



The Legend of the Two Sisters

By E. Pauline Johnson - Tekahionwake

YOU can see them from the heights, from the pleasure grounds, from the gay thoroughfares, from the great hotel windows —those twin peaks of the twin mountains that lift their pearly summits across the inlet which washes with its ceaseless tides the margins of Vancouver, the beautiful city which is called "The Sunset Gateway" of the Dominion of Canada. Sometimes the smoke of forest fires blurs these twin peaks, until they swim in a purple atmosphere too beautiful for words to paint. Sometimes the slanting rains festoon their gray and gauzy veils about the crests, and the peaks fade into inadequate outlines of soft shadows, melting, melting, forever melting, into the distances. But for most days of the year, the sun circles the twin glories with a sweep of gold, the moon washes them with a torrent of silver, and they stand immovable through sun and shadow, smiling on one side above the waters of the restless Pacific, on the other, above the depths and eternal silence of the Capilano Cañon.

Throughout the British Empire these peaks are known as "The Lions of Vancouver." Their striking resemblance to Landseer's Lions at the base of Nelson's Monument in Trafalgar Square, London, has won them this name. But the Indians of the coast know nothing of the white man's appellation, and you must indeed get near to the heart of some ancient Klootchman* before she will consent to tell you the Legend of the Twin Sisters.

We had been driving for some time, the handsome chief of the Capilanos sitting in the front seat of the light surrey, his slim, silent young daughter beside him, I in the back seat, and at my side the quaint old Indian mother, who, from time to time, told me the traditions of her people, in the half-halting broken English that is never so beautiful as when it slips from an Indian tongue. At our feet were baskets of exquisite weavery, all her handiwork, and that of her young daughter sitting before us.

*In the Chinook tongue, in general usage as a trade language on the Pacific coast, "Klootchman" means woman, and is a word used with great respect among the Indian tribes.

With housewifely care she had stowed these away before starting for the drive, for it was berry time, and she had no thought of leaving such precious muck-a-muck* for the foxes and birds, when her children and grandchildren had willing mouths to be filled. The chief was an excellent provider, but "Why not add to the store?" she remarked simply. "One must not be wasteful of these precious, God-given wild things." So the baskets reposed nearby, ready to be filled when opportunity afforded.

The trail wound about the foot of a cluster of mountains, following a riotous stream called the Capilano River, which brawled and quarreled, whispered and laughed among its rocks and boulders, tumbling headlong one moment, the next circling into a deep, transparent pool where leaping salmon and shy mountain trout glinted in the sunshine.

"So many things belong to this river," said the Klootchman in her pretty, stammering English, which I must eliminate if I am to make this story lucid. So I must keep to the everyday phrases, and my readers must be the losers of her fascinating expressions; but after all, it was her wonderful eyes and gestures that really made the tale, and what use to attempt a description of these? It is impossible.

"Yes, the river holds many secrets," she continued, "secrets of strong men's battles and many tragedies, but the mountains hold the secrets of an Indian mother's heart, and those are the greatest secrets of all things."

Her voice fell to a whisper, but her speaking eyes swept the distant summits with an understanding far subtler than sight. I did not offer a reply, for I knew that in her own good time the Klootchman would catch the mood of the mountains and impart to me some of their lore. The silence was long. Once or twice she swept effective gestures that were filled with meaning. She wished me to notice the crags and ledges, haunts of the mountain sheep and wild goats, a winging hawk, a leaping trout, the crimsoning o-lil-lies (Chinook for berries). Then as if from dreams she suddenly awoke.

"You will want to know the secret that is held in the mountains, the secret of the Indian mother's heart?" she asked.

I nodded. I could see she liked that wordless reply, for she placed her narrow brown hand on my arm, nor did she remove it during her entire recital of

THE LEGEND OF THE TWO SISTERS.

"You see them—those two peaks—towering forever and ever in that high place? Those are the Chief's Daughters, that every Indian mother loves. You see them, but you may not know—you who have come from the Land of Morning, the Land of Sunrise—for you have different customs, different traditions, from those of our people in the Sunset Land. I say you may not know that when our daughters step from childhood into the great world of

*Chinook for food.