



The Division of the Saranacs

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North American

Intermediate

3 min read

In the middle of the last century a large body of Saranac Indians occupied the forests of the Upper Saranac through which ran the Indian carrying-place, called by them the Eagle Nest Trail. Whenever they raided the Tahawi on the slopes of Mount Tahawus (Sky-splitter), there was a pleasing rivalry between two young athletes, called the Wolf and the Eagle, as to which would carry off the more scalps, and the tribe was divided in admiration of them. There was one who did not share this liking: an old sachem, one of the wizards who had escaped when the Great Spirit locked these workers of evil in the hollow trees that stood beside the trail. In their struggles to escape the less fortunate ones thrust their arms through the closing bark, and they are seen there, as withered trunks and branches, to this day. Oquarah had not been softened by this exhibition of danger nor the qualification of mercy that allowed him still to exist. Rather he was more bitter when he saw, as he fancied, that the tribe thought more of the daring and powerful warriors than it did of the bent and malignant-minded counsellor.

It was in the moon of green leaves that the two young men set off to hunt the moose, and on the next day the Wolf returned alone. He explained that in the hunt they had been separated; he had called for hours for his friend, and had searched so long that he concluded he must have returned ahead of him. But he was not at the camp. Up rose the sachem with visage dark. "I hear a forked tongue," he cried. "The Wolf was jealous of the Eagle and his teeth have cut into his heart."

“The Wolf cannot lie,” answered the young man.

“Where is the Eagle?” angrily shouted the sachem, clutching his hatchet.

“The Wolf has said,” replied the other.

The old sachem advanced upon him, but as he raised his axe to strike, the wife of the Wolf threw herself before her husband, and the steel sank into her brain. The sachem fell an instant later with the Wolf’s knife in his heart, and instantly the camp was in turmoil. Before the day had passed it had been broken up, and the people were divided into factions, for it was no longer possible to hold it together in peace. The Wolf, with half of the people, went down the Sounding River to new hunting-grounds, and the earth that separated the families was reddened whenever one side met the other.

Years had passed when, one morning, the upper tribe saw a canoe advancing across the Lake of the Silver Sky. An old man stepped from it: he was the Eagle. After the Wolf had left him he had fallen into a cleft in a rock, and had lain helpless until found by hunters who were on their way to Canada. He had joined the British against the French, had married a northern squaw, but had returned to die among the people of his early love. Deep was his sorrow that his friend should have been accused of doing him an injury, and that the once happy tribe should have been divided by that allegation. The warriors and sachems of both branches were summoned to a council, and in his presence they swore a peace, so that in the fulness of time he was able to die content. That peace was always kept.

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