

Mike Ness

"Hiawatha's Departure"

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By the shores of gitche gumee,
By the shining big-sea-water,
At the doorway of the wigwam,
In the early summer morning,

Hiawatha stood and waited.
All the air was full of freshness,
All the earth was bright and joyous,
And before him, through the sunshine,

Westward toward the neighboring forest
Passed in golden swarms the ahmo,
Passed the bees, the honey-makers,
Burning, singing in the sunshine.

Bright above him shone the heavens,
Level spread the lake before him;
From it's bosom leaped the sturgeon,
Sparkling, flashing in the sunshine;

On it's margin the great forest
Stood reflected in the water,
Every tree-top had it's shadow,
Motionless beneath the water.

From the brow of hiawatha
Gone was every trace of sorrow,
As the fog from off the water,
As the mist from off the meadow.

With a smile of joy and gladness,
With a look of exultation,
As of one who in a vision
Sees what is to be, but is not,

Stood and waited hiawatha.
Toward the sun his hands were lifted,
Both the palms spread out toward it,
And between the parted fingers

Fell the sunshine on his features,

Flecked with light his naked shoulders,
As it falls and flecks an oak-tree
Through the rifted leaves and branches.

O'er the water floating, flying,
Something in the hazy distance,
Something in the mists of morning,
Loomed and lifted from the water,

Now seemed floating, now seemed flying,
Coming nearer, nearer, nearer.
Was it shingebis the diver?
Or the pelican, the shada?

Or the heron, the shuh-shuh-gah?
Or the white goose, waw-be-wana,
With the water dripping, flashing,
From it's glossy neck and feathers?

It was neither goose nor diver,
Neither pelican nor heron,
O'er the water floating, flying,
Through the shining mist of morning,

But a birch canoe with paddles,
Rising, sinking on the water,
Dripping, flashing in the sunshine;
And within it came a people

(the son of the evening star)

Can it be the sun descending
O'er the level plain of water?
Or the red swan floating, flying,
Wounded by the magic arrow,

Staining all the waves with crimson,
With the crimson of it's life-blood,
Filling all the air with splendor,
Filling all the air with plumage?

Yes; it is the sun descending,
Sinking down into the water;
All the sky is stained with purple,
All the water flushed with crimson!

No; it is the red swan floating,
Diving down beneath the water;
To the sky it's wings are lifted,
With it's blood the waves are reddened!

Over it the star of evening
Melts and trembles through the purple,
Hangs suspended in the twilight,
Walks in silence through the heavens.

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