

Legends of Devil's Lake

A Legend of Devil's Lake

*Nestled close down between wild, rocky hills,
Feeding no rivers, and fed from no rills,
Devil's Lake lies like a jewel rare,
Dropped from the ocean's casket there.*

*On the stern gray rocks--they'd forgotten where--
By wandering nymphs of the upper air.
But, though forgotten, and bound to the place,
By the unyielding clasp of its shore's rude embrace,*

*Like a sad, prisoned spirit, it still seemed to be
Ever murmuring low for its home in the sea;
And in pity, perchance, for the painful unrest,
That at times heaved so wildly its beautiful breast,*

*Pines have grown up midst the rocks on its shore,
And whispers to it of the ocean's deep roar,
As fanciful breezes, with fingers unseen,
Toss their dark boughs into wavelets of green.*

*Like time-worn battlements, crumbling away,
Whose dark sides with lichens are softened and gray,
And over whose fragments of wave sharpen stone
A soft smile of verdure is gracefully thrown.*

*Stand bluffs, that, like Titans, their feet in the tide,
Seem guarding with vigilance all save one side
Of this crystalline lake ---here it's prisoning band
Is as fair as though formed by a sea-nymph's hand,
Of feathery willows, and wave-washed sand;*

*And back from it, with a gentle swell,
Stretches a forest, where song birds dwell,
And squirrels play in the checkered shade
By its Maple boughs, and old Oaks made.
Here, in those years of which we are told,
So many legends and stories old,*

*Camped for a while a roving band
Of Indians, by the lakelet's strand,
And, with the maidens of the tribe,
Bathed in its crystal water
Ke-she-ah-ben-o-qua, (The Early Dawn) their chieftain's only
daughter.*

*Slender her form, her motions full of grace,
As full of strange dark beauty her delicate young face--
Dark as though a shadow from the midnight of her hair,
Enamoured by its loveliness, was softly sleeping there.*

*But grace of form and feature were lost in sweet surprise
When the gazer felt the liquid light that trembled from her eyes;
So much of soul was in the look, so arch and yet so innocent,
T'was love and timid play fullness in one expression blent.*

*Yet oft that deeper light would steal into her eyes,
Which speaks of depth of feeling, boundless as mid-sea skies,
When listening the wild music the woodland birds would make,
Or the low whispered murmurings, the wavelets of the lake.*

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*Down through the regal woods of June,
The sun poured fierce the heat of noon.
All life had fled the open glade,
And even in the deepest shade,
A hunter who had thither strayed,
By some strange freak of fate or chance,
From far off, sunny, vine-wreathed France,*

*For sight of living creatures sighed,
At length the waters of the lake he spied--
Its hills all blue as though a veil of azure from the sky
Had dropped between their tree-tops green,
And his expectant eye.*

*He hastened on with quickened pace, impatient to survey,
This new-found gem of loveliness dropped sudden in his way--
But pauses, for a form of grace starts up before him, fair as dream
Of twilight, crowned as evening's queen
With stars and pearly dew.*

*One startled glance from her soft eyes,
And, while yet lost in pleased surprise, she vanished from his
view,
And left him wondering if some sprite --- The guardian of the wave---
had not just vanished from his sight to seek her mystic cave!*

*And she, Ke-she-ah-ben-o-qua, fled to a deeper shade,
To question why so strange a face appeared to her,
A simple maid, at such a time, in such a place.
Was it some form that she had seen returned to earth from
that fair shore?*

*Whose hills, arrayed in fadeless green,
Departed spirits wander o'er?*

*The eve dispelled the mystery, as she drew near the camp,
Just as the faint new moon lit up her silver crescent lamp,
Smoking the pipe of peace, close by her father's side,
Was that strange face she'd seen, that form of regal pride!*

*She rather felt, than saw his eyes rise from her father's face
To read the sweet confusion that lent her cheeks new grace.
As trembling, she hastened to seek the wigwam's shade,
Ere her timid heart's emotion to the stranger was betrayed.*

*The months rolled by, the autumn came, yet still the hunter staid,
As wondering as the Indians there, their camp -- his own -- he
made.*

*With them he chased the slender deer, and trapped the grim black bear,
Engaged in every dangerous feat, a fearless soul might dare:*

*With the glory of his deeds, his skills in every art,
Had won the envy or the love of every dusky heart.
And one heart more than all the rest watched for the even tide
To call him from the chase, to linger by her side.*

*To lay some trifle in her hand, per chance,
A single flower,
Or bird, with sun bright plumage,
Caught in some woodland bower.*

*You'd have known why the early dawning
Had given to her its name,*

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By her cheek so like Aurora's

When lit by the dawn's first flame,

When his steps, making music, were heard in the wood,

And she knew in a moment more

His shadow would fall on the grass where she stood,

Close by the wigwam door.

One night she parted from his side,

And strayed along the shore

Where in the moonlight's silver tide,

she'd wandered oft before--

Oft, when her heart had known no thought

Beyond the pearly shell,

The wave's soft rippling o're the lake,

Washed landward by their swell.

But now her heart was far too full

Of a great new found joy.

To think of vanished scenes or hours

Of childhood and its toy;

For on her lips burned love's first kiss,

And life for her had known no hour

More perfect in its bliss.

Yet though so happy, was it fear,

Or some foreboding shadow near,

That kept within her joyous breast

A vague strange feeling of unrest?

The wind, in whispering to the lake,

Its haunting memories seemed to wake,

And though the night was silver bright,

And every wave was gilt with light,

Their murmur seemed a captive's sigh

Or some low dirge's melody

And through the eve she seemed to hear

The breathing of a presence near,

Oh! Had the form she most should dread,

Windago, first in every chase,

The warrior of the stern, dark face,

Whose lengthened gaze she'd ever fled,

Haunted their moonlit trysting place!

When early morn, with dewy lips,

First kissed the slumbering lake,

And smiled to see the sleeping wave

In dimpling ripples wake,

Each lover sought the chieftain's side

To ask the maiden as his bride;

The one, with all that hate could paint

Stamped on each dusky lineament,

Showing the maid's foreboding true

In every glance his fierce eyes threw

Upon the other, who like stone,

Scarce curved his lips in quiet scorn.

The chief possessed one passion--pride--

All others in his breast had died,

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Or in this one were lost.

*Love never had his bosom stirred--
He felt no meaning in the word,
The question, then, within his mind,
Was not which suitor was most kind--
Which loved his daughter most;*

*But which, as hunter, could exceed
The other in some daring deed,
He paused a moment. In a tree
Towering high, o'er a cliff,*

*He'd seen an Eagle seek her nest the night before,
When in his skiff, he fished along the shore.
The place is found without much search,
For near the shore two groups of Birch*

*On either side the rocky way
Their graceful, silvery branches sway;
Then higher up for many feet,
Only nude rocks, one's footsteps meet-*

*One fragment, huge and gray has on its side
The ripple marks of some old tide-
And then a Pine, with fire scathed base,
Helps mark the pathway to the place;*

*A half-burnt tree still higher stands;
And then, defying feet and hands,*

*A hill-top fortress, crowned with pines,
The looked for cliff against the sky reclines.*

*Not long the silence was unbroke;
Pointing toward it, the chieftain spoke-
'He shall, the chosen suitor be,
Who first from the boughs of yonder tree*

*An unfledged Eaglet shall bring me,"
Scarce had they heard the Chief's reply
Ere they had flung their blankets bye,
And reached their boats upon the strand.*

*One hasty glance, their pathway planned,
Quick the time their paddles make,
O'er the waters of the lake,
As swift their steps of from block to block,*

*Up that wild mass of broken rock,
O're fallen trees and fissures deep
Thro' which the startled reptiles creep,
Thro' briers, that with cruel grasp,*

*Claimed blood as tribute for their clasp,
No pause - no rest - in this wild race
Save one dread moment, face to face,
When they had reached the crag's rude base;*

*And then no words, the silence broke;
Their eyes alone, the challenge spoke*

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*With flashed of that vivid fire,
Subtle as thought, without a name,*

*That bursts from souls when all aflame,
Telling the dreadful purpose of their ire!
And then, as with new madness strung,
Up the steep crag, the pale-face sprung,*

*Resting his feet he knew not where--
Whether on ivy, rock or air,
That he had gained upon his foe,
Was all he wished or cared to know.*

*The fatal tree was reached at last,
And upward he was climbing fast,
When to its base, the red man came,
Something more than rage or shame
Was in that upward glance of flame -
A deadly purpose nerved his frame!*

*Eager to know the lovers' fate -
Too eager in the camp to wait -*

*The maid, with others, crossed the tide
And clambered up the mountain side.
She found a spot where sought-could hide,
The sequel she must wait -*

*A moss crowned rock, quite near the base
Of the gray frowning precipice --*

*And there, with eager upturned face,
She stood in wild suspense.*

*She saw him seize the eagle's nest,
And place an Eaglet in his breast;
But ah! too late, he came to know
His weight was resting on a bough
Within Windago's grasp.*

*In vane he stretched his arm to clasp
The trunk in their embrace;
They only met a fiendish form
and a more fiendish face,*

*One upward glance - t'was a look of pain -
A frantic grasp that was all in vain -
And then far down by the maiden's feet
Was a pool of crimson gore,*

*A broken branch, a shapeless form -
An eaglet - nothing more!
A cry, as when the heart strings break,
A moment trembled o'er the lake:*

*And then, as mocking its despair,
A yell of triumph filled the air,
For Windago had gained the band
holding an Eaglet in his hand!*

*Like one who walks in some dread dream,
Unconscious quite - of reason's beam*

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The maiden found the water's side,
Here, the dark horror of the scene,
Rushed o'er her like a tide -

The mangled corpse - the exultant yell -
Windago's smile as Pierie fell --
Oh! agony! could she ever wed
That face that smiled above her dead!

Oft, as they'd glided o'er the lake,
When every wave was bright,
Pierie had spoken of a land
That never knew no night;

A land where all love's dreams come true--
Where lovers never weep--
Whose gates should open to their view
When death should bid them sleep.

She'd seek its shore---why should she wait?
Perchance she'd meet him at its gate;
If not, to lie beneath the breast
Of darkest waters, were more blest
Than life, with her dark fate.

Storms long since have swept away
The tree that held the nest;
But towering high above the rest,
To mark the spot, they say,
There stands a huge, rough rock today;

And, 'tis said, when through the sky
The hoarse autumnal breezes fly,
Scattering the garlands of gold and red

Autumn has wreath'd round the forest's head,
The maid comes back from her watery grave,
And wonders at night along the shore,
Where oft with her lover she'd wondered of yore;

Wreathing her arms, slender and bare,
With the long, dark waves of her midnight hair;
And then o'er the rock, like a spectral shade,
Glides the shadowy form of the Indian maid'

And a mournful sob and a wailing cry
Sweeps through the pines with a shivering sigh;
As, like a smoke-wreath, she fades away
Into the mist of twilight gray.

Woe to the warrior, maid or child'
That meets this spectre, weird and wild,
Or hears the notes of the vengeful cry
That fills the air as it passes by!

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A Legend of Devil's lake by Ben. D. House Dedicated to J. C. Chandler

*A nameless Lake with sullen roar
Broke on the rocky strand;
While Demons of the lake and shore
Seemed clasping hand in hand*

*And geni of the other blue,
With Gnomes beneath the earth
Seemed met in conclave real and true,
To shriek their ghostly mirth.*

*The wind awakened from its lair,
The clouds drove to and fro,
And chased the waves in upper air,
As surged the lake below.*

*And foam-drops from the upper main,
To meet the waves beneath,
Fell in a cold and sleety rain,
Which covered hill and heath.*

*Yet, in yon glen, the camp-fires seem
To scoff the Storm-King's thrall;
And with their bright and ruddy gleam
They rend the midnight pall.
And round the blaze in circling ring
With tomahawk in hand,
The Chiefs a war-song madly sing,
To cheer their warrior band.*

*But, borne upon the midnight blast,
A shuddering sound was heard,--
As though, on rushing pinions, passed
Some evil-omened bird.*

*Fell o're that throng a hush profound,
As though each heart were chilled!
As nearer came that weird sound,
The ghostly sound was stilled.*

*Each warrior grasped his ashen bow,
And sprang into the shade
To watch the coming of the foe,
Concealed, but undismayed.*

*And through the darkness of the night
There strode a stalwart form,
Whose eyes were fixed upon the light
Which pierced the driving storm.*

*He halted not until he'd crossed
The camp-fire's gleam of light,
Which, with a blood red glow embossed
The storm-king's shield of night.*

*The scalp-lock o'er his shoulders fell,
And from his hair, the sleet
Seemed changed as by a demon's spell,
To blood drops by his feet.*

*Five hundred braves were at his back,--
With stealthy step they trod;
Each warrior stepping in the track
He left upon the sod.*

*With folded arms across his breast,
He spake, with flashing eye:
"The wolves have left their coward nest!
For well they knew 'twas I!"*

*He scarce had ceased ere bow-strings' twang
Was heard from out the shade,
And war-cry answering war-cry rang
From brave 'gainst brave arrayed.*

*Shriek answered shriek-- from hill to hill
The cry was oft repeated!
Till echo, answering echo, told
The tale of foe defeated!*

*The fires gleamed brighter from the glen,
Where erst the war-song sounded;
But they who sang were prisoners then,
And by their foes surrounded.*

*The lake's wild roar was heard below;
The pine trees moaned and shivered;
The braves defeated knew their fate,--
Yet, not a muscle quivered.*

*They thought, that in the happy grounds
Along the sparkling rivers,
That they forevermore would hunt,
With never failing quivers.*

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The conquering chieftain bids his braves
With throngs of bark to bind their slaves,
And lead them to the lake;
That they, before they leave this land
To join the phantom hunting band,
Their thirst might freely slake.

But when they reached the rock-bound
shore,

His voice is heard, above the roar
That rages on the strand;
And thus he speaks unto his braves:
"These wolves who robbed our father's graves,
Shall bleach upon the sand!"

"The fish shall feed from off their bones!
Their beds shall be upon the stones
That lie beneath the waves!
Their scalps shall in our wigwams hang!
Their bow-strings in our hands shall twang!
And they shall have no graves!"

Then, as his order loud was given,
Their death song chanted up to heaven,
Above the wild wind's roar.
Their scalps from off their heads were torn,
And at the belt of victors worn,
And they cast from the shore!

The morning's sun in gloom arose;---
But they who drowned their conquered foes
Were treading forest path.
The waves still lashed their rock-bound
shore,
And seemed to vent, in sullen roar,
A very Demon's wrath.

Adown the rocks, far up the side
Of hill which raised its head in pride,
A chieftain slowly came;
And he alone, of all his band,
Still deadly weapons held in hand,---s eyes
flashed vengeful flame.

And for his braves, who slept below,
A curse he chanted, deep and low,---
And these words he spake:
"Forever cursed be the face---
Of all these hills, and all the space
Which holds this cursed lake!"

"And Minni-Wauken be thy name,
And cursed be his waters!
For thou shall have the darkest fame
With all our sons and daughters.

"And nevermore the red man's oar
Shall dip the cursed water
Made foul by death and Satan's breath
Breathed from the field of slaughter.

"For Manitou has cursed with woe
These murderous waters, ever;
And on this shore shall never more
Be slung the red man's quiver!"

To them its shore forevermore
Was like the Stygian river
Where souls in woe roam to and fro,
"Forever, and forever."

Fair lake! thy name shall never more
Be linked with thoughts infernal;
While there are blooming on thy shore
So many gardens vernal.

Despite the red man's bitter curse,
Upon thy southern border
A vineyard ripens in the sun,
Mid nature's wild disorder

Fair Kirkland! thou didst break the spell!
Thy groves with beauty laden,
Have changed what proved the red man's
hell
Into the white man's Aiden.

And "Minnehaha" be thy name,---
Thou Lake of laughing waters!
For thou shalt know the brightest fame,
With all our sons and daughters!