

THE HIAWATHA MELODRAMA

(extracted from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*,
Prologue and Chapters 10, 11, 12, 17, 20, and 22)

[1] PROLOGUE

Should you ask me, whence these stories?
With the curling smoke of wigwams,
With the rushing of great rivers,
And their wild reverberations,
As of thunder in the mountains?
I should answer, I should tell you:

"From the forests and the prairies,
From the great lakes of the Northland,
From the land of the Ojibways,
From the land of the Dacotahs,
I repeat them as I heard them
From the lips of Nawadaha,
The musician, the sweet singer.

"There he sang of Hiawatha,
Sang the Song of Hiawatha
How he lived, and toiled, and suffered,
That he might advance his people!

"Ye who love the haunts of Nature,
Love the sunshine of the meadow,
And the thunder in the mountains
Whose innumerable echoes
Flap like eagles in their eyries;
Listen to these wild traditions,
To this Song of Hiawatha!"

[2] PART ONE: HIAWATHA'S WOOING

As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto the man is woman,
Though she bends him she obeys him,
Though she draws him, yet she follows.

Thus the youthful Hiawatha
Said within himself and pondered,
Much perplexed by various feelings,
Listless, longing, hoping, fearing,
Dreaming still of Minnehaha,
Of the lovely Laughing Water.

There the ancient Arrow-maker
Made his arrow-heads of sandstone,
With him dwelt his dark-eyed daughter,
Wayward as the Minnehaha,
With her moods of shade and sunshine,
Eyes that smiled and frowned alternate,
Tresses flowing like the water,
And as musical a laughter;

And he named her from the river,
From the waterfall he named her,
Minnehaha, Laughing Water.

Was it then for heads of arrows,
That my Hiawatha halted
In the land of the Dacotahs?
Was it not to see the maiden,
See the face of Laughing Water
Peeping from behind the curtain,
Hear the rustling of her garments
From behind the waving curtain,
As one sees the Minnehaha

Gleaming, glancing through the branches,
As one hears the Laughing Water
From behind its screen of branches?

Thus departed Hiawatha
To the land of handsome women;
Through uninterrupted silence.
With his moccasins of magic,
And he journeyed without resting,
Till he heard the Minnehaha.

Straight the ancient Arrow-maker
Looked up gravely from his labour,
Bade him enter at the doorway,
Saying, as he rose to meet him:
Hiawatha, you are welcome!"

And the lovely Laughing Water
Seemed more lovely, as she stood there,
Neither willing nor reluctant,
As she went to Hiawatha,
Softly took the seat beside him,
While she said, and blushed to say it:
"I will follow you, my husband!"

Pleasant was the journey homeward,
Through interminable forests,
Over meadow, over mountain,
Over river, hill, and hollow.
Short it seemed to Hiawatha,
Though they journeyed very slowly,
Though his pace was checked and slackened
To the steps of Laughing Water.

From the sky benignant
Looked upon them through the branches,
Saying "O my children,
Love is sunshine,
Life is checkered shade and sunshine;
Rule by love, O Hiawatha!"

Thus it was they journeyed homeward;
Thus it was that Hiawatha
Brought the sunshine of his people,
Minnehaha, Laughing Water,
Handsomest of all the women
In the land of the Dacotahs,
In the land of handsome women.

[3] PART TWO: HIAWATHA'S WEDDING FEAST

You shall hear how Pau-Puk-Keewis,
Danced at Hiawatha's wedding;

First he danced a solemn measure,
Treading softly like a panther,
Then more swiftly and still swifter,
Whirling, spinning round in circles,
Leaping o'er the guests assembled,
Eddying round and round the wigwam,
Till the leaves went whirling with him,
Like great snowdrifts o'er the landscape,

Then the gentle Chibiabos
Sang in accents sweet and tender,

"Onaway! Awake, beloved!
Thou the wild flower of the forest!
Thou the wild bird of the prairie!
Thou with eyes so soft and fawn-like!

If you only lookest at me,
I am happy, I am happy,
As the lilies of the prairie,
When they feel the dew upon them!
Onaway! Awake, beloved!"

And among the guests assembled
At my Hiawatha's wedding
Sat the marvelous story-teller.
And they said: "O good lagoo,
Tell us now a tale of wonder."
And lagoo answered straightway:
"You shall hear the strange adventures
Of Osseo, the Magician."

"Once, in days no more remembered,
In the North-land lived a hunter,
With ten young and comely daughters,
All these women married warriors,
Only Oweenee, the youngest,
Laughed and flouted all her lovers,
And then married old Osseo,
Old Osseo, poor and ugly.

But Osseo was transfigured,
Was restored to youth and beauty;
But, alas! For good Osseo,
And for Oweenee, the faithful!
Changed into a weak old woman."

Then a voice was heard, a whisper,
Coming from the starry distance;
"O Osseo!
Broken are the spells that bound you,"

Then the lodge began to tremble,
And they felt it rising, rising,
Slowly through the air ascending,
From the darkness of the tree-tops
Forth into the dewy starlight;
And behold! The wooden dishes
All were changed to shells of scarlet!

And behold! The earthen kettles
All were changed to bowls of silver!
All the sisters and their husbands,
Changed to birds of various plumage
Some were jays and some were magpies,
Others thrushes, others blackbirds;
And they hopped, and sang, and twittered,
Pecked and fluttered all their feathers
Strutted in their shining plumage,
And their tails like fans unfolded.
Then returned the youth and beauty
Of Oweenee, the youngest
And her staff became a feather,
Yes, a shining silver feather!

Such was Hiawatha's Wedding
Such the dance of Pau-Puk-Keewis,
Such the story of lagoo,
Such the songs of Chibiabos,
Thus the wedding-banquet ended,
And the wedding-guests departed.

[4] PART THREE: THE DEATH OF MINNEHAHA

O the long and dreary Winter!
Froze the ice on lake and river,
Fell the snow o'er all the landscape,

Fell the covering snow and drifted
Through the forest, round the village.

Hardly from his buried wigwam
Could the hunter force a passage;
Vainly walked he through the forest,
Saw no track of deer or rabbit,
Fell, and could not rise from weakness,

O the wasting of the famine!
O the blasting of the fever!
O the wailing of the children!
O the anguish of the women!

All the earth was sick and famished,
Hungry was the air around them,
Hungry was the sky above them,
And the hungry stars in heaven
Like the eyes of wolves glared at them!

Far away amid the forest,
Rose the desolate Hiawatha,
Heard that sudden cry of anguish,
Heard the voice of Minnehaha
"Hiawatha! Hiawatha!"

And he rushed into the wigwam,
Saw his lovely Minnehaha
Lying dead and cold before him;
With both hands his face he covered,
Speechless, motionless, unconscious
Of the daylight or the darkness.

[5] PART FOUR: THE HUNTING OF PAU-PUK-KEEWIS

You shall hear how Pau-Puk-Keewis,
He, the handsome Yenadizze,
Vexed the village with disturbance;
You shall hear of all his mischief,
And his flight from Hiawatha,
And his wondrous transmigrations,
At the end of his adventures.

Now from his lodge went Pau-Puk-Keewis,
Climbed upon the rocky headlands,
Perched himself upon their summit.
Round him hovered, fluttered, rustled,
Hiawatha's mountain chickens
And he killed them as he lay there,
Slaughtered them by tens and twenties,
Threw their bodies down the headland.

Perched upon a crag about them,
At length shouted Kayoshk, the sea-gull,
"It is Pau-Puk-Keewis!
He is slaying us by hundreds!
Send a message to our brother,
Tidings send to Hiawatha!"

Full of wrath was Hiawatha
When he came into the village
Found the people in confusion
Heard of all the misdemeanours,
All the malice and the mischief
Of the cunning Pau-Puk-Keewis.

Hard his breath came through his nostrils,
Through his teeth he buzzed and muttered
Words of anger and resentment,
"I will slay this Pau-Puk-Keewis,

Slay this mischief-maker!
Not so rude and rough the way

That my wrath shall not attain him,
I will slay this Pau-Puk-Keewis
Slay this mischief-maker!
Not so long and wide the world
That my vengeance shall not reach him!"

Then in swift pursuit departed
Hiawatha and the hunters
And aloud cried Hiawatha,
From the summit of the mountain:
"Not so long and wide the world,
Not so rude and rough
But my wrath shall overtake you
And my vengeance shall attain you!"

Over rock and over river,
Through bush and brake and forest,
Ran the cunning Pau-Puk-Keewis;
Like an antelope he bounded.

Till he came unto a streamlet
In the middle of the forest,
To a streamlet still and tranquil,
That had overflowed its margin,

Over rock and over river,
Through bush and brake and forest,
Ran the cunning Pau-Puk-Keewis
To a dam made by the beavers,
To a pond of quiet water.

On the dam stood Pau-Puk-Keewis,
O'er his ankles flowed the streamlet,
Flowed the bright and silvery water,
And he spake unto the beaver,
With a smile he spake in this wise:

"Cool and pleasant is the water;
Let me dive into the water,
Let me rest there in your lodges;
Change me, too, into a beast!"

Then he heard a cry above him
Heard a shouting and a tramping,
Through the roof looked Hiawatha,
"Vain your manifold disguises!"
With his club he beat and bruised him,
Beat to death poor Pau-Puk-Keewis,
But the ghost, the Jeebi in him,
Still lived on as Pau-Puk-Keewis,
And it fluttered, strove, and struggled,
Till it took the form and features
Of the cunning Pau-Puk-Keewis,
Vanishing into the forest.

Next the people of the village
Saw the wings of Pau-Puk-Keewis
Flapping far up in the ether,
Followed fast by Hiawatha,

Then the cunning Pau-Puk-Keewis,
Once again in human figure
Came unto the headlands,

There without stood Hiawatha,
Smote great caverns in the sandstone,
Cried aloud in tones of thunder:

"Open! I am Hiawatha!"
But the Old Man of the Mountain
Opened not . . .
"Open! I am Hiawatha!"

Then he raised his hands to heaven
Called imploring on the tempest,
Called Waywassimo, the lightning,
And the thunder, Annemeekee;
And they came with night and darkness,
Sweeping down the Big-Sea-Water
From the distant Thunder Mountains:
And the trembling Pau-Puk-Keewis
Heard the footsteps of the thunder,
Saw the red eyes of the lightning,
Was afraid, and crouched and trembled.
Then Waywassimo, the lightning,
Smote the doorways of the caverns,
With his war-club smote the doorways,
Smote the jutting crags of sandstone,
And the thunder, Annemeekee,
Shouted down into the caverns,
"Where is Pau-Puk-Keewis?"
And the crags fell.

And beneath them
Dead among the rocky ruins
Lay the cunning Pau-Puk-Keewis,
Lay the handsome Yenadizze,
Slain in his own human figure.

[6] EPILOGUE: HIAWATHA'S DEPARTURE

By the shore of Gitche Gumee,
Hiawatha stood and waited.

Gone was every trace of sorrow,
As of one who in a vision
Sees what is to be, but is not,

On the shore stood Hiawatha,
Launched his birch canoe for sailing,
Sailed into the fiery sunset,
Sailed into the dusk of evening.

Thus departed Hiawatha,
In the purple mists of evening
To the regions of the home-wind
To the land of the Hereafter!