

The Camp Of Souls

Aesma Daeva

My white canoe, like the silvery air
O'er the River of Death that darkly rolls
When the moons of the world are round and fair,
I paddle back from the 'Camp of Souls.'
When the wishton-wish in the low swamp grieves
Come the dark plumes of red 'Singing Leaves.'

Two hundred times have the moons of spring
Rolled over the bright bay's azure breath
Since they decked me with plumes of an eagle's wing,
And painted my face with the 'paint of death,'
And from their pipes o'er my corpse there broke
The solemn rings of the blue 'last smoke.'

Two hundred times have the wintry moons
Wrapped the dead earth in a blanket white;
Two hundred times have the wild sky loons
Shrieked in the flush of the golden light
Of the first sweet dawn, when the summer weaves
Her dusky wigwam of perfect leaves.

Two hundred moons of the falling leaf
Since they laid my bow in my dead right hand
And chanted above me the 'song of grief'
As I took my way to the spirit land;
Yet when the swallow the blue air cleaves
Come the dark plumes of red 'Singing Leaves.'

White are the wigwams in that far camp,
And the star-eyed deer on the plains are found;
No bitter marshes or tangled swamp
In the Manitou's happy hunting-ground!
And the moon of summer forever rolls
Above the red men in their 'Camp of Souls.'

Blue are its lakes as the wild dove's breast,
And their murmurs soft as her gentle note;
As the calm, large stars in the deep sky rest,
The yellow lilies upon them float;
And canoes, like flakes of the silvery snow,

Through the tall, rustling rice-beds come and go.

Green are its forests; no warrior wind
Rushes on war trail the dusk grove through,
With leaf-scalps of tall trees mourning behind;
But South Wind, heart friend of Great Manitou,
When ferns and leaves with cool dews are wet,
Bows flowery breaths from his red calumet.

Never upon them the white frosts lie,
Nor glow their green boughs with the 'paint of death';
Manitou smiles in the crystal sky,
Close breathing above them His life-strong breath;
And He speaks no more in fierce thunder sound,
So near is His happy hunting-ground.

Yet often I love, in my white canoe,
To come to the forests and camps of earth:
'Twas there death's black arrow pierced me through;
'Twas there my red-browed mother gave me birth;
There I, in the light of a young man's dawn,
Won the lily heart of dusk 'Springing Fawn.'

And love is a cord woven out of life,
And dyed in the red of the living heart;
And time is the hunter's rusty knife,
That cannot cut the red strands apart:
And I sail from the spirit shore to scan
Where the weaving of that strong cord began.

But I may not come with a giftless hand,
So richly I pile, in my white canoe,
Flowers that bloom in the spirit land,
Immortal smiles of Great Manitou.
When I paddle back to the shores of earth
I scatter them over the white man's hearth.

For love is the breath of the soul set free;
So I cross the river that darkly rolls,
That my spirit may whisper soft to thee
Of thine who wait in the 'Camp of Souls.'
When the bright day laughs, or the wan night grieves,
Come the dusky plumes of red 'Singing Leaves.'
[Isabella Valancy Crawford]