



# *The Falls of Cohoes*

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North American

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*Intermediate*

*3 min read*

When Occuna, a young Seneca, fell in love with a girl whose cabin was near the present town of Cohoes, he behaved very much as Americans of a later date have done. He picked wild flowers for her; he played on the bone pipe and sang sentimental songs in the twilight; he roamed the hills with her, gathering the loose quartz crystals that the Indians believed to be the tears of stricken deer, save on Diamond Rock, in Lansingburgh, where they are the tears of Moneta, a bereaved mother and wife; and in fine weather they went boating on the Mohawk above the rapids. They liked to drift idly on the current, because it gave them time to gaze into each other's eyes, and to build air castles that they would live in in the future. They were suddenly called to a realization of danger one evening, for the stream had been subtly drawing them on and on until it had them in its power. The stroke of the paddle failed and the air castles fell in dismal ruin. Sitting erect they began their death-song in this wise:

Occuna: "Daughter of a mighty warrior, the Manitou calls me hence. I hear the roaring of his voice; I see the lightning of his glance along the river; he walks in clouds and spray upon the waters."

The Maiden: "Thou art thyself a warrior, O Occuna. Hath not thine axe been often bathed in blood? Hath the deer ever escaped thine arrow or the beaver avoided thy chase? Thou wilt not fear to go into the presence of Manitou."

Occuna: "Manitou, indeed, respects the strong. When I chose thee from the women of our tribe I promised

that we should live and die together. The Thunderer calls us now. Welcome, O ghost of Oriska, chief of the invincible Senecas! A warrior and the daughter of a warrior come to join you in the feast of the blessed!”

The boat leaped over the falls, and Occuna, striking on the rocks below, was killed at once; but, as by a miracle, the girl fell clear of them and was whirled on the seething current to shoal water, where she made her escape. For his strength and his virtues the dead man was canonized. His tribe raised him above the regions of the moon, whence he looked down on the scenes of his youth with pleasure, and in times of war gave pleasant dreams and promises to his friends, while he confused the enemy with evil omens. Whenever his tribe passed the falls they halted and with brief ceremonials commemorated the death of Occuna.

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