

The Great Carbuncle

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High on the eastern face of Mount Monroe shone the Great Carbuncle, its flash scintillating for miles by day, its dusky crimson glowing among the ledges at night. The red men said that it hung in the air, and that the soul of an Indian—killed, that he might guard the spot—made approach perilous to men of all complexions and purposes. As late as Ethan Crawford’s time one search band took a “good man” to lay the watcher, when they strove to scale the height, but they returned “sorely bruised, treasureless, and not even saw that wonderful sight.” The value of the stone tempted many, but those who sought it had to toil through a dense forest, and on arriving at the mountain found its glories eclipsed by intervening abutments, nor could they get near it. Rocks covered with crystals, at first thought to be diamonds, were readily despoiled of their treasure, but the Great Carbuncle burned on, two thousand feet above them, at the head of the awful chasm of Oakes Gulf, and baffled seekers likened it to the glare of an evil eye.

There was one who had grown old in searching for this gem, often scrambling over the range in wind and snow and cloud, and at last he reached a precipitous spot he had never attained before. Great was his joy, for the Carbuncle was within his reach, blazing into his eyes in the noon sunlight as if it held, crystallized in its depths, the brightness of all the wine that had ever gladdened the tired hearts of men. There were rivals in the search, and on reaching the plateau they looked up and saw him kneeling on a narrow ledge with arms extended as in rapture. They called to him. He answered not. He was dead—dead of joy and triumph. While

they looked a portion of the crag above him fell away and rolled from rock to rock, marking its course with flashes of bloody fire, until it reached the Lake of the Clouds, and the waters of that tarn drowned its glory. Yet those waters are not always black, and sometimes the hooked crest of Mount Monroe is outlined against the night sky in a ruddy glow.

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