, and exclaimed:

“Leelinau, the old man is thine!”

Laughter rung merrily through the corn-field, but Leelinau, casting down upon the ground the crooked ear of maize, walked pensively away.

The next morning the eldest son of a neighboring chief called at her father’s lodge. He was quite advanced in years; but he enjoyed such renown in battle, and his name was so famous in the hunt, that the parents accepted him as a suitor for their daughter. They hoped that his shining qualities would draw back the thoughts of Leelinau from that spirit-land whither she seemed to have wholly directed her affections.

It was this chief’s son whom Iago had pictured as the corn-taker, but, without objecting to his age, or giving any other reason, Leelinau firmly declined his proposals. The parents ascribed the young daughter’s hesitancy to maiden fear, and paying no further heed to her refusal, a day was fixed for the marriage-visit to the lodge.

The young warrior came to the lodge-door, and Leelinau refused to see him; informing her parents, at the same time, that she would never consent to the match.

It had been her custom to pass many of her hours in her favorite place of retirement, under a broad-topped young pine, whose leaves whispered in every wind that blew; but most of all in that gentle murmur of the air at the evening hour, dear to lovers, when the twilight steals on.

Thither she now repaired, and, while reclining pensively against the young pine-tree, she fancied that she heard a voice addressing her. At first it was scarcely more than a sigh; presently it grew more clear, and she heard it distinctly whisper—

“Maiden! think me not a tree; but thine own dear lover; fond to be with thee in my tall and blooming strength, with the bright green nodding plume that waves above thee. Thou art leaning on my breast, Leelinau; lean forever there and be at peace. Fly from men who are false and cruel, and quit the tumult of their dusty strife, for this quiet, lonely shade. Over thee I my arms will fling, fairer than the lodge’s roof. I will breathe a perfume like that of flowers over thy happy evening rest. In my bark canoe I’ll waft thee o’er the waters of the sky-blue

lake. I will deck the folds of thy mantle with the sun's last rays. Come, and on the mountain free rove a fairy bright with me!"

Leelinau drunk in with eager ear these magical words. Her heart was fixed. No warrior's son should clasp her hand. She listened in the hope to hear the airy voice speak more; but it only repeated, "Again! again!" and entirely ceased.

On the eve of the day fixed for her marriage, Leelinau decked herself in her best garments. She arranged her hair according to the fashion of her tribe, and put on all of her maiden ornaments in beautiful array. With a smile, she presented herself before her parents.

"I am going," she said, "to meet my little lover, the chieftain of the Green Plume, who is waiting for me at the Spirit Grove."

Her face was radiant with joy, and the parents, taking what she had said as her own fanciful way of expressing acquiescence in their plans, wished her good fortune in the happy meeting.

"I am going," she continued, addressing her mother as they left the lodge, "I am going from one who has watched my infancy and guarded my youth; who has given me medicine when I was sick, and prepared my food when I was well. I am going from a father who has ranged the forest to procure the choicest skins for my dress, and kept his lodge supplied with the best spoil of the chase. I am going from a lodge which has been my shelter from the storms of winter, and my shield from the heats of summer. Farewell, my parents, farewell!"

So saying, she sped faster than any could follow her to the margin of the fairy wood, and in a moment was lost to sight.

As she had often thus withdrawn herself from the lodge, the parents were not in fear, but confidently awaited her return. Hour chased hour, as the clouds of evening rolled up in the west; darkness came on, but no daughter returned. With torches they hastened to the wood, and although they lit up every dark recess and leafy gloom, their search was in vain. Leelinau was nowhere to be seen. They called aloud, in lament, upon her name, but she answered not.

Suns rose and set, but nevermore in their light did the bereaved parents eyes behold the lost form of their

beloved child. Their daughter was lost indeed. Whither she had vanished no mortal tongue could tell; although it chanced that a company of fishermen, who were spearing fish near the Spirit Grove, descried something that seemed to resemble a female figure standing on the shore. As the evening was mild and the waters calm, they cautiously pulled their canoe toward land, but the slight ripple of their oars excited alarm. The figure fled in haste, but they could recognize in the shape and dress as she ascended the bank, the lost daughter, and they saw the green plumes of her fairy-lover waving over his forehead as he glided lightly through the forest of young pines.

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