

Shonkeek-Moonkeek

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North American

Advanced
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This is the Mohegan name of the pretty lake in the Berkshires now called Pontoosuc. Shonkeek was a boy, Moonkeek a girl, and they were cousins who grew up as children commonly do, whether in house or wigwam: they roamed the woods and hills together, filled their baskets with flowers and berries, and fell in love. But the marriage of cousins was forbidden in the Mohegan polity, and when they reached an age in which they found companionship most delightful their rambles were interdicted and they were even told to avoid each other. This had the usual effect, and they met on islands in the lake at frequent intervals, to the torment of one Nockawando, who wished to wed the girl himself, and who reported her conduct to her parents.

The lovers agreed, after this, to fly to an Eastern tribe into which they would ask to be adopted, but they were pledged, if aught interfered with their escape, to meet beneath the lake. Nockawando interfered. On the next night, as the unsuspecting Shonkeek was paddling over to the island where the maid awaited him, the jealous rival, rowing softly in his wake, sent an arrow into his back, and Shonkeek, without a cry, pitched headlong into the water. Yet, to the eyes of Nockawando, he appeared to keep his seat and urge his canoe forward. The girl saw the boat approach: it sped, now, like an eagle's flight. One look, as it passed the rock; one glance at the murderer, crouching in his birchen vessel, and with her lover's name on her lips she leaped into her own canoe and pushed out from shore. Nockawando heard her raise the death-song and rowed forward as rapidly as he could, but near the middle of the lake his arm fell palsied.

The song had ended and the night had become strangely, horribly still. Not a chirp of cricket, not a lap of wave, not a rustle of leaf. Motionless the girl awaited, for his boat was still moving by the impetus of his last stroke of the paddle. The evening star was shining low on the horizon, and as her figure loomed in the darkness the star shone through at the point where her eye had looked forth. It was no human creature that sat there. Then came the dead man's boat. The two shadows rowed noiselessly together, and as they disappeared in the mist that was now settling on the landscape, an unearthly laugh rang over the lake; then all was still. When Nockawando reached the camp that night he was a raving maniac. The Indians never found the bodies of the pair, but they believed that while water remains in Pontoosuc its surface will be vexed by these journeys of the dead.

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