

WILD RICE

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BK

High into the softly fallen night
the flame from our campfire flew,
We four sat together, our eyes straight
ahead, as these words, scarcely spoken
came through:

"My brothers -

My sisters -

Listen to the tale of the night

Listen to the wisdom of the wind:

(Then a silence, broken only by the crack of
embers on the dying plain.)

"There was a time when we were strong

a time of deer-

a time of quail-

a time of noonday sun.

There was a time when our forests were green

a time of fertility for all living things

a time of great buffalo run.

In these days of long ago there was Wild Rice
for everyone.

Then came the intruder

the rampant killer of deer,⁺ quail and buffalo

the rampant killer of men.

Then the long ^{agon} days of darkness began

when the intruder took our lands.

And Wild Rice lost heart and began to die out

and we had to search for days to find her.

Then it was when I was small,

we set out in our canoes to harvest
~~the yellow grain~~
~~harpoon-bogey~~ on the banks of Lake Keshema.

On our side of the Lake

(where we had been confined to a reservation)

no rice grew.

Across the Lake it ^{plucked into the trees, and} grew in great abundance ^{in holes on the ocean}.

Early in the morning we began to shake the

headed grain into our canoes,

singing and joking as we worked

over the grain we had carefully tressed up

and nursed during the growing season.

In spite of troubles,

Life was good, as long as we papoose went hungry.

Wild-Rice would see to that:

Then a white man with a gun ordered us away from
the Rice.

He said it was his, for the birds which he wished
to shoot as they sought resting and feeding
grounds.

We were troubled and amazed, we were panic stricken
when we realized it meant no food for our winter
supply.

The food of our forefathers forbidden to us
by a stranger from across the seas.
A stranger who was steadily driving us

as a mountain lion drives a deer
into a smaller and smaller circle,

~~taking freedom from us -
starving us -
amphilitating us.~~

Our Lake was no longer our home,

The sense of being watched -
of being scorned -
and now refused our staple food.

There was low muttering among us
as we settled into our canoes for the
trip back across the Lake.

Our ancestor Manibus would have played a
magical trick - would have turned him
into a rabbit - would have ^{turned} made him
plead-for-his-life - into a stone

But this none of us could do.

But we could speak to those unseen but seeing
spirits.

We could ask Kik-ki-kan and Mas-quit-quit
to help us.

We could ask those whose land this was.

Those who eternally loved the early morning
sun-rays over the blue of Lake Keeshena.

We could ask those who were invisible presences
at our Bear ~~Feast~~ Festival

Those who dance with us
in our Big Lodge Ceremony.

As our canoe began its homeward way
my father spit onto the waters
and spoke to the wind

that blizzed to the intruder:

I say that
"No more wild Rice grow on ^{that} Manitowish's Lake shore
wild Rice grow only on ^{the} Indian side of Lake."
will our the

We paddled back with heavy hearts.

My father alone seemed at peace

an inner faith and knowledge.

As we pulled into the homeward shore

great clouds gathered -

waves grew high

as a spirit came up out of the depths of the Lake.

The skins in our teepees danced as animals

again alive in the great wind.

That night there was sleep for no one.

For no one but my father.

For him it was an intermingling of life

and death. A sleep from which there was no

waking.

KI-KI-kan-claimed HIS-own.

As the morning star faded from the sky

The great winds sank back to the depths of the Lake

And we beheld the handwork of Manibus:

The boggy marshes of wild Rice
on the opposite shore had been
torn asunder (by powerful medicine)
and were now a part of our land .

Keritue- Eik-ki-kan - and Mas-qui-quit
had taken care of their own.

heard my father speak
from that day to this, wild Rice grows
only on the Indian side of Lake Keshena.

My Brothers -

My Sisters *

~~There is none we do not know that we can understand."~~