

Why this sudden, startled peering in the darkness, as if fearing  
 Presence of an unseen figure standing there amid their fears,  
 Presence of a guest unbidden, somewhere in the darkness hidden,  
 Some mysterious, dark-browed stranger, who has whispered in their ears  
 Counsel which the boldest, hearing, shrinks and trembles as he hears.

"Why, my children, will ye perish? He, whose memory you cherish,  
 Journey done, last river traversed, out upon the margin bounds,  
 Even now I see him kneeling, his uplifted eyes revealing  
 Love and thanks to the Good Spirit, while the summerland resounds  
 With ten thousand shouts of welcome to the happy hunting grounds.

"Therefore say I now unto you, take what rightfully is due ye.  
 Brief his journey was, and game he found in plenty on his way.  
 When ye laid the food beside him that no hunger might beside him,  
 Nobly was your love and duty proven on that heavy day.  
 Now the need is not, I counsel, take and eat without delay."

Then they question each the other, question wildly one another,  
 Hope and fear contending, mingling on each haggard visage there.  
 "Who has spoken? who has spoken? who the dark despair has  
 broken?"

Question all, and each the query answers with an ashen stare,  
 Then they shudder as they whisper "'Tis the Evil One; beware!"

"Two days since our chief departed, only two days since he started;  
 Many days have yet to meet him ere his toilsome march be done,  
 These their thoughts, yet, as they ponder, what they heard grows truer,  
 fonder,  
 Truer, fonder, grows the counsel, and their weakened wills are won,  
 And the Tempter has completed what the famine had begun.

Then, by one wild impulse banded, food and life they all demanded,  
 Forth they stagger, and the weaker, crawling, perish by the way—  
 Maddened half and raging, fighting, wolf-like snatching, tearing, biting,  
 While the gaunt survivors fiercely battle for the buried prey.  
 Horrid peals of mocking laughter ring above the grim affray.

Lorn and lost, and anguish-riven, onward Wandago has striven,  
 Blindly, bravely bearing onward through the void and arid land,  
 Shapes of terror round him thronging, while his noble heart is longing  
 To relieve the sad souls' sorrow with a loving, gentle hand,  
 Though the pangs of thirst and hunger scorch him like a burning brand.

Till, on these infernal spaces, darksome, demon-haunted places,  
 Fell the eye of the Great Spirit, and the barrens were aglow;  
 Then majestically pealing—pity, justice, love revealing,  
 Came the voice of the Great Spirit "Hearken! noble Wondago!  
 For thine own thy life thou gavest—Lo! I raise thee from below.

"But ye people of the village by your sacrilegious pillage  
 Have aroused my wrath, and merit punishment severe and long.  
 As ye yielded to temptation, an eternal expiation  
 I inflict, and ye shall suffer for this great and grievous wrong.  
 And your tearful fate be chanted in the legendary song.

"Ye are doomed to wander ever as a flock of ducks, and never  
 Shall your tired wings be rested, for ye never shall alight  
 Where your happy kind are breeding and in summer marshes feeding,  
 Under sun and under moon, through bright day and sombre night,  
 Shall the beating of your pinions measure out unending flight.

"Once an hundred years a journey to the earth your fate shall turn ye;  
 And the interlude, embittered by remembrance of the rest  
 And the feeding of thy fellows on the lakes and marshy shallows,  
 Shall be spent in haunted regions on a joyless, hopeless quest,  
 Ever flying, ever hungered, doomed, abandoned, and unblest."

As I marvelled o'er the legend,  
 Wonderingly dreaming there,  
 Lo, there came a sudden beat of  
 Pinions on the parted air.

My hand went out to reach my gun,  
 But a spell was o'er me thrown,

Enchantedly, in rapt surprise,  
 I gazed with staring, startled eyes  
 On a sight I saw alone,  
 For in the bottom of the boat  
 The Indian lay prone.

Like to a prostrate worshipper  
 Before a pagan shrine,  
 He lay as people lie when dead,  
 He lay and made no sign.

Once only did he speak, and then  
 His voice it was so sad and strange  
 I scarce believed so brief a time  
 Could work so wonderful a change.

It seemed a voice from out the grave  
 That fell upon my ears,  
 In mute response I felt my eyes  
 Suffused with rising tears,  
 So sadly was the voice intoned,  
 "It is the Phantom Flock," he moaned.

A flock of ducks they were, and yet  
 Although in form and flight the same  
 As those of earth, never were met  
 The like on earth; methought they came  
 From out a land of dreams to show  
 That dreams are truer than we know.

Their plumage it was rich and rare,  
 Rare and rich as the pearly glow  
 At the setting of the sun,  
 On a mountain peak of snow.  
 Ah, never I ween  
 Was ever seen  
 Plumage of such celestial sheen.

With a long, long sweep and a sudden whirl,  
 Down over the mute decoys they hurl,  
 And there they poise with fluttering wings,  
 With fluttering wings and plaintive cries,  
 And helplessly they seem to hang  
 Suspended from the skies.  
 Vain, vain their effort to alight,  
 Away they flash in upward flight.

Again and yet again they come,  
 And hover over the carven flock  
 So tristfully,  
 So wistfully,  
 That pitiless it were to mock  
 The plight of these poor weary things,  
 Ah, pitiless indeed to lock  
 The heart whence pity springs.

And then a burden fell on the air,  
 A burden of sorrowful cries.  
 Ah, surely the like was never heard  
 By mortal ears from any bird  
 That moves beneath the skies.

It sounded in an unknown tongue,  
 A tongue no boy will ever know,  
 It was like human voices wrung  
 With years of woe.

It followed the vanishing flock that sprang  
 Up into the starry profound above,  
 Where the pitiful, penitent voices rang  
 In a wild appeal for mercy and love.

I prayed to the God that is over us all,  
 Through my tears and my grief,