

The Legend of Owatonna

Dark Days had befallen Chief Wabena, mighty warrior, hunger, sickness, and death stalked around the tepees clustered beneath the towering crags of the Minnesota River. Weaheta (snow) covered the hunting trails to a depth unknown before. Huntsmen returned, day after day, empty-handed. Famine threatened. One by one the faithful braves, their squaws, sons and daughters changed “Obewana wana” (I go, I go) while Chewadala, medicine man, continued to mix his brew of birch bark balsam and wintergreen berry and burn his fires of spruce and resin in supplication to the spirit healer.

And so the Moon of Difficulty (January) and the Moon of Sorrows (February) were written into the star scroll for future generations as the most bitter of all the years for Wabena and his tribesmen. And then, one day a terrible sorrow befell the tepee of the Great Chief himself. Owatonna, Beautiful daughter with eyes that reflected the brown of an October forest; whose voice trilled as sweetly – weary from the effects of the winter struggle, sent for Chewadala and his medicine chest.

Wabena watched by the sick couch for two moons. Then ordered his braves to prepare for a journey. Southward they trekked through the valley of many rivers and across the fertile prairies until, one day, they arrived at a beautiful spot where golden oak, proud maple and glittering birch swayed harmoniously in the marvelous setting. A purling brook danced among the shadows, plunged down the slope of surrounding crest and disappeared – happy and ambitious – as magnificence of the picture. On its bank of wondrous water gushed from the earth and race away with the fullness of the stream. Of this bubbling fountain Wabena had heard strange tales. For many years his Father and his Father’s Father before him had been sent to drink of this magic water. Many had told of its healing power until the fame of “Minnewaucan” (curing water) had become a campfire tale.

“**D**rink deep and often of this water, my daughter,” Chief Wabena counseled Owatonna, “and we shall be happy once more.. The sparkle will return to your eyes, the flush to your cheeks, strength to your limbs, and the laughter to your lips.”

Owatonna, forthwith and for many days thereafter, knelt at the bubbling fount and did as she was bid and with the approach of the Moon of Color (May) all was as her Father had predicted. Joy reigned in the tepee of the Great Chief.

Many years have passed since then. For years, Owatonna has slept peacefully on the hillside just above “curing water,” cradled there by kinsfolk at the close of a long and useful life in memory of the days when the sparkling, healing mineral water brought her back to health and happiness. Indian lore will tell that, even today. Her kindly spirit hovers near the spot and Owatonna ever beckons the weary traveler to pause in the beautiful valley that he too, may drink long and often, of the water which continues to dance merrily and murmur softly, sweetly on its long journey down through the valley and into the big river which leads to the sea.