

THE LEGENDS OF CRATER LAKE
(Arranged by W. Craig Thomas)

The Peace Moon

At the time of the peace moon, in the year of the beginning, the Klamaths and the Modocs and all other tribes dwelt together in friendship and it was a time of gifts and plenty and the taking in marriage. The animals roamed the earth without fear of each other under their own gods, and spoke together. Also the gods came to the land of the Klamaths and walked with them and were with them in the hunting, and the feasting, and rejoiced with them.

Now it chanced that during the passage of that moon, when the gods had come to the meadows of the Klamaths, the tribes were ruled by a mighty chieftain, whose name may not be spoken. 1.

Courageously this chief sought to bear himself with propriety before his guests, but his heart was heavy that no son had been sent who might profit by his years and his station and inherit his place after him. And yet because his heart was like a stone within his breast, the gods took pity on him and in due time there came to that lodge a daughter to comfort and care for the old chief.

Now this chief was very old and very wise and he knew that even the gods can make mistakes, so he caused the child to be trained in all those things which are befitting a brave of the tribe, and bade her deport herself as a youth among the other youths, so that the gods should remedy their error, and that the young chief might be found inferior to none.

And Kequolla-Tyee-Tihowitt, who was named Llao, and was the god of the "down-below", was with her father and the maiden in her father's house. And the god of the down-below became inflamed with her fairness, which was as of a youth, and by her eyes which were as of a fawn, and he sought her of her father saying:

"With me she shall suffer no want nor shall there be danger to frighten her; but shall descend with me into the center of the earth and there abide with me forever."

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Then a great fear arose within the breast of the chief as he listened to these promises, for he dreaded the wrath of the gods. But the knowledge remained within him that she was in truth his son who was to profit by his years and his substance and so could be the wife of none.

So a great rage possessed Lla-o when his desire was denied him and no reason given for the denial; but because it was in the time of the peace moon he must contain his wrath with amity in the land of the Klamaths.

Yet each time he regarded the maiden, his love for her burned through the shadows of his eyes, and each time he beheld her father, his hate tightened his sinews as the gut of a newstrung bow.

He hated also, Skell, who was the ruler of all things on the surface of the earth, and whose servants and children were the bear, the fox, and the eagle, the coyote, the dove, and the antelope. For Skell had noticed in the hunt one whose fleetness was that of the antelope, and whose grace was that of the wind-swayed flowers; and he sought out the lad and questioned him. And as the boy spoke, the god thought he beheld the beauty which precedes the sunrise and listened to the voice of the water whispering to the wild rice. Thus he observed her to be a woman, and he also demanded her of her father. And only then in his despair, did the aged chief tell the god of all things above, the answer he had made Lla-o, and Skell laughed aloud.

"Justly are you known as a great chief", he said. "For had Lla-o taken your child, she would have vanished from the top of the world, to serve unending days in darkness and among those monstrous things which are of Lla-o. But with me, she shall be forever where the Shadow's winds but soften the sun. And her children shall play with the young of the fox and the bear and the antelope and be as they are, the messengers of that god who rules all things above the earth."

Even more than the wrath of Lla-o, the father feared the wrath of Skell; yet he made answer as he must, that this child of mankind might not be the wife of any. Yet because he trusted Skell with the trust of his own hand, he told Skell of his prayers and his offerings to the gods and of their sending him a daughter who was to become a son and must remain a son forever. And after he had listened Skell departed without anger and spied upon Lla-o,

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and defeated the inflamed god who sought to abduct the maiden into his own land of fires and monsters and darkness.

Therefore Lla-O hated Skell, even more than the father but it was still the time of the peace moon and he was helpless; and must contain his anger for the Klamaths.

The War Begins

In the year of the beginning, the lands of Lla-O below the world; but at a certain place they were above the world also, and in this place the fires that are always below burst out above; where there are great holes of fire and great mountains. And there are devils in those mountains which take any shape they choose. It is the land of evil spirits, of swift winds, of horrid echoes and the thick, yellow water-smoke which in the year of the beginning breathed death to any living things within its folds.

Thence departed Lla-O at the waning of the peace moon with bitterness and hatred in his heart against his fellow Skell and against the chieftain of the Klamath people. But he could not spread the awful water-smoke upon the valley because of his desire for the maiden who dwelt there with her father.

So he wrapped the water-smoke about his shoulders that he should no longer see the valley and then dwelling there he hated, and he sat upon a great stone where the mountains sprawled around him and waited for the passing of many years that the fears of Skell might be abated.

Thereafter, he spied upon Skell through the leaves of the ground oak, which is poisonous to any excepting the evil powers and their kind. He observed how Skell directed the sunlight where best to ripen the valleys and the huckleberries (2) that grew upon the mountains, and how he shielded the doe from the path of the panther, and the young coyote from the fangs of the wolf.

Thus envy was added to the temper which curdled in the heart of Lla-O and from the height of a great cliff he cast

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a molten stone which arched the skies with fire and smote Skell upon the back of his head and he died.

Thus he killed Skell and while the antelope and the bear and the eagle were afar, creatures of Lla-O sprang through the earth and got the heart from the body of Skell.

High was the pride of Lla-O because of what had befallen and so that all the valley things might know that he was now Skookum Lla-O, which means a great many or more than one, he caused a messenger to descend into the valleys and meadows of the Klamaths and proclaim to all things living there that he was their god thenceforth, and to render him obedience. And this messenger came to the fountain whence Skell had drunk and charged all the faithful of Skell who were there assembled that they abandon their wailing and repair to the throne rock of Lla-O which overtopped all other mountains and there join their new peers, which would be the creatures of Lla-O and join in the games of rejoicing for the overthrow of Skell.

Mid-day shone upon the topmost leaf of the lodge-pole pine when the messenger had fulfilled his mission, but the sun had passed below the western hills ere any man turned his head. And when he looked, the spot, where the messenger had stood, was empty, and no man had witnessed his departure. And when the Voice spoke, each thought it the voice of his neighbor. The antelope believed he listened to the bear, and the eagle to the fox, but the coyote, who was craftiest of them all, believed he heard the echoes of far thunder and he was guided thereby.

And he told the owl, who could see in the night, to search all and make sure the messenger of Lla-O had indeed departed. Then flew the owl through the woods and through the paths of the woods and found him gone.

Then spake the coyote, "We who have lost our god, are as children who have lost their father. But shall we like children cry in a circle nor seek a remedy for that which may be restored? For it had been spoken that the heart of Skell shall live although it be possessed by the enemy, and returned to the body, the body shall live and be renewed in all strength and spirit out of the hands of Lla-O and the hands of all other evil ones who disdain it."

Then again the owl arose and flew three times around the spring to make certain no eavesdropper had heard the speech

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of the coyote, and each member of the council arose in silence and departed from his place, and each as he departed turned his face for a breath toward the westward whence come and go all spirits.

Now it is a fact, that the god of the up-above, Sneth, who is the most beneficent of all the gods, sees all that befalls beneath the skies. It is he who sends the nourishing rains, and the sunlight and the clouds which beget the rains, and he also it is who sends the snows, although no man understands his reason therefor. Thus from his place in the heavens, he perceived the flight of the missile which was cast by Lla-O and marked its flight. Greatly he wondered that one god should assail another and he was perplexed; for he had loved Skell and had often sought council with him. And in the end, he came to despise Lla-O and to distrust him; and he prepared whirlwinds, and lightnings and thunderbolts against Lla-O, for this god was a prophet who foresaw many things.

The Eruption

Thus came discord upon the world and the first cleavage between gods and men. And it distressed Lla-O when he saw what he had done, but none can consort with evil powers and avoid their poisons. Demons were his cohort, nor could he endure the doubt within him that if mortals and their kind might refuse his commandments, was he longer a god. Even his own people shrank from his presence and marked how he sat, day after day, gnawing his knuckles as an old dog a bone, and flashing the lightnings from his eyes over the skies of the Klamaths.

So after a time, he dispatched a new messenger to the people of the valloys and the chieftain of those peoples stating that if, before the end of the third day the maiden were delivered to him, the Klamath nation should become invulnerable and none would dare oppose them. But if his demand be again refused, he would bring against them all the agencies of his lower world; that the earth should open and swallow up thier houses and the houses of their fellows; and that the heavens should rain stones and fire; and the

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yellow water-smoke should come down into the valleys and the funeral dirge be ended, only when there lived no more to chant.

Thus Lla-O sent three days of terror and despair upon the Klamaths, for the maiden was the heart of every man and each would have died to save her from Lla-O if such saving could have been done. And the maiden herself had called them together, for they were as her brothers, and she told them that she should be cast into the trap of Lla-O for the salvation of her people. But they restrained her with thongs about her wrists and about her feet, within her father's house.

So descended the sun upon the third day, nor did it vanish as before, but withdrew itself at the horizon with an amazing cloud of light. Then the people of the valleys who knew that infernal things were about to appear, cast themselves to the ground, and each covered his face that he might not witness the approaching spectre of death.

Thrice the ground beneath their bodies bellied and sank again, until the trees broke their branches against another and great rocks bounded down the mountainsides, driven from their places by what occurred. Then while the whole world seemed to groan aloud with intolerable rupture, and with such a sound as had never before been heard, the throne rock of Lla-O burst upward and outward, and great objects and smaller fell through the air, bearing with them the very stars of the heavens.

Full seven days no sun was seen and there was no way to tell this day from another, and there was no light save the glare of the flaming mountains, and every day of those seven days the yellow water-smoke took toll in agony from those that could not live. And this was the time of fire and torture and rapine in the land, until Tlama, greatest of all the gods, arose in anger and demanded of Lla-O that these things must cease.

But Lla-O had gone mad with the bloodshed and the tumult and he asked of Tlama whether these men had not affronted him, refused his commandments, and was it untrue that the subjects of Skell had tricked him out of his vengeance beneath his very hand. And Tlama knew that Lla-O spake the truth, but he also knew that the fault was with Lla-O, for he had fallen enamored of a mortal woman in defiance of all the gods and continued his quest of her against their wills.

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Then again Lla-O demanded of Tlama whether men could prevail against the gods unless they possessed the knowledge of heaven (3) which was a dreadful thing, for then they would match wits against them and there would be neither gods nor men.

So Tlama listened to Lla-O and believed; and he consented that the four wise men of the Klamaths who were also the priests and the doctors and the chiefs of the people (4), should be delivered to Lla-O, to the end that the supremacy of heaven should continue over all things of the earth and that all conflict should be ended thenceforth and forever between them.

The Plan of the Coyote

The children of Skell, in silent groups of two and three, quitted the valleys at the break of day, to assemble far within the lands of Lla-O where the great, frowning rock scowled at its shadow flung across the hills. That was a land of bitter soils and scarce waters, of thin weeds and knotted forests; and the cliffs of that land were banded as a blanket with this color and that.

Now the people of Skell found it strange that although they had come as had been bidden, none was there to greet them and none moved among those hemlocks which were before the great rock. Therefore, after a time, the people of Skell desired protection from the high sun under those trees, but when the eagle sought to alight he fell to the ground with a great shout, for the tree gobbled like a turkey which is like the laughter of evil ones, and sprang out from beneath him. And a noble buck sprang high in the air, for one of the trees had reached out from behind and grabbed his tail, which is the trick of a monster. This being wore the shape of a scorpion and its laughter was like the rustle of a squirrel among dried leaves. Thus it came about that the coyote, who was craftiest of all, knew in truth all these trees to be evil powers. He remembered the messenger of Lla-O who had vanished at the spring, and gave thanks to the spirit of Skell that all there had spoken with silence.

Silently, then, he warned all who were with him to draw together at a distance; then some looked at the heavens and

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some looked at the ground, but none of them looked at the creatures of Lla-O who danced around them and stamped upon the ground and laughed until the mountains rang.

But Lla-O had commanded his people to make a peace with the people of Skell, so after they had laughed their fill, they led the way to a feast which had been prepared within the shadow of a mighty cliff. But Lla-O who spied upon them saw that none would eat of the meat for it was the flesh of the valley, and none would break of the acorn bread, for it was shortened with the fat of their fellows.

And Lla-O grew red with anger and demanded that the heart of Skell be brought before them that they might learn who now was God. And when the heart was come, one of the creatures whose shape was that of a scorpion (5) cast it with derision into the air, and another whose shape was that of a fish, leaped up and down crying, "Catch, brother, catch."

Then the coyote, who was craftiest of all, spake to the fox in the silent language; but aloud he laughed in scorn. "How puny a cast for so great a claw," he mocked. "Even the Coney who pants to lift a strawberry, could throw as far!"

"Aye?" cried the fish, who had caught the heart, "and could he cast as far as this?" Then springing up, he loosed a hurl that spun the treasure high and far.

Again laughed the coyote, more harshly than before. "A woman's throw", he sneered, "The elk could strike with his cloven hoof full thrice the distance."

Then up from his rock sprang the god of all things down below and cried in a great voice, "Could Skell himself have cast as far as this?" And bending himself like a bow, he made a mighty hurl which sped the heart high into the air and far into the valley below. And all stood breathless in the presence of such a throw and watched it with outstanding eyes.

Thus they saw the fox, who had waited where the coyote had bade him wait, spring into the air and catch the heart in its flight, and turn toward the valley of the Klamaths.

For the space of five pulses, each froze as he stood, at this audacity, then chaos and tumult burst forth in the land.

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of Lla-O. Spurring howl with oath, the multitude bore down upon the slowerfooted fox, intent to rend him. But through the horde sped the antelope, who caught the treasure from the gasping fox and leaped before the pursuers, fleetier than the flight of an arrow. Like the throb of drums were the feet of the followers, but like the rattle of hail were the hoofs of the deer. Harsh whistled the wind in the ears of the chase, but the branches bent after the antelope as he passed, and his shadow only broke the surface of the flowing stream.

But one who took the shape of a shadow sprang at the leaping heels and would have hamstrung them; but the eagle taloned the heart to himself, and with whistling wings swept above the clouds and vanished from the sight of all.

Then again tumult and contention broke out among the people of Lla-O: one saying do this thing, and another do that, until quiet ensued at length, and the voice of the dove (6) was heard over the land (7). And thus all knew that the heart was again with Skell, and fled like mad-men upward into the hills, of horror and disturbance from which they had sprung.

The Decision of the Gods

Now this decision regarding the medicine men was a bitter thing to Tlama, for he loved all his subjects. And after great thought, he summoned the God of the up above and held council with him, and he placed the four who had been chosen in that custody and ordained that they be guarded apart from the Klamaths and that none be allowed to approach them.

For these men possessed the art to exorcise evil spirits and to heal the sick and to foresee the future and also to engage in many other things of which the gods had taught them. Such knowledge must depart with them, nor be given to any who should remain.

And when the night was come, he gave each of these ancients a torch and bade them follow him, and he journeyed across the face of the lands and between the forests toward the place of Lla-O and the fates which awaited them.

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Thus they went forward in contentment, for they had held council with one another and had agreed that it was right that they should go. For, as they said, they were aged men whose lives were finished in their bodies and whose children had departed in the ways of life, as had been the custom since the beginning.

And they who remained in the valleys watched the torches as they went up the face of the mountains into the land of Lla-O; and each knew that not one of them would return.

So with them departed the secrets of the gods, and no man may say what befell them. That they should burn forever in the bowels of the earth was the punishment of Lla-O. He had opened a great hole in the top of the earth, which he had lined with fires that he might behold them writhing forever.

But Snaith who was the most benign of all the gods, had been hidden here to assemble all his waters, and all his snows, and all his rains; and the greatest of all the gods released these waters within the caverns of Lla-O and the fires thereof were quenched. Thus they remain unto this day.

The rocks still stand here in a great hollow ring, as Lla-O ced them; and between them lie the waters of Snaith; but what may lie beneath the waters no man knows. It is forbidden that man may look on the face of these waters lest he see what is hidden beneath. And the fires of Lla-O are surely vanquished, for these waters are very cold.

Therefore, when there is neither sun nor moon, nor any other way to see, the young men of the Klamaths steal silently and alone, downward to the edge of these waters, that they may once immerse themselves and depart, silently and singly as they came. For the still waters impart a strength and a valor which none other can withstand, and it contains, among other things, the knowledge of the lands and the forests and all that abide in them.

The Decision of Lla-O

Lla-O, brooding over the defeat at the hands of Skell's people became bitter with the review of his wrongs. Power had

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been his, yet at the height of his control, the people of his vanquished enemy had risen against him and had defeated him through strategy.

Thus he resolved to challenge Skell to a test of prowess and strength. And he set out for the land and the house of Skell.

Skell was out hunting, rejoicing in his renewed vigor and his restored life. But Lla-O waited in the house of his enemy until his return.

In face of the challenge, Skell hesitated. He did not want to wrestle, since Skell was not so strong as Lla-O, nor did he care to test his strength against the frenzied hatred of Lla-O.

But his people desired that he rid them of the menace of Lla-O's power, and rather than be branded cowardly by the gods and their peoples he consented to the bout.

So great however was the strength of Lla-O in his madness, that Skell was caught by the wrists and borne on Lla-O's back toward the hole of the fires in the mountain. And Lla-O taunted Skell as they went, with the fate from which there was no escape, that had been prepared.

"You are to be quartered," said Lla-O "And the people of Lla-O wait beneath the great rock for the feast of Skell's flesh which is to be thrown to them."

Skell pondered a moment and knew that it was to be done as was spoken, lest something shift the power from his enemy to him.

Then he asked that one arm be freed. "A louse is biting me," he said, "and I must scratch."

Lla-O shook the mountains with his laughter. "Why do you worry about a little thing like that," he said, "When in a few minutes you are to be thrown to my children?"

Yet Skell insisted that his last wish be granted. And when he had one of his arms free, he drew forth his great knife and cut Lla-O's head from his body. Great was the tumult in the fire mountain; as the rocks lifted and groaned and sides of the mountain shook. Yet the people of Lla-O thought it was

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but the triumphant return of the god of the down-below, and waited anxiously for the feast that had been promised them. And Skell sent a false message that it was Skell who had been killed and that the people of Lla-O should gather beneath the scowling cliff for the banquet.

Then on the rock which had been his throne, Lla-O was quartered and the blood drenched the cliffs around the chasm with red, and as each quarter was thrown over the people of Lla-O tore it asunder and swallowed it with great shouts of joy. Thus was the body of Lla-O destroyed. But when the head of Lla-O was thrown into the pit, his people recognized the familiar face and would not touch it. Today it lies where it fell within the lake, and strangers call it Wizard Island, yet those who know speak of it as the head of the vanquished Lla-O.

The stones within the chasm ceased their groaning with the destruction of Lla-O's body, and the fires died in great clouds of smoke, and all became dark and still. And the bereaved people of Lla-O gathered around the edge of the silent abyss, and shed their tears for the fate of Lla-O. And their tears fell within a dark pit. Today, the tears shine as clear and silent as they fell from the people of Lla-O, but we know them as Crater Lake.

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Sources and Footnotes

- (1) The Klamath Indians might not speak of their own dead, although they frequently spoke of vanquished enemies. Due to such religious practices, it was extremely difficult to obtain their legends from them. For that matter the number of legends was obviously limited by their beliefs.
.....Mrs. DeFault
- (2) There is reason to believe that the huckleberry had special significance for the Klamaths. Long treks were accomplished during the season of their ripening. They were probably among the extremely few sweets that the Indians had.
.....Count, Mrs. DeFault
- (3) Heaven, as a place, was completely unknown among the Klamaths, since their religion did not include such an expectancy. The term is used here only as a substitute for a term which is not included in our language.
.....Count, Mrs. DeFault from Colvig
- (4) Medicine men, as such, were unknown among the Indians of the Klamath region. But the chiefs, who really had little more than social position and wealth, rather than actual political power, held vaguely the positions of doctors and wisemen to some extent.
.....Steel, Count
- (5) In Steel's account, the scorpion is changed to that of a weasel who was recognized as Lla-O's brother. The coyote and the weasel both have figured prominently in the folklore of many western tribes. Other than the change from Mrs. DeFault's scorpion to Judge Steel's weasel, the legend is unchanged.
.....Thomas
- (6) The Indians say that a dove, though near, still sounds as though it were a long distance away. Steel in his account, says for that reason the people of Lla-O gave up the chase.
.....Thomas
- (7) Note the songs of Solomon, 11, 12.
.....Count, Mrs. DeFault

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- (8) This part of the legend is written up from earlier accounts by Judge Steel, who procured his information from the chief of the Klamaths through an interpreter. Judge Steel's personal account of the difficulty encountered in bribing the chief is of extreme interest from the standpoint of typical Indian reticence. A number of newminted dollars changed hands from Judge Steel to the interpreter before the chief could bring himself to tell the legends.

It is interesting to note that the history of the Indians in this region may easily have included the last eruptions of Wizard Island. The legend with its description of the seven days of death and destruction would seem to bear out the fact that many of the Indians were killed in the eruption of the volcano.

Mrs. DeFault, born Susie Brown, was a Klamath Indian girl, educated in the Indian schools. She married a French-Canadian and I understand lived in Europe for some time. From her cosmopolitan viewpoint she has given us much of the material as it is written up today. Dr. Applegate has been kind enough to give us this brief sketch of her life. At the present time, August, 1934, she is living somewhere in California.

Judge Steel, through his early contacts with the Indians, has given us much material that otherwise would have been lost to us.

Earl Count, during his period as assistant to the Park Naturalist, was able to procure much information for us through interpreters and the older Indians; and also has given us some of the ethnological background of the Klamath Indians.

(This paper was prepared by Ranger-Naturalist W. C. Thomas under the direction of Warren G. Moody, Acting Park Naturalist - 1934)